

Family Language Policy Leading to Multilingual Home Literacy Environment

Evidence from interviews with Russian-speaking mothers in Cyprus, Estonia and Sweden

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Introduction

With the first language(s) a child gains a whole cultural heritage that influences his/her way of thinking, feelings, identity and attitudes (Mwaniki 2014). Children are provided with opportunities and experiences through direct and indirect conditions of the home literacy environment (HLE) (Burgess et al. 2002; Burgess 2011). HLE includes various oral and written family interaction experiences of children and parents (Leseman & de Jong 1998; Aram & Levin 2002). It affects reading and writing development (Senechal & LeFevre 2002) via informal and formal literacy experiences. HLE is the totality of communicative conditions surrounding a child, which are in dynamic interaction with each other. Creating a specific balance of multilingual practices, families strive to shape the multilingual HLE so as to maximise the chances of social success for their children, whose linguistic behaviour might be more or less stable, or who, on the contrary, might follow conflicting practices.

This paper investigates family language policies which lead to multilingual HLEs, based on the example of Russian- and majority-language-speaking families in Cyprus, Estonia and Sweden. The main aim of the investigation is to determine differences and similarities, and whether, most importantly, translanguaging and various extralinguistic and sociolinguistic factors, such as heritage language use, maintenance and transmission, linguistic and cultural identities, heritage language attitudes, heritage language status, and quality and quantity of input, affect the development of home language literacies among children in immigrant and minority settings.

These families provide a very interesting setting for investigating the relevance of language attitudes and ideologies. In Sweden and Cyprus, Russian is used in *immigrant* communities (in Cyprus, Russian is the largest

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immigrant language). In Estonia, Russian is used as an L1 among one-third of the population, is now a *minority* language and was *formerly* the sociolinguistically dominant language. The understandings of Russian use in the HLE are linked to various ideological discourses and social practices, as well as differential motivations. In these micro-level settings, we can observe the contrast between top-down policies and bottom-up practices.

Thus, this article provides an analysis of family language ideologies in three different contexts where multilingualism occurs and investigates how families modify their family language policy, creating multilingual HLEs in response to their linguistic environments. We show that despite dissimilar external environments, there were more similarities than differences in Russian language use between the countries, especially in families who realised the importance of the multilingual HLE for early literacy development and Russian as heritage language transmission.

The knowledge, experiences and attitudes of twenty families in each country were investigated. The method applied in our study is based on the qualitative research tradition. We highlight key features that emerge from our data in different domains of family language policy and that were detected in all three countries. Thus, we focus on what phenomena characterise a multilingual HLE and what kind of literacy habits and activities, writing and reading beliefs concerning heritage language and majority languages (Burgess et al. 2002; Weigel et al. 2005) constitute it. Russian-speaking mothers were interviewed concerning literacy opportunities, heritage language instruction and its quality, cooperation and social-emotional quality (Leseman & de Jong 1998), the literacy activities of family members and joint literacy activities involving the child (van Steensel 2006; Manolitsis et al. 2013; Manolitsis & Sarri 2019), and the role of translanguaging in the development of multilingual HLEs.

The paper is structured as follows: Section 2 provides an overview of theories on multilingualism, translanguaging, heritage language, HLE and family language policy. Section 3 introduces the research approach, the results of which are presented in section 4 and discussed in section 5, which concludes the article.

Theoretical underpinnings to the current study

Multilingualism and translanguaging: Does one lead to the other?

Mobility allows people to create complex and semiotic forms from the linguistic and communicative resources available to them (Blommaert 2010, 2014). Multilingualism is related to migration, mobility and globalisation, temporal and spatial life trajectories, complexity and super-diversity (Kroon et al. 2015). This applies to situations involving immigration and heritage language environments when there is language dominance and when one language is the target. Thus, minority speakers need to be able to adjust their

linguistic repertoires and family language policies, language choices and uses to fit existing reality. The preference to use the majority language for social, economic or political reasons can lead to language shift, or even heritage language loss, which normally takes place within three generations after immigration unless parents make the effort to maintain the heritage language. Multilingualism triggers the development of language contact situations as people who speak different languages need to communicate with each other (Wardhaugh & Fuller 2015).

Rothman suggested that a heritage speaker is someone who is exposed “to the family language since birth at home, but they also acquire and are educated in the majority language spoken by the community” (Rothman 2009: 157). The heritage language is associated with “naturalistic input and whatever in-born linguistic mechanisms” that children need for language acquisition (Rothman 2009: 156). According to Montrul (2010), the acquisition of the heritage language (a minority language in our case) is incomplete due to the exposure to the majority language, and heritage speakers are children of immigrants who were either “born in the host country” or “who arrived in the host country some time in childhood” (Montrul 2015: 2). Polinsky has defined the heritage language speaker as “a simultaneous or sequential (successive) bilingual whose weaker language corresponds to the minority language of their society and whose stronger language is the dominant language of that society” (Polinsky 2018: 9). The recent work by Polinsky & Scontras supported the idea that heritage speakers are “children exposed to a language from birth who nevertheless appear to deviate from the expected native-like mastery in pronounced and principled ways” (Polinsky & Scontras 2019: 5).

Multilingual speakers do not have *equal* abilities in all their languages, as balanced multilingualism is a rare phenomenon (Grosjean 2001). This can lead to convergence among contact languages or code-switching and code-mixing (see Karpava et al. 2019). Moving away from a normative monolingual ideology, multilingual discourse (Bailey 2007; Creese & Blackledge 2010), languaging (Jørgensen 2008), translanguaging (García 2009) or metrolingual practices (Otsuji & Pennycook 2011, 2012; Jaworski 2014) are better terms to describe the fluidity of codes.

According to Lewis et al. (2012), translanguaging is the use by a bilingual individual of one language in order to reinforce another and to facilitate the learning of both languages. Baker defines translanguaging as the process of “making meaning, shaping experiences, gaining understanding and knowledge through the use of two languages.” (Baker 2011: 288). Translanguaging facilitates meaning construction in a transformative, non-hierarchical way and allows fluid discourses in different social, cultural and political contexts (García 2009). This is in agreement with Li Wei’s definition of translanguaging as “transformative in nature; it creates a social space for

the multilingual language user by bringing together different dimensions of their personal history, experience and environment.” (Li Wei 2011: 1223).

Hornberger & Link (2012) support the idea of translanguaging and mobile communicative repertoires. Thus, translanguaging shifts from the view of a language as a distinct code to the idea of speakers’ agency in communication. Lewis et al. (2012) suggest that the distinction between translanguaging and code-switching is ideological, as the latter is focused on language separation, while the former is focused on the flexibility and fluidity of languages. Translanguaging takes a positive stance towards language mixing for communication and sees it as a natural and beneficial learning process. Translanguaging goes beyond code-switching and translation: it is focused on flexible bilingualism and multiple discursive practices (García 2009; Blackledge & Creese 2010).

For García & Li Wei (2014), translanguaging is a space for new language practices that goes beyond different linguistic structures, systems and modalities. Translanguaging “signals a trans-semiotic system with many meaning-making signs, primarily linguistic ones that combine to make up a person’s semiotic repertoire” (García & Li Wei 2014: 42). A translanguaging repertoire consists of biographies and learning trajectories, verbal and non-verbal communication, mobility and experience, and semiotic resources in time and public space.

Home Language Environment

The HLE is important for children’s reading and writing achievement (McElvany 2008) and includes all resources and opportunities that parents provide their children to develop their reading and writing skills. Early literacy experience is the basis for later reading and writing achievement (Gunn et al. 1995; Whitehurst & Lonigan 2001; Lonigan 2006).

The frequency of literacy-related activities (e.g. reading books together, writing and watching educational programmes), the number of educational resources (e.g. children’s books and educational materials), socioeconomic status, the level of the parents’ education, their attitudes towards literacy reading behaviours and formal reading and writing instruction at school are important factors for literacy development. This applies to both monolingual and bilingual/multilingual environments/families (Mullis et al. 2007; Stubbe et al. 2007).

There are a variety of literacy activities, such as parent-child (picture) book reading, telling and retelling stories, and using print and digital resources and materials in the household (Leseman & de Jong 1998). If parents are involved in reading and writing activities themselves and have positive attitudes towards literacy activities, then their children will be encouraged to be engaged in them as well (Sonnenschein & Munsterman 2002). Reading and writing competence development is a reflection of a rich literacy environment at home (Bus et al. 1995; Senechal & LeFevre 2002).

Families with rich HLEs are privileged and are usually families with high socioeconomic status, and thus they facilitate the conditions for their children to achieve higher scores in reading and writing tests. Growing up in an environment that supports and encourages reading and writing leads to higher motivation and an easy and enjoyable learning process (McElvany & Artelt 2009). It is a great advantage for children to develop pre-literacy skills, such as phonological awareness and understanding the importance of literacy before entering primary school (Tarelli & Stubbe 2010).

Language and identity are interconnected (Bucholtz & Hall 2003). Language awareness in the community, an effective family language policy and socialisation activities are important for language maintenance and transmission. The family language policy depends on practice, management and ideology, as well as on emotional and psychological factors. Language ideologies are determined by family, language use and value, place and status of minority and majority languages, dynamics, quality, the extent and longevity of social use, social networks and strategies for revitalisation (Shohamy 2006; Spolsky 2009; King et al. 2008). Parents' attitudes, beliefs, family language policy and efforts with respect to language use are important for the development of the HLE. It is important whether families choose monolingual, bilingual or multilingual/translanguaging family language policies. This is closely related to the HLE.

The creation of the HLE in multilingual families may depend on how long families plan to stay in a target country: whether their immigration and length of settlement is temporary or permanent. Language ideologies and politics, language status and valorisation (Bourdieu 1977; Hamers & Blanc 2000), socio-economic status, the individual goals of a family, the aspirations for their children's education and future careers, the educational level of the parents, past personal experiences and marital status are factors that can contribute to language management and the HLE. In our modern multilingual world, people often have multiple identities and are fluid and flexible with languages (Custance 2012).

In a transnational or immigrant family, it is quite often the mother who takes an active role in first language maintenance and transmission, and in the literacy development of a child (Hill 1987; Harvey 1994; Zentella 1987; Okita 2002; Piller 2002; Piller & Pavlenko 2004). There may be variation in outcomes, from successful first language maintenance to a complete loss and shift to another language (Gal 1978), while there can also be translanguaging, or a symbiosis of both. Mothers seem to put more effort into the development of the HLE as they spend more time at home with their children, even if both parents have full-time careers. According to Hochschild & Machung, women have a "second shift at home" (Hochschild & Machung 1989: 25) and play the role of language socialisers and agents of literacy development. Language choice and use is related to women's multiple roles and identities (Walters 1996; Piller 2002; Lanza & Li Wei 2016). Our informants, research

participants, were only Russian-speaking women as this is the most common pattern in Cyprus and Sweden for intermarriage families: an immigrant female and a local male and, in Estonia, Russian-speaking wives were more willing to communicate and participate than their husbands were.

Methodological background

Research participants

We chose our families (20 in each country and 60 in total) according to the following criteria: mothers' age range from 26 to 36, highly educated, always Russian-speakers who had lived as immigrants in the country of immigration for many years (Estonia is an exception, as the women were actually born there) and who belonged to the middle social class in their country of residence, according to their own perceptions. What the Russian-speaking mothers in Cyprus, Estonia and Sweden had in common were bilingual children who attended majority (i.e. Greek/Swedish/Estonian) pre-school educational institutions and medium schools and whose ages ranged from 5 to 18 years old. We are not concerned with how *typical* or *representative* our sample is in terms of the statistical data on Russian-speaking or Russian-majority bilingual families in each country. We decided to use purposeful (or purposive) sampling because our goal was to find research participants who could provide ample insights into their family language policy, translanguaging and the creation of multilingual HLEs, and who were ready to share important and exact details about multilingual HLE and translanguaging strategies as a social practice of a particular micro-community, the family in our case, which would not be available otherwise.

Research procedure

Our data sources were semi-structured narrative interviews, which reflect a qualitative method (Lamnek 1989; Riesman 1993; Hatch & Wisniewski 1995; Flick 1998). They provide a more in-depth participant perspective without imposing the question-response structure, as well as offering a selection of themes and topics, ordering and wording of the questions and avoiding the influence of an interviewer. In order to elicit valid and objective data through story-telling and listening, a specific type of everyday communication was used (Jovchelovitch et al. 2000).

Our interview questions were based on a large-scale questionnaire's results (see more in Karpava et al. 2018), but the oral mode allowed the speakers to elaborate more on certain issues and to provide more in-depth information, supported by actual examples from their life experiences and detailed descriptions of naturalistic settings, which helped to define meaning categories. The duration of the interviews was 30-50 minutes. The interviews were in Russian (this, however, did not preclude the use of translanguaging). The data were recorded, and then a verbatim transcription was implemented;

as we reproduced verbal data word-for-word, we cross-checked that our written data were exact replications of the oral data (Poland 1995). A verbatim record of interviews brings researchers closer to their data, which is critical for the theoretical underpinnings of the research design. The fact that the researchers, who were involved in the interview process and had first-hand knowledge of and expertise in interviewing, and were involved in both verbal and non-verbal exchanges with the participants, transcribed their own interview data and made notes of the participants' non-verbal behaviour greatly enhanced the reliability and validity of our research (MacLean et al. 2004).

Then the data were thematically coded and analysed in line with the phenomenological approach (Bevan 2014) in order to answer our research questions about the experiences of the participants and the grounded theory research method (Glaser & Strauss 1967; Willig 2008). This helped to develop a more objective understanding based on different data sources. Combining both philosophical and sociological approaches, we aimed for a holistic interpretation of our findings. For our discussion here, only those extracts where family language policy leading to the creation of multilingual home literacy environments as described by mothers were of interest and were included, whereas those strategies which explicitly or implicitly referred to the processes of monolingual upbringing at home (whether in the majority language or in Russian) were not considered.

According to Merriam, qualitative research aims to understand “the meaning people have constructed, how people make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world” (Merriam 2009: 13). Also, it helped us to interpret the experiences and feelings which participants connected with certain phenomena. In our study, it facilitated the understanding of the true meaning of translanguaging, and the feelings, emotions and experiences associated with the multilingual HLE. The phenomenological research helped to describe the complex experience and consciousness of the life-world of the participants from their own intersubjective perspective (Giorgi 1997; Mason 2002; Bevan 2014). We conducted a phenomenological analysis of the individual interviews and searched for common themes, opinions and ideologies in the collected data across the three countries. Iterative and recursive content analysis of the data was implemented in order to reveal thematic patterns (Patton 1980; Ward & Wolf-Wendel 2004). The data were thoroughly reviewed in order to find repeating themes. These themes were coded with keywords and phrases, such as multilingualism, HLE, translanguaging, family language policy, identity, heritage language use, maintenance and transmission. Then the codes were grouped into concepts and categories hierarchically, such as language behaviour patterns used in home interpersonal communication by parents, translanguaging, home language environment, implicit and explicit strategies for child literacy development, multilingualism, multi-literacy and multi-modality, learning

context, children's agency and voice, the mother's role, languages used at home, (non)formal education, linguistic and cultural identities, family language policy, heritage language use, maintenance and transmission. Each of us coded our own data set first and then we discussed our initial findings with the aim of expanding or amending blocks of data which best fit each category.

Results

Our results are strictly synchronic, representing snapshots in time, and do not reflect possible dynamics in the development of majority and heritage linguistic and cultural processes. Individual families adapt differently to linguistic and cultural demands of their sociolinguistic environments. Individual strategies differ as each family seeks its own language policy, it finds natural, suitable and beneficial for dealing with the mainstream society. Thus, there is no single family language policy or plan, but rather a number of enacted policies in relation to translanguaging as the home language and multilingual literacy development. To illustrate the common themes, each category includes quotations from narratives in unaltered forms, translated into English, that were derived from interviews with Russian-speaking mothers in Cyprus, Estonia and Sweden. We acknowledge that our choices are selective in that we constantly made choices about what to leave out, keeping in mind that words might have double meanings, but we hope that our researcher bias was overcome by the fact that we examined each other's data for its representativeness and persistent evidence. For us meaning mattered, i.e. we were interested in the verbal productions by informants that directed their natural actions, tactics and specific activities.

In what follows, we give a short overview of translanguaging as the language behavior patterns used in home communication by parents, present the language behaviour pattern of mothers, the learning situation and the "multilingual" nature of HLE, including the children's agency and mothers' roles in it, non-formal education as an alternative setting when creating a multilingual HLE as well as the languages used in home (cultural) domains.

Translanguaging as the language behaviour pattern used in home interpersonal communication by parents

Family members in mixed-marriage families have to develop the ability to switch/mix codes, creating a multilingual discourse, in order to be able to communicate and understand each other in language-contact situations. Our data show that immigrant Russian-speaking mothers in mixed marriages with majority speakers in Cyprus and Sweden, as well as Russian-Estonian families in Estonia, used translanguaging at home. Extracts 1–3 show that the child adopted the conversational pattern of the family:

Extract 1 – Sweden

We switch languages all the time and she hears them and it is natural for her to switch between Russian and Swedish. Now she is learning English as well, and has even started writing messages to us in English.

Extract 2 – Cyprus

Our two-year old child switches from Greek to English in one second; he can also translate, if you ask him. He associates languages with people: mother-Russian, father-Greek and so on...my older ones were using three languages from the beginning [Russian, Greek and English] and they knew exactly which language to use with whom.

Extract 3 – Estonia

With my children we spoke and speak Estonian (husband), Russian (me), and sometimes we both use English because we believe that this is better for the children.

Parents use various ways to develop multilingualism in their children. But as Extracts 1–3 show, the “one person – one language” model is widely seen as one way to make children multilingual. In addition, our data support the claim that heritage languages diverge from their baseline languages as they are affected by cross-linguistic interference, attrition and structural reorganisation in language contact situations.

In many respects, the mother becomes a role model in translanguaging. As we saw in Extracts 1–3, the children copied the behaviour of their parents and when they heard the mother switch between the heritage language and the majority language (Swedish, Greek or Estonian) in order to express a specific thought or because of the interlocutor’s linguistic repertoire, the child saw this as an acceptable linguistic habit and did the same. One informant from the Swedish data set characterised such linguistic behaviour as natural imitation: “*They look at me and copy*”.

The language behaviour pattern of mothers: a driving force of translanguaging

In all three countries, mothers translanguaged in order to help their children to better understand difficult and abstract concepts in Russian, i.e. some issues that were specifically relevant to Russian culture, food and nature and sometimes were absent in Cyprus, Estonia and Sweden. Extracts 4–10 reveal the role of the mother, whose use of two or more languages helped to create meaning and enhance understanding (Extract 4), or helped her to organise a multilingual family language policy (Extract 5 and Extract 6) in order to raise a multilingual child:

Extract 4 – Sweden

Sometimes, when I want to convey a thought, I switch to Swedish. They [the children] still don’t know complicated words [in Russian] very well.

Extract 5 – Estonia

From birth I have spoken Russian with my daughter and my husband speaks Estonian with her, but when we are together, we mainly use Estonian. From the very beginning I spoke Estonian with my husband's relatives. She heard this and took it as a natural direct connection between ethnicity and language: with Estonians use Estonian. This is why my daughter speaks with her father's parents in Estonian and with mine in Russian.

Extract 6 – Cyprus

Our Greek grandmother takes our child to her place for three hours per day, so he is going to be bilingual, without any other options. I will try to maintain Russian... At home we speak English and Greek, so our child has a mixture in his head. I would like to have a Russian nanny till the age of three and a half... Then a Greek-speaking kindergarten and Russian hobbies... As for English, I have not decided yet at which stage to add it, but we have to, so that he is ready for high school.

Extract 4 shows that the language choice patterns in this family seemed to be designed by the mother so that Swedish was used to fill in lexical gaps and convey social meaning. Seen from a cross-country comparison perspective, this translanguaging pattern, i.e. switching to majority language elements because of their greater frequency in everyday speech in comparison with Russian equivalents, was widely preferred by bilingual mothers regardless of the degree of their bilingual competence. Extract 5 confirms that mothers also believed it was best to use one parent–one language as a communication strategy. This divergent language choice may have been used in the researched families as a habitual routine pattern of interaction, and we link this type of bilingual interaction with translanguaging. As is demonstrated by Extract 6, translanguaging might have been intentionally used by certain individuals whose linguistic behaviour offered a set of rules for the child's divergent language use. In such specific settings, the child received synchronic knowledge of all languages involved.

Translanguaging takes a heteroglossic and dynamic perspective on bilingualism and suggests that a bilingual person has one integrated linguistic system. Translanguaging allows immigrant (or minority) parents to gain agency in communication, as shown in Extract 7 and Extract 8, making use of or consuming multilingual resources (Extract 9) or providing a vivid example of the life-long learning of languages, as illustrated in Extract 10. The result of these activities is a multilingual HLE. These are instances of the extra-linguistic meanings of translanguaging that are intentionally and purposefully related to the successful outcome in raising a multilingual child.

Extract 7 confirms that translanguaging, in which mothers communicate, was often mothers' choice in social situations and might have been positively supported by the larger society. Extract 8 is an example of an internal method to control family language policy that, again, supports translanguaging: singing songs together and keeping in touch with cultural heritage in a

majority language in addition to Russian. Extract 9 is an example of strategic activities carried out in creating different ways to connect three languages via translanguaging and contributing to the multilingualism of the child. Extract 10 shows that concurrent learning and the use of three languages by a mother might also accompany translanguaging.

Extract 7 – Estonia

Sometimes I shift from Russian to Estonian without even noticing.... I do that at work and especially a lot at home. I cannot imagine how to make myself understood without switching. And sometimes it is great fun. We have a lot of multilingual jokes at home. I am not sure others would get them.

Extract 8 – Sweden

I did not know much Swedish. I learned Swedish nursery rhymes together with my daughter. What kind of Swedish mother would I be if I did not know about *Imse Vimse Spider* [In English: *The Eensy Weensy Spider*]?

Extract 9 – Sweden

I spoke English and Swedish to them from the very beginning so they could learn them both. Of course, I read all the time [in Russian and Swedish].

Extract 10 – Cyprus

A lot of us when arriving in Cyprus learn two languages, Greek and English, so we constantly change languages... I speak and write in three languages [Russian, Greek and English]. I speak all of them well, but I do not write well. Now I have bought a mobile phone which can check and correct my mistakes, so I learn in this way.

As Extract 10 signifies, we need to take into consideration mothers' life trajectories and migration experiences (see also Li Wei, 2011). Here we see that the pattern of switching between three languages was used widely and was even referred to as a “we” strategy among Russian-speaking immigrant mothers: “a lot of us... we constantly...”. This positive emotional attachment to group behaviour might mean that the same pattern of language use was common for their children and was considered to be a successful pattern, i.e. leading to a multilingual HLE.

As for the tendency to have access to multilingual reading sources, we found that not every family had strong reading habits. However, a multilingual translanguaging space on a bookshelf might have been created by a mother so that various Russian, English and majority language books indicated the coexistence of diverse languages and cultures in the home. We will come back to this topic in Section 4.7.

Excerpts 4–10 show the decisive role of the mother in the development of a multilingual HLE, home language maintenance and transmission and literacy development in the child. An important aspect in Extract 6 is that a mother was trying not only to maintain a minority/immigrant language (Russian) but to plan and organise the pre-literacy skills of their children

based on translanguaging, which could facilitate their further educational progress at school and at university. There were a number of responses on families' school experiences that had effects on attitudes towards Russian shown by children later at home and implicitly or explicitly influencing the creation of a multilingual HLE by Russian-speaking mothers.

Learning situation/context/environment and the “multilingual” nature of HLE

Multilingual speakers are exposed to various languages, but very often only one, the dominant, is learned through schooling or in an institutional setting. Maintaining various languages can be prestigious or of low value, depending on the status of the languages, whether this occurs in a rural or urban environment and whether the school supports it. Let us compare Extracts 11 and 12, showing supportive preschool and public environments, vs. Extract 13, reflecting the negative impact of the monolingual linguistic environment for heritage language transmission:

Extract 11 – Sweden

Everyone in her preschool knew it [that she spoke Russian] and the teachers even asked her to recite a poem in Russian.

Extract 12 – Sweden

Here in Rinkeby everyone is multilingual. There is hardly anyone who does not speak some other language, so it is easy to speak Russian in public and just everywhere. No problem at all!

Extract 13 – Sweden

In our district in Nacka, only our family were immigrants. The rest were Swedes. No one else spoke Russian there.

Another important factor that should not be disregarded is the teacher's individual attitude toward the heritage language and the understanding of “what right language behaviour is” as signalled in Extract 14

Extract 14 – Estonia

At the very beginning, his primary school teacher said to me: 'Please do not speak Russian with him, especially here; there are other Russian children in this classroom. I will be tormented with language discipline during classes. Here it's Estonian only. I do not care what you do at home.'

In Cyprus, representatives of mixed-marriage families mainly choose public Greek-speaking schools for economic, linguistic, cultural and integrational reasons, as we see in Extract 15:

Extract 15 – Cyprus

I am for the Greek school. First of all, it is important for a child to know the language of the country where he lives and it is easier to do so at a young age.

Secondly, it is free of charge!!! And this is super as you can spend this money on English, hobbies, tutors and other interesting things. Thirdly, it helps to assimilate into the local society, to adapt to their mentality and traditions.... if the child aims to live in Cyprus, then she needs to know Greek to be able to socialise.

Interestingly, opinions similar to those in Cyprus were commonly expressed in Estonia, where the minority Russian-speaking parents for the sake of *free* higher education in *Estonian* and more successful careers for their children chose Estonian-medium schools, as we see in Extract (16), where an example of a discourse quite common among Russian-speaking mothers is reproduced.

Extract 16 – Estonia

I wanted to make it easier for my child to learn Estonian from a young age in the education system.

There is a strong relationship between the languages used in education and in public spaces in the “multilingual” nature of an HLE because, based on our collected data, we found that mainstream education influences the child’s decision to abandon the use of the heritage language at home, despite all of the efforts of the Russian-speaking mother or both parents’ HLE. Due to changing patterns of everyday language use (from translanguaging at home to the majority language in an educational setting) because of starting (pre)school, children start implementing their own language policies. There is a kind of cumulative non-linear effect that is difficult to separate into individual components, since one factor influences another ad infinitum: children study in the majority language and the heritage language is not facilitated (at school or in the public space), consciously or subconsciously, by teachers or classmates, forcing a child to claim his/her voice and agency. From the point of view of a multilingual HLE, children’s linguistic behaviour under these circumstances is not beneficial.

Multilingual HLE: children’s agency and voice

In Extract 17 a parent complains that it was impossible to have a conversation in Russian when her children entered a preschool and Swedish became very dominant:

Extract 17 – Sweden

As soon as they went to kindergarten, it became very hard to keep up with Russian. They did not want to show that they knew another language. They wanted to use Swedish only.

In Extract 18 a mother presents the problem of her child refusing to speak the language as “laziness”. From her response it becomes clear that both of her children prefer the mainstream language (she starts talking about “my son” and then continues with “it is easier for them”):

Extract 18 – Cyprus

My middle son refuses to speak Russian; he is lazy.... it is easier for them to speak Greek....

In Extract (19) a Russian-speaking mother from Estonia mentions the domination of the official language because of school:

Extract 19 – Estonia

The children speak Russian with us, but since the Estonian language began to dominate more than Russian, one often hears the children use expressions in Estonian, as it is easier for them.

The strongest reason is that mainstream equivalents become so frequent in children's speech that they easily replace heritage language expressions. Volitional family language policy is needed to help a child to develop all languages in more or less one rhythm despite numerous difficulties. Extract 20 reveals how parents and children implement translanguaging in order to cope with a multilingual situation in educational settings:

Extract 20 – Cyprus

Before she went to school, my daughter communicated using mainly Russian, though she has a lot of Cypriot friends and neighbours. When she went to first grade at a Greek school, her teachers did everything they could to get my daughter to express herself properly in Greek ... and, in her head, when she was in the first grade, everything got mixed up: she used letters from three alphabets [Greek, English and Russian] when she was writing. Her teacher did an incredible job, so when her Greek at school became organised, and she started reading and so on, all other languages were also alright. In the afternoon school, they helped her to do homework [in Greek], and now she does it herself in Greek, English and Russian. When she does not understand something, I use Google translator, I try to explain in Russian, while at school they explain in Greek. It is difficult [to function in both Russian and Greek], but we try to cope.

As we see, the mother's determination and belief that she is able to organise and control learning situations in the heritage language in parallel with school teachers to achieve a desirable objective – a multilingual child – is highly relevant. The question of mothers' roles and agency in overcoming heritage language learning difficulties experienced by children to sustain a multilingual HLE is discussed next.

Mothers' roles in children's agency: goal orientation – multilingual HLE

When a child enters a majority language school, each minority/immigrant mother has to decide about home language management, family language policy, whether to use the majority language or the heritage language (e.g. during the completion of homework assignments), whether to maintain and transmit the L1, to shift to the second language (L2) or to use both codes or

translanguaging (Fishman 1991; Spolsky 2012; Kirsch 2012; Li Wei 2012; King & Fogle 2016).

What we found is that some reasons for not speaking Russian with the child in Sweden echoed results from Cyprus and Estonia: it was easier *practically* to speak Swedish; many of those mothers who *started* speaking Russian to their children when they were born *abandoned* the idea of a bilingual upbringing for similar reasons or when confronted with *difficulties*, when bilingual development did not go smoothly or when the child refused to speak Russian, but there was also one tendency that seemingly differentiated Sweden from the other two countries. The mothers *tried* to develop both the reading and writing skills of their children in Russian, spending, according to them, *quality* time with their children: reading Russian-language books *together*, listening to Russian songs, watching Russian-language TV, and using print and digital educational resources. What emerged from the Swedish data was that the words “try” and “force” showed that the process of heritage language transmission was not always neutral or natural:

Extract 21 – Sweden

I try to talk to my child in Russian all the time and force her to answer me in Russian.

On the other hand, many mothers in Sweden had a “he will talk later if he wants to” attitude and did not force their children to speak Russian if they refused to.

A mother might become concerned about her child’s knowledge of Russian and take actions to learn it with her child or to teach it to the child. In Extract 22 and Extract 23 a mother describes the process of learning the heritage language; in Extract 22, in addition, she acknowledges the role of a grandmother who comes to visit them occasionally:

Extract 22 – Cyprus

I teach my younger child; she likes to circle letters and she learns how to read syllable by syllable. It is difficult and I don't have enough time, but her grandmother helps us when she visits.

Extract 23 – Sweden

At home I showed her letters. We made our own alphabet. We took, for example, the letter D and chose a picture. We connected pictures to letters. She glued them on.

The important role of grandmothers in language transmission was also recognised by the Russian mothers in Sweden (Extract 24) and in Estonia (Extract 25). It is interesting that the frequent visits of relatives from Russia also had positive impacts on children’s heritage language development (see also Ringblom 2012).

Extract 24 – Sweden

Grandmother and grandfather come very often. They just buy a last-minute ticket and come.

Extract 25 – Estonia

Of course, our children read constantly with their grandmother [in Russian], watch Soviet cartoons.... With my job I can hardly devote the same amount of time to them as she has done all these years.

In Cyprus and Sweden, strong ties between different generations of a family facilitate smooth heritage language maintenance. This is particularly relevant in these countries because external language learning situations in Russian are quite sporadic. The interview data are examined for “natural” literacy activities as a part of the family’s multilingual HLE in Section 4.7.

What made Swedish and Estonian data similar was that it was often said that a child *had to* know the mother tongue of the parents: his or her heritage language. However, our participants from Estonia emphasised that there was no need to *push* children to learn. The mothers were able to rely more on the social milieu and sociolinguistic environment, as in Estonia 31% of the population are Russian-speakers:

Extract 26 – Estonia

Our child has many opportunities to learn the language in natural conditions, outside of school life.

Another context which received the attention of mothers in the interviews was non-formal learning of the heritage language and the majority language.

Non-formal education as an alternative setting when creating a multilingual HLE

The mothers tried to use all of the resources and opportunities available in order to develop the reading and writing skills of their children as they understood the importance of early literacy experience and its positive, long-lasting effect on their children’s future academic success. Based on our data from Sweden and Cyprus, we can conclude that the informal learning of the heritage language and the majority language was connected because the purpose for which the children were studying was multilingualism, and its role in a multilingual HLE cannot be overestimated. Parents developed informal literacy activities at home and organised formal literacy activities outside the home by sending their children to kindergartens and schools. This is relevant not only to the heritage language but to the majority language as well, as is indicated by Extract 27, where a mother’s belief is that literacy activities should become a natural part of the family’s environment, and that books should be introduced very early, basically as early as the first toys:

Extract 27 – Sweden

Although I spoke mainly Russian at home, we always went to *öppen förskola* [open preschool] to learn Swedish. There we were always together, singing Swedish songs, talking... We had books in both languages from the very beginning: paper and hardback. These were right next to the toys from the very beginning, the Swedish books were there too and I read them aloud in Russian; already at six months our child started playing with a book: there was a fabric butterfly and when one turned pages, it made a sound. I explained what was in the picture.

In Cyprus, the strong inclination to send children to Russian Saturday schools or Russian-speaking private schools was a consequence of the specific family language policy, where the very high status of Russian in Cyprus was reinforced by the large and prosperous Russian community:

Extract 28 – Cyprus

From a very early age we have had a rule: with us, only Russian, please. And it works! You do not need to be afraid to speak Russian with children in public. On Saturdays it is always Russian school; it is important to know how to write and read! We need rules and need to be ready to implement them... It is enough to speak Russian with a child and read Russian books; first you read to him and then he starts to read himself. I do not see any problem there. Our children can speak Russian, English and Greek.

Compare this with Extract 29, where a mother shows scepticism towards Sunday school in Russian in Estonia because she is interested not in cultural capital but in practical benefits, practical knowledge with a strategic purpose:

Extract 29 – Estonia

I really do not understand why a child has to sit there and do calligraphy. Also, learning poems by heart is of doubtful value. It would be better to learn the same things that a Russian school teaches in Russia. Just give them textbooks and that is it.... We ended up buying textbooks [in Russia] and working with them independently at home.

An encouraging discovery was that a parent acting as a role model and the availability of multilingual literacy material in the household were key factors in children understanding the importance of the ability to read and write in both languages and in their motivation and later achievements in reading and writing skills, when studying languages in non-formal and formal education settings.

Mothers sent their children to Russian Saturday/Sunday schools or private Russian-speaking schools, bought Russian books and if they were not available in the L2 countries, then they ordered them online or used digital resources. It was obvious that the frequency, quantity and quality of literacy-related activities played a crucial role in the development of multilingual literacy in their children. But they also tried to develop their literacy in L2

(the language of the host country: Greek, Estonian and Swedish) and in English, as they wanted to ensure their children a better future; for some of the parents this was the main reason they had moved to another country. The most important finding was that they had a positive view of multilingualism and tried to bring up their children accordingly.

The languages used in home (cultural) domains

Another important factor was the amount of time the parents and Russian-speaking relatives spent (on-line and off-line) with the children practising Russian, whether the family maintained strong ties with their relatives in Russia or Russian-speaking countries, and made frequent visits to Russia. Quite often parents brought a lot of books back from Russia to Cyprus, as there are not enough Russian book shops on the island:

Extract 30 – Cyprus

I feel that we will have to carry a heavy suitcase with books from Russia.

Multilingual space analysis showed that the material environment of the participants in Cyprus was shared between Greek, Russian and English; in Estonia Estonian and Russian, and in Sweden Swedish, Russian and English. These languages and their corresponding cultures played a crucial role in the complex reality of the participants' lives.

In Cyprus and Sweden, children were sent to Russian weekend schools, were provided with Russian books and, if they were not available locally, the books were ordered online or digital resources were used, as stated in Extract 31.

Extract 31 – Cyprus

I rarely go to Russia as I am very busy; books for children you can buy or exchange via social networks, second hand. This is very convenient and much cheaper; mothers sell them at the end of the school year. I also have a friend who has a daughter who is a little older than mine, so we inherit their books.

In Estonia, there are lots of book stores where it is possible to get all kinds of Russian books: from fairy tales to grammar textbooks, as we see in Extract 32, where a Russian-speaking mother describes the reading habits of her children as quite diversified, from entertainment magazines to Russian classics.

Extract 32 – Estonia

Everything is available. They especially like to read all kinds of adventure stories and magazines, as well as doing crosswords.

The close proximity to Russia and the opportunity to freely obtain not very expensive (text)books played an important role in parents' enthusiasm for heritage language teaching. In Cyprus, if study participants sent their children

to Russian weekend schools, they bought the books that were required: for example, hand-writing activity books (*propisi*), which teach the children to write Russian letters correctly and to develop calligraphy skills. It is noteworthy that in Cyprus Russian-speaking participants and their children mainly watched Russian TV programmes and to a lesser extent Greek and English programmes, while in Sweden it was the opposite: the parents there mainly watched Swedish channels and to a lesser extent Russian and English channels. Recently Russian TV channels have even been advertised along the highways in Cyprus.

As for media use in Estonia, it is quite possible to live within the cultural environment of the Russian Federation (RF): watch RF television, listen to RF radio, and read RF newspapers online (and easily buy them in kiosks or bookshops, especially in Ida-Viru county, on the border with Russia). In our Estonian data, though, the parents did not have a clear preference for Russian or Estonian channels: sometimes they watched English programmes instead (see Extract 33). There is one local Russian-language TV station in Estonia that the families might watch for the daily Russian-language news broadcast.

Extract 33 – Estonia

The whole family basically watch all channels together, in English, in Estonian and in Russian. But I would say that the dearest to our hearts are the Russian channels. I'm not sure why, but probably it's because of the jokes; the comedy shows are somehow closest to our souls. Also, soap operas in Estonian or English are often not that good.

Extract 34 – Sweden

It is important that we watch TV or read books together. Let it be just five or ten minutes, but we do it together and we discuss it.

The interview data showed that Russian-speaking parents found it important to develop both the reading and writing skills of their children in Russian. They tried to read books together, to listen to Russian songs, watch Russian TV (and found it important to do that together and even discuss what was seen; see Extract 34), to spend quality time with their children, and use print and digital educational resources, which shows the importance of joint literacy activities involving the child in the development of a multilingual HLE.

Russian language transmission went hand in hand with passing on Russian culture, which was considered very important by the participants. Cyprus and Estonia were perceived as small republics with a limited number of cultural events, so a lot of members of the Russian-speaking communities travelled to Russia, especially to big cities. From Estonia, Saint Petersburg is quite close and affordable “to satisfy cultural hunger” (see Extract 35), while for Cyprus parents, with their high socio-economic status, it was not a problem to travel to Moscow once or twice per year, as mentioned in Extract (36):

Extract 35 – Estonia

We are an intelligent family. When we need to meet our needs, we just get up and go.

Extract 36 – Cyprus

We get culture when visiting Moscow and on trips around Europe.

Multilingual space might also be created with the help of various symbols and cultural attributes: not only Russian cultural artefacts (e.g. Russian *Matryoshka* dolls, samovars or kitchen tools) but also shawls, Russian *kosovorotki* (peasant shirts) or Russian forage caps. The HLE included all resources and opportunities that parents provided their children to develop their reading and writing skills, as is revealed in Excerpt 37:

Extract 37 – Sweden

We have Russian letters on the refrigerator... We have always had Russian food at home. I get it from the Russian shop here in Stockholm.

What was common to all three countries was that education in the majority language led to the necessity of implementing translanguaging strategies at home in order to help children understand difficult and abstract concepts in Russian, and some issues related to Russian culture, food and nature that were absent in their current home countries.

In all three countries, some mothers tried to maintain strong links with their homeland (or historical, maybe even imagined, homeland in the case of Estonia) and bring different symbolic cultural items from Russia and/or Russian-speaking countries. At home, these were put together with items of the majority culture and often Anglo-American cultures, which could be a reflection of a translanguaging space and their temporal and spatial life trajectories, complexity and super-diversity.

Discussion and conclusions

In this article, we discussed selected interview extracts from an on-going ethnographic study of the language practices and ideologies among majority language – Russian-speaking families in Cyprus, Estonia and Sweden. The fieldwork data included 60 semi-structured interviews, where we talked to Russian-speaking mothers from immigrant families in Cyprus and Sweden, and minority families in Estonia.

The main research question was: what differences and similarities can be found in the issues of translanguaging, family language policy, heritage language transmission, linguistic and cultural identity and their roles in the creation of the multilingual HLE among immigrant and minority Russian-speaking families in Cyprus, Estonia and Sweden? The quotes in the analysis were chosen because they are particularly illustrative of the issues

experienced by families when conducting family language policy and creating multilingual home literacy environments.

As for the similarities, parents in all three countries realised the importance of early childhood literacy experiences at home and tried to enhance these experiences both in Russian and in the majority language of the country via (in)direct teaching and meaning-focused shared activities. This is in line with previous research (Gunn et al. 1995; Whitehurst & Lonigan 2001; Lonigan 2006). When it comes to supporting the majority language, the practices were different: while some families made additional efforts to expose their child to language learning from the earliest ages, others did not bother and believed in following a natural course of language acquisition and that the child would get exposed to it at preschool and school. The latter was especially true in Sweden and Estonia. However, for a multilingual HLE, when it came to the minority language the need for a thoughtful family language policy became even more apparent since the compensational function of the school was almost non-existent. Translanguaging must become as integral a part of schools' high academic level as their democratic atmosphere, positive attitude and respect for the child's personality.

Translanguaging was used for practical reasons, for better comprehension and for the facilitation of a multiple language learning process, as was earlier suggested by García (2009) and Lewis et al. (2012). Translanguaging space at home was a reflection of translanguaging in the society, especially in the case of Cyprus, where Greek, English and Russian were used interchangeably. A multilingual HLE was enhanced by translanguaging: Russian-speaking parents implemented translanguaging strategies in the HLE in order to increase educational opportunities for their children and to improve their chances for rewarding careers and comfortable lives. The translanguaging space enhanced the multilingual HLE as it went beyond linguistic systems and structures and incorporated verbal and non-verbal communication, semiotic resources, and meaning-making signs at home and in the society, in life and in learning trajectories (García & Li Wei 2014).

The most important factors that affected the creation of the multilingual HLE were the sociolinguistic setting of the country, heritage language status, ability to maintain close ties with Russia (or Russian-speaking countries), connections with relatives, the availability of quality time to spend with the children in order to develop their reading and writing skills, and literacy-developing materials and resources, which supports the findings of Bourdieu (1977) and Hamers & Blanc (2000).

Our findings suggest that there were a variety of alternative factors that noticeably impacted attitudes towards translanguaging as a home language and multilingual literacy development technique among children: family's educational and professional backgrounds, migration profiles, factors of future educational orientations for children, and intra-ethnic relationships within the majority community, as was previously determined by Shohamy

(2006), King et al. (2008) and Spolsky (2009). While most mothers wanted to preserve the quality of the Russian language and transmit it to their children, they sometimes let the children use the language that was most convenient in particular situations. This can be seen as an accommodation or convergence towards the target society tendency. As a result, some parents noted that over time more domains were dominated by the majority language.

The reading space at home was always a potential site for translanguaging: while some parents, as their children grew older, tried to sell or exchange books with other parents, other parents preferred to keep the books so that younger siblings could use them. Thus, expanding collections of pre-primary and primary school books of the Russian language and literature were created.

Russian-speaking families in Cyprus, Sweden and Estonia tried to create a translanguaging space, enriching the linguistic and cultural experiences of their children by buying Russian (text)books, using various multilingual digital and hard copy learning resources and attending Russian-language cultural events when possible. A multilingual space was created with the help of various symbols and cultural attributes. Russian-speaking participants tried to maintain strong links with Russia and bring different cultural items from Russia. At home, these items were combined with items of local majority cultures, which could be a reflection of translanguaging space. This provides evidence in favour of García & Li Wei's (2014) position regarding translanguaging space.

Technological advances have made available on-line education for children and their parents, providing an opportunity for heritage language children to communicate with their relatives in Russia without going there. Media play an important role in supporting and stimulating the heritage language maintenance process, as well as increasing children's natural curiosity and interest in Russian Federation-related cultural and societal issues. In all three countries, Russian culture was seen by families as Bourdieu's "symbolic capital".

Families constructed their own language policies, involving all available linguistic and extralinguistic resources. This supports the previous research by Spolsky (2012) and King & Fogle (2016). In Sweden and Cyprus, the role of Russian communities was of great importance: parents could find, request and exchange Russian-language materials and literature that was necessary for their children to enhance their HLE, to support their heritage language, to maintain and transmit to their children Russian language and culture and to develop the Russian-language literacy of their children. Russian heritage schools and educational centres also enhanced the development of HLE. Children attended these schools at least once a week, and parents and grandparents tried to help children do their homework. They emphasised the development of both reading and writing skills.

In Estonia, Russian-speaking families had not migrated or changed countries; instead, they had had to adapt to the new socio-linguistic and socio-

political situation in the country after the collapse of the USSR and incorporate Estonian into their linguistic repertoires and dominant language constellations. The close proximity to Russia created a better opportunity for Estonian mothers to buy Russian books and educational materials for their children than in Cyprus or in Sweden.

As for the differences, Cyprus seemed to have more favourable conditions for the heritage language and multilingual HLE development than Estonia or Sweden. This can be explained by the high status of the Russian language and culture in Cyprus, as well as positive attitudes towards multilingualism and the growing Russian community on the island (Eracleous 2015). In addition, the post-colonial situation in Cyprus and the widespread use of English throughout the country (Buschfeld 2013) made English an essential language for the HLE, apart from Russian and Greek. In Estonia, Russian-speaking children were mainly exposed to Russian and Estonian, while in Sweden they were exposed to Swedish, Russian and English. It should be noted that Russian-speaking parents in Cyprus were more satisfied with the level of Russian of their children than in Estonia and Sweden, where the parents seemed to have fewer opportunities to use Russian with their children and more restricted resources and support from the local society.

However, everything depended on the family, who created micro-environments where literacy could develop. The family also supported literacy through their own examples and by reading books themselves and having them around the house. The importance of a supportive environment cannot be overestimated. The families that lived in a multicultural environment even in Sweden mentioned that it was much easier for them to transmit Russian to their children. They saw no problems in doing so. They even got support in preschools. On the other hand, families from the mainly Swedish-speaking environments found it more difficult. In such situations, more purposeful actions needed to be taken by the family in order to support Russian.

It is difficult to predict the future of mainstream languages and Russian as an heritage language, but it is clearly very important that, almost at the end of the first quarter of the 21st century, Russian-speaking families are able to choose their parenting pedagogical approaches, considering linguistic and cultural values, with the goal of creating balanced multilingual and multicultural children. Undoubtedly, language maintenance and transmission are fostered if a new generation considers competence in these languages advantageous, if there are positive associations and if they are reinforced by parents and social networks.

Finally, it should be noted that in the countries we investigated there are Russian-speaking parents who worry that Russian-mainstream language bilingualism may be harmful to their children's literacy development and are afraid that their children will become language impaired because of dual language exposure, but such families were not part of our research. The

present article explored and presented distinct and well-documented family strategies in multilingual HLE creation and translanguaging variation that extend beyond official political ideologies and interpretations and highlight positive collaborative opportunities to facilitate raising bilingual and multilingual children.

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