

“One Should Not Forget One’s Mother Tongue”: Russian-Speaking Parents’ Choice of Language of Instruction in Estonia

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Abstract

This exploratory study identifies factors affecting parental choice of language of instruction, based on semistructured interviews with 16 Russian-speaking parents in three urban areas of Estonia. We investigated three different types of language programs: Russian schools, which provided education in the children’s first language; Estonian schools, which provided education in the children’s second language; and Russian–Estonian bilingual programs, which functioned as separate classes within Russian schools. Our interviews with parents revealed four basic types of orientation toward language and culture. We have labeled these orientations multicultural (appreciating or feeling comfortable with many languages and cultures), Russocentric (feeling most comfortable with Russian culture and/or seeing Russian language and culture as superior), bicultural (having familiarity with and/or interest in both languages and cultures, or cultural neutrality), and Estoniocentric (having a strong desire to belong to the Estonian cultural and language group). These orientations correspond to parents’ choice of language of instruction for their children, suggesting that choice of school language has different meanings for parents with varying culture and language identifications.

Introduction

Despite the heated debates surrounding language of instruction in the United States, there is little research on parental attitudes about language of instruction (Gribbons & Shin, 1996; Shin & Kim, 1998). Furthermore, parents’ attitudes and theories regarding second language (L2) acquisition are not sufficiently taken into account by policymakers. Some researchers imply the

importance of parental attitudes when they suggest that members of minority communities support bilingual education (e.g., Schmidt, 1997). Other researchers (e.g., Porter, 1996) claim that many immigrant parents in the United States do not want schools to maintain their children's first language (L1) if this is done at the expense of learning English.

Elections in the United States indicate minority members' support for bilingual education. Although Ron Unz, the initiator and financial supporter of Proposition 227 in California (which terminated bilingual education in the state in 1998), claimed that Hispanics themselves favored the proposition (Hubler, 2002), this is untrue. According to a poll conducted in June 1998, 63% of California's Hispanic voters voted against Proposition 227, and according to a February 1998 poll, 88% of Hispanics with children in bilingual classes supported bilingual education (Crawford, 1999). In Massachusetts in November 2002, 93% of Latino parents—as indicated in exit polling—voted against Question 2, which nonetheless passed and eliminated bilingual programs (Capetillo-Ponce, 2004). Language-minority families—parents and their children—are the main stakeholders affected by policy decisions regarding language of instruction in schools. Therefore, it is important for policymakers and administrators to learn what drives parents' choice of language of instruction, so they can provide the necessary language assistance to allow children to meet educational goals.

Estonia provides an excellent laboratory for investigating language of instruction because the Russian-speaking language minority has unusually unfettered options: education in the L1 (Russian), education in the L2 (Estonian), or bilingual programs (in Russian and Estonian). In the United States, such freedom of choice in language of instruction is rare to nonexistent. Current U.S. trends in language policy are toward more restrictive policies. Proposition 227 included provisions allowing teachers to be sued by disgruntled parents if teachers do not conform to its powerful prohibitions. However, the current trend in language referenda in the United States, exemplified by Question 2 in Massachusetts and included in other attempts to outlaw bilingual education, has become much more draconian. New provisions under Question 2 include the creation of a private right of action, allowing any parent to sue any teacher, elected official, or school district employee directly. Parents can also sue for legal costs and compensatory damages: a provision relatively unknown in civil rights statutes. Sued parties cannot be indemnified by the state, or any private party or insurer, so teachers and school board members and others will have to bear all the costs of their own legal representation; if a parent prevails against him or her, the employee or elected official cannot be rehired or reelected for 5 years.

While many language-minority parents in the United States will not be able to freely choose the language of instruction for their children due to current restrictive trends against bilingual education, the linguistic situation

in Estonia is vastly different. Even after Estonia gained independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, Russian-speaking children in Estonia maintained the right to receive basic education in L1 but can opt for education in the Estonian language or in bilingual programs.

In this exploratory study, we identified factors affecting parental choice of school language, based on interviews with 16 Russian-speaking parents in three urban areas in Estonia. The results of this study suggest that the differences found in parents' choice of language of instruction for their children are related to their culture and language attitudes, which we will call orientations. We identified four such orientations among parents in this study: multicultural, Russocentric, bicultural, and Estoniocentric.

Political and Linguistic Context of Russian Speakers in Estonia

Because Estonia was annexed to the Soviet Union between 1945 and 1991, it experienced a massive immigration of Russian speakers after World War II. The percentage of the population in the country who spoke Estonian as L1 declined from 88% to 62% during the Soviet regime, due to this influx of Russian speakers. Currently, Russian speakers form one third of Estonia's population (Kirch, 1999).

Russian speakers are a minority with previous privileges. A former European official has stated that Russian speakers in Estonia resemble a "colonial minority" (Kirch, Kirch, Rimm, & Tuisk, 1997, p. 52). The dominance of Moscow during the Soviet years provided a linguistic environment that allowed the expansion of the Russian language.

Although there was no one official language in Estonia during the Soviet era, the Russian language dominated many domains of Estonian society; for example, banking, statistics, the militia (Russian police), transportation, and much of industry functioned in Russian (Rannut, 1991). Also during this time, a separate public school network was established for Russian-speaking children; these schools used Russian as the language of instruction while teaching some practical Estonian (Estonian Ministry of Education, 1997). Meanwhile, the Estonian-speaking public schools serving Estonian-speaking children taught Russian as another native language (Rannut & Rannut, 1995). The emphasis on the Russian language in Estonian society generally and the expectation for Estonian speakers to learn Russian through the school system created a one-way bilingualism: Most Estonians were bilingual in Estonian and Russian, while only a small percentage of Russians learned Estonian.

The linguistic situation in Estonia began to change with the breakup of the Soviet Union. When Estonia regained its independence in Fall 1991, it had to accommodate a large number of mainly Soviet-era immigrants in the abruptly changed political context and to define the status of Russian speakers and the Russian language. Even before independence, the Estonian language law,

approved in January 1989, created a policy of limited bilingualism. Its goal was to enforce bilingualism and to equalize Estonian with the Russian language by guaranteeing services in either language (Hint, 1990; Pettai, 1996). Post-independence legislation in 1995 officially designated Russian a minority language (Ozolins, 2000). Furthermore, it has become necessary to obtain some Estonian-language proficiency to gain Estonian citizenship, and Estonian proficiency is now viewed as an asset in the labor market.

Russia criticized Estonian citizenship and general language policies, calling them human rights violations, and these policies were investigated by international organizations such as the Council of Europe (Ozolins, 2000). However, Estonia's language of instruction policies are exemplary because they offer a range of options for language-minority students: Russian-speaking schools, which are the mainstream schools for Russian-speaking children; Estonian-speaking schools; and bilingual classes within Russian-speaking schools that use both Russian and Estonian, such as immersion programs, most of which have only existed since 2000 (Kemppainen & Ferrin, 2002). A law will shift the language of instruction from Russian to Estonian in Russian-speaking secondary schools in 2007 (Rannut, 2001). Mother-tongue education, however, is guaranteed in basic education (the first 9 years) for Russian-speaking children, even after the year 2007 (Kemppainen & Ferrin).

Literature Review: Second Language Acquisition

Research on parental attitudes and beliefs concerning language of instruction in the United States is scarce (Gribbons & Shin, 1996; Shin & Kim, 1998). Thus, L2 acquisition literature will be utilized to help illustrate factors relevant to parental choice regarding language of instruction. Sociocultural factors, including acculturation and language attitudes, play important roles in L2 acquisition (Baetens Beardsmore, 1995; Cummins, 1982; McGroarty, 1988; Schumann, 1978, 1986) and may provide insights into parental language choice in education as well. Literature discussing motivation for the choice of school language sheds additional light on the choice.

Schumann's (1986) acculturation model is especially helpful in the Estonian context because it highlights factors of ethnic group relations and associates language learning with three primary social factors: social dominance, integration strategy, and enclosure. Social dominance—the perceived political, cultural, technical, or economic superiority of a group (Schumann, 1986)—affects the likelihood of groups learning each other's languages. Russian status in Estonia during the Soviet era resembled social dominance, since many institutions used Russian to conduct business (Rannut, 1991).

The second social factor of acculturation is integration strategy, which includes three degrees: assimilation to the dominant culture and language, preservation of one's native culture and language, and adaptation to the host

culture while maintaining one's native culture and language. Assimilation and adaptation may facilitate L2 learning (Schumann, 1986). Russians in Estonia exhibit low assimilative tendencies. Only 8% of Russian speakers in Estonia indicate a desire to assimilate with Estonian speakers (Laitin, 1996).

The social factor of enclosure refers to the lack of shared social institutions, such as churches, schools, and professions (Schumann, 1986). Traditionally, Estonians and Russians have had separate social institutions, including schools, so they have lacked the frequent interaction that might influence the need and opportunities to learn L2s.

Researchers suggest that positive attitudes toward the majority or dominant culture and willingness to associate with L2 speakers may facilitate successful L2 acquisition (Cummins, 1982; Hoffmann, 1993). However, a positive attitude toward one's own culture is important, as ambivalent attitudes toward one's own cultural identity and perceived threats toward the L1 may negatively influence L2 acquisition (Baetens Beardsmore, 1995; Cummins). In Estonia, the Russian speakers and Estonian speakers each appear to perceive their own language as having the higher status (Rannut, 1999).

Although instrumental rationales—such as social mobility, labor market, and higher education opportunities—play a role in the choice of language of instruction, culture and language are significant factors in the choice. For example, Landry and Allard's (1985) interview study of parental language choices in the Canadian bilingual environment found that maintaining the French language (L1) and culture is important in school language choices among French speakers. Language loyalty, caused by “manipulation of ethnicity”—arousal of group consciousness by political forces (Fishman, 1989, p. 44)—may help explain attitudes toward L1 and L2 and also parental language choices. While ethnicity was undermined in the Soviet ideology and Soviet identity was emphasized, the dissolution of the Soviet Union led to awareness of distinct ethnicities. The changed political environment and ethnic consciousness may have increased language loyalty among Russian speakers in the current language-minority context.

Methodology

Because little is known about choice of language of instruction and there are no comprehensive theories to explain parental choice of school language, this exploratory study used grounded theory to obtain a better understanding of Russian-speaking parents' choices of language of instruction for their children. In grounded theory, understanding of a phenomenon is grounded in the received data (Strauss & Corbin, 1994). Although Schumann's (1986) acculturation model helped in providing an initial framework for the interview questions, the themes that emerged from the parental interviews became the focus of the data analysis.

Setting

Since over 90% of Russian speakers in Estonia are urban dwellers, we selected participants from three urban areas. We chose three heterogeneous cities (i.e., Tallinn, Tartu, and Narva) based on socioeconomic and ethnic differences between these cities to ensure that we would find research subjects with different backgrounds (Morse, 1994). Tallinn is the capital, with a 47% Russian-speaking population (the rest of the inhabitants being Estonian speakers); Tartu is a university city, with a 16% Russian-speaking population; and Narva is in an industrial region, bordering Russia, with a 92% Russian-speaking population (M. Rannut, personal communication, September 30, 2002). Tallinn has the highest socioeconomic level and Narva the lowest of these three cities, measured in average per-capita monthly income (Vihalemm, 1997; see notes in Table 1).

In each city, we examined three educational options for our study: Estonian-speaking schools, Russian-speaking schools, and Russian-Estonian bilingual immersion classes. We selected regular public schools, not elite schools with restricted admission.

Participants

Research participants were 16 parents: 5 from Tallinn, 4 from Tartu, and 7 from Narva. Demographic characteristics of the interviewees are presented in Table 1. It is interesting to note that while all of the interviewed parents spoke Russian as their L1, most reported mixed ethnic ancestries: Russian, Ukrainian, Estonian, Lithuanian, Latvian, German, Belarusian, and Finnish/Carelian, indicating that Russian speakers are a heterogeneous group ethnically although they share Russian as their L1.

After we selected certain students (in cooperation with school administrators) to represent desired school language and age groups (Miles & Huberman, 1994), we interviewed their parents. Six students were in *gümnasium* (i.e., Grades 10 through 12), and six students were in fifth and sixth grade from both Estonian- and Russian-speaking schools. The three students selected in the bilingual classes were in second and third grade because these new programs—except for one—had only functioned for 1½ years and served lower grade levels at the time of data collection. Table 2 shows the parents and schools selected for this research in each town.

Data Collection

Data collection included semistructured interviews and observation. The number of interviews was based on a saturation principle, referring to “diminishing marginal contribution” of additional data (Gummeson, 2000, p. 96). Parents were interviewed individually; each interview lasted about 1 hour. When no new themes appeared, the interview process was concluded. Two translators translated and transcribed the interviews from Russian into

Table 1

Characteristics of Interviewed Parents

	Type of program attended by children			Total/overall
	Estonian-speaking school	Russian-speaking school	Bilingual class	
Age in years (average)	39	42	27	36
Gender				
Female (<i>n</i>)	6	6	1	13
Male (<i>n</i>)	1	0	3	4
Education^a				
Basic+ (<i>n</i>)	0	0	1	1
HS+ (<i>n</i>)	4	1	2	7
BA (<i>n</i>)	3	5	0	8
Occupation				
Professional (<i>n</i>)	3	6	0	9
Technical/service (<i>n</i>)	2	0	2	4
Production/operation (<i>n</i>)	2	0	1	3
Family income^b				
Low (<i>n</i>)	5	2	3	10
Middle (<i>n</i>)	2	4	0	6
High (<i>n</i>)	0	0	0	0

^a For the education categories, Basic+ stands for basic education and vocational education; HS+ represents high school and vocational education; and BA stands for bachelor of arts degree.

^b The family income categories are based on annual income in Estonian Crowns (EEK); U.S. dollars are provided in parentheses (Institute of Baltic Studies, 2003): Low, under EEK 60,000 (\$3,398); Middle, EEK 60,000–120,000 (3,398–6,795); High, over EEK 120,000 (\$6,795). Estonian gross national income per capita in 2001 was \$4,106 (ESA Statistikaamet, 2003).

Table 1, cont.,
Characteristics of Interviewed Parents

Length of residence, in years (average)	29	35	27	30
Citizenship				
Russian (<i>n</i>)	0	2	1	3
Estonian (<i>n</i>)	6	3	2	11
Other (<i>n</i>)	1	1	0	2
Estonian fluency				
None (<i>n</i>)	1	0	1	2
Some (<i>n</i>)	4	6	1	11
Fair/good (<i>n</i>)	2	0	1	3
Ethnic background				
Russian (100%) (<i>n</i>)	0	1	2	3
Estonian (100%) (<i>n</i>)	0	0	0	0
Mixed (<i>n</i>)	7	5	1	13
Ethnic identity				
Russian (<i>n</i>)	2	4	2	8
Estonian (<i>n</i>)	2	1	0	3
Mixed (<i>n</i>)	2	1	0	3
Other nationality (<i>n</i>)	1	0	0	1
Does not know (<i>n</i>)	0	0	1	1

English. Parts of the translated texts were back-translated by a native Russian speaker for lexical correspondence (Neuman, 1994). To protect the interviewees' privacy, we have changed all names in this research report.

Data Analysis

Interviewing and initial coding occurred simultaneously. For data analysis, the interview transcripts were imported into NVivo software for qualitative textual analysis. During the analysis, the data were coded and reduced to emerging ideas and themes. The open coding brought up several themes that we labeled and then categorized. Using axial coding, we made connections between categories and investigated subcategories (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Finally, we used selective coding for investigating cases related to relevant categories (Neuman, 1994) and for showing how all the identified categories were related to the core category (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

To ensure credibility, we based the final categorization of parents' language and culture orientations (multicultural, Russocentric, bicultural, and Estoniocentric) on member checks, peer debriefing, and triangulation (Erlanson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993). First, we sent the interviewed parents a letter asking them to assign themselves to one of the four given orientation categories. The letter provided names of the identified orientation categories and a description of each category.

Table 2

Participants by City and Children's Type of Educational Program

	Russian-speaking school	Estonian-speaking school	Bilingual class	Total
Number of Tallinn parents	2	2	1	5
Number of Tartu parents	1	2	1	4
Number of Narva parents	3	3	1	7
Total	6	7	3	16 ^a

^a Originally 17 parents were interviewed. Data analysis, however, was based on 16 interviews because one of the parents was available only for a short time and could not participate in a follow-up.

Also, inter-rater reliability was tested with two outside raters, professionals not associated with this research. The outside raters and the primary researcher performed the analyses individually; they did not negotiate the categorizing.¹ The overall agreement rate among the interviewees, the two outside raters, and the primary researcher was 85%. Finally, the categories of parental attitudes were verified with Estonian scholars in education and language policies, who had attended, translated, and transcribed the interviews.

Findings

The parents differed significantly in their attitudes toward language and culture. These attitudes influenced the parents' choices of language of instruction for their children. We found four categories of culture and language attitudes among the 16 interviewed parents. As previously stated, these categories, or orientations, were multicultural, Russocentric, bicultural, and Estoniocentric. Our interviews elicited a range of language attitudes: strong desire to learn Estonian, willingness to learn Estonian, feeling pressured to learn Estonian, no expressed attitude toward Estonian, appreciation for the richness or necessity of the Russian language, and valuation of many languages. Similarly, we found a range of culture attitudes: emphasis on Estonian culture, emphasis on both Russian and Estonian culture, emphasis on Russian culture, neutrality about culture, and valuation of many cultures.

An analysis of the data led us to distinguish the four aforementioned categories of culture and language attitudes among the 16 interviewed parents. These categories represent different orientations toward Russian culture and language, and toward Estonian culture and language. Multicultural orientation refers to parental culture and language attitudes that emphasized interest in and value of many cultures and languages, rather than focusing on one particular culture or language. The term in this research is used in this narrow context and may deviate from connotations given to it in literature. Russocentric orientation, in this study, means emphasis on superiority or comfort with Russian culture. Parents in this orientation perceived the Estonian language requirements as putting pressure on them or made no reference to the Estonian language. Biculturally oriented parents found the Estonian culture or living environment familiar but simultaneously regarded Russian culture as highly valuable. Some parents in this category were neutral toward each culture. Biculturally oriented parents found learning Estonian important and expressed that they wanted to learn the language. The sole Estoniocentric parent wanted to learn about Estonian culture and pass it on to her children, and she indicated strong desire to learn Estonian.

A perception of the richness and necessity of the Russian language was shared among Russocentric parents, many biculturally oriented parents, and one multiculturally oriented parent. The biculturally oriented parents, however, emphasized the Estonian language along with the Russian language, and the multiculturally oriented parents emphasized many languages simultaneously.

Similarly, Russocentric parents, biculturally and multiculturally oriented parents shared some pride in Russian culture. The Russocentric differed from other groups by not expanding their personal cultural interests to include Estonian culture or other cultures. Two parents outside the multicultural category mentioned interest in many languages. One of them, however, did not include interest in many cultures and therefore differed from multiculturally oriented parents. We classified this parent as bicultural. The other parent outside the multicultural category, who belonged to the Estoniocentric orientation, indicated some interest in many languages and cultures but was placed in a category of her own because of her very strong emphasis on Estonian culture, which the multiculturally oriented parents did not share. Table 3 provides definitions for these categories and examples of parents' statements.

Of the 16 interviewed parents, 3 were identified by the researchers as multiculturally oriented, 3 as Russocentric, and 9 as biculturally oriented. Only 1 interviewee represented the Estoniocentric orientation.

One multiculturally oriented and one Russocentric parent were from each city, but five of nine biculturally oriented parents lived in Narva, which is 92% Russian speaking. Two possible explanations for this are: (a) The linguistic environment in Narva does not support acquiring Estonian in daily interaction, or (b) the secure position of Russian may reduce perceptions that the L1 (Russian) faces any threat, and may therefore increase bicultural and bilingual orientation. Interest in the Estonian language and bilingual programs appears greatest in areas where Russian dominates and least in areas where the majority language, Estonian, dominates (Vassiltshenko, Pedastsaar, Soll, Kala, & Kera, 1998; L. Vassiltshenko, personal communication, September 18, 2000).

Multicultural Orientation

Although all the parents categorized as having a multicultural orientation had mixed ethnic ancestry in their backgrounds, they all had Russian ancestors. This group differed from the other language and culture orientations because they valued a number of cultures and languages. For example, one parent, Anatoli, emphasized that all cultures have something to offer: "I think in this way, the world becomes smaller and all the cultures and languages are important . . . as in the workplace . . . everyone has his own information and knows what to do with it. Languages and cultures are like that." Another parent, Tamara, expressed appreciation of many cultures, including Estonian, German, and Russian.

In addition to emphasizing many cultures, all of the parents in the multicultural category downplayed the role of ethnicity. For example, one parent, Alissa, commented, "When we come together, Estonians, Russians, Moldavians, Finns, all are together—we don't differentiate. . . . It is important to be a human being, not depending on the language and one's ethnicity." Furthermore, multiculturally oriented parents valued many languages. These parents did not appear to have an emotional attachment to the Russian language and culture like the Russocentric parents. For example, Anatoli stated,

Table 3

Categories of Parental Language and Culture Orientation

Category	Definition	Examples of parents' comments
Multicultural orientation (<i>n</i> = 3)	Parents who: 1. Appreciate or feel comfortable in many cultures without giving preference to one culture, and 2. Value many languages without giving preference to one language.	Anatoli: "The world becomes smaller, and all the cultures and languages are important." Alissa: "Important is being a human person, not depending on the language and one's ethnicity."
Russocentric orientation (<i>n</i> = 3)	Parents who: 1. Emphasize the superiority of the Russian culture or comfort with the Russian culture, and 2. Mention governmental language pressure to speak Estonian or do not mention the Estonian language.	Larissa: "Russian culture is one of the richest cultures in the world." Olga: "[Russian culture] is more comfortable for me." Larissa: "There is some sort of pressure . . . to get Estonian-speaking communication."
Bicultural orientation (<i>n</i> = 9)	Parents who: 1. Feel familiarity with the Estonian culture while appreciating the Russian culture or are culturally neutral, and 2. Emphasize learning the Estonian language willingly.	Ljubov: "Russian culture is very high and one must know it. . . . We have got used to the Estonian more correct behavior." Veronika: "I think that Russian is becoming more and more popular. . . . I am now in the process of passing the [Estonian] exam."
Estioniocentric orientation (<i>n</i> = 1)	Parents who: 1. Want to transfer the Estonian culture to their children, and 2. Strongly desire to learn the Estonian language.	Lilia: "I think I would like to pass the Estonian culture to my children." Lilia: "I understand [Estonian], but I am ashamed of speaking, as I am ashamed that I don't know my language."

“If I had any opportunity, I would learn several languages and cultures.” Alissa wanted to maintain the L1 and “all other languages.”

Russocentric Orientation

Paradoxically, two of the Russocentric parents were not Russian by ethnicity but appeared to represent a pattern among Russian speakers: “The ideology inherent to ethnic Russians seems to be prevailing regardless of the Russian speakers’ actual ethnicity” (Rannut, 2001, p. 49). The overall culture orientation of the Russocentric parents emphasized pride in Russian culture. For example, one parent, Larissa, stated:

Russian culture is one of the richest cultures in the world. It has a great significance in understanding the world, for self-consciousness, being certain [of] oneself, cultural priority—that everybody is like a branch of the developing big tree that goes back to ancient times.

The Russocentric parents considered Russian culture and education to be superior to Estonian culture and education. Larissa said, “There is not much literature for me in Estonia, as Estonia is a small country.” Similarly, another parent, Olga, stated, “Generally in Estonia there is not such a variety of specialties [areas of specialization in which to study] as in Russia.” Unlike parents in the other orientations, the Russocentric parents expressed that they were most comfortable in the Russian culture.

The Russocentric parents found little reason to learn the Estonian language, except in response to pressure from the government. For example, Larissa mentioned that “on the governmental level there is some sort of pressure . . . in order to get Estonian-speaking communication,” whereas “on the private level, there seem to be no problems [pressure to learn Estonian].” Olga perceived general tolerance between Russian and Estonian cultures but observed pressure in language requirements: “Because of the fact that we are squeezed all the time that we have to learn and pass the category, backlash takes place. We don’t want to learn because of threat.”

Although these parents personally valued the Russian language, they expressed it as undervalued in Estonian society, or “stigmatized,” as Larissa put it. Olga wanted to restore the status of Russian: “I would like to believe in bright minds that will make the [Russian] language the second state language officially. . . . It [Russian] is not a state language and doesn’t come even near it.” The Russocentric parents did not resist learning the Estonian language per se; rather, they focused on strengthening the status of Russian in Estonia—unlike parents in other categories, who did not seek a special status for the Russian language and willingly complied with the government requirements to learn Estonian.

Bicultural Orientation

Although two of the parents characterized as having a bicultural orientation were exclusively of Russian descent, many parents in this category had both Estonian and Russian ancestors. Biculturally oriented parents emphasized learning Estonian, and some of them expressed interest in Estonian culture. For example, one parent, Vasili, commented, "I prefer Estonians even more than Russians, as they have interesting traditions." Another parent, Teresa, valued Estonian culture, and she was willing to learn more about Estonian culture. She related that she learned from her daughter "much about the traditions of the Estonian nation." Simultaneously, these parents expressed their appreciation for Russian culture. Vasili commented that his "culture will be Russian," meaning that the Russian culture will remain personally significant for him. Teresa wanted to pass on to her child aspects of the Russian culture "in which I am strong." About half of the parents in the bicultural category were generally neutral about cultural issues and referred little to either Russian or Estonian culture. Some parents in this category reported that they were more comfortable with Estonian culture than with Russian culture. For example, one parent, Ljubov, stated:

Here a kind of behavior has emerged, and on the other side of the river [Russia] it is very different. When crossing it, communication is very different . . . and we got used to the Estonian more correct behavior, tactful, and it is difficult for us there.

All of the biculturally oriented parents viewed the Estonian language positively and wished to learn it. These parents typically reported that they should learn Estonian while living in Estonia. For example, one parent, Jevgenia, claimed, "I understand that while living in Estonia I must know the Estonian language. . . . I would have opportunities to move upward in my career." Biculturally oriented parents' interest in the Estonian language seemed to be mainly instrumental, geared toward material benefits of the language. Ljubov, however, exclaimed: "I love Estonian as any other foreign language."

Estoniocentric Orientation

The parent who was categorized as having an Estoniocentric orientation had a mixed ethnic background, including Estonian, Finnish, and German ancestry, but no Russian ancestors. This parent, Lilia, had become a nearly monolingual Russian speaker and lost her Estonian proficiency after moving from Estonia to another republic as a child. Nevertheless, she had maintained an emotional attachment to Estonia and finally moved back to Estonia in the 1990s: "I always longed for here," she said, and "wanted to return." Lilia regarded the culture as "higher here [Estonia]" and wanted to pass on Estonian culture to her children.

Lilia, who lived in Tallinn—a city with large Russian-speaking enclaves—expressed her belief that in the future, Estonian society will function in the Estonian language. She had a strong desire to learn Estonian, the language she had lost: “Up till 10 years old I spoke Estonian fluently. . . . I understand [Estonian], but I am ashamed to speak, as I am ashamed that I don’t know my language. . . . I want to go to a village in order to learn Estonian perfectly.”

Parental Orientation and Choice of Language of Instruction

Further investigation of parents’ orientations toward culture and language showed that these orientations affected choice of language of instruction for their children. Table 4 shows the relation of parental culture and language orientation and parents’ choice of language of instruction for their children.

Multicultural orientation and language choice

Parents of multicultural orientation chose either bilingual classes or Estonian-speaking schools for their children, but no Russian-speaking schools. Their explicit comments on school choice were consistent with multicultural attitudes: They chose options other than Russian-language schools because they sought an international influence or a humanistic atmosphere that they perceived as lacking in these schools. Russian-speaking schools are known to be more traditional and authoritarian than Estonian-speaking schools, which emphasize interactive processes and independent learning (T. Vihalemm, personal communication, September 29, 2000). Anatoli

Table 4

Parents’ Choices Regarding Language of Instruction

	Russian	Estonian	Bilingual
Multiculturally oriented parents (<i>n</i> = 3)	0	1	2
Russocentric parents (<i>n</i> = 3)	3	0	0
Biculturally oriented parents (<i>n</i> = 9)	3	4	2
Estoniocentric parent (<i>n</i> = 1)	0	1	0

explained his rationale for choosing a bilingual program: “The program came from Canada and provided the nuance missing in the Russian school program.” Tamara appreciated the humanistic educational atmosphere in Germany and found similar characteristics in the Estonian school; she stated that students “learn in ethnically mixed classes [in Germany]. There is no xenophobia or intolerance there.” She wanted to raise her child in the same way as in Germany, with international interests and in an ethnically tolerant atmosphere.

Russocentric orientation and language choice

All of the parents of Russocentric orientation opposed sending their children to Estonian-speaking schools (the bilingual programs had not existed long enough to be an option for these parents). For example, when asked whether she would consider an Estonian-language school, one parent, Regina, replied: “To tell the truth, no. I would not.” She explained that she herself graduated from the same Russian-language school that she had chosen for her child.

Russocentric interviewees’ comments suggested that education in L1 has a cultural component. Regina supported Russian education “so that the Russian child is educated in Russian school. . . . Thus, one’s own culture will not be lost.” Larissa, a teacher by profession, extended the notion of superiority into curricula: “The level of preparedness of subjects in Russian-speaking schools is high enough. . . . We make use of more facts, materials, and data than Estonian-speaking teachers.” Some parents were concerned about the challenges of studying in a non-native language, including psychological stress as well as academic difficulty. Larissa stated:

When the child is learning in a non-mother tongue, she is under pressure and stress. . . . To get the child out of it, it means that one has to support the child, and I considered that the development of the identity of the child is more important than learning language.

All in all, Russocentric parents neither had their children enrolled in Estonian-speaking schools nor planned to send their children to these schools.

Bicultural orientation and language choice

Parents of bicultural orientation selected a range of the school options: Estonian schools, Russian schools, and bilingual classes. Three families had their children in Russian-speaking schools, two in bilingual classes, and four in Estonian-speaking schools. Parents of children attending the Russian-language schools sought enhancement in Estonian education through the means of language camps or future attendance at Estonian-language schools.

Ljubov, whose daughter attended a Russian-speaking school, believed that if she herself spoke Estonian, “I would put her [in an Estonian-speaking school].” Svetlana, whose son had attended Estonian language camps for many summers, indicated that she was interested in Estonian-speaking school for her son but hesitated to send him unless a Russian-speaking friend also

enrolled to keep him company. Biculturally oriented parents whose children attended Russian-speaking schools, especially those living in Narva, wished for more opportunities for their children to learn Estonian.

Unlike Russocentric parents, biculturally oriented parents with children in Russian-speaking schools looked for educational options, such as schools and summer programs, in which their children could learn Estonian and simultaneously retain their L1. One of the parents in the bicultural category, Zoya, expressed pleasure that the children in the bilingual classes “have [sufficient] Estonian and Russian, and the teachers teach Russian culture.”

Estoniocentric orientation and language choice

The one parent of Estoniocentric orientation, Lilia, sent her daughter to an Estonian-speaking school so she could learn the Estonian language and culture: “I returned to my homeland, so my child must know the language of her homeland. . . . I was sure that she wouldn’t go to a Russian school.”

Summary

There appears to be a correlation between parents’ culture and language orientation and their decision regarding language of instruction for their children. It is important to reiterate that at the time of data collection, most bilingual classes had functioned only 1½ years, and therefore this choice had not been available to parents with children in the upper grades.

Discussion

In this study, we used Schumann’s acculturation model (1978, 1986) concerning adult learners because literature on parental choice of language of instruction is scarce and does not discuss sociocultural aspects of choice. The present research suggests that sociocultural factors, such as acculturation and attitudes toward language and culture, are significant not only in linguistic outcomes but also in parental choice of language of instruction.

The results of this research show parental choice of school language is a complex process, including more than conscious rationales (e.g., instrumental reasons). The choice holds cultural significance for families and has different meanings for parents with varying culture and language orientations. Parents who have sent their children to Russian schools view L1 as critical not only for cultural maintenance, but also for emotional development and academic benefits. Many parents understand that fluency in L1 facilitates learning L2 (Krashen & Biber, 1988).

It is especially noteworthy that parents who perceive coercion to learn L2 have somewhat negative attitudes toward that L2 and may be protective of L1. Group consciousness that emerged among Russian speakers after the political changes in Estonia may contribute to language loyalty (Fishman,

1989). The notion that L2 is more positively perceived in areas where L1 is dominant and possibly not seen as under threat might suggest that language enclaves do not necessarily produce negative attitudes toward L2.

Because of the limited scope of this research, the results may not have application beyond parents similar to the 16 studied here. However, the parental types identified in this research are similar to those studied by other researchers who have investigated Russian speakers' integration into Estonian society (e.g., Rannut, 2001; Tammaru, 1997; A. Kirch, personal communication, December 14, 2001). These similarities add triangulation for this research and may suggest that the participants in this study have experiences similar to those of other Russian speakers in Estonia.

A subsequent survey study (Kemppainen, 2003), with a larger sample of 346 Russian-speaking parents in Estonia, tested whether the orientation categories were useful in predicting the choice of language of instruction. The data analysis suggested a statistically significant association between parental orientation categories and the choice of language of instruction among Russian-speaking families in Estonia.

Researchers in the United States have identified integration patterns that parallel the orientations identified in the studies of Estonia. For example, McGroarty (1988) describes different types of integration categories: immigrants or minorities who are willing to assimilate, fully adopting the lifestyle and values of the target group; immigrants or minorities who want to preserve their lifestyle and values and thus reject the target culture; and immigrants and minorities who are willing to adopt elements of the target culture while maintaining the native culture as well. These parallels suggest that similar associations between integration and choice of language of instruction may be found elsewhere.

Russian speakers currently perceive themselves as having a lower status than the Estonian-speaking population (Kemppainen, 2003); thus, they may resemble language minorities elsewhere. However, the strong emphasis on the Russian language and culture exhibited by Russocentric parents may reflect the former dominance of the Russian language and therefore may be unique to these particular Russian speakers in Estonia.

Conclusion

This research performed in Estonia allowed investigation of parents in a less restricted educational language environment than in the United States and provided information not accessible in most language-minority contexts. If the attitudes and experiences of the parents in this study are similar to those of parents in other countries, this research may inform language policies in the United States as well. The interviewees' language and culture orientations and preferences concerning language of instruction send a message that one-size-fits-all language approaches do not correspond to many parents'

educational views. Bilingual programs support the maintenance of native culture and L1 while providing a child with critical skills in L2. The choice of language of instruction and the success of L2 acquisition are both tied to attitudes and may be interrelated. Providing choices may itself be a facilitating factor in L2 acquisition.

Many bilingual education policy decisions in the United States—for example, in California, Arizona, and Massachusetts—have ignored preferences of language-minority parents.

Further research would be needed to examine whether comparable language and culture orientation categories correspond to choice of language of instruction in other regions as well. Future research could also explore whether accommodating different language and culture orientations enhances L2 acquisition. The influence of perceived threat to the L1 on choice of language of instruction merits further research as well. However, the wish of Anton, a Russian-speaking father in Estonia, may reflect a universal desire among language minorities:

I consider that in every country, people, any minority, must have the choice in educating their children. Many parents want their children to learn [Estonian]. Let the small percentage of Russians be who want Russian education only. Let's provide this small percentage the opportunity to learn in the language they want to.

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Endnote

¹ One of the raters tended to perceive more Russocentric orientations than the other rater and the primary researcher. All these cases were finally categorized as bicultural orientations. The two outside raters perceived two cases as multicultural, whereas the interviewee and the primary researcher categorized one of these cases as a bicultural orientation and one as an Estoniocentric orientation. The primary researcher, who performed the interviews, tended to perceive the orientation more often according to the interviewees' perceptions. In three cases, however, the researcher and the outside raters clearly agreed and perceived the orientation to be contrary to the interviewees' self-perception. Two of these cases were categorized as Russocentric orientations and one as a multicultural orientation. The researcher believes that the interviewees were not aware of these orientations in themselves.

