Language Shift and Maintenance among Russian immigrants from the former Soviet Union

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The resolution of the language question—whether to maintain the mother tongue, shift to the mainstream language, or try to maintain two or more languages in the family—creates significant psychological complications and linguistic reflections. Methods of sourcing these challenges vary, but the most effective data source to date is the the Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS) data set. It helps to address the quantitative part of this research. Findings suggest that weak tendencies toward language revitalization could be explained by the influx of Russian-speaking immigrants to the United States between 1990 and 2000, when opportunities for Russians/Russian speakers to communicate in their native language sharply increased. However, in the big picture, this occurrence did not reverse the continuing shift from Russian to English. Multivariate analysis suggests that the strongest effects are related to linguistic isolation and the number of generations living within the same household, both of which tend to be positively associated with multilingualism.

INTRODUCTION

As a Russian national, I grew up in a world where no one talked about "immigration," which was a taboo topic for a rather long period. Unwittingly, however, I was exposed to the lives of immigrants from the former Soviet Union by marrying one of them. Now, as the mother of two little children, I am also personally interested in the educational, cultural, and linguistic experiences of immigrant children and families living in the United States. My recent reflections about my role as a researcher have sharpened my perspective and raised my consciousness about issues of positionality. I belonged to one group (Russians living in Russia), and my mentality was shaped by a strong link between the place where I lived and my Russian identity. I was born in Yaroslavl (Russia) where I got my PhD in Pedagogy. As a Fulbrighter I went to study to the United States where I met my husband – an immigrant from the former Soviet Union. I spent seven years in the US where I got my Maters Degree and PhD. In addition to two dissertations I defended, I have two beautiful children who have been exposed to both Russian and English languages. As you could see, I was an "extreme outsider" to immigration issues, but my situation now as I write is more

complex. I do not perceive myself as an "insider." I remain a Fulbright scholar with a PhD from the University of Arizona, yet I also share an insider's perspective because of my marriage.

In their daily lives, immigrants make hundreds of choices, many of which are vital to the quality of their experiences in new cultural and geographical locations. Language choice becomes one of the paramount areas of challenge. Very often parents decide what language(s) to use not only for themselves but also for their children. However, parental preference does not necessarily coincide with children's literacy levels, particularly in the parents' mother tongue. This disconnection occurs because in communities that are characterized by multilingualism, immigrants are likely to use different languages in different domains (Fishman 1986 in Mesch, 2003), and each of these domains has its own policy, with some features managed internally and others influenced by forces external to the domain (Spolsky, 2009). Consequently language choice at the family level can be simultaneously regulated internally and influenced by external controls, creating a conflicted learning/acquisition environment.

Since many parents have come to the United States hoping to improve living conditions for their children, their decisions become of crucial importance in relation to how their children use language. The adults feel an enormous responsibility to provide their children with what they consider to be the best resources available in the country of settlement. Frequently, the decisions of the middle generation (middle, because they are located between their children and their own parents) impact the elder (grandparent) generation, who are more likely not to speak the language of their country of origin and consequently have less flexibility in finding jobs and participating in English-speaking life. One of the decisions the parents have to negotiate is whether to whether to continue use of the mother tongue at home. This decision and its consequence involves all three generations. Spolsky (2009) says that "language policy is all about choices" (p.1). This statement refers to different levels, two of which are society and family. In this manner, the present study attempts an examination of external factors affecting the language-based choices made by families and individuals within these families in addition to the individual characteristics that interplay in these decision-making processes.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Immigration is a world-wide phenomenon that produces complex interactions among individuals from all over the globe; these interactions include exchanges of ideas, values, and customs (Safdar, 2002). In fact, large-scale immigration is one of the most important social developments of our time (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001). The United States of America becomes the new home to an average of 800,000 immigrants each year (Dimitrov, 2004). Based on the U.S. Census Bureau estimates for 2006, every

31 seconds one person is being added to the U.S. population as a result of net international migration. According to Ginsburg (2002) in Lashenykh-Mumbauer (2005), in the first half of the previous decade, the Russian-speaking population was one of the fastest growing minorities in the U.S. These numbers contrast greatly with those from 1990, in which the U.S. Census reported only 334,000 foreign-born residents from the former Soviet Union. Between 1995 and 2005, nearly 450,000 immigrants arrived in the U.S., according to the Statistical Yearbook of the Immigration and Naturalization Service (SYINS) (Lashenykh-Mumbauer, 2005). In addition, an estimated 250,000 *undocumented* Russians flocked to the U.S. in the 1990s, resulting in a total population growth rate of almost 200% for the period (Lashenykh-Mumbauer, 2005). During 1993-2003, approximately 500,000 Russian speaking immigrants came from the former Soviet Union to the United States (Epshteyn, 2003).

The literature refers to immigrants from the former Soviet Union as "Russian" despite the fact that they are a heterogeneous and multilingual group of people. Thus, in addition to being misleading, this label causes a great deal of confusion among researchers. To avoid further complications, I shall examine how different researchers explain the phenomenon, using a wide variety of arguments. Malko (2005), in her study, explains that the word "Russian" refers to the immigrants of Russian ethnic background in addition to immigrants from other former Soviet republics where Russian was spoken, taught in schools, and used in home settings as a compulsory discipline. She assumes that those who went through the Soviet system of education had similar types of experiences, regardless of ethnic background. After their arrival to the United States, immigrants from the former Soviet Union preferred to call themselves Russian to reflect their linguistic and cultural reality and to simplify explanations to Americans (Andrews, 1999 in Malko, 2005). Even if some immigrants were unsure as to how to identify themselves, their choice was guided by their proficiency in Russian over other languages spoken in the household (Malko, 2005). One example of this phenomenon is the Soviet-Jewish immigrant population within the U.S. They were classified as the fifth largest refugee group to enter the United States in the period 1981-1990 (Vimala, 1995). Many Jews recognize themselves as Russian because they have changed their nationality registration (the 5th line in the Soviet passport where the ethnicity of every individual was stated) in their internal passport because of fear of persecution and intermarriage. in fact, as of 2003, ninety percent of children of mixed marriages who were registered as Russian (Epshteyn, 2003) had started identifying themselves as Jews to simplify the emigration procedure. The preceding example emphasizes the need for current immigrants to the U.S. from the former Soviet Union to be viewed as a very diverse group of individuals and not as a monolithic cultural unit.

Historically, research done in the field of immigration has uncovered some of the reasons that motivated members of the Russian population to emigrate. According to Watson (2006), among these reasons are the following: (a) discriminatory state policies; (b) persecution under the Soviet government,

and, as a result, the inability to obtain the status of a political refugee (Watson, 2006); (c) discrimination against ethnic groups after the Soviet Union collapsed (for example, all negative events in Russia were blamed on ethnic Armenians) and Russians in the republics of the former Soviet Union (for example, Latvia and Uzbekistan); (d) poor economic conditions; (e) medical-emergency situations; (f) recruitment policies of American companies, causing a brain-drain phenomenon; (g) Russian-American marriages; (h) military draft avoidance; and (i) better opportunities for their children when emigrants' futures looked bleak (Watson, 2006).

Lashenykh-Mumbauer (2005) posited that up until 1995, Russian immigrants came to the United States to flee religious persecution and to escape political chaos created by the fall of the Soviet Union, whereas in recent years, Russians have been entering the United States with work and student visas, some with the intention of earning money and returning home and others with the hope of obtaining residency status. Epshteyn (2003) lists the following reasons for the emigration of Russian Jews: (a) persecution, (b) victimization, (c) mockery under tsarism, (d) physical extermination of Jewish families during the Russian Civil War, (e) extermination of the Jewish intellectual elite under Stalin, (f) the Holocaust, (g) anti-Semitism in the post-war decades, and (h) the increase of anti-Semitism during the perestroika and Glasnost years.

Lashenykh-Mumbauer (2005) distinguishes newly-arrived Russian immigrants from refugees and immigrants of the first, second, third, and fourth waves by several important characteristics: (a) the majority of recent immigrants have relocated to the U.S. single-handedly, without extended family members; (b) recent non-Jewish immigrants do not enjoy any governmental benefits or support of from local religious communities; (c) a great number of Russian immigrants do not belong to any religious groups and are not involved in resettlement programs or refugee services; and (d) Russians are no longer considered refugees, as their country of origin is no longer viewed as a place of religious and political persecution.

For the purpose of the current work, it is necessary to bring together the research being done on adaptation and acculturation strategies of Russian immigrants from the former Soviet Union. Birman and Trickett (2001) measured acculturation along three dimensions: language competence, cultural identity, and behavioral acculturation. Their research has shown that it takes about 6-7 years to shift from being very Russian-oriented to being acculturated in both cultures along the measures of behavior and identity. Malko (2005) stated that assimilation was the most typical acculturation strategy used by immigrants from the former Soviet Union. However, the strategy of separation experienced by some parents (when they preferred to reject the culture of the majority group) led to negative psychological outcomes for their children, resulting in depression. The strategy of integration was pursued by those individuals who had high proficiency in their native language and English. Those who had low proficiency in both their first language and English oscillated between separation and assimilation.

Information on Russians' experiences of acculturation is sparse (Kisselev, 2005). The most frequently studied dimensions are gender and age. Special attention has usually been paid to the person's age at the time of arrival in the United States rather than to the length of time spent in this country (Kisselev, 2005). When acculturation starts early, the process is generally smooth, and personal flexibility is maximal during these early years (Berry et al., 2002). These findings are supported by research done by Birman and Tyler (in Kisselev, 2005), who have claimed that older men and women tend to be more attached to the Russian culture than their younger peers. Evidence also suggests that gender influences the acculturation process (Berry et al., 2002). Despite the proclaimed equality of sexes, men usually have held more positions of power in the former Soviet Union than women. Even women with impressive educational attainments have rarely been promoted to leadership roles in Soviet society (Kisselev, 2005). In addition to holding full-time jobs, they are responsible for all housework and childcare. However, this may have prepared them better than men for immigration (Kisselev, 2005), since immigrant women who enter the job market to support their families did not really think about the loss of their professional status, moreover, they were preoccupied with their family responsibilities, whereas their husbands have experienced a loss of status and a concomitant lowering of self-esteem (Chun & Akutsu as cited in Kisselev, 2005). This fact contradicts the conclusions made by Berry et al. (2002), who emphasized that females may be more at risk for assimilation problems than males.

Russian immigrants in the United States adopt various acculturation strategies that help them better fit into the host society. Vimala (1995) identified three directions of adaptation relevant to Soviet Jews: (a) striving to adopt American-Jewish ways; (b) developing parallel Soviet-Jewish institutions unconnected to American ones; and (c) developing syncretic behavior that incorporates symbols and behaviors from both the Soviet and the new American context. Lashennykh-Mambauer (2005) named the ability to access Russian television channels, Russian books and newspapers, and Russian food as key coping strategies. Spending American and universal holidays in America with Russian people is another way to relieve stress. The aforementioned strategies provide the participants with the feeling of being in "another world"—in the "Russian world," where they are able to experience familiar rituals and interactions. Good English language skills are also a potential key to success in the host society and a factor related to lessened alienation, as English proficiency increases chances for a better job and for a better relationship with the host society (Lashennykh-Mambauer, 2005, Fridman, 2000).

Language choices of immigrants from the former Soviet Union are a complex issue that undergoes a number of transformations due to its constantly changing nature. The language learner does not just learn grammar but also individually constructs and predicates language use on historical, social, and political contexts (Gonzalez, 2005). These contexts, in their turn, cause personal choices and force decisions related to language use. This

review of the literature shows that the issue of language choice that immigrants have to face on the daily basis is very complex. The present study fills a perceived gap in the knowledge about Russian-speaking immigrants from the former Soviet Union by analyzing this population in a quantitative way. Also unique is that this research allows comparison of immigrants from the former Soviet Union with immigrants of other nationalities and reveals some unusual characteristics of this group.

METHODOLOGY

This paper focuses on the quantitative part of a bigger research project which explores how external variables and internal controversies affect the choice of language by an individual family member as well as the family as a whole unit, and how this choice, in its turn, impacts the relationships within the family. This study draws on the several theoretical domains of immigration, psychology, and language acquisition. A mixed-method research design used for a bigger project allows a broad outlook on the Russian-speaking immigrants, comparison of immigrants from the former Soviet Union with immigrants of other nationalities, and restricted and concentrated analysis at the family level. The Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS) data set helps to address the quantitative part of this research, while the qualitative part is based on in-depth case studies of four immigrant families.

For the purposes of the current paper I refer to the IPUMS data set, which contains a stratified sample of the population that revised long-form census questionnaires eliciting, in part, language-use information (Mora, Villa, & Davila, 2006).

The following results use the 1980, 1990, and 2000 census data as well as the 2008 ACS samples, which were collected through the IPUMS data base. Different variables were analyzed based on specific questions and assumptions being considered. Among those variables several were created based on information in the original sample to better address several of the issues and relationships in which I was interested.

The *sample* selected for the study represents Russian-speaking immigrants from the former Soviet Union who reported their place of birth as "other USSR/Russia" or "46500"; "Byelorussia" or "46510"; "Ukraine" or "46530"; and "USSR, ns" or "46590." Two new variables, "selected" and "else," which combined all the responses listed above, were created. Afterwards, the "else" selection was dropped, as I was interested exclusively in the immigrants born in the former Soviet Union. Using the "serial" category, I sorted heads of household by serial number in order to link them with their family members. The weighted sample design was not chosen for the purposes of this paper because the reported disadvantages outweighed the advantages. While the advantage of a weighted sample design is that it provides maximum precision for persons residing in small localities, the disadvantage of this design is that it makes the sample more cumbersome to

use and actually reduces precision in relation to the general population (Ruggles et al, 2009).

To document the retention or loss of Russian among foreign-born and U.S.-born children with immigrant parents, I relied on Mora, Villa, and Dávila's (2006) work to develop synthetic cohorts based on data drawn from the 1980, 1990, 2000, and 2008 Censuses from the IPUMS database. Following the path suggested by Mora, Villa, and Dávila (2006), I identified U.S.-born children with foreign-born parents on the basis of the IPUMS-provided momloc (mother's birth location) and poploc (father's birth location) variables. The cohorts are presented in the following way: (1) the first cohort (the 1980s Cohort) includes children 5-7 years old in the 1980 IPUMS, and 15-17 in the 1990 IPUMS; (2) the second cohort (the 1990s Cohort), includes children 5-7 years old in 1990 and 15-17 in 2000; and (3) the third cohort (the 2000s Cohort), includes children 5-7 years old in 2000 and 15-17 in 2008.

In order to distinguish those who were born in the U.S. from those who immigrated at some point, I created two variables: "bp" = born in the United States and "other" = everybody else. These two groups are associated with emigration from the former Soviet Union. The group associated with the "bp" variable is more closely limited than the "other" group because I allowed that the "other" group emigrated at some point in contrast to being exposed to the American culture since birth ("bp" group). To preserve the synthetic cohorts, foreign-born children included were only those who had migrated to the U.S. by the initial Census year. For example, in the 1980s Cohort, foreign-born children who migrated to the U.S. after 1980 are excluded from the 1990 sample.

To see which factors had played an important role in the choice of language, a multivariate analysis that involved logistic regression modeling of the outcome of speaking Russian at home was conducted. The dependent variable contrasts the individual's speaking only English (0) with speaking another language, Russian (1). The model included parental, household, and locational variables.

With regard to parental education, the EDUC (education) variable was selected. It indicates respondents' educational attainment as measured by the highest year of school or most advanced degree completed. Following the IPUMS coding, education variables were recoded in the following way: 1 = through high school, and 2 = through the first year of college and above.

The second variable of interest was "lingisol" or linguistic isolation area. LINGISOL identifies "linguistically isolated households" and comes from IPUMS. These are households in which either no person age 14+ speaks only English at home, or no person age 14+ who speaks a language other than English at home speaks English "Very well."

The number of children in the household was another variable of interest. NCHILD counts the number of children (of any age or marital status). I coded this variable as follows: "0" = no children, "1" = 1 child, and "2" = two or more children.

"Multigenerational household" was selected to be the next variable. MULTGEN identifies the number of distinct generations contained in each household. The coding I used for this variable was straightforward, and it incorporated all of the details assigned to each generation: "1" = one generation in the household; "2" = two generations in the household; and "3" = three (or more) generations in the same household.

"Total family income" was the next variable considered. FTOTINC reports the total pre-tax money income earned by one's family (as defined by FAMUNIT) from all sources for the previous year. For the census samples, the reference period is the previous calendar year; for the ACS/PRCS, it is the previous 12 months.

"House value," VALUEH reports the value of housing units in contemporary dollars.

YEAR reports the four-digit year when the household was enumerated or included in the census, the ACS, and the PRCS.

The Ordinal Regression Model was used in the Discussion category, with SPEAKENG or "English language proficiency" as a dependent variable that indicated whether the respondent spoke only English at home. This model also reported how well the respondents who spoke a language other than English at home also spoke English. All the other variables from the Logistic Regression Model remained unchanged.

Migration as a factor of language maintenance

Families of Russian-speaking immigrants are spread all over the United States, which is demonstrated in the map presented in Figure 1.
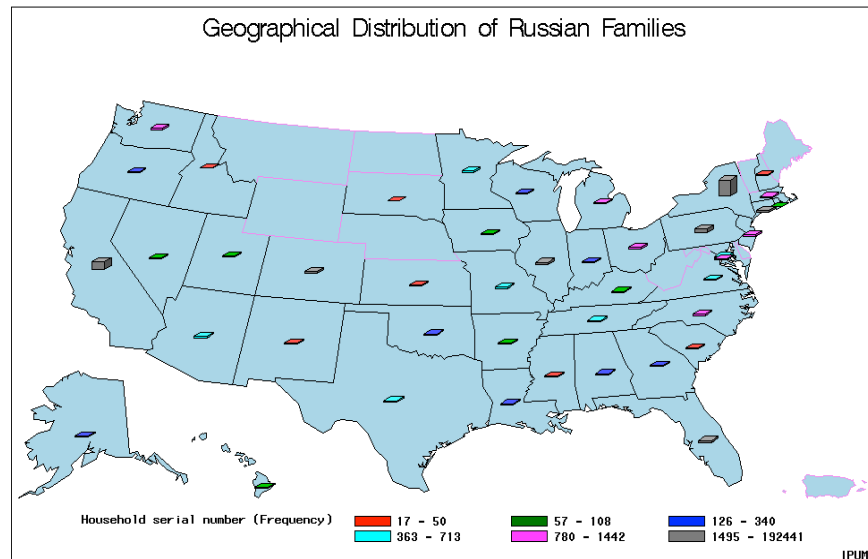

Figure 1. Distribution of Russian immigrant families in the United States. (Map created by author using IPUMS database.)

    The map above illustrates that this group resides in almost each state but prefers the East Coast. Thus, the concentration of the Russian speaking population is much lower in Tucson, Arizona, (where I resided with my family for seven years). Moreover, in Tucson this group is scattered, with no Russian-speaking enclave as in New York, Los Angeles, and San Francisco, where one can successfully function in society without knowing English.

    The histogram below (Figure 2) illustrates the reported years of emigration in the twentieth century and makes a point about how the emigration from the former Soviet Union took place and made "Russians" unique as compared to other populations. The histogram illustrates the waves of emigration that occurred after the Second World War, during the Soviet era, and beginning in 1987. The last wave on the histogram is the "thickest" and largest. It is clear that the phenomenon of intense emigration is relatively recent and is a result of increased political freedom and open borders between countries. This massive ten-year wave helps explain the nature of Russian-speaking emigration and how it changed the patterns of language use observed during the decades before and after.
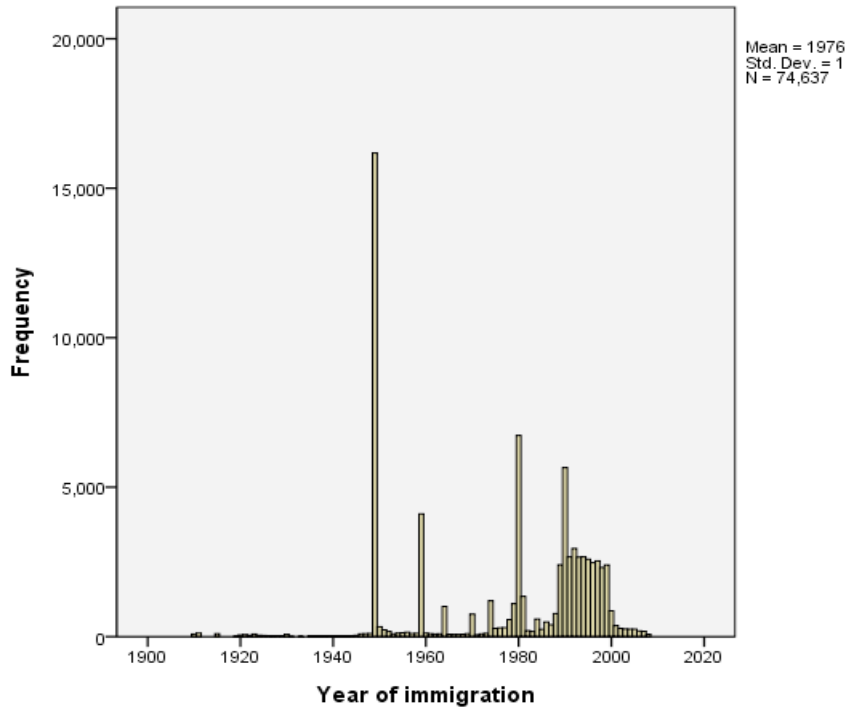

Figure 2. Histogram of number of Russian immigrants coming to the United States. Created by the author from the IPUMS database

Before moving into the discussion of language choice by the family members and their motives regarding Russian-language maintenance, we have to think about the reasons these people departed a country where some of them had been residing for up to half a century. Moreover,,in the majority of cases people had to leave behind their friends, family members, and a familiar lifestyle. Some had to give away furniture, jewelry, and other valuable possessions they had accumulated over the decades. Why did those who spent more than half of their lives in a country they considered to be their motherland abandon it and move into uncertainty? The element that made this decade (1990-2000) different from the previous waves of emigration was that people had an opportunity to sell their apartments and dachas (summer cottages) and often found ways to bring the money to the United States. Earlier people could not buy or sell their apartments because they could not own them. All the property belonged to the government. On the other hand, sellers often could not get full price for their homes, accepting whatever money they could to invest in their houses in the United States. This side of the story is still very sensitive and painful to many immigrant families, and they prefer not to return to those times and recollect the details of abandoning their motherland.

Loss of Russian among foreign-born and U.S.-born children with immigrant parents

A lot has been said about language maintenance and language shift in the immigrant communities in the United States. However, a need also exists to document the retention or loss of Russian among foreign-born and U.S.-born children with immigrant parents. To do this I used the synthetic cohort method, based on data drawn from the 1980, 1990, 2000, and 2008 Censuses.

I relied on Mora, Villa, and Dávila's (2006) work to develop the cohorts. They claim that this method is "an important tool for estimating the transmission of non-English languages from a migrant generation to its children, an analytic approach that aims to create a temporal representation of a population, over ten year intervals in this case." (p.242). The goal was both to study Russian-speaking populations and compare them with other immigrant populations using the available data. In this case available data on Hispanics and non-Hispanics comprised two synthetic cohorts: the first cohort (the 1980s Cohort) includes children 5-7 years old in the 1980 IPUMS and 15-17 in the 1990 IPUMS; the second cohort (the 1990s Cohort) includes children 5-7 years old in 1990 and 15-17 in 2000. In addition to replicating the study by Mora, Villa, and Dávila (2006) with the two cohorts of Russian-speaking immigrants from the former Soviet Union, I created a third cohort (the 2000s Cohort), which includes children 5-7 years old in 2000 and 15-17 in 2008. To preserve the synthetic cohorts, the only foreign-born children included were those who had migrated to the U.S. by the initial Census year. For example, in the 1980s Cohort, foreign-born children who migrated to the U.S. after 1980 were excluded from the sample in 1990. Mora, Villa, and Dávila (2006) selected the 5-to-7-year age range for the initial samples because the children

would have been old enough to speak but still young enough to reside with their parents a decade later.

The Census contains birthplace information, which allows for direct identification of foreign-born children. The authors identified the U.S.-born children with foreign-born parents on the basis of the IPUMS-provided momloc (mother's birth location) and poploc (father's birth location) variables. I used the data from the article by Mora, Villa, and Dávila (2006) for Hispanics and Non-Hispanics and compared them to "Russians." This term ("Russian") describes people from a variety of countries and racial backgrounds in the former Soviet Union. Then I followed the analysis described by the aforementioned researchers to discover whether the results I obtained were comparable to theirs.

Table 1: *Percentages of the Synthetic Cohorts who Spoke a Non-English Language at Home: Foreign-Born Children and U.S.-Born Children of Foreign-Born Parents.* [1]

	Hispanics (Data from the article by Mora, Villa, and Dávila (2006))		Non-Hispanics (Data from the article by Mora, Villa, and Dávila (2006))		"Russians"	
Year	Foreign-Born	U.S.- Born	Foreign-Born	U.S.-Born	Foreign-Born	US Born
1980s Synthetic Cohort						
1980 (ages 5-7)	90.7	85.6	44.4	28.2	8.8	2.5
1990 (ages 15-17)	91.1	88.1	37.3	30	5.5	1.9
1990s Synthetic Cohort						
1990 (ages 5-7)	88.7	85.5	49.5	36.2	11.3	4.4
2000 (ages 15-17)	92.3	87.1	45	38.3	17.8	6
2000s Synthetic Cohort						
2000 (ages 5-7)					29.5	18.6
2008 (ages					14	5.1

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[1] In their paper the authors do not analyze 2000s – 2008s Cohort.

15-17)						

Table 1 provides the percent of Hispanic, Non-Hispanic, and Russian children in the synthetic cohorts who spoke a non-English language in each Census year for. Groups are separated on the condition of whether children were foreign-born or U.S.-born. Mora, Villa, and Dávila (2006) drew several conclusions analyzing Hispanic and non-Hispanic children: (1) Hispanic children were more likely than children from other racial/ethnic backgrounds to speak a non-English language at home; (2) a greater proportion of non-Hispanic children in the 1990s Cohort spoke a non-English language at home than in the 1980s Cohort; (3) the 1980s and 1990s Cohorts exhibited different patterns with respect to language maintenance Foreign-born Hispanics in the 1980s Cohort, for example, did not experience a significant language loss or gain during the 1980s, where approximately 91 percent of this sample reported speaking Spanish at home in both 1980 and 1990. In the 1990s Cohort, however, the share of foreign-born Hispanics who spoke Spanish at home increased from nearly 89 percent to over 92 percent between 1990 and 2000; (4) non-Hispanic children born outside of the U.S. experienced loss of their original traditional language in both the 1980s and 1990s, although this loss was not as severe in the 1990s. These findings provide evidence that non-English languages have been recently retained in U.S. households beyond the first generation; the beginning of this maintenance appears to have been as early as the 1980s.

My research documented a severe Russian language loss compared to both Hispanic and non-Hispanic groups. The proportion of the U.S.-born population who speak Russian at home is forty times smaller than in the same group of Hispanics and on the average ten times smaller when compared to non-Hispanics. If we compare foreign-born groups, then the number of Russian speakers is dramatically small as well. U.S.-born children in households where somebody speaks Russian have experienced more significant language loss than foreign-born children. Looking at the patterns across the years, it is evident that the 1990s Synthetic Cohort has exhibited a tendency towards home language maintenance; moreover, the proportion of children speaking Russian has increased from 11.3% to 17.8% for those born outside the U.S and from 4.4% to 6% for the U.S.-born group.

Cross-generational issues and problems

My special interest is rooted in the cross-generational issues and problems immigrants from the former Soviet Union face. One of the causes of these problems arises from the fact that different generations speak different languages. It is commonly understood that the generation of grandparents does not speak English, whereas the generation of children does not speak their heritage language. To see if this is actually the case, I decided to investigate the populations of Russian-speaking immigrants maintaining their mother tongue at home by generations. The first generation was born in the former

Soviet Union; the second generation was born in the U.S. but had parents (or at least one parent) born in the former Soviet Union; and the third generation was born in the U.S. while somebody in their family (for example, grandparents) was born in the former Soviet Union.
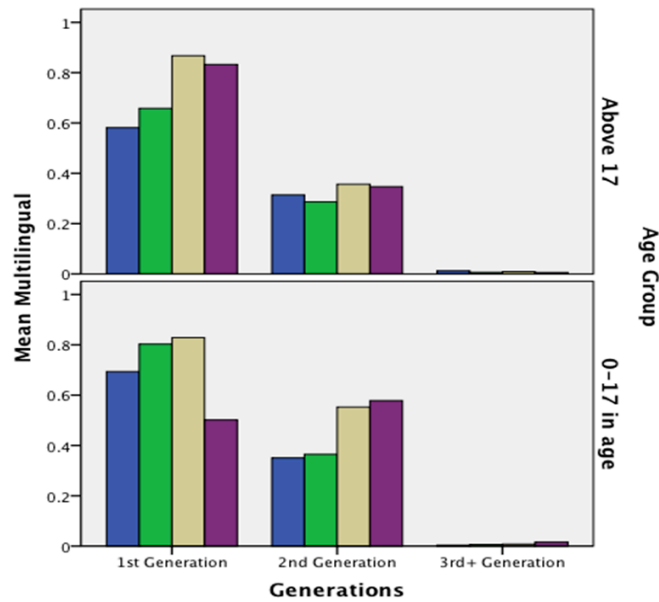

Figure 3: Percentage of first and later generations who speak Russian at home. Created by the author from the IPUMS database

The results show inconsistencies in the effect of the year of migration turned. The proportion of those who speak Russian varies slightly across years but not significantly. I expected that the pattern of linguistic assimilation would be different for the two age groups (above 17 and 0-17), as children are reported to shift to the language of a host society much faster than adults. However, I found instead that there was not any statistically significant difference between these age groups. Another finding worth noting is that the 0-17 second-generation group showed a reversed language-shift pattern in the year 2008. The proportion of those speaking Russian at home increased from 55.3% in 2000 to 57.8% in 2008. One possible explanation for this phenomenon may be the influx of Russian-speaking immigrants that occurred between 1993 and 2000, thus increasing the overall size of the Russian language-use community and perhaps expanding the opportunities to speak Russian. This occurrence may be compared to a generation of baby boomers in the United States in the 1940s and 1950s. The effects of this trend could be observed over several decades.

The analysis of the IPUMS database with reference to Russian-speaking immigrants from the former Soviet Union revealed the following findings: (a) the loss of the Russian language within three generations was more severe compared to Hispanic and non-Hispanic populations in both U.S.-born and foreign-born study groups; (b) the 1990s Synthetic Cohort of the children of immigrants from the former Soviet Union, compared to the 1980s and 2000s cohort groups, showed a larger degree of home-language maintenance; (c) generational analysis aiming to reveal the proportion of Russian-speaking immigrants who maintained the mother tongue at home demonstrated a language shift and language loss within three generations and showed the increase in use of the mother tongue in the 0-17-year-old, second-generation group in 2008; and (d) weak tendencies of language revitalization noted above could be explained by the influx of Russian-speaking immigrants between 1990 and 2000, when the opportunities to communicate in the native language sharply increased. However, in the big picture, this occurrence did not reverse the overall language shift from predominantly Russian to predominantly English.

What factors affect which language(s) immigrant families speak within different domains?

My multivariate analysis involved logistic regression modeling of the outcome of speaking only English versus speaking Russian at home. The purpose of this logistic regression model was an attempt to see which variables predict Russian language maintenance in the household. The selected variables were based on the literature available (see for example, Andrews [1998], Dimitrov [2004], Mora, Villa, Davila [2006]) as well as availability and credibility of this variable in the IPUMS database. The model included parental, household, and location variables.

In regard to parental education, Portes, Fernández-Kelly, and Haller (2008) have considered the human capital that immigrant parents possess to be one of the principal resources that helps them confront the challenges they face in the course of adjusting to a new life. Education is an essential part of the human capital that predicts how successful family members will be in the labor market (Portes, Fernández-Kelly, & Haller, 2008).

The Russian-speaking families that emigrated to the U.S. in the 1990s are likely to have gotten their education in the former Soviet Union. Parental higher education has been considered a variable having a high influence on the willingness of parents to maintain their heritage language at home. Kagan (2006) has specified that competency in Russian is interrelated with the amount of education the immigrants received in the former Soviet Union. The IPUMS database delineates two variables (higher education and higher education of the head of the household) which are subdivided into various levels of educational training. For the purposes of the current project, I was mostly interested in whether the immigrants attempted or received higher education. To study these educational variables, I recoded them: 1= through high school, and 2 = through the first year of college and above.

The second variable of interest was "lingisol" or the linguistic isolation area. LINGISOL identifies "linguistically isolated households" in which either no person over the age of 14 spoke just English at home, or no person over the age of 14 and who spoke a language other than English at home spoke English "Very well." The graph illustrated below, Figure 4., shows that linguistically isolated households positively relate to the city population variable. The bigger the city in the U.S., the more it is likely that a Russian-speaking enclave will be located there. Among locations where there are large Russian-speaking enclaves are New York, Boston, Philadelphia, Chicago, and Denver. Tucson also has a Russian-speaking enclave for elderly people, although it is a small one.
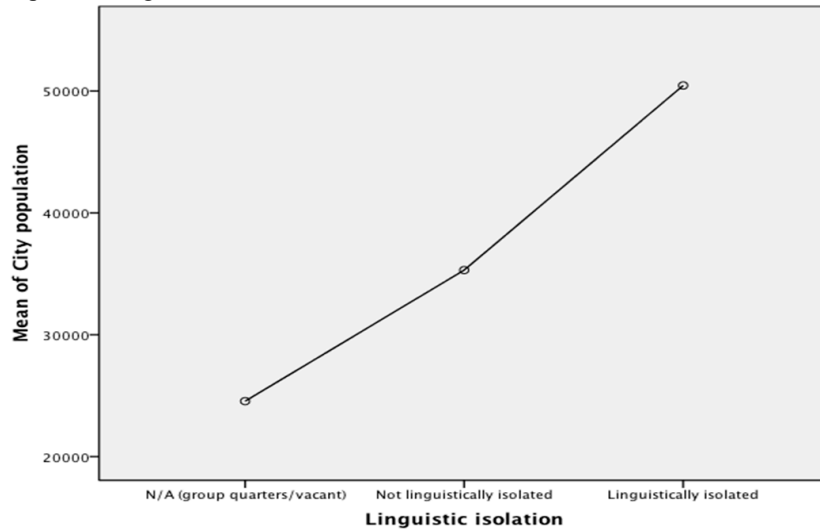

Figure 4: Relationship of linguistically isolated households to city populations. Created by the author from the IPUMS database.

The number of children in the household was another variable of interest. "NCHILD" counts the number of children (of any age or marital status) residing with each adult individual and includes step-children and adopted children as well as biological children. Persons with no children present in their homes are coded "0." I coded this variable as follows: "0" = no children, "1" = 1 child, and "2" = two or more children. The research (see for example, Stevens and Ishizawa, 2007) suggests that the probability of children speaking a non–English language is influenced by their siblings and by the length of their residence in the U.S. Consequently, if there is more than one child in the household who has lived in the host country since a very young age or who was born there, it is more likely that the family will be inclined to shift to English as a language spoken at home. This happens because after one child begins to go to daycare or school, he/she brings the dominant language

home. Siblings often shift to the language of the dominant society easily, as it is the language spoken everywhere.

The multigenerational household was selected to be the next variable. MULTGEN identifies the number of distinct generations contained in each household. I chose the detailed version of the IPUMS for this purpose, as it provides more nuance within each general category. The family interrelationship pointer variables provide additional information on "other relatives" and nonrelatives of the householder.

The presence of one of the following relationship combinations caused the household to be coded as multigenerational: (1) householder, householder's child, and householder's grandchild; (2) householder's parent, householder, and householder's child; or (3) householder's parent-in-law, householder, and householder's child. The coding for this variable was straightforward and incorporated all the details assigned to each generation by the IPUMS database: "1" = one generation in the household; "2" = two generations in the household; and "3" = three (or more) generations in the same household.

Three more variables included in the model were total family income, house value, and year of immigration. Table 2 (see below) presents the estimated coefficients from a logistic regression model for immigrants from the former Soviet Union. The dependent variable contrasts individuals speaking only English (0) with those speaking another language, Russian in my case (1).

Table 2: Logistic Regression Model Predicting Speaking Russian Language at Home

Variables in the equation	Variable codings	B	Wald
Highered (1)	Higher education	.322	444.625
Higheredhead (1)	Higher education of the head of household	.501	1198.048
Lingisol 2	n/a		6896.753
Lingisol 2 (1)	Non-linguistically isolated	- 6.429	6590.877
Lingisol 2 (2)	Linguistically isolated	- 6.543	6876.884
Numchild	No children		1073.178
Numchild (1)	1 child	.088	23.158
Numchild (2)	2 or more children	.542	860.243
Multigen	1 generation		778.152
Multigen (1)	2 generations	- .659	767.616
Multigen (2)	3+ generations	- .473	541.666
Constant		4.879	3551.211

The strongest effects relate to linguistic isolation, which is associated with being multilingual. At the same time, being in a non-linguistically

isolated group is negatively related to being multilingual; consequently, being in a linguistically isolated group tends to be positively associated with being multilingual.

Another significant influence on bilingualism (in this case speaking Russian at home) is the number of generations living within the same household. The more generations who live under the same roof, the greater the probability that the mother tongue will be maintained at home: "The presence of aunts and grandparents reduces the odds that the child will be monolingual, especially when grandparents or aunts and uncles who speak a mother tongue live in the home, the frequency of conversation in the mother tongue increases, and, depending on the English proficiency of these adults, the child may be encouraged or required to speak to them in the mother tongue (Alba, Logan, & Stults, 2002, p.477)." Table 3 illustrates how the number of generations in the same household influences the language spoken at home. Having two generations at home reduces the possibility of Russian language maintenance across the years, whereas with three generations under the same roof, the probability increases.

It is worth noting that the year 2000 stands out as showing an increase in three-generational households and therefore the number of Russian languages spoken at home (from 25.1% in 1980 and 21.3% in 1990 to 48.2% in 2000). I have already addressed this issue and shown that the peak of immigration occurred from about 1993, which had a big impact on language maintenance. However, in the year 2008, the percentage of three-generation households returned to what it had been before the influx of a Russian-speaking population.

Table 3: The Impact of the Number of Generations Living in the Same Household on the Frequency of the Language Spoken at Home

Number of generations	Speak Russian at home			Speak only English		
	1	2	3	1	2	3
1980	20.1%	13.4%	21.3%	79.9%	86.6%	78.7%
1990	15.4%	14.7%	25.1%	84.6%	85.3%	74.9%
2000	35.7%	38.6%	48.2%	64.3%	61.4%	51.8%
2008	21.1%	22.8%	29.4%	78.9%	77.2%	70.6%

Absence of children creates a small positive relationship with being multilingual as compared to households with two or more children. In a single-child family, that child is more likely to be multilingual than in a multi-child family. Thus, the presence of two or more children in the household has tended to lead to English monolingualism in the families of immigrants from the former Soviet Union.

The effects of socioeconomic status and year of immigration seem to be inconsistent and have not made any difference in the model.

KEY FINDINGS

Documenting Language Loss across Three Generations

My research, using the IPUMS database, documented a severe Russian-language loss. The proportion of the United States-born population who speak Russian at home is forty times smaller than in the same group of Hispanics and on the average ten times smaller when compared to non-Hispanics.

Russian emigration occurred in several distinct waves. The last wave, between 1993 and 2000, is the "thickest" on the histogram and the largest compared to the rest. It is clear that the phenomenon of intense emigration is a result of increased political freedom and open borders between the countries. This massive ten-year wave helps explain the nature of Russian-speaking emigration and how it changed the patterns of language use observed during the decades before and after.

The assumption that different generations speak different languages was supported by statistical analysis of the IPUMS database. Generational analysis aiming to reveal the proportion of Russian-speaking immigrants who maintained the mother tongue at home demonstrated a language shift and language loss within three generations.

Weak tendencies toward the language revitalization noted above could explained by the influx of Russian-speaking immigrants between 1990 and 2000 when the opportunities to communicate in the native language sharply increased. However, in the big picture, this occurrence did not reverse the continuing shift from Russian to English.

The multivariate analysis involved logistic regression modeling of the outcome of speaking only English versus speaking Russian at home. The strongest effects related to linguistic isolation, which is associated with being multilingual; being in a linguistically isolated group tends to be positively associated with being multilingual. Another significant influence on multilingualism (in this case speaking Russian at home) was the number of generations living within the same household.

EPILOGUE

My research was strongly motivated by my desire to answer the following troubling question: How does one maintain her mother tongue in a host country that does not support multilingualism in general or immigrants in particular. Knowing the statistics and frequently running into the second-generation (not even the third!) immigrant children from the former Soviet Union who do not speak their native language, I have witnessed the complete disappearance of the mother tongue within three generations. My hope was to find exceptions to this "language death" rule—specifically conditions that help to maintain biliteracy—and to learn how to bring up my own children as biliterate in Russian and English.

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