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Title: “Maybe it was a shield, you know” : Exploring family language policy through the lens of perezhivanie

Year: 2023

Version: Published version

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Please cite the original version:

Vorobeva, P., & Leontjev, D. (2023). “Maybe it was a shield, you know” : Exploring family language policy through the lens of perezhivanie. *Language Policy*, Early online.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10993-023-09681-4>



“Maybe it was a shield, you know”: Exploring family language policy through the lens of *perezhivanie*

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Received: 22 May 2023 / Accepted: 17 October 2023
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Abstract

The current study builds an argument for using Vygotskian *perezhivanie* as a theoretical perspective to explore the becoming and being of family language policy (FLP). We shift the focus from the three components constituting FLP – language beliefs or ideologies, language practices, and language planning or management – to the individual. Namely, we suggest focusing on the individuals who sift their explicit and implicit FLP decisions through their emotional lived experiences – *perezhiviniya*. The study draws on interviews with two single Russian-speaking mothers in Finland. It explores how they refract their experiences connected to language use (i.e., Finnish and Russian) through the prism of *perezhivanie*, focusing on individual dramatic events that shape family language policies. The analysis illustrates that participants attach different or even controversial, however, co-existing, meanings to their FLPs. Furthermore, it accentuates the non-linear nature of individuals’ development, and, as a result, the development of their FLP. Above all, tracing the two mothers’ development through the lens of *perezhivanie* allowed making visible the complex trajectories that led them, despite struggles and obstacles, to gain the volition to act and implement a bilingual language policy in their families.

Keywords Family language policy · *Perezhivanie* · Multilingualism · Single parenting

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Introduction

Since its inception as a field of research, family language policy (FLP), which examines explicit and implicit decisions about language use among family members (King et al., 2008; Curdt-Christiansen, 2009), has undergone significant changes in its approaches to family multilingualism. In the late 20th – early 21st century, cognitivist (De Houwer, 1990) and interactional discourse analytic approaches (Lanza, 2004) prevailed and were generally applied to study the so-called normative families (i.e., gender normative families with two caretakers). Presently, however, researchers started examining FLP from different angles, including collaborative autoethnographic approaches (Mirvahedi & Hosseini, 2023), critical perspectives (Wright, 2020), and nexus analytic approaches (Palviainen & Boyd, 2013; Vorobeva, 2021) in various family constellations (e.g., Fogle, 2012; Vorobeva, 2023) and in different contexts (e.g., Curdt-Christiansen, 2013). Presently, the dominant theoretical lens in FLP research is the language policy (LP) model by Spolsky (2004). According to this model, LP incorporates three components: attitudes to certain named languages or *language beliefs*, the repertoire spoken by the individuals or *language practices*, and efforts to change the existing language practices or *language management*. Looking beyond this tripartite framework and inspired by Lomeu Gomes' argument (2018, 51–52), in this study we shift the focus from these components of FLP. We explore individuals (see also Spolsky, 2019), who sift their explicit (e.g., planned decisions about language use) and implicit (e.g., ad-hoc language use) FLP (King et al., 2008; Curdt-Christiansen, 2009) through their lived experiences in the moments of being comprising the process of their becoming. We, therefore, approach *being* and *becoming* as dialectically related, where the individuals' development emerges in the moments of being, whereas these specific events (the moments of being) can only be fully understood when the individual's history is taken into account. Our study is informed by the Vygotskian notion of *perezhivanie* (see Blunden, 2016), for approaching the development of FLP not as an aggregate of aspects but a holistic process of individual's becoming, with changes in FLP being one of its outcomes. To our knowledge, this has not been pursued in FLP research despite calls for focusing more on the individual and the need for novel methodological and analytical tools this necessitates (Soler, 2023; Palviainen, 2020). To account for this process, we formulated a guiding research question:

How does Vygotskian *perezhivanie* explain the becoming, and being, of family language policy?

We consider emotions as a central notion in the current study, being dialectically related to individuals' intellect. Below, we outline some FLP research focusing on emotions, including how emotions are entangled with agency and identity in FLP. Next, we present the theoretical approach, discuss the concept of *perezhivanie*, and present our analysis and findings.

Family language policy: identity, agency, and emotions

In recent years there has been a growing demand to concentrate on the role of emotions and lived experiences in FLP research (see e.g., Palviainen, 2020). For example, Tannenbaum (2012) placed emotional and psychological aspects at the core of FLP by decentering the language as such and focusing on the FLP as a tool that helps to navigate emotionally loaded or difficult life trajectories. According to this approach, FLP is seen as a mechanism represented by explicit or implicit language policy that may help to maintain family cohesion in emotionally charged moments.

Agency and identity in this line of research are often intertwined with family language use (e.g., Fogle & King, 2013; King, 2013; Palviainen & Boyd, 2013). Agency in the FLP field is often defined as “the socioculturally mediated capacity to act” (Ahearn, 2001, p. 112). However, this has been found to be insufficient to delineate agentic acts in the parent-child discourse. Instead, Smith-Christmas (2022) suggested a model that bridges approaches to agency in childhood studies and FLP and provides a more nuanced understanding of child agency. Following this conceptual line, agentic acts are associated with “individuals as actors with the ability to make sense of the environment, initiate change, and make choices” (Kuczynski, 2002, p. 9). Agency in this line of research is approached as relational and emerging in the interaction between four facets – compliance regimes, linguistic competence, generational positioning, and linguistic norms in the family which are embedded in the reflective relationships between family practices and the wider society or the environment. This conceptualisation is commensurable with our stance on how manifestations of agency surface and are made sense when refracted through *perzhivanie*.

Emotions, too, have recently been gaining prominence in FLP research. Tang and Calafato (2022) studied how emotions associated with the identities of multilingual families impacted their multi- or monolingual practices. They found that positive emotions led to the continuation of multilingual practices whereas negative emotions, such as frustration, led parents to implement monolingual family language policies. Sevinç (2022) and Sevinç and Dewaele (2018) studied multilingual speakers' anxiety when they use both a heritage language and a majority language within and outside the family. Sevinç and Dewaele (2018) used statistical analysis of questionnaire responses from 166 Turkish immigrants in the Netherlands. They found that while heritage and majority language use did indeed explain anxiety, it only happened in certain situations, leading the authors to suggest that the effects of other factors need to be considered. Sevinç's (2022) qualitative study showed that anxiety about using the language can be transmitted across generations due to the participants' monolingual mindset as a part of their ethnic identity and suggested that positive emotions can help in overcoming the challenges associated with language use anxiety. Pavlenko (2004) explored emotions in a bilingual family talk from the perspective of perceived language emotionality (i.e., do parents perceive their languages to be emotional) and from the perspective of emotional discourse (i.e., what linguistic repertoires are used in an emotionally charged talk). The analysis indicated that perceived language emotionality was not a cornerstone for language choice in general, but was connected with the choice of L2 for approval or discipline. Pavlenko (2004, p. 188) noted that these results should not be seen as causal but as embedded in social

processes and connected with human agency, not elaborating, however, on how this embeddedness can be understood and studied.

While these studies indicate that emotions have been researched as a pivotal factor in FLP research, they have been studied largely as an aspect either impacting other factors or being impacted on, or as a facet of multilingual identity (e.g., Little, 2020). In this paper, we propose a theoretical lens of *perezhivanie*, which allows to shift the focus on the individuals and their emotional (multilingual) experience being lived through.

Perezhivanie

Perezhivanie as a dialectical unity of emotion and intellect

In Vygotskian sociocultural theory research, emotions are studied as a part of dialectical unity—*perezhivanie*. *Perezhivanie*, often translated as “emotional experience”, is one of the central concepts in Vygotsky’s theory of individuals’ psychological development (Vygotsky, 1935/1994). As Vygotsky (1998) put it, “the relation of the child to the environment and the environment to the child occurs through *perezhivanie*.” (p. 194). In other words, *perezhivanie* is a means through which the social becomes the individual and vice versa (Blunden, 2016; Lantolf & Swain, 2019; Smagorinsky, 2011). The translations of the term *perezhivanie*, e.g., as “emotional experience” (e.g., González Rey, 2009) or “lived experience” (Blunden, 2009) fail to capture that *perezhivanie* is a countable noun, meaning that there can be different single *perezhivaniya* (Blunden, 2016), which creates difficulty in understanding Vygotsky’s (1935/1994) argument for using *perezhivanie* as a tool for studying individuals’ psychological development. We will provide an outline of *perezhivanie* as a concept, as a phenomenon, and as a tool, for the reader to better follow our subsequent data analysis and its interpretation, discussing first its metatheoretical basis.

At the core of Vygotsky’s thinking is dialectics. Briefly, dialectically related phenomena are not seen as separate but as forming a dialectical unity, in which the elements co-influence one another and co-develop. These elements are seemingly different, or even conflicting, but have a quality allowing us to fully understand them in relation to one another (see Lantolf & Poehner, 2014). This is not to say that one cannot focus on one of them, but in doing so, the other element should not be forgotten. Vygotsky (1987) gives an example of such unity—water, where, if the elements of oxygen (which sustains the process of burning) and hydrogen (which is flammable) are considered separately, the concept of water is difficult to emerge. Such is the unity of *perezhivanie*, which is composed of the dialectical unities of individual-environment and emotion-intellect, whose relationship can fully be understood when the individual’s process of becoming (i.e., the individual’s history) is taken into account.

As Vygotsky (1935/1994) discussed, the environment is the source of any psychological development. However, their relationship is not that of cause and effect. It is the individual that makes the environment the source of their development. Hence, the social is not reflected on by the individual but is *refracted* by them through the prism of emotion-intellect. Understanding the individual-environment relationship

through refraction, in González Rey's (2009) words, means that "the effect of any external event to the person's situation or process would depend on the individual's psychical organization and action in the ongoing process of a living experience" (p. 69).

Just as the individual and environment are not seen as separate in Vygotsky's thinking, so are emotion and intellect. In Zaporozhets' (2002) words, in the process of an individual's becoming, emotions "are intellectualized, they become intelligent, generalized, and anticipatory, while cognitive processes functioning in this system, acquire an affective nature and begin to perform a special role in meaning discrimination and meaning formation." (p. 57). As we work through our experiences, our own prism of emotion-intellect changes, leading us to reinterpret our experiences, attach meanings to them, and act in the environment in qualitatively different ways.

The third key part to understanding development is recognising it as a genetic historical process. The relationship between the individual and the environment is dynamic and changes as the individual's development happens. This unique dialectical individual-environment interaction refracted through an individual's emotion-intellect is called a *social situation of development* (see Lantolf & Swain, 2019). Similar social situations that individuals experience and even the same social situations that different individuals find themselves in become unique social situations of development as they are refracted by individuals through the prism of emotion-intellect and unique histories. The tensions arising in these social situations, when the individuals cannot continue acting in the old ways, become essential for the individuals' development.

Perezhivanie, then, is a unity that comprises the dialectical individual-environment relationship refracted through emotion-intellect, which develops historically. As a result, the experiences that triggered particular *perezhivaniya* and developmental trajectories are interpreted differently with time as the individual has worked through these *perezhivaniya* in various social situations.

***Perezhivanie* as a unit of analysis**

Veresov (2017) explained that just like the concept of *perezhivanie* is a unity, the unit of *perezhivanie* is a single manifestation of it that contains all of the characteristics of the unity. Should this unit be divided further, it will lose its characteristics. This distinction, we argue, is important, as it allows us to use *perezhivanie* as a concept and as a unit of analysis allowing to identify and analyse experiences that are lived and refracted through emotion-intellect and individual history. For analytical purposes, one can focus more on the history, the individual-environment, or emotions-cognition. However, all parts of the unit of *perezhivanie* should be considered in the analysis regardless of the focus.

Approaching FLP from this perspective, we aim to track how dramatic events – social situations where tensions or conflicts emerge – in the participants' lives made them (re)interpret and (re)negotiate their family language policies by refracting their personal experiences through their emotion-intellect as they worked through their *perezhivaniya*.

Data collection

The data were collected for a PhD project exploring family language policy in single-parent Russian-speaking families in Finland. Eight interviews with the mothers were recorded from 2020 to 2021 to explore how beliefs about child-rearing, education, and language use informed and shaped their FLPs. The interviews were planned as semi-structured and were built around the following themes: participants' cultural and linguistic background, their migration history, education, occupation, language(s) used and spoken with their children, their language attitudes, and language management strategies. During the interviews, participants were encouraged to elaborate on the moments of their lives that they found critical for their FLPs. Two interviews were chosen for this study to illustrate how *perezhivanie* can be applied to study FLP. These audio-recorded interviews were conducted online via video calls on WhatsApp and Skype and lasted 30 and 75 min. They were conducted in Russian and transcribed verbatim. Selected excerpts were translated into English. Data collection followed the recommendations of the Finnish National Board of Research Integrity (TENK, 2019), which implied that the participants consented to participate in the study. They were informed about the possibility of withdrawing at any point during the research process. All names in the study are pseudonyms.

The interviews were recorded by the first author (referred to as "R" in the data transcript), who had a partially shared background with the participants (e.g., was a single mother, a speaker of Russian, and was an immigrant in Finland). Within the sociocultural theory, the interview is an intrinsic part of the context, where an interviewer and interviewee create the conversation together, with the interviewer guiding the process. The meanings during the interview are created by the interviewer and the interviewee together, as they make parts of their understandings and histories available to each other (see van Compernelle, 2019).

The analysed interviews illustrate that FLP, agency, identity, and ideology, are intertwined with feelings and emotions. While both accounts are saturated with critical and emotional moments, they represent unique life trajectories, which shaped FLPs. Both mothers are speakers of Russian¹; however, their linguistic repertoires and migration trajectories vary. We intend to show the versatile ways in which FLP emerged as a result of the individuals' *perezhivaniya*.

Analysis

The two interviews were analysed using *perezhivanie* as the unit of analysis. We explored the moments of *being* (significant events that the participants brought into the interaction) in the process of our participants' *becoming* as they recalled their experiences related to language use in and outside their families, refracting these experiences through their emotion-intellect.

¹ Irina's linguistic repertoire includes Ossetian, Russian, and Finnish; Mimosa's linguistic repertoire includes Russian, Finnish, and English. Both Irina and Mimosa had a strong emotional connection with Russian.

We first identified the relevant excerpts where participants' *perezhivaniya* related to their FLPs became visible in the interviews. We approached these excerpts holistically and studied the dialectical unities of individual-environment and emotion-intellect together. We traced how the reported experiences were refracted through the participants' emotion-intellect, as they relived these experiences during the interviews. We included both the accounts of experiences that the participants considered important in the process of development of family language policy and their refraction of these experiences. We note that, at times, what formed an instance of *perezhivanie* was not necessarily in a single chunk of an interview but emerged somewhat later in the interview. So what will be presented as a continuous account will, at times, be a compilation of separate turns together, forming the unity of *perezhivanie*.

Informed by Vygotsky's genetic method, we traced the process of becoming of our two participants backward historically (Xi & Leontjev, [submitted](#)). We will zoom in on the two dialectical units—individual-environment and emotion-intellect in our analysis of the first case, Mimosa (M in the transcript; Sect. 5.1), and will illustrate the historical process of becoming with reference to the second interview with Irina (I in the transcript; Sect. 5.2). We will focus on how the individuals worked through their *perezhivaniya*, attaching meanings to languages and their use in their families and beyond, as we move together with them through the recollections of their lives and those of their children. To understand the *perezhivaniya* we identified, we used tools of discourse analysis, such as situated meanings, focusing also on discourse patterns (e.g., Gee, 2014). However, considering the theoretical and metatheoretical basis of the study, we built on Mercer (2004), who elaborated that in sociocultural discourse analysis, any joint activity has a historical and dynamic aspect, which largely corresponds with the dialectics of becoming and being we outlined earlier. At its core, sociocultural discourse analysis is not just a methodology but an interpretative procedure informed by sociocultural theory.

In the transcripts below, we use the following limited transcription markings: "[...]" to indicate an omitted part of the transcript, "[]" to indicate a comment, and "-" to indicate truncated words.

Refraction as a window to multilingual selves: Mimosa

Mimosa was raised in Estonia but has been living in Finland for over 30 years. Though she is of Ukrainian descent, her family language is Russian. She received a Bachelor's degree in Finland with Finnish language and culture as a major and Russian language and culture as a minor and worked as an interpreter and translator. By the time of the interview, Mimosa's son, Viktor, was already an adult, and thus her refracted story was distanced from the time when she was actively making decisions related to the FLP. Mimosa accentuated the important role of grandparents (both Russian-speaking and Finnish-speaking) in Viktor's language development.

She added that relatives on her first Finnish-speaking ex-husband's side were "simply wonderful", and the grandmother (on the Finnish-speaking family side) was "like a second mother". Furthermore, she highlighted that her Finnish-speaking relatives were proud of Viktor's Russian language skills. As Mimosa was reflecting on her FLP decisions, she recalled that her Finnish language skills were rather poor at

that time, and it wouldn't even cross her mind to speak Finnish with Viktor. It is worth mentioning that Mimosa reported "we spoke only in Russian with him [Viktor] when we were little"². In Excerpt 1, Mimosa recalled what the use of Finnish meant to her and how her son reacted.

Excerpt 1

M: well you know, back then yes, yes maybe- maybe it was so that I didn't want to attract attention uhm yes but my appearance purely Slavic, maybe I just wanted to show that I speak with an accent, maybe I wanted to show that we live here because back then in the turbulent 90s there was a bad opinion about Russia, prostitutes and thieves, well all in all uhm thugs. Maybe it was a shield you know, that I speak with an accent in Finnish but people around me would uhm [they] won't insult me, they will see that [my] child speaks pure Finnish. At the moment I perceived it this way, it was a sort of a, how to say it, a shell [...] not to catch attention. [...] He [Viktor] straightened his back, loudly and clearly [said] in Russian, mom you're Russian and so, please, speak Russian.

While Mimosa does not define the particular emotion she attached to this experience, in this situation, her reluctance to speak Russian to her son emerged from her worry that other people on the subway would think of her son as Russian. This, in turn, stemmed from her understanding of how Russian speakers are perceived in Finnish society. The choice of words (e.g., "shield" and "shell") leads us to believe that, on the one hand, she wanted to protect both herself and her son from a hypothetical insult but, above all, to protect her son with the "shield" of Finnish from witnessing herself being insulted by inviting him to demonstrate his fluency in Finnish. Hence, it is the refraction of the situation through her emotion-intellect and history – Russian speakers in the '90s associated with thugs and prostitutes – and not the situation itself that led to a particular action—the choice of language to converse with her son and to attach the meaning of "shield" to this action during the interview. We note that the meaning Mimosa attaches to her language choice created by the implied perception of Russians is a situated meaning, marked by "you know", emerging due to the partially shared identity with the interviewer.

Viktor refused to converse with Mimosa in Finnish, clearly demarcating the choice of language with his mother being Russian. In fact, Mimosa's choice of words in recalling this episode (her child straightening his back) suggests that her interpretation of his reaction in the moment was that he was proud of speaking Russian. This moment can also be understood as a manifestation of Viktor's agency that Mimosa, in her refraction, explicitly connected with her ethnic identity, which can be interpreted as aligning with the established family language practices (primarily speaking Russian) rather than a resistance to it, having thus both dynamic and historical aspect. The tension between Mimosa's desire to use Finnish as a shield and her son's insistence on Mimosa speaking Russian made the event a dramatic event, leading to Mimosa's recognition of her son being proud to have Russian as a part of his identity

² By using the pronoun "we" in this excerpt, Mimosa refers to the language use between Viktor and herself (see Wright, 2020 for the analysis of the use of pronouns in single-parent families).

and that of his mother's. This excerpt also exemplifies how Mimosa equips purist language ideologies ("they will see that [my] child speaks pure Finnish") as a shield which, as she thinks, will protect Viktor from the potentially negative associations. As Mimosa refracts the situation, she attaches an ethnicity-equals-a-language ideology to her son's actions when he asks her to speak Russian (see Lomeu Gomes, 2021 for a discussion on the entanglements of race/ethnicity and language).

The demarcation between the two languages in the family – and Mimosa's son's reaction – becomes clearer in the following episode.

Excerpt 2

R: Does it mean that you preferred to use Finnish instead when you were somewhere in pu- in public spaces?

M: for me ye- and for the child, it didn't matter. But uhm, I'm saying, maybe because I always convinced him that we are for the purity of language, either Russian or Finnish, maybe that's why he was hurt by the fact that I spoke Finnish. Mom is Russian, [she] has to speak Russian. Even when I asked him, son are you a Russian boy or a Finnish boy? [He] put his hand on his bellybutton and says from here to here, to head I'm a Finnish boy, and from here to uhm tiptoes, I'm a Russian boy. I even- I even was getting upset, I'm saying is it that your head is Finnish your mind is Finnish, and is your mom a little fool then?

Extract 2 illustrates that Mimosa approached her son's bilingual identity as a sum of two monolinguals, where one overtakes or even excludes the other in certain situations. Mimosa expresses her strong imposition of this onto Viktor as "purity of language", which explains the situation on the subway. Viktor was used to seeing his mother as a Russian speaker, so the distortion of this led to him expressing his uneasiness. The monolingual-self view that Mimosa held is also evident in how she formulated the question to her son, using "either/or" (e.g., are you a Russian or a Finnish boy?), implying that Viktor needs to choose one. This shows that Mimosa saw the two languages *and* language identities as separate and monolithic (see Palviainen & Bergroth, 2018 for a similar finding). Taken together, the two excerpts show that family identity can encompass seemingly contradictory facets. Mimosa uses Finnish identity as a shield to protect Viktor from the circulating ideologies (Russian speakers associated with thugs) while stating that it is normal for her son to inhabit both Finnish and Russian selves. The identity, as refracted by Mimosa is, therefore, simultaneously historically contingent and emerges dynamically in social situations, leading Mimosa to discuss it differently in close succession during the interview. We will focus on the dialectics between being (single social situations) and becoming (history) in the following section. Here we wish to highlight how recalling two different situations, Mimosa refers to Viktor first as being proud of his Russian identity and later as it did not matter to him whether he was Finnish or Russian.

Viktor perceives his language identity as having both languages (from here to the head I'm a Finnish boy, and from here to my tiptoes, I'm a Russian boy). Mimosa, further, refracts the experience through her emotion-intellect, referring to the feeling she had at that moment as being upset. She seems to contrast her strong connection to her Russian self with her son's weakening bond with Russian, by interpreting

her feeling evoked by Viktor's association of the mind with his Finnish language as upsetting.

In Excerpt 3, Mimosa refracts her son's bilingualism as he was growing up.
Excerpt 3 (Mimosa):

R: And what do you think, when he was growing up he- did he realise that he spoke two languages? later even three [languages] and did he enjoy it how did he feel [about that] in your- In your opinion?

M: You know, he didn't pay any attention to that I think it was normal, natural for him, so you know, [he] didn't think of being proud or put on airs [...] children all of them are bilingual too, and it was absolutely natural for them to speak two languages.

Mimosa's account changes notably when the focus shifts onto Viktor's perception of his language use (as refracted by Mimosa). No longer does she attach the feeling of Viktor being proud of his language use, but rather reveals that for Viktor it is natural and normal to use both languages. Here, of course, the dialectical unity of the individual and the social has shifted to that between her son and his friends, too.

Mimosa's case illustrates how child agency, identity, and ideology are caught up in her refraction of social situations. Our analysis shows that child agency surfaces as a result of Mimosa's *perezhivanie* refracted through her emotion-intellect. This allowed us to examine how agency emerges in the relationships between family and the environment (see Smith-Christmas, 2022). Unlike Smith-Christmas (2022), however, our focus on *perezhivanie* allowed us to see agency as a part of a social situation refracted by Mimosa, intertwined with history and identity, which led Mimosa to understand Viktor's action on the subway with reference to being proud of his and her Russian identity. In turn, purist language ideologies, which clearly informed the language practices used by Mimosa in the situation, were equipped as a shield to protect her son. Together these reveal the meanings that Mimosa attaches to the situations discussed, her and her son's emotions, including being afraid, upset, and proud, which she brings into her refraction.

Historical development of FLP and dramatic events: Irina

In this section, we illustrate the development of FLP, tracing it historically as the second interviewee, Irina, refracts dramatic events through her emotion-intellect. While our stance in this paper is that emotion-intellect, individual-environment, and individuals' histories are irreducible parts of the same dialectical unit (and unity) of *perezhivanie*, in this section, we focus more on the history part of this unity.

For Irina, Ossetian by birth, Russian had an emotional meaning which she revealed at the end of the interview discussing why she maintained both Finnish and Russian but did not maintain Ossetian in her family (Excerpt 4).

Excerpt 4

I: I am ashamed that they do not know fin- Ossetian, I feel ashamed because of that. Let them at least know Russian [...] This is the language of feelings[...]

and he [Irina's son] in the shop asks for a toy, and [daughter's name] knows that it [the present] is already packed and we cannot take another one, and she tells him "hey, ..." don't get upset, hey little brother, don't, wait for a couple of weeks, Santa will bring it to you" "[boy to his mother, Irina] mom what if he doesn't?" Wait, please wait, little dearie, why are you so... well, how can you say this in Finnish?

R: mhm, I don't know.

I: and this is what the sister tells her younger brother, how (pause) warm and tender it feels to hear it [what his sister says].

Earlier, Irina mentioned that Finnish is important because they live in Finland, and Russian is connected to her children's roots and it opens up work and study opportunities. She reveals being ashamed that her children do not speak Ossetian, which she, at a different point of the interview, associated with *her* roots. Despite her Ossetian origin, Irina does not think that her children have Ossetian roots. She reveals that Russian is the language of feelings for her, and implies that the same is true for her children, as emerges in the episode in a shop. Irina refracts the event and attaches the meaning "warm and tender" to her feelings during the interview. Excerpt 4 helps to understand Irina's internalised relationship with the Russian and Ossetian languages. It may also add to the explanation of why she acted in certain ways in the social situations we discuss later (see Excerpts 6, 7, and 8).

Recalling her experiences growing up in Ossetia, Irina brought up memories of the village where she lived as a child. The village was predominantly Ossetian-speaking, but Irina recalled how lucky she was to have Russian-speaking neighbours, especially a girl of her age who spoke Russian. She further elaborated that her mother, Ossetian by ethnicity, was a highly proficient Russian speaker raised in an orphanage where there was no Ossetian language and only Russian was spoken. Irina also added that it was important to master Russian to continue her education and move to a city.

It emerges that Irina's mother's history (being deprived of Ossetian) and Irina's aspiration for education in a city where the language policy favoured Russian made the Russian language rather than Ossetian the language of feelings, even though she felt ashamed about her children not speaking Ossetian³. Considering the history of Irina's mother being deprived of her Ossetian identity, Irina's word choice, feeling ashamed that she was depriving her children of their Ossetian identity, adds to the explanation of why she did everything for her children to "at least know Russian". As Irina later reported, her first husband, a Finn and the father of her daughter, was proud to have a Russian-speaking wife and even tried to learn Russian himself, supporting Irina in maintaining Russian with her daughter.

Irina recalled several dramatic events connected to her second marriage, where her husband, a Finn, and the father of her son, was against them speaking Russian. The following recollections illustrate Irina's refraction of these events.

Excerpt 5

³ The developmental trajectory of Irina's linguistic repertoire has probably been subjected to the conditions of linguistic imperialism, first in the Soviet Union and later in Russia, where minority languages and official languages of the republics were and still are marginalised (e.g., Semenova et al., 2021).

I: we then moved to [village name 2] it is a small village, and there, there was also no Russian language at all, no friends, no people, no school, no teachers, nothing [...] there was only communication with me, but this communication was severely limited because by that time I got acquainted with the other (pause) man [...] with the father of the boy (pause) and he simply forbade us to talk in Russian.

R: oh wow!

I: there was a full ban of the Russian language in our home [...] he was afraid that we would be talking privately behind his back [...].

Irina first gives an overview of changes that coincided in her family life which led to her daughter being almost deprived of communication in Russian – them moving to a small village where there were few opportunities to practice Russian outside home and Irina marrying another man, who prohibited to use Russian at home. Irina also distances herself from her husband (e.g., “the other man” and “the father of the boy”) and from what was quite clearly a dramatic event – a clash between Irina’s desire to retain the Russian language for her daughter and a total ban on it in their home. This clash led them to address this through the Family Counselling. This event is described by Irina in Excerpt 6, where she elaborates on how the Family Counselling decision influenced FLP.

Excerpt 6

I: [they] supported him, [they] said would you like it if we started to speak Swedish now, you won’t understand us. I say no. [They say] he doesn’t like it either. [...] And he’s at home all the time. I didn’t have a minute that I was home, and he wasn’t [home]. He is always at home. I leave for work, and he’s at home, I come back, he’s home. To the store either we go together, or I go alone. I come back, he’s home. He’s always home. That’s why I didn’t have an opportunity to speak Russian with children. [...] and there were ehm, at the meeting there were two Family Counselling representatives ehm and a child welfare officer. There were four people, and they (pause) said that we needed to speak only Finnish in his [the ex-husband’s] presence.

The history here appears to emerge as an objective sequence of events. First, Irina faced the ban on using Russian, and then she sought help from family counselling which sided with her ex-husband. It may sound like Irina describes the situation in a matter-of-fact way – there were four people, and their decision was that no Russian should be used when Irina’s ex-husband was present. However, a deeper analysis of her recollection depicts this event differently. The formulation Irina uses at the outset – “Would you like it if we started to speak Swedish now” – is a structure often used by Russian speakers, e.g., when the intention is to make children comply with what adults require. This meaning is situated in the context of the interview, and thus, does not need to be negotiated – Irina sees the researcher as someone who would recognise the expressed vulnerability due to their partially shared identity.

Irina, therefore, positions herself as a vulnerable party lacking agency while the authorities she counted on sided with her ex-husband. Refracting this situation in

this way, Irina brings a meaning into the interview that gets a different significance. The four people imposed their power onto her, leaving her, at the time of the event, powerless. Just as a child is expected to comply in this situation, Irina agrees with the authorities and accepts that her ex-husband would not like them to use Russian in his presence. One might say that Irina was deprived of her volition, leading to her siding with the authorities in that social situation. This, however, created a tension that Irina needed to solve. On the surface, in Excerpt 6, Irina acknowledges the impossibility of the resolution imposed onto her by her husband and the Family Counselling. However, simultaneously, there is a seed for future actions, expressed by Irina as revealing that her ex-husband is always at home. In other words, seen as a moment of being, this episode can be analysed as a lack of agency. However, as Excerpt 7 shows, this contributed to that Irina deployed her agency later.

Irina emotionally summarises what this period of her family life meant for her daughter, saying, "Everything was taken away from her [Irina's daughter] in an instant: the Russian language, the Russian friends, the Russian classmates." Irina's refraction of this period completes both recollections of the instances of *perezhivanie*: the experience that Irina and her daughter endured living with Irina's second husband and her recollection of the family services siding with him. The meaning that Irina attaches to these experiences now is that they led to her daughter being deprived of everything and were clashing with her commitment to retain her children's Russian identity (Excerpt 4), marked by "everything was taken away".

Negative *perezhivaniya* do not mean that an individual stays with a lack of volition. On the contrary, individuals work through their *perezhivaniya* to regain their volition and capacity to act, developing themselves in the process. Irina could not agree with her daughter being deprived of using the language to which Irina had a strong emotional attachment. As has already emerged in Excerpt 4, which historically happened after Irina's refraction in Excerpts 6 and 7, Irina resolved the tension by nurturing the use of Russian with her children, rather than siding with her husband's total ban on the language in their home. Excerpt 7, involving two dramatic events, illustrates how Irina resolved this tension.

Excerpt 7

I: Only sometimes in the store [...] if we break free to a store, then we could speak Russian, otherwise not [...] and again I was fighting for the Russian language [...] this is my right and the right of my children to speak Russian [...] and those [people] for him [Irina's ex-husband] they are important people, [they] said that [we] need to speak Finnish [...] I didn- I couldn't step over them. That's why my only choice was to leave.

Irina first states that the only place for her to use Russian with her daughter was during shopping, an experience that Irina refracts as "breaking free". Irina interprets these shopping experiences as fighting. She also highlights that the Family Counselling and the Child Welfare Office representatives were authorities for her ex-husband only. She, however, recognised that she could not "step over them" while continuing to live with her ex-husband. For her, the only way to resolve the situation was to leave her ex-husband.

Analysing this excerpt as a holistic unit, including the dialectical unities of emotion-intellect, individual-environment, and history, allows for a fuller understanding of the meaning that the shopping experiences had for Irina and their significance in the process of her becoming – and becoming of the family language policy in Irina’s case. She explicitly links it to her ex-husband’s ban of the Russian language and the authorities siding with her ex-husband as well as her following divorce.

In the interview, Irina explicitly states that the officials were the authority only to her ex-husband (Excerpt 8). However, sociocultural theory compels us to recognise that as individuals work through their *perezhivaniya* (used here as a phenomenon; Veresov, 2017), refracting these in novel social situations; these *perezhivaniya* acquire different meanings. A change in Irina’s interpretation of the experience is likely, leading her to decide to “fight for the Russian language”. For her, it was the only, occasional way to use the language with her daughter. That is, she acted within the limits imposed onto her and her daughter by the authorities. This *and* the recognition of the power that Family Counselling and the Child Welfare Office decision had, in Irina’s interpretation at the time of the interview, led to her filing for divorce. The environment-individual created tension for Irina, which she resolved by starting to act in a qualitatively different way (fighting in her words) in the environment, thus leading to its changes – the configuration of her family – allowing, her to use the Russian language with her children. At the same time, Irina’s decision to leave was driven by the interpretation of the social situation – going shopping and speaking Russian with her daughter became an intrinsic part of the fight for her children’s right to speak Russian. The following excerpt focuses on the FLP in Irina’s family as a result of her journey and her *perezhivaniya*.

Excerpt 8

I: there was mixing only if [son or daughter] doesn’t know a word [in one of the languages], what is it in Russian or what is it in Finnish or ehm-, as I had courts, I needed a lot of Finnish, so I put pressure on [daughter’s name] (unintelligible), they say something in Finnish to us like that- like that, but in general, it’s Russian, and we use Finnish only to specify something [like when] a Finnish-speaking friend comes over then it’s all [interaction] in Finnish. They [children] speak Russian [between each other].

In Excerpt 8, Irina explains that the primary family language is Russian, which is used between Irina and her children and between the siblings. However, Irina points out that the court hearings forced her to dive deeper into the Finnish language, and her daughter was appointed by Irina as an assistant in this situation. While Russian still takes the central role, the family switches to Finnish whenever their Finnish-speaking friends are visiting. This depiction of FLP indicates that Russian has claimed its place as a family language, while Finnish is the language used in non-family discourse (e.g., legal discourse and when meeting with friends).

This excerpt demonstrates that after living through a number of dramatic events, Irina reclaimed her volition to implement the FLP of her choice and thus broke free from the constraints imposed on her, which consequently also impacted FLP. The becoming of the family language policy, in this case, was not linear, and neither

was the family language policy at the time of the interview an outcome of any one single dramatic event we outlined and discussed in this section. It was the outcome of the complexity of factors emerging in dialectical relationships between the individual and the environment refracted through Irina's emotion-intellect, which was also shaped by her history. In this process, and despite the only refraction we had access to, the meanings of Irina's experiences, which allowed her to act in particular ways, created novel situations of development. Hence, while a statement that Irina's separation from her ex-husband (a change in her family configuration) allowed her to use Russian with her daughter more would generally be true, it would also be a simplification of the becoming of the family language policy in Irina's case.

Discussion and conclusion

In this study, we, responding to a call by Soler (2023), explored the development of FLP as a holistic process in which the individual and environment, as well as emotion and intellect, are not seen as separate but as parts of a dialectical developmental process. This metatheoretical, theoretical, and analytical angle allows for an approach qualitatively different from previous studies which focused on the impact of certain emotions on language identity and use (Pavlenko, 2004; Tang & Calafato, 2022) or the effect of certain variables on anxiety in language use (Sevinç & Dewaele, 2018). That is, instead of focusing on the role of certain components (e.g., language practices, identity, or emotions) in FLP, we focused on being of individuals in their process of becoming through *perezhivaniya*. Pursuing this goal, we limited our analysis to emotion-intellect and individual-environment dialectics in the case of Mimosa and to historical development in our analysis of Irina's interview.

In the case of Mimosa, by focusing on the single *perezhivaniya*, we explored how FLP emerged in the dialectics of individual-environment, as these events were refracted through the prism of the individual's emotion-intellect. The meanings Mimosa attached to her and her son's multilingualism and language use (e.g., language as a shield, Irina's positive evaluation of her son being proud speaking Russian, her son seeing his bilingualism as normal) co-existed, collectively creating her understanding of the use of Russian (and Finnish) back in the social situation on the subway and contributing to her concept of family multilingualism and language use.

We further showed how the being and becoming of the family language policy in Irina's case can be explained by analysing historically her refraction of dramatic events, making these her unique social situations of development. This process emerged in complex interactions between her and the environment, leading her to act in different ways to resolve tensions emerging in different social situations. On the surface, while Irina's positive emotions towards Russian stayed the same, the meaning she attached to the use of Russian changed, as she went through the series of dramatic events and worked through them, including refracting on her experiences during the interview (see Zaporozhets, 2002).

While in Mimosa's case, we focused on certain moments or dramatic events, in Irina's case, we looked at these dramatic events and her refractions of these events as historically connected. However, it is important to note that being and becoming can-

not be examined separately. Therefore, both single dramatic events (being) and series of these events (becoming), dialectically related, are important to deeper understand the development of individuals and, as a result, changes in FLP.

This study brings in several theoretical and conceptual implications. First, our study expands on the growing number of studies focusing on the role of emotions in FLP (e.g., Sevinç, 2022; Tang & Calafato, 2022) by building the argument for the inseparability of emotions and intellect in meaning formation. The development process happens as individuals make sense of their experiences, recognise and build their understanding of the tensions these experiences create, and work towards resolving these tensions (Vygotsky, 1998; Zaporozhets, 2002). In contrast to the studies mentioned above, where emotions are seen as impacted by certain language practices or impacting these practices, approaching them as a part of the dialectical unity of *perezhivanie* allows for a qualitatively different interpretation of the findings.

Secondly, we argue for the value of shifting the analytical focus from individual factors contributing to the development of FLP, to the process of becoming of the individual. We emphasise the central role of individuals' lived experiences, which tend to be understated in the FLP research. Simultaneously with shifting the focus, *perezhivanie* compels us to adopt a more zoomed-in approach to exploring the development of FLP as a part of individuals' developmental trajectories. These trajectories emerge in the dialectical relationship between the individual and the environment, and *perezhivanie* helps us make this relationship visible. In our view, it is beneficial to move the focus onto the development of individuals understood in this way, or from the *language policy* part of the FLP acronym to *individuals* as those who constitute the family. Studying the process of these individuals' *becoming* through the theoretical lens of *perezhivanie* can develop our understanding of how family language policy emerges. We emphasise that negative *perezhivaniya* do not necessarily lead to a lack of capacity to act. Rather, by refracting these experiences through their emotion-intellect and histories and working through their *perezhivaniya*, individuals regain the capacity to act, themselves developing in this process. Individuals' developmental trajectories are then reflected in shifts in family language policy and family configurations. This approach also opens up possibilities to tap into agency, identity, and language ideologies as embedded in the relationships between the individual and the environment while being refracted through *perezhivanie*. That is, the focus is shifted from agency, ideologies, and identity as previously discussed in FLP research (see Curdt-Christiansen, 2013) to how these are interwoven into the individual's process of becoming.

A more practical implication relates to the dominant discourse on single-parent families as deficient. As the findings illustrate, the mothers thrive to raise their children bi-/multilingually. In fact, Irina appeared to be feeling alone in her striving to continue speaking Russian with her children *while* she was married, with Family Counselling Services siding with her ex-husband. She has gained more independence and volition to implement a bilingual FLP after separation from her husband (see Excerpt 8). In addition, the reprimanding dispositions of Family Counselling services (see Excerpt 6) point towards the need for more caring support for the families, which implies taking into consideration the histories of all family members. The changes in

practices could emerge in cooperation between the researchers, families, and counselling services.

Seen this way, the glimpses of the two life stories in the study paint the picture of the two mothers not only struggling but *acting* in order to, as the second informant explicitly put it, be happy and raise their children as individuals for whom their bi- and multilingualism is natural. We, hence, wish with this paper to suggest that the focus on *becoming of individuals* in family language policy research is as important as single factors, struggles, and obstacles.

Acknowledgements We would like to thank Dr Jiao Xi and Professor Karita Mård-Miettinen for their feedback on the early versions of this paper, and anonymous reviewers for their constructive suggestions and comments. We thank the participants of this study for sharing their stories.

Funding Open Access funding provided by University of Jyväskylä (JYU).

Declarations

The authors do not have any competing interests to disclose.

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