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Families in flux: at the nexus of fluid family configurations and language practices

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ABSTRACT

Research on multilingualism in the home has approached the family as a fixed unit thus neglecting the dynamic view of the family and its intersection with family language practices. The present study aims to address this gap by focusing on Russian-speaking mothers in Finland who have raised their children bilingually in single-parent as well as in dual-parent families. Russian speakers are the largest minority language group in Finland, and their number is constantly growing. The current study is a contribution to the research on family language practices in the Finnish context. It examines the nexus of shifts in family configurations and language practices and explores how the dynamic changes in family constellations shape language practices in four families. The study reveals that creating new kinships leads to shifts in the language practices of the peripheral family members and that forming voluntary kin can expand heritage language use and enable an overhearer and bystander role for children. Non-residential family members expand the family's linguistic repertoire and support the legitimacy of already established practices. Being sole caretakers enables mothers to encourage language practices that they consider beneficial for their children without encountering any resistance from other family members.

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Introduction

Since its beginnings as a field of inquiry in the early 2000s, family language policy (FLP) (King, Fogle, and Logan-Terry 2008), has evolved rapidly, encompassing various contexts, family configurations and types of communication (see e.g. Fogle 2013; Poveda et al. 2014; Catedral and Djuraeva 2018; Palviainen 2020a). Previous research in FLP and language socialization has primarily focused on normative families (see e.g. Curdt-Christiansen 2009; Armstrong 2014; Hua and Wei 2016; Bezcioglu-Goktolga and Yagmur 2018; Lomeu Gomes 2020) while non-normative families have remained very much on the margins (see however Obied 2010; Poveda et al. 2014; Wright 2020). At the heart of this article are the experiences of single or recently married Russian-speaking mothers, who have raised their children in Finland and have attempted to preserve Russian as a family language. The study focuses on shifts in family configuration and reported language practices (i.e. what mothers say they do with language). I refer to the mothers as single mothers, as they raised their children as primary or sole caretakers for the most part of their lives or were single mothers at the time of the interviews. Therefore, their single-parent experiences were at the center when the data collection started.

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Previous FLP research has approached family as a fixed entity, therefore taking a synchronic approach to it (see e.g. Curdt-Christiansen 2016; Lomeu Gomes 2020; Lubińska 2021; Mirvahedi 2021). The current study conceptualizes family as a fluid network, in which new members become significant while others grow apart. The study thus examines families' trajectories in flux (see Palviainen 2020b). This focus on fluctuation in the family configuration (when parents divorce, remarry, form voluntary kinships or build relationships with non-residential members) brings a new perspective to the field of FLP. Voluntary kinship in the context of the current study refers to 'those unrelated by blood or legal ties who are important in a person's social network' (Braithwaite et al. 2010, 391). By interviewing four Russian-speaking women and applying a nexus analytical lens (Scollon and Scollon 2004) I identify the shifts in family configuration as a social action and trace the trajectories of the discourses that shape this social action in four Russian-speaking families living in Finland. The single mothers' lived experiences intersect with communicative changes in the families and converge with beliefs and ideologies about the language use.

As there has been little earlier research within the field of FLP that has tackled questions of the intersection of fluid family constellations and language policy, the current study addresses the following research questions: (1) Do shifts in family configuration lead to changes in language practices? (2) How do shifts in family configuration, the formation of voluntary kinships and non-residential family members shape language practices in the families?

Family language policy in one-parent families

Family language policy was defined by King, Fogle, and Logan-Terry (2008) 'as explicit (Shohamy 2006) and overt (Schiffman 1996) planning in relation to language use within the home among family members'. As the field expanded studies in FLP started to pay attention not only to explicit decisions but also to implicit and covert factors that shape FLP (Curdt-Christiansen 2009).

Since its recognition, the field has developed rapidly and it is now undergoing an empirical and theoretical expansion (see e.g. Hiratsuka and Pennycook 2020; Lomeu Gomes 2020). Numerous studies have applied Spolsky's (2004) tripartite model, which encompasses language beliefs or ideologies, language practices, and language planning or management strategies exercised by family members. The model has informed a considerable body of research that has focused on families in various sociolinguistic contexts, some of them looking particularly at Russian speaking communities. A longitudinal in-depth case study in Israel, which focused on one Russian-Hebrew bilingual family indicated that the parents' attempts to conduct a pre-planned language policy in the family and incorporate specific management strategies may be insufficient, while spontaneous language management and naturally occurring linguistic performance may evoke children's interest in the heritage language (Kopeliovich 2010, 171). A quantitative study by Otwinowska et al. (2019) examined family language policy and Russian language and literacy transmission in Cyprus, Ireland, Israel and Sweden. Their research reveals that mothers who speak Russian and multiple other languages at home succeed in transmitting Russian to their children, in other words, it shows a positive correlation between mothers' multilingualism and language transmission. Furthermore, the research emphasizes the importance of such factors as family type, parental discursive strategies and language attitudes towards heritage language maintenance and transmission.

In recent years there have been more studies looking at one-parent families in the field of language socialization and FLP. A large-scale study on parental input patterns by DeHouwer (2007) which included single parents among the participants, showed that single parents are more likely to speak a minority language with their children at home than parents raising their children in dual-parent families. Their research suggested that the differences in children's minority language use may be explained by how the languages are used by parents and in what combinations (DeHouwer 2007). Research by Obied (2010) focusing on divorced families and children's literacy development demonstrated that 'one-parent families and divorced families can produce two-language children' (Obied 2010, 240). Focusing on Portuguese-English bilingual children the

study finds that a single parent can construct and maintain a positive environment for a child's bilingual literacy development. The study shows that the influence of non-residential fathers on a child's minority language development may strengthen as the child becomes older (Obied 2010).

Poveda et al. (2014) looked specifically at families that are single parent by choice and examined how children are socialized into non-conventional families and how they 'explore the system of family social relations' (Poveda et al. 2014, 326). By considering the family as a voluntary project in which members themselves define who is a part of the family rather than relying on biological ties, the research highlights the additional work that the parents in non-conventional families have to do in the face of societal expectations of what a family is.

Wright (2020) examined how kinship is constructed within adoptive, single-parent and queer families. The study in relation to single-parent families focused on how the interactional environment in a one-parent home influences use of the minority language. The results show that interactional patterns and the ratios in parent-child communication and child-adult accommodation in this family configuration are different from those found in two-parent families. The presence of only one parent leads to extensive collaboration and results in positive language maintenance outcome in one-parent families. The study also reveals that single parents' use of the collective pronoun 'we' often refers to themselves and their child(ren), which serves as another indicator of a distinctive family dynamic within one-parent families (Wright 2020, 45–54).

According to the studies mentioned above, single parents are successful in maintaining a minority language. It is also evident from these studies that one-parent and double-parent families rely on different strategies when talking *with* and *about* their children. Nonetheless, with its focus primarily on either single-parent or double-parent families, the existing body of research has avoided taking a perspective that would take into account the fluidity of family configuration. The current study aims to address this issue.

Russian speakers in Finland

The number of Russian speakers in Finland has been growing since the 1960s (Latomaa and Nuolijärvi 2002, 111). In the 1990s Finland experienced a noticeable increase in the number of Russian-speaking people due to a ratified law that was passed, under which all Ingrian Finns were entitled to return to Finland as repatriates. Currently, the most common reasons for Russian speakers to migrate to Finland are repatriation (the return of Ingrian Finns from the currently Russian territories of Leningrad oblast and Karelia), marriage (i.e. a Russian-speaking woman married to a Finnish-speaking man), and family ties (Pikkarainen and Protassova 2015; Protassova 2018b). The number of Russian-speaking families residing in Finland was around 30,000 in 2018 (Official Statistics of Finland 2020). Single-parent families headed by women account for over 10% of all families in Finland, but the share of one-parent families within the Russian-speaking community is even larger – it comprises 15% of all Russian-speaking families, and a total of 4574 (Official Statistics of Finland 2020).

The body of research addressing issues in relation to Russian speakers in Finland is growing and now covers a variety of research agendas, such as attitudes towards Russian-speaking minorities (Nshom and Croucher 2014), discrimination against Russian speakers in Finland, identity and belonging (Jasinskaja-Lahti and Liebkind 1998), women's experiences of migration (Krivonos 2015; Tiaynen-Qadir and Matyska 2020) and transnational mobility (Davydova-Minguet and Pöllänen 2020). In recent years researchers have also looked at issues of family multilingualism in Finland (see e.g. Moin et al. 2013; Protassova 2018a; Поротцова 2019).

Research on single-parent families in Finland has examined financial struggles, stress level, and family policy in relation to single mothers (e.g. Forssén, Haataja, and Hakovirta 2005; Joutsenniemi et al. 2006; Hakovirta 2011), but questions on the intersection of single-parenting and language socialization in Finland have largely been ignored. Often, when research has been conducted on family bilingualism, mothers have outnumbered fathers as participants, which suggests that they are the ones who are especially involved in the child's language development (see e.g. Kim and Starks

2010). In Finland, research that focuses on the lived experiences and migration trajectories of Russian-speaking women indicates that ‘Russian language and culture serves as a source of identification’ for women (Tiaynen-Qadir and Matyska 2020). A study by Davydova-Minguet and Pöllänen (2020) demonstrates that Russian-speaking women have to negotiate family languages with their spouses when enacting transnational family. In some cases, partners would make an effort to learn the woman’s mother tongue (i.e. Russian) and speak it with family members on a daily basis, while in other cases Finnish spouses would insist on speaking Finnish in the family. These attitudes towards Russian have a direct influence on how family language policies are shaped in transnational families.

Methodology

Participants and data collection

Participants for the study were recruited through social media groups aimed at Russian speakers in Finland. The selection criteria were: (1) experience raising a child bilingually as a single parent, and (2) speaking Russian on a daily basis with the child or children. Two out of the three social media groups in which the call was published targeted Russian-speaking mothers and women living in Finland. In total eight women responded to the call and participated in semi-structured interviews. All the participants had long-lasting experience as single parents or were their children’s primary caretakers at the time of the interview. For the purpose of this article, four cases were analyzed to illustrate the fluctuating nature of the family and its interconnectedness with language policy negotiations. The participants’ age varied between 34 and 50. All of the participants were first generation migrants, who had immigrated to Finland from Russia, Estonia or the former Soviet Union. All the participants were L1 speakers of Russian except, for Maria, who reported the Mari language, a minority language in Russia, as her L1. However, all of them reported that they spoke Russian at home with their children and they all had experience raising children both in double-parent families and as single parents.

Three interviews were conducted face-to-face and one via Skype. The interviewees lived either in Central Finland, or in the Helsinki region. This discrepancy is crucial as people living in the Helsinki region have wider access to L1 support for their children (i.e. a Finnish-Russian school, Russian-medium kindergartens, heritage language classes and a vast choice of extra-curricular clubs). In Central Finland, the options are limited to classes in Russian as a heritage language and just a few opportunities for extra-curricular activities in Russian.

The interviews lasted from half an hour to over an hour, and they were audio-recorded and transcribed. All of them were conducted in Russian. Participants were asked about their cultural background, migration trajectories, education, occupation and experiences as single parents. Such themes as language practices, ideologies and the decisions that informed certain linguistic choices were also discussed. Mothers also talked about changes in their family configuration and the social environment and explained why maintaining Russian was crucial for their families. As the interviews were semi-structured some discussions, on issues of identity, for example, or reflections on the changes in family configurations were initiated by the mothers. Prior to starting the interviews, the researchers informed the participants about privacy and data protection policy. All the names and places presented in the paper are pseudonyms. Brief profiles of the participants are presented in Table 1. The interviews were analyzed with a nexus analytic approach (Scollon and Scollon 2004).

Table 1. Key information about the research participants at the time of the interview.

	Country of origin	Age	Years in Finland	Occupation	Age of child/children	Mothers’ L1
Anna	Russia	34	8	cleaner	3	Russian
Julia	Estonia	34	6	English language teacher	7	Russian
Katerina	Russia	43	15	customer service consultant	12 and 1	Russian
Maria	Russia	50	25	n/a	6, 19 and 21	Mari

Once the data had been transcribed, they were imported to Atlas.ti, and coded according to the nexus analytic framework.

Nexus analysis

A nexus represents a complex aggregate of discourses with a social action at its center (Scollon and Scollon 2004, 14). The social action, in turn, is located at the core of the nexus and is defined as ‘any action taken by an individual with reference to a social network, also called a mediated action’ (Scollon and Scollon 2004, 11–12). It is described as occurring at the intersection of the historical body, discourse in place and an interaction order (Scollon and Scollon 2004, 153). The historical body in the context of the current study is the mothers’ migration trajectories and their discursively reconstructed past experiences as language speakers. The historical bodies rooted in the mothers’ lived experiences intersect with the interaction orders and discourse in place. The interaction order here is the communicative changes that take place within the families when the mothers reconstitute their families, divorce, or establish voluntary kinships (Braithwaite et al. 2010; Nelson 2013). The interaction order, then, focuses on *who* establishes and shifts the communicative norms in the family (i.e. what languages are spoken and under what circumstances) and initiates, supports and/or resists negotiation or renegotiation of language practices. Discourse in place refers to the conceptual context, norms, ideologies, and beliefs about the language use among family members, which serve as mediational means for the action in question (Hult 2015, 224).

Nexus analysis (NA) has been widely applied in language policy and planning research (see e.g. Hult 2015) as well as in family language policy (see e.g. Palviainen and Boyd 2013; Palviainen and Bergroth 2018; Smith-Christmas, Bergroth, and Bezcioglu-Göktolga 2019; Soler and Roberts 2019). Hult (2019) emphasizes that nexus analysis makes it possible to map the dynamism of the social action. By employing nexus analysis, I highlight the dynamic nature of family and language practices while mapping the relevant discourses which shape the action. In the present study, the social action is identified as the shifts in family configurations, that took place in the lives of Russian-speaking mothers who had created voluntary kinships, raised their children as single parents, married, and maintained family relations with non-residential family members. It should be noted that in each case the shifts in family configuration took place on different time scales. While some reappeared or repeated themselves (as in Anna’s case with a non-residential father and Katerina’s case with voluntary kin), others were more durable (as in Julia’s and Maria’s case with divorce). Another aspect that needs to be taken into account is that in some cases the mothers gave birth to children when their older children had moved out of their homes and started living separately. In these cases, the shift concerned not only forming new kinships but also giving birth to children and growing apart from the older children.

Attempting to achieve an emic perspective (see e.g. Olive 2014; Markee 2012), I engaged into the nexus as a Russian-speaking single parent myself. I made this clear to the participants either in an informal conversation before the interview or during the interview. Thus, the interviews were approached as a social practice and collaborative act in which meanings are co-constructed between participants and the researcher (Talmy 2011; Talmy and Richards 2011), and, in the Scollon and Scollon’s (2004) terms, the interviews were regarded as zones of identification, which make it possible to pinpoint the relevant social action.

Findings

Katerina: marriage and voluntary kinship

When relating her life story, Katerina said that she had moved to Finland as an Ingrian Finn at the age of 28. Her mother, an Ingrian Finn herself was already living in Finland when Katerina arrived. Katerina had studied Finnish in school in Russia, and by the time she moved to Finland she had

already reached intermediate level. From Katerina's story, it becomes clear that her historical body orients towards bilingual Russian-Finnish language use.

Emilia, Katerina's daughter, was born three years after Katerina's arrival in Finland. Her father was a Russian speaker with whom Katerina was in a long-distance relationship and who kept in touch mainly via phone calls. Emilia attended classes in Russian-as-a-heritage-language, and Katerina insisted that Emilia continued to take these classes as she 'couldn't provide it [proficiency in Russian] herself'. Katerina had been bringing Emilia up as a single parent for 9 years. Emilia's grandmother lived separately from Katerina and Emilia, although she often stayed with Emilia while Katerina was studying or working. Katerina noted that as the grandmother spent time with Emilia and spoke Finnish with her 'she more or less [could speak] Finnish' by the time she started kindergarten, which was important for both, Katerina and the grandmother at that time. It illustrates the language ideologies that were enacted in the family when the grandmother was still involved in the family-making. Despite Katerina's predominant use of Russian with Emilia, she still had a positive attitude towards the grandmother's use of Finnish with Emilia before she started preschool.

From Emilia's birth, Katerina had spoken Russian with her, and her grandmother had mainly spoken Finnish with Emilia, implementing the one person-one language (OPOL) strategy (Döpke 1992). However, on occasions when Emilia was out with her mother and/or grandmother, both primarily spoke Finnish with her. While the use of OPOL had come about without any particular planning on the part of either Katerina or her mother, the use of Finnish outside of home was explained by an external factor – grandmother's resistance to being heard speaking Russian. Ingrian Finns are mainly associated by other Finns with Russian language and culture (see e.g. Salonsaari 2012) and Russian speakers are often perceived negatively in the Finnish society (Nshom and Croucher 2014; Jaakkola 2000). Katerina's mother, of Ingrian descent, being now assimilated into Finnish society, perhaps did not want to be identified with the negative attributes given to Russian speakers and therefore chose to speak Finnish with Emilia outside the home. This decision was rooted in her grandmother's historical body and was reinforced by the discourse in place (i.e. attitudes towards Russian speakers in Finland). This case resonates with the findings discussed by Curdt-Christiansen (2016), that the language ideologies held by caretakers and dictated by the dominant societal discourse lead to the application of a pro-majority-language FLP.

Katerina reported that she had tried to persuade her mother to switch to Russian when Emilia was of school age, but these attempts had failed, and grandmother continued to speak mostly Finnish with Emilia. This instance illustrates how Katerina's language ideologies changed over time: she had declared before that she thought it was important for Emilia to be able to speak at least basic Finnish by the time she started preschool, but later she decided to try to influence grandmother's language practices and convince her to speak Russian with Emilia.

Emilia was 12 years old at the time of the interview and Katerina had just gotten married to a Russian-speaking man with whom she was bringing up Emilia and a 1-year-old daughter. Before marrying him, Katerina had been in a long-distance relationship with another Russian-speaking man, who had two daughters from a previous marriage. Katerina and Emilia had regularly spent holidays and weekends together with them and taken part in discussions in Russian, which had expanded their use of the heritage language. In nexus analytic terms, these instances can be described as a nexus of practice in which voluntary kinship was being formed. Therefore, the social action led to shifts in the interaction order and the already established language practices (i.e. OPOL and Finnish outside the home).

Since Katerina had experience of bringing up a child bilingually both as a single parent and as a parent who was raising children in a wedlock, it naturally led her to reflect on the language practices in the family while the family configuration was in flux and the proximity and involvement of extended family members was shifting. This led to instances of negotiation and renegotiation of language practices. Extract 1 illustrates this shift:

Extract 1

- 1 то есть так как мы с ней все-таки большинство времени были вдвоем
so I mean because most of the time it was just the two of us
- 2 либо она с бабушкой была вдвоем
or she was together with her grandmother
- 3 у нее очень э: повлияла мне кажется на-
*she's very eh*m* it influenced I think he-*
- 4 на всё её развитие
her whole development
- 5 то что у нее вот не было пассивного слушания всего
that she didn't have the passive listening
- 6 то есть-
I mean-
- 7 то есть ну люди друг с другом
I mean [when] people are with each other
- [...]
- 8 а все-таки когда муж жена там или со старшими детьми с младшими детьми разго- варивают
but when a husband and a wife talk or with younger children
- 9 то всё равно ребенок это всё слышит
a child still hears everything
- [...]
- 10 а у нас это практически полнос-
and in our case that was almost tota-
- 11 полностью отсутствовало
totally absent

In lines 1–5 Katerina reflects on her experience as a single parent and refers to a lack of ‘passive listening’ or in Goffman’s terms, to the lack of the role of bystander or an overhearer for the child (Goffman 1981, 132). It is worth noting, that despite Emilia being a skilled Russian speaker, and her proficiency in Russian being encouraged by her mother when she was a single parent, Katerina perceives single parenting as having a negative impact on Emilia’s communicative skills. This may be related to the dominant discourse of the nuclear family normativity, in which certain interaction norms are taken for granted. Further, in lines 8–11 Katerina explicitly refers to the current family configuration, mentioning husband, wife, and older and younger children, all of whom could be involved in communicative practices. These actors can be identified as primary actors, who alter the interaction order and give children overhearing roles in communicative situations. It is noticeable that the grandmother is not mentioned as an important figure here, which indicates that her role in the family has become more peripheral.

Furthermore, as Katerina got married and thus created a new family bond, Emilia’s grandmother’s language practices changed along with the change in family configuration. The following extract illustrates this change:

Extract 2

- 1 ну сейчас больше по-русски
well now [she speaks] more Russian
- 2 потому что щас уже получается
because now it's
- 3 ну муж у меня русскоязычный теперешний и
well my present husband is Russian-speaking
- 4 и как бабушка уже понимает что она это как бы она на ин-
and grandmother sort of understands that she sp-
- 5 на иностранном языке для него говорит
speaks a language that is foreign to him

Extract 2 illustrates how forming a new family bond led to changes in language practices. Lines 3–5 demonstrate that while Katerina’s deliberate attempts to get grandmother to use more Russian were unsuccessful but forming a new family bond (i.e. getting married to a Russian-speaking man)

led anyway to a renegotiation of language practices and grandmother's more frequent use of Russian. In lines 4 and 5 Katerina explains that grandmother's adjustment also occurred because Katerina's husband was not proficient in Finnish (*a language that is foreign to him*). This highlights the complexity of factors that lead to shifts in family language practices. In this case, a new family member brought in his own experiences as language speakers (*historical body*) and other family members adjusted to it.

Katerina's case exemplifies how shifts in family configuration and the formation of voluntary kinships lead to changes in communicative and language practices among family members. In Katerina's case creating voluntary kinship led to shifts in her family's established language practices and the norms of the interaction order, and forming a new family bond (i.e. getting married) affected the language practices of other family members (i.e. Emilia's grandmother). This case also illustrates the complexity of the interplay between different actors and their mutual positionality.

Anna: non-residential father

Anna moved to Finland at the age of 27, six years before to the interview. As she expressed it, there was nothing for her in Russia and she decided to study in Finland in a program that combined content and Finnish language learning. During the interview Anna aligned her present historical body with pro-multilingual attitudes by reflecting on her past choice to study math and physics in school instead of languages, saying that 'languages open the doors'. She used the metaphor to refer to more job opportunities around the world when talking about Sofia's, her daughter's, prospects. Anna met Sofia's father at work, and, as the father was from Germany, they started a long-distance relationship. Sofia was born almost three years prior to the interview and lived in Finland with her mother. When talking about her current language policy at home Anna said that it was important to maintain both languages (i.e. Russian and Finnish). This resonates with her alignment with multilingualism.

When explaining the choice of Russian as a family language (family here means Anna and Sofia), Anna mentioned three reasons: the recommendation from the child health clinic to speak the mother's L1 at home with the child, the fact that Russian is Anna's mother tongue, and it is the only language she feels she can 'explain the simple things in' to Sofia and comfort her in and, thirdly, having extended family members in Russia who visited them regularly. Furthermore, Anna's historical body indicated that Russian was the most obvious and most natural choice also because she was not proficient in other languages, except English in which she had basic proficiency at the time she moved to Finland. In Anna's case, the decision to speak Russian as the family language was rooted in the intersection of discourse in place and historical body, where Russian was associated with affective motherhood and at the same time it was the family language recommended by Finnish health practitioners. However, Anna explained that when Sofia's father visited them, family language practices changed considerably:

Extract 3

1	с папой когда получается он приезжает and with her father then when he visits
2	папа по-немецки с ней her father speaks German with her
3	мы между собой на английском с ним and we speak English with him
4	и я на русском and I [speak] Russian
5	это вот у нас вообще перемешка that is we've got quite a mix
6	она с папой м: with the father m:
7	либо отвечает что-то по-русски whether she replies with something in Russian

8 но: по-немецки она не говорит
 9 bu:t she doesn' t speak German
 она понимает я думаю что
 she understands I think
 10 ну не знаю процентов восемьдесят-то точно
 well I don' t know eighty percent for sure

In lines 1–4, Anna explains that they drew on a repertoire of three languages (Russian, German and English). In nexus analytic terms the social action here – Sofia’s father’s visits – becomes a nexus of practice that is established over time, with a repeated site of engagement (i.e. Anna’s and Sofia’s home). The father spoke his L1 (i.e. German) and the language that was most familiar to the child (i.e. Russian) to take care of his daughter. When explaining how these language practices came into being Anna refers to the fact that at first the father ‘couldn’t understand why she [Sofia] needs [to speak] Russian in Finland’ but over time, he realized that Finnish was necessary because they lived in Finland and Russian was necessary because Anna and Sofia lived together. It is precisely through the iteration of the social action – the father’s visits – that the employed language practices that were used were negotiated. The formation of these practices may also indicate that over time the father accepted his role as a non-residential family member and accommodated himself to the established family roles and language practices. Anna conceptually constructed the father’s language ideologies as tied to one-language-one-environment by ascribing a monolingual home to Sofia and constructing Finnish as a societal language and Russian as a family language.

Sometimes when Sofia’s father was staying with Sofia, he spoke mainly German with her and used Russian verbs such as ‘to eat, to pee, to poop’. Although the non-residential father’s input in Russian was limited to single words, the practice might have supported Russian as a legitimate family language as he was embedding in his speech words from the language that had already been routinely spoken as a family language between Anna and Sofia. Therefore, instead of challenging or changing the established norm by, for example, speaking only German with Sofia, he rather took a stand in support of the established interaction order. This strategy of her father’s might have impacted the child’s perception of and attitudes toward Russian and created an affective and positive association with the language (see e.g. Smith-Christmas 2018).

Anna’s case illustrates that the father’s visits lead to shifts in language practices within the family. Not only did the father bring his L1 (i.e. German) into the family but he also supported and legitimized Russian as a family language by using the words that helped him perform parenting responsibilities and bond with his daughter. Furthermore, Anna indicated that these practices were developed over time so through a repeated social action (the father’s visits) family members developed these language practices.

Maria: from double-parent family to single-parent family

Maria moved to Finland at the age of 25, to study in a college. In Russia, she had spoken Mari in the family as a child, learnt Russian when she started school and was also learning German as a foreign language in school as well. Bilingualism came naturally to her because she spoke Mari at home and Russian in school. Maria raised her older children in a double-parent family with a Finnish-speaking husband in the countryside where she did not know any Russian speakers. The family language was Finnish and eventually Maria’s older children refused to speak Russian. The choice of Finnish as a family language was not Maria’s decision when she was bringing up her older children together with her husband. She explained that she had to speak Finnish at home because her husband was a Finn:

Extract 4

1	Ну, потому что наверное у меня муж э-
	Well, maybe because my husband is eh-
2	финн
	a Finn
3	и всё же мне надо было всё равно говорить всё только на финском языке
	and I still had to speak only Finnish
[...]	
4	например всей семьей
	for example the whole family
5	я только говорила с детьми только на финском
	I only spoke Finnish with the children
6	вот это вот может не надо было допускать.
	perhaps I shouldn't have let this happen.
[...]	
7	ну: я даже не знаю тогда я сама наверно тоже учила финский язык
	we:ll I don't even know back then I guess I was also learning Finnish
8	может более,
	maybe more,
9	чтоб было легче может понять мужу что ли
	maybe [to make it] easier for [my] husband to understand
10	[...]
11	что он может быть даже иногда против был,
	That he was perhaps against it [Russian at home] sometimes
12	потому что он не понимает русский язык
	because he doesn't understand Russian

In lines 5–8 Maria says that she spoke only Finnish when the whole family was together. In lines 11–12 she says that she herself was studying Finnish at the time and that she wanted her husband to understand what was being said. She adds, with some hesitation, that her husband was against the use of Russian in the family. A number of factors came into play when the FLP was established in this double-parent family. First, the language choice can be explained by power relations within the family (i.e. Maria needed to adjust her language practices as her husband did not understand Russian). This language choice was reinforced by the environment (i.e. the lack of Russian speakers in the area where the family lived) and Maria's own trajectory as a Finnish language speaker (see line 7). As a result, the children ultimately refused to speak Russian at home. Similar findings were discussed by Souza (2015), who found that minority language-speaking mothers had to negotiate FLP in order to maintain the child's heritage language.

Maria's youngest child Oscar was born six years prior to the interview and was raised in a single-parent family. Oscar's father is a Finnish speaker, and they meet occasionally and speak Finnish with each other. When Maria was bringing up Oscar, it was her deliberate decision to speak Russian at home with him, a decision that nobody challenged. As she explained: 'When he was born, I decided to give him an opportunity [to speak Russian]'. When I asked Maria, what language she speaks with her children now, she replied:

Extract 5

1	Я с младшим ребенком говорю на русском языке.
	I speak Russian with my younger child.
2	У нас-
	We have-
3	мы дома говорим на русском языке
	we speak Russian at home

In Extract 5 Maria first says that *she* spoke Russian with Oscar but in the next utterance, in line 3, she specifies *we* (implying herself and Oscar) 'speak Russian at home', thus highlighting that Oscar

was also a co-collaborator in the FLP negotiation. Maria further elaborated on Oscar's role in the language policy negotiation saying that each time she started speaking Finnish with Oscar he asked: 'Why do you speak Finnish?', explicitly manifesting his agency.

Maria's case illustrates that her intention of speaking Russian at home with Oscar was rooted in her historical body at a time when she could not enact the language practices that would enable the transmission of Russian to her children. When Maria became a sole caretaker, she faced no resistance in response to her chosen pro-Russian FLP. Additionally, their social environment (i.e. Russian-speaking friends) had a positive impact on Oscar's language maintenance. Unlike Maria's older children, Oscar actively positioned himself as an agent of pro-minority-language FLP.

Julia: divorce and single parenting

Julia was born and grew up in a predominantly Russian-speaking area of Estonia. When describing her place of birth Julia said: 'I don't belong neither here nor there, well at all, for Estonians I'm Russian, for Russians I'm sort of an Estonian.' Julia moved to Finland at the age of 28, seven years before the interview, because her husband was working in Finland. Julia worked as an English language teacher in a college and in her interview, she emphasized that she knew how to support a child's bilingualism referring to the OPOL strategy. Like the other cases discussed above, Julia aligned her historical body with pro-multilingual FLP. Despite predominantly using Russian with her son, Alexander, she said that they could sometimes fool around in English, and Alexander might initiate some talk in Finnish which led to meta-linguistic discussions in Russian.

Alexander was born in Estonia. He was brought to Finland with his parents when he was one and a half years old and started kindergarten soon after that. Both of Alexander's parents are Russian-speaking, and Julia reported that Alexander started speaking Russian first but gradually he became proficient in Finnish as he was attending a Finnish-medium kindergarten, where he had a Russian-speaking assistant. Julia explained that Alexander now often helped her with Finnish and corrected her. This positions Alexander as being empowered in relation to Finnish language norms. As mentioned above, Julia mostly spoke Russian with her son, but she said that she used to have arguments with her ex-husband over their language practices at home:

Extract 6

1	Ю: Ну мы как бы оба разговаривали на русском,
[...]	well we both spoke Russian,
2	то есть э: в принципе нет, ничё не поменялось э;
[...]	so ehm basically no, nothing has changed ehm,
3	Вот он мне говорит что мы когда разъехались,
4	So he says that when we separated,
5	он уже там пытался мне сказать про то что
6	he tried to tell me that
7	надо с ним по-фински говорить,
8	it's necessary to speak Finnish
9	ну как-то это так на корню и засохло все,
	and well it sort of withered on the vine,
	ну то есть как бы я ему сразу дала понять что это-
	well I mean I let him know at once that it-
	это не работает как бы,
	it kinda doesn't work,
	ну вообще-то это лишнее,
	well it's actually unnecessary,

In lines 1 and 2, Julia specifies that nothing changed in their language practices after their divorce. Nonetheless, lines 4–9 illustrate the attempts of Julia's ex-husband to change language

practices they had already established. Although he was a native Russian speaker himself, Julia's ex-husband tried to convince her to shift toward the majority language (i.e. Finnish). In addition, Julia described how his new wife had intervened to support Russian as a family language for Julia and Alexander. Julia, as the primary caretaker, further explained her attitude by the fact that Alexander was immersed into a Finnish-speaking environment, and he lacked input in Russian.

Although the particular extract that I have quoted here does not include any reference to the shift in language practices, it does, however, highlight that Julia as the primary caretaker resisted making such a shift and maintained the practices that were already established. It is interesting that the father tried to shift their language practices after the divorce. This indicates that non-residential family members can play a significant role in shaping language policies at home, like in Anna's case, where the non-residential father played a key role in FLP negotiation (see e.g. Obied 2010). In Julia's case, however, not only did the father take part in the negotiation but so did his new wife. This confirms that peripheral members may indeed play a significant role in FLP negotiation (see e.g. Smith-Christmas 2019).

Discussion

The aim of this study was to explore the links between shifts in family configuration and potential shifts in language practices. The findings show that there may indeed be links between the two, and that these links are revealed in several ways. First, one person creating new bonds leads to shifts in the language practices of other family members, as in Katerina's case: the mother's deliberate attempts to get the grandmother to change into Russian failed but getting married led to the grandmother's adjustment of her language practices to the language preferences of Katerina's husband. Second, forming voluntary kin can expand heritage language use and enable children to take over-hearer or bystander roles. In Anna's case, the changes in personal relationships expanded the family's linguistic repertoire and supported legitimacy of the already established practices, as the non-residential father often embedded Russian words in the conversations. Finally, the study showed that becoming sole caretakers enables mothers to enact the practices that they themselves find beneficial for their children. This supports the argument put forward by Davydova-Minguet and Pöllänen (2020) that Russian-speaking mothers often have to negotiate FLP with Finnish-speaking partners. As the current study illustrates, this was the case for two participants as well (i.e. Maria and Julia), who managed to implement the FLP of their choice after a divorce.

In line with Poveda et al. (2014) this study illustrates the salience of bonds for single parents. This may be explained by the fact that single parents tend to create networks that may potentially develop into bonds. This led to the (re)negotiation of the FLP in Katerina's and Anna's cases. In one of the interviews (with Katerina) there is clear evidence of the dominance of a normative family discourse, against which Katerina sets her experience as a single parent. This vividly illustrates how the dominant discourse is perceived as a norm while single-parent experience is a deviation from the norm, which is in turn directly linked to interactive norms and patterns (i.e. a certain number of participants of a certain gender).

Conclusion

The study outcomes present a complex picture of fluid family configurations and their links with language policy (re)negotiation. The study illustrates how the families (re)negotiate their language policies within a network of social actors and shows that single mothers maintain their children's bilingualism when they are the sole decision makers. Two of the participants, Julia and Maria, drew attention to their children's agentic roles by seeing them as resisting certain language choices or acting as experts in the majority language. In the future, it would be useful to take a synchronic approach to family and further scrutinize the interplay between changes in family constellations and language policies. Combined with a long-term research design and an outcome-based

approach, this could reveal how these processes influence children's minority language maintenance. Examining this process from children's perspectives would also shed light on how the children navigate family relations and contribute to FLP negotiation with non-residential family members, voluntary kin and peripheral family members.

Transcription conventions:

- [...] omitted utterances
- truncated word
- [] transcriber's comment
- : elongated sound

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