Family language policy research meets code-switching research: a case study on Russian-Estonian code-switching

EAAL Conference

Anna Verschik, Reili Argus (TLU)

Tallinn, 16-17 June 2022

Instead on introduction

- We claim that just looking at the linguistic data is insufficient
- Bilingual conversations in a family (Russian-Estonian): nothing "interesting" from a structural point of view
- Father speaks Russian, mother speaks Estonian (and occasionally switches) > OPOL?
- Need for background information > FLP

What is actually going on

- Both parents are ethnic Russians!
- Not the case of an indigenous or immigrant minority adopting the majority language!
- Russian-speakers in Estonia are mostly the Soviet-era newcomers who were monolingual until recently
- Some studies show shift to Estonian as one of the or the only language in the family (no statistics, probably, very small number of cases)
- Regional? I.e., one study on Lääne-Virumaa (Konsap 2017), but also in Tallinn (Härgina 2015)

Goals

- The paper analyses FLP in a family where both parents are ethnic Russians; the father speaks Russian and the mother speaks Estonian to the children.
- Spolsky (2004): language ideology, language management, language practices.
- FLP studies usually concentrate on parent's goals and attitudes, and semi-structured interviews are the standard data collection method.

What is different here

- In contrast, our goal is **to both interview parents and to analyse actual child-directed speech**

- We want to find out whether there are **differences** between beliefs (ideology), measures taken for the children's bilingual development (management), and naturalistic language use (language practices).

Data and method

- The data was collected in two ways: a semi-structured interview with the parents (1.5 h) and 6 h of recordings of family conversations.

- All cases of CS identified and classified (insertions, alternations)

Interviews (Father)

Russian, ***Estonian,*** <u>English</u>

(1) *No ja ne znaju, kak nado,* **kasulik**

'Well, I don't know how it should be, **useful**'

(2) ***Te mõtlete seda, et on*** <u>first language</u> ***või mida?***

'You mean that <u>first language </u>or what?'

(3) ***Eestikeelne*** <u>exposure</u> ***tekkis siis kui ma olin mingi kaheksa aastat, üheksa aastat.***

'<u>Exposure</u> to Estonian started when I was about eight, nine years old'

Bilingual conversations

Alternations

(1) *MOT: *pojdem **lähme** pojdem*

'let's go, **let's go**, let's go'

Russian-Estonian

(2) *MOT: *a čto vy jeli?* what did you eat?'

*CHI: mmm ***sai*** 'mmm **white bread/bun**'

(4)

Estonian-Russian (one speaker, one language)

*MOT: ***võta veel kaks ampsu, siis on korras või üks amps, mida sa pidid võtma.***

'eat two more bites, then it is fine or one bite that you are supposed to eat'

*CHI: *vsjo* 'done'

*MOT: ***no, väga tubli*** 'well, very well done'

(4) Insertion

*MOT: *skazali že s obeix storon i škura dolžna byt' **krõmpsuv**, a kogda v duxovku kladjoš, tože škura že kladjotsja vverx* 'but it is said: on both sides and the crust should be **crunchy**, and when you put it in the oven, the crust should definitely be on top'

Findings 1

- Discrepancies between the declared ideologies, management and practices.
- The declared policy is strict OPOL and, as the father rendered it, purism because of the concern that the children will be confused otherwise.

- During the interview, it was the father who switched between Estonian, Russian and English.

Findings 2

- The number of turns in the mother's speech in recordings is 1151, of which ~50 % are child-directed. Of all child-directed turns 12 % are in Russian and 8 % contain either insertional code-switching or alternational switching within one turn.

- There are only 6 instances of code-switching in father's speech.

- Although the parents declared that they speak Russian to each other, the mother switched to Estonian from time to time while addressing the father.

- Sometimes, the mother repeats the same turn in the other language in child-directed speech.

Findings 3

	ALL UTTERANCES	INSERTIONS	ALTERNATIONS	CONGRUENT LEXICALIZATION
MOT	1151	15	39	4
FAT	211	2	5	
CHI	874	8	14	

- In FLP research, triangulation of statements obtained from interviews (ideology), practical steps (management) and actual linguistic behaviour (practices) is highly desirable.
- Despite the declared OPOL policy, it is in fact impossible to avoid code-switching.