



COST

IS1306 "New Speakers in a Multilingual Europe: Opportunities and Challenges"

Högre seminarium i lingvistik

'New Speakers' of Russian: Evidence from Russian-speaking mothers from Sweden, Estonia and Cyprus

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**Stockholms
universitet**

'New Speakers' of Russian: Evidence from Russian-speaking mothers from Sweden, Estonia and Cyprus

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This study investigates Russian-language maintenance and transmission, and the social and cultural identities of Russian-speaking female informants in multilingual settings in Cyprus, Estonia and Sweden. The relationship between language and identity depends on socio-political, socio-economic and socio-cultural factors (Pavlenko and Blackledge 2003). We plan to investigate the linguistic and sociolinguistic profiles of immigrant and minority communities in the three countries. In particular, our research is focused on the home languages of the members of these communities, and whether Russian as an L1 is maintained and transferred to the second and third generations. Written questionnaires were used for data collection among Russian-speaking mothers, of which 27 currently reside in Cyprus, 11 live in Estonia and 15 in Sweden.

In Cyprus, as well as in Sweden, Russian is spoken by a small minority group – immigrants or members of mixed marriage families – and may come under threat of extinction in the future in this host country. In Estonia, Russian is a minority language, the former socio-linguistically dominant language, and still used as the L1 among almost one-third of the country's population. In Sweden, Russian is more a migrant language, mainly used in inter-ethnic marriages.

Language transmits culture and history, and thus language loss can lead to the loss of inherited knowledge. Linguistic diversity is as important as ecological diversity (Crystal 2000; Krauss 1992). Language vitality depends on such factors as demography, status, prestige, institutional control, and the ethnolinguistic group, its distribution and size (Giles et al 1977). In our study, we aim to look into the factors that influence minority/immigrant language transmission, among them motivation (integrative/intrinsic motivation), the symbolic role of a language, minority identities, socio-economic status, social networks, religion, the tendency toward social segregation or inclusion, language solidarity (García, 2003), attitudes and valences (Woolard, 1998; Wölck, 2004; Lasagabaster and Huguet, 2007), the environment of the speaker and the value of bilingualism and multilingualism in particular environments (family, school, society and individual) (García, 2009), the use of the minority language in public (Wölck, 2004) and its utility (Grin and Vaillancourt, 1997; Henley and Jones, 2005), and the cultural value of the language (Woolard and Shieffelin, 1994) and its utility (Wölck, 2005).

We believe that our study will show that Russian-speaking mothers get stuck on the one-parent, one-language strategy when using languages at home. Multilingualism and the maintenance of the Russian language and culture among children are usually encouraged. As for school choices, mothers select mainstream language education for different reasons, even in Estonia where schools with Russian as the language of instruction are also available.