

Research Article

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“We Speak Pidgin!” – Family Language Policy as the Telling Case for Translanguaging Spaces and Monolingual Ideologies

<https://doi.org/10.1515/opli-2020-0037>

received March 11, 2020; accepted October 8, 2020

Abstract: With the increase in global movement, both temporary (travel and transsettlement) and permanent (e/immigration), traditional conceptions of the linguistic processes rooted largely in the long-term translocation(s) or migrations are revisited through the study of family language policy. The present study of family language policy serves as a telling case (Mitchell, 1984) of (1) translanguaging (Williams, 1994) as a practical theory of language (Li, 2018), describing how the transnational individual experienced the construction of two intergenerational translanguaging spaces (Li, 2011): the family and the community and (2) how the phenomenon of monolingual ideologies infiltrates the translanguaging space of the family to exert its influences toward the standard, in this case the standard Russian dialect. Importance of increased mobility characteristic of contemporary times and the central role of temporality in linguistic processes and their disruptions are discussed in this article.

Keywords: family language policy, translanguaging, transnationalism

1 Introduction

Transnationalism is defined as “the process by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement” (Basch et al., 1994: 7). In addition to transnationalism through immigration as defined above, the rise in the number of transnational settlers¹ (Hirsch and Lee, 2018) globally is linking several societies of origin through settlement, resettlement, and serial and return migrations. In turn, these (re)settlement patterns are giving rise to individual and communal idiolects that challenge linguistic boundaries beyond code-switching (CS) between different languages available to the individual or community to integrated systems referred to as translanguaging.

Translanguaging was first introduced by Williams (1994) as *trawsieithu* and translated by Baker in 2001. Williams first refers to *trawsieithu* as the creative practice and process of knowledge construction that focuses on meaning making (García, 2009) rather than teaching and learning between teachers and students in Welsh and English. Li (2018) offers translanguaging as a practical theory of language concerned with knowledge construction as described by Williams (1994), García (2009), and others and explains that as such it is dependent on descriptive adequacy, focusing on “[...] interpretations that can be used to observe, interpret, and understand other practices and phenomena” (Li, 2018) rather than on predictions

¹ Transnational Settlers are defined as individuals and families whose experiences are rooted in increased and more frequent or intended translocations characteristic of today’s shifting labor opportunities and access to different forms of capital (Hirsch and Lee, 2018).

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and solutions. Translanguaging is the use of “one’s idiolect without regard for socially derived languages and labels,” and it is a creative integration of languages (and modalities) in meaning making and knowledge construction in communication that includes CS, translations, transliteration, trans-enunciating, and other creative means. It produces an idiolect that challenges linguistic boundaries (Otheguy et al., 2015), with individual idiolect being the personal language that a multilingual individual produces (Li, 2018) and – which is unlike other’s idiolect; and a group variety – being a linguistic repertoire that mashes mutually shared languages into an integrated system (García, 2009; Canagarajah, 2011) in translanguaging spaces. Translanguaging space in turn, according to Li (2011a, 2018), is the creative social space where a language user brings different aspects of self (history, experiences, attitude, belief, ideologies, etc.) into “one coordinated and meaningful performance” (Li, 2011a: 1223) and where their particular integrated system of languages is shared with others in the effort and with the goal of knowledge construction and meaning making. With these definitions in mind and through the description of the telling case (Mitchell, 1984) of family language policy (FLP) of a transnational, Russian–Hebrew–English translanguaging family in Israel as shared with us by the father, this work is to serve as an example of (1) translanguaging as a practical theory of language, describing how the transnational individual experienced the construction of two intergenerational translanguaging spaces through translanguaging: the family and the community and (2) how the phenomenon of monolingual ideologies infiltrates the translanguaging space of the family to exert its influences toward the standard, in this case the standard Russian dialect. We discuss how contemporary increased global movement of self and others, both contributing to translanguaging and creating opportunities for monolingual ideologies to disrupt it.

2 Temporality in transnationalism and translanguaging

Transnationalism that takes into account the different types of global movement of today, (im)migration, (re)settlement, serial migrations, etc., is the processes of forging, linking, and sustaining relations between different societies of settlement and belonging as well as languages over time. The process is carried out through language and is rooted in temporal factors of the move (Hirsch and Lee, 2018). Permanent translocations (immigration) carry different motivations than translocations that are intended to be temporary (transsettlement). Different goals, linguistic and otherwise, emerge out of intentions rooted in temporality of the move: permanent moves may inspire active heritage language (HL) maintenance efforts for some and abandonment for others, while temporality of transsettlement may inspire host language learning for some and avoidance in others. Within a family, along with the temporal aspects of the move, these responses to translocations may be rooted in family roles and dynamics as well as ethnolinguistic vitality of the community, once again rooted in time. Ethnolinguistic vitality is “a group’s ability to maintain and protect its existence in time as a collective entity with a distinctive identity and language. It involves continuing intergenerational transmission of group’s language and cultural practices, sustainable demography and active social institutions, social cohesion, and emotional attachment to its collective identity” (Ehala, 2015), all of which take time and are rooted in time. Thus, translocation into the host society where speech community is lacking will inspire different responses toward the host society, HL maintenance, and host language learning than will translocation into the host society within which one’s speech community’s presence is strong. At the same time and over time, individual idiolects and communal translanguaging practices develop.

3 Russian in Israel

Immigrants and transsettlers from the former Soviet Union make up the largest ethnolinguistic group that has translocated to Israel. Currently, Israel is the home to the biggest population of Russian-speaking Jews,

with approximately 9,00,000 Jews from the former Soviet Union residing in Israel. Approximately 1.2 million Russian-language speakers (Jews and non-Jews) reside in Israel today. Around 20% of the total population of Israel is of former Soviet Union heritage (Central Bureau of Statistics). Research shows that Russian-speaking transnationals in Israel highly value and identify with their cultural and linguistic heritage (Kraemer et al., 1995; Spolsky, 1997; Ben-Rafael et al., 1998; Donitsa-Schmidt, 1999; Epstein and Kheimets, 2000; Kheimets and Epstein, 2001; Remennick, 2003; Kopeliovich, 2006; Burstein-Feldman, 2008; Altman et al., 2014) and make concentrated efforts in their maintenance. These concentrated efforts include both the family domain efforts through targeted FLPs that support Russian-language learning and maintenance as well as through the institutional support building and utilization – such as the early childhood education centers in Russian or bilingual, Hebrew and Russian, the news outlets in Russian, and others. With several waves of immigrants to Israel from the former Soviet Union, the Russian-speaking immigrants and transsettlers have experienced the absence of the speech community, the building of the speech community, and a speech community that is ethnolinguistically strong – depending on the date of arrival in Israel. In 1990s, Israel saw the largest influx of Russian-speaking immigrants and transsettlers, with approximately 7,40,000 Russian speakers translocating to Israel within the decade (Central Bureau of Statistics). Thus, the 1990s were the time of Russian speech-community building. Those that translocated to Israel during the 1990s were faced with the dual task of socialization into the Hebrew-dominant society and survival within it, and building of the speech community whose ethnolinguistic vitality is strong today due in large part to their efforts.

4 FLP

FLP is the study of both explicit (Shohamy, 2006) and overt (Schiffman, 1996) and implicit (Fogle, 2013) language(s) policies within the family milieu. It is the study of attitudes and ideologies, management approaches, and language practices (Spolsky, 2004) as (re)negotiated between different family members at different points in time, over time – with (re)negotiations and changes continuously happening explicitly or implicitly, with different stages in family's life. It is the study of language policies within biological families, chosen families, adoptive families, transnational families, extended families, same-sex families, multilingual families, bilingual families, as well as monolingual families. Of course, FLP is not studied in a vacuum, and larger sociopolitical and sociocultural processes of the space and time inhabited by the family are taken into account and focused on in research to varying degrees, depending on the purposes of the study. "Ideal" FLP research is naturalistic in nature, capturing the true goings-on within the family milieu over an extended period of time – the closest we have come to achieving this is through the utilization of social media and online ethnographic research, in which a participant's communications regarding FLP could be traced back across several online communities within which she discussed language-related decisions, changes, concerns over an extended period of time, when and how she felt the need to do so, allowing the researcher to create an event-map representative of her family's FLP (see Hirsch, 2017). Most FLP research is qualitative in nature, relying on relatively short observations, interviews, and questionnaires or all of the above over longer periods – as in ethnographic research. Some FLP research is quantitative – focusing more on the linguistic changes or outcomes, rather than social aspects of FLP, or focusing on more than one family in hopes of uncovering patterns (with)in speech communities, for example (Kayam and Hirsch, 2012). FLP research largely focused on parental reports (mostly mothers) and child outcomes in terms of language proficiency or reported proficiency by the parent(s) in the past. It has since expanded to include the perspectives of the children, in some cases as focal points, and perspectives of all household family members at the same point in time (Kayam and Hirsch, 2014). FLP has also broadened its perspective by studying adoptive families and transnational families and has taken into account and represented families that are physically separated due to economic (Dagenais and Berron, 2001; Dagenais, 2003; Saeki, 2007; Báez, 2013; King, 2013; Guardado and Becker, 2014; Hua and Wei, 2016), political (or religious; Seloni and Sarfati, 2013; Kayam and Hirsch, 2014), and education-related reasons (Cho and Shin, 2008;

Song, 2010, 2012a,b; So Hee, 2013, 2014, 2014; Song, 2016). FLP studies have also looked at many different areas of the world, from Canada and North America, South America, across the Americas, Europe, Middle East, Asia, and Australia. FLP is evolving and providing a diverse yet unified look into the processes of language maintenance, learning, and/or loss within the most critical of domains – the family domain (Spolsky, 2012). Interdisciplinary in nature – it is expanding our knowledge by including research from other, relevant disciplines, that are helping us revisit what we know about migration and how we think, understand, and refer to those who have translocated. It is also inspiring us to examine how the changes in the living patterns and technological advancements have affected, among other things, family structures, types of moves, and different (linguistic) needs of different individuals within the family and different needs of different families depending on their individual and/or collective goals at different points in time (see Hirsch and Lee, 2018). Although the parental perspectives have always been well represented in FLP research, as mentioned above, fathers have not enjoyed the same amount and quality of representation as mothers, likely due to practical reasons. The current study focuses on one father’s story and perspective in his family’s FLP trajectory that serves as our telling case (Mitchell, 1984).

5 Method

5.1 The telling case

Data for this study were collected in the form of ethnographic conversations, observations, and in-person interviews as well as e-mail communications over a period of 1 year. Written informed consent was obtained for all of the information shared here. The story of the FLP as reported by the participant, the father, serves as the telling case (Mitchell, 1984) for the experiences of a tightly knit community of highly integrated Russian-speaking immigrants in Israel, who are part of the largest Russian-speaking migrations into Israel. The telling case is defined as the particular circumstances surrounding a case “serve to make previously obscure theoretical relationships suddenly apparent” (Mitchell, 1984: 239), and the FLP trajectory of this family including its rich points² (Agar, 2006) makes this family’s FLP trajectory telling in making apparent “other phenomena” (Li, 2018), namely, the emergence of two translanguaging spaces (the family and the community) and the infiltration of monolingual ideologies into the family domain.

6 Participant: the father

Our participant is a Belarus-born Russian-speaking immigrant in Israel. He is married to a Russian-speaking immigrant in Israel and a father to two Israeli-born daughters. Vlady³ and his wife immigrated to Israel in 1994, during the time of the largest influx of Russian-speaking immigrants and transsettlers (Hirsch and Lee, 2018) into Israel. Four years after their arrival, their first daughter was born (now aged 20) and 6 years later their younger daughter was born (now aged 14). Through conversations regarding Vlady’s background, languages and migration, it became clear that he was a strong supporter of multilingualism. In fact, he stated that the formal education of his (younger) daughter, whom he felt he could still guide, was less important than her proficiency in Hebrew, Russian, English, and Arabic. Vlady stated that being proficient in those languages “in Israel and the world” would set her apart and make accessible

² Rich points are defined as “those surprises, those departures from an outsider’s expectations that signal a difference between LC1 and LC2 and give direction to subsequent learning” (Agar 2006, p. 2).

³ Pseudonym is utilized throughout this work in order to protect the identity of our participant and his family members.

opportunities otherwise unreachable, regardless of her performance in a school setting. He went as far as to state that he did not care how she performed at school as long as she advanced in the languages. Vlady was not dismissive of his daughter's interests. In fact, he discussed his wife's and his involvement in her aspirations for a modeling career and his conversations with her regarding the future opportunities. He supported her, drove her to appointments, and rooted in her modeling aspirations, but he also spoke with her regarding the odds of success in the industry and the need for more practical education: the language education. Vlady felt very strongly about this. They were, at the time of the interview, providing his daughter with private tutoring in English and Russian and were looking for a tutor in Arabic. Curious about their home language policies, we asked about the practices within the home and how they came to decisions regarding language management. His response was supportive of previous findings: parents make decisions regarding the languages in their lives based in large part on their own past experiences (Hirsch, 2017; Hirsch and Kayam, 2020). While sharing his family's story, Vlady seemed to view himself as an expert and a novice in his language proficiencies, an immigrant and a native, and new and old. On several occasions, Vlady mentioned being in Israel for "over 25 years" and having built the country (of Israel): "I built this country," describing himself (and his peers) as different from both, the newer waves of immigrants from the former Soviet Union and his daughter's generation. "We built this country, [...] my daughters won't have difficulties we had with their Hebrew 'sfat-em'⁴ proficiencies. They won't have to overcome the obstacles we had to" [because of their Hebrew language proficiencies]. When asked about their language practices within the home, Vlady explained "We speak Pidgin. We speak a mix of Russian and Hebrew and English. I work with computers so, I don't even know how to say some things in Hebrew [...] or Russian, it's all in English." Assuming he is referring to CS, we ask him to elaborate regarding his Russian use outside of the home. Vlady explained that it is not just him that speaks "pidgin" – he clarifies and explains that the community as a whole speaks the new variety – "I speak pidgin [...] hodge-podge [...] mix, and I speak it with my wife who speaks the same way, and our friends who speak the same way [...] our whole community speaks that way, and now [...] our daughters speak the same way." At this point, he explained that this is why they decided to hire a Russian tutor for their youngest, to teach her to read and write "proper" Russian. In support of their decisions, he shared his daughter's experience during which she came face to face with realizations regarding her Russian-language proficiency that motivated FLP management changes within the family. Vlady had said that his youngest thought she spoke Russian, but that during her trip to Germany, through an educational program on the holocaust, organized for Russian-Jewish children and conducted in Russian, her daughter realized that "she was not speaking Russian [...] the kids couldn't understand her. She was speaking pidgin." This was the first time Vlady reports his daughter realizing that her Russian was different from the standard. Having gone through the experience, she came back motivated to learn the standard Russian, so that she could communicate with others outside of their "hodge-podge, pidgin Russian-speaking circle." This was the rich point (Agar, 1995, 2006) [...] a moment during which FLP (re)negotiation, explicit planning, and management began. The experiences of the parents rooted in their past struggles to succeed as new immigrants in linguistically new surroundings, the fast building of the speech community of the 1990s which produced pidginization within it, were brought to the foreground with their daughter's experience in Germany. This was a rich point during which differences in the languaculture(s) between those from Russian-speaking regions and Russian speakers from Israel became a moment of learning and action. Since the rich point, active, explicit, and overt FLP management had replaced implicit and spontaneous FLPs. Beliefs and ideologies regarding (multi)lingual development were verbalized and active management of FLP was undertaken through the hiring of private tutors in order to support the ideological goals. In the case of this particular family, management was not unilateral – with adult family members or parents implementing "[...] a range of monitoring techniques to attain desired linguistic outcome from the children" (Nandi, 2018: 7). Rather, it was bilateral and in line with research that shows adolescents, and particularly girls, caring about their HL maintenance (Obojska, 2018).

⁴ Sfat-em – transliterated from Hebrew meaning mother tongue.

7 Discussion and conclusions

Through interlingual contact of Hebrew and Russian – over extended settlement (with)in the speech community that was highly integrated in Israel, a new linguistic variety was created, much akin to creolization, serving as evidence of interdependence between language and society (Hymes, 1971). Rooted in Russian and Hebrew (with influences of English through the advancements of e-communication and professional needs), Valdy had created his own ideolect and Vlady’s generation and community were the first to speak this new, creative, translanguaged variety. His daughters were born into it. They were the native speakers of the new variety their parents and their community had taught them (in addition to Hebrew which came through the educational system and society at large). If Vlady reports their story is representative of their community, of the children of his friends, who like him, settled in Israel over 25 years ago, then indeed the linguistic process of change had been under way and a new translanguaging dialect and space were indeed created.

CS into the host language has been noted across generations of transnational immigrants, including in the population of interest. Altman et al. (2014) noted CS into the host language of preschool-aged children regardless of the FLPs of the parents (strict-Russian, mild-Russian, and pro-bilingual), interpreting it as evidence of a possible sign of language shift. With all three FLPs shifting in the same direction as well as one of the parents’ preference in providing the answers in Hebrew (rather than Russian), we are left wondering whether perhaps, as Vlady reports, the parents in that study already spoke a nonstandard variety of Russian. A new, creative translanguaging form focused on meaning making, which resulted from fast growth and extended settlement of a speech community that is highly integrated in a host country. Were these children being taught the translanguaged variety? More studies into the actual parental language use within this generation need to be carried out to explore this further.

The process of language loss has been studied and confirmed. Within three generations, HL is likely to be lost, with host language replacing it. According to Fishman (1964) and his three-generation rule, the first generation is HL dominant and learning the host language, second generation is bilingual, if not host language dominant, and generally speaking, by the third generation the shift had taken place, with the host language replacing the HL as the strongest language for the most third-generation immigrants. Fishman’s three-generation rule is confirmed for immigrants. Today, however, with increased global movement and proliferation of transnational settlers with different settlement patterns including reverse migrations, (re) settlement, and serial migrations into linguistically distinct communities lacking in speech communities to those who enter highly integrated speech communities, as well as intergenerational interlingual contact as described here, time has come to revisit and update what we know about these processes, their progressions and reversals rooted in movement (translocations and temporary travel), and temporal factors (such as the time in history of a given speech community that one has translocated during, or the temporal factors associated with the move – how long one plans to stay and what are the associated goals, etc.). Today, translanguaging is a common and practical reality of many individuals across the globe. With this increased movement and serial and return migrations and transnational settlement, perhaps for some families, language shift is not as linear and away from the HL across generations, but rather multidimensional and inclusive of other languages resulting in new, translanguaged varieties. This new variety is challenged and standard varieties re-introduced not only through institutions (such as the educational institutions or other top-down sources) but rather through contact with standard variety speakers.

What we have learned and cannot ignore is that the link between increased global movement and temporal factors of translocations that are characteristic of the contemporary living patterns and linguistic processes is present. In Vlady’s family’s linguistic trajectory, the influx of “new(er)” Russian-speaking immigrants and his daughter’s trip to Germany, where she met other standard-variety Russian speakers, had alerted this family to the communal and intergenerational change in their HL which they then chose to manage. Although this change could be characterized as exemplifying the process of a language shift, what we see is not language shift or loss but rather a change that was creative and successful in knowledge construction and meaning making over generations. It is a process that is borne out of transnationalism, and interlingual contact of translanguaging between Hebrew, Russian, and mutual influences of the lingual

franca, English. At the same time, further movement (translocation and travel) characteristic of the current times, in this case new Russian speakers to Israel and Vlady's daughter's trip to Germany, created rich points (Agar, 1995, 2006) and pivotal points of change in this family's language policies. Venturing out of translanguaging spaces allowed for monolingual ideologies to seep in and motivate the family to revisit their FLP to focus once again on the standard – rather than on the creative translanguaging practices.

Vlady's generation translocated at a time when computer-mediated communication (CMC) and frequent travel were not the norm. His generation, as he explains it, "built" the country of Israel while maintaining strong links to the speech community within the host country. Perhaps in part what he meant was that his generation built the (speech) community within Israel. Thus, another way that temporality is central in discussions of translocation processes and outcomes is the stage of arrival or the period in history of a particular ethnolinguistic community within which the arrival happens. Immigration or transsettlement at a time when ethnolinguistic community is absent or is in its early stages of development offers different opportunities and motivates different responses than when the community is well established. Over the following 25+ years, the changes in CMC, the influx of new transnational immigrants and settlers from the former Soviet Union with their "standard" Russian, the increase in international travel, and transnational contact, such as Vlady's daughter, have drawn their attention to their creative and practical use of language – translanguaging – with its lack of regard for socially defined and labeled languages (Otheguy et al., 2015); and in this case, this family has interrupted it with more traditional, socially and politically acceptable ideas and labels. In response, this particular family has decided to adjust its FLP, two generations in cooperation, to disrupt translanguaging. Only time and more studies focusing on different families and generations within this speech community will tell whether the new, creative, linguistic variety of translanguaging continues, whether Russian is lost to Hebrew, or whether the influx of standard Russian speakers and increase in transnational movement will encourage standard Russian language maintenance and learning.

If viewed in terms of CS into the host language indicating early stages of language shift, increased transnationalism and movement could be viewed as beneficial in reversing that shift – at least within this family. However, if the view of linguistic processes of creative, meaning making, and knowledge construction as the goal is considered, what we see are the enduring negative attitudes toward the nonstandard and new, and as Vlady refers to it – pidginized varieties by their very speakers. The temporality associated with the move in terms of intended, permanent settlement by Vlady's generation and the time in history when they translocated contributed to the linguistic process translanguaging, with transnationalization of the world through CMC, travel, and increased movement both contributing to it and disrupting the process. This study points to the need for more sensitive engagement with the concepts and processes of translanguaging, language contact, CS, language shift, language change, and other sociolinguistic concepts and processes by including temporality, transnationalism, and information regarding the experiences of different generations along those lines. With an increase in movement, there are increased opportunities for language loss, language change, and evolution but also for language maintenance, (re)learning, and the disruption of the creative translanguaging practices – depending in large part on the temporal factors of the move(ment) and the ideologies of its speaker(s) rooted as indicated in previous research, largely in experiences (Hirsch, 2017).

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