

Family language policy in families of Ukrainian origin: maintaining ties to heritage and fostering well-being

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Abstract

Ukrainians constitute the third largest ethnic group in Estonia (The Population and Housing Census, 2011). In the same time, it regrettably becomes evident that the maintaining of the language and culture of the Ukrainian minority living in Estonia and their attitudes towards their own heritage language have hardly been studied at all (see also Küün, 2022). This study seeks to fill mentioned gap by adding information on the family language policy practiced by the Ukrainians living in the Republic of Estonia to the field of research concerned with family language policy (FLP) and transmission of the heritage language and culture. The article describes the role of Ukrainian Sunday schools in two Estonian towns, Tapa and Sillamäe. Some of the parents of children studying Ukrainian language and culture in Sunday schools in mentioned towns are involved as informants of the study. I used four semi-structured interviews in frame of case studies as my research method. Study results reveal that the role of language and culture related Sunday schools should certainly not be underestimated in strengthening national mindsets and a sense of belonging, learning the heritage language, and encouraging the use of Ukrainian.

Keywords: *family language policy, language ideology, language practice, language management tools, languages of education, Ukrainian Sunday school, Ukrainian*

Introduction

The search for opportunities in support of heritage language and culture studies by one's children is directly linked to family language policy (FLP). The article thus adopts FLP as its central topic. In addition, in my study I discuss the use of Ukrainian and the conditions of use and maintain it in Estonia.

I find that it is the model proposed by Spolsky (2004) that offers essential aspects that should be considered as a matter of priority when examining FLP. I agree that in examining FLP, the most important aspects to consider include language ideologies applied within families. This mainly involves the parents' concept of the importance of different languages, including the heritage language – the ways in which language ideology is applied both at home and outside of the home, i.e. language management tools (Spolsky 2004). Also, FLP includes the family members' language practice patterns (ibid.).

The objectives of the study included in this article are as follows: 1) to establish what has motivated informants in maintaining their heritage language and culture in Estonia, using to that end among other things the help of respective Sunday schools; 2) to establish the factors contributing to maintenance of the Ukrainian language and culture.

Based on these study objectives, I developed the following research question:

1) Which language ideologies do the families studied follow in implementing language management tools internal and external to the family?

The article first briefly introduces studies in FLP. The empirical part of the article presents data and analysis in a systematic manner correspondingly to the language management tools, language practices, and language ideologies of the studied families. The article concludes with a discussion and summary.

Studies in FLP

Language practice is often seen as having a special connection with ethnic self-perception (see, e.g., Tabouret-Keller 2000, Tseng 2020). For example, B. Busch as well has written about how young bilingual people in particular construct their ethnic and/or cultural identity and mark their social inclusion using language choices (Busch 2017). As I agree with the main thrust of this approach, I rely on the notion of ethnic identity as something that is not innate but a phenomenon akin to potential changes during a person's life span based on various life events (see also Padilla & Perez 2003, Tabouret-Keller 2000). An individual can denote both their personal and social identity by using the characteristics of linguistic features (Staicov 2020). Consequently, the relationship between heritage language and ethnic identity has also been seen as significant to the sense of belonging to a particular ethnic-linguistic community (see, for example, He 2010). At the same time it should not be forgotten that not all members of national minorities may have an internal sense of connection to their mother tongue (Gogonas & Kirsch 2016).

However, in the context of the study underlying this article, it is important – as also noted by N. Shevchenko (2015) – that for the Ukrainian population, language is no longer the main marker of Ukrainian identity. However, I assume that it may have changed with recent events in Ukraine and large number of Ukrainians moving across Europe in recent months. Rather, formation of Ukrainian identity is becoming a political concept instead of an ethnic definition (Shevchenko 2015).

Although one could assume that FLP applied in families is very clear-cut, it may not always be clearly visible – in many cases it may be skillfully manipulated by parents (but also by children) (Curdt-Christiansen 2009). In retrospective analysis, in line with the so-called traditional approach, the opinions and aspirations of the children in studied families have regrettably generally not been observed (see, for example, Wilson 2020). However, this aspect has rightly received more and more attention recently (see, for example, Kopeliovich 2013, Palviainen & Boyd 2013, Verschik & Doyle 2017), proving that children in relevant families are not mere reflectors of their parents' FLP but active facilitators of the FLP (see also Fogle & King 2013, Kheirkhah 2016, Wilson 2020). My current article tentatively addresses the issue of children's perspectives and well-being. This is in keeping with whole child focus in FLP. Thus, there are also examples of steps having been taken in the study of FLP, adopting a broader approach to the studied issues, considering both the parents and the children.

Shulamit Kopeliovich introduced the *happylingual* approach to FLP, a principle he established during the course of his study: the language preferences of children in the family must be respected, while maintaining an impartial attitude towards all the languages the household is exposed to (Kopeliovich 2013). This serves as a prerequisite to the children's harmonious bilingual development as they are raised within the family, i.e. the subjective (incl linguistic) well-being of the family members is not in any way negatively affected by factors in the bilingual or multilingual environment (see De Houwer 2020). Otherwise, if parents do not show a flexible attitude towards FLP, the family's children may be at risk of conflicting bilingualism (Wilson, 2020) that, naturally, will damage the family's microclimate. It is clear that although FLP in bilingual or multilingual families often tends to be quite an emotional issue for those involved (De Houwer 2020), respective families and households should be flexible in implementing FLP (Kopeliovitch 2013, Soler & Zabrodskaia 2017). A similar tendency has already been shown in previous studies, such as relevant study by A. Leist-Villis where it was concluded that without parental pressure, i.e. without imposing the parents' own language ideologies, children in the studied bilingual families (including adolescents) managed to achieve a harmonious bilingual experience (Leist-Villis 2004).

Another important aspect in favor of FLP flexibility is one that S. Wilson (2020) noticed based on his research: namely, if corrections are made in the case of a nonfunctional rigid FLP, children from bilingual or multilingual families should be given a greater opportunity to create their own cultural identity (see also Kheirkhah 2016, Küün 2022). Although parents may wish for their children's linguistic beliefs and cultural identity to coincide unconditionally with their own and with those of their ancestors, there is no guarantee that this will indeed be so (see, for example, Duff 2015, see also Küün 2022), especially in today's mobile and globalized world. At the same time, it has been noted that the other extreme – providing children too little input in their heritage language within a family – may result in the risk that younger members of new immigrant families in particular lose part of their cultural identity when they arrive in the destination country (De Houwer 2013). However, it is clear that parents should nevertheless allow especially their school-age children to create their own identity (Kubiliūtė 2021). In the opinion of the author of this article, this on the one hand relates to the rights of young people and, on the other hand, can create a more favorable ground for a more positive attitude towards one's heritage culture and language.

As briefly mentioned above (and also as became apparent in the study underlying this article), a tendency may be noted for the sociolinguistic environment external to the family surrounding the children to become more and more restrictive in terms of the use of the heritage language, especially for school-age children (see e.g. Kubiliūtė 2021, Yamamoto 2001). In other words, in the social circle formed in educational institutions, even more important guides of language attitudes have been seen, compared to the family (see e.g. Kubiliūtė 2021). In addition, important factors influencing the development of FLP, including socio-cultural, economic, and historical-political circumstances, cannot be ignored (Curd-Christiansen 2018, Lazdiņa & Marten 2021, Tseng 2020, see also Küün 2022). Thus, the sociolinguistic background surrounding the family should certainly not be underestimated in the study of FLP (see e.g. Lazdiņa & Marten 2021, see also Küün 2022), and in this article as well I have taken this principle into account when analyzing the FLP of the families studied.

Research methodology

The article is based on the principles of a case study, with the keywords being dissecting the phenomena under study based on the perceptions of the informants (Peräkylä 2005, Yin 2009), i.e. on the example of four families (each family has been treated as a separated case). They participated in the interviews in an environment that was comfortable and, due to the coronary pandemic, safe for them – at home. Although the interviews were conducted using smart devices, the author of the article still acquired exhaustive answers to her questions when conducting the interviews in this way.

The head of the Tapa Sunday School (A) helped to find out if there were any informants who met both selection criteria and would be willing to take part in the study. It turned out that one person from the city of Tapa agreed to participate in the interview and the interview was conducted virtually on the Viber environment, as this was the safest option. Informant A emphasized that the Sunday school had been stalled since the spring of 2021 due to the global coronary pandemic. At the moment, according to the informant M1, the school's activities have been suspended also because the organization need to find new premises and also a new leader. In the case of informant M1, I conducted the interview via video (whereas I recorded the interviewee's speech but not the video).

Similar to Tapa Sunday School, the head of the Vodograi Sunday School (B) also helped to reach the informants of the Sillamäe educational institution. Interviews were conducted with each interviewee at a separately agreed time (May and June 2021). Due to technical problems with Viber, I decided to conduct telephone interviews with informants in a coordinated manner. Although I wished to get acquainted with the Vodograi school landscape from a linguistic point of view in the autumn of 2021, according to B, this was not possible in the conditions of the global coronary pandemic.

The language of the interviews was Russian, as both the informants and the interviewer spoke the language fluently. In mentioned situation we used it as a lingua franca (i.e., the author of the article does not speak Ukrainian at the communicative level). Some interviewees felt insecure in the use of the Estonian language (they mentioned this before the interview), which is the interviewer's mother tongue. Starting from the first contact, Russian proved to be the most suitable common language for all parties. With the permission of the informants, I used a voice recorder for all the interviews, at the beginning of the interview repeating the aims of the study and the fact that the purpose of data collection is to use the obtained information in research. I also informed the informants that I use pseudonyms when presenting the excerpts of the interview, thus ensuring the anonymity of the participants.

I transcribed the interviews manually and did so using a verbatim transcription strategy. There was no need to use transcription symbols, as the aim of the work was not to analyze, for example, the structure of the conversation, etc. (Linno 2021). In other words, I used unfocused transcription because it was required by the data analysis strategy – qualitative content analysis, during which I monitored the repetition of the patterns and topics of the thematic content throughout all interviews (see also Kalmus et al. 2015).

Sampling

The sample of the study consists of informants of Ukrainian origin whose children (or grandchildren) attend a Ukrainian language and culture Sunday school (in the cities of Tapa and Sillamäe, respectively), i.e., it is a purposeful sample (see also Õunapuu 2014). Thus, the above-mentioned content criterion (ibid.) has been decisive in the selection of the sample.

However, in addition to the four interviewee, I received more general information about Sunday schools from two other informants – the principals of the Sunday School of Ukrainian Language and Culture in Tapa and Vodograi (A and B, respectively). I have identified the informants from Tapa with the pseudonym M1. In Sillamäe, I managed to obtain the consent of three informant parents to participate in the study (M2, M3, M4, respectively). I have more generally marked the families of the language managers as F1, F2, F3, and F4, respectively. The average length of all interviews was 37 minutes, with each informant talking about their own language practices and other aspects of FLP.

Methodology and data

General information on the first family (F1)

M1 was 61 years of age at the time of the study and her ethnicity by self-definition is Ukrainian. M1 has three mother tongues: Russian, Ukrainian (her main childhood language), and Polish. According to M1, the maternal grandmother spoke Polish with her, but M1 has forgotten that language to some extent by now. She has graduated from a Ukrainian-language school (Russian was also studied as a separate subject). M1 has a secondary vocational education. There are currently only two people in her household: M1's husband and M1 herself. M1 met her husband while living in Estonia, but her husband is from Russia. M1's husband does not speak Ukrainian. M1 lives currently in Tallinn. While living in Ukraine, the family had previously lived in the Carpathians, where M1's parents came from. F1 has one child – a 37-year-old daughter. M1 has two grandchildren (ages 13 and 11) living in Tallinn.

General information about the second family (F2)

M2 is 42 years old at the time of the interview. She was born in the Estonian border town of Narva, near Sillamäe. She considers herself a Russian by ethnicity and also mentions Russian as her mother tongue. As a child, Russian and Ukrainian were used in her family. M1 communicated with her father in Ukrainian until she was eight years old without using any other languages. After the age of eight, M2 no longer used Ukrainian because her father divorced her mother, and her relationship with her father was severed. M1's father came from a mixed family, where her father's father was Russian, but her father's

mother was Ukrainian. Today, M2's paternal parents, who used to live in Ukraine, are dead (M2's children have never seen them), but M1 herself communicated with them in Ukrainian during their lifetime. Her family consists of herself and her daughter and son. The father of M2's older child (son) was Lithuanian but died when the son was nine months old. M2 is divorced from her next husband, who is also the father of M2's daughter. M2 studied at a school with Russian as the language of instruction, has higher education, and works as an entrepreneur.

General information about the third family (F3)

M3 was 32 years old at the time of the study, and her hometown is Narva. She considers herself a Ukrainian, although her mother tongue is Russian. M3 has Estonian citizenship. When she was a child, the M3's family used both Russian (the language of communication with her Estonian father) and Russian and Ukrainian simultaneously (with her mother). M3's mother is from Vinnytsia Oblast, Ukraine, and was sent to work in the former ESSR after graduation. M3 emphasizes that as a child, she spent time with her grandparents in Ukraine every summer.

M3 has no siblings. F3 has four members: M3, her husband, and two daughters (2 and 9 years old). M3 studied in a school with Russian as the language of instruction and has a secondary vocational education.

General information about the fourth family (F4)

The fourth informant, 31-year-old M4, was born in the Kirovograd Oblast of central Ukraine, where her parents still live. M4 came to live in Estonia in 2016. Thus, as of the moment of participating in the interview, she officially qualified as a new immigrant because it had not been five years since she settled in Estonia (see also Riigi Teataja 2014). M4 has the Ukrainian citizenship. According to her self-definition, she is Ukrainian by ethnicity. M4 considers Ukrainian and Russian to be her mother tongues. She studied at a school with Russian as the language of instruction.

In M4's childhood home, both Ukrainian and Russian were used in parallel. M4 emphasizes that the village in which she lived has a Russian-speaking language environment. Her father has always lived in this village, but M4's mother is from a little farther away from the Ukrainian language-dominated region, and her mother still prefers to use Ukrainian. She has used Russian with one of her grandmothers and Ukrainian with the other one. F4 has three members: M1, her husband, and her 13-year-old daughter born in Ukraine. In Ukraine, M4 received higher education in Ukrainian. She currently works as a kindergarten teacher in Sillamäe.

Table 1 provides compact background information on interviewees.

Table 1: General information about the interviewees of Vodograi Sunday School in Sillamäe and Tapa town

Family	Informant	Age	Education	Children	Ethnicity by self-definition	Mother tongue
F1	M1	61	Secondary vocational education	Daughter (37 years old)	Ukrainian	Russian, Ukrainian and Polish
F2	M2	42	Higher education	Daughter (10 years old) and son (16 years old)	Russian	Russian
F3	M3	32	Secondary vocational education	2 daughters (2 and 9 years old)	Ukrainian	Russian
F4	M4	31	Higher education	Daughter (13 years old)	Ukrainian	Ukrainian and Russian

Findings

FLP of F1

As a child, in the family of M1, the most widely used language was Ukrainian, and Ukrainian was also the language of instruction at school from the age of 11 when she and her parents returned from Russia to the Carpathians in Western Ukraine. It is characteristic of Ukraine that there are strong Ukrainian-speaking communities in rural areas and especially in western Ukraine (including the Carpathian Mountains) (see, for example, Goodman 2009). At the same time, according to M1, Russian was the predominant language used in hobby groups (e.g., folk dance and singing groups). As M1's husband, who is from Russia, speaks Russian ("he does not speak any languages other than Russian"), the spouses have chosen Russian as the language of communication since the beginning of their acquaintance. The family's 37-year-old daughter is fluent in both Ukrainian and Russian. M1 has used Ukrainian to communicate with his daughter.

Currently, the interviewee M1 hears mostly Russian around her, but also some Ukrainian – in connection with the Tapa Ukrainian Sunday School. During the interview, M1 emphasizes that her social circle differs from that of her husband precisely in that M1's circle of friends includes mainly Ukrainians. In addition to the Ukrainian Sunday school in Tapa, in which she previously participated, M1 was also the conductor of Tapa Ukrainian Choir. It is in the choir's work that M1 has been exposed to language switching: since, according to M1, there have been singers in the choir she conducts who prefer Estonian, Russian or Ukrainian languages, she has even switched the language within a sentence.

M1's language of reading is mainly Russian. She uses Ukrainian to communicate via Facebook with relatives and acquaintances living in the Carpathians, including former classmates.

M1 has provided the daughter with continuous input in Ukrainian as a language management tool (although the first language the daughter learned was Russian). In addition, M1 has sung Ukrainian lullabies and other songs to her daughter. M1 emphasizes that because as encouraged her daughter to read books and poems in Ukrainian, her daughter learned to love reading in Ukrainian. M1 has also considered it necessary for her daughter to develop her literacy in Ukrainian – her daughter writes in Ukrainian, Russian and Estonian without any mistakes.

Among the external language management tools, M1's daughter has been actively visited relatives in the Carpathians for many years – daughter has been using Ukrainian when communicating with her grandparents in her childhood and other relatives also later. However, since the daughter went to a school with Russian as the language of instruction in Estonia, she mainly uses Russian when writing. The M1's daughter did not study at Tapa Sunday school because when her daughter was of the relevant age, this school had not been established yet. At the same time, already in the 1990s, M1 put her daughter to a singing club, where they also sang songs in Ukrainian.

M1 had previously taught Ukrainian at Tapa Sunday School and in addition, before the corona pandemic, she had travelled from Tallinn to Tapa every week and often took her grandchildren with her to Sunday school.

Excerpt 1

M1: *It's just ... I tell them [M1 grandchildren] about my roots, where my parents come from, so they know. And of course ...no language skills and knowledge are useless ... and they [M1's grandchildren] have really started to understand Ukrainian better thanks to attending Tapa Sunday School... if I ask them something, they will answer me [in Ukrainian]. I want them to be interested in the Ukrainian language and Ukraine. And the grandchildren, indeed, it is obvious especially after they started going to Sunday school, they are interested and understand much more about their roots.*

In my research, finding this out was to achieve to research objective. Based on the interview, it can be concluded that this family is interested in passing on their language and cultural knowledge and has been quite successful in doing so.

According to M1, attending Sunday school has strengthened the eagerness of the studied family to celebrate Ukrainian national holidays. Some holidays are celebrated twice (e.g., Christmas, i.e., according to the Estonian and Ukrainian folk calendars). M1 has been keeping the tradition for decades, often making Ukrainian national dishes vareniki and borscht for the family, as well as a variety of cakes. M1 also passed on her knowledge of Ukrainian cuisine during her Ukrainian language lessons at Tapa Sunday School. In language learning, however, M1 always introduced new words to students through poems because she found that this method made it easier for them to learn new words.

According to the stated research question, I found out that grandchildren, like M1's daughter, are also taken to relatives in Ukraine every year, where they can play with relatives of the same age (i.e. one of the external language management tools). According to M1, her grandchildren understand Ukrainian very well. But M1's daughter has sent her children to a school with Estonian as the language of instruction, so sometimes there is a situation where they admit that it is difficult to communicate in Russian even when communicating with their grandmother because they no longer remember Russian words in every situation. At the same time, M1 confirms that neither the choice of a school with Estonian as the language of instruction nor the multi-ethnic family has changed the language practices in the family – the main language of communication is Russian. Regarding my research objective, I received important information: M1 is convinced that the role of the Sunday School of Ukrainian Language and Culture is sufficient to carry out the language ideologies of the parents studying at the school, as “in addition to language, the transmission of culture and traditions is also extremely important, and this school also pays close attention to it.” According to her, M1 has used a “soft approach” to teaching Ukrainian, i.e., she has not considered it right to force her daughter, grandchildren, or students to use Ukrainian. Thus, it could be said that it coincides, for example, with S. Wilson's (2020) approach (to mention only one author) about the most successful language ideologies in the family.

FLP of F2

Even though M2 considers Russian her mother tongue and has always been communicating with her mother in Russian, in her childhood, she spoke Ukrainian to her father and her grandmother on her father's side. As it is the family of M2 on her father's side and the connection with her father was lost at an early age, she was estranged from the family in Ukraine.

M2 went to a school where Russian was the language of instruction. She is surrounded by Russian language now, which is not actually surprising, taking into consideration the language environment in the town of Sillamäe. The language used in her work as an entrepreneur is also Russian. She only hears Ukrainian at the Vodograi Sunday School, where she serves as a board member today – M2 claims that this Sunday school always works in the Ukrainian language.

With the first husband of M2 with Lithuanian and Estonian roots, her language of communication was Estonian. However, M2 only got to live with the father of her first child until her son became 9 months old. They also planned to teach Lithuanian to their son, which was spoken by the first husband of M2, but as her husband died when the son had not yet learned to speak, the child never got the opportunity to learn Lithuanian as one of the languages of the family.

With the father of her second child – the daughter – she always spoke Russian since they first met. During the interview, the daughter of M2, who was finishing the fourth grade (ten years old), and the son, who went to the upper secondary school, spoke Russian to one another. According to M2, her son does not speak Ukrainian but her daughter understands Ukrainian very well.

M2 prefers reading news as well as literature in the Russian language. The menu on her phone is in Russian and she also uses Facebook and other social media networks in the Russian language. Thus, it may be concluded that the media language of M2 is Russian.

An interesting fact is that even though M2 always uses Russian at home “and never uses mixed language”, she admitted that “as strange as it may sound, I always switch to Ukrainian when I sing”. M2 also used to sing songs, including lullabies in Ukrainian, to her older son when the children were small. In regard to reading books in Ukrainian, became clear that her children did not read them. On the other hand, M2 occasionally watches films in Ukrainian on YouTube. Thus, in the light of this information, it may be presumed that M2 prioritizes spoken Ukrainian language skills to the written skills in the case of her daughter.

M2 also uses several options for external language management tools. She registered her son at a school where the language of instruction is Russian but some of the subjects are taught in Estonian. Namely, the so-called “60/40 policy” is being implemented in Estonia, which partly means that 60% of the curriculum is taught in the Estonian language at schools where the Russian is the language of instruction (see Dijckmans 2017). M2 highlights an important fact in her interview: as she has registered her younger child at a fully Estonian language school in Sillamäe, where English is also being taught from the first grade, according to M2, she has noticed that all languages mix in the head of her daughter and she occasionally uses “a bizarre language of abbreviations” which contains bits of different languages.

Excerpt 2

M2: My daughter is, of course, suffering in the sense that some parts of the grammar in Estonian as well as Russian are difficult for her. The positive is, however, that she speaks Estonian completely freely otherwise.

Still, the mother of M2 decided before her daughter started school that an Estonian language school would be the best option for her daughter if she were to remain in Estonia in the future. This was based on the conviction that her daughter would have overcome the slight difficulties with the Estonian grammar by the time of graduating from school and would later have more opportunities for acquiring education and for employment if she spoke Estonian at a very good level. M2 also considers English language skills important. Indeed, as mentioned in the theoretical part of the article, some pragmatic considerations can be observed in the selection of the language of instruction also in this case (see Gogonas & Kirsch 2016).

Russian is included in the curriculum at the school of the daughter of M2 and as it is also the language of communication at home, M2 believes that this will be enough for her daughter to acquire verbal and written Russian language skills for now.

M2 also highlights the significant fact that her daughter has been happily attending the Vodograi Sunday School in Sillamäe for years where Ukrainian language and culture are taught. Thanks to the events regularly organized by the Sunday school, her daughter is used to reciting Ukrainian poems and singing in Ukrainian. However, the daughter of M2 also writes in Ukrainian in a certain area, which is illustrated well by the following excerpt from the interview.

Excerpt 3

M2: Even when we were writing a letter to Santa Clause, my daughter wanted to use Ukrainian. I do not know why. Even at the Estonian [language] school, she recites poems to the Santa Clause in Ukrainian (laughs).

On the one hand, this indicates that the children at the Sunday school probably regularly practice reciting poems expressively in Ukrainian and writing letters in Ukrainian at the Sunday school. As was

added by M2, her daughter also occasionally writes Ukrainian letters to the children in her age who attend the same Sunday school. Reciting a poem in Ukrainian to the Santa at the Christmas party at a school where the language of instruction is Estonian can probably be considered culturally enriching for the children from Estonian-speaking families as well.

To the question of what has made M2 wish that her daughter attended a Ukrainian Sunday school, M2 responds as follows.

Excerpt 4

M2: It is, of course, learning the language, learning about the roots... the culture. But also pulling the child away from the phone for at least for two-three hours. For example, they practice crafts there [at the Sunday school] which is important for the development of the brain. And dancing, singing on the stage. And all those communication skills which are being used there. They also learn to write in Ukrainian.

M2 also stresses that her family always celebrates Estonian, Russian, and Ukrainian holidays at home. Among other things, M2 has always been creating national embroideries which has been the tradition in her family, according to her. She also highlights that “borscht and pork lard are essential for us [F2]”. But still M2 believes that her 10-year-old daughter does not yet clearly acknowledge her Ukrainian roots.

M4 considers the role of the Sunday school where the Ukrainian language and culture are being taught sufficient for implementing their language ideologies in the case of their children. When it comes to learning languages, M2 believes that “children should not be forced to learn a language, instead, it should be made sure that the children themselves want to learn, at that, providing controlled freedom to the child”. This is largely aligned with the approach in the case of which flexible implementation is deemed the best option for FLP (see Kopeliovich 2013, Soler & Zabrodskaia 2017).

FLP of F3

M3 was 32 years old when the interview was conducted. M3 claims to be Ukrainian, but admits that their mother tongue is Russian. This case also shows that the ethnicity and mother tongue may not always fully match. On the other hand, it should be noted that the concept ‘mother tongue’ which all informants have referred to has several meanings by its nature: for example, Ukrainians most commonly tend to associate *mother tongue* with the language community which they most relate to (Shevchenko 2015).

F3 consists of four members: M3, her spouse, and two children. In the childhood of M3, Russian and Ukrainian were used in parallel in their family (she spoke Russian and Ukrainian with their mother and Russian with their father). The mother of M3 also lives in Sillamäe and speaks Russian to the children of M3, although M3 claims that “when my mother argues with her grandchildren, she may also use Ukrainian”. It has indeed been found that people tend to express their stronger emotional responses in their first language (L1) (Dylman & Bjärtå 2019), especially in the case of bilingual individuals (see also Belcher & Connor 2001).

In the F3 family, the language of communication of the spouses is Russian and the daughters also speak Russian to one another. M3 has been buying books in Russian for the children and has been singing Russian songs to them from an early age. Conclusively, the afore-mentioned internal management tools are implemented in F3.

M3 stresses that they mostly hear Russian in their daily environment and adds that “Sillamäe is a Russian-speaking city, we [the residents of the city] do not speak Estonian here [in Sillamäe]”.

M3 and their spouse consume media in the Russian language and especially like reading news on the internet. However, a bit later in the course of the interview M3 also adds that as she understands Ukrainian well, she also follow the news in Ukrainian to a certain extent.

M2 of the family members live in Vinnytsia and M3 uses Facebook or Viber to contact them, using Russian to speak to the family, while they respond in Ukrainian. According to M3, she have never experienced any issues with understanding one another when communicating with those family members. It should also be noted that the people in Ukraine generally speak Russian, while the opposite is not true in many cases: this phenomenon is still being associated with the extent of the impact of the Russification in the Soviet era (see Kulyk 2014). The children of M3 speak Russian to their Ukrainian grandmother, even though M3's own languages of communication with their mother (i.e. the grandmother of the children) have been Ukrainian and Russian. Therefore, linguistic consistency between the representatives of different generations cannot be observed in this case.

On the other hand, M2 highlights an important fact: she has registered her daughter at the school with Estonian as the language of instruction, which she justify as follows: "we live in Estonia, Estonian language is the priority". The daughter of M3 is also attending at the Vodograi Sunday school of Ukrainian language and culture (which was also attended by M3). Thus, in the case of the older child, M3 uses a school with Estonian as the language of instruction and Ukrainian language hobby education as the external management tools (although M3 of the daughter has also attended other, Russian-speaking hobby groups). While M3 has a positive attitude towards learning different languages in parallel, she also refer to a more complicated side of being in the sphere of influence of different languages.

Excerpt 5

M3: Most of the classmates of my daughter at the Estonian language school which my daughter goes to come from Russian-speaking families. The teachers naturally speak with the students in Estonian. My child is bilingual, she speaks Estonian and Russian very well, but it is still a bit difficult for her to read in Ukrainian, as the Ukrainian letters are a bit different from the Russian ones. And she is also studying English... And Estonian at the same time... And Russian. But my daughter reads very well in Estonian and Russian. Yet, it can be seen that the languages are getting mixed for her a bit, which makes using several languages almost in parallel more difficult.

When asked what was the motivation behind the wish of M3 for her child to attend the Sunday school for Ukrainian language and culture, M3 responded that it was primarily the fact that the child was very active, wishing to take part in any sports and hobby activities available. On the other hand, it is interesting that M3 believes (as does M2) that "the Sunday school has not yet helped the child to acknowledge her Ukrainian roots, as she is probably still too young". This response allows concluding that M3 does not probably consider the Sunday school part fully sufficient for implementing their FLP, as this includes acknowledgement of one's ethnic identity, based on the interpretation of the author. This shows that it would be necessary to separately study the perceptions of the children of these issues, as the knowledge of the parents may not match the knowledge of the child/children.

FLP of F4

M4 emphasizes that her former home in Central Ukraine (also the home of her father) is a Russian-speaking small town. M4 brings out the connection that, "it was probably due to the Russian language environment I was speaking Russian to my father, although he knows how to speak Ukrainian". M4's mother, however, comes from a Ukrainian-speaking region and this is why "it was natural for me to speak Ukrainian to my mother". As for grandparents, she spoke Russian to one grandmother and Ukrainian to the other. Therefore, in her childhood home, M4 spoke both Russian and Ukrainian, and she considers both languages her mother tongues.

At the time of the interview, M4's daughter (from her previous marriage) was 13 years old, she was born in Ukraine and moved to Sillamäe with her mother in 2016. M4's husband from Sillamäe, whom

M4 met via the internet, also uses Russian to communicate with M4's daughter. M4 uses Russian to speaking with her husband (she used Russian for communicating with her previous husband as well), and with her daughter, because her daughter "does not want [to speak] Ukrainian". The language of communication between M4 and her daughter has been Russian since the day she was born.

Excerpt 6

M4: [daughter's name] *prefers Estonian to Ukrainian and if I start speaking in Estonian, she also starts speaking Estonian to me immediately. But [the daughter of M4] realizes that I do not understand everything in Estonian. And then she starts speaking to me in Russian.*

The reason why M4's daughter prefers Estonian to Ukrainian can be explained with the fact that she goes to an Estonian school in Sillamäe. The following excerpt will reveal the internal management tools implemented by M4 that were used to develop her daughter's Ukrainian skills since early age. The interview also sheds light to which direction the language management tools implemented by M4 are going.

Excerpt 7

M4: *When [M4's daughter] started to show interest in books, then ... I started reading fairy tales to her. At some point I would take a fairy tale in Ukrainian and read it to her. Then I realized that she did not understand a word of Ukrainian. I decided this is not the way to go. I bought an alphabet book and letters that can be attached to the wall. When you push a letter, you'll hear the pronunciation of the letter. We already had a similar Russian-language educational toy at home. My child started playing with these Ukrainian letters. Later on, when she was 4–5 years old, we started learning poems in Ukrainian, again, by shifting from Russian to Ukrainian. But... let's say, things were great until we moved to Estonia. We completely lost touch with Ukrainian after we moved here.*

M4 admits that while living in Estonia "it has been hard to prove to her that Ukrainian is an interesting language which may become useful in her life". This case shows clearly how the drastic changes in living and language environment may change language preferences (see also Küün 2022).

M4 emphasizes that her daughter usually starts speaking Russian to her grandmother living in Ukraine (M4's mother), and switches to Surzhyk (emphasizes) in the course of conversation. During the interview, M4 mentions that she "also sometimes speaks Surzhyk", at the same time confirming that her writing is impeccable both in Ukrainian and Russian. She adds that in the Ukrainian small town where her daughter was born, "there is no way to escape from Surzhyk". Indeed, the use of Surzhyk in Ukraine is quite frequent (see, e.g., Seals, 2009). Despite the fact that this Russian-Ukrainian mixed language is widely used in Ukraine, Surzhyk is not considered a pure language, which has given it a negative reputation (Bilaniuk 2005). However, as shown by the current case, the informant M4 was not afraid to acknowledge that she also uses this language from time to time.

The working language of M4 is Russian. During the interview, M4 mentions that she has found all her friends and acquaintances through the Vodograi Sunday school. M4 confirms (with sadness in her voice), that as the language environment of Sillamäe is Russian, M4's circle of friends only uses Ukrainian when they meet for Sunday school. As for her friends and acquaintances in Ukraine, M4 uses Ukrainian with some of them and Russian with her friends from the university.

M4 rarely watches television. She rather watches TV-shows and series from YouTube. She also uses social networks Facebook and Instagram – she mainly uses the internet in Russian. She also reads the news from the news portal Delfi or from the local newspaper Postimees in Russian.

M4 emphasizes that as she lives in Sillamäe, she almost never hears Estonian. She highlights that this fact is certainly not helping her to learn the language efficiently (“In Sillamäe, I encounter Estonian only on the packages of goods, on cheques, on some papers, and, of course, in language courses”). This is why she is really happy that the school language of her child is Estonian, “although there is only one Estonian child in her class”. In the light of these data, it may be said that in Sillamäe, a lot of parents have acknowledged that enrolling their children to Estonian schools helps and encourages them to learn Estonian as the official language of Estonia.

According to M4, her daughter, who in 2021 graduated from the 6th grade of the Estonian-language school, has never any language-related or other problems in school. M4 emphasizes that she is very happy about her daughter ending up in the Estonian-language school, as “I wish that job-wise, my daughter would have it easier than me” and adds that unfortunately, she has not “picked up” Estonian herself yet. M4 confirms that although she has studied Estonian “since the day I arrived in Estonia, taking the language courses”, the language environment in Sillamäe does not foster the natural and quick acquisition of Estonian (informant M3 also referred to this).

In addition, M4 brings out the Sunday school as an external language management tool for teaching her daughter Ukrainian and educating her about the Ukrainian culture. The motivating factors for that are mentioned as follows.

Excerpt 8

M4: Even if the language [language of origin] is not used, you need to know where you were born, know about the country. Secondly, you do not know what will happen in ten years, where your life will take you. For example, I was taken to Estonia (laughs). I had never thought about it or dreamt about it, but it happened. Maybe one day my daughter will return to her birth country. Learning a language always comes in handy. For example, you can work as a translator. Thirdly, speaking different languages is good for the development of thinking.

This shows that for M4, it is important for her daughter to learn Ukrainian from the emotional point of view. However, it is known that parents can decide on language management tools based on practical aspects (see, e.g., Gogonas & Kirsch 2016). The answer also reflects the pragmatic reason behind M4’s wish for her daughter to learn Ukrainian: M4 thinks it is possible that her daughter will return to her birth country and that she could, for example, work as a translator.

During the interview, it turns out M4 has worked in the Sunday school as a teacher of Ukrainian and handicrafts, although now she has given up the job because of lack of time. In addition to Ukrainian children, some Estonian children are attending the Sunday school, she adds. M4 happily confirms that thanks to Vodograi Sunday school, their family has adapted holidays “my husband had never heard about before, and this is very nice, as we now have more days we can make presents to each other as family”. She adds that the Sunday school is what brings together the Ukrainian community in Sillamäe, and that the school has also unified her family.

Similarly to the M2, M4 thinks that her daughter does not recognize her Ukrainian roots (“she does not understand yet what ethnicity is”). It cannot be ruled out that M4’s daughter has got a mixed sense of ethnicity due to using different languages daily. In order to claim this with certainty, the child of the informant should be included in the study. M4 says that her “daughter has been born in Ukraine but is actually an Estonian”. From this, it can be concluded that the sense of ethnicity is heavily influenced by spending time in the everyday Estonian micro-language environment and cultural space (Estonian-language middle school): it can have an effect of a person’s sense of ethnicity, although the language at home, in this case, is Russian (see also Küün 2022).

M4’s language ideology concerning Ukrainian is that a child cannot be forced to learn the language. She considers any type of forced guidance to be fruitless.

Excerpt 9

M4: It's not working anymore when I say to my daughter: go to the [Vodograi] Sunday school. If she does not want to go, we will spend, for example, 2 to 3 hours watching at home "Harry Potter" in Ukrainian. At least we have this option on the day she is not attending the Sunday school. The option of not hearing any Ukrainian at all that day... no, this cannot be.

M4 regrets that she has not been able to offer enough writing practice in Ukrainian for her child, and she connects this to her daughter's wish, e.g., her daughter has no interest in writing in Ukrainian. It may be that her daughter senses that she will not need this skill, as at the moment, she has no one to write to in Ukrainian. However, M4 admits that "it is very difficult to keep up the child's desire to communicate in Ukrainian". It can be assumed that the mentioned circumstances can be explained by the fact that the daughter is surrounded by other languages on a daily basis and therefore she may not feel, at such a young age, the practical value of knowing Ukrainian while living in Estonia.

Discussion and summary

In summary, the study showed that informants are motivated to maintain their language and culture of origin by the aspiration to ensure the continuity of their language and cultural heritage. The first reason is related to the emotional aspect: the language managers foremost see a symbolic meaning in learning Ukrainian language and culture in view of the Ukrainian identity in the Estonian context because in real life, even more so when living in a Russian-speaking environment, there are few opportunities to use Ukrainian. The study revealed that Ukrainian is mainly used only when meeting at the Sunday school.

The informant M4, however, also highlighted a practical purpose of learning Ukrainian for her daughter: she emphasized that it is possible that her daughter might start working as a translator in the future where she will need a high level of proficiency in Ukrainian and/or she might return to Ukraine as an adult. As a third reason for informants wanting their children to study at the respective Sunday schools is the fact that parents are of the opinion that even if their children do not end up using Ukrainian in the future, having any language proficiency or any skill is developmental for a child or young person. In addition to learning the language and culture of origin, Sunday school is generally also seen as a hobby group that broadens the horizons (see also Küün 2021) and offers exciting activities for young people. It should be mentioned that it came as a surprise to the author of the article that Tapa and Vodograi Sunday schools are open and ready to accept children and young people with any roots. At the same time, I am sure that this non-formal and, according to the heads of schools, individualized learning is educational and culturally enriching for everyone, regardless of their ethnicity or native language. The informants also mentioned the role of Ukrainian Sunday schools operating in Estonia in uniting local people with Ukrainian roots and creating a united sense of community (see also Küün 2022).

The study on which the article is based indicated that internal-familial language management plays the most important role in the maintaining of Ukrainian language and culture – in particular, providing a linguistic input, e.g., talking to the child in Ukrainian, singing to them, also guiding them to Ukrainian-language books to develop their literacy. But it all starts with attitude towards one's language of origin, i.e. how much the language and culture is valued (see e.g., Schwartz & Verschik 2013, see also Küün 2021). Indeed, it can be presumed that the ability to offer a sufficient linguistic and cultural environment to children so that we could even talk about the possibility of maintaining one's language of origin is particularly important for the maintaining of heritage language (Wilson 2020).

The most important external-familial language management included participation in the Ukrainian language and culture studies at a Sunday school and the opportunity to interact with relatives living in Ukraine. M4 pointed out that, unfortunately, her daughter has lost interest in the Ukrainian language

due to moving to Estonia from Ukraine. Instead, M4 added that her daughter who studies in a school with Estonian language of instruction and communicates in Estonian prefers to communicate in Estonian and, according to M4, it seems to her that in the five years of living in Estonia, her daughter has acclimated to Estonia so much that “she is as if she was born in Ukraine but is actually Estonian”. It is obvious that at one point, the constant presence in a certain language and cultural environment (school with Estonian language of instruction) could start to affect one’s self-perception (see also Küün 2022). However, I was unable to learn whether M4’s daughter herself feels this way about herself or with whom she associates ethnically, because I did not interview the children of the families. However, the study revealed that both, M2 and M4, believe that their children are still too young to acknowledge ethnicity. As the author of the article, I am sure that in the field of FLP, both in the context of language and identity, future studies should also address the perception of ethnicity among the children of the studied families in order to get the fullest picture possible of the issues examined.

Coming back to the research question raised in the beginning of the article, in terms of the language ideology of families, it can be highlighted separately that parents are generally of the opinion that even if their children do not end up using Ukrainian in the future, knowledge of Ukraine as a country (and other aspects of the Ukrainian culture) and, of course, proficiency in Ukrainian are important to know your own roots and those of your ancestors. At the same time, informants M2 and M4, in particular, emphasized that children should never be forced to learn a particular language and use it at home, for example. They also do not think it would be right to force them to attend a Ukrainian Sunday school. In summary, both M2’s and M4’s understanding of the effectiveness of the flexibility of language ideology in the implementation of FLP coincides with that of S. Wilson (2020). Based on their research results, J. Soler & A. Zabrodskaia (2017) have also encouraged the adoption of softer language ideology in the form of more flexible language practices in the family, which, in addition to parents, linguists studying the respective topics should also regard more positively (Soler & Zabrodskaia 2017). In summary, the FLP of families I studied was flexible in all cases: parents fully took their children’s wishes into account when introducing language practices and language ideologies. In other words, they tried to ensure the linguistic well-being of their children (see e.g., De Houwer 2013, Yates & Terraschke 2013).

There was another recurring pattern that revealed itself in the study of language ideologies of the families examined. Namely, the 37-year-old daughter of M1, M2, and M3 as well as M4 considered it important to enroll their children in a school with Estonian language of instruction. There is, of course, a practical value and purpose to it, because parents have an expectation that it will significantly accelerate their children’s acquisition of Estonian as the official language of Estonia (see also Küün 2022). At the same time, M2, M3 and M4’s words revealed a downside: as their children are in the sphere of influence of several languages (Russian, Estonian, English, and Ukrainian), the languages seem to mix for their children, which can sometimes cause certain communication problems. However, the parents are still happy with their choice of a school with Estonian language of instruction for their children. Russian is spoken at home and also studied as part of a subject at a school of Estonian language of instruction, and parents believe that this is enough at first for their children to acquire (and become literate in) Russian. M2’s, M3’s and M4’s children have also been studying English since grade 1 in the same school.

When mentioning the relationship between language and identity, it is important to note that, in general, in Ukraine, a situation is common where people who see themselves as ethnic Ukrainians speak Russian or Surzhyk, not Ukrainian (Bilaniuk 2005). Thus, a person may carry a certain sense of ethnicity without using their language of origin (*ibid.*) as was also the case in this article. In the case of Ukrainians, a dual association with two languages, i.e. Ukrainian and Russian, is commonly observed (see e.g., Seals 2009). This is also confirmed by the results of the study on which this article is based.

As one of the cases described in this article illustrated (F4’s daughter who had already acquired Ukrainian as one of the languages of the family but has lost the desire to use Ukrainian while living in Sillamäe), it is also possible to become alienated from one’s language of origin even when initially using

one's language of origin but changing one's country of residence and language of education (see also Küün 2022). However, it can be presumed that, in the end, it may not always be associated with an immediate change of identity. If the circumstances surrounding the specific family change, however, this might also have an impact on the family's FLP (see also Küün 2022) and parents need to be prepared for this possibility. Particularly when it comes to school-aged and older children whose social networks are, of course, much broader than those of pre-schoolers (see e.g., Kubiliutė 2021).

In conclusion, overall participants reported motivated to maintain their language and culture of origin. The aim of this study was not, of course, to study the FLP of all Ukrainians living in Estonia, but the results help to delve deeper into the issues examined based on the principles of a case study and, at the same time, these results provide enough information to answer the research question. It seems important to note that interviews provide participant perspectives on what they think happened and what they want to share with interviewer, including perceptions of bilingual parenting as good parenting (see e.g., King & Fogle 2006). As the largest limitation, however, I must admit that, in the study, I am not taking into account directly the perceptions of the children of the families studied but am instead focusing on the opinions and statements mediated by their mothers. The plan is to take children as an important party in shaping the FLP (see Wilson, 2020) into account in studying these issues in the future because I agree that researching parents and their children will provide a clearer and more unbiased picture of the main issues and dilemmas of FLP (*ibid.*), also of linguistic well-being of children.

Notes

¹ When interviewing research participants in both Tapa and Sillamäe, I used an adapted version of a questionnaire from the research project "Globalization and family and social plurilingualism in medium-sized language communities (MSLC) in Europe" (GLOBLINMED). First, I received permission to use it from the developer and principal executor of the original questionnaire in Estonia, who is a Professor Anastassia Zabrodskaja at Tallinn University. I then supplemented the semi-structured questionnaire with questions relevant to the research question in my study. More specifically, Tallinn University research and development project TRU15044 (FFI2012-35502), 2014–2015.

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