



Russian Language Home Maintenance Strategies: A Survey of Bilingual Parents – Content Validation Phase

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Introduction

- Recent data suggests a predicted 400% increase of Russian Speaking people in the United States by the year 2020 (Ortman & Shin, 2011).
- An important consideration for Speech Language Pathologists working with bilingual Russian speaking families is the importance and value of maintaining the mother tongue at home.
- Research supports that bilingualism is a positive achievement and should be encouraged because of cognitive linguistic benefits (Bialystok, 2001).
- In New Jersey, there is a large Russian speaking community and it is important to understand some of the practices used to maintain the mother tongue at home.
- Kraftsoff and Quinn (2009) qualitatively interviewed bilingual Russian-English speaking families in Ireland and found four important themes: (1) Demographic information about the family; (2) Perceptions of the importance of Russian language maintenance in the home; (3) Reasons to maintain Russian at home; and (4) Strategies to encourage the maintenance of Russian at home.
- To better understand home language practices in Russian speaking homes a quantitative survey that operationalizes the four themes found in Kraftsoff and Quinn (2009) was developed.
- The purpose of this poster is to share findings from the content validation of the survey developed for the study.

Results

Respondents:

- There were 7 respondents who participated in reviewing the survey on how the questions align with the purposes of each section. They were 4 PhD healthcare professionals, 2 MA healthcare professionals, and 1 undergraduate student who was a bilingual parent.
- One of the respondents was monolingual. Six of them were bilingual with 5 of them raising bilingual children.

Comments/Feedback:

- The survey is clear overall and the content validity is strong as supported by the questions aligning with each of four sections.
- Simplify the language used to a 5th grade reading level (e.g., instead of ‘maintain’ use ‘speaking’) to better serve the layperson completing the survey.

Additional Suggestions:

- Include questions regarding when parents immigrated to the U.S.
- Include a question whereby parents provide 3 typical utterances for each child under 5 years of age (to help confirm typical language development).
- Include a space where parents can specify the first/primary languages learned and if the child is a sequential or simultaneous language learner.
- Specify the timeframe when asking about what percentage of time spent speaking English/Russian (e.g., some of the time, most of the time, none of the time).
- Use term ‘cultural heritage’ instead of ‘cultural identity’.
- Add a question to find out parents' perceptions of children’s attitudes towards preferred language.
- Add a question to determine in what languages siblings communicate with one another.
- Specify, Clarify, or Delete questions related to accent.
- List additional family members to learn about the language children prefer to communicate with each family member.
- The question ‘in what country was your child’s last grade level completed’ is confusing, figure out the purpose of this questions.
- The questions about providing Russian tutoring need to be clarified and differentiated between paid services verse familial tutoring.
- Add questions that determine parent’s levels of English/Russian proficiency.

Discussion

- Based on the feedback and suggestions obtained from our respondents, we are creating and modifying a survey that will yield optimal results to understand home language practices in the bilingual Russian community. With the four important themes in mind, we hope to gain insight into the parents perceptions and feelings of maintaining the Russian language in the household, reasons why they may want to maintain the language and raise bilingual children, and the different strategies and methods they use to ensure the language remains active in their children’s lives; all while considering the demographic profile and individuality of each family.
- Ultimately, the survey can be adapted to gain similar insights across languages, for instance, we could compare home language maintenance strategies between Russian, Spanish, Cantonese, and French Creole, the top four second languages spoken in New Jersey.
- To better serve and empower and ever-growing bilingual population in New Jersey, it is important to understand language maintenance practices and how these may affect development and differ by language and culture. This survey is first step in addressing this need.

References

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- Kraftsoff, S., & Quinn, S. (2009). Exploratory study investigating the opinions of Russian-speaking parents on maintaining their children's use of the Russian language. *Irish Journal Of Applied Social Studies*, 9(1), 65.
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- For more information e-mail: Anthony.Koutsoftas@shu.edu
- Be sure to visit: <http://blogs.shu.edu/row-lab/>