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Language Management in Transnational Multilingual Families: Generation 1.5 Parents in Finland

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Abstract: In today's globalized world, more children are born to parents who speak two or more languages between them. These families manage complex language dynamics, with diverse language practices influencing communication among family members. The complexity intensifies when multilingual and multicultural parents move with their children to a country with a new majority language, while keeping connections to their original society. In such cases, balancing heritage and host country languages affects both cultural preservation and integration into a new society. Based on semi-structured interviews with seven Generation 1.5 Russian–Hebrew bilingual parents living in Finland, this paper explores their strategies for managing their children's multilingual development. The study poses two key questions: What are the language management strategies reported by the parents? What are the major challenges these parents face in maintaining heritage Russian and Hebrew languages in Finland? Thematic data analysis using ATLAS.ti software highlights the parents' persistent commitment to maintaining multilingualism within their families, focusing on preserving existing social connections and fostering new ones for the entire family. The findings reveal key aspects of parental language management, parental involvement and home environments, along with reported challenges, both personal and institutional, in maintaining Hebrew and Russian as heritage languages in Finland. This study offers a new perspective on language management strategies in multilingual families, handling a less-explored language combination. By analyzing individual language management approaches, this study reveals common strategies used to support multilingualism and balance heritage languages with those of a new environment, thereby contributing to discussions on linguistic diversity and multicultural integration in transnational settings.

Keywords: heritage languages (HLs); family language policy (FLP); language management; multilingual family; transnational family; Modern Hebrew; Russian; Nordic countries

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1. Introduction

The increase in transnational migration has given rise to new multilingual family dynamics. In such families, language becomes central to parenting, presenting various linguistic challenges for parents in communicating with their children and in making multiple language-related decisions (Lanza 2021). These decisions often revolve around balancing the heritage language (HL) with the language of the new environment. In cases where the parents themselves are bi- or multilingual, an additional question arises concerning the choice of HLs to transmit to their children in a new linguistic environment. Most existing research on patterns and strategies for language choices and usage in multilingual transnational families is represented by case studies, thus making it difficult to discern general patterns (Quirk et al. 2024). The lack of large datasets on multilingual transnational families hinders the ability to identify clear patterns and make generalizations. To effectively explore and understand successful strategies for managing multilingualism at home, there is a need for more ethnographically informed research (Soler and Zabrodskaja 2017).

Parental attitudes regarding HL maintenance in their children and their attempts to support their children's HL are major determinants of HL preservation (Park and Sarkar 2007). This study advances the understanding of FLP in transnational multilingual families

by focusing on a previously underexplored language combination. It offers a deeper understanding of the unique characteristics of a multilingual language setting, by exploring the language management strategies employed by transnational families with bilingual Russian–Hebrew parents raising their children in Finland.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with seven parents to explore their language management strategies for raising multilingual children. The goal was to understand how home environments and parental involvement contribute to the successful transmission or attrition of each of the multiple languages available. Additionally, this study aimed to identify the challenges specific to maintaining the two HLs involved, Russian and Hebrew. The following research questions guided the study: What are the language management strategies reported by the parents? What are the major challenges these parents face in maintaining heritage Russian and Hebrew languages in Finland?

This article is structured as follows. The background section outlines the theoretical framework on language management in multilingual families, followed by a review of previous studies on language management in transnational families and on Israeli Generation 1.5 Russian–Hebrew speakers. The methodology and data section provides a detailed description of the participants, as well as the data analysis framework. The next section presents the findings from the semi-structured interviews conducted in this study. The concluding sections focus on the main results of the study and summarize the overall findings.

2. Materials and Methods

This section is divided into a theoretical framework and a review of the literature on language management in transnational families, as well as on Hebrew speakers both in Israel and the diaspora.

2.1. Language Management: Theoretical Framework

Spolsky's (2004) language policy model serves as a key framework in Family Language Policy (FLP) research. Language policies at the macro, meso, or micro level consist of three interconnected, yet distinct, factors: language ideologies, language management, and language practices (Spolsky 2004). Language ideologies represent cultural assumptions and underlying policies concerning languages and communication (Schiffman 1998) and are expressed through linguistic practices (Spolsky 2004). Language management is reflected in explicit and observable actions by individuals or groups who can influence participants' language practices or beliefs (Spolsky 2009). Within the family domain, Curdt-Christiansen defines language management as "the implicit/explicit and subconscious/deliberate parental involvement and investment in providing linguistic conditions and context for language learning and literacy development" (Curdt-Christiansen 2013, p. 57). Parental language management, driven by their own past experiences and future aspirations for their children's language development, encompasses a variety of strategies to enhance their children's linguistic experiences and expand their language repertoires (Curdt-Christiansen and Lanza 2018). Research into determining the most suitable language management practices at home has been the primary focus of much of the existing work on FLP (Soler and Zabrodskaja 2017). Effective parental language management in multilingual families, with strong support for maintaining the home language(s), significantly correlates with their children's achievements in regard to their HL(s) (Curdt-Christiansen 2016; Smith-Christmas 2016).

Drawing from Curdt-Christiansen and Morgia's (2018) study on HL literacy management in transnational families in the UK, the present study looks into family language management strategies applied by Russian–Hebrew-speaking parents residing in Finland, focusing on home environments and parental involvement. The third component in Curdt-Christiansen and Morgia's (2018) study, represented by various forms of family capital, is not examined in the present research for anonymity reasons. Family capital includes parental educational backgrounds, occupational choices and opportunities, and

their adaptation and integration into the new society (Li 2007). Given the small size of the community in Finland, coupled with data on the participants' education and occupation, the anonymity of the participants would be compromised. Within the family language management domain, home environments are represented by both culturally related practices (Schwartz 2010) and linguistic resources, such as books or media; parental involvement consists of formal and informal linguistic activities, shaped by the caregivers' past experiences, present assessments of their children's language needs, and their aspirations for the future (Curdt-Christiansen and Morgia 2018).

2.2. Language Management in Transnational Families

Transnational families are families that reside in two or more countries. The challenges they encounter are similar to the ones faced by immigrant families; the main distinction is their close connection to their homeland and their willingness to preserve family connections (Cho et al. 2010). The relocation experiences of these families differ from those of traditional immigrant populations, with management, learning, and maintenance of multiple languages becoming fundamental processes in transnationalism (Hirsch and Lee 2018). In these families, the main negotiation typically focuses on parental HLs versus the official language(s) of the receiving country, with the linguistic dynamics growing increasingly complex with each relocation and every new language. Regarding language choices, transnational families also differ from traditional immigrant families in that they have an additional option: selecting a language previously acquired by the family, which is neither the parents' HL nor the dominant language in the new environment (Hirsch and Lee 2018).

While much of family language management research is dedicated to monolingual parents, either sharing a language or speaking two distinct languages, raising their children in a different language environment (e.g., Curdt-Christiansen and Morgia 2018; Otwinowska et al. 2021; Zhang-Wu 2024), research on language management and practices in highly transnational families, where the parents themselves are bi- or multilingual, is represented mostly by case studies with significantly varying patterns, thus making it difficult to identify general patterns (Quirk et al. 2024). For instance, Braun and Cline's (2014) chapter dedicated to bilingual parents raising their children in a third-language environment, describes a number of case studies involving various language combinations in different countries. The findings show that language management, in many cases, includes either dropping one of the parent's native languages or struggling with family trilingualism, as well as the inability to apply the most "(in)famous" (De Houwer 2021, p. 8) 'one parent–one language' OPOL family language management strategy (Barron-Hauwaert 2004). Haque's (2011) study on a plurilingual Indian family in Finland describes parental language management strategies aimed at maintaining both native parental languages, Hindi and Urdu, at home, as well as the decision that the children will be educated in English, with moderate support in Finnish, resulting in the children's gradual shift away from both HLs. Such diverse case study findings indicate that more ethnographically informed research is "needed to continually examine successful ways of managing multilingualism in the home environment" (Soler and Zabrodskaja 2017). Overall, the scarcity of extensive datasets on such multilingual families hinders the ability to predict distinct patterns and draw broad conclusions. The present study aims to contribute to the expanding body of literature on family language management in transnational families, by exploring home environments and parental involvement as major language management strategies of bilingual Russian–Hebrew-speakng parents residing in Finland.

2.3. Hebrew Speakers

Modern Hebrew, with its multilingual and multicultural origin, emerged from linguistic contact and koineization (Henkin 2020). As of 2022, it is the primary language in Israel, spoken by 49% of the population and used by 92% for communication. 15% of Israelis speak Russian as their first language and an additional 5% as a second language (Central Bureau of Statistics 2022).

Between the collapse of the USSR and 2000, about a million people from PSS immigrated to Israel (Perelmutter 2018). Children from this wave, known as Generation 1.5, became 'skewed bilinguals', using Russian mainly with Russian-speaking monolinguals, while shifting to Hebrew to communicate with their younger relatives and peers (Remennick and Prashizky 2019). They developed a code-mixed language influenced by Hebrew, differing significantly from Modern Standard Russian (Perelmutter 2018). This group, estimated to be 170,000 individuals, has a distinct, hybrid social, cultural, and linguistic identity, shaped by shared challenges (Remennick and Prashizky 2022).

Outside Israel, Hebrew is spoken in Jewish schools worldwide and by Israeli immigrants (Grossman and Reshef 2020). Tracking Israeli emigration is challenging due to the lack of specific data on those intending to emigrate, in particular because many Israelis abroad see themselves as temporary expatriates. According to DellaPergola and Lustick (2011), around 10% of Israel's population lives outside the country at any given moment, with economic factors being the primary reason for emigration. Data on Israeli emigration by languages spoken is scarce. As of December 2023, Finland had 990 Israeli citizens, with 569 holding dual citizenship. 536 Finnish residents self-identified as Hebrew speakers (Official Statistics Finland 2023a). Finland's language registration system, which records only one mother tongue, complicates the accurate count of bi- and multilinguals (Palviainen and Bergroth 2018). In a recent survey of Hebrew-speaking parents in Finland (Bloch 2024a), 10 out of the 36 participants self-identified as Generation 1.5 Russian–Hebrew bilinguals.

3. Results

The present study is part of a qualitative case study examining the Family Language Policies of bilingual Russian–Hebrew parents residing in Finland (Bloch 2024b). The qualitative nature of the study can be observed via the method applied; semi-structured interviews were used to collect information on the participants' lived experiences concerning the language maintenance strategies involving their children.

3.1. Data Collection

Participants were identified through a survey on heritage Hebrew maintenance (Bloch 2024a). The eligibility criteria required adults who had moved to Israel from PSS as minors, subsequently relocated to Finland as adults, spoke both Hebrew and Russian at a native level, were parents to minor children, and expressed a willingness to be interviewed within a month.

3.2. Participants

All participants, aged between 40 and 50, were parents to at least one minor child (Table 1). They were repatriated to Israel from PSS as minors during the late 1980s to 1990s, between the ages of 6 and 15, classifying them as Generation 1.5. They relocated to Finland as adults with at least one child, settling in various locations across southern and central Finland, including main cities and small towns. The duration of their residence in Finland ranged from 1 to 20 years. Interviews were conducted with both parents in cases where both belonged to Generation 1.5 (four participants, two families). In three remaining cases, participants' spouses moved to Israel from PSS as young adults, spoke native Russian and advanced, but not native-level, Hebrew and, therefore, were not interviewed.

Table 1. Basic characteristics of the participants.

Family	Research Participant	Age of Repatriation to Israel	Duration of Residence in Finland (years)	Minor Children *	Languages Used with Children Daily
F1	Mom1 Dad1	7 9	4	Two in primary school	Russian Russian
F2	Mom2 Dad2	9 7	10	One in JH school, one in primary school	Hebrew, Finnish Hebrew
F3	Dad3	15	11	Two in JH school, one in primary school	Russian
F4	Mom4	15	20	One in JH school	Russian
F5	Mom5	15	1	One in high school, one in JH school	Hebrew

* Information about adult children living separately is not included in this study and is therefore not mentioned here.

3.3. Interviews

The interviews served as a continuation of the research on the Family Language Policies of Hebrew-speaking parents in Finland (Bloch 2024a). The semi-structured interviews comprised topics on parental language ideologies, linguistic management within the family, reported linguistic practices, and language as a factor influencing the children's social inclusion in Finland. The interviews were conducted through April–May 2024, either in person or via Zoom operated by the University of Helsinki. The interviews with families, where both parents were interviewed, were conducted as follows: each parent was interviewed separately first, with the second spouse either absent or present based on their preference. Following the individual interviews, both parents were interviewed together for clarification purposes, a process initiated by the families themselves.

The language management strategies were examined through semi-structured interviews, which provided flexibility and encouraged open conversation. These interviews were part of a broader study on multilingual Israeli families in Finland (Bloch 2024a, 2024b). The interviews were organized around the following themes: (1) background questions; (2) family language practices; (3) explicit language policies; (4) language ideologies; (5) language management; (6) the emotional aspect of language acquisition in different stages of life; (7) external factors influencing parental decisions on language choices; and (8) language acquisition and social inclusion. The study explored both linguistic and social structures, documenting various patterns of language use and situating these findings within the broader social context (Soler and Zabrodskaja 2017).

The languages used in the interviews transitioned fluidly, primarily in Israeli Russian, with frequent code-switching between Russian and Hebrew (Perelmutter 2018), and occasional insertions of Finnish and English. A total of 7.5 h of interviews were recorded, averaging about one hour per participant. These recordings were transcribed, translated into English, and uploaded into the ATLAS.ti software version 9 for subsequent categorization and analysis.

3.4. Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was employed to discern patterns in the participants' responses. The analysis was based on Spolsky's (2012) Family Language Policy theory, which explores language management as one of three aspects within the family setting: ideologies (strong beliefs about languages, language learning, language maintenance, etc.), management (plans and approaches adopted to support a specific language policy within the family), and practices (actual use of language by family members). The analysis employed elements of the approach outlined by Curdt-Christiansen and Morgia (2018), focusing on home environments and parental involvement. The third component in Curdt-Christiansen and Morgia's (2018) study, represented by various forms of family capital, was not examined in

the present research, for anonymity reasons. This approach highlights the significance of the interplay between various actors in maintaining HL skills across different cultural groups.

The thematic analysis revealed consistent language management strategies, aligned with those documented in studies on transnational multilingual communities. Using the ATLAS.ti software, patterns in the participants' responses were discerned, leading to the categorization of their language management strategies. These strategies were organized into four main areas, namely parental involvement, home environments, future planning, and maintenance challenges, with each further divided into subcategories. The recurring strategies within each area were identified based on theoretical frameworks from research on language management in multilingual transnational contexts.

4. Findings

This section provides an overview of the key themes identified through the semi-structured interviews with the seven participants. Section 4.1 describes parental involvement consisting of formal and informal linguistic activities, such as teaching the HL, reading to and with their children, homework help, and communication with their children in the HL or on the topic related to the HL. In Section 4.2, home environments as tools of HL management are presented, divided into subchapters on communication and literacy resources aimed at HL maintenance; Section 4.3 describes parental plans on HL management in the future. Section 4.4 provides an overview of the challenges concerning the management of each of the two HLs in Finland.

4.1. Parental Involvement

Drawing from Curdt-Christiansen and Morgia's (2018) study, parental involvement was divided into communication with the children in the HL, shared book reading, and explicit teaching. All the children were studying in schools with Finnish as the main language of instruction, and HL classes were attended by one child, therefore the aspect of homework help in HLs was omitted in this study.

4.1.1. Communication with Children

Supportive interaction in the HL at home, between parents and children, is the key determinant of HL preservation or its gradual disappearance over generations (Lao 2004; Park and Sarkar 2007). All participants in the study emphasized the critical importance of developing oral skills in at least one of the HLs and highlighted the value of daily oral communication with their children, thus underscoring a parental management strategy that prioritizes oral proficiency in the HL over literacy skills.

(1) But I think that the best thing [to maintain HLs] is to communicate in everyday life, about most ordinary things. It's not just sitting there for an hour reading books in some specific language, but everyday things to communicate with children about. (Mom2)

(2) I believe that writing and reading can always be learned at a later age, and speaking is way more important. . . I don't want to traumatize them. I want it [HL maintenance] to be fun, so I focus on conversational language, and don't worry about writing or reading. (Mom1)

The participants described conversational practices in the HLs as the most natural way of communicating with their children, both from linguistic and personal points of view:

(3) I wanted to be able to maintain closeness with them, because first of all, I can express myself best in my own language. (Mom4)

(4) I have no problem communicating in Hebrew, but, probably, when it comes to some kind of warm feelings, I'm not sure how well I can express such feelings in Hebrew. (Dad3)

4.1.2. Shared Book Reading

The category of shared book reading includes two types of activities: reading to their children and reading with them. Both reading to their children and engaging in accompanied reading, where the parent actively listens to their child reading, were considered essential for both maintaining HLs and supporting the child's overall development.

(5) To maintain the language, we need to read aloud to them. It doesn't matter what age [the children are]. And this, it seems to me, is very developing. And it doesn't matter what kind of books—they might be comic strips, children's books. (Mom1)

(6) We have achieved the regularity that we read a paragraph in Russian every day, and then a paragraph in Finnish, then a paragraph in English. (Dad3)

The same parent shared details of a reward system connected specifically to books. For every unplanned entertainment activity or new toy the youngest child (in primary school) wanted, it had to be earned as a result of reading:

(7) Dad, I want a new Lego!—Sure, let's finish this book till the end, and we'll go buy you a new Lego. (Dad3)

Older children were reported to be more independent in terms of their reading, and the parents confessed that they had significantly less influence on what languages the children used for reading.

(8) If the children are interested in something, they find it by themselves and read it. (Mom4)

4.1.3. Explicit Teaching

The participants' attempts to explicitly teach HLs can be roughly divided into three groups. The first group involved strict teaching strategies, incorporating detailed daily plans to ensure consistent HL instruction. The second group consisted of parents who reported more sporadic and unstructured teaching sessions. The third group comprised parents who admitted to never teaching HLs to their children explicitly. An example of the first approach is Dad3, who dedicated a specific amount of time each day to language teaching. He emphasized that regularity was the cornerstone of his language management strategy, underscoring the importance of consistent effort in fostering language skills in his children:

(9) In the beginning, mutual agreement is necessary. That is, no one insists on 100% fulfillment, but if you agree on something, then try to stick to it... You get used to it, it becomes the norm and doesn't bother you anymore. But if it's day yes day no, then it's always some kind of additional effort, and then it's hard. But if you make it into the norm, like brushing your teeth, then you simply don't notice, and it becomes uncomplicated. (Dad3)

Families 1 and 2 exemplified the second approach, with one of the parents teaching their children HL literacy intermittently:

(10) I don't always have time for this and it's not always systematic, but when I take a book and explain it to him, he understands, so he's already reading Hebrew. With difficulty, I confess, but he does read in Hebrew. (Dad2)

(11) My husband teaches them. We order books in Hebrew from Israel, he sits with them, so they know all the letters, they write a little bit, the elder child reads. (Mom2)

In contrast, the third approach involved avoiding any explicit HL teaching of the children:

(12) I've never put any effort into it [explicitly teaching the children languages at home], we never needed any kind of tutor, and everything has worked out in an amazing way on its own. (Mom4)

(13) They are great at constantly reading something, texting, and so on. Hebrew is already built in, there is nothing to develop there, yeah, everything is fine. (Mom5)

Both participants who had never taught their children any language explicitly, and entrusted HL literacy to each child's preference and willingness, shared information about their children's attempts to learn basic Russian literacy independently:

(14) The middle child understands everything in Russian. She herself learned to read in Russian very clumsily. Since this is already the second child, no one taught her anything, she herself learned to read in Russian and to write in block letters. The youngest understands absolutely everything in Russian, speaks better than the middle one, but does not write or read. (Mom5)

(15) The middle child has never learned Russian as a subject, she only speaks it. At around the age of 14, she herself expressed this desire—"I want to learn to read in Russian," and giggled. I remember her sitting with some kind of an ABC book that she found. (Mom4)

This approach respects the child's autonomy in language learning, allowing them to explore and engage with the HL at their own pace. It suggests a more relaxed attitude towards formal language instruction, with the belief that the child will naturally acquire literacy skills when they are ready and motivated.

4.2. Home Environments

Transnationalism usually involves language learning, acquisition, maintenance, or loss. It includes developing and maintaining language skills essential for sustaining complex multinational and multilingual relationships in transnational families (Hirsch and Lee 2018). Previous research highlights the family as a crucial context for exploring ideologies, management, and practices involving different languages among family members (Spolsky 2012). This section explores parental management aimed at maintaining both HLs, in particular, and multilingualism, in general, as expressed explicitly in comments about language management strategies and in regard to recurring practices reported in the interviews. Home environments discussed in this section include communication-related resources and literacy-related resources.

4.2.1. Communication-Related Resources

This section aims to look into the recurring communication opportunities in terms of the HLs for the children. All the participants' parents and most of their other relatives resided in Israel. Taking into account the COVID-19 pandemic and the geopolitical situation that started a few years prior to the interviews taking place, visits by the participants to Israel, or visits by their relatives to Finland became scarce, thus a number of interview questions was dedicated to online communication with family members, specifically with grandparents. Multilingual families engage in diverse practices to promote their children's fluency in multiple languages, with grandparents contributing to HL maintenance as part of these efforts. The role of grandparents in child-rearing practices varies across cultures. Children can enhance their HL skills, learn about language forms and functions, and develop cultural understanding with their grandparents serving as mediators (Curdt-Christiansen 2013). The cultural tradition in the PSS includes grandparents, particularly grandmothers, as integral participants in the child-rearing process. In Israel, there are two predominant models that PSS grandmothers follow in organizing their lives: active, heavily influenced by Soviet family culture and commonly found in less-educated families; and individualized, where grandmothering is just one aspect, possibly not even the most significant, of a woman's personal identity and daily life, with this model being particularly prevalent among educated, urban, middle-class families (Fogiel-Bijaoui 2013). The parents of all the participants had resided in Israel since the repatriation in the 1990s. Their level of Hebrew, as reported by the participants, varied from intermediate to advanced, but they all spoke only Russian as their native language. Based on the research findings detailed above, the interviews had presupposed at least some consistency in the communication between the participants' parents and their children. Unexpectedly, the vast majority of participants reported that neither they nor their children communicated with the grandparents, in

three cases even asking to skip the question (this was the only topic where the participants showed an unwillingness to answer the question), and one participant explained the reluctance of the children to interact with their grandparents on a permanent basis, due to a reason directly connected to HLs:

(16) We used to receive comments from the grandmother, which my children for some reason still remember, for some reason they were even hurt—the grandmother once criticized their Russian—'they speak with such a terrible accent, can't you hear that they don't really know Russian?' . . . They [the children] still ask me sometimes—'do I speak with an accent?' (Mom4)

Only one participant (and their spouse who was not interviewed) reported continuous participation in their children's life, which involved implementing thorough planning and management strategies. The participant considered the involvement of their children's grandparents as an excellent opportunity to promote both oral and written heritage Russian skills with the children:

(17) We even specifically persuade grandparents to call them [the children] on WhatsApp and talk to them [in Russian] on any topic in order to maintain both the communication and the language, and to exchange WhatsApp messages in Russian. . . Now they share on a daily basis via WhatsApp things like I got a bad grade, the weather is good, I fell from a bicycle and scratched my knee, I'm reading an interesting book. (Dad3)

Another communication recourse participants used for maintaining the HLs was interaction with friends. Regarding Hebrew, the parents mostly spoke about the lack of opportunities for their children to have meetings with their peers on a regular basis:

(18) We try, we do our best, as much as possible, so that children meet other Hebrew-speaking children, but in general it's just us [the parents] who speak Hebrew to them. (Mom2)

The situation is the opposite for the Russian language, with the participants sharing the plethora of options for their children to communicate with their peers in Russian:

(19) There are a lot of Russian speakers here, so you can very easily find after-school activities for children with many Russian-speaking children. (Mom1)

Russian was also mentioned as a means of communication, and even as a lingua franca, for the children whose Russian was described as weak by the parent residing a small town in central Finland:

(20) At school there are several people who speak Russian, these refugees from Ukraine, and my children speak Russian with them. (Mom5)

4.2.2. Literacy-Related Resources

Books were mentioned by most participants as the major source for HL literacy in regard to their children. While HL literacy was not considered of primary importance by most parents, the availability of books seemed to play a paramount role in the parents' language management strategies. The participants shared the ways they acquired books, which in the case of Hebrew was not a trivial task, the books were sent on specific occasions, sent by their relatives, or bought in bulk during their visits to Israel. Books in Hebrew were available in all the participants' homes, independently of the home language. The following two examples are from the families where Hebrew (Example 21) or Russian (Example 22) was chosen as the home language; concerning the latter, the family had resided in Finland for four years, and the older child had attended school in Israel for one year and had basic literacy in Hebrew.

(21) Either relatives send us books [in Hebrew], or we buy them when we go to Israel. (Dad2)

(22) Sometimes we ask for books in Hebrew to be sent to us from Israel, such as comics, things that he likes to read, and he seems to read them sometimes. (Dad1)

Most parents had never heard about the existence of the Helsinki Jewish Congregation's library. It is unsurprising since the library has no internet site; the only mention of it

is on the World Jewish Congress website in English, without an external link to the library[1]. One participant who knew about its existence, but had never visited it, explained:

(23) I don't think they have children's books. (Dad2)

While books in Hebrew were mentioned as available at home by six out of the seven participants, the three participants who spoke Hebrew to their children did not mention books in Russian. The four participants who spoke Russian to their children and had Russian books at home, said that books in Russian were easily available, both for purchase and from libraries.

(24) We have books (in Russian), a few good encyclopedias in Russian, also books on biology, chemistry, and physics. (Dad3)

Libraries were mentioned by most of the participants as one of the pastimes that they encouraged for their children, but the most important thing for the parents was the habit of reading, not the specific languages involved.

(25) I send them all the time to this [municipal] library so that they take books. And each time I say—take 4 books. And they read. In Finnish, but that's natural. (Mom2)

Concerning the media as a means of maintaining HLs, cartoons in both languages were available at home in most families. One more parent mentioned shows (a movie series) in Russian; the same parent was the only one to mention audiobooks:

(26) She reads [in Russian], we try hard while we can still force her, so she reads. We've found some interesting shows, and she's also listening to a lot of audiobooks now. (Dad3)

4.3. Future Plans

Most of the participants discussed the transmission or maintenance of HL opportunities that they had chosen to waive at home. A key point in these discussions was the child's active interest in learning the language. A clear distinction emerged between Russian and Hebrew: for Russian, parents generally expressed that it would be beneficial if the child showed a willingness to learn or improve their skills, but no participant had any practical plans for supporting heritage Russian. Conversely, for Hebrew, parents had concrete plans ready in case their children expressed an interest. These plans, which were consistent across families regardless of the home language, included explicit parental teaching and total immersion by sending their child to Israel for a period of time.

Both parents in the family F1, with Russian as the home language, shared their plan to resume teaching Hebrew to their youngest child at home, starting the following school year. The mother outlined a detailed plan, including the topics to be taught and the materials to be ordered from Israel in the near future. There was a clear preference for developing oral skills over literacy.

(27) Starting next September, I will be teaching her [younger child] Hebrew. This is the decision we've made. Hebrew is also very important to me, more sentimentally. Because this is my, let's say, native language, this is my culture, too. And I want to communicate with them [both children]. I don't care whether they can read and write it, but I do want them to be able to speak fluently. (Mom1)

Regarding total immersion in Hebrew, two participants from different families, who both opted for Russian as the family home language, shared:

(28) At some point we even discussed whether he wanted to learn Hebrew, and he said it's possible, and therefore I do not exclude the possibility that maybe in the near future he could go there for 3–4 months, for example, maybe even we'll enroll him in a school for six months, so that he can improve his Hebrew. I mean, he is in general capable, he can quite easily raise his spoken Hebrew to a decent level in six months. (Dad3)

(29) If any of them says—mom, I want to learn Hebrew, I, of course, will make every effort and help the best I can, and they know they can always go live at the grandparents [in Israel]. But if they don't say that, I won't offer it. (Mom4)

In the family where a Hebrew-only language strategy was chosen by both parents, the mother confessed to having difficulty maintaining their children's Hebrew literacy, despite the parents' explicit teaching of written Hebrew to their children. In this case, the parents had similar plans to send their children to Israel:

(30) It would be nice to send them [to Israel], so they would study [written] Hebrew. Since at home it doesn't work in most cases. We've had thoughts about sending them to our relatives in Israel for some time. (Mom2)

Not only the other HL support plans were shared by the participants. One of the participants mentioned the school's proposal for his child to be involved in a language exchange program. Although the participant considered it an amazing opportunity for their child, the child's unwillingness was the main reason for canceling this plan:

(31) There was an opportunity to send him to France as an exchange. And he just rested his feet and didn't want to go, he said—I don't want to live in an unknown place. It's a pity, of course, he could have had such a boost for the language. (Dad3)

While the participant clearly regretted the missed opportunity for his child, the child's autonomy in deciding which languages to learn and how to learn them was the main determinant.

A notable trend emerged concerning Hebrew, regardless of the chosen language for communication at home, whether or not they had tried the Jewish school, or the proximity of their residence to it, no participants mentioned sending their children to the Jewish school to learn or improve their Hebrew when their children expressed such an interest.

4.4. Maintenance Challenges

This section describes challenges concerning HL maintenance, as reported by the parents. It is divided into two subsections, personal challenges and challenges with external HL support.

4.4.1. Personal Challenges

Personal challenges in HL maintenance, whether Russian or Hebrew, can be roughly divided into two categories: parental time constraints and parental erroneous planning. In accordance with the survey responses by Israeli parents in Finland (Bloch 2024a), where 25% of the respondents quoted personal time constraints as one of the reasons for their children being illiterate in Hebrew, two out of the seven research participants (who had also participated in the survey) quoted a lack of time as a hindrance to teaching oral and written HLs to their children:

(32) Yes, I have doubts about [my own practices in teaching] Hebrew, I need to force myself and my son to dedicate more time and pay more attention to this, because time runs fast and one needs to practice more. That's how it would be done correctly. (Dad2)

(33) I would like to spend more time on [multiple languages], but here you need to spend both energy and time on the language so that you can communicate. . . But the problem is that, again, we are so busy that we have no time. And if we want to hire someone privately, our job probably won't make us enough money to support it. (Dad3)

Four participants reported instances of ineffective language management, expressing regrets about their inability to teach more languages. Three participants regretted not having planned teaching both HLs to their children:

(34) The only thing is that I regret a little that I didn't put an emphasis on Hebrew at an earlier age. Like, if I could look back in time, I would have taught it, if my husband and I had decided then to speak two languages in parallel at home, having known then, that we would come here to Finland. (Mom1)

In addition to parental second thoughts concerning the maintenance of both HLs, some voiced regrets that they had not given their children the opportunity to learn the language spoken in the new environment, Finnish, or English, before their relocation to Finland:

(35) Had I known that we would go to Finland, I would have taught them Finnish right away. This has to do with what I think is most important. Life is about social skills, and if a child comes to a kindergarten or school and cannot communicate with most people, this creates a little, well, a kind of self-doubt later that is difficult to overcome. (Dad1)

(36) I regret that the children don't know English well, I should have thought about it earlier [in Israel]. (Mom5)

These examples represent a notable appreciation for multilingualism, reflecting a common parental belief underlying the ideology that multilingualism is the most natural and beneficial language practice for their children; the multilingual advantage ideology was reported by the same participants (Bloch 2024b).

4.4.2. Challenges with External HL Support

Within the category of technical maintenance challenges, the participants discussed the availability and accessibility of HL classes, as well as the quality of the instruction. Unsurprisingly, the availability of HL classes varied drastically between the two languages, due to the size of each community. Finland grants the right to HL instruction to every student with an immigrant background (OPH 2022). However, the availability and quality of HL classes vary significantly, depending on the language and region (Venäläinen et al. 2022).

Russian, with almost 100,000 native speakers in 2023, is one of the most widely spoken foreign languages in Finland (Official Statistics Finland 2024). There are several bilingual Finnish–Russian schools, pre-primary institutions, and non-compulsory organizations offering Russian courses for children. According to a survey on minority mother tongues and religions conducted by the Prime Minister's Office (Tainio et al. 2019, pp. 70–71), the percentage of qualified HL teachers (who have completed both a higher university degree and pedagogical training) is high in Russian, with almost 80% having such training. To compare, in regard to other large foreign language-speaking communities, the percentages are significantly lower; for example, within an Arabic-speaking community of over 41,000 people, just 20% of teachers with Arabic as a native language are fully qualified. The Estonian-speaking community of 50,000 people benefits from around 55% of teachers being qualified. The attendance rate in Russian HL classes is high, too; for instance, out of approximately 10,000 Russian-speaking children and youths aged 7–19 in 2017, 5200 attended Russian classes all over Finland (Official Statistics Finland 2023b; Tainio 2019). Nevertheless, parents have reported issues with the quality and quantity of Russian HL instruction and educational materials (Protassova 2018; Bloch 2024b).

Hebrew was registered as the first language for 46 individuals aged 5–19, as of December 2023, with just one institutional option available for Hebrew instruction in Finland. The Jewish Community School of Helsinki (Helsingin Juutalainen Yhteiskoulu), a private Finnish-language school supported by the Jewish congregation of Helsinki, teaches Hebrew to around 100 students from first to ninth grade, following the national education curriculum (HJYK 2024). The Jewish community of Finland, mainly in the capital region, comprises about 1500 members, with the majority in Helsinki and a congregation that is ten times smaller in Turku. The community's size and the availability of only a single school likely impact language transmission, learning opportunities, and Hebrew proficiency among children (Czimbalmos 2023; Latomaa and Nuolijärvi 2002).

All the participants were aware of the existence of the Jewish Community School of Helsinki; some assumed without having checked, and others knew from experience, that Hebrew HL classes were available there; nevertheless, none of the children residing in the capital region attended these classes in the current year. The first reason mentioned was inconvenient access to Helsinki city center. The participants who did not live in the capital region said they understood why there were no classes in their regions, and considered it logical.

(37) There are Hebrew classes, but only in the community, but I'm not ready to drive the children there specifically for this. (Mom2)

(38) And today, just to learn Hebrew, she will probably have to go devil knows where, probably only to the Jewish community. And this is not very convenient. (Dad1)

Many participants mentioned at least having heard about the availability of heritage Russian classes, and the proposals by schools for their children to attend them, even in the case of a participant residing in a town with a population under 2000 in central Finland. Russian language classes were proposed even to the children who used Hebrew at home and were registered with Hebrew as their "mother tongue" and who were completely illiterate in Russian. Nevertheless, most parents decided to forego the Russian classes, with only one child attending them. Some of the reasons for not registering their children for Russian HL classes included the child's unwillingness to participate, accessibility issues, or not paying enough attention to the school's proposal on Russian as a HL at the time.

(39) Our school cannot provide it [Russian as a HL]; there is an opportunity to get it at another school, but the schedule is very inconvenient, so we didn't even bother. And since we take care of it at home, well, there's not much point. (Dad3)

(40) He doesn't have [Russian as a HL], he doesn't want it, but he reads Russian fluently. He writes with mistakes, but he does write, so I don't really worry. (Mom1)

Another reason for parents withdrawing their child from HL classes after at least one year of attendance was dissatisfaction with the quality of teaching, for both Russian and Hebrew:

(41) The terrible [teacher's name] instilled an aversion to learning the Russian language in my eldest child for the rest of her life. [Teacher's name] did her job in the sense that my daughter has wonderful handwriting, very beautiful, without lifting her hand, with all the capital letters. With all this, she still made 15 mistakes in each word, so it was absolutely useless. Apparently, there was no motivation, plus she also taught poorly. Well, I think the middle daughter has never learned Russian because we still remember [teacher's name]. (Mom4)

Dissatisfaction with the quality of Hebrew teaching was voiced by two parents who opted for Russian as the language of home communication. They attempted to maintain both HLs in the beginning, by using Russian at home and sending their children to Hebrew classes at the Jewish school, but withdrew their children from there, explaining that it was either due to their dissatisfaction with the teaching level, or due to their dissatisfaction combined with the inconvenient location of the school:

(42) We sent them to this Jewish school at the beginning. And there were Hebrew lessons, but they were so-so, to be honest. There were other nuances, but in general, it was more convenient for us to send them to a local school near the house than to this Jewish school, which is far away, and the way they taught Hebrew there, we were kind of dissatisfied with it, it was really like no use. (Dad1)

(43) Hebrew was taught horrendously incompetently and the auntie who taught it was not a teacher at all, but just some kind of an Israeli auntie who, for some reason, decided that she could actually teach the language just for the fact she was Israeli, so she taught it horrendously. (Mom4)

5. Discussion

This study explored the language management strategies used by transnational bilingual Russian–Hebrew-speaking parents living in a Finnish-speaking environment. It focused on reported parental efforts to balance multiple languages by their children upon relocating to Finland. The main objectives of this study were to examine the language preferences reported by the seven participants and to analyze the strategies they employed to manage their children's multilingual development in connection with these choices.

Language-related decisions in transnational multilingual families are intricately woven into all aspects of child rearing, influencing each family member (Soler and Zabrodskaja 2017). The importance of parental involvement in HL maintenance, as highlighted by the study participants, aligned with the theoretical framework on FLP, which emphasizes the

role of parents as key decision-makers in language use and transmission within the family (Spolsky 2012). In line with previous studies, the emphasis on oral communication over literacy skills also reflected the practical constraints and preferences of many multilingual families, who may prioritize communicative competence for immediate family interaction and social use (e.g., Lao 2004; Park and Sarkar 2007; De Houwer 2007).

King and Fogle (2017) found that parents' beliefs and attitudes towards the HL significantly influence their language practices at home. Indeed, the parental management strategies reflected the participants' language ideologies in the preceding study (Bloch 2024b). The parents' complete support for multilingualism in regard to their children was reflected in the language management strategies adopted, supported by parental efforts to maintain as many languages as possible, as well as home environments being full of resources aimed at supporting multilingualism.

Two of the main findings in this study were the similarity of the management strategies for each of the two HLs at home and the differences in the external support available. Most aspects concerning parental efforts to maintain HLs at home showed similar attitudes for both languages. It could be assumed that the home environments would differ regarding Russian and Hebrew, due to the different sizes of the communities and, stemming from that, the availability of books for purchase or loan, or the availability of educational materials for explicit teaching, or children having more opportunities to communicate in Russian than in Hebrew with their grandparents. Surprisingly, these aspects did not appear to influence the findings. Parents perceived HL maintenance mostly as their own responsibility and confessed personal challenges as hindrances to HL teaching in regard to their children. Parental time constraints, as highlighted by the participants, were perceived as a significant barrier to HL maintenance. Indeed, multiple studies have shown that time constraints were a major factor affecting parents' ability to support their children's HL development (i.e., Tse 2001; De Houwer 2007).

In contrast, external support differed for each of the languages, mostly due to the different sizes of the communities. Most participants reported receiving a proposal from the school to register their children for classes in Russian as a HL. While the availability of Russian HL classes is good, with high attendance rates, highly qualified teachers, and even bilingual Russian–Finnish state schools (Protassova 2018), the opportunities for maintaining Hebrew are very limited. While Israelis who have moved away from Israel typically maintain at least some Hebrew use in their homes and with friends, and they often retain connections to Israeli culture and identity, a gradual shift away from Hebrew is evident. This shift is greatly influenced by the size of the diaspora and the availability of Hebrew classes, among the main factors (Spolsky 2016). Nevo and Verbov (2011) attribute the decline in relevance of Hebrew outside of Israel to the absence of local Hebrew-speaking teachers and a preference for other languages, as well as to a lack of clear objectives in Hebrew instruction, all of which were reported by the participants in this study.

There are significant disparities in the availability of Russian and Hebrew HL classes in Finland; nevertheless, a common trend was commonly seen, namely the parents chose not to enroll their children in HL classes for two main reasons: limited accessibility and a dissatisfaction with HL instruction, regardless of the language. Furthermore, parental decisions to forgo external HL support reflected a common trend: many migrant parents see home language maintenance as a personal responsibility, separate from the role of schools as social institutions in their new country (Park and Sarkar 2007; Kang 2015). This perspective is also prevalent within the PSS community in Israel, where HL maintenance is largely considered a parental duty (Yakhnich 2016).

The participants reported a variety of conscious language management strategies; however, FLPs can also be "implicit, covert, unarticulated, fluid and negotiated moment by moment" (King and Fogle 2017, p. 322). As discussed in the article on language ideologies based on interviews with the same seven participants, their future language policies, established in Israel around the time of their first child's birth, remained unchanged after moving to Finland. These policies generally focused on raising children with either

two strong native languages, Russian as the home language and Hebrew as the external language, or with Hebrew both at home and outside it, with some Russian heritage. After the relocation to Finland, families using Hebrew at home maintained their strategies from Israel, showing no regrets about their children not learning Russian and not planning to do so. Despite available Russian classes, parents viewed them as unnecessary or potentially detrimental to the development of other languages or to the children's mental well-being. In contrast, three of the four participants using Russian at home made several efforts to introduce Hebrew, such as providing Hebrew books or enrolling their children in the Jewish school in Helsinki. Two of these participants, with teenage children, planned to send them to Israel to learn Hebrew if they desired, while the other two belonging to one family, with younger children, planned to resume Hebrew instruction at home in the future. While most language management strategies discussed in this study are explicit and deliberate, the difference in the attitude and the future planning in regard to the two languages can be attributed to the "subconscious parental involvement and investment in providing linguistic conditions and context for language learning and literacy development" (Curdt-Christiansen 2013, p. 57). Intimacy, emotions, and identity are shaped through interactions, and the encouragement or disapproval of specific language use in daily life can function as implicit language planning strategies. Caregivers contribute affective and emotional linguistic inputs that influence language development (Pavlenko 2004). All participants expressed a deep emotional connection to Hebrew (Bloch 2024b), while Russian held similar significance in two cases. This "emotion discourse" reveals unspoken language management efforts and provides insight into how language maintenance and shift occur within the everyday social dynamics of families (Curdt-Christiansen and Lanza 2018). Further research into these nuanced strategies and emotional influences will enhance our understanding of multilingual family dynamics and the implementation of language policies in transnational multilingual families.

6. Conclusions and Limitations

This study examined the language management strategies reported by seven transnational Hebrew–Russian parents living in Finland and explored the reported challenges related to maintaining Russian and Hebrew within these families. While choices on the HL(s) to maintain varied between Russian-only, Hebrew-only, or both languages, the management strategies were notably similar. This study identified and analyzed two primary areas of parental language management: parental involvement and home environments. Parental involvement included communication in the HL, shared book reading, and explicit teaching. The home environment was further divided into communication-related resources and literacy-related resources. Significant differences emerged in the challenges faced in regard to access to external support for HLs, primarily due to the considerable disparity in the size of these two language communities in Finland.

The current study is part of a larger project on Hebrew speakers in Finland. The first article explored the FLPs of Hebrew-speakers in Finland, revealing that bilingual participants who were not born in Israel, but repatriated as minors, often chose to maintain only one HL in the family, even in cases where both parents were bilingual (Bloch 2024a). Building on this, the project explored the detailed FLPs of such families, using Spolsky's (2012) three aspects of a FLP: ideologies, management, and practices. The second article focused on the language ideologies of seven bilingual Russian–Hebrew parents, highlighting their strong support for their children's multilingualism and key ideologies, such as freedom of language choice for their children and parental responsibility for HL transmission (Bloch 2024b).

This study acknowledges several limitations. The findings, while complex and diverse, are derived from a small sized sample and, therefore, do not claim to be generalizable to other multilingual transnational families and contexts. The reliance on participants who volunteered may introduce selection bias, offering a limited view of the phenomena. Adding participant observations or conducting longitudinal studies, as well as increasing

the number of participants, could provide deeper insights and a more comprehensive understanding of the aspects involved. Furthermore, future research should aim to include a more diverse sample of parents with other language combinations, for instance, Hebrew–Spanish or Hebrew–Portuguese (language combinations available in the Israeli community in Finland), and explore various linguistic environments in different countries of relocation. This approach would ensure a broader representation of the language management strategies applied by bilingual Israeli parents residing in a third-language environment.

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Note

[1] Community in Finland—World Jewish Congress: Community in Finland—World Jewish Congress https://www.worldjewishcongress.org/en/about/communities/FI#jewish-education (accessed on 14 October 2024).

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