



# **“When I speak to him, I speak from my childhood”: Language maintenance, attrition and emotionality in 1.5 generation Russian Australians**

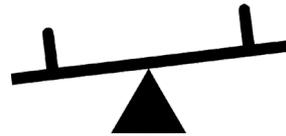
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# Introduction

1.5 generation – *1.5ers*: children migrating between the ages of 6 and 12 (Rumbaut & Ima, 1988).

2<sup>nd</sup> generation



1<sup>st</sup> generation

Heritage speakers

Childhood sequential bilinguals

BUT generation per se

## 1.5ers are:

- very heterogeneous in terms of language proficiency and dominance (Frodesen, 2002);
- usually L2-dominant, while their L1 competence may vary (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001);
- often L1 attriters (Doolan, 2011; Remennick, 2017).



studied for L2 competence, not L1 maintenance

## The Russian community in Melbourne

Size (AU): 85,657 Australian residents – Russian ancestry;  
50,308 speak Russian at home

Size (Melbourne): 22,335 – Russian ancestry;  
16,984 – speak Russian at home

(against: English ancestry – 7,852,224 (AU),  
1,193,051 – Melbourne)

*Source: Australian 2016 Census*

## School programs in Russian

No standard programs offered by primary or secondary schools – programs offered by the Victorian School of Languages

357 students enrolled in VSL programs – primary and secondary level (0.1%)

(against Mandarin: 85,885 including standard schools – 19.8%)

+ 509 students enrolled in Community Language Schools (against 15,316 for Mandarin)

## The Russian community in Melbourne – language maintenance and bond

The Russian language viewed as:

- “carrier of cultural heritage, “ideally suited to expressing deep thoughts and passionate emotions”, VS English “a far more emotionally neutral language” (Garner, 1988: 46)
- “emotional and symbolic values of Russian language and culture” for different generations (49),
- “feelings of language loyalty” (Kouzmin, 1988: 63);

## Parent-child communication: choices

Parents choose to use the L1 because of

- the benefits of bilingualism: cognitive advantages and future opportunities for their children (Döpke, 1992; Okita, 2002; Piller, 2001)
- the affective bond with this language, a means to pass on an important part of themselves to their children – “I just think it’s nice for the children to know who I am” (Piller, 2002: 254);

## Parent-child communication: choices

- Form of emotional communication (Pavlenko, 2004);
- Significant relationship between language dominance and language choice for parenting;
- Language emotionality influences choices for language used with children, but doesn't correlate;
- No relationship between language dominance and language emotionality
- LX-dominant bilinguals (and L1 attriters) might choose the LX for parenting, but perceive stronger emotionality for the L1.

## PhD bilingualism and emotions

1.5ers, L1 – Russian and L2 – Australian\*-English

Semi-structured interviews on the relationship with their  
two languages

- If you have/had children, which language do/would you use with them?

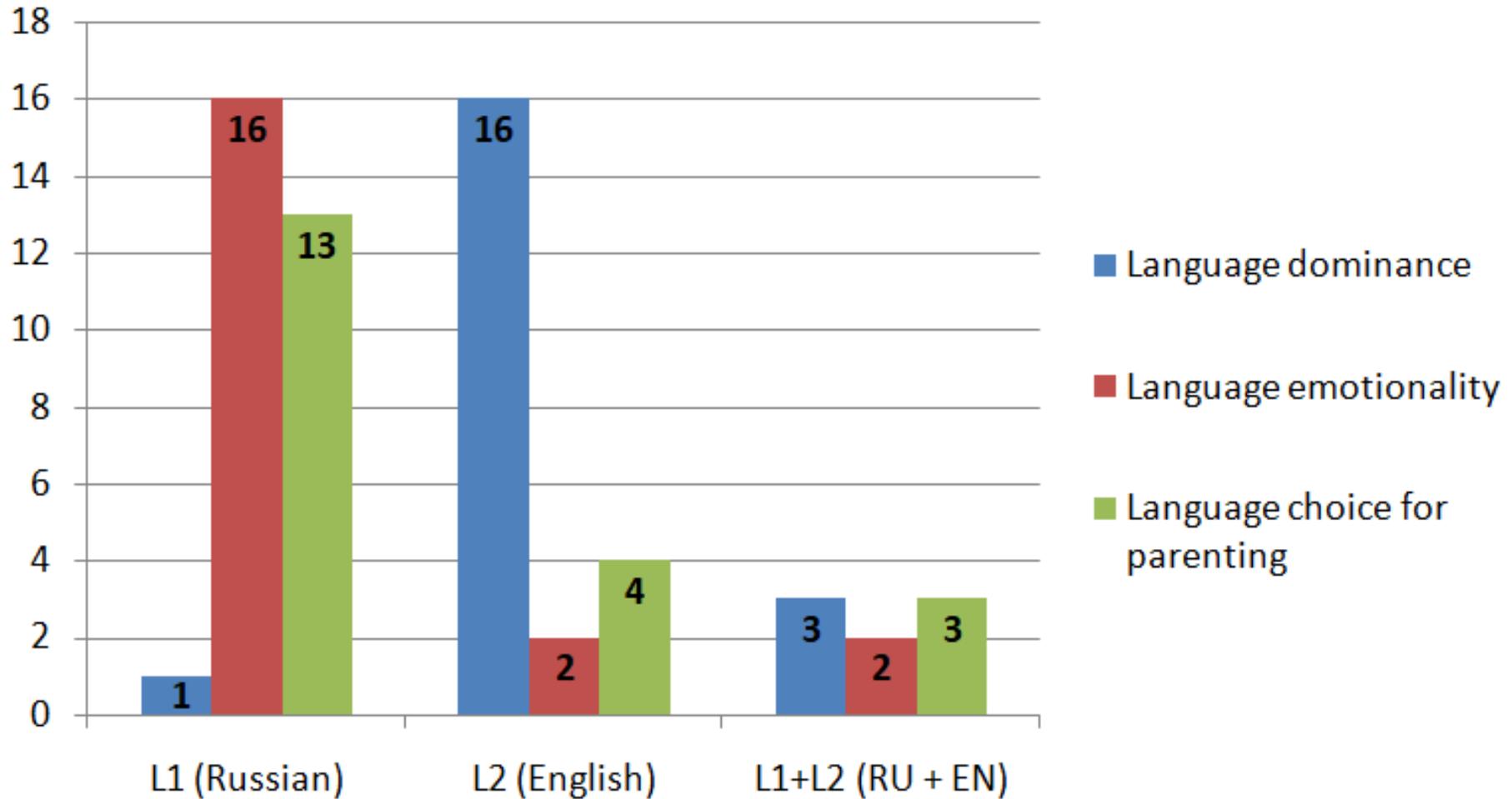
[Also, questions on language emotionality and language dominance]

Participants: 20 Russian-Australian 1.5ers, aged between 18-41

RQs:

- What are their language choices for parenting and what factors affect these choices?
- Are these choices influenced by self-reported language dominance?
- Are these choices influenced by perceptions of language emotionality?

# Results





- ***Eleonora***, 33, arrived in AU at 11. Self-reported dominance: RU & EN. Emotionality: RU. Single parent to a two-year old boy, language used: RU.
- ***Oleg***, 33, arrived in AU at 8. Self-reported dominance: EN. Emotionality: RU. Has a 1.5-year old son, who lives with his English-speaking mother, but he uses RU with him.
- ***Tanya***, 36, arrived in AU at 10. Self-reported dominance: EN. Emotionality: EN. Has a 1.5-year old son, her husband uses EN with him and Tanya, she uses only RU with the son.
- ***Elena***, 37, arrived in AU at 9. Self-reported dominance: EN. Emotionality: RU. Has 3 children (9, 7, 2). She speaks RU & EN with her husband (Russian-speaker), but only RU with the kids.

# Reasons



Tanya

*I definitely speak to him in Russian only because I want him to maintain it, it doesn't come naturally to me whatsoever. I catch myself speaking to him in English a lot. So I'm like, speak in Russian, why do you do it? So, it's definitely something I have to constantly remind myself, and it's so much more easier for me to find words in English to describe what I'm doing, or, you know, anything like that. Russian is hardship for me, which is quite surprising, 'cause, you know I kept it up, I studied it, I used it in my work, but the last 10 years I haven't, except for conversational language with my parents and grandparents but, now it's only because I want him to have an understanding of it and maintain it more than anything.*



# Reasons

*Only in Russian, he [speaks] only Russian, because he goes to a Russian kinder, well I sent him to a Russian kinder on purpose because I want him to know Russian, to read and write like me, that's why, when he goes to a normal school, on Sundays, a Russian one, I'll send him there, too. So, at home only, well, my ex-husband too, he didn't speak English at all, because we met there, in Russia, and at home it was only in Russian and in a way this had a very good impact because I wanted my child to speak only Russian at home, so he's starting speaking already, he says a lot already, only in Russian and understands Russian.*

*Well because I know a lot of people, they had kids here, they're all Russians and the kids don't speak, because at home, although there are two Russians, the mum and the dad, well because they grew up here and they already somehow speak English at home and the kids lose the language completely, they don't know it at all, and I find it so... So sad, if you can maintain it, why not. Losing your culture, losing a second language, I think it's always useful, but you have to work on it, as with everything, you can't say after 10 years "It didn't work out" haha, you have to do something, haha.*



Eleonora



# Reasons

*With my children? Oh yeah yeah, with the children... I do, you know, I had to teach myself to speak Russian again*



**Elena**

*with my girls, when they were born, I actually had to speak just Russian, and the same with him [the son], he doesn't speak much English. But yeah, with me, because I spent my whole childhood speaking in English, and I'm a Humanities person so, I did a lot of, for that you're required to use the language, so Russian is not one of those ones that has come sort of naturally to me, but occasionally I'd throw myself off and I go "Oh my God, I didn't even know that word, how did that happen?", so either it came back from when I was little, uhm, or obviously I heard it somewhere. But, to my children, I say to them "It's so important that you know Russian" and I say to them, because a lot of their activities are in Russian, and they realised that there's a value in being able to speak another language and to be able to speak that language fluently, so it's very nice to hear them speaking with my grandmother.. they call out and they speak to her in Russian.*

# Reasons

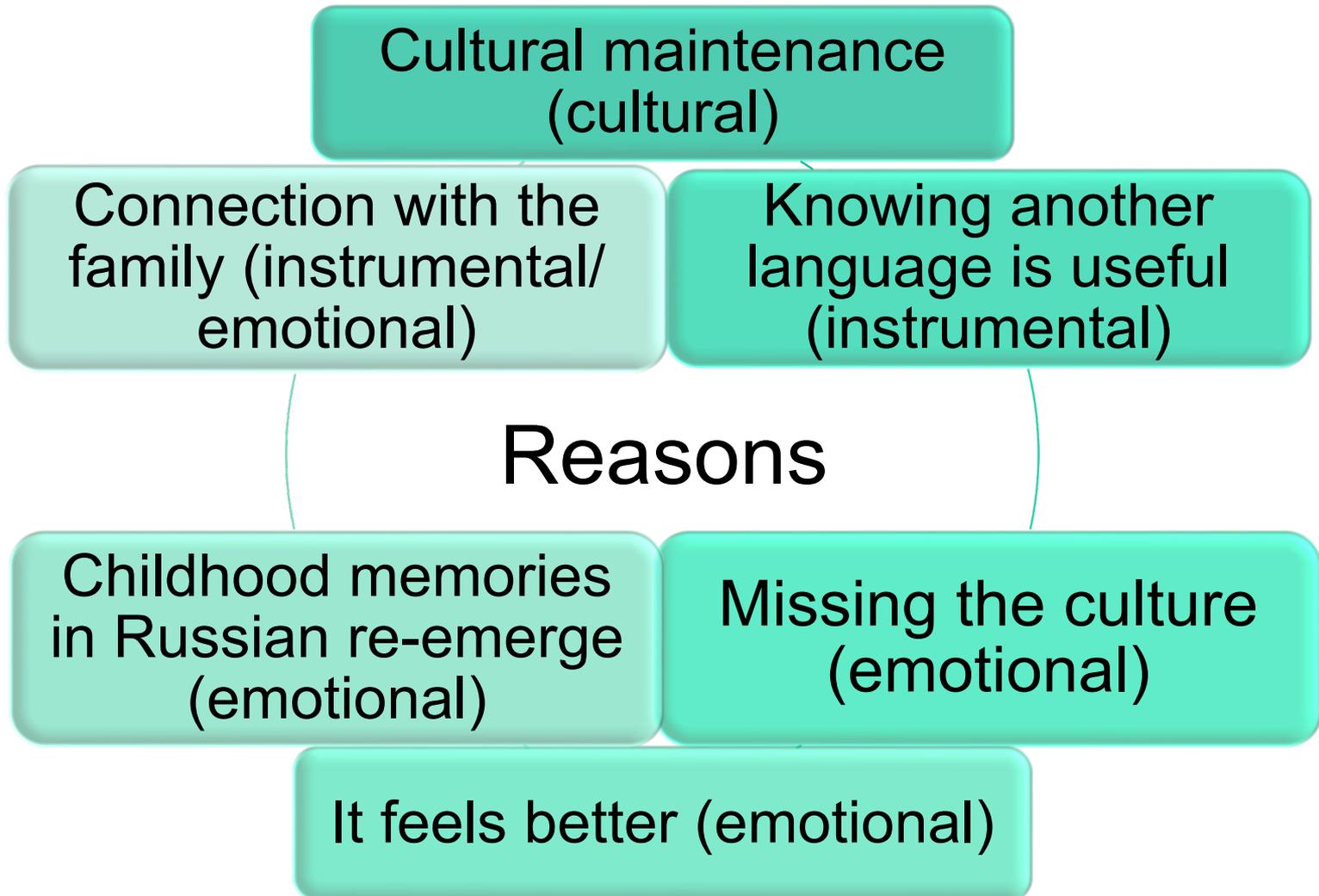
*because I'm missing that part of my culture, I'd like him to have some of that. There's a conscious part of it, and then there's a, it also feels good, it feels better to speak to him in Russian, I can't describe why.*



Oleg

*it brings up your memories of your childhood, that would never surface without it. I found spending time with him brings me back to that age.. there's certain things that he does, where I suddenly get a flash of memories, of emotions from that, when I was one and a half years old and, you know, these pure emotions that they experience, that, you know.. you've long forgotten, and all of a sudden I'm like "Wooh, wow", ok, yeah, and you remember that, and I was in Russia back then, I didn't know any English, so all of my childhood was in Russian, and when I was speaking to him, I was speaking, like, from my childhood, of course it's gonna be in Russian, 'cause I don't know, I don't know any English childhood, so yeah, it's because it takes you back to your roots and whatever your first language is, that's what you're default to.*

# Reasons



The L1 is preferred for parenting;

- Main factors influencing this choice: instrumental, cultural and emotional (Döpke, 1992; Okita, 2002; Pavlenko, 2004, Piller, 2001, 2002);
- Language dominance doesn't influence these choices;
- “Fight” against L2 dominance and possible L1 attrition;
- Language emotionality and emotion-related factors influence these choices – ‘emotional context of learning’ theory (Harris et al., 2006).

# Conclusions

- Role of the L1 for this generation;
- Role of L1 attrition in intensifying identity conflicts and feelings of difference (Venturin, 2019, 2020);
- Emphasis on younger immigrants, 1.5ers and HSs, who might have unique perceptions of language maintenance and identity – third, hybrid identity (Remennick, 2017; Riehl, 2017;);
- Pedagogical implications for heritage languages programs targeting this generation (US model).



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