

Linguistic and Cultural Adaptation of the Migrant Women Abroad

Based on individual and group private and official interviews, as well as written sources, the study focuses on female practices of linguistic and cultural adaptation in immigration. Russophone women play a central role in creating a sense of home abroad through cultural preservation and community connections, despite facing challenges like discrimination and language barriers. Their resilience and dedication contribute to family stability and well-being, serving as a source of inspiration and financial income. They often influence the languages spoken at home and with their children, which depends on factors like fluency in different languages and beliefs about cultural heritage. This can lead to translanguaging or a choice between the native language and the language of the new country. Language decisions may evolve over time, impacting children's linguistic and cultural development. However, Russophone women may face challenges related to ethnic identity, with some feeling ashamed or trying to hide their background, while others seek support through social networks or online communities when proximity to their ethnic group is limited.

Keywords: *integration, post-Soviet states, Russian language, intercultural marriage, family language policy, multilingualism, female communities*

Introduction

Since immigration is a stressful life event for adults and children, it often proves a hard test for families. On the one hand, in the Soviet period women made a leap in emancipation competing with men in terms of education and career targets; on the other hand, the popular perception of gender roles in the family remained largely patriarchal and conservative (Peri 2018, Varga-Harris 2019). The need to excel at work, participate in public life and at the same time the expectation that a woman should be a skillful housekeeper, a caring wife, and the main educator of the children drained women and in many ways made them feel and behave patronizingly towards men (Engel, Posadskaya-Vanderbeck 1998). The clash of the “Soviet super-woman” and the lazy and “good-for-nothing man” was a popular topic of the Soviet joke lore (Antoshchuk, Gewinner 2020). The shuttle trade, often underestimated due to its seemingly small scale, emerged as a significant aspect of Russian consumer trade in the 1990s, primarily driven by women, with Mukhina’s (2014) study shedding light on their motivations, experiences, and the broader social impact, revealing how gender dynamics shaped the transition period from communism to market economies and highlighting the disparities between market rhetoric and reality.

Paradoxically, it was the reformist Mikhail Gorbachev who declared as a societal goal to bring women back home so that they could act as wives and mothers without having to seek employment. This paved the way to overtly discriminatory attitudes to women and policies developed in the Russian post-

1 Soviet labor market (Riabova, Ovcharova 2016). These views were expressed
2 officially and went hand in hand with rejection of feminism. Even in emigration,
3 interviews with older women reveal common themes of social suffering, including
4 trauma of World War II, poor living conditions in the Soviet Union, scarcity of
5 resources, and fear of persecution, all of which influenced their sense of identity
6 (Pushkareva 2013). They show a prevalent feeling of disconnection from the
7 future, highlighting the importance of life stability (de Medeiros et al. 2015).
8 However, in the first post-Soviet years, when Russians did not travel much, the
9 myth that everybody living abroad was affluent still lingered on.

10 Moreover, women themselves dismissed feminism as inapplicable in the
11 Russian situation. In the 1970s nearly 90 per cent of the women were employed.
12 After the demise of the Soviet Union these numbers dropped, but most women
13 could not afford to stay at home even if they wanted to and sought alternative
14 means of earning a living, for example, in other parts of the former Soviet Union
15 (Kangas et al. 2023, Kosmarskaya 2022). For many marrying a foreigner seemed
16 to be the only reasonable alternative, promising stability and affluence.
17 Matchmaking agencies opened in many towns, helping their clients to write letters
18 to their suitors (some of the brides did not speak any other languages but Russian).
19 The agencies organized photo-sessions and even distributed texts explaining
20 specific features of the “national character” of potential grooms (Heyse 2011). As
21 a result, many a disappointment awaited “Russian brides” who found upon arrival
22 in their spouse’s country that their husbands could not afford the luxuries they had
23 dreamt about (Cvajner 2019). The most common problems encountered by
24 Russian-speaking immigrants is difficulties in finding jobs due to incompatibility
25 of skills or impossibility of practicing their profession in the new country. This is
26 common among the highly educated reluctant to retrain and/or learn new skills in
27 the occupations which are in demand in the local labor market (Sverdljuk 2010,
28 2016). Sivoplyasova and Gafurova (2022) claim that the number of Russians
29 moving abroad for marriage and family creation is increasing, particularly towards
30 Eastern countries like Korea, China, and Japan. Recent years have seen a shift in
31 motivations, with moral and psychological factors playing a significant role.
32 Additionally, there is a shift in the marriage market infrastructure, with the
33 emergence of dating sites alongside traditional marriage agencies.

34 In the Soviet period interethnic marriages were encouraged because they were
35 regarded as contributors to the gradual disappearance of differences between the
36 peoples populating the country. Soviet ideology viewed intermarriages as more
37 progressive because they were less subject to the hold of traditional values;
38 moreover, they reinforced Russification as partners would often use Russian as a
39 home language (Gorenburg 2006: 149–150). Intermarriages with foreigners were
40 very rare in the Soviet period, because few people were allowed or had a chance to
41 maintain international contacts. Furthermore, until Perestroika, marrying a
42 Westerner was akin to treason, and could have adverse effect on the career and
43 social status of the “defecting” bride’s family members remaining in the USSR.
44 However, in the post-Soviet period transnational marriage migration evolved into
45 one of the chief forms of mobility for women. Ryazantsev and Sivoplyasova
46 (2020) state that “Russian brides” are primarily women from post-Soviet nations

1 who speak Russian and have a Slavic look, creating a kind of brand on the
2 worldwide marriage market. There are different models for finding foreign
3 husbands: through match-making agencies, independent search on the internet,
4 personal meetings through work or during vacations, and through family members
5 or friends residing abroad. Along with the opportunity to study abroad,
6 Russophone girls have gained a chance for a more careful selection of their future,
7 including search for a spouse, and entering same-sex relationships and
8 partnerships.

9 Identity in mixed families is a multifaceted and evolving concept influenced
10 by interactions with persons with diverse cultural backgrounds and the evolving
11 nature of language use in which code mixing and translanguaging become the
12 norm. Everyday practices in mixed families are inseparable from negotiations and
13 attempts to find common grounds, sometimes they cause confusion and result in
14 miscommunication; yet they also offer opportunities for personal growth and
15 understanding. Shevchenko and Lachover (2023) examine media representations
16 of 1.5 generation post-Soviet women in Israel using a special issue of the
17 periodical *La'isha* [Woman], highlighting four discourses shaping women's
18 identity (nationality, Russianness, transforming into an Israeli, successfulness) and
19 arguing that the magazine portrays them as successful symbols of Western
20 neoliberal feminism within the context of Israeli gender norms and ethno-national
21 identity.

22 The present study considers the following research questions:

- 23
- 24 • How do language dynamics impact the social integration of Russophone
25 female emigrants in their host countries?
- 26 • What role does the Russian language play in the communication patterns
27 and social interactions of female emigrants within their families compared
28 to their interactions outside familial circles?
- 29 • How do Russian-speaking female emigrants explore linguistic and cultural
30 differences in their host countries, and how does this affect their daily
31 activities and social interactions?
- 32 • What are the multifaceted roles that Russian-speaking female emigrants
33 assume in their unique situation between two cultures?
- 34 • How do women balance traditional expectations with the realities of their
35 new environment?
- 36 • How do the experiences of Russian-speaking female emigrants shed light
37 on the complexities of identity, belonging, and adaptation in cross-cultural
38 settings?
- 39
- 40

41 **Materials and Methods**

42

43 Our material was drawn from numerous in-depth biographic interviews the
44 authors conducted in Australia, Finland, Greece, Israel, Italy, Norway, Spain,
45 Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, UK, and USA. Some of them were audio- and
46 others video-recorded and later transcribed. Participants were informed about the

1 purpose of the study and its anonymity (they are marked with initials in bold).
2 Furthermore, we monitored various forums and analyzed discussions involving
3 women about their experience of adapting to their new environment. We listed
4 themes related to their search for new identities and a sense of home. We also
5 added some oral and written documents created by the Russian women who write
6 fiction and non-fiction abroad. The methods we relied on are based on thematic,
7 content and motif analyses, as well as biography studies, which are often used in
8 qualitative research (e.g., Fuhse, Mützel 2011, Herz et al. 2015, Knox et al. 2006,
9 Kuckartz, Rädiker 2022, Mey, Mruck 2020, Pushkareva 2019). For a more
10 thorough analysis, we choose specific themes based on their frequency in the
11 interviews and other sources we have gathered. Triangulating content across
12 multiple sources indicates that the phenomenon is not random, though even a
13 single instance can validate its presence in the research material.
14
15

16 **Intermarriage as an Adventure**

17
18 The process of language acculturation is a route to achieving economic
19 prosperity. However, when women undergo acculturation at a swifter pace, it
20 challenges traditional gender roles within the economic sphere (Kisselev et al.
21 2010). Intermarriage can be seen as an adventure in cultural discovery, personal
22 growth, and building relationships across differences. It offers the opportunity for
23 individuals to broaden their perspectives, learn about new customs and traditions,
24 and form connections with people from different backgrounds. Braux (2015)
25 encourages a nuanced exploration beyond stereotypes, addressing issues of
26 prostitution, trafficking, and bi-national marriages between Turkish citizens and
27 women from Russia and Ukraine, shedding light on deeply ingrained prejudices.
28 Seeking for a Russian wife might also mean seeking for an old-type traditional
29 woman dedicated to the household and satisfied with financial security and
30 stability for herself and her children, yet the traditions are interrelated with full
31 emancipation, self-consciousness and independence in the Russian women (Lahti
32 2015).

33 Russian brides are seen as creatures seeking a gilded cage, complete security,
34 and fulfillment of all their wishes, which they are legally entitled to in the East (see
35 e.g., the documentary series ‘Eastern Wives’ [https://www.youtube.com/playlist?
36 list=PLCudXZcslfSNDBtje1pmV_g8Ttp5KoBIn](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLCudXZcslfSNDBtje1pmV_g8Ttp5KoBIn)). In exchange, these women are
37 willing to tolerate their husbands’ polygamy. The primary reason for this
38 ambivalence is the domestic family model’s turmoil. Many young women with no
39 education or previous career leave Russia, and their grooms are frequently middle-
40 aged men willing to start a family. Besides financial security, for Russian women
41 today there is one more vitally important reason to search for partners abroad: in
42 their home country there is a shortage of men who maintain healthy-life habits and
43 do not indulge in excessive alcohol consumption, heavy smoking, and risky sexual
44 behavior. Moreover, unlike Russian men, who see a woman’s child from a
45 previous marriage as an obstacle, foreigners are often willing to adopt their brides’
46 children.

1 The life stories of women married to Austrian men are collected by Barkan
2 (2017). The Russian women behave differently from their western peers; some
3 dedicate their lives to children, others to husbands, and some to themselves. Geier
4 (2019) narrates her journey from Ukraine to Germany where she married a
5 German, became a famous translator of the Russian classic literature, especially
6 Dostoevsky, and spent her time between the languages. For her, translation is a
7 form of breathing.

8 A third generation Germanist with a PhD and an MBA diploma, a graduate
9 from a German university, Katinskaya (a penname; 2023) has managed language
10 centers in North Rhine-Westphalia. Born in Yaroslavl, she won grants for trips to
11 German universities. Inspired by her internship in Konstanz, she debuted with the
12 novel “Time of Pickled Cucumbers.” Now, she is raising multilingual twins with
13 her Franco-German spouse who encourages her to stay true to her identity. She
14 narrates adventures of a provincial girl who came to study in Germany and met her
15 love there. She describes the mixed Russian-German language¹ of the Russian
16 German from Central Asia who chooses a Turkish man as her partner. She also
17 depicts life trajectories of two Russophone students from different post-Soviet
18 states who experience cultural shock, use German concepts in their Russian, strive
19 to adapt to the situation and decide whether to stay in Germany or return home.
20 One of them lives with an age-mate from Ukraine, the other, with an older German
21 man implicated in criminal behavior. Remarkably, all the characters are to
22 different degrees proficient in German different degrees, while Germans from the
23 East of the country still speak some Russian.

24 The opinion of the Norwegian man is presented by Sandermoen (2018)
25 whose love story started in Moscow where he met his future wife. The spouses
26 had very different backgrounds. Here comes what he formulated in his book.
27 When visiting Russia, one immediately notices the abundance of elegantly dressed
28 beautiful women, seemingly ready for a party, with slim figures largely unaffected
29 by fast and processed foods. He claims that Russian men often receive less
30 emphasis on health and grooming from their upbringing, contributing to
31 challenges in domestic responsibilities and relationships, reflecting an old-
32 fashioned societal dynamic reminiscent of some Asian cultures rather than
33 European ones. Contrary to the widespread stereotype that Russian women are
34 “fortune seekers,” they want to have happy family life and offer warmth and
35 passion once a close connection is established, demonstrating devotion and love
36 for old-fashioned gallantry in their relationships. Russian women prioritize their
37 appearance, even dressing up for a simple trip to the nearby store, reflecting a
38 cultural emphasis on beauty and self-presentation. Growing up in the Soviet
39 Union, the author’s wife faced additional challenges, because she was born
40 Tajikistan where her grandparents were exiled in Stalin’s times, and she had a

¹Like *Ist nicht dein Ernst! Мне просто нужен Geschenk zum Geburtstag meiner Mutter, понимаешь? Dringend! ‘Are you serious? I just need a gift for my mother’s birthday, you know? Urgently!’*. The speech of the older generation speaking German with a Russian accent, is presented in Cyrillic transliteration, while those who grew up in Germany, except for individual words, do not have an accent; they borrow more complex expressions from German, and they are given in Latin script. See also Meng, Protassova 2022.

1 Georgian surname, as a result she had to experience the society’s chauvinistic and
2 sometimes racist attitudes towards satellite republics. She recalls pleasant
3 memories from her childhood in Dushanbe but also the need to be vigilant against
4 disrespectful behavior towards females, particularly young girls. In the West,
5 access to social and health services became a universal right, exemplified by
6 practices like child allowance payments. Conversely, in Russia, reliance is more
7 on interpersonal networks rather than state services. Russian wives consult with
8 online communities before making decisions rather than following official
9 channels. It is not customary to share intimate matters with neighbors, but it is
10 acceptable with strangers. Russian mothers uphold a strict and traditional approach
11 to parenting, emphasizing the importance of their children’s appearance and
12 behavior, and they are direct in addressing any shortcomings. This style is in stark
13 contrast with a more lenient and praise-oriented Western parenting style that may
14 inadvertently foster unrealistic expectations. Russian schools prioritize strict
15 discipline, academic rigor, and early testing compared to their European
16 counterparts, whereas Western European schools often prioritize joy, play, and
17 teamwork, particularly in the lower grades. Russian women constantly think that
18 everyone is hungry and try to offer too much food; they consider kitchen to be
19 their territory. Russians more often have portraits of their writers on the walls than
20 of their own relatives; they know classic music much better than the cinema and
21 the Western fiction. When asked “How are you?” Russians take it seriously and
22 give a detailed report about their life. They sit down and keep silent for a while
23 before stating a journey. They always tell jokes, love long toasts, birch trees and
24 quote from old Soviet films. When visiting friends, they bring small gifts. They are
25 convinced that it is boring to live anywhere outside Russia.

26 A typical case is when a Russian woman marries a foreigner older than
27 herself, often, it is a second marriage for both, and they already have children.
28 Mattisson’s book (2024) begins with the heroine explaining how difficult it was
29 for her to live in Russia with a Ukrainian surname.² Although she spent summers
30 with her grandmother in Western Ukraine as a child, she did not learn the
31 language, and her Ukrainian identity did not form. Marrying a Swede as her
32 second husband, Mattisson changed her surname, but for her, the word *familiya*
33 ‘surname’ itself began to be etymologized as ‘family.’ A relationship with an
34 abuser and a second wedding followed. Two more children were born. The author
35 feels she is in limbo: neither Swedish nor Russian. In the beginning, she could not
36 follow traditions because the Swedes she had met would not share them. A foreign
37 country, unfamiliar language, and severe climate—all of these caused rejection.
38 She observes that lacking knowledge about the simplest things makes you feel
39 stupid. You cannot make use of your knowledge and skills and achieve a
40 respectable status in the new society, although you were someone back home.

²The surname was just strange (Muzyka ‘music’), it could not be associated with Ukraine, and Ukraine was their own, friendly country. In Russia, millions of people live with Ukrainian surnames that do not raise suspicions, including people in the Russian government. We can also give an example when in Finland a girl was teased because of her supposedly Russian surname, while in fact it was Polish-Ukrainian. See also Protassova, Yelenevskaya 2024a.

1 Children experience things more acutely and more emotionally, but they
 2 learn a new language faster. International English helps adults. She was not
 3 inhibited to talk about her origins, and everyone laughed at the thought that Russia
 4 could invade a neighboring country. In Sweden, it was completely normal to
 5 communicate with a new family of the spouse from whom you divorced, and it
 6 was great to go to university at the age of almost 30. Today the author is proud to
 7 speak Swedish with but a slight accent. She understands almost everything, and if
 8 she doesn't, she memorizes unfamiliar words in context. It was very important to
 9 move from one place to another because gradually you learn to adapt to different
 10 ways of life in your surroundings, to find a right man, to resist manipulation, and
 11 to bring back one's profession. Although the Russian language might hurt today,
 12 the Russian classic literature remains an anchor, says the author.

13 New experiences, events and encounters affect development of one's identity,
 14 and migration and building up family life under new conditions makes this process
 15 deeper and more dramatic. The questions "Who am I? Who do I identify with? In
 16 what spirit shall I bring up my children? Should I make a goal to bring them up in
 17 such a way that they would wish to maintain my native language and culture, or
 18 will it be easier for them to live if they completely assimilate and become
 19 indistinguishable from their peers in the host country? In various internet
 20 discussion forums created by and for women, and uniting Russian speakers
 21 coming from various communities and linguistic surroundings these questions
 22 emerge again and again, triggering heated discussions. We came across numerous
 23 reflective posts that reveal immigrants' search for an answer to the question of
 24 who and what they identify with. On the website *eva.ru* one of discussants writes
 25 about her self-perception:

26
 27 **EV:** And if you're curious about who I am in terms of nationality, I'd be delighted
 28 to tell you. I was born in the Soviet Union, I was a Ukrainian citizen until
 29 recently, and I've been a US citizen for approximately a year. According to the
 30 nationality entry in my ancestors' passports, I am approximately half Russian, a
 31 quarter Jewish, and a quarter German. So, who do you think I feel I am?
 32

33 The attempts to facilitate the assimilation of 'imported' wives through the
 34 establishment of organizations for them, driving lessons, combined outings and
 35 travels are particularly interesting. Clubs for older immigrants might be formed to
 36 organize activities such as tourist trips (including overseas), camping vacations,
 37 and choirs. Theater and journalistic studios, photo clubs, fashion design, and
 38 camps are available for younger people. To breed some unity of the Russian
 39 speakers in the young generation, parents organize language and art courses, send
 40 Christmas vs New Year cards, arrange meetings around the globe, exhibitions of
 41 children's art, festivals of the amateur theaters and other cultural events.

42 The process of merging two cultures and traditions in the family sometimes
 43 leads to conflicts and requires a lot of open-mindedness, tolerance and readiness to
 44 find compromise. Intermarried couples sometimes face discrimination and
 45 misunderstanding by people in their environment, adding an extra layer of
 46 difficulty to their journey. Regardless of these challenges, many intermarried
 47 couples find that their experiences bring them closer together and help them to

1 appreciate and respect their partner’s cultural heritage. They often find that the
2 journey of intermarriage leads to personal growth and a deeper understanding of
3 the world and each other.

6 **Friendships**

8 Researchers have shown that female immigrants need social networks outside
9 their workplace more than men. Women tend to be more active in maintaining
10 contacts with fellow immigrants and making new acquaintances both with co-
11 ethnics and members of the majority in their host countries (Remennick 2005,
12 2007, Ryabov 2013, 2016). The trouble is that host countries’ majorities only
13 partially meet the women’s need for support in a new environment. The
14 newcomers carefully probe their environment to find a way to better life for
15 themselves and their families and seek to find spiritual ‘sisters’. Those who are
16 used to being socially active form NGOs, but most prefer informal contacts by
17 participating in community organizations and events, such as clubs, hobby groups,
18 festivals, charity organizations, weight-watching groups and others. This enables
19 women to spend their leisure hours meaningfully and break the routine. Some of
20 these activities, such as concerts, hikes and excursions are organized for families,
21 but others are for women only, enabling them to socialize outside the family
22 milieu (cf. Intke-Hernández, Holm 2015). The desire to share experiences and
23 problems and receive advice from the likeminded is also manifested in numerous
24 online groups for Russian-speaking women, such as Facebook groups “Girls in
25 Belgium”, “Russian-speaking mothers in Germany, Russian-speaking mothers in
26 Israel”, “Russian girls in Valencia”, “Russian girls in Turkey” and others
27 (Yelenevskaya 2024).

28 Among the most popular communities among Russian-speaking diasporans
29 are female groups. Members of these communities do not always meet in person,
30 and their communication is primarily virtual. Sometimes they unite women
31 residing in one country, but more often they are transnational. The women
32 discover that their worldview, everyday practices, and child rearing methods are
33 markedly different from those of women in their host societies; at the same time,
34 they find that their reasons for migration, problems they encounter in integration
35 and patterns of cultural adaptation are quite similar, irrespective of which country
36 in the post-Soviet space they come from. Russian is the lingua franca of their
37 communication; they speak the same language, literally and metaphorically.
38 Before the pandemic it was not uncommon to organize offline meetings and
39 conferences consolidating their new global friendships. These contacts are the
40 pillars of the diasporans’ transnational identity, which has supplanted the previous
41 Soviet supranational identity. The worldwide virtual community of Russian
42 speakers is thriving even today despite the new dividing line: those who support
43 Russian invasion in Ukraine and those who are against it (Protassova 2012).

44 Many Russophone families continue celebrating the International Women’s
45 Day but do not ignore Mothers’ and Fathers’ days. These celebrations can also
46 turn into acts demonstrating determination to preserve one’s identity. Thus, in the

1 study conducted by Wara and Munkejord (2022), Russian-speaking women
2 narrated that on the 8th of March they put on their best clothes and high-heeled
3 shoes. They make up thoroughly using bright lipstick and go out. They use this
4 holiday as an occasion to both confirm and resist what they conceive as the
5 majority's perceptions of them as a group ('Russian women in Norway'), by
6 expressing femininity, which they have to downplay on other days to avoid
7 prejudiced attitudes. This is also a revolt against the understanding of equality as
8 sameness, which they feel dominates in Norwegian society.

9 Similar stories appear in the interview with our Israeli participant S. A
10 university lecturer, she told us that she shocked her colleagues by wearing heels to
11 classes and specially chosen clothes to the exams. She felt it was her way to
12 express respectful attitude to the event and cited a popular Soviet phrase: *Ha*
13 *работу как на праздник* 'Going to work like to a festivity'.

14 **EP**, who arrived in Norway from Vologda, talks about the Russian-speaking
15 life in Tromsø and Bergen: they organize celebrations for the Old New Year (13th
16 of January, the New Year in the Julian calendar), International Women's Day
17 (March 8), *Maslenitsa* (Pancake week), Cosmonautics Day (April 12,
18 commemorating the first manned flight to outer space by Yuri Gagarin), Victory
19 Day, and more. They arrange various quizzes, serve delicious food, sing folk and
20 popular songs. Such events allow Norwegian and foreign husbands to become
21 acquainted with Russian culture. Some women have been living in Norway for a
22 very long time, and for them, it is an important part of their existence. When the
23 town is small, people are more interested and united. However, being part of
24 Norwegian society is more important, remarks our interviewee.

25 A Poet and an expert in the Slavic studies at the University of Berkeley,
26 Polina Barskova, describes herself in her pedagogical and research activities as a
27 "laborer of literature", a somewhat unromantic stance. Having left her beloved city
28 of St. Petersburg due to a personal tragedy, she views her emigration as one of the
29 best things that happened in her life (besides the birth of her daughter). It offered
30 her complexity, experience, and freedom, although she still longs for her
31 hometown. Despite being far from her people, she believes in the importance of
32 nurturing various loves and connections, finding significance in the ability to
33 contribute to culture in her new environment. If necessary, she rereads Alexander
34 Herzen, Russian exiled writer of the 19th century. However, she believes that
35 people are given different loves, different respects, different friendships, different
36 relationships, and what she feels towards Berlin, San Francisco, New York are
37 very important parts of herself (Gordeeva 2023).

38 The latest wave of migration gives examples of friendships evolving into
39 professional partnerships. A case in point is career trajectories of Miriam Sekhon
40 and Liza Miller (Leyfer 2024) The two women have known each other since early
41 childhood. Born and brought up in Moscow they pursued successful careers, one
42 as a theater and movie actress, the other as a classic musician playing a multitude
43 of instruments. After working in Russia and traveling the world, both settled in
44 Montreal where they formed a duet. They are fluent in French and English and
45 their songs are in three languages, attracting Russophone immigrants and
46 Canadians. At the end of the interview, also conducted in three languages after the

1 box-office success of their concerts, they said that it was an amazing gift to find
2 each other in the same city again. Transforming a lifelong friendship into
3 professional relations opens new horizons. They feel that everything is possible,
4 because whatever disputes arise in the process of creating new shows, they are still
5 close friends ready for give and take.

6 Many Russian-speaking immigrant women find strength and resilience
7 through their communities and find a sense of belonging and purpose in their new
8 home. Their experience as immigrants is unique, and it also testifies that the
9 human spirit is powerful demonstrating the ability to persevere through adversity.
10 Russophone women often play the lead role in maintaining family life and
11 integrating into a new society while serving as nurturers and supporters of their
12 families. They also feel responsible to create a sense of comfort and community
13 (cf. Protassova, Yelenevskaya 2024b).

16 **Immigrant Women as Anchors of the Family Life**

17
18 In Europe, there is no statistically significant variation in family size or child
19 count between intermarried and endogamous couples; in the US, mixed-
20 nationality couples have greater labor-force participation rates but substantially
21 lower formal marriage rates, whereas higher Gender Inequality Index values were
22 positively connected with the propensity to work for money and work longer
23 hours, implying self-selection into the US immigration system. Children of
24 working Russian-speaking immigrant mothers who are also more involved in their
25 children's school affairs, get superior academic results (Ponomareva 2017).

26 Family communication and child-directed speech vary from family to family
27 (Koptjevskaja Tamm 2000, Goleva 2012, Vorobeva 2024). A family language is
28 inevitably the one that is used in larger communities, because idiolects are smaller
29 in volume than sociolects. A child growing up in a single family cannot have the
30 same vocabulary as a child growing up, figuratively speaking, communicating
31 with an entire village. Sociolinguistic studies of bilingual families' linguistic
32 practices address the contexts, procedures, and outcomes of private
33 communication between spouses from various national and cultural groups.

34 There are also issues with the adoption of Russian-speaking children (cf.
35 Schwartz, Kaslow 2003). Fogle (2012) investigates how Russian-speaking
36 adoptees in three US households actively influence chances for language
37 acquisition and identity building through everyday communication. She also
38 studies how these children acquire proficiency in their new environment and
39 socialize in it while still maintaining Russian. In the framework of the family
40 language policy theory Fogle and Curdt-Christiansen (2013) demonstrate that
41 when adoptive parents of the older native Russian-speaking adoptees made
42 decisions based on their children's specific cognitive and emotional abilities,
43 educational requirements, and desire to build a family, such strategy proves
44 beneficial for the adoptees and contributes to their successful integration into
45 society.

1 Matisson (2024: 101) explains that one of the reasons for divorcing her
2 Swedish husband was that, although she had adapted to his language and culture,
3 he had not learned her language and culture. He disliked her speaking Russian
4 with their children and her relatives, referring to the language as strange, despite
5 her efforts to translate everything or switch to English in the presence of others. If
6 the wife in a mixed family has a good command of the dominant language of the
7 environment, it does not contribute to her husband's motivation to study Russian.

8 Yet, some Russian schools in the diaspora are already offering Russian
9 language classes to parents who do not speak Russian. According to the one-
10 parent-one-language principle, children are addressed in the native language of the
11 parent. However, unless this principle has been consciously chosen, and the adults
12 are disciplined in adhering to it, most families find it difficult to communicate at
13 home without code mixing and translanguaging. Today, translanguaging is
14 becoming more acceptable in language pedagogies, and school policies
15 concerning bilingual children are becoming more tolerant and more flexible.
16 Sometimes, different strategies are tried with different children in the same family.
17 Language and culture appear to be of vital relevance in intermarriage in terms of
18 establishing a new identity and deeper understanding of each other. Personal
19 experience, society and the marital partner influence the Russian-speaking
20 immigrants' decisions. In most situations, the easiest solution with the least
21 amount of effort is chosen.

22 For **RU**, living in Oslo and coming from an international family, a crucial part
23 of supporting the Russian language for her children is visits from her mother who
24 meets the children after school and entertains them during their free time. An
25 important aspect of **RU**'s life is socializing with expatriates and other international
26 families. Generation roles have changed in modern societies as the elderly remain
27 socially active much longer than in the past. This also concerns diasporic
28 grandparents who see their peers in western societies continuing to travel, take
29 courses and do sports. Turning into a free babysitter for the family is no longer
30 perceived as a standard practice. But the role grandparents do take upon
31 themselves willingly is transferring the language and culture of the home-country
32 to the young. This role is not always rewarding, because both children and their
33 parents may show resistance to Russian language maintenance, which seems to
34 them to be a wasted effort.

35 **MT**, who has been living in Sweden for a long time, does not find it possible
36 to be involved in Russian-speaking organizations, while speaking Russian in the
37 family is perfectly natural for her. While conversing with her child in Russian at a
38 café, she encountered situations where Swedes would give her odd looks, and she
39 had to explain in sophisticated Swedish that multilingualism is an asset, not a
40 deficit.

41 Those who used to live in a monolingual environment find it difficult to
42 acquire the language/s of the majority at the same time improving their proficiency
43 in English, which is becoming a prerequisite for employment in many spheres
44 (Iikkanen 2020). It is not always easy to overcome generation gaps, and Russian-
45 speaking parents eager for their bi- and multilingual children to share their values
46 and interests resort to various ways of transferring their culture to their offspring

1 growing up away from Russia (Karpava et al. 2024). At the same time, it often
2 happens that immigrants of the one-and-a-half and second generation are so
3 deeply immersed in the culture of the host society that even when they marry
4 within the community, they switch over to the majority language in their home
5 communication, and their parents who have not learned it well, feel that they are
6 losing ties with their children and grandchildren (Tiaynen-Qadir, Matyska 2020;
7 Yelenevskaya 2023).

8 Social stigmatization affects family relations. Since most children acquire a
9 new language faster than adults, in the initial period following resettlement parents
10 often resort to their children's help hoping to use them as interpreters and
11 translators. However, this strategy is seldom successful, because even those
12 adolescents whose proficiency in the language/s of the host country is high are not
13 taught skills needed for translation, nor are they familiar with the terminology of
14 business documents, legal services and medicine—those very domains which are
15 essential for immigrants to understand. As a result, these failed attempts lead to
16 frustration on both sides. Moreover, parents are humiliated by having to depend on
17 their children, and the children lose the feeling of security since they see their
18 parents lose self-confidence (Intke-Hernández, Holm 2015).

19 To combat the decline of Russian culture, the migrants must dissociate the
20 language and culture from the current regime and state, says Maria Stepanova,
21 who now lives in Germany, “no one from the outside will be able to impose any
22 norms, rules of behavior, or preserve it in a crystal coffin. I believe that
23 "preserving the Russian language" can only amount to finally giving it freedom.
24 Let our language live wherever it wants, let it blend with other dialects. Let it
25 whistle, chatter, produce neologisms – anglicize, germanize, arabize.” With the
26 language already detached from a specific territory due to a new wave of
27 emigration, it should acquire new traits, allowing it to roam freely and blend with
28 other dialects, ensuring its vitality and adaptability (Arkhangelsky 2023).

31 **New Employment Opportunities**

32
33 In the Soviet Union most women had jobs and in addition carried the biggest
34 load of household duties. Having immigrated to the West, they were integrated
35 into the culture in which men are still considered to be the main breadwinners but
36 are also expected to be much more involved in doing domestic chores and in child
37 rearing. In Central Asian countries due to the reinvigoration of the Muslim culture,
38 women feel they are losing some achievements of emancipation they enjoyed in
39 Soviet times, and migrating they hope to regain them. However, Russian-speaking
40 women in many countries have difficulties finding jobs according to their
41 educational level since skills and degrees obtained in the post-Soviet states are not
42 recognized and undervalued (Elo et al. 2020). So, these women face the dilemma
43 of additional studies or retraining which often interferes with child rearing;
44 otherwise, they must reconcile with unqualified jobs. Since work is a central
45 aspect of their identities and a source of their feelings of self-worth, this

1 professional devaluation feeds the personal distress and de-emancipation (Bloch
2 2011, Şahin 2023).

3 For some female entrepreneurs, starting a business abroad can be a path to
4 financial independence, offering an opportunity to escape limiting gender roles
5 and restrictions in their home countries. In many cases, these entrepreneurs bring
6 with them a wealth of knowledge and experience, which they use to create
7 successful businesses and even establish themselves as leaders in their industries.
8 On the other hand, the path to success as a female entrepreneur abroad can also be
9 fraught with challenges, including linguistic deficits, cultural discrepancies, and
10 limited access to resources and networks. In many cases, female entrepreneurs
11 face additional obstacles related to gender, such as discriminatory laws and
12 regulations, and cultural norms that limit their opportunities, access to investments
13 and capital.

14 The artist **KL** has been living in France since the beginning of 1992. This
15 place can be considered her home, as she has her own small place there,
16 prioritizing her well-organized comfort above all else. For her, this is more
17 important than the country in terms of politics, language, nature, or culture,
18 although those factors are also significant. In France, her house serves as her
19 home, a country cottage with a garden, and a studio. She brought with her clothes,
20 photo albums, books, and Orthodox icons that are dear to her heart. Her first
21 husband, a Russian, emigrated in 1978 and created a distinctly Russian home in
22 Paris, speaking poor French. **KL** helped him on all occasions. She still owns his
23 four antique samovars and continues to acquire old and valuable Russian items.
24 She was dedicated to him, and her life revolved around him, but he passed away in
25 2010. Later she remarried a Pole, and now they are blending all cultures accessible
26 to them.

27 **NP** who heads an institution employing several thousand people in Germany
28 is still married to the same Russian husband with whom she migrated. She
29 demonstrates remarkable resilience and determination, working tirelessly to build
30 successful businesses and establish her place in the economic landscape of the
31 world. Through her entrepreneurial spirit and hard work, she became a role model
32 and inspiring figure for other women and girls, breaking down barriers and paving
33 the way for greater equality and opportunity. Despite the challenges she faces, she
34 was able to achieve remarkable success and make lasting contributions to her
35 community.

36 The lawyer **PI**, had three children when she met a Norwegian in St.
37 Petersburg, married him and moved to Norway in 1995. At that time, there were
38 very few Russian-speaking immigrants in the country. Some were descendents of
39 the refugees who escaped October Revolution and the Civil War that followed.
40 Only one ship arrived in 1920 from Arkhangelsk, and just a few Russian speakers
41 remained in the country. They endeavored to maintain Russian in their families,
42 hoping to return to Russia. Their descendants could visit this neighboring state,
43 where the language was their native tongue, for the first time in the 1990s.
44 According to **PI**, immigrants always establish similar organizations and organize
45 events for children and themselves (clubs, celebrations of Russian religious
46 holidays, schools, charity concerts, etc.), and they often vie for dominance within

1 the community. **PI** founded her own music school, striving to keep fees as low as
2 possible. Norwegians enjoy attending musical and themed evenings, and she is
3 happy providing such opportunities for them. Thanks to various events, it is
4 possible to bring Norwegians closer to Russian culture. She also worked to
5 organize concerts for Russian musicians, dancers, and singers.

6 **IL**, who has been living in Germany since 1992, recalls being amazed by the
7 products sold in German stores and by what Germans discarded. She made efforts
8 to send large parcels to Russia, not only food but also clothing and even plastic
9 yogurt cups. Her home has been always full of guests, especially in the early years
10 of her family's life in the West, with hundreds of friends and acquaintances
11 coming and going. Each person left with a large bag (which she specifically kept
12 for such occasions). **IL** learned accounting in Germany and founded her own firm,
13 which provides services for Russian speakers.

14 **XS**, living in Italy, does not believe that there is a problem with socialization.
15 For Italians, it is enough to go out to the square to start chatting. By becoming a
16 guide, she helps Russian speakers get acquainted with Italian culture.

17 **AK**, who became a kindergarten teacher in Finland (living there since 1989),
18 has grown accustomed to working in a diverse team and believes that nationality
19 and language are irrelevant to her. What matters is the person, making it easy to
20 communicate and to collaborate. For her, mixed international teams are preferable
21 to homogeneous ones.

22 **CC** from Finland is involved in the global union of Russophone theaters
23 abroad. This amateur movement receives subsidies from the government, often
24 goes on tours, and helps Ukrainian refugees. Her education as a Russian language
25 teacher and theatrical producer allows her to work with groups of different ages in
26 unconventional ways.

27 **AL** from Novosibirsk started working at school while she was a student,
28 teaching French and English. Then she moved on to work at a large company but
29 was heavily involved in training and teaching adults. Later, she went on a
30 volunteer project to India to set up a computer class for children in a boarding
31 school. She married a Frenchman with whom she lived in Strasbourg, France, in
32 the USA, and now in UK. She studied the theory of Russian language teaching,
33 learned through practice, created teaching materials, and worked both offline and
34 online.

35 Polina Zherebtsova is a writer, documentarian, prose writer, and poet, best
36 known for her *Chechen Diaries*. Since 2013, Polina and her husband have been
37 living in Finland, where they were granted political asylum after facing
38 persecution in Russia from both Russians and Chechens for her publications about
39 the war in Chechnya. In her interview she says that the war in Chechnya forced
40 her from her home, and she never took sides, only supported peaceful civilians.
41 Initially hopeful for peace, she faced escalating hostility and even genocide.
42 Coming from a multiethnic family, she witnessed crimes committed by both sides.
43 In Russia's peaceful regions, she felt out of place due to cultural differences and
44 lack of state support. Though she and her mother met kind people, survival was a
45 struggle, and after the war, they were left homeless and unsupported, lacking
46 documents. Now, thank God, she is home. In 2017, Zherebtsova became a Finnish

1 citizen and received the Ernest Hemingway Award, established to support
2 Russian-speaking authors whose works demonstrate a quest for new artistic forms
3 and the expansion of linguistic and semantic boundaries (Shalygina 2018).

4 According to Irina Dorogan, in the 30-million Russian diaspora, seeking
5 connections with ordinary people rather than the highbrow intelligentsia revealed
6 the vulnerability of being an immigrant, despite potential success in salary and
7 societal standing, with few opting for employment at Google, where assimilation
8 into a diverse workforce often leads to a new identity; however, many still
9 experience “Russian longing” and nostalgia, sometimes leading to an unexpected
10 affinity for Putin (Medvedev 2021). A Russophone woman faced psychological
11 barriers due to her profession not being in demand. Having small children, she
12 could not dedicate herself to re-establishing her career. At some point she divorced
13 her husband and changed her name to a Finnish one, after which, she started
14 receiving more interview invitations. Despite defending a doctoral dissertation at
15 the University of Helsinki, another woman encountered challenges in working as a
16 psychologist in Finland due to language requirements and bureaucratic processes,
17 although she planned to help expats in English and Russian only. In Russia, recent
18 changes in childcare emphasize rejecting gender stereotypes simultaneously with
19 the idea of staying at home with a child, summarizes the third communicant. In
20 Finland, they should include measures for integrating foreign mothers and
21 recognize the diversity of immigrant family roles and lifestyles (Shalygina 2021).

22 23 24 **Conclusion**

25
26 The experiences of Russian-speaking female immigrants abroad are shaped
27 by language dynamics, family interactions, and social practices, influencing their
28 communication patterns, integration, and cultural identity. They often act as
29 cultural bridges between their new and old home countries, promoting
30 understanding and facilitating cultural exchange. Despite facing challenges like
31 language barriers and socio-economic mobility, they contribute to their
32 communities through entrepreneurship and education initiatives.

33 Russian female immigrant writers have made significant contributions to
34 literature by sharing their experiences and perspectives of living in a foreign
35 country. Their works often explore themes such as identity, belonging, and cultural
36 displacement, as well as the challenges of adapting to a new society. These writers
37 have provided unique and valuable perspectives on the immigrant experience,
38 enriching the literary landscape and fostering greater understanding and empathy
39 among readers.

40 Language dynamics play a significant role in the social integration of
41 Russophone female emigrants in their host countries. The Russian language serves
42 as a crucial tool for communication within their families, often maintained as the
43 primary language, fostering a sense of cultural continuity and connection to their
44 roots. However, outside familial circles, these emigrants must cope with linguistic
45 and cultural differences, often adapting their communication patterns to fit into
46 their new environment. This balancing act between preserving their cultural

1 identity within their families and adapting to the norms of their host country
 2 reflects the multifaceted roles that Russian-speaking female emigrants assume.
 3 Their experiences highlight the complexities of identity, belonging, and adaptation
 4 in cross-cultural settings, as they formulate their multiple identities and affiliations
 5 while striving to maintain a sense of cultural heritage amidst the challenges of their
 6 new environment.

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