The influence of social factors on the status of Russian language within immigrant families in Germany

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This paper aims to explore the current language situation of Russian-speaking immigrant families in Germany, specifically the influence of social factors on the status of Russian language within them. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Germany was one of the countries to receive a major part of the immigrants from the succession states. The majority of estimated three million Russian-speaking immigrants had little or no knowledge of German when arriving in Germany.

There are several researches about linguistic biographies of immigrants (Berend, 1998; Meng, 2001), about immigrant children and adolescents (Anstatt, Dieser, 2007) and about language contact (Goldbach, 2005; Brehmer, 2007). The present study has a multigenerational character as it investigates the language contact situation in families with children, who made self-recordings by their daily routine at home. Besides it focuses on the differences of the status of Russian language in different immigrant families. Special questions of the study refer to the typology of bilingual speech developed by Auer (1999): Are there some elements of language mixing or even of fused lects in the speech of Russian-speaking immigrants apart from code-switching? How can this typology be used to define the grades of development of a language contact situation? How can this typology help to describe social factors, which are the most relevant for the status of the immigrant language?

The analysis of the data has shown that in different family conversations were found tendencies to code-switching or language mixing and tendencies to the loss of Russian language. Correlating the classifications with social data several important social factors were worked out. The most important factors for the 1st generation are education, the contact to German native speakers and the presence of own children; for the 2nd generation – the contact to Russian native speakers and/or instruction in Russian language.

Keywords: family language, code-switching, language contact Russian-German.