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**Observing Census Enumeration of
Non-English Speaking Households
in 2010 Census: Russian Report**

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Observing Census Enumeration of Non- English Speaking Households in 2010 Census: Russian Report

U.S. Census Bureau standards and quality process procedures were applied throughout the creation of this report.

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Abstract

This study was part of an ethnographic research project in the 2010 Census Assessment and Research Program to observe the 2010 Census Nonresponse Followup (NRFU) interviews with households that speak a language other than English, in areas of the U.S. with heavy concentrations of residents with limited English proficiency. A multilingual research team consisting of seven sub-teams in the seven primary languages (Arabic, Chinese, Korean, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish, and Vietnamese) was commissioned to carry out the research in the 2010 Census.

The objectives of this research were to identify: (1) how language and socio-cultural factors affect the enumeration of non-English-speaking populations during the Nonresponse Followup interview process; (2) what measures were taken by enumerators to negotiate and maintain access to non-English-speaking households and to collect the required census data from these households; (3) how in-language census materials were used in the field; (4) how non-English-speaking immigrant populations perceived and reacted to the census and its public messaging; and (5) what changes, if any, are needed to improve the enumeration process with households that have limited or no English proficiency. Findings from this study will help develop recommendations for planning the 2020 Census, including the Decennial Language Program, questionnaire development, translation of census questions, use of interpreters in enumeration interviews, and interviewer training.

This report presents findings from the Russian research team of bilingual ethnographers who studied the Russian community to highlight the issues observed in the research. While the findings clearly draw attention to the importance of linguistic competency among NRFU enumerators, they also demonstrate that we need more than linguistic competency, language aids, and minority language media campaigns in order to increase successful census participation among linguistic minorities. The negotiation of interview access, effective communication about the census' objectives, the translation of concepts that do not carry conceptual equivalence, the ability to successfully sustain the interview as a communicative event, and ultimately the ability to elicit the information that the census is designed to obtain—are all demonstrated to require robust understandings of the highly differentiated social and cultural contexts of particular immigrant communities. Drawing on findings from the ethnographic study, the report suggests recommendations for planning the 2020 Census.

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1. Introduction

In 2010, the U.S. Census Bureau undertook the decennial census to enumerate the U.S. population, with a mission of counting everyone once, only once, and in the right place. Accurate enumeration of linguistically-isolated households in decennial censuses represents an enormous challenge for the Census Bureau. To meet this challenge, the Census Bureau developed a comprehensive language assistance program, which includes the 2010 Census fulfillment form in the top five non-English languages (Spanish, Chinese, Korean, Russian, and Vietnamese), language assistance guides in 59 languages, and telephone questionnaire assistance in the top five non-English languages.

Despite these measures, as of the time of the 2010 decennial census the Census Bureau still lacked an adequate understanding of how linguistic isolation influenced the census data collection process amongst non-English-speaking households. Since many such households seemed unlikely to respond to the English mail-out/mail-back census questionnaire, it remained likely that the data they would provide would be obtained through face-to-face interviews. Consequently, a comparative study was designed to ethnographically observe Non-Response Follow-up (NRFU) interviews and conduct debriefings with respondents from eight different communities of language in an effort to identify what, if any, social and linguistic factors were affecting the reliability and validity of the NRFU data collected from linguistically-isolated households.

This report focuses on the findings from the Russian research team which was part of the comparative ethnographic study. The Russian team observed census enumeration conducted with households in which Russian was either the primary or only language spoken. Our overarching objective was to assess the extent to which the NRFU interview process obtained valid and satisfactory responses from Russian-speaking respondents, and to assess social, cultural and linguistic factors that created barriers or otherwise mediated that goal. More specifically this study sought to focus on several broad questions addressed by all ethnographic teams in the broader comparative study, namely:

- 1) How did Russian-speaking respondents perceive the census, what factors shaped those perceptions, and how did those perceptions affect their participation in the NRFU interview and the responses they provided?
- 2) How was the interaction between census enumerators and Russian-speaking respondents mediated by cultural, social and linguistic factors and how did these factors affect the NRFU interview?
- 3) How were translation challenges and interpretation needs handled? What effect did these challenges have on the NRFU interview process and the responses elicited? How were these translation challenges and interpretation needs addressed? And what effect did they have on the communicative process?

In order to address these questions, this report first provides a brief overview of the Russian-speaking population in the United States with some additional details about the Russian speakers

in our specific fieldwork sites. The section that follows provides information about the scope and methods employed during this field study. It also discusses some of the limitations of our findings that resulted from inadvertent and unplanned challenges confronted in the field. Subsequently we present our findings, addressing each of the primary questions above in turn.

We start by discussing how Russian speakers' prior experiences in Russia with the state more broadly, and with census operations in that country more specifically affected their perceptions of the 2010 U.S. census operation. We note how both these past experiences with the Russian state and a socially-differentiated array of concerns (for example with the legality of their immigration status) both inform Russian respondents' reactions towards official scrutiny here in the United States. We then focus more specifically on how those perceptions, in conjunction with more narrowly "linguistic factors" (such as terminological non-equivalencies and differences in communicative conventions), influenced the process of negotiating access with these respondents as well as the responses they provided during the course of the NRFU interview.

In the process we also explore the strategies deployed by the enumerators our team observed to cope with these challenges (including translation itself) and assess their relative effectiveness. For reasons detailed in our discussion of methodology, our data highly constrains our ability to speak to the question of interpretation. We do, however, provide some assessment of the Russian-language aid materials and the extent of their use and effectiveness. Finally, the conclusion provides a series of recommendations that might be tested further in order to improve future census operations amongst the Russian-speaking population.

2. Community Background: An Overview of Russian-Speakers in the United States

Over the last century the United States has experienced three primary waves of immigration from Russia (Chiswick 1997; Glad 1999). The earliest of these waves occurred at the turn of the 20th century when Jewish emigrants fled the rising anti-Semitism in Russia. Subsequently large immigration began to arrive after the communist revolution of 1917 forced those Russians opposing the new regime into exile abroad. The size of this wave is disputed. Thus, according to the U.S. Department of Justice (Chiswick, 1997, p. 235), almost a million immigrants from Russia arrived in the U.S. during the revolution and the heyday of Stalinism (the 1930's); while Glad (1999, p. 403) refers to a much smaller number of 103,322 for roughly the same time period (1917-1939), drawing on official U.S. immigration statistics.

In the wake of World War II the second wave was augmented by Russians who had fled to European destinations prior to the war and chose to re-emigrate to the United States after it ended.

Subsequently, and until the early 1970's, there was virtually no immigration from the USSR. During this time period different estimates suggest the United States received only between 5,000 (Chiswick, 1997, p. 235) and 18,400 (Glad, 1999, p. 403) Russian immigrants.

The third and most recent wave of Russian immigration to the U.S. which began in the mid-1970's involved several distinct sub-groups. Throughout the mid- and late-1970's a relatively small number of Russians of Jewish ethnicity began to arrive in the United States. After a lull

throughout early 1980's that reduced Russian immigration again to a mere trickle, this flow increased dramatically with the easing of emigration restrictions in the years just prior to the collapse of the Soviet Union. Thus, as a result, in 1989 alone, 39,600 Russian Jews arrived in the U.S. (Paltiel, Sabatello, & Tal, 1997, p. 288). After 1990 this immigration flow to the U.S. diminished largely as the result of an agreement reached between the U.S. and Israel. In essence this agreement only provided the immediate relatives of naturalized citizens with a direct route to the U.S., while diverting the rest of the Russian Jewish immigration flow to Israel. Notably, while many ethnic Jews in Russia availed themselves of the state of Israel's Law of Return to leave Russia, a number of those who arrived first in Israel eventually re-emigrated to the United States as well.

Following the fall of the Soviet Union, and largely since the turn of the 21st century, yet another group of predominantly non-Jewish Russian emigrants have made their way in growing numbers to the United States. Thus a growing number of Russian scientists and engineers responded to the extremely poor job market in the former USSR and to the liberalization of post-Soviet travel policies by leaving to pursue careers abroad. While a number of these immigrants were able to obtain green cards and entered the U.S. through legal means, the economic turbulence of the first two post-Soviet decades compelled many other Russians to enter (or remain in) the U.S. as undocumented immigrants. Although there is no precise or reliable information on the exact number of undocumented Russian immigrants in the U.S., some indication of significance of their presence is reflected in the extent to which their plight remains a prominent topic of discussion in Russian language media.

Some of the largest communities of Russian-born immigrants in the U.S. have been established in several of New York City's boroughs. Over a quarter of a million of Russian-born immigrants were already estimated to be living in New York City over a decade ago (Glad, 1999). More recently, other major American cities that have come to host significant populations of Russian-born immigrants include Chicago, Cleveland, Detroit, Philadelphia, Miami, San Francisco, Washington, DC, Los Angeles, Boston, and Houston. At the same time significant concentrations have also emerged in many smaller metropolitan areas as well.

Very few in-depth or reliably representative studies of recent Russian immigrants to the United States exist, making valid generalizations about this population difficult to make. To the extent that the Jewish population in the USSR was known to be relatively highly educated (Isurin, 2011; Remennick, 2007), and that other Russian immigrants have tended to have professional qualifications, it is probable that Russian-born immigrants as a whole are a relatively highly educated group. Moreover it seems likely that those who remain most linguistically isolated are unlikely to be individuals pursuing professional careers. By way of contrast their elderly relatives who may accompany them, or more elderly individuals who have immigrated on their own, seem the most likely to restrict their interaction to a network of fellow Russian speakers. This is certainly the view that seems to circulate within the Russian-speaking community. Although broad generalizations should certainly not be drawn based on either popular discourse, nor on our own limited and non-random sample in this study, these characterizations seemed consistent with what we also observed. Our field teams thus found that a preponderance of the Russian-only speakers that were interviewed by the bilingual Russian-speaking NRFU enumerators whom we

observed tended to be significantly older than the English-speaking counterparts we observed, tended to live alone (54%), and often in subsidized housing (39%) (see Table 1 below).

3. Study Scope and Methods

The Russian field research team consisted of three researchers. The team leader was a native Russian speaker who was an expert in Russian-English bilingualism and Russian immigration. The other two members were fully fluent English-Russian bilinguals pursuing a graduate degree in Russian studies. The majority of Russian NRFU cases were personally observed by the team leader.

In this study our field team's observations were carried out in two different locations, one being the greater New York City metropolitan area (known to have the largest concentration of Russian-born immigrants in the US); and another in a location in the state of Ohio with a less well-known and yet still significant concentration of Russian-born immigrants numbering in the several thousands. Between May 10 and June 16, 2010 a total of 67 NRFU interviews with Russian respondents were observed, along with 36 NRFU interviews conducted with English speakers. In accordance with our research protocol a subsequent debriefing interview was conducted by our researchers with 63 of the 67 Russian respondents (4 refused these interviews). The objective of these debriefing interviews was to obtain additional insight into how Russian respondents with little or no ability to speak English understood and experienced the NRFU interview process. In our original field study plan the majority of observations were supposed to take place in the Ohio area. However, numerous unexpected bureaucratic hurdles prevented our research team from getting into the field at the time when most Russian NRFU interviews were being conducted in Ohio. Therefore the study was redirected to include the New York City metropolitan area. Ultimately, the majority (52 cases, 78%), of the observed interviews among Russian respondents were residents of New York City, with the remaining 15 (22%) residents in Ohio. All observations of NRFU interviews with English-language speakers (the control group) took place in Ohio (as per the original plan).

Half (33) of the observed Russian participants resided in apartment buildings while another significant number (26) lived in government subsidized housing. The high percentage of respondents living in government subsidized housing is probably an indication of the relatively low socio-economic status of a significant portion of the Russian immigrants whose NRFU interviews we observed.

More than half of the Russian respondents we observed were 70 years of age or older (in contrast to a far younger age distribution amongst the English-speaking respondents that we observed). Most of these Russian immigrants came to the U.S. at an advanced age, and have never been employed in this country, nor learned the English language. For many of these older Russian speakers, the subsidized housing in which they live provides them with a community of other immigrants from the same social, cultural and linguistic background. This housing thus appears to meet more than an economic need, in that it also provides a milieu for meaningful social interaction that can be conducted in their native language and does not require learning English.

The Russian respondents whom our field team observed were predominantly females (72%), mostly single (54%) and were mostly present alone during the interview (77%). In these respects the Russian respondents that we observed contrasted with the English respondents that we observed, in that the majority of English respondents resided with at least one other person and the gender balance of respondents was far more even (only 58% were female). Table 1 provides a summary description of the demographics of both our English and Russian-speaking respondents:

Table 1. Demographics of Respondents observed

Language	Research Sites	Age/Gender							
		Under 30		31-50		51-69		70+	
		Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	female	Male	Female
Russian	NY	1	7	5	8	3	4	7	17
	Ohio	1	0	0	1	0	0	2	11
English	Ohio	10	8	2	6	1	1	3	4

The primary purpose of the study was to observe how Russian-speaking households in which English was spoken little or not at all handled the NRFU interview. Ultimately 85 percent of the Russian participants observed and then subsequently interviewed in our fieldwork met this criterion in that they reported “poor” or “no” proficiency in English.

In fact an important point to note is that the majority of the NRFU interviews that our field team observed were cases in which respondents had already requested a Russian-speaking enumerator as a result of a previous visit by a non-Russian speaking enumerator. These were thus second NRFU visits in which a Russian-speaking enumerator was sent to deal with non-English (and presumed as Russian) speakers (66%). Only eight (12%) interviews that we observed did not fall into this category and involved three enumerators who had to resort to an interpreter¹.

This fact has some bearing on the extent to which our observations are able to address some of our initial core questions. In particular the very limited number of observations we were able to make of interactions between monolingual Russian-speaking respondents and monolingual English-speaking enumerators provided us with more limited opportunities than we had hoped for to observe instances of interpretation. Since we were only able to observe three enumerators who had no knowledge of the Russian language, we have only the most limited basis for comparing the strategies used by Russian-speaking enumerators to negotiate access and to cope with potential threats to successful social interaction, with those deployed by enumerators who did not have Russian language skills or knowledge of communicative conventions specific to this community of language.

On the other hand, the fact that most of the interviews we observed were conducted by fluent Russian enumerators did provide us with ample opportunity to observe how translation-on-the-

¹ Only a few interviews involving an English-speaking enumerator were observed in Ohio before the study had to be re-directed (for logistical reasons) to the greater New York City metropolitan area, where all observations involved second NRFU interviews that were conducted by Russian-speaking enumerators.

fly was handled (including how they met the challenges posed by English-language terms lacking ready conceptual equivalency in Russian). We were also able to observe how these culturally-knowledgeable interviewers coped with a variety of interactional challenges that arose in the course of the interview. Many of these challenges were a result of differences in culturally shaped understandings about the census process itself or in communicative and social conventions.

4. Findings

4.1. Perceptions of the Census Process

Altogether 63 Russian-speaking respondents were debriefed by a member of our field study research team. These debriefings focused in particular on eliciting more information about Russian-speaking respondents' perception of the census questionnaire and process. The debriefing first posed questions concerning the respondents' general familiarity with the census procedure, both in the U.S. and Russia. It also sought to explore whether the respondents' experience with state authority in both the past (with Soviet authoritarian regimes) and in the present (with the U.S. government) had any bearing on their perceptions of and participation in census in the ongoing 2010 census procedure.

Of the 63 monolingual Russian-speaking respondents debriefed in this field study, almost two thirds (63%) had participated in a census back in the USSR. Another 18 percent had also participated in a previous U.S. census operation.

Amongst those who reported prior experience with the census in Russia, just under a third (31%) noted significant procedural differences between the Russian and U.S. census. In particular, respondents observed that in the Russian census in which they had participated, the forms had not been mailed and that the enumeration had been conducted by schoolchildren (rather than by strangers bearing official credentials). Another notable procedural difference that was often highlighted was that in the Russian census only one interview took place. Our field team interpreted this as a comparison that appeared to be drawn unfavorably vis-a-vis the U.S. census in which respondents had experienced multiple interview attempts, or in which interviews had been conducted after forms had (according to the respondents) already been returned. The perception of interview redundancy seemed to foster suspicions about potential ulterior motives. It is also possible that highlighting the difference between school children and "officials" flagged some of the generalized discomfort with the U.S. census procedure that our field team observed in this target language group.

A much larger percentage (69%) of the monolingual Russian-speaking respondents who had previously experienced a census in Russia highlighted major differences between the questions that were asked in the Russian and American censuses. The most noted difference in the questions asked by these two censuses concerned forms of social group identity affiliation. In this respect the "race" and (Hispanic) "ethnicity" questions in the American census represented a noticeable departure from both Russian census practice and from other forms of government-sponsored affiliation assignment. We discuss the effect of this difference at greater length later in this report in the section on "problematic questions." Another question that most respondents

highlighted as different (and that many reacted to with hesitancy and reluctance) was the request for a telephone number at the conclusion of the interview.

Throughout the course of the debriefings a variety of reasons for this reaction became evident. First, such a question would have made little sense in earlier Russian censuses because few people had telephones at the time when these immigrants had resided in that country. However, in the “problematic question” section we also discuss why this question appeared to raise suspicions and concerns amongst these respondents about whether ulterior motives and unwanted state surveillance might be in play.

All of the Russian-speaking respondents debriefed by our field team indicated that they knew that participation in the U.S. census was required, although only 47 percent knew it was a requirement enshrined in law. Notably just over one quarter (26%) of the respondents who knew that participation was required believed that this stipulation applied only to U.S. citizens and to those immigrants with legal documents. Some of these respondents believed that illegal immigrants in particular actually should not participate in the census. Some legal immigrants with Green Cards also posited that because they were not qualified to participate in elections, they understood that they should not participate in the census either. Such responses suggest that a certain degree of confusion concerning the right and requirement to participate in the census persists amongst Russian speakers and thus that more work needs may be required in order to clarify this point within this population.

The respondents we debriefed were also asked about what they believed was done with the data that was collected from them by the U.S. census – and more specifically if other agencies might have access to that data and which agencies might have access to it. The majority of the respondents (57%) either did not know what was done with the data or who had access to it while another significant percentage (27%) specified that the data went to “the government.” Only 8 percent of the respondents knew that the data collected from them only went to the Census Bureau. When asked the more specific question about whether they believed their data would be shared with, or be accessible to, other agencies besides the Census Bureau, only 21 percent confidently responded that they did not believe the information would make its way to other agencies. The more general conviction registered amongst the respondents was that the results would be shared with any and all other U.S. government agencies that might wish to use it. This too is obviously an area in which more effective messaging strategies may need to be crafted for this community of language.

In the course of our debriefing interviews, respondents were also asked broader questions about whether their experiences with government authorities in the past in Russia had any bearing on their perceptions of comparable government-sponsored activities in the United States. When posed directly with the question of whether their Soviet past had any impact on their attitude to comparable government-sponsored activities in the U.S., the majority (78%) of respondents claimed that past had no impact on their attitude toward a government-run activity like the U.S. census, while a small number of respondents (10%) chose to respond “I don’t know.” However, our field team observed that there was almost a universal hesitancy with which many respondents fielded these questions. The research team concluded that this readily-observed hesitancy probably indicated that most respondents crafted their answers with a variety of

concerns in mind rather than merely providing information that reflected their most accurate response to the substance of the question. That interpretation seems to be reinforced by the responses of yet others who, rather than responding to the question itself, instead quickly offered an expression of loyalty and support to the government (“We agree with everything”). In the field team’s view the hesitant mode in which these responses were provided should probably be interpreted in light of the deep-seated concern with the potential negative consequences of openly criticizing any government actions that may have been inherited from Soviet times. Moreover the 12 percent of the respondents who did openly affirm any connection between their past experience with state-sponsored activity in Russia and their view of the U.S. census as a state-sponsored activity all highlighted how that past experience generally heightened their generalized concerns with the effects of state surveillance (including the U.S. census itself).

4.2. Negotiating Access and Securing Rapport

The enumerators that we observed confronted several challenges in negotiating initial access to respondents and then in establishing and maintaining rapport that was conducive to the successful solicitation of reliable responses from their Russian-speaking respondents. We have already discussed above one of the factors that inhibited access and rapport, namely perceptions of state authority and state-sponsored activity. In this section we also highlight another set of factors that posed access and rapport-maintenance challenges for enumerators: those occasioned by the inadvertent meta-communicative effects of the prescribed census protocol. More specifically we will discuss how some of the procedural rules that enumerators were trained to follow inadvertently violated certain expectations about social interaction held by Russian speakers who had been raised in another cultural context. We then summarize the strategies that enumerators deployed to cope with these challenges—including the rationale behind significant deviations from prescribed protocol. We also discuss the observed effects of these strategies in meeting the challenges of negotiating access and maintaining rapport. Particular census questions also posed significant access and rapport maintenance challenges. Given that the meta-communicative effects of these questions were only one amongst several aspects that made them problematic (translatability was another aspect), we analyze these in a separate subsequent section of its own.²

² One important factor that is likely to influence the negotiation of access and maintenance of rapport was linguistic differences between enumerators and respondents. However we had very few opportunities to observe any enumerators who were not fluent in Russian. The overwhelming majority of the Russian-monolingual speakers whom we interviewed expressed a strong preference for a Russian-speaking enumerator. This observation is neither surprising nor particularly informative because almost all the cases that we observed and debriefed were individuals who had already been identified in previous visits by other NRFU enumerators as individuals who should be visited by the Russian-speaking enumerators. Lacking any robust comparison with those who may have responded to non-Russian enumerators rather than requesting Russian-speaking ones, we can only draw weak inferences from the expressions of preference collected in our debriefings. With these caveats we nevertheless report the following results from the debriefing interviews: The majority of the respondents (76%) debriefed by our field team openly stated that they preferred to deal with a Russian-speaking enumerator. Some of these explained this preference by stating that they distrusted “foreigners” (a reference to English-speakers in general), who did not understand what they wanted. Only one respondent voted firmly for an American enumerator stating that she did not trust Russians because of “all the anti-Semitism that she had been subjected to in Russia.” Elderly participants seemed to be the most strident in stating their strong preference for an enumerator who shared their language and culture.

4.2.1. Negotiating Access: Russian Responsiveness to “Imperative” Approaches

From our observations, we noticed that one of the most effective ways to induce participation in the NRFU interview from even the most reticent of Russian speakers was for enumerators to underscore that participation in the census interview was required as a matter of legal compliance. One of the most effective enumerators observed in swaying reluctant Russian respondents would knock loudly on their doors and announce in a loud and commanding tone: “United States Federal Government, Census Bureau!” After having announced himself, he would then say his name and bring his badge (a sign of his official stature) closer to the door for respondents to see (through the peep hole). Whereas less imperious enumerators had greater difficulty and sometimes even failed to gain access to Russian respondents (some of which our field team could at times hear speaking in Russian behind unopened doors), in every case Russian respondents opened the door for this particular enumerator.

In the view of our Russian research team, the effectiveness of what might be termed an “imperative approach” in securing participation may well reflect a form of social conditioning about how to handle state authority and demands that may be somewhat specific to the Russian case. Thus, under the Soviet regime many Russians learned that one of the best strategies for preventing the intrusion of government authorities was to avoid behavior that might invite any special scrutiny. This obviously included any flagrant violations of the law but also conditioned individuals to pay particular attention to being responsive to routine administrative requirements and bureaucratic demands when these were directly posed by government agents. By crossing their “t’s” and dotting their “i’s” (so to speak) Russians could avoid providing any “excuse” or rationale for special additional (and unwanted) attention. A rough analogy might be drawn to the extra care drivers might have in observing the speed limit when they are aware that a police patrol car is immediately behind them, or when they have been warned by other motorists of an upcoming speed trap. Independent support for this interpretation is provided in the debriefing interviews themselves. Thus all of the Russian respondents who stated in the debriefing interview that they had not been aware that participation in the census was actually a legal requirement, also noted that they would have more been more readily responsive had they been aware of that fact.

4.2.2. Securing Rapport: Personalizing Interaction

While our research team noted that an authoritative approach proved effective in securing initial access, it also noted that the subsequent task of building rapport that facilitated the flow of reliable information presented enumerators with a different challenge – that is, to establish an almost diametrically opposed sense of personal connection that could dispel the apparent discomfort and suspicions that had been predicted and ultimately observed in most Russian respondents.

Drawing on her extensive previous ethnographic and sociolinguistic research with Russian immigrants (Isurin, L., 2007; Isurin, 2011; Isurin, under review), the lead researcher (Isurin) of the Russian team for this specific field study had hypothesized that Russian monolingual respondents would generally be more uncomfortable with the NRFU interview process, more reluctant to participate in it, and generally less forthcoming – posing challenges that NRFU

enumerators would need to overcome. This reticence was deemed to be a likely product of several specific socio-historical factors. One of these is a posture of suspicion about the intentions of state authorities and a generalized reluctance to interact with them that many respondents (and particularly those who were older and/or part of a minority, Jewish in particular, that had suffered discrimination) would have acquired as subjects of a totalitarian regime. Another factor conducive to such reticence would be illegal status in the U.S. (predominantly a problem for younger respondents of Russian or other Slavic ethnicity) that would furnish other reasons to evade surveillance by the government in this country. More generally she argued that ethnographic evidence established that Russian culture, as a particular type of collectivist culture, predisposes people to treat those who are not part of one's own recognized social circle with a greater degree of indifference or even what might be seen as hostility compared to interactional norms that might broadly prevail in American society (Triandis, 1989; 1990; 2001).

Drawing on her own expertise as a Russian ethnographer and sociolinguist experienced in discourse analysis, the lead researcher of the Russian team developed an observational protocol that utilized culturally-specific indicators to code the level of respondent discomfort at the beginning and end of the NRFU interview. She used several independent measures³ to code discomfort as displayed through respondent behavior and verbal utterances. As summarized in the tables below, she found much higher levels of discomfort among Russian respondents than English-speaking respondents both at the beginning of the interviews and throughout their full course. The Russian respondents were almost twice (56%) as likely to begin the interview in some state of observable social discomfort than their English-speaking counterparts (30%).

³ All cases were coded in terms of the level of comfort that the respondents showed at the beginning and at the end of the interview. The level of comfort was classified using the following terminology: uncomfortable and almost hostile, uncomfortable and distant, neutral and indifferent, friendly but distant, comfortable and relaxed. The assignment of different levels of comfort was based on an assessment of the respondent's facial expressions, posture, behavior and the researcher's knowledge of the cultural norms pertaining to each described behavior in the Russian and English-speaking context. The majority of the English language interviews were observed and coded by native speakers of English on our research team while the majority of the Russian language interviews were observed and coded by a native speaker of Russian. Two additional behaviors in this study were observed and systematically coded as additional (and independent) measures that could provide culturally significant indicators of the comfort level of Russian respondents in the interview. These two indicators were the seating arrangement and the location in which the interview was held. Both of these behaviors provide important indications in the Russian cultural context in particular. Whether enumerators were ultimately invited in or allowed to conduct the NRFU interview outside and the way in which seating arrangements were organized provided cultural-telling indicator to the ethnographic observer about the level of comfort of Russian respondents. The summarized findings here report only on the "observed comfort" measurements though these largely dovetailed with our findings from the analysis of interview location and seating arrangements. The more detailed description and the full range of results of all aspects of the observational assessment can be found in the interim report on the Russian field study.

Table 2. Observed Comfort level at Beginning and End of NRFU Interview: Comparison of Russian with English speaking respondents

	Comfort level	Uncomfortable, almost hostile	Uncomfortable and formal	Neutral and indifferent	Friendly /formal	Comfortable and informal
	Point in Interview					
Russian Speakers N=67	Beginning	13%	43%	18%	19%	7%
	End	10%	18%	16%	33%	23%
English Speakers N=37	Beginning	0	30.7%	50%	11.1%	11.1%
	End	2.7%	8.3%	19.4%	41.6%	30.7%

The observed level of discomfort amongst Russian respondents not only heightened the challenge of securing access but was also observed to detrimentally affect the question/response process throughout the course of the NRFU interview. Familiar with the social background and meta-communicative strategies operative in this community of language, the ethnographic team readily recognized the tendency for respondents to resort to answers such as “I do not remember” or “I do not know” as the deployment of a well-worn repertoire of strategies that Russians have long used to deflect unwanted official inquiry.

Decreasing this discomfort and securing the trust of respondents in order to generate more forthcoming responses thus required skillful modulation and re-negotiation of the interview’s “social register” (Pan and Lubkemann, forthcoming). Thus, after initially asserting their authority, bilingual enumerators usually drew on their own knowledge of the communicative conventions and interactional norms within this community of language in an effort to reframe the interview in culturally recognizable ways as a “social visit” (inspiring confidence and truthful responses) rather than as an “official interrogation” (likely to invite evasiveness, non-responsiveness, and possibly even deception).

As Russian speakers are familiar with the communicative conventions and the broader interactional expectations of this socio-cultural group, the bilingual enumerators that our team observed deployed a variety of strategies to cope with the challenges of evasiveness and non-responsiveness. One of the most commonly observed strategies involved breaking with prescribed protocol by accepting invitations to enter the house of respondents. Even though these enumerators had been trained not to enter the respondents’ houses and to maintain a strict focus on their role as census employees and the task of census data collection, most of these enumerators opted to be responsive to offers of hospitality (when these were offered) that required them to enter Russian-speaking respondent’s homes and interact with them on a more personal basis.

Debriefings with the enumerators confirmed that their rationale for accepting such offers stemmed from their recognition of these offers as a form of culturally-scripted “litmus test” of their trustworthiness. Through these offers respondents were seeking to understand how the

enumerators themselves defined the interview and thus by extension to determine the extent to which they should and would be forthcoming in any responses they provided. Enumerators recognized that in the Russian cultural context any rejection of an invitation to come inside the house would be taken as an insult to the respondent who had offered his or her hospitality and an indication that the enumerator him- or herself might even have hostile intentions. Such a refusal would by default reinforce the enumerator's status as a "stranger" and subject him/her to the culturally predisposed negative attitude that status would invite—and thus actually be likely to make the data collection process even harder. By accepting such invitations, and by engaging with respondents in a less formal manner than the prescribed script would permit, the enumerators could conversely offer a clear signal that would likely allay respondent fears or suspicions about the enumerator's intentions and thus facilitate the information solicitation process.

In their debriefings, all of the Russian-speaking enumerators affirmed that one of their primary strategies for establishing rapport with Russian-speaking respondents was to seek to establish some form of personal connection with them. This could take many different forms, ranging from interjections of humor to extensive discursive detours that addressed a range of issues and concerns of interest to the respondents but generally had little or nothing to do with the census questions or process per se. The text box below provides an example⁴ of such a discursive detour that has been subjected to more detailed discourse analysis:

TEXT BOX 1

Excerpt 1 from R7 (*present: E, R, U*⁵)

1. U: [no nono, skol'ko vam let?]

2. =no nono, how old are you?

3. R: 94 ½ [daže]

4. = even...

5. U: [oh, xorošo vyglidite]

6. = Oh, you look great.

8. R: [v avguste mne budet 95 let]

9. = In August I'll be 95 years old.

10. U: "94". She looks good. (laughs)

11. E: Good! Oh, man. Oh, month and the date.

12. U: [Rodilis' ešče do revolucii?]

13. = You were born before the Revolution?

14. R: [da. ešče do revolusii.]

15. = Yes. Before the revolution

16. And then a few lines later there is a diversion from the interview process.

17. U: [vy ne pomnite?] (laughs)

⁴ These examples are drawn from a much more extensive number of interviews that were subjected to detailed discourse analysis by the Russian field team research leader (Isurin). Procedurally: her analysis tracked the level of respondent comfort in the interview, focusing on three variables: adherence or lack thereof to the script provided to the enumerators in the delivery of questions, the speech contour of the interactants, and finally the topical relevance of turns.

⁵ Ethnographer acts as an interpreter here.

18. = *Do you remember?*

19. R: [*Pomnju revoluciju, pomnju voinu, vse pomnju*]

20. = *I remember the revolution, I remember the war, I remember it all.*

21. U: *Wow. [kakaja vašanacial'nost' ?]*

22. = *What's your nationality.*

Discourse analysis: In line with the work of Jefferson (1972) and Brouwer (1997), what seems to develop in this extract is a side sequence wherein the interlocutors set the “official” task at hand (i.e., collecting information directly requested in the census questionnaire) aside and take a discursive detour that focuses on other social tasks, interests, and signals in order to foster a higher level of respondent comfort. The side sequence begins on line 5 of the excerpt where the ethnographer (U) offers a compliment to the respondent (R). This helps to foster an environment that is more personal and more in line with a personal encounter rather than a formal interview. This personal compliment is later supplemented in line 17 by a line of questioning that refers to R’s personal history and her recollection of a specific historical event – the (Russian) revolution. This is a specific historical referent that in itself signals a sense of common identity between the enumerator and the respondent since it would not be one likely known by a non-Russian enumerator. Note that in both instances it is the ethnographer (U) who initiates the side sequence. Moreover several phonetic features that are less readily apparent in a textual analysis (such as the rising intonation in line 5 and the increased rate of speech) signal less formal forms of speech that would be expected in a transaction with “government authorities” in a Russian social context.

The bilingual enumerators that our field team observed also sought to secure rapport with Russian-speaking respondents by showing personal interest in the respondent (such as asking questions about their family, their health). In some cases enumerators even went so far as to offer to provide post-interview assistance with matters entirely unrelated to the NRFU interview. It was thus not uncommon for bilingual enumerators to offer their Russian-speaking respondents contacts or references for assistance in other matters—or to promise to call those respondents later in order to provide such contacts. In one case a male enumerator asked the respondent about her injured arm and showed a genuine concern about the woman being home alone and not having help. His suggestion that he could contact a few possible people who might assist her visibly warmed up the interaction and led to an invitation to enter the house which he accepted. As our field team observed this kind of departure from the protocol, it generally appeared to have salutary effects on the interview process. Establishing a closer relationship with the respondent based on attention to issues other than those specific to the interview procedure seemed to promote more effective communicative behavior within the interview itself.

In contrast to the bilingual enumerators, the non-Russian enumerators our team observed generally did not enter the houses of Russian respondents, invitations notwithstanding--thus following the recommendation obtained during their training (in exceptional cases they accepted an invitation if they deemed an elderly respondent too frail to stand at the door). Perhaps of greater interest is the fact that the bilingual enumerators themselves tended to only deploy the aforementioned interactional strategies when they encountered Russian respondents, sticking much closer to the script when interviewing English-speaking households. By way of illustration the table below provides a summary of the communicative strategies that our team observed

enumerators using with Russian speakers as well as those they used in interviewing English-speaking respondents. It is not a strict tabulation; rather, it is provided primarily for heuristic purposes that aim to draw a general contrast.

Table 3. Comparison of Enumerator Interaction strategies with Russian and English respondents

Typically Observed Enumerator Strategy utilized with:	Russian respondents	English respondents
Introduction	<p>Formal authoritative: no refusals but low comfort level at the beginning of the interview.</p> <p>Less formal: does not eliminate refusals but creates more comfort at the beginning of the interview.</p> <p>Starting the interview in the target language worked positively.</p>	<p>Formal: accepted by the respondents as a norm, refusals happen.</p> <p>Less formal: perceived by the respondents as more natural, refusals happen.</p>
General mood of the interview	Trying to be more personal, asking irrelevant questions about the respondent's life and family, relating to the respondent by offering their own stories, showing sincere interest and concern, making compliments on the appearance and the residence worked positively.	Being formal and completing the interview according the protocol is expected. However, humor and occasional departures from the formal behavior are appreciated.
Place of the interview	Accepting an invitation to come inside promotes general comfort.	Observing privacy and making no attempt to enter the house or solicit such an invitation
Language	Using less formal register in asking the questions, streamlining long questions and skipping "self-evident" questions is a common strategy.	Sticking closely to the script and reading all questions verbatim
Interview duration	Prolonging visit if the respondent wants to extend his/her hospitality .	Keeping the interview to the minimum is expected, overstaying does not work positively.
Wrap-up	Shaking hands, giving hugs or even kisses can be expected in those instances where the interview ended at a high level of comfort.	Formal departure.
Post-interview contacts	Elderly respondents tend to establish a friendly rapport with the enumerator and invite the individual to come again. Some enumerators offer help regarding the respondent's personal matters. The latter is a clear violation of the protocol but is perceived acceptable by Russian enumerators and respondents.	Never broached

4.3. Problematic Questions

While our field study was unable to ascertain the extent to which fluency in Russian affected the NRFU interviews, we were able to observe the difficulties that ensued when either bilingual enumerators (or in a few cases bilingual interpreters brought by an enumerator) sought to translate on-the-fly. This proved to be particularly the case for a rather select suite of questions in which a lack of conceptual equivalency appeared to present even fluent Russian-speaking enumerators with translation challenges. In just over a third (34%) of the NRFU interviews with Russian-speakers that we observed, one or more conceptual equivalency problems affected comprehension during the course of the interview. This type of problem was most apparent in the questions that asked about race and ethnicity. Another question that raised a conceptual equivalency challenge was that about home ownership/rent.

However, other questions proved problematic because they raised flags for respondents who wondered whether they might in fact be indirect probes for information that they felt uncomfortable revealing. These included the “date of birth” question as well as the request for the respondent’s telephone number that the NRFU protocol prescribes at the conclusion the interview.

Yet other questions posed a different form of interactional problem because they threatened to cause inadvertent social affront and to violate interactional or communicative norms. Examples of such questions that we discuss include the question about sex and also about the biological parentage of children (i.e., adoption).

Notably, more than one of the aforementioned issues rendered some questions problematic, thus compounding the challenge of eliciting valid responses. As discussed below, an example of such a question was the “April 1 residency” question. In the course of documenting how and why these questions proved problematic we also detail the strategies that bilingual enumerators deployed to cope with these challenges.

We identify the aforementioned types of problematic questions in three categories: ‘lack of conceptual equivalency’, ‘ulterior signaling,’ and ‘inadvertent social affront’ (see Pan and Lubkemann, 2012). They are defined below:

1. *lack of conceptual equivalency* between the ideas invoked by certain English terms and the terms available or used in their stead in other languages;
2. *inadvertent social affront*, involving situations in which the question itself proved provocative or offensive to members of a particular community of language in a manner that would typically not be the case for American English speakers;
3. *ulterior signaling*, involving situations in which the particular terminology and structure of the question inadvertently raised respondent suspicions that the question was being asked to serve some ulterior motive (usually assumed by the respondents to be undesirable).

Next we provide examples of their application to the problems we observed. Table 4 outlines three most problematic questions as a way to illustrate the scope of the challenge. Our discussion that follows will deal with other questions as well.

Table 4. Summary of Questions Posing the Greatest Difficulty Amongst Russian NRFU Respondents

Question	Percent of Respondents confused
What is your race?	74%
Do you rent or own the place? Mortgage or no mortgage?	26.1%
Has anyone else lived here on April 1, 2010?	13%

4.3.1. Problematic question 1 (lack of conceptual equivalency): Race, ethnicity and self-identification

The question that proved to be far and away the most problematic for Russian-speaking respondents was the “race” question (and the related Hispanic ethnicity question). Among those respondents who found some census questions problematic, almost three quarters (74%) of the Russian-speaking respondents demonstrated some form of confusion over this question. This confusion can be explained in large part only by relating it to the economy of identity categories operative in the Russian context in which most of these respondents were socialized. These problems thus ultimately proved to be ones of a lack of conceptual equivalency.

People born in the USSR were assigned a “nationality” that designated a sense of “social identity” in which ethnic boundaries (Barth, 1967) were marked through forms of difference that were very particular to Russia’s historical context. Thus for example, “Russian,” “Ukrainian,” and “Jewish” were all possible variants of “nationality” that could be listed on a bearer’s passport or identification documents—even if these factor as categorically different types of difference (e.g., national citizenship, ethnicity, and religion) in the social context of the United States (Andrews, 1998; Remenninck, 2007). In the Russian context this “nationality” was imposed on citizens from birth, registered in the official forms of identity documentation they used on a daily basis, and generally precluded any form of negotiation on the individual’s part in terms of determining one’s own identity (Isurin, 2011; Isurin, under review). Furthermore, the assignment of “nationality” contributed to the stigmatization of particular minorities (such as Russian Jews).

Meanwhile, other criteria for social differentiation that factor prominently in shaping identity categories in the United States—such as the role of skin phenotype in the assignment of “race”—were relatively alien to the Russian experience, at least until these immigrants arrived in the United States. Not surprisingly, the question about “race” posed problems of conceptual non-equivalency for both Russian-speaking enumerators and respondents. In many cases the Russian respondents appeared to interpret the race question as one about their “nationality” and to then apply a Russian social classificatory scheme in crafting their response. Thus for example, at least half of those whose last names were taken by the ethnographic field team as indicative of the

likelihood of Jewish origin responded to the race question by listing themselves as “Jewish.” While this is a category of “nationality” in Russian social classificatory schemes, it is not in American racial schemes. Thus, by way of contrast, English-speaking respondents who could invoke Jewish ancestry did not do so when asked about their “race,” generally responding instead that they were “white.”

Other respondents observed in this study simply listed their race as “Russian” (including some who could have opted to be listed as “Jewish”). This may reflect an application of the classificatory logic of “nationality” to a new context in which they as immigrants in U.S. society find themselves often ascribed as “Russian” by American counterparts. Again, if those same American counterparts were asked the race of these Russians, they would be likely to describe them as “white.” The fact that some Russian respondents themselves answered a question about their race by referring to their nationality likely indicates that they were applying the logic of Russian social classification in the American context rather than a different logic (of American provenience) altogether. We observed that elderly respondents tended to adhere more closely and consistently to Russian identity categories in their responses to the race question, while younger respondents proved more variable and flexible.

Although not consistently, many of the Russian-speaking enumerators (or interpreters) that our field team observed often translated the term “race” with the Russian term “nationality” to which Russian respondents could more readily relate. Others actually did not even ask the question but simply filled in the line with reference to the Russian notion of nationality simply based on the following logic: if the person speaks Russian he/she must be Russian. In such cases the additional categorization of “white” was also sometimes added—but again not in any consistent manner across all cases and enumerators/interpreters. This is also a likely explanation for why the “Hispanic identity” question was often skipped by the same enumerators. In this sense the Russian notion of “nationality” roughly conflates American notions of “race” and “ethnicity” and thus would seem largely redundant.

Perhaps the most significant finding is that in struggling to translate this question (and the related Hispanic origin question) enumerators proved remarkably inconsistent in how they ultimately phrased this question or whether they even posed the question at all. Our field teams did observe that both the way in which the race question was initially posed and its later elaboration seemed to affect responses by triggering different forms of initial social reference and self-identification. Thus whereas the majority of respondents tended to identify themselves by resorting first and foremost to Russian “nationality” categories, whether they also identified with another category could easily be affected by how the question was posed by the enumerators. This is illustrated in the following example: when one respondent did not understand the question of race, the enumerator suggested possible answers: White/Black/Russian. The respondent exclaimed: “I am Jewish!” Our team noted that when the enumerator subsequently asked “are you white?” (which was not always the case), respondents who had used a Russian nationality category almost invariably said yes.

4.3.2. Problematic question 2 (lack of conceptual equivalency): Do you rent or own the place?

The question about rent/ownership also proved confusing to some Russian-speaking respondents, who reported their monthly rent instead of answering with a simple “yes” or “no.” Some responded that they did not “own” the property since it was owned by a bank to which they paid monthly mortgage payments. At least one respondent was infuriated at the question, indicating that he saw it as an unwarranted invasion of his privacy. Social and historical context helps explain this range of reactions.

For the majority of Russian immigrants--and especially those who grew up during the Soviet regime--the very concept of home ownership or rent is somewhat novel. In the USSR there was no private property and people lived in government subsidized housing subject to a monthly fee. The linguistic term “*kvartplata*” (literally, payment for the apartment) does not provide an exact equivalent for the English term “rent.”⁶ Thus, some elderly Russians struggled with a lexical term that has no readily corresponding concept in Russian. Cultural differences in how the term “ownership” is understood appear to have also come into play. Thus, to most Russians, “owning” a property implies that there are no outstanding obligations to any third party. Thus if you still have a mortgage on your house most Russians would consider the bank to still be the “owner.” The following excerpt illustrates this type of confusion in a recorded NRFU interview:

Excerpt 2 from R64 (present: R, E, I, U)

1. *E: Okay um, do you or does someone in this household own this apartment with a*
2. *mortgage or loan, including home equity loans, own it free and clear, rent it, or*
3. *occupy it without having to pay rent?*
4. *I: [Vy ili kto-to drugoi, uh, vladejete etim apartmentom uh bez... I dazhe*
5. *esli u vas est' mortgage?]*
6. *= Do you or someone else uh own this apartment? Uh without and even if you have a*
7. *mortgage?*
8. *R: [ya ne pominaju, kak-to]*
9. *= I don't understand, what?*
10. *I: I don't understand the question, this is not my property*
11. *E: Okay. If she, if she rents it that's one of the choices. All this thing, it's one of four*
12. *choices. It's, like, own it with a mortgage or loan including a home equity loan, OR*
13. *own it free and clear without a mortgage or loan OR, rent it OR occupy it without*
14. *payment of rent.*
15. *I: Every single person rents it here.*
16. *E: Okay. And I realize you explained this to me but I have to get the information*
17. *from her that, that's what I'm trying to get clarified. I have, I have to give the*
18. *choices just exactly like, that's the way the census does things, we have to read*
19. *from the script.*

⁶ In the USSR, people were entitled to stay in the same apartment provided to them by the state for their entire life—but were not entitled to sell it. This form of (lifetime) entitlement thus implied something that was more stable, permanent, and secure than the term “rent” tends to imply in the American context, while at the same time falling short of what the term “ownership” implies.

Many respondents also seemed to be overwhelmed with the list of options and thus found it hard to answer promptly at first. Russian-speaking enumerators and interpreters consistently sought to respond to this challenge through streamlining and simplifying strategies that reduced the linguistic content (dropping words and conjunctions) or offering an increasingly reduced menu of options from which a final response could be inferred based on previous knowledge about the respondent's social context or on cues that offered a basis for an educated guess. So for example, one interpreter (a social worker familiar with the housing situation of the elderly residents who were being interviewed in a government-subsidized facility) preferred to simply inquire whether the occupant paid rent.

In some cases enumerators opted to review what they deemed to be the most likely response options from the list as successive questions posed in a "yes" or "no" format until they received an affirmative response. An example of a streamlining strategy is provided in the excerpt below where successive single questions seek to reduce options and hone in as efficiently as possible on a final response. In particular a strategic single question allows the respondent to quickly comprehend the question and once the question is answered affirmatively, does not require any further listing of other payment arrangements for the respondent.

Excerpt 3 from R65 (present: R, E, I, U).

1. E: *Do you or does someone in this household and there are 4 categories, in, in this*
2. *apartment – do you own this apartment with a mortgage or loan including a home*
3. *equity loan or do you own it free and clear without a mortgage or loan, or do you*
4. *rent this place, or do you occupy it without payment of rent.*
5. I: *[vy platite rentu?]*
6. =*do you pay rent?*
7. R: *[čto?]*
8. = *what?*
9. I: *[vy platite svoju rentu?]*
10. = *do you pay your rent?*
11. R: *[da]*
12. =*yes.*

Here again we see that rather than repeating an entire list of options, the interpreter concentrates on a single question that with an affirmative response, allows for a much more efficient means of conducting the interview.⁷

4.3.3. Problematic question 3 (ulterior signaling): Personal information: middle name and date of birth

In a handful of cases we observed that respondents exhibited some confusion when asked about their middle name. In Russia people have a first name, last name, and a patronymic (father's name). Patronymics are not the equivalent of a middle name and tend to be dropped by most Russian immigrants. Consequently some of the elderly respondents had trouble understanding

⁷ Although I's question is in fact repeated, the repetition owes from R's not hearing the question rather than not understanding. Prior to the interview I informed both U and E that some of the questions might need to be repeated since R65's hearing was not very good.

this question. It is possible that for some of these respondents, asking them about a name that was associated solely with their lives in Russia--and that had since been dropped--may have also raised doubts about an ulterior agenda related in some unspecified (and thus potentially problematic) way to their previous lives.

While requests to provide a middle name may have required further clarification and raised the occasional eyebrow, our team observed that most Russian-speaking respondents exhibited much more noticeable signs of unease when asked to provide the enumerator with their date of birth. This question roused immediate suspicions in many respondents since it seemed to have no clear rationale and to be requesting specific personal information that they would not usually provide to strangers. In our debriefings we discovered that Russian-language media in New York had repeatedly warned its listeners to be on the lookout for con artists who solicited personal information to get access to personal credit cards and bank accounts. Evidently the timing of those warnings inadvertently coincided with the enumeration process and is likely to have played a role in underwriting these suspicions on the part of the Russian respondents.

However, other concerns may have also been in play. It is not uncommon for Russians to have immigrated to the U.S. with documents in which their dates of birth were altered to allow them to qualify for social security payments upon their arrival. Unexpected and unexplained questions about a specific date of birth could thus invite concern that this ruse might be under investigation and subject to revelation with all of its potential attending consequences.

Together these factors combined to make this question one that roused a great deal of discomfort amongst many Russian-speaking respondents. The fact that this question was also asked quite early in the interview may have contributed more generally to the relatively high level of initial discomfort with the NRFU interview as a whole that our field teams noticed amongst the Russian-speaking respondents that they observed.

4.3.4. Problematic questions 4 and 5 (inadvertent social affront) - Adoption and Sex questions

Certain questions posed challenges to enumerators seeking to secure and maintain rapport because they threatened to cause some form of social affront. The most noticeable of such questions was about whether a child was biological or adopted, which threatened to violate a cultural taboo. In Russian culture there is a stigma attached to parents' -- especially women's -- infertility. Thus adopting a child remains a rare and highly secret act. Children adopted at a young age (this remains the usual case in Russia) are not informed about their adoption unless they find it out somehow at a much older age. During the Soviet times parents were given new housing upon adoption. The sole purpose of moving to a new apartment was to avoid any possible leak of information to children from neighbors. Given the housing shortage it was remarkable how the government protected these adopted children and their new parents from any possibility of the truth being revealed. Oftentimes parents manipulated the situation and asked again for a new apartment on the pretense that the neighbors found out about their adoption. Such a statement was enough for people to get new housing from the government. Given this context, any census question asking whether children are adopted or biological seems offensive to most Russians. Russian enumerators invariably skipped this question altogether when

interviewing Russian-speaking respondents, deeming it simply too offensive to pose or unlikely to be answered truthfully.

Enumerators also often varied from prescribed protocol to avoid any affront when it came to the question about respondent/occupant sex. This question was often skipped altogether as one that could be (and was) self-evident and thus readily inferred by the enumerator. In a few cases, particular discursive strategies – such as humor – might be deployed in posing this question, as exemplified in the excerpted interview (and accompanying discourse analysis) provided in the text box below:

TEXT BOX 2

1. E: Okay. And silly question but I'm required to ask you this. X is female, correct?
2. R2: Ah yeah I hope. (laughs).
3. E: (laughs) and X is male.
4. R1: Most definitely (laughs)
5. R2: you sure (laughs).

Discourse Analysis: In this excerpt humor is coupled with other discursive strategies in an effort to smooth over the potentially threatening effects of a potentially offensive question. The utterances in lines 2-5 are accompanied by laughter which deflects the face threatening nature of asking for one's sex and creates an informal comfortable environment. Additionally, there are several measures that the enumerator takes in order to not offend the face of R2. Noticeably, the actual sought information in question (the sex of respondent 1) is not solicited until the very end of the turn. Prior to asking "X is female, correct?" the enumerator offers the following justification for posing a question that could be awkward by stating, "I'm required to ask you this," thus shifting the responsibility for the face threatening nature of the question to those who are requiring him to ask the question. This reduces it as a threat that might jeopardize the personal relationship established between the enumerator and the respondent. There are two further mechanisms that the enumerator employs to allay the face threatening nature of questioning one's sex; namely, the enumerator states flat out that this is a "silly question." He thus delegitimizes the validity of the question. In a way, he foresees the respondent will as well, placing them both in on the same side and thus reinforcing rapport instead of undermining it. Finally when the enumerator poses the question he closes the turn with the word "correct," an implied answer that invites the respondent to simply answer affirmatively. This poses the interaction as one in which she is acknowledging the enumerator's recognition that she is in fact female, rather than opening any possibility that he might be questioning that fact (which would threaten the rapport that had been established).

Other questions that were often skipped because they were viewed as "self-evident" and thus inferable by the enumerators were the "Hispanic origin" question and the question about whether this was the respondent's only residence.

4.3.5. Problematic question 6 (compounded: lack of conceptual equivalency and ulterior signaling): "Has anyone else lived here on April 1, 2010?"

The question “Did anyone else live here on April 1, 2010?” also proved somewhat confusing to some respondents. Some simply found it hard to remember whether anyone was staying with them at that time. However, confusion also resulted from conceptual equivalency issues. The Russian verbs “living” (*žil*) and “staying” (*ostanavlivalsja*) were the ones most commonly used in the translations-on-the fly by Russian-speaking enumerators. However, neither one by itself necessarily provides a perfect translation and both may be taken to suggest somewhat different questions than the one the census seeks to ascertain. Thus in Russian the verb “live(*žit*)” tends to imply a permanent residency lasting for more than few months. Conversely, in Russian, the concept “stay”(*ostanavlivat’sja*) cannot be directly translated into one English word. It needs a collocation such as “overnight” – which can give it a variety of different specificities. We have to remember that most Russian respondents observed in this study come from a Soviet background where travelling and staying at hotels (this is the situation where the verb “stay” is used) would be a very rare event and most people never experienced such a concept. When someone comes over and stays in the house it is usually expressed through different linguistic means where the entire concept of “living/staying” is skipped. It will thus tend to be vaguely specified as “came for a few days” or “were here for a few days.” In short, the lack of easy conceptual specificity meant that enumerators and translators struggled to solicit the information the census desired through the use of one terms alone and without further elaboration. In the following excerpt we see such elaboration employed by an interpreter in an effort to resolve the ambiguity resulting from imperfect conceptual equivalency.

Excerpt 4 from R64. (present: E, R, I, U)

1. *E: We do not want to miss any people who might have been staying here on April*
2. *Ist. Were there any additional people you didn’t mention for ex..., and then you can*
3. *just say yes or no to each one of these choices. Babies, who might have been here on*
4. *April Ist.*
5. *I: Visiting or staying?*
6. *E: Uh it says staying. Um...*
7. *I: [Kto-to zdes’ žil na pervoje aprelja ?]8. =was anyone living here on the Ist of April?*
9. *R: [Net]*
10. *=No.*

Particularly notable here is the negotiation in lines 5 and 6 over the verb “staying.” Although the interpreter asks for a clarification of the verb, the translation for the verb in question (*žit*) carries the denotation of living rather than “staying” or “visiting,” and as such should not be considered the correct equivalent for either of “visiting” or “staying.” The incorrect translation of the verb may threaten to lead to a wrong answer. As our field team observed it, the translations deployed by different enumerators were inconsistent and often threatened to solicit information that did not accurately correspond to the information the census sought. A variety of different verbs (stay, live, sleep, etc.) were used by different enumerators.

4.4. In-language Material Use

Another question posed in our debriefing interviews with enumerators and respondents alike concerned the use and usefulness of available material produced by the census in the target

language (Russian). Most enumerators said that they did not use the materials or found them useless. They preferred to pass the case on to another enumerator who would find an interpreter or who could speak the target language. Russian-speaking enumerators simply opted to use the forms in English and translate the questions on the fly.

The majority (70%) of the respondents claimed that they never knew about the existence of materials in their target language. However, it was observed that the safe answer “Did not know” was offered quite quickly in a possible effort to eliminate any accusations of wrongdoing. However, the local liaison with the Russian community in NY informed the ethnographer that these materials had been widely advertised on local Russian TV channels.

The tendency of respondents to provide evasive responses, particularly ones that professed ignorance (i.e., “Did not know”), makes their responses difficult to interpret with respect to any evaluation of the effectiveness of messaging efforts in this community. Perhaps more interesting is the fact that amongst those who did profess ignorance, over 80 percent added that it would have made no difference to them and they would not have sought these materials out even if they had known of their existence (the other 20 percent claimed they would have sought this material).

4.5. 2010 Census Messaging and Form-Handling

During our debriefing, Russian-speaking respondents were asked several technical questions concerning their receipt and handling of the mailed census form and their exposure to census messaging.

Most respondents (84.4%) lived alone and reported they were responsible for getting their own mail. When asked why they had not returned the mailed forms, more than half the respondents either did not remember whether they had received the forms or claimed that they never got them (see the Table below). However, responses such as “do not know/do not remember” could also represent the use of the “Soviet-era authority evasion strategies” already described. A few respondents complained that they had placed calls requesting these materials and had left messages but no one had ever contacted them in response. One respondent claimed that he had mailed back the target language forms, but the forms had been returned at a later date due to an unspecified “technical problem.”

Table 5. Respondent Reports About Whether they Received a Census Form

Reports	Percent
Got the forms and mailed them back	31.5%
Got the forms and did not mail them back	9.3%
Got the forms and destroyed them	3.6%
Did not get the forms	27.8%
Do not remember	22.2%
Do not know	5.6%

The majority of the respondents (80%) reported watching exclusively or predominantly Russian-language channels. There are at least six Russian-language channels available in Ohio; far more than that are available in the New York area. Some NY respondents reported having access to as many as 98 Russian-language channels brought to them via a dish satellite.

The local liaison in NY claimed that all major Russian channels in NY had numerous ads related to the census. He also reported that forms were mailed at least twice to each Russian household.

4.6. Questions Unanswered: Fluency, Interpretation

4.6.1. Bilingual Enumerator fluency (in Russian)

The differences in Russian-language fluency amongst the bilingual enumerators who were observed in the study were so slight that we were unable to observe whether differences in target language fluency—or (by extension) in meta-communicative competence—had any effect on the success of the NRFU interview. This prevents us from making observations comparable to those that were possible in a number of the field studies of other communities-of-language (e.g. amongst Portuguese (Rodrigues et al. 2013) or Korean speakers (Yoon et al. 2012) in which heritage and native-speakers of the language could be observed and compared.

4.6.2. Interpretation

Another question that the larger multi-community ethnographic study sought to address was how interpretation was handled and its effect on the outcome of the interview. As we have already detailed, early logistical challenges conspired to cause almost all of our observations ones to involve bilingual enumerators whose fluency in Russian precluded any need for an interpreter. Our observations of interpretation were thus very limited (involving only 4 interviews out of 67), and even in these cases the interpreter was brought along by the enumerator. Our study was unable to register any instances of an enumerator looking for an interpreter once a Russian-speaking household was encountered. We cannot therefore speak to questions of interpreter recruitment in this community-of-language. Moreover, given that the interpreters we observed had similar fluency levels to the bilingual enumerators we observed, they functioned in much the same manner as did those enumerators with respect to the specific issue of translation. Our primary findings about translation problems and challenges were observed to operate comparably in these cases, and these cases provide no different data on translation than that obtained from the observations and analysis of the bilingual enumerators alone. We therefore opted to analyze the translations of these bilingual interpreters in conjunction with those of the bilingual enumerators—thus contributing to the analysis already provided above of translation issues.

5. Recommendations

5.1. Looking Towards 2020: A Ten-Year Outlook for the Russian-American Community

Over the last 30 years, Russian immigration to the U.S. has remained predominantly Jewish. After the collapse of the USSR in 1991, all restrictions on Jewish immigration from Russia were

lifted. However, after an agreement between Israel and the U.S. was reached in 1989, this flow from the former USSR to the U.S. began to diminish. More generally, improvements in the economic situation in Russia, combined with the advent of stricter immigration laws and enforcement in the U.S. have also contributed to a significant decrease in Russian immigration to the U.S. The current economic situation in the U.S. no longer provides ample opportunities for foreign professionals to secure employment on the U.S. market. These factors have resulted in fewer Russians – including those not necessarily of Jewish ancestry – seeking immigration to the U.S. via an employment route. As we enter the second decade of the 21st century, it therefore appears that the Russian population has become more stable and less emigration-prone (Isurin, 2011). In short, barring unforeseen developments, no major waves of new immigration from Russia to the U.S. are likely to occur over the next decade.

By 2020 the makeup and demographics of the current Russian immigrant population in the U.S. will change. Due to natural causes the number of elderly immigrants with limited or no proficiency in English will decrease. However, in big cities, such as New York, there may still be a sizable group of middle-aged and elderly immigrants who continue to speak very poor or no English. This is most likely in a select number of “ethnic enclave” communities where the relatively large number of Russian speakers allows immigrants to function in everyday life without English.

Another group of Russian-speaking immigrants that will remain are those who are here illegally. It is likely that many of these individuals, regardless of their age, will speak little English and most certainly will remain hard to reach. Their undocumented status makes them feel vulnerable and, as a result, suspicious of any government-initiated activity or surveillance. Such groups will continue to blend with other Russian immigrants and can mostly be found in places with a big Russian presence. To reach those people more attempts should be made by Russian liaisons and Russian community leaders to explain the purpose of the census. Given the collectivist nature of Russian culture, information about the census that is delivered by other Russians—and in particular by leaders or advocacy organizations that are already trusted-- will likely be more successful at soliciting higher rates of participation.

5.2. Specific Recommendations for 2020 Decennial Census

Three different types of recommendations are provided for future NRFU interviews with monolingual Russian speakers: 1) those that pertain to tactics and strategies for approaching such respondents in any official interview situation, including factors that will influence responses to all questions asked; 2) those that pertain to specific questions themselves—including which terms are used, sequencing, and forms of explanation that may need to accompany the question itself; and finally 3) recommendations about potentially useful future research that could address gaps and shortcomings from this study, more robust testing of its provisional findings, or pursue new questions that have arisen in its course

5.2.1 Recommendations that are Generally Applicable to Russian-Speakers

We consistently observed the apparent benefits of including an explicit statement that the enumeration is required by law in the enumerator’s introduction process. Highlighting this in a

matter-of-fact manner seemed to encourage participation amongst Russian-speaking subjects—apparently regardless of their legal status and despite the concerns of some with official surveillance. Though additional research on this subject might be warranted, and absent any contradictory evidence, our observations suggest that it would make sense to underscore this legal requirement in the opening line of the enumerator’s introduction in order to secure initial access within this particular population. We would highlight that this finding may be very specific to Russian speakers and rooted in a rather particular form of cultural strategy for coping with state authority.

At the same time we also observed that the establishment of forms of personalized rapport with Russian-speaking respondents seemed equally important to the tasks of obtaining valid information and overcoming respondent reluctance and suspicions. The most effective strategies for securing and maintaining rapport that we observed involved enumerator responsiveness to culturally-specific cues through which respondents sought to ascertain trustworthiness. Most notably, such strategies included: 1) accepting invitations to enter a respondent’s home when this was offered; 2) willingness to engage respondents in a variety of less formal ways that allowed for the discussion of a much broader range of topics than those prescribed in the NRFU protocol. Many of these interactional strategies were not strictly pertinent to the interview’s purpose but were critical to establishing and maintaining a facilitative relationship with respondents. Use of such strategies implies that greater latitude be provided to enumerators so they can venture beyond the current narrow prescriptions that they are trained to observe in the NRFU interview.

This also implies that an enumerator must be able to recognize the cultural cues that are being provided linguistically and through other interactional cues in the first place. Fluent Russian speakers are far more likely to be in possession of such communicative and interactional competence than their monolingual English-speaking counterparts. This fact underwrites our recommendation that fully bilingual enumerators continue to be tasked with interviewing monolingual Russian respondents.

In our view, it would be ideal if steps could be taken to identify as many Russian monolingual respondents beforehand so that a NRFU interviewer could be assigned to them from the start rather than identifying such respondents through an initial visit after which a bilingual enumerator is assigned to follow up. Minimizing the need for such follow-ups would help address some of the sources of suspicion that are aroused in this community and that generate questions when respondents implicitly draw contrasts with census-taking experiences back in Russia. Follow-ups by bilingual enumerators still remain a viable option even if they are not the perfect solution.

We also noted that Russian-speaking respondents’ suspicions of strangers had been heightened by media warnings about con artists trying to get into residencies under the pretense of gathering personal information for a variety of purposes. The timing of such warnings coincided with the enumeration process in the NY area. This highlights the need for closer collaboration with the Russian-language media to explain to the audience how to identify a legitimate enumerator. It may also imply that the census should do more to monitor the broader media context in which its messaging is taking place, to enable response to specific challenges that may emerge coincidentally at the time of NRFU enumeration.

5.2.2. Recommendations pertaining to specific questions

Our field team's observations of how language and communicative conventions affected interviews conducted in the Russian-speaking context suggest that specific questionnaire changes are needed to adequately address multifaceted problems of translation and disruptions to the flow of social interaction. In some cases specific questions will require new terms altogether. However, for many questions terminological substitution is unlikely to address all of the different types of problems that we observed. Thus some questions are likely to require additional measures including:

- 1) providing more elaborate explanations about what the question is trying to ascertain and—importantly—why it is being asked in the first place;
- and,
- 2) possibly revising the question order (largely to avoid triggering concerns or suspicions).

Finally, we acknowledge that some questions pose even thornier dilemmas that may not be entirely resolved by even these additional measures. This is particularly evident in those questions the census poses about social group categorization (e.g., “race”). For the sake of consistency, we would suggest that choices will need to be made by the Census Bureau about whether Russian respondents should be allowed to employ their own social classification schemes or provided with more background information about mainstream American ones and then asked to use these. Absent such decisions and the provision of explicit guidance to bilingual enumerators, our observations suggest that each enumerator becomes the arbiter of that decision. This introduces a form of unpredictable variation that can and should be avoided.

We highlight potential changes on a per question basis below—with the added recommendation that cognitive testing should be conducted to determine specific final solutions in each case.

1. The question “Did anyone else live here on April 1, 2010?”. First, a better translation of the verb “live” (*zhit'*) should be employed. We recommend replacing it with the verb “stay overnight” (*ostanavlivat'sja na noc'*) which more adequately corresponds to a comparable Russian concept. It is also important to address the fact that this question can be perceived as threatening by Russian respondents. This question should also be preceded by an explanation of why it is being asked, and accompanied by assurances to respondents that it is O.K. if they do not immediately have a clear recollection of this fact. These measures will likely be helpful in mitigating the apprehension and sense of threat this question unintentionally generates for these respondents.
2. The question on the middle name. This can be confusing to elderly Russians whose identity is linked to their Patronymic (which is different from “middle name”). We recommend asking respondents how their name is spelled on other documents obtained in the U.S., when and if such confusion occurs.

3. The question on rent/mortgage. In order to eliminate the problem described above, we suggest rewording the question and breaking it down into more discrete questions. Indeed in its current form the question may understandably pose processing problems even to people who speak good English. Certainly in the Russian-language context the question probably needs to be broken down into a few parts with each part delivered in a simplified target language version: Did you buy this house? Have you paid it off? Do you still have a mortgage on the house? Do you rent it? One option would be to provide enumerators with a standardized series of questions that break down the initial question in this manner if it is evident that respondents are evidencing confusion.
4. The questions on date of birth. We recommend asking this question closer to the end of the interview when a higher level of comfort has been achieved.
5. The question on race. We have already highlighted some of the decisions that need to be made about how the question on race/nationality should be posed to Russian speakers. In addition, non-Russian enumerators working with the Russian immigrant population should be made aware of the Russian concept of “nationality,” and in particular that “Jewish” in this social context refers to something that is not conceptually equivalent to Jewish as a religious orientation in the West.
6. The question on Hispanic origin. The Hispanic origin question seems irrelevant to Russian immigrants. If it is to be posed to Russian speakers, further research will be needed to determine how it should be posed. That determination will itself be contingent on the decisions that are made about whether to emphasize emic or etic forms of self-identification.
7. The question on adoption. We observed that the question about adoption was almost universally skipped by Russian-speaking enumerators who regarded it as simply too offensive to ask. Obviously skipping the question altogether is not a good option. While we might envision an approach in which a lengthy and somewhat apologetic explanation was provided before the question was asked, this is an issue that requires more research based on initial extensive consultation with community members and organizations before a reliable answer can be provided.

Finally, given the confusion and inconsistency caused by these problematic questions and the specificity of particular communicative and interactional conventions in the Russian immigrant community we recommend: 1) developing and testing a standardized Russian translation of the census form; and 2) developing and introducing a training protocol for Russian bilingual enumerators that specifically would focus on the problem questions, interactional patterns, and case scenarios.

5.2.3 Recommendations about potentially useful future research.

To address some of our initial questions that were not answered because of limitations imposed upon the field study team, we recommend further research address the following issues:

First, enumerators with varying fluency in Russian need to be observed in their interaction with Russian immigrants. This will provide evidence on the possible role of the enumerator's language fluency in affecting the outcome of the interview.

Second, English-speaking enumerators seeking assistance with translation as well as the content of such translation on the fly should be scrutinized.

Additional issues that have our field research highlighted as meriting further scrutiny include:

Which terms and interactional approaches will best address the questions that proved most problematic including those about identity (race, ethnicity), adoption, rent (see above).

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Appendix I

Transcription Coding

[Russian]

=translation of previous text.

“Reported Speech”

E – Enumerator

R – Respondent

I – Interpreter

U – Ethnographer

Participant Information

E11:

R1: Female, 50’s, white

R2: Male, 50’s, white

E: Male 20’s, white

E37:

R: Female, 50’s, white

E: Males ,20’s white.

R64

E: Male, 40’s, white

R: Female, 80’s, white

I: Female, 40’s, white

R65

E: Male, 40’s, white

R: Female, 80’s,white

R66:

E: Male, 40’s, white.

R: Female, 70, white,

I: Female, 40’s white.

R67

E: Male, 40’s, white

R: Female, 80,white

I: Female, 40’s, white

R7

E:Male, 50’s, black

R: Female, 90’s, white.

U: (Note here that U also functioned as an interpreter)

R8 (Note here the respondent is a proxy)

R: Female, 90's, white

E: Male, 70's, white U: (Note that U here functioned as an interpreter) Female, 40's.

Appendix II

Debriefing questions

1. Have you ever participated in the U.S. census?
2. Was there any difference between the last/ previous time(s) and this time?
3. Did the materials in Russian help?
4. Did you know that you can request them in your language?
5. Have you ever participated in the census process in Russia?
6. How different was it?
7. Do you think that coming from the Soviet background might have affected your attitude to census in the U.S.?
8. Have you ever participated in any surveys/ interviews? How do you feel about it? Do you think that coming from the Soviet background might have affected your attitude to surveys and interviews in the U.S.?
9. Do you know that your participation in census is required by law?
10. Would it affect your participation if you were told this right away?
11. Do you think that only U.S. citizens should participate in census? Would your citizenship affect your willingness to participate?
12. Where do you think the results of the census go to? Why is census important?
13. Do you believe that this information may be shared with the IRS, INS, or FBI?
14. Why do you think so and where did you get this information from?
15. Would you prefer an enumerator to be a native Russian speaker? Or a Russian-speaking American? How would it help you?
16. Who is usually responsible for mail pick up?
17. Do you remember getting the census form and could it be that incidentally you destroyed it before opening it?
18. What TV channels do you usually watch?
19. Do you subscribe to any newspapers?
20. Why did not you mail the form back?
21. Did you get information about census from any other source?
22. Do you feel that the interpreter help you understand the process better?
23. Would you rather have a bilingual enumerator helping you with this process?