

# Qualitative Research with Demographically Diverse Russian Speakers

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AAPOR Annual Conference – Austin,  
Texas – May 14, 2016

***NOTE:*** *The views expressed in this presentation are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the U.S. Census Bureau.*

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# This Presentation

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- We will report on findings related to recruiting and question interpretation among russophone (Russian speaking) immigrants in the US.
- The work was part of the multilingual study that is the focus of this session

# Demographic Overview

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- The American Community Survey (2009-2013) identified there are a total of 890,120 Russian Speakers in the US.
  - 482,766 Russian speakers indicated speaking English very well.
  - 407,354 Russian speakers indicated not speaking English very well.
    - Majority living in urban areas
    - Majority living in high employment areas
    - Living in areas where people 25 and above have a college degree or higher.

# Demographics Continued

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- The top five states that have Russian speakers who do not speak English very well are the following:
  - \*New York= 130,848
  - \*\*California= 74, 239
  - Washington= 26,219
  - Illinois= 19,575
  - New Jersey= 18,888

\*Kings County and Queens County had the highest population in NY (87,272 and 18,409 , respectively).

\*\*Los Angeles County had the highest population in CA (26,325).

# Demographics continued

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## □ Education

- 67% of foreign born Russian speakers have a High School Degree.

## □ Age

- Median age range for Russian Speakers is between 32.5 and 38.1.

## □ Origin of Russian speaking population:

- Armenia
- Azerbaijan
- Belarus
- Estonia
- Georgia
- Kazakhstan
- Kyrgyzstan
- Latvia
- Lithuania
- Moldova
- Russia
- Tajikistan
- Turkmenistan
- Ukraine
- Uzbekistan

# Immigration of Russian-Speaking Population to the US

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- ❑ The first wave was between 1881 and 1914
- ❑ The second wave (1917 to 1922) of immigration was less diverse in origin.
- ❑ The third wave of Russian immigration to the United States was in the 1970's
- ❑ With perestroika and beyond, open borders.

# Multilingual Research for 2020 Census Questionnaires

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- Expert review
- Two rounds of cognitive interviews
  - 15 Russian speakers per round (2 rounds)
  - Representing 9 countries of origin: Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Moldova, Uzbekistan
- Four focus groups
  - Focus groups held in Maryland and Illinois
  - Total of 39 monolingual Russian speakers
  - Representing 8 countries of origin: Russian, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Belarus, Azerbaijan, Crimea, and Kyrgyzstan.

# Recruitment Characteristics

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## Cognitive rounds

### ■ Household composition including:

Foreign born/native born combinations

Unrelated and mixed relation households

### ■ Immigration Year

### ■ Demographics

## Focus Groups

### ■ Immigration Year

### ■ Demographics



# Recruitment methods

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- ❑ Russian Language newspapers/Internet sites
- ❑ Churches, Synagogues and Mosques
- ❑ Jewish Community Centers
- ❑ English (ESL) classes
- ❑ Computer classes (at community centers)
- ❑ Senior citizen centers/groups
- ❑ Word of mouth / Social networks
- ❑ Russian-speaking businesses

# Study Participants

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- Rs varied in time of emigration from place of origin
- Some left their country of origin during or shortly after the existence of the Soviet Union
- Others have lived under Capitalism in their countries of origin

# Findings -Recruitment

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- Recent immigrants (2000-2016)
  - more outgoing/less suspicious
  - not afraid to give opinions, more interested in incentives
- Immigrants from the 90s and earlier
  - more reserved,
  - did not want to give information about their household situation
  - less willing to give their opinion
  - Generally older in age

# Findings -Recruitment

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There was an evident effect of time of immigration on ease of recruiting:

- Across age groups
- Across place of emigration
- Across religious affiliation

# Differences in Perspectives

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- ❑ Recruitment impressions were complemented by focus group findings
- ❑ Differences in reactions related to 'official' language, 'official' nature of documents.
- ❑ Differences in being critical about materials
- ❑ Interpretation of terminology was influenced by the cultural reality in which they lived before emigrating.

# Official Nature: Focus Group 1

- Older Rs, lived in the SU

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- Participants felt that the documents/ letters were written in an official manner; **this left a good impression**
- They liked that the idea that confidentiality was clearly explained
- They liked that consequences of breaking confidentiality were spelled out

# Official Nature: Focus Group 2 – Younger Rs, from FSU Countries

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- Also said text was highly official but for this group it had a **negative impact** on their understanding of the document.
- During the discussion participants agreed that this document looked official and had a lot of official information, but it was not written using a clear and simple Russian language.

# Terminology: Vocabulary Reflects Cultural Reality

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- Language affects thought and categorization of reality, but culture also affects language.
- FGs represented people raised in different cultural realities despite sharing the 'same' language



# Tenure Question

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4. Is this house, apartment, or mobile home — Mark  ONE box

- Owned by you or someone in this household with a mortgage or loan? *Include home equity loans.*
- Owned by you or someone in this household free and clear (without a mortgage or loan)?
- Rented?
- Occupied without payment of rent?

# Terminology

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- Reflecting different cultural realities, we detected that Rs who lived in the Soviet Union had much lower understanding and lack of Russian terms for 'mortgage' or 'equity'. More prone to borrow from English.
- Rs who lived after the Soviet Union in their countries had terminology in Russian to refer to these.

# Terminology (cont.)

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- ❑ Offering transliteration vs. English word
- ❑ R1 cognitives: Respondents recommended using the English words for mortgage and equity in parentheses, following transliterated English term in Cyrillic
- ❑ R2 cogs cognitives: For 'home equity loan,' the Russian paraphrase followed by the English term in parentheses provided everyone with something they could understand.
- ❑ For 'mortgage,' this did not work equally well. Several Rs did not know the Russian term ('ipoteka')

# Terminology (cont.)

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- In Group 4, 6 out of 10 participants weren't familiar with the English term, but longer term immigrants were.
- Most participants understood the meaning of the Russian paraphrase for home equity loan: «кредит под залог жилой недвижимости» (loan with real estate as collateral)
- A participant explained:  
*Ну на учебу взял в счет жилой недвижимости, например, ссуду для того чтобы детей учить. (A loan that a person took for his kids' college for example, putting his house as collateral)*

# Lessons Learned

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- ❑ Year of emigration matters when working with Russian speakers
- ❑ Language skill alone does not assure comprehension of terms / Cultural realities differ depending on year of emigration
- ❑ Conduct qualitative research to determine terminology to use
- ❑ Consider using transliterated English terms if needed
- ❑ Need to strike balance between 'official' language and simpler Russian wording

# **Thanks for your attention!**

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