

## Assessing Heritage Language Vitality: Russian in the United States

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### Abstract

The article offers a comprehensive assessment of the linguistic viability of Russian as a heritage language in the United States, following a framework that provides three factors involved in promoting language vitality (Lo Bianco, 2008a, 2008b): *capacity*, the level of knowledge that heritage speakers of Russian have in the heritage language and the factors that create conditions for development of such capacity; *opportunities* for the use of Russian in different domains and contexts; and heritage learner motivations and *desire* for continued use of Russian and for developing the skills necessary for its maintenance and transmission.

### Introduction

Russian, one of the ten most commonly spoken languages in the United States, is spoken at home by 881,720 individuals, with almost a third of all Russian speakers residing in the state of New York (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). Brighton Beach, located in Brooklyn, New York, remains the largest Russian-speaking area, with relatively smaller Russian communities found in virtually all major American cities, including Boston, Chicago, Cleveland, Detroit, Houston, Los Angeles, Miami, Minneapolis and St. Paul, Philadelphia, San Francisco, Washington DC, and New Jersey. At first glance, it may seem that the steady stream of immigrants from Russian-speaking parts of the world during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and the overall increase in the use of Russian in the United States in the past century, would create sufficient conditions for survival of the language in the foreseeable future. However, an analysis of the trajectory of linguistic development past the immigration point reveals a steady decline in the use of Russian, even among newly arrived immigrants, alongside a rapid adoption of English, a pattern that is typical of the overall linguistic landscape in the United States (Potowski, 2010, and discussions of different languages therein; Zemskaja, 2001). Unlike Brighton Beach, sometimes nicknamed “Little Odessa” because of its rich infrastructure and linguistic self-sustainability (in fact, the residents of Brighton often joke about English being a minority language in the area), most Russian communities in the United States are not very large, and the majority of Russian speakers do not live in clearly defined ethnic communities. Instead, they tend to be dispersed among the general population, with relatively few opportunities to use the language outside the home. As a result, like many other heritage languages in the United States, Russian does not survive beyond the second generation (Kagan & Dillon, 2010). According to existing classifications of language vitality (e.g., Giles, Bourhis, & Taylor, 1977), this pattern is fully consistent with the profile of an endangered language.

It is common to analyze Russian immigration to the United States during the 20<sup>th</sup> century as falling into several successive waves, starting with the first wave triggered by the revolution of 1917 and the fall of the Russian Empire, the second wave coinciding with World War II, and the third and fourth waves marking the Soviet era of *perestroika* and subsequent collapse of the USSR (Andrews, 1998; Isurin, 2011; Kagan & Dillon, 2010; Zemskaia, 2001). These last two waves of Russian immigration are of particular importance for understanding the dynamics of ongoing language loss in Russian-speaking communities. The children of these immigrants represent the population of heritage speakers relevant to the current discussion – individuals at the forefront of language shift, raised in homes where a language other than their current dominant language is spoken, and proficient in the dominant language and to some degree in the minority (i.e., home) language (Valdés, 2000).

Since 1990, the Russian-speaking population in the United States has nearly quadrupled (see Figure 1), resulting in a considerable number of heritage speakers whose linguistic skills form a wide-ranging proficiency continuum, from a high level of fluency in the heritage language to the most rudimentary and incomplete knowledge of the grammar (Polinsky & Kagan, 2007). Our main goal is to assess the viability of heritage Russian in the United States by analyzing the sociolinguistic ecology of Russian-speaking communities with reference to the following typology of three factors involved in language vitality: Capacity Development, Opportunity Creation, and Desire, or COD (Grin, 1990, 2003; Lo Bianco, 2008a, b; Lo Bianco & Peyton, this volume).

The article is structured as follows: First we look at capacity, understood here as the level of knowledge that speakers have in the heritage language, in connection with the factors that create conditions for the development of such capacity. We then examine the opportunities for the use of Russian in different domains and contexts, followed by a discussion of learner motivations for continued use of the heritage language and for developing the skills necessary for its maintenance and transmission.

### **Russian as a Heritage Language in the United States**

It is noteworthy that early studies of heritage Russian in the United States were framed as studies of language death: In the absence of the term “heritage speaker,” the notion of a “semi-speaker” (Dorian, 1977), an individual with limited skills in a dying language, was extended to situations of language shift in immigration (Polinsky, 1996). A critical distinction was drawn between first-generation speakers, adult immigrants for whom Russian remains the first, and by and large the primary, language; and subsequent generations of Russian speakers, U.S.-born or brought to the United States as young children, for whom English ultimately replaces Russian in most domains of language use. The language variety spoken by the former group is referred to as *Émigré* Russian, whereas the variety of the second group is undergoing rapid structural shift and has been termed American Russian or Heritage Russian. Both varieties are further contrasted with Full Russian, the baseline language spoken by native speakers outside of the immigrant context

(Polinsky, 1996, 1997, 2000). Although our main question pertains to the viability of Russian as a heritage language, it will be necessary to refer to *Émigré* Russian throughout the discussion: Because heritage speakers' experience with Full Russian is either severely limited or non-existent, *Émigré* Russian serves as the primary resource of linguistic knowledge for these speakers.

What are the levels of language knowledge that Russian heritage speakers possess? Extensive work on grammatical properties of heritage Russian in the United States, conducted over nearly two decades, provides an in-depth account of a range of systematic shifts in the nominal, verbal, sentential, and discourse domains (Bar-Shalom & Zaretsky, 2008; Isurin & Ivanova-Sullivan, 2008; Laleko, 2008, 2010; Pereltsvaig, 2005, 2008; Polinsky 1996, 1997, 2000, 2005, 2006, 2008; Polinsky & Kagan, 2007). Although most linguistic work on heritage Russian has been focused on low-proficiency speakers (in fact, morphosyntactic deficits have been argued to be a "hallmark property" of a heritage language; Bar-Shalom & Zaretsky, 2008, p. 281), recent studies have shown that highly advanced heritage speakers of Russian also exhibit signs of divergence from the baseline variety. These divergences are manifested in restrictions on occurrence and interpretation of linguistic forms even in the absence of overt production errors, suggesting difficulties with subtle discourse and semantic operations and contexts that allow for optionality and ambiguity (Laleko, 2010). Overall, it appears that heritage speakers across the proficiency continuum do not exhibit native-like capacity in Russian, likely as a consequence of multiple factors, including incomplete acquisition, attrition, transfer from the dominant language, insufficient schooling in the heritage language, reduced linguistic input, and qualitative shifts in *Émigré* Russian. (For additional discussion of factors contributing to the reduced linguistic competence exhibited by heritage speakers, see Benmamoun, Montrul, & Polinsky, 2010; Laleko, 2010.)

On a larger scale, Russian-speaking communities in the United States are generally characterized by a certain sense of linguistic insecurity, possibly due to a strong prescriptive tradition and emphasis on the value and prestige of the standard literary language in the old homeland. This sense of insecurity is sometimes manifested in openly self-critical comments made by adult speakers of *Émigré* Russian, who are often reported to describe their native language as "rusty" and "full of mistakes" after spending significant time in the United States (e.g., Laleko, 2010, pp. 235-237) as well as in diminished self-ratings of native language proficiency among these speakers. For example, in Isurin's (2011) sample of 50 adult immigrants from Russia who had spent at least 10 years in the United States, only 40% of participants assessed their proficiency in Russian as "very good," while 34% rated themselves as "good," 22% as "okay," and 4% as "bad" speakers of Russian (p. 211). By comparison, the same study reports that all Russian speakers residing in Israel rated their proficiency in Russian at the two highest levels on the four-point scale described above: either as "very good" (94%) or "good" (6%). These surprisingly low self-ratings of first language (L1) proficiency among speakers of *Émigré* Russian in the U.S. group may be attributed to a decreased amount of continuous exposure to Russian and regular

contact with English in the new homeland, and in a certain sense they reflect the onset of the larger intergenerational process of language loss. Linguistically, Russian spoken in the U.S. by first-generation immigrants is characterized by a number of phenomena that distinguish it from the baseline language, including register contraction, lexical transfer and borrowing, and word order changes (Andrews, 1998; Benson, 1960; Bermel & Kagan, 2000; Pavlenko, 2003; Polinsky, 2000), and it is not surprising that some of these linguistic shifts are subsequently passed down to the next generations. In what follows, we take a closer look at the three factors of the language vitality framework discussed above and examine the specific ways in which this framework can contribute to our understanding of the transmission and maintenance of Russian as a heritage language in the United States.

### **Capacity Development**

According to Kagan (2005, p. 213), the primary sources of capacity development in heritage language acquisition can be represented as the following triad: family, community and community schools, and formal education. Each of these three elements may have a more or less prominent effect on language maintenance in a given community. While community schools generally play a significant role in the education of heritage language learners (Compton, 2001; Lo Bianco, 2008a), particularly for languages like Chinese and Korean, which have a well-established system of community schools (Kagan & Dillon, 2010), very few community schools have been established for the acquisition of Russian (Kagan, 2005, pp. 213-214). The Heritage Language Programs Database of the Center for Applied Linguistics ([n.d.](#)) lists 25 programs, including 14 community-based programs, aimed at preserving and developing the knowledge of the Russian language and culture among children of Russian-born parents in the United States. With few exceptions, the programs are funded by tuition and fees paid by the parents. There are also several weekend schools established by the Orthodox Church, which offer Russian language lessons in addition to promoting cultural and religious knowledge. A number of Russian cultural centers offer language classes, coordinate workshops on various aspects of the culture, including folklore, music, and even Russian baking (e.g., the New Russia Cultural Center in Albany, NY (n.d.)), and organize other events in celebration of the Russian cultural heritage. Unfortunately, access to these opportunities is available only to speakers residing in major cities or large metropolitan areas, and as a result most heritage speakers of Russian grow up without much institutional or community support. For example, the National Heritage Language Survey found heritage Russian speakers to be the least likely group to have attended a community or church school in their heritage language in the United States (Carreira & Kagan, 2011). According to the most recent data, in a sample of 254 heritage learners of Russian, 84.3% have never studied Russian at a community or church school, and only 14.7% reported having attended a community or church event in their heritage language within the last six months (National Heritage Language Survey, 2012).

Without access to community schools, formal language classes in Russian seem like the next option for obtaining and improving language skills outside the family setting. In 1990, a record

year for the popularity of Russian in the United States, 44,626 students were enrolled in college-level Russian language courses (Modern Language Association, 2009). This number includes predominantly second language learners of Russian as well as some heritage Russian speakers, as no separate Russian language programs for heritage speakers existed in 1990. However, despite a steady growth of Russian immigration to the United States and subsequent increase in the numbers of heritage speakers, the overall enrollments in Russian language courses decreased to 26,883 by 2009 (see Figure 1), thus limiting the opportunities for college-level Russian language study in recent years.

**Table 1.**

*Russian-speaking population and college enrollment data since 1990*

	1990	2000-2002	2009	Source
Total speakers of Russian (5 years and older)	241,798	706,242 (2000)	881,723	U.S. Census Bureau (2012)
Enrollment in college Russian courses	44,626	23,921 (2002)	26,883	MLA Enrollment Survey (2009)

Adapted from “Enrollments in Languages other than English in United States Institutions of Higher Education, 2009” by N. Furman, D. Goldberg and N. Lusin, 2010, Table 5, p. 25. Retrieved from [http://www.mla.org/pdf/2009\\_enrollment\\_survey.pdf](http://www.mla.org/pdf/2009_enrollment_survey.pdf). Copyright 2010 by the Modern Language Association.

Of course, the overall reduction in Russian language courses and programs is not the only factor that may explain why many heritage Russian speakers never gain access to formal instruction in Russian (Polinsky & Kagan, 2007). Research suggests that even heritage speakers who express the desire to receive formal instruction in Russian are often unable to gain access to existing Russian language classes, most of which are designed for second language learners of Russian. In some cases, heritage speakers themselves do not find such courses particularly useful; in other cases, heritage speakers are denied the opportunity to enroll in college Russian courses, simply because they are dismissed as “native speakers who are not legitimate students in foreign language classes” (Kagan, 2005, p. 214).

Since K-12 schools rarely offer Russian classes (Kagan & Dillon, 2010; Rhodes & Pufahl, 2009), and since opportunities for college-level language instruction in Russian are relatively limited, the task of language transmission and (re)learning is largely placed on the shoulders of families and particularly the parents and grandparents of heritage Russian speakers, who remain the main source of heritage language exposure and education for their children or grandchildren. Intergenerational language transmission in the home is “a critical dimension of language maintenance and recovery” (Lo Bianco, 2008a, p. 25), and it is thus not uncommon for parents to

serve as the primary (and often only) source of linguistic input for children in immigrant families. For Russian, language exposure at home emerges as the most significant factor in heritage language maintenance and transmission. According to the National Heritage Language Survey, 59.5% of the Russian heritage learners responding to the survey report living at home with parents while attending college. In fact, Russian heritage speakers were among those receiving the highest exposure to the heritage language at home compared to all other language groups (Carreira & Kagan, 2011).

The success of language transmission in these circumstances is directly correlated with patterns of daily language use in the home, attitudes toward language use and preservation (those overtly expressed and those implicitly practiced by family members), and efforts for creating opportunities and incentives for language use in and outside the home. However, on the basis of existing data, it is not clear that heritage speakers receive sufficient encouragement from their parents to actively *use* the heritage language, even if such opportunities are present. According to a survey in Isurin's (2011) study of the Russian diaspora, only 27% of adult participants encouraged their children to maintain the heritage language, and only 26% of the Russian-speaking parents of heritage speakers reported providing explicit linguistic feedback in the form of corrections to their children. Several studies indicate that Russian parents and grandparents do not always feel the need to use only Russian with their children or grandchildren and even do not always see value in language maintenance (Lavretsky, Meland, & Plotkin, 1997; Polinsky, 2000). These attitudes are especially prevalent in the families of immigrants representing the third wave, i.e. people who left the Soviet Union between 1970-1990 with no intention of returning (Kagan & Dillon, 2006; Zemskaja, 2001). Research also suggests that it is not uncommon for heritage speakers to respond to their parents in English even when they are addressed in Russian (Polinsky & Kagan, 2007) or, in the case of proficient speakers, to code-switch between English and Russian at home (Schmitt, 2000). Taken together, these findings certainly bear on the questions of opportunity creation and motivation, which we address separately below, and suggest that the quantity of linguistic input from the family, the main linguistic resource for Russian heritage speakers, is considerably limited, and so are the opportunities for acquisition and maintenance of the heritage language in the context of sharp competition with the dominant language.

### **Opportunity Creation**

Besides the home, what additional opportunities for language exposure and use might be available to Russian speakers? As noted previously, the majority of Russian speakers in the United States live outside clearly definable ethnic or linguistic neighborhoods; certainly, this factor makes it necessary for them to rely on English for most of their daily tasks. Kagan and Dillon (2010) report, on the basis of U.S. Census 2007 data, that over 75% of Russian speakers claim to be able to speak English "well" or "very well" and that most Russian immigrants are able to obtain jobs requiring high levels of education, including management and professional occupations. These findings suggest that English, rather than Russian, occupies a place of

primary importance in the daily linguistic repertoire of these speakers outside the home. For those residing in major cities and large metropolitan areas, it is somewhat easier to maintain connections with their cultural and linguistic heritage due to the existence of the relevant infrastructure, including small businesses that cater to the Russian-speaking population, most notably food stores and restaurants, bookstores, art galleries, hair and beauty salons, medical offices, various real estate and insurance agencies, and religious organizations.

In reference to the latter, it should be noted that Russian immigrants of the Soviet era, representing the third wave of immigration (Andrews, 1998), are a predominantly secular group: in the Soviet Union, where religion was discouraged, people rarely attended religious services on a regular basis (Isurin, 2011). Because religious organizations are known to play a key role in the preservation and promotion of community languages and traditions by providing a place for community members to gather on a regular basis, Russian communities are often faced with the need to rely on other resources for this purpose, often fulfilled by cultural centers and similar organizations as well as through events organized by private individuals (e.g., weekend picnics, musical performances, holiday celebrations). The fact that a very large portion of people in the third and fourth waves of Russian immigration are ethnically Jewish (Kagan & Dillon, 2006; Andrews, 2012) highlights an additional dimension relating to the problem of language maintenance through religious institutions. For Russian speakers who identify themselves primarily as Jewish, maintenance and transmission of the Russian language and culture may not be seen as an issue of primary importance, and emphasis on learning Yiddish or Hebrew may instead determine the choice of weekend schools, summer schools, or other language programs for children.

Media serve as a common source of daily linguistic exposure for many Russian speakers regardless of their geographical proximity to other members of the community. Recent work on the Russian diaspora in the United States suggests that the majority of Russian immigrant families have at least some access to the Russian-language media, including print sources (98%), TV and movies (96%), music (92%), and radio (61%) (Isurin, 2011). Unlike immigrants in the pre-digital era, who had to rely on subscriptions to magazines and various print sources (see Kagan & Dillon, 2010, for an overview), often distributed through ethnic grocery stores and cultural centers, today's immigrants have virtually unlimited access to Russian-language media via Internet-based resources. There are multiple opportunities for maintaining links with the homeland through email, Skype, chats, and social networks. In addition to several U.S.-based television networks and radio stations serving the Russian communities in the United States, most television and radio stations in Russia now offer the option of streaming programs directly from their websites. The global interconnectedness brought about by the rapid development of technology has opened multiple doors and opportunities for maintaining cultural, informational, interpersonal, and even professional links with the homeland. However, these growing opportunities do not seem to change the established patterns of preference for English-language media among second-generation Russian Americans, who develop American cultural preferences

and listen predominantly to American music, watch American movies, and spend time on the Internet visiting English language websites. Research shows that even among heritage learners of Russian enrolled in college-level language courses (i.e., speakers most likely to have the basic literacy skills in the heritage language, including knowledge of Cyrillic), the majority do not access the Internet in their heritage language and do not read in the heritage language outside of school (Carreira & Kagan, 2011). For example, 83.8% of heritage Russian learners enrolled in college-level Russian courses answered “no” or “rarely” when asked if they access the Internet in Russian (National Heritage Language Survey, 5/21/12). Among daily activities that involve use of their heritage language, most heritage Russian learners in the survey listed activities that do not presuppose literacy in the heritage language, such as speaking on the phone, listening to music, and watching television and movies (Carreira & Kagan, 2011).

Because, as discussed above, there are very few Russian programs in K-12 education and community schooling opportunities are scarce, many heritage speakers of Russian wishing to develop literacy skills in the home language do not always have the opportunity to do so in an instructional setting. However, because Russian remains one of the several strategically important languages for the U.S. government, and due to the economic and political growth of Russia in recent years, there is a chance for some positive changes. First and foremost, this is evidenced by a growing number of programs and initiatives aimed at developing curricula that would allow students to attain superior-level language proficiency in Russian. The federally funded STARTALK project, administered by the National Foreign Language Center at the University of Maryland ([STARTALK](#), n.d.), offers summer programs for teachers and language learners with the goal of increasing linguistic and cultural literacy in critical languages, including Russian. As of 2012, ten student programs and eleven teacher education programs in Russian are offered through the STARTALK initiative at colleges and high schools throughout the United States. Other government-funded programs for the study of Russian include The National Security Language Initiative for Youth (National Security Language Initiative for Youth, n.d.), which provides scholarships for high school students to participate in overseas immersion programs, and The Critical Language Scholarship Program (The Critical Language Scholarship Program, n.d.), which offers fully funded summer language institutes for U.S. university students. In addition, the recently established Russian Flagship Program (The Language Flagship: Russian, 2013), launched in 2002 as a component of the National Security Education Program, provides extensive language training aimed at helping students reach Superior levels (American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, 2012) of competence in Russian by offering intensive language courses at four U.S. universities (Bryn Mawr College, Portland State University, UCLA, and University of Wisconsin-Madison) and a year-long immersion program at St. Petersburg University in Russia. Heritage speakers, some of whom exhibit high levels of fluency in spoken Russian, are great candidates for such programs.

In addition, several U.S. universities and colleges now offer language courses designed specifically for heritage speakers. The important question is, of course, whether or not heritage



speakers of Russian are likely to enroll in these courses or participate in the general Russian-language programs discussed above, and this brings us to the third factor of our language vitality triad: the desire of speakers to acquire and build the literacy skills necessary for continued maintenance and transmission of the heritage language.

### **Desire**

Perhaps one of the most difficult aspects of the language vitality triad to assess or quantify directly, speakers' *desire* for maintaining their heritage language, can be conceptualized as an 'internal' component of the COD framework, one shaped by a complex interplay of factors related to speakers' own ethnic, linguistic, and cultural identities and their personal connection to the heritage language and degree of identification with it (see Lo Bianco & Peyton, this issue).

As applied to our discussion, the question of cultural and ethnic identity gains additional complexity in light of the observation that the term "Russian" receives a new interpretation in the context of Soviet and post-Soviet immigration to the United States, where it often becomes a reconstructed, and perhaps even in some sense reinvented, concept. Immigrants from the former Soviet republics (now independent states) represent a diverse multilingual, multiethnic, and multicultural group of people. Although they have been educated in Russian, the official language of instruction in the former USSR, immigrants from the post-Soviet space may also speak other languages in addition to Russian and often come from countries outside Russia's borders. Upon arriving in the United States, however, many of these speakers introduce themselves and become perceived as Russian, regardless of their ethnic roots, nationality, or citizenship (Andrews, 1998, 2012). In other words, a Jew from Ukraine could be as Russian in the U.S. context as his next-door neighbor from Moscow. It is also important to keep in mind that a large portion of the predominantly Jewish immigration of the third wave came to the United States via Israel, which many Soviet Jews claimed as their national homeland under the Brezhnev regime in the 1970s in order to obtain exit visas (Andrews, 2012; Remennick, 2007). In this context, the issue of multiple identities becomes central for understanding language attitudes that are intrinsically tied to the patterns of language use and maintenance in the homes of immigrants of the third and fourth waves. For them, the choice of linguistic and cultural identification extends beyond the typical dichotomy of negotiating between the old self and the new self and requires a complex mechanism of reanalyzing, reinventing, and adjusting past experiences and attitudes to construct a new identity.

It is often pointed out in recent sociolinguistic studies on the Russian diaspora that the preservation of Russian and the emotional investment in the language is overall considerably weaker for immigrants of the third and fourth waves, particularly as compared to their predecessors of the first wave, who were much more vigilant about preserving and transmitting the Russian language and culture in the hopes of returning to the old homeland and the old ways of life. In contrast, immigrants of the Soviet era, people born and raised in a country that no longer exists, generally do not view the idea of returning to the old homeland as a plausible or,

for that matter, desirable option. Studies repeatedly underscore the strong emphasis placed on acquisition of the English language skills among immigrants of the third and fourth waves, who view mastery of English as a prerequisite for economic stability, success, and advancement. (See Andrews, 2012, for discussion and references.) If these observations are correct, and assuming that language attitudes in the home serve as a predictor of continued inter-generational language maintenance in immigrant families, we may hypothesize that desire for maintaining and actively using the heritage language beyond the home and family domain may not be among the highest priorities for the American-born generation of heritage Russian speakers.

A more direct way of assessing Russian heritage speakers' desire for maintaining the heritage language, and the specific forces that compel these speakers to actively seek opportunities for improving their heritage language skills, is to analyze responses on surveys and questionnaires that provide quantitative data from heritage language learners enrolled in Russian language courses about their motivations for studying the language in a formal setting. Consistent with the conception of a heritage language as a home language of particular family relevance (Fishman, 2001; Wiley, 2001), existing surveys of Russian heritage learners suggest that the motivation for studying Russian tends to center first and foremost around family and cultural factors. For example, a survey of heritage speakers conducted at UCLA in 2000 revealed that "preserving family ties" was the main reason for studying Russian that 16 of 41 students gave, in addition to 31 students who expressed the desire to preserve the Russian culture and 33 students who studied Russian in order to be able to read Russian literature (Kagan, 2005). The same survey revealed that only 7 students mentioned career goals as part of their motivation for studying Russian. Similarly, the National Heritage Language Survey (Carreira & Kagan, 2011) found that the desire "to communicate better with family and friends in the United States" and "to learn about their cultural and linguistic roots" were the two top reasons selected by the Russian college-level heritage learners, while professional reasons were ranked much lower on the scale. In comparison, heritage learners of Chinese and Spanish prioritized professional goals for learning the language (Carreira & Kagan, 2011), a likely consequence of the role these languages play in today's political and economic climate in the United States and the wider opportunities in the job market that knowledge of these languages may provide. Overall, it seems that in the case of Russian heritage speakers, the desire for maintaining the heritage language is fueled to a large extent by affective, rather than purely practical, factors and aims first and foremost at preserving familial continuity and strengthening emotional ties to the cultural heritage.

These findings provide an important insight into the place of the heritage language in the lives of Russian speakers and offer support for Fishman's (2001) observation that the minority or home language is typically associated with the "old," rather than with the "new"; in Lo Bianco's (2008a) terms, it "seeks to support the interests of older generations rather than the young" and may be seen "as atavistic, nostalgic, i.e. backward looking" (pp. 14-15). Until the language begins to be viewed as having real value in the present and future lives of the speakers, rather than only as a bridge to the past, it is unlikely to have a sustainable future.

## **Conclusion**

Like many other heritage languages, Russian does not survive beyond the second generation in the United States. While the number of Russian speakers seems to grow steadily because of ongoing immigration from the former Soviet Union, well-established patterns of intergenerational language shift are just as steady. Recent surveys indicate that while children in Russian-speaking households tend to speak only Russian until age 5, exclusive use of English is achieved in half of the surveyed households by the age of 18 (Kagan & Dillon, 2010). As is common in the context of subtractive bilingualism, Russian as a heritage language retains primarily retrospective (or past-oriented), rather than prospective (or future-oriented) value for its speakers. Despite growing opportunities and resources for language use with the advancement of technology, high levels of assimilation and dispersion in the Russian diaspora and an emphasis on education and professional success in the English-speaking environment create conditions for the promotion of the majority language at the expense of the heritage language. Families remain the primary vehicle for the intergenerational transmission of Russian. At the same time, the home domain falls short of providing a communicatively and linguistically diverse environment. It is characterized by emphasis on the interpersonal rather than on the presentational linguistic mode (Kagan, 2005), preference for colloquial forms, and reduced distribution of registers and lexical and grammatical forms (Andrews, 1998; Laleko, 2010; Polinsky, 2000). In the absence of additional reinforcement through schooling and literacy, heritage Russian speakers' linguistic representations comprise only a subset of those available to competent speakers, contributing to diminished confidence and motivation for continued language use and transmission.

At the same time, it is not entirely impossible to conclude the discussion on a somewhat hopeful note. Although little is known about the ongoing wave of post-Soviet immigration, sometimes discussed as the fifth wave, the picture emerging so far exhibits signs of a different dynamic. This wave is formed by people for whom immigration is viewed as a temporary and largely job-related phenomenon, which allows for tight contact with and frequent visits to the homeland, transcontinental business opportunities, and the possibility of return (Dubinina & Polinsky, in press; Kagan & Dillon, 2006). While it is still too early to tell what these changes might mean for the next generations of Russian heritage speakers in the United States, it seems that increased opportunities for meaningful language use, along with a more present- and future-oriented value placed on Russian as a viable language, are among the key factors for promoting additive bilingualism. It is hoped that the new paradigm of geographical and linguistic coexistence will prove to be more conducive to the use of Russian in the United States and intergenerational language transmission of the language.

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