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## Chapter 6

# What kind of speakers are these? Placing heritage speakers of Russian on a continuum

**Abstract:** It is commonly presupposed that one's first/home language is acquired easily, but there are numerous prerequisites for this "ease of acquisition": multifaceted purposes and a high frequency of use, a broad spectrum of speakers and situations, developing the habit of receiving information about the world in the language (the primary socialisation and verbally-mediated cognitive development), and shaping one's behaviour through this means of communication. Today, Russian develops as a pluricentric language with multiple centres of contact with languages of environment, e.g., in the USA, Israel, Germany, and Finland, as is demonstrated in this study with teenager bilinguals with the goal to show what is native-like and what belongs to their special proficiency. The debate upon pluricentricity strongly interrelates with the notions of norms/standards and native/heritage speakers in diaspora. Heritage speakers often report that they struggle to recognize their language imperfections. The position of the heritage speakers between the L1 and the L2 speakers/learners of a language is both emotionally and practically vulnerable. The concept of a native speaker of Russian should be rethought, and the multilingual speakers who claim to have Russian as their first language should be offered placement on the scale between native and non-native performance, as part of a continuum and not positioned on one end of this continuum.

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## 1. Introduction

The political, social, and economic reforms of the late 1980s followed by the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 produced a considerable surge of Soviet migrants and refugees, commonly called “the fourth wave” (Ben-Rafael et al. 2006). This chapter looks at the growing population of Russian *heritage speakers* (HSs) from a linguistic and sociolinguistic perspective and attempts to clarify the concept of HSs, as opposed to the concept of native language (NL) speaker, by thoroughly analysing the characteristics of the Russian speech of four groups of teenagers that speak Russian as a *heritage language* (HL) and English, Hebrew, German, or Finnish as dominant languages.

The notion of HSs has become problematic in recent years due to the globalization of migration (e.g., Kagan et al. 2017; Kasstan, Auer, and Salmons 2018). Migrants arrive with hundreds of languages and continue to speak them to their children at home in their new countries. Nevertheless, after two or three generations, many of these languages are lost. In general, large immigrant communities can either support bilingualism or impede integration into the majority of society. The number of speakers, political structures, and access to technology influence the linguistic vitality of a language (cf. Laleko 2013).

Several hundred million people speak Russian (about 150 million speak it as a first language, and an equal number speak it as a second or a foreign language). According to Arefev (2019), the number of Russian language (RL) speakers is in decline. While Arefev refers to learners of Russian and to those who already speak Russian, he does consider those who are bilingual from childhood to be a special group. Learners of Russian as a second or foreign language who studied it at some point, but may not use it anymore, still qualify as speaking some Russian. Individuals who speak Russian fluently, having learned it as their mother or second tongue at school during the Soviet era, might nowadays, for political, identity or language shift reasons, say that their dominant language and their NL are not Russian. These are complex processes related to identity, socio-political, and economic factors, among others, and are not always directly related to one’s language proficiency.

The idea of linguistic pluricentricity (existence of a language with multiple centres of development, often in codified varieties, e.g. Kamwangamalu, this volume) was developed theoretically by Clyne (1992) and Muhr (2012); they mentioned Russian as a potentially pluricentric language. Today, Russian displays multiple

centres of contact with the local language all over the world (Kamusella 2018; Mustajoki, Protassova, and Yelenevskaya 2020; Zybatov 2017). According to Coulmas (1981), linguistics cannot exist without the authority of the native speaker (NS), who decides about the quality of a construction, relevance of a word entry, or adequacy of emerging meaning. For Ortega (2019), this is valid only because we constructed the NS that way, in a monolingual paradigm of linguistics that changed a lot. Davies (2003) explains that the language individuals learn first can be or become neither their dominant language nor the most important language for them, making a case for a more dynamic view of language biographies and concepts usually used to refer to languages.

Due to the unique history of Russian-speaking expansion and emigration, many countries with communities of Russian speakers have developed policies for Russian Language (RL) and culture (Ryazanova-Clarke 2014; Yelenevskaya and Protassova 2015). Such communities are generally heterogeneous and embrace an ethnically diverse population of all waves of migration. Russia uses the umbrella term *compatriots* (*sootchestvenniki*) to identify these people and tries to include them into the “Russian World”, whose representation abroad is also formally promoted via sponsored structures and programs by the Russian government. There are media and educational institutions in Russian because their members value education in Russian and preserve Russian culture at the material (food, shops, books, et cetera) and spiritual levels. All these facilities promote RL intergenerational transmission (Nikunlassi and Protassova 2019).

This chapter is aimed at analysing the acquisition of a home language abroad taking as example Russian as a pluricentric language and elaborates on the notions of the HLs. We search to show whether we could name those persons NSs (of Russian). First, the chapter addresses the theoretical background of the notion of the HSs. After that, we discuss data from interviews with young Russian-speaking immigrants in four countries: the USA, Israel, Germany and Finland. In the last section, we compare results between the countries and draw conclusions concerning the differences in the acquisition of the HL in respective countries.

## 2 Theoretical concepts

### 2.1 Varieties of a home language

Transmitting a language through multiple generations in a diaspora is difficult. Developing and maintaining any language in a child or a close community of speakers within a broader other-language-speaking community requires the

synergy of many individuals, institutions, and initiatives. This task needs to extend beyond the linguistic domain and includes outreach in the community, the global spectrum of cognitive potential, and the plenitude of cultural amalgamations. While research indicates that acquisition through reduced input outside the dominant language home country follows the same pattern as that of learning the language in a monolingual environment, it may stop earlier (Flores, Jesus, and Marques 2017; Montrul 2015: 208–248; Polinsky 2018: 1–16). Comparing the contexts surrounding HL acquisition can potentially reveal the veritable nature of language “fuelling”: what helps to condition fully-fledged linguistic competence. On the other hand, the age of the children and the amount and quality of exposure to the language determines the volume of language they acquire.

The quality of language at home may vary, but HSs can attain levels of linguistic competence that are either never or rarely achieved by the learners with a non-native background, such as language learners (Brecht and Ingold 1998). Still, HSs often have gaps in their acquisition because it is nearly impossible to reproduce the full experience and structure of first language acquisition. The fact that a language was learned first but outside of Russia could imply that the individual speaks it at the same level as that of a NS (a monolingual speaker of Russian born in Russia). However, this criterion is not enough. The term HL was previously used to designate the language of a person’s heritage; that is, the language of parents, grandparents or great-grandparents (cf. Dewaele, Bak, and Ortega, this volume). HL was juxtaposed to “home language”, which is the language used by the family. Home languages differ from those of the environment in cases of immigration, expatriation, minority groups, or a foreign or other naturally- or artificially-introduced language. Today, the term HL usually refers to the language first spoken by the family and later fossilized, acquired, or forgotten by the child or individual despite its continued use at home. In the literature both concepts (home language and heritage language) are sometimes used interchangeably.

Research has usually not discerned between children growing up in multilingual or monolingual homes, which means that having one or more first languages was not an important component for many researchers of HLs. Children who receive dual linguistic input from the time of their birth are exposed to these languages as mother tongues, and these children’s competence is expected to differ from those who come from a monolingual family that later switched to another language.

Parents influence the way their children gain proficiency in their language(s) by deciding how languages are introduced: in a separate institution outside school hours or in a bilingual pre-primary or primary school. In a HL context, some

people are able to speak Russian, but they cannot read or write in Russian. Additionally, some may have visited Russia, while others speak only “kitchen Russian” (Pavlenko and Malt 2011). Regarding formal RL education, there are different types of textbooks available: L1 for monolingual, mother-tongue speakers in the countries where they live and for bilingual or multilingual speakers abroad; L2 for ethnic minorities and immigrants in Russia; and textbooks for foreign-language learners, typically, outside Russia (starting at different levels). These textbooks are published both in Russia and abroad.

Until now, researchers have found that factors affecting a person’s knowledge of a language include the generational socio-economic status of the person’s family (education, knowledge of other languages, occupations, and the number of the family members and generations living together), the length of the person’s exposure to the language, the age at which the person was first exposed to the language, the quantity and quality of the exposure, identities (cultural, ethnic, and religious views), and attitudes about multilingualism and language use (Ansala 2019; Rhodes, Ochoa, and Ortiz 2005).

Individuals can, surprisingly, lose competence in their first languages if they cut ties to other speakers of the language, especially if these individuals are still children and have not acquired literacy (Gindis 2005; Lindquist, McComarck, and Shablack 2015). One negative aspect of language loss is that previous generations, including parents and grandparents, cannot pass down their knowledge and experiences. Success depends on the family language policy; usually, parents make their decisions based upon the conditions of their surroundings and their life conditions (see Haque and Le Lièvre 2019; Schwartz and Verschik 2013; Slavkov 2017 and references therein).

As a pluricentric language, Russian should have its own variety in every country, which could be taught as such at the local level. Russian speakers in diaspora are subject to at least two types of variation in their language: a variety that was imported from their former residence (dialect and regional varieties), and another variety that is the result of local influence (standard and non-standard varieties) (Andrews 1999; Makarova 2012). The curriculum for first / HL should acknowledge the co-existence of the different language varieties alongside with the school standard or norm.

The differences between HSs and NSs are vague yet clear. With HS, there is an intact zone in their language that corresponds to NL proficiency combined with some deficits and lacunae due to the way they have acquired the language. It is a useful construct if we want to underline that the first language developed abroad may be affected by the language(s) and the lifestyle of the surroundings. This can be thought of as a variety of bilingualism.

## 2.2 Oral versus written proficiency in the HL: The case of Russian HL

In this section, we touch upon some trends in the discussion about HL and very briefly present the scope of the research on HL relevant for our study. Kupisch and Rothman (2018) claim that dominance is not nativeness. In their view, “naturalistically acquired native grammars that are sufficiently developed for communication cannot be incomplete, only different – potentially drastically – from one another by comparison. HSs are native speakers of their HL” (Kupisch and Rothman 2018: 573). Polinsky and Scontras (2020a) critically approached and re-examined the notion of a HL from the point of view of the object and methods of analysis and its results. If HL replaces the term *unbalanced bilingualism*, it can be extended to any multilingual situation. According to Polinsky and Scontras, the quantity and quality of the input, and “the economy of online resources when operating in a less dominant language” trigger deviation from the relevant baseline (Polinsky and Scontras 2020a: 4). Meisel (2020: 34) argues that “exposure to a HL over a longer time may lead to more balanced bilingualism; but this concerns proficiency, not competence. Empirical research suggests that even when relative frequency of exposure amounts to no more than 30%, this need not lead to divergent attainment.” In their response, Polinsky and Scontras (2020b: 50) state: “Some of the defining properties of HL systems include high regularity of grammatical paradigms, commitment to fully-compositional expressions, low tolerance of ambiguities at various levels of linguistic representation, preference for perceptually-salient forms over the ones that are perceptually weak, and related difficulty with silent (missing) material in linguistic forms”.

It is widely known that the outcomes in one’s first language for some monolingual speakers may be different from the outcomes for other monolingual speakers. For example, according to Hart and Risley (1995), there are considerable discrepancies in vocabulary growth among monolingual children with different socio-economic statuses. This indicates, by analogy, that some bilingual individuals may have larger linguistic inventories than other bilingual or even monolingual individuals. While there are parents who invest a lot of time and energy into the development of HL proficiency, others prefer that the shift to the dominant language happens as quickly as possible (e.g., Akifyeva 2016; Otwinowska et al. 2021). This is one of the factors that determines the variety of HL proficiency. Also fluency diverges among HS: some report that they feel at ease while speaking in their first language, while others regret that they cannot find the right words, have delayed reactions, or that they differ from NSs (De Jong 2018).

The research on HL shows that these bilingual speakers are competent to a certain degree in the language of the environment (the language of their daily life and formal education) and the home language (which can also be, at least partially, the language of formal education). Oral proficiency usually correlates positively with written language proficiency. Yet, not all parents are aware that their child's oral language should be supported with literacy or they are just happy that they are able to communicate orally. Because children have little contact with literacy practices, their language may diverge from the so-called norm.

Self-assessment by and internal/external assessment of HSs produces mixed results. Their learning trajectories obviously do not coincide in time with that of “monolinguals” who frequent schools and interact daily with the language in the countries where this language is a majority language. In an empirical study on this particular subject in Finland, we met with heritage learners who were considered fluent speakers of Russian but learned to “properly” read and write only at a later age (Protassova 2008). Their peers learning Russian as a foreign language made fewer errors in written Russian but were unable to attain the same level of oral expression as the heritage learners. When assessing such learners, the goals vary from the socio- and psycholinguistic to the practical. Kagan and Kudyma (2019) examined in detail the issue of teaching and assessing heritage RL learners and concluded that such students displayed unbalanced oral and written proficiencies, and that grammar markers varied widely, depending on the amount of schooling.

### **3 Young Russian adolescents with migration backgrounds and Russian as a HL in the United States, Israel, Germany, and Finland: a transnational state of the art**

In order to expand our understanding of the concept of HS as opposed to that of the “native language speaker”, we conducted descriptive analysis of the semantic and morpho-phonological characteristics of the Russian speech of four groups of teenagers who speak Russian as a HL and English, Hebrew, German, or Finnish as dominant languages. In the following section, we will briefly describe: i) the demographic situation in each country; ii) how immigration laws influence language maintenance policy; and iii) the state of the art of the studies conducted in each country about the Russian diaspora.



### 3.1 The United States

The number of Russian speakers in the United States is more than 0.9 million. There are no large, concentrated Russian-speaking communities in the U.S. outside of New York, New Jersey, and California. Less than one-third of Russian-speaking parents in the U.S. encourage their children to maintain Russian, and these children may have only a passive knowledge of it (Isurin 2011).

According to Romanov (2014), the motivation of heritage learners is undermined when their family members and educators emphasize their deficiencies in Russian (which is lexically poor and grammatically incorrect if compared with a native-speaker norm based on Russian from the Russian Federation). At home, they encounter the Russian world via access to Russian TV-channels, and some are active on Russian social media (e.g., Odnoklassniki, VKontakte, and Facebook). Place of birth also plays a key role. Romanov (2014) discovered that Russian students learning the RL want to learn their L1 because it is their NL, their parents and family members push them to learn RL at university, they want to maintain family ties, travel in Russia, use the language at work, or do business in Russia. With their relatives and acquaintances, they speak about education, family, friends, and free time; fewer responses were received concerning actualities, ways of life, and professions. Even fewer spoke about weather, health, history, films, books, or art, which indicates that students generally do not discuss these topics in Russian.

Carreira and Kagan (2011) showed that, on the all-national level, some respondents underscored the importance of communicating with relatives in the U.S. and abroad, as well as knowing their cultural and linguistic roots. This was a self-selected group of individuals who chose to take Russian in college and, therefore, not a fully-representative sample. Also, this survey is from some time ago, and there have since been some generational shifts. Among those students, the transition to English happened mostly after the age of 5, when parents put them into school (before age 5, many stay at home, have a Russian nanny, or attend Russian-language day care). Upon entry into school, these children switch to English, and their parents do not oppose it. Less than half of the school children still speak Russian, but they remain exposed to listening in Russian, and only 3% go to Russian-speaking countries at least once a year (Carreira and Kagan 2011). In the majority of the cases, the students did not learn literacy until college.

### 3.2 Israel

In Israel, about 1 million inhabitants speak Russian. Spolsky and Shohamy (1999) describe Russian as one of the most frequently spoken languages in Israel, with

significant infrastructure. Niznik (2011: 103) writes that “the younger their age at migration to Israel, the greater their Hebrew proficiency, yet all respondents have retained some basic communication skills in Russian,” with more than 90% retaining literacy skills in Russian. The RL in Israel possesses defining features (Naiditsch 2004), is weaker (Meir 2018) and evolves in both the public and private spheres (Yelenevskaya 2015). Socio-linguistic trends in bilingual development have been studied by Schwartz (2012, 2017) while Meir and Polinsky (2019) discovered a robust dependence on the age of onset on bilingualism in the grammar of the HS of Russian in Israel.

### 3.3 Germany

Estimates of Russian speakers in Germany range up from 2 million. Russian-speaking immigrants to Germany include numerous diverse nationalities from former Soviet republics, currently independent countries. Isurin and Riehl (2017) summarized the multifaceted conceptions of Russian-speaking immigrants in Germany, including language maintenance, emerging identities, measurements of social inclusion, linguistic integration, and bilingual practices. Russian-German bilinguals experience language attrition and are described as having certain gaps in Russian-language acquisition (Anstatt 2011; Brehmer and Mehlhorn 2015; Brüggemann 2016, 2018). The grammatical features of their Russian are affected by varying exposure to Russian, matriculation into school and literacy acquisition in the local language (Gagarina and Klassert 2018). Scholars generally show a large spectrum of variation in the HSs’ performance in Russian.

### 3.4 Finland

In Finland, about 80 thousand people are speakers of L1 Russian. For children, it is possible to frequent a bilingual daycare centre, a Russian-speaking circle, a group in kindergarten, or attend a bilingual school (there are six such schools in Finland) and receive instruction in Russian as a foreign language from ages 7–8, 12–13 or 17. All schoolchildren in Finland have the right to receive two lessons per week in their mother tongue (called *home language*) from age 6–19. These measures invigorate performance in HL.

As Moin et al. (2013) reflected, parents expect that children acquire multilingual abilities and maintain Russian on a high level. Some peculiarities of Russian spoken by different generations of bilinguals in Finland are uniform and stable due to the influence of the Finnish language and way of life, some vary, and some

are caused by the complexities of the Russian grammar or emerge because of lexical lacunae (paronyms) (Protassova 2009). Rynkänen and Pöyhönen (2010) reinforced the argument that psychological and social factors partly shape linguistic and behavioral characteristics of young Russian speakers in Finland.

## **4 Empirical study: research aims and methodological approach**

In the present study, which represents a multi-site research, we analysed the different backgrounds of adolescent HSs of Russian in the four countries presented before (the United States, Israel, Germany, and Finland), which, as we saw, have considerable Russian-speaking minorities. We then compared the outcomes of language acquisition and tried to embark on a conceptual discussion as to whether or not participants can be considered NSs of Russian.

We conducted interviews (see Appendix), provided self-evaluations for the participants, and collected narratives from 56 immigrant adolescents who either were born to Russian-speaking families or immigrated as small children to the U.S. (12), Israel (13), Germany (15), and Finland (16). Each session with a participant lasted about one hour, during which we conducted a structured interview for approximately 30 minutes. Participants were selected by the snowball method, starting from the researchers' acquaintances. The interviews were conducted individually at home, at school, or in public spaces. Professor Olga Kagan composed the written and oral questionnaires. Questions on narrative abilities of the participants are analysed elsewhere (Minkov et al. 2019). Here, we concentrate on the participants' answers about themselves. All of the data was transcribed, and each author analysed the materials. The qualitative analysis focused on describing the semantic and grammatical features of the adolescents' speech.

## **5 Results**

### **5.1 General description of the commonalities across countries**

Below is a snapshot of some themes that came up in the interviews conducted with the participants in the four countries. This summary will serve as a background to the more specific results presented by country below.

All of the interviewers' parents and children had multilingual backgrounds. On their own initiative, participants sometimes briefly judged the quality of the RL of their families that immigrated from the former Soviet Union. A young man from Israel mentioned, for example, that his parents' Russian was "broken" because when they visit Russia, everyone immediately recognizes them as "not from Russia." While answering questions, participants generally evaluated their Russian as being slightly accented; some said that they pronounced the sound *r* differently and they were aware that other Russian speakers recognize something strange in their speech. One remarked that her tone of voice changes when she switches to another language and, in consequence, she becomes a kind-of different person. They stressed that their Russian proficiency develops in the course of communication with NSs (e.g., "the language learned from my mother is my native language") and it should be perfect, and they regret to make mistakes. Adolescents noted that they have difficulties understanding fluent speech, such as what is said on television or by guests from Russia. They felt that they spoke better Russian when they were younger. Several individuals mentioned that they learned other languages besides Russian successfully. Writing, as they acknowledged, is often absent or problematic (while, for those who learn Russian as a foreign language, writing tends to be easier than speaking). One girl from Germany commented that she had not attained a high level of Russian; she mentioned that she reads insufficiently, misses some words, cannot formulate complex sentences, and cannot converse on many topics. She is able to do these things at school in German, but not in Russian, as she explains. Other participants mentioned that some borrowings from their other languages into Russian occur spontaneously, and their parents often criticize them. Some expressed interest in visiting their countries of birth/parents' origin in Russia.

The methods for acquiring literacy in Russian that their parents once used range from hiring a babysitter or coach to frequenting a bilingual school, either on Sundays or more regularly during the week; it was easier to learn the language if they watched Russian television at home and everybody used Russian exclusively in the household. Some respondents dropped their literacy studies early while others did so once they started high school. Their arguments in favour of learning Russian vary: knowledge of any language, especially one not widespread, is useful; knowing (Russian) is better than ignoring (it); the family language should be maintained, not just learned; better communication with family and other people; benefits for the younger children in the family; and being able to pass it on to their future generations.

## 5.2 Snapshots of results per country

### 5.2.1 The United States

#### Sample

We interviewed 12 teenagers aged 13 to 18 (seven girls and five boys) selected from a summer course in Russian at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). Half of these students were born in the U.S. (of these, one was born in Canada), and the other half had arrived before school age. At home, Georgian, Ukrainian, Armenian, and Uzbek were spoken along with Russian. In the cases where the parents came from Belarus or Moldova, the students were less likely to use the former local languages at home. The parents usually spoke English, but not all of the grandparents did.

#### Findings

The students noted that they reply to their parents in Russian and English and speak with their grandparents primarily in Russian. Generally, grandparents watched TV in Russian but parents did so less frequently. Some of the students attended Russian preschools, took afternoon classes, or had Russian-speaking friendships that continued after preschool, although these students reported that they had lost contact with many of those friends unless they were children of their parents' friends. Some had Russian-speaking sports coaches.

We observed a number of examples of code-switching: in their Russian discourse, some participants used English words like *carpool*, *downtown*, *biology*, *summer*, *permit*, *assignment*, *application*, *report*, *credit*, *contact*, *appointment*, *population*, *director*, *babysitter*, *elementary school*, *high school*, *college*, *university*, *community*, *apartment*, *art*, *musical*, *my part for humanity*, *patient*, *open heart surgery*, *hospital*, *outside*, *wheelchair*, *seriously wounded*, *moody*, *separate*, *popular*, and *different*. They used the English discursive markers *like*, *you know* as well as the names of movies, festivities, books, and (geographic) locations. Thus, code-switching takes place in semantic fields served principally in the English language (namely, realities of their urban, school, and professional lives).

In addition, the choice of words, verbal agreement and tense, gender, number, case, the pronunciation of cognates or rare items, incorrect overgeneralizations, word formation (prefixes, suffixes), intonation, aspect, and stress were often deviant from a monolingual native-speaking norm. Combinations of English and

Russian words emerged, for example, when participants spoke about school subjects (*alfabit, kemija, bajologija* instead of *alfavit, himija, biologija*) or other countries (*Russija, Bulgerija* instead of *Rossija, Bolgarija*). Verbs with general meanings, like *delat'* (make) and *xodit'* (go), replaced verbs with more specific meanings. Some participants used calques like *ja 15 let* (I am 15 years old, not *mne 15 let*).

## 5.2.2 Israel

### Sample

We interviewed 13 adolescents, seven boys and six girls. Not all of them could read and write in Russian, although a few had acquired academic skills in it. Most of them were born in Israel. All the participants were involved in after-school Russian-learning settings.

### Findings

The adolescents seemed fluent in Russian and could communicate freely. Hebrew words entering the Russian discourse usually involved the names of shops, newspapers, universities, musical groups, hospitals, foundations, programs, terms for alternative and volunteer service, ambulance, as well as quotes from other people's speeches. The participants had studied Russian at *mofit, basmat, shiton* (names of the educational chains of institutions operating in Russian). Some expressions were translated from Hebrew: e.g., *vysokij ivrit* (high Hebrew) instead of *vysokij uroven' ivrita* (high level of Hebrew), *ja beru neskol'ko let opyta* (I have several years of experience) instead of *ja nabiraju neskolko let stazha*; an extra preposition *dlja* (for) appeared in the clause, *tam pomogal dlja uroki delat'* (there, I helped with the homework).

In addition, in trying to explain local realities, sometimes the participants employed too many words and thus the meaning of their statements was not easy to recover occasionally. Child-like errors emerged while using difficult cases of Russian declension, like *soldatov* instead of *soldat* (Gen. Pl. 'soldiers'), *musul'manov* instead of *musul'man* (Gen. Pl. 'Muslims'), and conjugation, like *iskaju* instead of *ishchu* (1. Sg. 'search') and *hochem* instead of *hotim* (1. Pl. 'want'). There were cases of non-standard agreement, prepositions, aspect, and so on.

### 5.2.3 Germany

#### Sample

We interviewed 15 teenagers aged 13 to 19 (five boys and ten girls), most of whom were born in Germany and whose parents came predominantly from Ukraine, and some Russian-German families repatriated from Kazakhstan. Many of them spoke Russian and had Russian-speaking friends and relatives; they frequented bilingual primary schools or took courses at the Russian House or elsewhere. One preferred not to take Russian as a foreign language at school because, she stated, the teachers “know the language worse than the students”.

#### Findings

All participants were able to converse freely with the researcher. The German participants produced some grammatical forms using incorrect models, similar to those small children use. For example, the participants used *zahlebyvavjus'* instead of *zahljobyvavjus'*, and *analizirovaesh'* instead of *analiziruesh'*. They invented hybrid pronunciation cognates like *inzhenjor* for *inzhener* (Germ. *Ingenieur*), *intenzivno* for *intensivno*, or they pronounced German words with a Russian accent (*gimnazium* instead of *gimnazija*). We found creative expressions, like *ne vedi nizhe plintusa, eto znachit ne vedi duraka*, produced from *ne vedi sebja ploho* (don't behave badly) + *nizhe plintusa* (below the plinth = at an all-time low) + (this means) *ne valjaj duraka* (don't mess around). Some participants confused the sounds *i* and *y*, used a middle *l* (between Russian hard and soft consonants, like in German), employed calques from the German language, copied German verbal agreements, and employed words with general, unspecific, meanings or overgeneralized animacy of nouns in Russian. Many used German words like *Termin* (appointment [missing in Russian]), *Nikolaus* (Nikolaj – the name of the saint who comes on December 6, a tradition that does not exist in Russian Orthodoxy), *Silvester* (December 31), and the terms *Jura*, *Rechtswissenschaft* (jurisprudence, law), *Duales Studium* (when a person works and studies at the same time), *Musikwissenschaft* (musicology), *TU*, *Technische Universität* (Institute of Technology), *Realschule* (a type of school in the German system), *Physik* (physics – a school subject), and *Pfleger* (nurse). The use of these terms means that they were learned and employed in a German context. The word *privat* (in private) was used as such and in the Russified form, *privatno*. The term *Abitur* (a certificate of the final examinations at school) was used to denote the German word (with German pronunciation) as well as the Russified masc. *abitur* or fem. *abitura*.

### 5.2.4 Finland

#### Sample

We interviewed 16 participants, ages 15 to 17 (nine girls and seven boys). 13 were born in various places in Finland, and three were born in Russia (Karelia and St. Petersburg). Most of them spoke Russian with their family members and friends, some had relatives with whom they spoke Finnish, and one had a Finnish-speaking father (and self-assessed his Russian skills as very low). Most expressed a desire to improve the proficiency in Russian, which was said to prevail over Finnish. Their knowledge of Russian was based on home communication and lessons at school (from two to five lessons per week; half of the participants abandoned this instruction). One learned Russian as a foreign language, some of the respondents' families employed a teacher, and one started learning Russian formally only at the age of 14. Most of the parents had repatriated to Finland as Finns from Russia. All of the participants wanted to have a future career that would, in some manner, employ Russian.

#### Findings

Most of the participants' conversational contributions were correct. The lexical lacunae were filled in with Finnish words: the festivity, *pääsiäinen* (Easter); the occupation, *marjastus* (berry collecting); historical events like *itsenäisyys* (independence), *ruokapula* (famine), and *työvoimapula* (workforce deficit); terms of school life, such as *ylä-aste* (classes 7–9), *lukio* (high school), *ammattikoulu* (college). One boy said that it was difficult for him to translate Finnish terms. In some cases, there was no grammatical agreement. In Finnish, there is no grammatical gender, and the participants sometimes get confused by this. They invented new words: a common case in Finnish is the production of nouns derived from verbs and signifying actions. We encountered *puteshestovanie* (traveling), *igranie* (playing), and *byvanie* (being), which are absent in standard Russian. When trying to produce a longer stretch of speech, some participants had difficulties formulating their thoughts.

## 6 Discussion: comparing and interpreting the results

As in previous studies (e.g., Nikunlassi and Protassova 2014), our participants in this multi-site research had difficulties expressing time, finding the proper



adjectives, and constructing complex sentences. In addition, they confused reflexive and non-reflexive verbs, the grammatical gender of nouns, places of stress, and some nuances of negation; they used verbs with general semantics for a variety of other words: *vzjat'* (take) for rent, travel, hire, buy, receive, and choose; *delat'* (make) for put, set, and place; *pojti* (go) for ride, travel, and fly; some confounded *znat'* (know) and *umet'* (can).

From the point of view of 'normative' Russian, all four groups displayed borrowings, calques, pauses, and wavering while choosing the right word. They all made grammatical errors, especially with numerals (also with age), gender, and they frequently confounded the terms for older/younger siblings (they say *bol'shaja sestra* [big sister] or *malen'kij brat* [little brother] instead of *starshaja* [elder] and *mladshij* [younger]). They employed terms denoting nationality after the model *russkij* 'Russian', which is both a noun and adjective in Russian: for example, they said *nemeckij* (German) for a citizen of Germany, which should be *nemec* or *grazhdanin Germanii*, and *finuskij chelovek* (Finnish man) for a Finn, which should be *finn*. The participants in all of the groups used *esli* (if) when introducing indirect speech or a clause without a conjunction (in Russian, this should have the particle *li*). We found numerous examples of placement of the preposition *ot* (from, of) instead of synthetic Genitive (*ot sosedja balkon* [of the neighbor's balcony] instead of *balkon sosedja* [the neighbor's balcony]); for *iz* (from) (*priehala ot Baku* [came from Baku] instead of *iz Baku*); or for possessive constructions (*dedushka ot papy* [grandpa from dad] instead of *papin dedushka*).

Many of our participants utilized special forms to express how one speaks a language: *ona bol'she russkij, chem ja, govorit* (she speaks Russian more than me), which should be *ona govorit po-russki bol'she, chem ja*; *po-ivritski* (in Hebrew), which should be *na ivrite*; *po-angliuskij* or *po-angliuskomu* (in English), which should be *po-anglijski*. Many would say *familija* (family name) to denote 'family', which is *sem'ja* in Russian; *pianino* was shortened to *piano*. Instead of *odnazhdy*, we repeatedly encounter *odin den'* (one day).

Overall, these inaccuracies, which are quite often reported by other researchers of non-standard Russian (in Russia and abroad), seldom impeded communication. Since the participants were born to Russian-speaking families, the local populations abroad consider them to be NSs. For Russian speakers in Russia, their language can seem incomplete, possibly primitive, with a touch of "foreignness". As Carreira and Kagan (2011) put it, they study Russian because they want to communicate, search for information, study their ancestral culture, read Russian literature, talk with family and friends in other countries, watch Russian TV, talk with the Russian speakers in the community, and follow Russian-language church services.

## 7 Conclusion

This chapter was aimed to analyse the acquisition of Russian as a heritage language abroad by comparing first and heritage languages. Our analysis showed a complex relationship between the two notions, native speakers and heritage speakers. Thus, on the scale of NSs to foreign language learners, most of the interviewees fell on the side of native speakers. Considering the overall amount of knowledge acquired by the participants, as well as their academic level and readiness to learn, they should not be considered incompetent speakers of Russian. Still, a couple of our teenagers struggled to express themselves adequately in Russian and felt that the RL was their mother tongue although they cannot perform in it at a level that they wanted to attain. If we accept the idea of pluricentricity, this could still be *their* language, if they choose to call it so.

For Bloomfield (1933: 43), a native speaker is one who speaks a language as a first language. In the case of HSs, we see that their first language is a language that they acquired sequentially or in parallel to a different majority language. Thus, while not matching the ideal, it is not a foreign language. Cook (1999) argues that teaching should consider the needs and abilities of the L2 learner rather than think about him or her as the failed native speaker, proposing the designation of “multicompetent speaker”.

To distinguish between NSs and HSs may be still useful practically (Houghton et al. 2018). Theoretically, it should deal with a continuum of HSs and pluricentricity as well (Singh 1998). The ideal RL speaker, the so-called “bearer of the norm”, is as much a myth as any other NS. The body of research on the reality of the RL use in each country is growing as these countries increasingly encounter such students in their school and university curriculums.

To conclude, it is currently difficult to estimate to what extent multilingual speakers whose Russian is their first language are “true” (in their own words) NSs of Russian throughout the world. Our study showed that the linguistic features of their speech are specific, partly common for all HSs, and they have the right to speak and name any language as their own. The current study searched to answer the question of whether the HSs could be characterised as NSs as well within a context of only one (although huge) linguistic diaspora. Future studies are necessary to continue exploring the nature of the relationship between NSs and HSs.

## Authors' Positionalities

**Olga Kagan** (written by Anna Kudyma): Originally from Moscow, Olga Kagan received an MA from the Moscow Pedagogical Institute and began her career teaching English as a foreign language. After emigrating to the U.S. in 1976, she taught Russian as a lecturer, first at UC Riverside and then at UCLA starting in 1981. In time she earned a PhD, became a full professor, undergraduate advisor and director of language programs in her department, and director of the UCLA Center for World Languages, the Russian Flagship Center, and the National Heritage Language Resource Center (NHLRC), funded by the Department of Education's Title VI. NHLRC was founded to offer effective, research-based approaches to teaching heritage language speakers and providing teacher education. Olga coauthored over 10 Russian-language textbooks, published many articles and book chapters in heritage language studies, and founded the Heritage Language Journal.

She developed an interest in heritage language education after noticing an increasing number of Russian heritage speakers in UCLA Russian classes. While many instructors saw heritage speakers as disruptive and cynical, Olga looked more deeply and saw a fascinating human and pedagogical need and intriguing research questions. She often said, "If they come for an easy grade and that's what we give them, it's our fault, not theirs." She designed a class for heritage speakers at UCLA, which advances heritage speakers to high-level Russian coursework in one year by building on what students know rather than harping on their deficiencies.

Olga's work with these students and her publications made her a widely respected leader in the field. She won several awards for her work, two from the American Association of Teachers of Slavic and East European Languages (AATSEEL) for the Best Contribution to Pedagogy (in 2001 and 2004 for her books), another from AATSEEL for Excellence in Teaching in 2003, and one for Distinguished Service to the Profession from the Modern Language Association in 2014. She was a gifted teacher of foreign and heritage language students on all levels. Olga's work in heritage language studies was informed by her vision for language study for all students: that language can be a medium for discovering the world and oneself. That vision is also the guiding principle of UCLA Russian Flagship Center, one of eight in the U.S. that teach undergraduates to high levels of proficiency in Russian. Her gifts for interaction were evident in her genius for collaborating with many people simultaneously on multiple projects. She loved sharing ideas, designing projects and seeing them come to life, and mentoring students, officially and unofficially. She served on and chaired numerous dissertation committees and wrote thousands of letters of recommendation. Olga's sterling integrity of character could be seen in the integrity of her work. She was also intensely curious, immensely well-read and informed, and saw a staggering workload as a good time. She loved solving problems and was a true scholar in that she was fascinated and pleased to find unanticipated results. She practiced active goodness and was great fun to work with.

*To our great grief, Olga Kagan passed away in April 2018. As we were working on this paper, we were not only comforted by her colleagues at UCLA but encouraged to continue.*

**Miriam Minkov** is PhD student at the Tel Aviv University, Israel. Her research focuses on heritage language and the acquisition of early literacy in the context of bilingualism. Currently she is working on the research of the teaching of heritage languages in the early age.

**Ekaterina Protassova** holds Ph.D. in Philology and Hab. in Pedagogy. She is Adjunct Professor in Russian language at the University of Helsinki. She has authored and co-authored over 300 monographs, articles and book chapters, headed and participated in various international and national projects investigating language pedagogies, child and adult bilingualism, and the role of language and culture in immigrant integration. Her service to the profession includes editorial work for various journals and publishers and organization of seminars and conference panels. Her diverse interests brought her to collaborate with researchers and serve as Ph.D. advisor in Estonia, Germany, Israel, Italy, Kazakhstan, Latvia, Russia, the USA, and other countries. Her work has received multiple awards, including awards for disseminating bilingualism and biculturalism among minority bilingual education and language revitalization in Russia.

**Mila Schwartz** is a Professor in Language and in Oranim Academic College of Education (Israel). Her research interests include language policy and models of early bilingual/multilingual education; linguistic, cognitive, and socio-cultural development of early sequential bilinguals; family language policy; and language teachers' pedagogical development. Recently, she has proposed and elaborated on the following theoretical concepts: language-conducive context, language-conducive strategies and child language-based agency. In addition, Prof. Schwartz has taken an active part in several international projects. For example, international projects entitled *Language Conceptions and Practices in Bilingual Early Childhood: Swedish-Finnish Bilingual Children in Swedish-medium Preschools in Finland* (2013–2017) and *Listening to the Voices of Teachers: Multilingualism and Inclusive Education across Borders* (2018-present). Furthermore, she has recently been invited to act as an international advisor in a new research project called *Language Policies and Practices of Diverse Immigrant Families in Iceland* and their implications for education, led by Prof. Hanna Ragnarsdóttir. She held the position of Secretary of the Steering Committee of the International Symposium of Bilingualism from 2015 to 2019, and currently she acts as Convenor of the MultilingualChildhoods network. In addition to her academic work, Prof. Schwartz is an Academic Adviser of “Hand in Hand: Center for Jewish-Arab Education” and the Russian-Hebrew speaking bilingual preschools in Israel.

## Appendix

*The questionnaire for participants (original is in Russian)*

- (1) Where does your family come from?
- (2) What languages do you speak at home and with friends?
- (3) How do your parents and grandparents react if they hear errors in Russian?
- (4) How have you learned Russian and other languages?
- (5) Which languages are beneficial?
- (6) What do you want to do in the future?
- (7) Which subjects do you enjoy studying?
- (8) What do you celebrate at home?
- (9) Do you listen to the Russian music?

- (10) Do they know any Russian singers?
- (11) Have you travelled to Russia or the country of your parents' origin? If yes, what are your impressions?
- (12) What do your parents say about the life in the former Soviet Union?
- (13) How do you identify yourself?
- (14) Do you have a best friend? Can you talk about him/her? How did you meet?
- (15) What did you do yesterday? What are you going to do tomorrow?
- (16) If you are to have children, would you want them to speak Russian?

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