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Special Issue
COVID-19 and Online Teaching Pedagogy in the Times of a Global Crisis: Research, Practices, and Solutions

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A Journal of the American Council of Teachers of Russian
Russian Language Journal

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INTRODUCTION TO THE SPECIAL ISSUE

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Introduction to the Special Issue

Emergency Remote Teaching, Online Instruction, and the Community: Lessons from the COVID-19 Crisis in Language Education

LIUDMILA KLIMANOVA, JASON MERRILL, SHANNON DONNALLY SPASOVA

1. Introduction

The COVID-19 crisis took all of us by surprise. Universities and schools, in unprecedented fashion, quickly began to move instruction online. In some universities, the switch to online instruction coincided with spring breaks, allowing instructors a brief period for hurried preparation, whereas other colleagues had only a few hours’ warning. In any case, few educators had previous experience with online instruction, so most were suddenly asked to teach in a completely new way. Despite these new challenges and the isolation necessitated by COVID-19, the language teaching community, in addition to adapting or creating courses for online delivery, was quick to share tips and best practices, publish case studies of ways programs navigated the move online, and conduct research that studied aspects of the pandemic’s impact on our field.

During this intensive introduction to online instruction, as a profession we learned a great deal about teaching and our priorities as teachers. This special volume of Russian Language Journal seeks to capture the spirit and lessons of the COVID-19 crisis. While most of its articles concern the teaching of Russian, the challenges faced by instructors and students during COVID-19 have affected the entire language teaching community. We hope therefore that the lessons learned will be useful to instructors of all languages. This special volume takes an early step in reflection and discussion of the developments that have affected all of us during this time.

At the time of publication of this volume, most institutions of higher education in the United States intend to return to face-to-face instruction in Fall 2021. Even if we are able to meet in our physical classrooms, we
certainly will not return to the teaching of Russian as it was done before the pandemic began. Like colleagues in other disciplines, during the pandemic Russian instructors used new technologies, learned new approaches, and reassessed priorities. COVID-19 has permanently changed the teaching of Russian, but exactly how remains to be seen. Has the pandemic drawn lasting attention to questions of access and inclusion? Will we see more online and hybrid Russian courses after the pandemic? What tools will remain after we return to face-to-face teaching? What was the student and instructor experience of COVID-19 and will those attitudes change as the pandemic fades from memory? Will universities spend resources on preparing for another pandemic?

To establish a broader context for the discussion of these important questions, this introductory article attempts to outline what its authors believe are some of the most impactful takeaways of the COVID-19 pandemic for education in general and foreign language teaching in particular, and to identify critical themes for further discussion and research moving forward.

2. The Impact of the Pandemic on Higher Education
There is no doubt that COVID-19 will continue to impact all areas of education. Educators are well aware of a “summer slide,” the loss of a certain percentage of educational gains during long summer breaks. In early 2020, specialists were already speaking of a “COVID slide” that potentially could be far more significant than the annual “summer slide,” and these concerns were first expressed well before much of the world spent an entire academic year (or significant parts of it) learning online (GoGuardian Team 2020). The loss of previous educational gains, or of gains that under normal circumstances would have been made but under COVID-19 were not, has the potential to ripple through education for years to come. In higher education, this concern is relevant for any major (such as languages) in which courses are sequenced to build on one another.

The pandemic has had an enormous impact on enrollments; 2020 and early 2021 saw significantly fewer students enrolled in higher education. Spring 2021 enrollments were 5.9% lower than a year earlier, and the largest drop (-7.2%) was among students aged 18-20 (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center). This decrease in enrollments may have affected men more than women, worsening an already-existing gender gap (Field 2021). More than a few universities reacted by freezing or cutting programs, many of which were in the
liberal arts (Dennon 2021). While at this point the pandemic’s impact on language programs is unclear, even before 2020 headlines such as “Study Finds Sharp Decline in Foreign Language Enrollments” (Jaschik 2018) and “Colleges Lose a ‘Stunning’ 651 Foreign Language Programs in Three Years” (Johnson 2019) were already familiar to language instructors and administrators. The pre-COVID-19 numbers for Russian were a cause for concern but also contained some encouraging signs (Kraemer, Merrill, and Prestel 2020).

Concerns about the human element in emergency remote teaching were raised immediately (Lederman 2020a). The overall impact on faculty was palpable. In an international survey of over 600 language instructors, most reported significant amounts of stress during 2020, and the authors of the survey call the stress “enormous” (Jin et al. 2021, 19). Sources of stress were professional (lack of familiarity with technology and no time to learn it properly, isolation from colleagues and students) and personal (financial concerns, family responsibilities, health factors) (Marshall, Shannon, and Love 2020). Those instructors with online teaching experience were inundated with urgent emergency requests for participating in, leading, and creating webinars to help their colleagues switch to emergency remote teaching, adding to the workload and stress levels of all involved. Faculty reported various strategies (with varying success) for addressing this greater-than-usual stress (MacIntyre, Gregersen, and Mercer 2020).

Not all faculty members experienced the pandemic the same way. It likely affected women and caregivers more than others (Skinner, Betancourt, and Wolff-Eisenberg 2021). The pandemic quite possibly exacerbated the existing divide between non-tenure-system and tenure-system faculty. It is well known that the percentage of non-tenure-stream positions in US universities has been increasing, and today more than half of faculty positions are part-time and over 70% are contingent (AAUP). Well before 2020, the fact that most online instruction was done by non-tenure-system faculty was documented and studied (Chapman 2011; Mueller, Mandernach, and Sanderson 2013, 342; the latter found that online courses were more “effective” when taught by full-time [not necessarily tenured] faculty [345]). Yet the pandemic, to which many institutions responded with budget cuts, almost immediately showed “how fragile the situations of contingent faculty members actually are” (Executive Committee), which only added to the immense stress felt by this large group. On the other hand, the pandemic seems to have “spawned a dramatic increase in the number of submissions to academic journals” (Richards 2020, 334); assuming that most of these submissions were from tenure-system faculty
whose responsibilities include publishing, many of them have been able to continue this portion of their job mostly uninhibited by the pandemic.

Scholars have already begun to study the negative impact of the pandemic on students’ mental health (Belenkova 2020; Wang et al. 2020). Like their instructors, students felt increased amounts of stress, which manifested itself in various ways (Charles et al. 2021). Much of this anxiety was related to non-academic questions such as personal and family health, economic well-being, and the overall unpredictability of the virus. It also was caused by disruptions to academic plans and missed opportunities such as canceled study abroad programs (Vovk and Mommadova 2020). Researchers have already begun studying student stress during the pandemic in the larger context of stress studies, including coping strategies students adopted, mostly under lockdown orders (Baloran 2020; Russell 2020). It was fortunate that during these stressful times, instructors shared among themselves assignments and classroom strategies that helped keep isolated and vulnerable students motivated (Fuentes Hernández and Flórez 2020).

Of great importance for the future will be an understanding of students’ academic experience during COVID-19, revealed through surveys of their online experiences and preferences regarding mode of delivery (for example, see Erickson 2020; Lederman 2020b; Novikov 2020). Surveys of various groups mostly show similar results: students appreciate the flexibility and control of asynchronous learning but miss the personal contact of synchronous learning, online and especially face-to-face (Erickson 2020; Lin and Li 2020; Rozhkova and Rozhkova 2020; Berardi 2021). The recognition that both modes have advantages may explain the popularity among students (over online delivery) of the HyFlex model according to one study (Kohnke and Moorhouse 2021).

Colleagues from around the world shared their experiences of shifting to online delivery in various contexts (see, for example, Akhmetzyanova, Smolentseva, and Moskaleva 2020 [Turkmenistan]; Bao 2020 [Beijing University]; De Santis 2020 [Defense Language Institute]; Ross and DiSalvo 2020 [Harvard Language Center]; and Drucker and Fleischhauer 2021 [Germany]). Several colleagues at Russian universities have written about the transition to online learning at their institutions (Almazova et al. 2020; Dvorakova and Kulachinskaya 2020; Goncharova and Zaitseva 2020). Regardless of their location, these programs faced similar challenges: little previous experience and very little time to learn new technologies; providing instructors with opportunities to learn new technologies in a short time; uneven and inconsistent access to quality
internet and appropriate technology; and efforts to ensure that educational standards and goals are maintained during online delivery.

Due to COVID-19, almost all language instructors have had to use some online delivery of their subjects or are at least far more aware of online instruction than they were previously. Another question will be about the lasting impact, if any, on our profession. On the basis of survey responses, Superville (2020) argues that remote learning “will keep a strong foothold even after the pandemic.” Jin et al. discovered that, during the pandemic, language faculty attitudes toward teaching online in the future were to a great degree determined by their attitudes toward student readiness, their own level of confidence, the training and support they received from their institutions, and their own levels of stress, even if they understood that emergency remote teaching is not the same as well-planned online teaching (2021, 9). Nevertheless, these same language faculty acknowledge that online language instruction is a trend “they must take seriously” (17). Jin et al. also found that “Among all the factors investigated in the study, only three—perceived values, self-confidence, and stress—had significant positive effects on participants’ intention to adopt online language teaching in the future” (17). Regardless of their stance regarding online instruction, the “vast majority” of language faculty report being willing to integrate more technology into their face-to-face teaching in the future (Jin et al. 2021 19). Colleagues in Russia make similar predictions; for example, Strelchuk (2021) argues, based on survey results, that, as online teaching methods improve, the teaching of Russian as a FL in Russia will likely move toward a more hybrid format, despite the presence of some who are “totally against online teaching” (105). Regardless of future outcomes, the pandemic quickly raised awareness of online instruction at a speed and to an extent that would not otherwise have taken place.

3. Digital Equity, Inclusivity, and Access to Learning

Online curricular development is not new to our field (e.g., Meskill and Anthony 2005; Spasova and Welsh 2020). Prior to COVID-19, some Slavic language programs across the country had offered language courses in blended and fully online learning environments (e.g., Murphy-Judy and Johnshoy 2017; Klimova this issue). The technologies and practices, however, have been implemented unevenly. Online and hybrid language classes were often blended with in-person on-campus instructional modules and out-of-class conversation practice, and students had some degree of flexibility in choosing the medium of instruction that worked best with their schedule and preferences.
The COVID-19-instigated shift to almost exclusively online delivery of language instruction for most students has revealed economic and social disparities in the student population, disrupting students’ regular learning routines and exposing inequalities in teaching and learning (“Taking Colleges Online,” Inside Higher Ed Special Report 2020). While opening a new space for expansive thinking and bold innovation in language education, this shift has also amplified the necessity to create swift and effective approaches to ensure digital equity in online language learning opportunities.

Many academic programs across the country were forced to confront the issues of digital accessibility that extended far beyond previous efforts narrowly focused on the supply side of technology (the question of whether a student has access to a device). Contrary to the well-established belief that most young people these days have uninterrupted access to the internet, broadband access in some residential areas is still very limited (Bauer 2020). Even in the most wired metropolitan areas, wi-fi access can be porous and unstable, especially in the wake of the economic downturn caused by COVID-19. Some families had to forego internet and educational opportunities altogether because medical bills and unexpected loss of income drained their family budgets (Sharp 2020). A national survey conducted by Digital Promise published in July 2020 found that more than 20% of undergraduate students had technical difficulties with internet connection, software and hardware that significantly impeded their learning progress during the pandemic (“Suddenly Online”).

During the pandemic, successful learning depended not only on a student’s access to a stable high-speed internet connection and devices with videoconferencing capabilities, but also on time, dedicated study space, financial stability, the health of relatives and friends, and academic, financial, and emotional support. A lack of one or more of these factors put students at risk by restricting their engagement with online learning opportunities. For example, without critical campus resources such as libraries and wi-fi, many lower-income students were forced to abandon plans to continue with classwork or even withdraw from their academic programs (“Bridging the Digital Divide: Lessons From COVID-19”). On-campus support networks and resources help level the playing field for students from different socio-economic and cultural backgrounds. Digital equity has proved to be very complex in its connections with other institutional and societal systems and deserves further study.

The increased attention paid to digital inequities was not limited to the abrupt transition to virtual teaching and service provision. The
pandemic coincided with the rise of anti-racist movements in response to the killing of George Floyd and other non-white Americans as well as increased hate crimes directed against Asian Americans. Numerous protests and demonstrations across the country ignited national conversations about inequality and systemic racism in all spheres of public life, including education. These conversations added another layer of complexity and urgency to the question of inclusivity and diversity and the impact of virtual teaching on various student populations. National organizations, such as AATSEEL, ACTR, and ASEES, have reacted to these social changes, publishing strong position statements calling on scholars in Russian and Slavic Studies to advocate for greater diversity and inclusion among students and faculty, and for the implementation of innovative teaching strategies with a particular focus on increasing the success of underserved and marginalized students from low-income backgrounds, LGBTQ+ students, first-generation students, and students of color (e.g., “SEEJ Forum: Working towards equity in Slavic language and literature programs,” Winter 2020).

Many of the articles in this special edition of Russian Language Journal address various aspects of inclusivity and access to learning during the pandemic. Since March 2020, instructors have been grappling with issues associated with the creation of inclusive learning environments that can accommodate different learning styles and socio-economic statuses (Garza this issue), be responsive to varied student attitudes and perceptions about the effectiveness of online language learning (e.g., Klimanova and Vinokurova this issue; Sivachenko and Nedashkivska this issue), but also offer integrated mental health and moral support systems (e.g., Kolesnikova this issue; Evans-Romaine et al. this issue; Vinokurova this issue). In addition to the question of access, emergency remote teaching has prompted language professionals to reevaluate established practices in online language education in light of emerging socio-economic and humanistic considerations, including the rigid structure of courses and fixed homework due dates (“OLC Continuity Planning and Emergency Preparedness”), use of texting tools and video cameras (Borup, West, and Gram 2012; Kaplan-Rakowski 2021), screen fatigue and the balance of synchronous and asynchronous instruction (Bowers-Abbott and Hourchard 2021) and formative and summative assessments (Gunn this issue).

4. Impact on Language Assessment and Testing
Language assessment and testing also have been profoundly impacted by the pandemic. Many high-stakes language assessments, such as national
and global language proficiency tests and certificates (e.g., IELTS, TOEFL, TRF), could not be delivered in person, which created obstacles for those seeking educational opportunities and employment. Traditional in-house language placement tests had to be replaced by alternative evaluative procedures or cancelled altogether in some universities (Ockey 2021). In response, programs adapted by using scores from a different test or an online version of an existing test (Isbell and Kremmel 2021). To meet the community’s needs, testing companies began to offer alternative formats of high-stakes language examinations and to adapt proctoring protocols in order to comply with national and state regulations for remote delivery of instruction and social distancing in accordance with the public health measures taken in response to COVID-19. This unprecedented support of public health measures resulted in a “watershed moment” in language teaching (Gacs, Goertler, and Spasova 2020) and in language testing practices (Chappell 2021).

In the United States, some language tests used for awarding college credit for high school coursework, such as the National Examinations in World Languages and Advanced Placement Exams, have partially transitioned to at-home administration, or the organizations administering them have offered shortened versions of their regular language tests (Isbell and Kremmel 2021). In March 2020, Language Testing International (LTI), a US-based language testing agency responsible for administering, among other languages, Russian proficiency examinations in collaboration with the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL), began to offer revised Out of School testing options for the ACTFL Assessment of Performance toward Proficiency in Languages (AAPPL) and the ACTFL Latin Interpretive Reading Assessment (ALIRA) (“K-12 COVID-19 Response”). Similarly, the TRFЛ (Тест по русскому языку как иностранному, ТРКИ) testing centers in many countries introduced asynchronous online testing options in which test takers are allowed to take the Russian language examination from home (“В Польше впервые прошло тестирование по русскому языку в формате онлайн,” 2020). This new format of distance Russian language certification may become a new norm and would allow testing centers to accommodate test users in need of language proficiency certificates who are unable to come to a testing facility due to restricted mobility or other circumstances. Accepting results from distance language tests for high-stakes decisions raised a number of concerns about examination security and validity of scores and pushed national testing agencies to consider alternatives to standard practices and start thinking about at-home testing as a potentially permanent and viable
alternative to proctored tests administered in a classroom or in a language testing facility (Isbell and Kremmel 2021).

At the institutional level, a sudden transition to at-home language testing and assessment was named one of the biggest challenges of emergency remote language teaching during the pandemic (e.g., Gunn this issue). Many paper-based assessment instruments originally designed for in-person language instruction were not suitable for fully online delivery (Oh 2020) and required substantial modifications (Goertler and Gacs 2018; Goertler 2019; Gacs, Goertler, and Spasova 2020). Transitioning paper-based tests and in-person oral assessments to online platforms raised many questions about validity of test results, access, and security.

Instructors strived to accommodate learners’ varied technology skills and to ensure the provision of uninterrupted access to online testing platforms for all remote students. In addition, instructors needed to take into account issues of student privacy and intellectual property, and to accommodate learners with disabilities in fully online language-learning contexts. The situation with language assessment was aggravated by the fact that third-party remote proctoring companies, such as Examity and LogMeIn, suspended their services almost immediately after the transition to remote online delivery (Wan 2020); moreover, it became virtually impossible to provide remote proctors in larger language programs. This complication posed a threat to the validity of course exam scores due to possible academic misconduct, such as the use of textbook and reference materials, requests for help during an exam, and security of testing materials. While the consequences of academic misconduct on in-class examinations may not be as grave as for high-stakes tests (after all, instructors can always create a new set of evaluation materials), the fairness of an exam or evaluation procedure can be compromised, sowing doubt and causing frustration for students taking an exam in good faith. To add to the complexity of classroom language assessment during the pandemic, the mental health and well-being of students, instructors, and their families, as well as anxiety associated with online instructional delivery, had to be taken into consideration when alternative forms of assessment were proposed (e.g., MacIntyre, Gregersen, and Mercer 2020).

Student anxiety may also be associated with the lack of agency in the selection of instructional delivery mode (Russell 2020), including the format of assessment. If online instruction is not a good fit for every language learner (Russell and Murphy-Judy 2020), neither is online language assessment, particularly one that is completed in an uncontrolled, technologically unfamiliar environment. The pandemic renewed interest
in a “humanizing” approach to in-class language assessment along with other forms of humanistic teaching (Stevick 1990) and ways of creating a relaxed, accepting, and non-threatening online learning atmosphere for language learners. To reduce student stress and anxiety, some language instructors implemented the “chunking” method in which larger summative assessments were chunked and spread out over a period of time. A greater emphasis was placed on formative assessments administered frequently via learning management systems and other online platforms, and assessments that prompted learners’ content choice in performance-oriented tasks (as opposed to achievement-based assessments) (Doludenko this issue; Gunn this issue). Such humanistic assessment allows for greater flexibility, learner self-actualization, and attendance to students’ individual learning needs.

5. Teacher Preparedness for Emergency Remote Online Teaching and Instructional Technology Leadership

As the pandemic disrupted the usual ways of teaching for large numbers of instructors, many felt unprepared for the switch to teaching online (Jin et al. 2021). This is true for the field of Russian language learning and teaching as well. In a pre-pandemic survey about technology and Russian language teaching conducted by Shannon Donnally Spasova and Jason Merrill (with help from Meghan Birch), almost half of respondents reported that no online courses were offered at their institutions, only about 8% of first-year Russian courses were taught online, and over 40% of those surveyed had never used videoconferencing in their teaching. More than a quarter felt they did not have the training to teach online and over half of the respondents wanted more training in technology. Despite numerous studies pointing out the benefits of technology in the classroom (Meskill and Anthony 2007; Liu and Chao 2017) and indicating that online and blended language teaching may be as effective as face-to-face teaching (Jin et al. 2021), in 2017 over 40% of respondents felt that online courses were not as effective as face-to-face courses.

Experts in the field of online language teaching and technology in language pedagogy have long called for additional training in technology for instructors (Jin et al. 2021). In our survey of the Russian field, over

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2 The survey was conducted in Fall of 2017. It included demographic questions and questions about the following topics: types of technology used, attitudes toward technology, formats of technology-enhanced courses, reasons and goals for using technology, training and comfort in using technology, perceptions of student attitudes toward technology, and the perceived value of technology in teaching by institutions. Seventy-two participants completed the survey.
80% of respondents said that they had learned about using technology in teaching on their own, and only 13% had taken any formal coursework in the use of technology in teaching. Younger faculty and current graduate students (those with 0-5 years teaching experience) reported the lowest rate of training in the use of technology (18.2%) and a rate of formal technology coursework (9.1%) that was significantly lower than colleagues with 6-20 years’ experience (28.6% and 21.4%). This result does not align with the fact that open faculty positions in Russian often list experience and proficiency with learning technology as a desired qualification for the preferred candidate. The twenty listings posted between September 29, 2017 and September 12, 2018 on the “Employment Opportunities” section of the American Association of Teachers of Slavic and East European Languages website mention as desired or required qualifications: “strong computer literacy,” “a critical and creative attitude to instructional technology,” “background in online education and pedagogy,” “teaching with technology,” “expertise in language pedagogy, language-learning in digitally mediated environments, technology-enhanced (TE) language course design,” “digital literacy in SL education,” and other less specific qualifications that likely include technology such as “innovative pedagogy” (https://www.aatseel.org/joblist). Those who had been teaching from 6 to 20 years were more likely to have taken formal coursework in technology, which could indicate that they sought it after they had finished graduate school and had begun a faculty position. Although our survey did not ask Russian instructors if their current institutions offer training on the use of technology, the responses pointed to a potential disconnect in training opportunities; over a third (35.3%) stated that the use of technology was expected in their teaching, yet over 80% said that they learned how to use technology without institutional support. These numbers suggest that institutions that expect instructors to use technology need to provide more opportunities for in-house training in the use of technology. Because institutions were forced to offer more training to accommodate the move to emergency teaching, the need for systemized training opportunities has become apparent. Additionally, many of the programs offered by universities to help instructors move online during the pandemic were not sufficiently focused on the teaching of language specifically (Jin et al. 2021). The desire for candidates to have real expertise in instructional technology, beyond the scramble to move to online teaching in 2020, is only likely to grow in the post-COVID environment. Teacher education in using technology in language teaching needs to become a regular part of graduate curricula, and work by relevant organizations such as the
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International Association for Language Learning Technology (IALLT) and the Computer Assisted Language Instruction Consortium (CALICO) needs to be promoted to graduate students and new teachers.

Technology use has not been traditionally prioritized as part of the reward systems prevalent in academic institutions. Non-tenure-system positions have a heavier course load than tenure-line positions, often including more language courses that come with expectations that their instructors will be leaders in the use of technology. In our pre-COVID survey, only 4% of tenured faculty said they use technology because administrators prefer it, but 23.5% of non-tenure-system faculty cited administrator preference as a reason they use technology, likely because of the lack of stability inherent in their positions and their perception that they need to align their teaching more closely with administrative priorities. The percentage of tenured (45.5%) and tenure-track (25%) faculty who reported being very comfortable using technology is significantly lower than those of non-tenure-track (70.6%) and part-time (60%) faculty. This result is also not surprising, as the use of technology is more common in lower-level language courses (Goertler 2019, 65), which tend to be taught by non-tenure-system faculty and, as Galanek, Gierdowski, and Brooks (2018) and Goertler (2019) show, the more instructors are exposed to technology, the more positive their attitude toward it becomes. Non-tenure-system faculty members, while carrying a heavy course load, also have to teach themselves how to use constantly changing technologies, investing extra time to attend workshops and seminars (and in cases where institutional support does not exist, they must spend the time to find and evaluate existing opportunities). Non-tenure-system faculty were more likely to reply that they would like more training (61%, versus 33% of tenured faculty). Tenured faculty were much more likely to say they would not use more technology if they had more training (25% versus 0% of pre-tenure faculty and 11% of non-tenure-system faculty). Researchers should look more deeply into the divisions between tenure-system and non-tenure-system faculty in the areas of attitudes toward and use of technology in language teaching. Many non-tenure-system faculty are enthusiastic and heavy users of educational technology, and, though they may have significant expertise and experience with technology, they are often not empowered to influence institution-wide decisions about technology and curricula. This disconnect should be examined more closely as the numbers of non-tenure-system faculty continue to rise.

Following the pandemic, more faculty are likely to be open to teaching online or to integrating more technologies into their teaching
(Jin et al. 2021). However, the fact that the majority of instructors began teaching online in a crisis situation rather than in the context of planned online language education (Gacs, Goertler, and Spasova 2020) suggests that more online training and support is needed for faculty to be successful (Brinkley-Etzkorn 2019; Moser, Wei, and Brenner 2020). In addition, the fact that experienced online teachers are often not decisionmakers in educational institutions needs to be acknowledged as a side effect of the deepening divide between tenured and contingent faculty.

6. Predicting Change: Russian Language Teaching in the Post-Pandemic Era
As traumatic as the transition to emergency remote language teaching has been for many of us, it may help bring about more positive attitudes toward the value of online language teaching as a viable complement or alternative to face-to-face instruction. This “unprecedented immersion with technology” (Jin et al. 2021, 19) may lead to greater willingness to continue to explore online delivery. The number of hybrid and online Russian courses may increase, and more face-to-face courses will likely incorporate more technologies, as many instructors have experienced for the first time some of their clear advantages. Familiarity with videoconferencing could introduce more flexibility in teaching for a variety of purposes (such as office hours and advising) and reasons (e.g., illness, weather, conference and other professional travel).

The pandemic forced instructors to consider new methods of assessment. Both high- and low-stakes assessments will likely be reevaluated, with emphasis on access while maintaining quality and validity. In-class assessments may be increasingly moved online, providing flexibility and access.

COVID-19 drew attention to the need for more training in technology and online teaching. Graduate programs should include teaching with technology as a required part of the curriculum and offer practice in online and hybrid language teaching as they have in face-to-face teaching for decades.³ Some of this work can be done by familiarizing graduate students with organizations that focus on technology in language teaching. Institutions should offer support to those using technology in their teaching and continue to develop more discipline-specific offerings.

³ In 2017, Kessler and Hubbard reported that “many language teachers are still graduating without having received sufficient formal preparation and there continues to be a general lack of autonomy among teachers when using technology” (2017, 285).
We recommend that institutional leaders recognize the importance of expertise in technology and adjust promotion and annual review procedures to prompt faculty to prioritize this expertise, as well as increase the numbers of faculty in leadership positions who have experience teaching online or with technology. More research should be conducted on best practices in online and hybrid language teaching so that we can continue to leverage those features that most benefit students in their learning of Russian.

The language teaching community would benefit greatly from the continuation of the spirit of cooperation that existed during the pandemic, through webinars, conferences, and the sharing of experiences, advice, and resources. Groups and communities that emerged to provide support in response to an urgent need in the spring of 2020 can continue to serve as hubs for information and community. Institutions can cooperate using our newly learned common language of virtual communication by pooling resources and hosting events open to the larger community.

Ideally, institutions and faculty will continue to focus attention on and propose solutions to the myriad barriers to access that face instructors and students. The pandemic exposed the reality of the digital divide in higher education, which hampered learners who already experienced socioeconomic barriers to completing educational programs (McKenzie 2021). Although technology has highlighted some of these barriers to access, there are many ways that it can also be used to overcome them. We hope that conversations about the digital divide in education and inclusive teaching practices that were started during the pandemic will continue to raise questions about equity and access in teaching and learning and will offer solutions that lead us to our common goal of equal access to learning resources for students from various cultural and socio-economic backgrounds.

7. This Volume
To capture a variety of experiences with emergency remote language teaching during the pandemic, this volume contains four types of articles by program administrators, practitioners, and researchers that address aspects of the effect of the pandemic on the teaching of Russian. First come administrative reports, in which representatives of Russian programs describe ways in which they adjusted to the pandemic and lessons learned for the future. Next are traditional research articles that analyze data gained from pandemic teaching to further our knowledge of online instruction. The third section contains papers describing online pedagogical innovations
developed during the pandemic. The volume ends with reflective essays ("think pieces") that look ahead to the teaching of Russian after the pandemic. The volume concludes with an afterword (Martin, this issue) that summarizes a number of recurrent themes that appear in this special volume and offers some predictions for the post-pandemic future of our profession.

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Connecting through Language and Culture Learning during the COVID-19 Pandemic: The University of Wisconsin–Madison Russian Flagship Program

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LAURA MARSHALL, ASSEL ALMURATOVA

1. Introduction
Research on the mental health and overall well-being of U.S. college students during the COVID-19 pandemic confirms how profoundly the pandemic has affected their lives: students are experiencing increased levels of anxiety and an overall decrease in the quality of life (Firkey, Sheinfil, and Woolf-King 2021), increased symptoms of mood disorders and stress (Charles et al. 2021), and increased levels of depression (Wang et al. 2020). For many students, the need for physical distancing to prevent the spread of the coronavirus that causes COVID-19 has resulted in acute feelings of isolation and disconnection. Wang et al., for example, found that the top lifestyle concern reported by U.S. college students during the pandemic was related to changes in social relations and to social isolation (7). The difficulties experienced by students during the global pandemic highlight the critical importance of human interactions, human relationships, and community – not only for students’ learning and their satisfaction with their academic coursework, but for their overall mental health and well-being.

Among all academic disciplines, instructional programs in languages are uniquely positioned to serve as vital sites for human connection and community for students in emergency and non-emergency contexts alike. Given the centrality of interaction in second language acquisition (SLA) and teaching, students in language courses are not just interacting with course content: they are also interacting with peers, instructors, and often other speakers of the language in the wider community. This positioning of language programs as sites for human connection aligns with sociocultural and sociocognitive approaches to SLA (see, for example, the chapters in Atkinson 2011) as well as with ecological approaches such as the “transdisciplinary framework” put forward by the Douglas Fir Group (2016) that places “individuals engaging with others” at the center of the micro level of social activity in a multiscalar model, embedded within
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the meso level of sociocultural institutions and communities (Douglas Fir Group 2016, 25). Through the many varied interactions in which students in language programs are active participants, and as students move through sequences of language courses in cohorts, students can form meaningful relationships that extend beyond the boundaries of the academic program. Outside of formal courses, many language programs offer opportunities for students to practice the language of study in informal contexts and to participate in cultural activities that also provide opportunities for social interaction. Instructional programs in languages can thus be understood not only in terms of their academic mission, but also as sites within the university for meeting students’ need for social connection.

Students of languages value this aspect of language learning. Research by Magnan et al. (2012; 2014), for example, found that among the five “5 Cs” goal areas of the World-Readiness Standards (Communication, Cultures, Connections, Comparisons, Communities), the Communities goal area was the one most highly prioritized by U.S. postsecondary language students, followed closely by Communication. Magnan et al.’s findings are supported by a survey of all undergraduate students conducted at the University of Wisconsin–Madison in Fall 2020 (University of Wisconsin–Madison n.d.) that showed that students long for a sense of connection and community in their academic courses. Looking at students’ satisfaction with their courses during the pandemic, the survey found, according to Vice Provost for Teaching and Learning John Zumbrunnen in summarizing survey findings, that “forming meaningful relationships with instructors and peers is crucial for student learning – and everything we’re hearing from students reinforces that” (Erickson 2020). Sadly, according to that survey, 65% of student respondents felt “a little or not at all” connected to their peers or members of their community on campus (University of Wisconsin–Madison n.d., 4, 29).

This article offers a case study of how one postsecondary Russian program, the Russian Flagship at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, has leveraged existing affordances in the program’s design (Evans-Romaine and Murphy 2021) to support new forms of interaction and social connection through language learning in the context of emergency remote instruction during the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite the many challenges

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1 See also the 2019 special issue of The Modern Language Journal on SLA Across Disciplinary Borders (Byrnes and Duff, eds.).

2 See Gacs, Goertler, and Spasova (2020) for a discussion of the difference between emergency remote and planned online language education.
in abruptly transitioning to emergency remote instruction in March 2020, the Russian Flagship program was well-positioned to adapt to an online environment that fosters community-building, given its structure as a wraparound program that places student academic, linguistic, and cultural development, and student agency at the forefront. The Russian Flagship program at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, one of eight Russian Flagships and 31 Language Flagship programs in critical languages at 23 colleges and universities in the United States, is a federally-funded program supported by the National Security Education Program in the U.S. Department of Defense to enable undergraduates of all majors to attain ACTFL Superior-level (ILR 3) language proficiency through a combination of intensive coursework, tutoring, co-curricular programming, and study abroad. The capstone study abroad program, administered by American Councils for International Education, is at Al-Farabi Kazakh National University in Almaty, Kazakhstan and includes coursework, tutoring, co-curricular programming, a homestay, and a professional internship. As described in Evans-Romaine and Murphy (2021), the Russian Flagship program at the University of Wisconsin–Madison combines classroom instruction in both academic-year and summer-intensive environments, individual and small-group tutoring, a variety of co-curricular activities meant to appeal to students’ diverse interests and preferred forms of interaction, and a combination of regular advising by Flagship staff and peer mentoring. In addition, any University of Wisconsin–Madison student may choose to apply and live in Russkii dom, the Russian-language floor of the International Learning Community (ILC). Components of the program’s design that are included in this descriptive case study are Russian language instruction at all levels, including summer intensive instruction at lower levels; Russian language tutoring; advising and peer mentoring; co-curricular programming; and the residential Russkii dom in the ILC.

The article seeks answers to the following questions:

1. How do aspects of the Russian Flagship program encourage and facilitate social interaction and open channels of communication and community-building?
2. How does the structure of the Russian Flagship program balance students’ sometimes contradictory needs during a time of social and physical isolation during the COVID-19 pandemic?
3. How does the Russian Flagship program work to counteract students’ sense of isolation during a period of pandemic when isolation cannot be avoided?
In addressing these questions, the article describes aspects of the University of Wisconsin–Madison Russian Flagship program that support student learning in an online environment and, at the same time, support social connection through interactions between students and their instructors, peer-to-peer interactions, and community-building throughout.

2. Classroom instruction: A balancing act
A noteworthy aspect of the University of Wisconsin–Madison Fall 2020 survey of undergraduates is the roughly even divide among student preferences for synchronous and asynchronous instruction: in selecting among modality preferences for online instruction, 47% of students reported that they prefer synchronous instruction, while 50% prefer asynchronous instruction (University of Wisconsin–Madison n.d., 4, 14). One student respondent noted that “meeting synchronously or at least checking in individually to see how their students are actually doing […] shows that they actually care if you are doing well or not” (University of Wisconsin–Madison n.d., 14). On the other hand, the slightly higher percentage of student support for asynchronous teaching is explained in survey findings by its flexibility: asynchronous classes allow for students in various time zones or with complicated schedules to engage with the course content at a time convenient for them. Another important factor is screen fatigue: students surveyed reported that “synchronous lectures are often very mentally draining and are often done poorly because of technical difficulties” (University of Wisconsin–Madison n.d., 14).

For the reasons cited in this survey, and to offset the cumulative effect of screen fatigue expressed by students in the latter half of the Spring 2020 semester, the summer intensive first- and second-year Russian courses were redesigned for online delivery to balance synchronous and asynchronous learning. In the face-to-face intensive summer program, students meet daily for four hours. Instead of replicating this schedule in the online environment, the class was designed for two hours daily of synchronous instruction supplemented by two hours daily of independent work with instructional support. During the two synchronous class hours, instructors focused on activities that ensured that students were engaged and speaking as much as possible: students completed pair and small group speaking tasks, as well as group activities emphasizing teamwork. The synchronous instructional hours resembled a typical face-to-face classroom, with an emphasis on interpersonal speaking and active student engagement.
The remaining two hours, designed to increase student agency, were focused primarily on learning activities in modalities other than speaking and for more independent work, but with instructional support. The format of these hours resembled a combination of a study hall and office hours, carefully coordinated with synchronous class meetings. Students were not required to be on camera during these two hours, nor were they required to be engaged in working together. Instead, students completed graded assignments, asked their instructor for help as needed, and took quizzes and tests. Apart from quiz or test days, the general expectation was that students be engaged in the course material, although attendance was not taken. The course instructors, on the other hand, were on camera and available for consultation: if a student was having trouble with a writing assignment or had a question on grammar, the instructor was there. Since the summer intensive courses typically require at least four hours a day of homework, in addition to assignments that students completed during the “study hall,” they also used this time to complete homework while the instructor was present to answer questions. The flexibility of this format allowed students greater freedom and increased agency: if they wished, they could complete coursework and homework later in the day. This balance between synchronous instruction, during which students were on camera and required to be engaged and speaking, and the more flexible independent work hours during which students could complete assignments with support from instructors, was intended to ameliorate screen fatigue and to give students both options and access to guidance as needed. The success of this approach was shown both in student preparedness for synchronous hours and in unofficial (internal) exit OPIs, which indicated that all had attained ACTFL Intermediate Low to Mid-level proficiency.

To promote student engagement and sustain motivation, instructors emphasized creativity and flexibility in assignments. For example, students drew apartment advertisements on the whiteboard in their breakout rooms and visited each other’s virtual apartments. Students in intensive second-year Russian wrote and performed plays, wrote a story about an imaginary creature of their own design, and solved a murder mystery together while the instructor played film noir music in the background. Creative classroom activities emphasized teamwork and community-building, and instructors tapped into student interests and talents in planning activities.
3. Integrating co-curricular programming into a summer intensive environment

Normally the summer intensive Russian language program is full of co-curricular activities: a weekly film showing, a weekly Russian conversation table during the lunch hour, an outing to a local pelmeni restaurant, and various other activities, the last of which is traditionally a talent show and awards ceremony, followed by a Russian food potluck. In the entirely online instructional environment, co-curricular activities were modified to emphasize opportunities for students to socialize and make connections online, while also minimizing screen time. Activities were reduced to six over the eight-week period, but each was given special attention and was designed to meet student wishes and interests. Weekly film screenings were reduced to only two for the summer: Stiliagi (Hipsters) and cartoons. Students’ lives were put front and center: there was a show-and-tell in which students could introduce their pet(s) to each other or share anything else they wished. Students were invited (but not required) to give virtual tours of their hometowns using their phones.

The most popular co-curricular events were two cooking classes, one on bliny and the other on samsa (Kazakh savory pastries); the first was so popular that students requested the second. These cooking classes were staged as they might be on a cooking show, in which one instructor taught the other how to cook. As two of the instructors were roommates, they decided to stage the cooking classes in their shared apartment. Using two cameras, from a laptop and a smartphone, the instructors were able to play the roles of teacher and student. The two cameras focused on their interactions and on the hands of the cooking teacher at work. Students were sent lists of ingredients in advance so that they could participate at home, if they wished, and the instructors remained engaged with students throughout the class. If one student’s bliny did not work at first, that provided an opportunity for students to learn the expression «Первый блин комом». The lesson on samsa gave instructors, both from Kazakhstan, the opportunity to introduce aspects of Kazakh culture as well: one instructor played the dombra and another talked to students about ways in which the history of Kazakhstan in the Soviet era affected the daily lives of those in Kazakhstan then and now, from its ethnic diversity derived in part from Soviet-era repressions and mass migrations, to the reverence for food harkening back to the mass famine in Kazakhstan in 1930–33.

3.1. Community-building at a distance

The cooking classes, and students’ “show and tell” and hometown tours,
provide glimpses into the affordances of an online environment that would be difficult if not impossible to replicate in a university campus classroom: through these cooking classes, and through demonstrations at an instructor’s home of apartment vocabulary, students entered their instructors’ homes and lives in ways that are rare in college settings today and virtually unheard of at a large university. In turn, students could share aspects of their lives if they wished: their homes, their pets, their hometowns, and in the talent show, their talents and interests. Students’ request for a second cooking class showed their desire for a glimpse into home lives in the Russian-speaking world as well as for immersive and “hands-on” learning experiences. At the beginning of the course, instructors made introductory videos and invited students to do the same: these virtual introductions helped to establish a close-knit virtual class community and made it easier for students to take both the normal risks associated with language learning and the emotionally higher risks of introducing their hometowns and even their homes or pets to students whom they may never have met in person. Students engaged in social activities at a distance when socializing in person was impossible. Moreover, students enhanced opportunities for creating community by connecting with each other through WhatsApp – something instructors could not have required students to do, in order to protect their privacy.

At the same time, it is impossible to hide the losses for community-building in a face-to-face summer intensive environment, primarily in the form of spontaneous connections: the conversations that can take place before and after class, the possibility to make friends and create community over a cup of coffee in a local café or lunch outside, and through collective participation in activities such as preparing for a final talent show.

4. Lessons for the academic year: Russian courses
The University of Wisconsin–Madison Fall 2020 Undergraduate Student Survey presented a disturbing finding: almost 59% of student respondents reported that their Fall 2020 course workload was less manageable than in Spring 2020, while only 9% reported that their coursework load was more manageable in the Fall than in the previous Spring. (Almost one third of the students, 32%, reported that the Spring 2020 and Fall 2020 coursework loads were about the same.) Even before the publication of this data, it was clear by the fall that students were already tired of onscreen learning, onscreen interactions generally, and continued physical and social isolation. The program therefore made strategic decisions that emphasized intentional communication between students and Flagship staff and among students.
In making decisions about tutoring and co-curricular programming, we solicited student input in as many ways as possible, in order to make sure we would build a program that addressed changing student needs and interests. Key to the program design were student agency and flexibility in all aspects of the program’s delivery.

The lessons learned from the intensive summer session were used in planning for the fall, when most courses remained online: multiple low-stakes assignments (which had already been part of the Russian program’s instructional practice), open-book and open-note tests, and surveys of students regarding their needs and concerns related to online learning. Language instruction remained daily and synchronous, in order to align with face-to-face practices as closely as possible. Classroom instruction emphasized student engagement and interpersonal speaking, with non-speaking activities moved outside class time. Teaching assistants exchanged ideas for creative activities that kept students engaged.

5. Tutoring
A key component of all Language Flagship programs is tutoring, which, in annual University of Wisconsin–Madison Russian Flagship student surveys, is regularly rated as one of the most impactful aspects of the program. Russian Flagship students are required to participate in one to three hours of non-credit tutoring per week; at lower levels, this takes the form of paired or small-group tutoring, and beginning with third-year Russian, students are required to participate in one hour of individual and one hour of small-group tutoring per week. Students in the program are expected to bring their own requests and questions to tutoring, so the sessions are highly personalized and tailored to students’ interests. Group tutoring has been less popular than individual tutoring: although it provides students with opportunities to engage in discussion, it also involves scheduling difficulties and interpersonal challenges, including compromises regarding speaking time, topics for discussion, and questions that can be addressed in the time allotted.

In Spring 2020, the program began mid-semester to offer only virtual tutoring; this practice continues throughout Spring 2021. During Summer 2020 and academic year 2020-21 the program changed its tutoring structure to accommodate students’ desire for one-on-one tutoring. During the summer, the program moved to an opt-in model, providing students with optional 30-minute tutoring sessions, limited to two per week. During the academic year, tutoring was once again required but was one-on-one for students at all levels, except for small-group second-year tutoring in
the fall. The Flagship leadership continues to discuss the optimal length of tutoring sessions in the virtual context and will once again survey students in Spring 2021 regarding their tutoring preferences: one-on-one or small-group, and 30- or 50-minute sessions. While individual tutoring allows only for student-tutor interaction, students value that opportunity to speak one-on-one with tutors, just as they had before the pandemic. Tutoring also provides students with opportunities to converse with Russian speakers other than their course instructors. For all these reasons, tutoring plays an important role in relationship- and community-building.

6. Co-curricular programming
Lessons learned both from the summer intensive program and from successful co-curricular activities of previous years include the following. First, more is not better. As the research on student well-being during the pandemic has shown, and as most of us interacting with students regularly have observed, students are under enormous stress: balancing coursework presented in a variety of forms and modalities; scheduling and time management challenges in a mixed in-person/synchronous/asynchronous environment; screen fatigue; family and work responsibilities; financial and health concerns; and isolation. Given the many sources of stress that students are facing, the Russian Flagship regularly surveys students about what kinds of co-curricular activities they would like to participate in, engages students as participants in co-organizing activities if they wish, and limits the number of co-curricular activities, their length, and the means and frequency with which these activities are announced. Information about co-curricular activities and all other pertinent announcements are conveyed to students in a weekly e-bulletin, the Ezhenedel’nik, and co-curricular activities are limited to one or occasionally two per week. Students are welcome to turn on their cameras or leave them off during co-curricular events, and to drop in and leave when they wish, thus reducing the stress of committing to a long evening activity when homework assignments and other obligations may still await them.

Second is the recognition of the affordances and limitations of the online environment in designing different types of co-curricular programming. Popular online activities have included informal conversations with alumni about their current jobs in a series called Career Connect; a series called Telemost, with guest speakers who talk informally with students about their personal histories, work, home cities in the Russian-speaking world, or current events; and social activities designed to reduce stress. Social activities have ranged from holiday celebrations
to creating playlists of Russian music, to crafting activities arranged in a format similar to the cooking classes described above. For the crafting activities, students are sent supplies or supply lists in advance, with supplies provided either by University Housing from the budget for International Learning Community activities, or by the Flagship. Students and a staff facilitator gather online to paint, sew, make holiday cards, or engage in similar hands-on activities, all while chatting informally. Students have also enjoyed storytelling activities and games, such as a Mad Libs-style ghost story created for Halloween, and a conversation game, Express-Beseda, in which students and tutors rotate among breakout rooms and conversation topics.

A strong source of support in developing online co-curricular activities in recent years has been the Flagship Technology Innovation Center at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa, which has assisted in the development of blended-learning programs such as joint undergraduate research conferences hosted by all Russian Flagship programs. This year, to provide a forum for building community across Russian Flagship programs with a less stressful event, the shared program is a series of blended learning activities culminating in an online trivia game based loosely on the Russian game show Что? Где? Когда? (What? Where? When?). The thematic focus of the project is the underground Russian rock scene in 1980s Leningrad. Elements include local online screenings of Kirill Serebrennikov’s film Leto; an online lecture by music journalist and author Artemy Troitsky on the rock group Kino; blended learning activities for students to complete individually or in teams; and an online trivia game in which teams of students compete to answer questions about the film, the group Kino and its members, the setting, the period, and Russian realia. Although the activity is designed to introduce students from all levels of Russian to important aspects of perestroika-era Russian culture, its main goal is community-building across Russian Flagship programs. Since these students have been unable to meet each other during intensive summer study domestically or abroad, the hope is that participation in this series will encourage students to develop friendships and will foster a sense of connection and community across programs that will help motivate students to continue their intensive study of Russian until they can meet in Moscow, St. Petersburg, or Almaty.

3 Russian Flagship programs are at Bryn Mawr College; Indiana University; Portland State University; the University of California, Los Angeles; University of Georgia; University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; University of Wisconsin-Madison; and Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University.
7. Advising
Advising has always been a key component of all Language Flagship programs, but in this time of pandemic-induced isolation, advising has also provided an emotional lifeline to students. Students are reaching out more often than before the onset of COVID-19 for individual advising to help them create and navigate new paths when carefully laid plans have to be changed because of the pandemic: not only academic paths and course choices, but also study abroad, career plans, and other opportunities. Advising appointments that begin with academic and career questions sometimes turn to student concerns that extend beyond their studies – about life in isolation, health concerns affecting their studies, and general worries about their futures. One of the points of pride of Language Flagship programs is our engagement in “high-impact” practices, including advising; through advising, we had established relationships of trust and respect with our students prior to the pandemic. Existing relationships with students have deepened during this period of isolation, when access to campus counselors is limited because of the sheer volume of requests; students sometimes simply need to talk to someone they trust regarding the stresses of academic life and the uncertainty of future plans. Our previously existing flexible advising structure has allowed us to build on these relationships and to better support our students, while, as always, referring them further for issues beyond our professional capacity to resolve. Flagship and other staff, in turn, have also experienced much higher levels of stress in balancing competing professional and personal demands, and here too community has been vital: workshops on online teaching hosted by the Language Institute, by peer institutions, and by national organizations such as the American Association of Teachers of Slavic and East-European Languages (AATSEEL) and the American Council of Teachers of Russian (ACTR) have provided invaluable sources of support – from innovations in online teaching to advice on handling new challenges in the online instructional environment, to forums for discussion.

8. Student-to-student mentoring: Flagship student ambassadors
Another strong aspect of community-building in the Russian Flagship is peer mentoring. This program affordance has become even more important during the pandemic, when students feel particularly isolated and in need of the support not only of academic advisors, but of their peers. For students who are new to University of Wisconsin–Madison, this gateway into student life at the university and within the Russian Flagship has been critical. Peer mentoring in the Russian Flagship is formalized through
a program of student ambassadors, who are hired for hourly positions. Student ambassadors participate in the planning and implementation of co-curricular activities; serve as spokespersons to convey student wishes and concerns to the program’s leadership; and serve as representatives of the program. They assist with program recruitment by making informational classroom visits, participating in various campus resource fairs, and meeting with prospective students. Most of all, they enjoy serving as peer mentors to newly admitted students. At the beginning of each semester, ambassadors are assigned to small groups of two to four new students and are asked to meet with them monthly, equipped with a list of discussion questions provided by the program on their goals, the Russian Flagship, and strategies for attaining Superior-level proficiency. They are program ambassadors in every sense of the word.

In this year of isolation, the mentoring program has changed its rhythm, from spontaneous encounters in Russian Flagship-designated spaces on campus to more intentional, scheduled meetings online. In prior years, students would see their peer mentors and meet other students in dedicated program spaces or in the hallways of classroom buildings. These chance meetings would lead to new introductions and new relationship- and community-building. In addition, mentors would introduce their mentees to fellow Flagship students at co-curricular events. With the opportunity for spontaneous meetings missing, students have stronger incentives to arrange for meetings with their mentors, and mentors in turn help their charges become better integrated into the program.

The peer mentoring program has proven beneficial to the emotional well-being of all participants. Mentors feel that they have an important role to play in shepherding new students through this difficult time. The result of this mutually beneficial relationship is that students are communicating with each other more frequently than was originally expected of mentors, and on an increasing number of platforms. Because mentoring activities can take place in English if mentors are working with lower-level students, students can be paired based on academic majors, areas of interest, or personalities, not on language level. Finally, mentors are asked to write brief summaries of their meetings with their mentees, so that when questions or suggestions about the program arise, Flagship leadership can intervene or make policy or programmatic adjustments.

9. Residential learning: Russkii dom in the International Learning Community
Perhaps even more than the other affordances described above, residential
life has had to adjust radically to the conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic. Students in the ILC live in single rooms, but dormitory capacity has been reduced in order to ensure student safety. Students are unable to engage in the kinds of activities that are normally a part of life in the International Learning Community: ILC dinners for all residents, with students from each language house sitting at one table; tea-drinking evenings, games, or film showings in dormitory lounges; outings on or off campus or further from campus, such as group trips to the Russian grocery store. The Graduate Language Program Coordinator (GLPC) of Russkii dom, a graduate student in Slavic, has worked closely with the Russian Flagship program to coordinate social activities that complement Flagship activities, but which also provide Russkii dom residents a sense that they have a community of their own. Biweekly ILC dinners are replaced with biweekly online conversations with faculty members who talk with students informally about their career and life paths, followed by an online conversation in Russian with the GLPC and the faculty director of Russkii dom, also a co-director of the Russian Flagship. Following the same principles that guide the structure of co-curricular activities this year for the Flagship, these conversations are limited to 30 minutes. This allows for small-group conversation with a graduate student and a faculty member in Russian without requiring students to stay for a long time.

10. Lessons for the future
This article provided a descriptive case study of how a postsecondary language program, the Russian Flagship at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, provided various ways for students to virtually interact and connect with each other and with program faculty and staff during the COVID-19 pandemic in academic year and intensive summer courses, and through tutoring, co-curricular programming, advising, and peer mentoring. We are under no illusion that the program’s efforts to build community through the activities and affordances described above are always successful. Students still feel stressed and isolated, deprived of the spontaneous encounters and social activities that form a vital part of campus life. Students still report a preference for in-person language courses. Yet as colleagues have noted in the forums mentioned above, there is a good deal to be learned from the experience of living in isolation and studying and working online during the year of COVID-19. What lessons can we bring to our instruction and tutoring, co-curricular activities, advising, and mentoring once we can return to face-to-face interactions? And more importantly, what can be applied beyond Flagship programs?
Student-centered planning. We will continue to check in with students through a variety of channels, from surveys to individual meetings to feedback through student ambassadors, to make sure that we continue to offer a program that is not only focused on student learning, but on their overall well-being. Informal student surveys are an easy, informative, low-cost approach to obtain student feedback beyond course evaluations: on student goals, wishes for co-curricular planning, and overall program suggestions.

Student mentorship. Peer mentorship, peer tutoring, peer conversation exchange programs, and peer input into the design and organization of co-curricular activities can be implemented in any language program through exchanges with other programs, student Russian Clubs, and Russian community organizations. Credit-bearing service-learning programs are one way to organize some of these activities that would formally acknowledge student initiatives with other programs and in the community.

Balance and flexibility. Throughout the country, in all programs, instructors have learned a great deal from teaching and working in a remote emergency context. We can bring to face-to-face instruction those aspects of online learning that have worked well, from blended course design to activities that meet a variety of student needs, to cognizance of the many demands facing students as they reenter “normal” life in the post-pandemic period and readjust their plans for the future.

Creating new spaces for interaction. Teaching and learning online from our homes has shown us that we can blend classroom instruction with activities outside the walls of the classroom. In these more porous classrooms (Godwin-Jones 2020), we can consider new ways to bring guest speakers from around the world into our academic and co-curricular programs, take students on tours of Russian-speaking places and invite students to give us guided tours of their own hometowns, teach cooking online from our homes. We can continue to build community by taking into account our own and our students’ lives beyond the classroom.

Advocates for language education often focus on the cognitive, academic, or career-related benefits of additional language learning. In this article, we have tried to make the case of the importance of language learning in meeting students’ needs for human connection and community. The experience of teaching and supporting students during the COVID-19 pandemic has heightened our awareness of this aspect of our work. As we prepare for our return to face-to-face instruction post-pandemic, we will continue to foreground the well-being of our students, our colleagues, and
ourselves in our teaching practices and in our broader program planning, design, and implementation.

References


Развитие межкультурных коммуникативных компетенций в условиях виртуальной учебной программы: трудности и результаты

ЛИЛИЯ ЕРУШКИНА, ЕКАТЕРИНА СМИРНОВА, АННА НГОМА

1. Введение
К настоящему времени Национальный исследовательский Нижегородский государственный университет им. Н.И. Лобачевского (далее – Университет Лобачевского) имеет достаточно успешный опыт организации и реализации программы CLS (Critical Language Scholarship) Американских Советов по международному образованию (далее - программа), направленной на интенсивное изучение иностранных языков и погружение в культуру страны изучаемого языка.

Уникальность программы обеспечивается сочетанием нескольких обязательных компонентов, которые во взаимодействии позволяют студентам достичь в течение достаточно короткого времени значительных результатов в изучении иностранного языка.

В задачи Университета Лобачевского как организатора программы входит обеспечение максимально эффективного взаимодействия трех компонентов:

1) академическая составляющая, которая заключается в организации непосредственно учебной части программы по изучению РКИ (русский язык как иностранный);
2) культурная составляющая, целью которой является максимальное погружение студентов в культуру страны изучаемого языка. В данном случае культура понимается в широком толковании понятия: речь идет о традициях, обычаях, исторических реалиях, достопримечательностях, современном быте России и т.д.;
3) компонент «лингвистическое партнерство», который представляет собой обеспечение практики разговорной речи с носителями языка, направленной на устойчивое формирование и закрепление коммуникативных навыков студентов.
Помимо разработки содержательной части всех вышеупомянутых компонентов программы важной задачей для принимающей организации становится успешное администрирование программы: организация работы каждого сотрудника, участвующего в реализации программы, и обеспечение между ними непрерывного взаимодействия. Только в таком случае можно говорить об успешности программы.

До 2020 года программа реализовывалась в традиционном, привычном для всех, очном формате, и можно с уверенностью сказать, что программа была успешной, о чем свидетельствуют результаты студентов в изучении РКИ. При прохождении независимого тестирования по оценке языковых компетенций (Oral Proficiency Interview - OPI) по завершении программы студенты демонстрировали повышение уровня владения русским языком: в 2020 году из 25 участников программы 23 показали переход на несколько уровней выше по шкале уровней владения иностранными языками, разработанной Американской ассоциацией преподавателей иностранных языков (ACTFL).

В период пандемии COVID-19 Американские Советы по международному образованию приняли решение не отменять программу, а провести ее в онлайн-формате. К лету 2020 года Университет Лобачевского уже имел достаточный опыт реализации дистанционных образовательных программ, но все-таки это был определенный вызов. Необходимо было реализовать программу изучения русского языка, в которой огромную роль играет именно погружение в естественную языковую среду. Разумеется, все компоненты программы, обозначенные выше, должны быть обеспечены и в дистанционном формате.

Таким образом, помимо организации учебных занятий и обеспечения регулярной разговорной практики с носителями русского языка, не менее важной для Университета Лобачевского стала задача моделирования виртуальной языковой среды с целью максимально возможного восполнения отсутствия естественного языкового окружения у участников программы.

Далее в статье будут описаны способы обеспечения эффективной работы каждого из компонентов программы и их взаимодействия в условиях виртуальной реализации программы летом 2020 года.
2. Академическая составляющая программы
Главный вызов, который стоял перед разработчиками академической части онлайн-программы, состоял в том, чтобы сделать занятия максимально эффективными для студентов.

С этой целью было решено, что академическая программа преимущественно должна по содержанию остаться такой же, как и была в условиях очного обучения. Другими словами, изменилась только форма представления студентам содержательной части программы. Вместо привычной аудитории в Университете с преподавателем студенты ежедневно занимались в виртуальном классе, где они также видели, слышали, спрашивали преподавателя, отвечали на вопросы одногруппников и преподавателя, при этом находясь в разных точках планеты. То есть при реализации интенсивной программы изучения иностранного языка даже в дистанционном формате очень важно сосредоточиться на развитии коммуникативных навыков у обучающихся, формирование и активизация которых становятся невозможными при отсутствии реального живого общения на занятиях. В этой связи очевидна неоценимая роль именно синхронных онлайн-занятий, которые проводятся в режиме реального времени с каждой учебной группой. В качестве технического инструмента для организации синхронных занятий была выбрана платформа Zoom, которая на сегодняшний день является достаточно популярной с точки зрения проведения групповых видеоконференций. Кроме того, Zoom обладает интуитивным интерфейсом, что, разумеется, важно при проведении онлайн-занятий как для преподавателей, так и для студентов.

Очевидно, что сам процесс изучения иностранного языка сопровождается как участием студентов в занятиях, так и их самостоятельной работой, выполнением домашних заданий. С целью организации самостоятельной работы студентов были разработаны электронные учебные материалы и размещены в системе электронного обучения Университета Лобачевского e-learning.unn.ru (далее - Система). Данная Система разработана на платформе Moodle и успешно используется уже на протяжении длительного времени при реализации дистанционных образовательных программ в Университете Лобачевского.

Таким образом, учебный план программы состоял из двух типов занятий: синхронных занятий, которые проходили в режиме реального времени с помощью платформы Zoom, и асинхронных
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занятий, которые представляли собой самостоятельную работу студентов с электронными учебными материалами в Системе.

С целью распределения студентов по учебным группам было проведено входное тестирование, которое включало в себя выполнение лексико-грамматического теста в Системе и участие в индивидуальном собеседовании с преподавателями в режиме реального времени в Zoom. Также студентам было предложено написать письмо преподавателю. Мы подготовили план такого письма, который включал в себя ответы на следующие вопросы: откуда вы, из какого штата, сколько вам лет, где вы учились (университет, факультет), чем вы увлекаетесь, почему вы начали изучать русский язык, как долго вы изучали русский язык, почему вы решили принять участие в программе CLS 2020. Такое письмо не может быть рассмотрено и учтено как работа, демонстрирующая уровень владения русским языком, поскольку студенты могут использовать словарь или компьютерные программы для перевода для того, чтобы выразить свои мысли. Письмо студенту преподавателю имело целью, прежде всего, «познакомиться» со студентом, чтобы узнать в том числе и о его интересах, увлечениях. Это впоследствии помогло преподавателям подбирать более интересные темы для разговорного курса, опираться на известные им факты из жизни студентов.

До проведения индивидуального собеседования преподавателям уже были известны результаты грамматического теста, что позволяло им задавать вопросы разной сложности в зависимости от предполагаемого уровня студента. Заранее было составлено расписание собеседований, и каждый студент подключался к Zoom в соответствии с расписанием. Длительность собеседования составляла от 10 до 15 минут.

Так, на основании всех полученных результатов тестирования и собеседования, 25 человек были распределены по четырем группам. Необходимо отметить, что такой формат проведения входного тестирования нам представляется достаточно успешным.

Как уже говорилось выше, было решено максимально сохранить содержательную часть академической программы, то есть содержание программы составляли те же учебные курсы, что и в условиях очного формата реализации программы:
- Адаптивный курс фонетики. Данный курс был разработан как полностью асинхронный курс. Это было сделано с целью организации именно индивидуальной самостоятельной работы каждого студента с материалами данного курса, поскольку опыт преподавания фонетических курсов говорит нам о том, что у каждого студента свои специфические трудности при освоении фонетической системы русского языка, формировании и активизации произносительных норм русского языка и др. Через Zoom студенты занимались фонетикой только на индивидуальных консультациях. Все занятия по фонетике предполагали асинхронный режим работы. Для работы студентам было предложено множество аудиоматериалов, связанных с произношением звуков русского языка, интонационными конструкциями и т.д. Преподаватели выявляли произносительные трудности у студентов или сами студенты говорили о трудностях во время индивидуальных занятий. Надо заметить, что в случае, если фонетические ошибки не затрудняли процесс коммуникации, то преподаватели не тратили много времени и сил студента на их исправление, поскольку постановка правильного произношения процесс длительный, что невозможно осуществить в условиях восьминедельной программы.

Занятия по всем другим курсам программы были реализованы как в синхронном, так и асинхронном режиме.
- Практическая грамматика: на этом курсе студенты изучали лексико-грамматическую систему русского языка, трудные случаи русской грамматики, особенности словообразования, идиоматику, многозначность лексики русского языка, типы синтаксических конструкций и др. Изучаемые темы подбирались с учетом уровня владения студентами русским языком.
- Практический разговорный курс: на этом курсе студенты изучали различные разговорные темы в зависимости от уровня группы, актуализировали знания, полученные на уроках грамматики на разном текстовом материале.
- Практика речи на материале средств массовой информации: на занятиях студенты работали с текстами из газет и журналов, материалами новостных форумов, аудио и видеоматериалами. Необходимо отметить, что студентам во время занятий предлагаются для работы аутентичные материалы.
- Практика речи на материале кино: на занятиях студенты работали с фрагментами из фильмов на русском языке.
- Практика речи на материале художественной литературы: на занятиях студенты работали с текстами из произведений русской литературы.

- Страноведение: на этом курсе студенты изучали русский язык на материалах по истории, этнографии, географии. Данные материалы позволили студентам познакомиться с национальным и культурным разнообразием России, с особенностями быта русских людей, традициями и культурой России, с культурным наследием нашей страны и получить знания о стране в целом. Ценность данного курса невозможно переоценить в условиях дистанционного формата обучения, когда студенты не смогли погрузиться в культурные реалии страны, находясь в самой стране.

Все вышеупомянутые курсы были представлены в расписании учебных занятий для каждой группы. Занятия начинались ежедневно с понедельника по пятницу в 17:00 по московскому времени, что было удобно по времени для американских студентов, находящихся в разных часовых поясах северо-американского континента. При составлении расписания учебных занятий были учтены требования, предъявляемые к программе Американскими Советами по международному образованию: еженедельно 10 часов синхронных занятий и 8 часов асинхронных занятий. Также для каждого студента была предусмотрена еженедельная часовая индивидуальная консультация с преподавателем в онлайн-режиме, на которой студент мог задать все интересующие его вопросы, преодолеть трудности в освоении той или иной темы, просто иметь возможность дополнительной разговорной практики. Индивидуальные консультации также были отражены в расписании.

По каждому курсу программы в Системе были размещены учебные планы с обозначением темы занятий, что является очень привычным для американских студентов.

Для оперативного информирования студентов, а также для общения друг с другом и с преподавателем были созданы групповые чаты студентов в соответствии с учебными группами на корпоративном портале Университета Лобачевского (portal.unn.ru).

Одним из требований программы является соблюдение условий языковой политики программы: на всей территории программы студенты могут использовать исключительно русский язык. Была определена территория программы в условиях дистанционного формата: синхронные занятия, асинхронные занятия (достаточно простой интерфейс Системы на русском языке не требует специальных
знаний для пользователей), портал Университета Лобачевского, встречи с лингвистическим партнерами, культурные мероприятия. Заметим, что все студенты успешно справились с выполнением данного требования.

На протяжении восьми недель программы студенты ежедневно встречались на онлайн-занятиях, работали в Системе, выполняли задания, участвовали в разговорных клубах, готовили финальный проект. Ежедневно все их достижения фиксировались в электронном журнале, представляющем собой файл в программе Excel.

В середине программы студенты выполняли промежуточный тест, который включал в себя письменную и устную часть. По результатам этого теста для каждого студента были подготовлены письменные рекомендации с указанием конкретных достижений и «слабых моментов» студента. По итогам программы студенты выполняли тест, а также представляли подготовленные заранее проекты на русском языке. Надо отметить, что студенты показали отличные результаты по итогам программы, что убеждает нас еще раз в уникальности программы и ее жизнеспособности и в условиях дистанционной реализации: из 25 студентов 3 участника программы повысили их уровень владения РКИ на один подуровень, 8 - на два подуровня, 9 – на три подуровня, 1 – на 4 подуровня по шкале уровней ACTFL. Двое по результатам прохождения тестирования не показали прогресса в изучении РКИ, двое не проходили тестирование (в 2020 году прохождение тестирования OPI не являлось требованием к участникам программы).


Безусловно, был и ряд трудностей, с которыми мы столкнулись летом 2020 года. Во-первых, дистанционный формат реализации программы предполагает отсутствие технических проблем. У студента должно быть оборудование, позволяющее ему принимать
участие в онлайн-занятиях и работать в Системе, и устойчивое интернет-соединение. Без этого участие в онлайн-программе было бы невозможно. На протяжении программы мы сталкивались с техническими проблемами у студентов (временное отсутствие электричества из-за урагана, неустойчивое интернет-соединение и т.д.), которые они, к счастью, успешно преодолевали.

Во-вторых, к лету 2020 года у студентов уже успела накопиться психологическая усталость от дистанционного обучения. Студенту тяжело долго быть активным участником занятия на протяжении длительного времени, смотря в монитор. И отзывы самих студентов это подтверждают. Поэтому приходилось использовать на занятиях различные методические приемы, удерживающие внимание студентов, подбирать увлекательный и актуальный контент: фрагменты фильмов, новости, материалы форумов и др. С этим также успешно справлялась команда преподавателей русского языка Университета Лобачевского.

В-третьих, оперативное создание электронных учебных материалов для работы студентов требует колоссальных временных затрат преподавателя. При разработке электронных курсов для программы преподаватели руководствовались принципами целостности, логичности и понятности материала. Нам было важно не просто разместить в Системе материалы для асинхронной работы студента, а создать самодостаточный цифровой продукт для изучения русского языка как иностранного. Поскольку это делалось в режиме реального времени, по ходу реализации программы, с учетом возможностей и интересов студентов, можно с уверенностью сказать, что преподаватели работали на протяжении восьми недель программы круглосуточно. Самым ценным вознаграждением за их труд стали результаты студентов по итогам программы и их настоящий интерес к занятиям.

Говоря об перспективах реализации программы в дистанционном формате и в дальнейшем, можно быть уверенными в том, что подобная форма является успешной, и в случае, если нам придется повторить данный опыт, команда Университета Лобачевского постарается сделать программу еще лучше.

3. Культурная составляющая программы
Культурная часть программы в интенсивном курсе, проводимая исключительно на русском языке, представляет собой важную часть погружения в культуру изучаемого языка, где составляющими
компонентами могут являться и экскурсионная программа, и академические мероприятия культурологического плана, и знакомство с бытом в принимающей семье, и опыт общения со знакомыми и незнакомыми людьми и т.д. Важная задача при очной форме организации программы — это соблюдение баланса академической и «развлекательной» нагрузки для студентов, чтобы эмоциональный комфорт от адекватного восприятия информации и погружения в иностранный язык соответствовал зоне ближайшего развития студента.

В языковой онлайн-программе необходимо соблюдение баланса. Однако накладываются известные трудности: отсутствие ситуаций для спонтанного общения, сложность организации одновременного интерактивного общения большой группы студентов или техническая невозможность вовлечения студентов в процесс общего взаимодействия, например, во время мастер-классов.

Культурная составляющая разделилась на три больших взаимосвязанных компонента:

1) Академический курс «Страноведение», уже описанный выше, основной задачей которого являлось предоставление возможности студентам читать, смотреть и слушать материалы, адаптированные под уровень каждой конкретной группы.

2) Взаимодействие с языковыми партнерами, построенное на личных интересах студентов с учетом уровня развития языковых навыков и технических возможностей онлайн-общения. С точки зрения организации и администрирования процесса со стороны университета потребовались усилия для подготовки вариантов идей для интерактивных встреч, пакета внешних интернет-ресурсов, проведения мастер-классов для российских языковых партнеров для планирования, подготовки и реализации встреч в онлайн-режиме.

3) И собственно культурная часть, которая дистанционно должна была остаться в интерактивном формате и не превращаться в дублирование интернет-каналов, показывающих достопримечательности России. Задача предстояла сложная, и мы изначально предполагали следующие трудности: технические сложности подготовки подобного материала, невозможность проведения онлайн-встреч в музеях и других туристических местах из-за разницы часовых поясов и вечернего (темного) времени суток, и самый большой вызов состоял в подборе адекватного материала на изучаемом языке в связи с существенной разницей в уровнях владения языком у самих студентов.
Культурная часть по замыслу организаторов должна была сохранить академическую направленность и задумывалась как погружение в тематику через знакомство со специалистами в области, связанной с обсуждаемой темой. Примерно раз в две недели после запланированных занятий студентам предлагались небольшие мероприятия для знакомства с русской культурой на изучаемом языке. Предполагались 4 академические короткие лекции с последующей дискуссией и 2 мероприятия особого формата в форме виртуального тура и разговорного клуба. Темы лекций выбирались с учетом устойчивого интереса со стороны американских студентов в течение многих лет организации программы: «Традиции и культура России», «Бизнес в России», «История и современность России», «Русская языковая политика».

Привлечение лингвистических партнеров к работе двух других семинаров послужило созданию благоприятной онлайн-среды и вовлеченности в студенческое сообщество. Лингвистические партнеры приняли участие в виртуальном туре «Русская дача» и дискуссионном клубе «Живая библиотека», которые предоставили студентам возможность непринужденно пообщаться со своими партнерами и друг с другом. Русская дача традиционно вызывает интерес у иностранных студентов, как феномен, свойственный не всем странам и являющийся особенностью культурного быта россиян. Понимание новой лексики облегчалось использованием не только заранее подготовленной видеозаписи, но и специальной презентацией, и привлечением лингвистических партнеров.

Идея разговорного клуба «Живая библиотека» предполагала, как и в очном режиме, увлекательное путешествие - знакомство с «книгой» в виде интересного спикера, представителя Нижнего Новгорода с интересным хобби или профессиональным занятием: эколог, бизнесмен, лидер молодежного движения и т.д. А участники разговорного клуба с помощью активного аудирования и дискуссии должны погрузиться в «чтение» - общение. Более подробно механизмы организации мероприятия в таком формате будут описаны в разделе 3 настоящей статьи.

Языковая подготовка студентов к подобным культурным мероприятиям в контексте дистанционного формата очень важна. Для каждого занятия такого вида деятельности преподаватели готовили специальные учебные материалы по предстоящей теме обсуждения.

Как показала практика первых занятий, в ситуации онлайн-
обучения особенно очевидными становятся следующие проблемные моменты онлайн-дискуссии:

(а) низкий уровень владения русским языком не позволяет одинаково активно участвовать в синхронных дискуссиях,

(б) использование стиля общения, характерного для современной интернет-коммуникации,

(с) трудность определения объема материала, который участник вносит в дискуссию.

Для повышения активности участия каждого студента и большего понимания материала в интерактивном формате обсуждения на последующих встречах нам пришлось использовать несколько новых форм работы:

- деление группы на подгруппы в соответствии с уровнем владения русским языком для обеспечения эмоционального комфорта студентов,
- участие преподавателей русского языка или лингвистических партнеров в качестве фасилитаторов дискуссии в подгруппах,
- видеозапись информативной части выступления преподавателем русского языка,
- предварительное ознакомление с видеозаписью информативной части занятия с целью, чтобы студенты, работая асинхронно в своем темпе, могли прослушать и ознакомиться с материалом для последующей дискуссии,
- проведение нескольких итераций одного и того же культурного мероприятия, адаптированного к языковому уровню учащихся.

Подобная организация дала положительный эффект: выросла активность высказываний участников в каждой группе, возрос интерес к предлагаемым темам, что в свою очередь нам позволило создать чувство общности в онлайн-среде группы и избежать давления психологического фактора изолированности, негативно влияющего на мотивацию и успеваемость студентов.

Плюсы и минусы использованных способов формирования культурологического наполнения программы 2020 года глубоко анализировались как в ходе программы для своевременного решения возникших трудностей и повышения уровня качества программы, так и после ее окончания для формирования пакета форм, методов и приемов для использования их в дальнейшем. Формат онлайн-
программы еще раз убедил нас, организаторов, в том, что компоненты программы, работающие в очень тесном взаимодействии друг с другом, незаменимы и обязательно должны сыграть свою важную роль в формировании коммуникативных компетенций. Регулярная структурированная внеклассная деятельность интенсивных программ и в условиях дистанционного обучения формирует необходимые языковые компетенции, максимально погружает в языковую и культурную среду, помогает студентам снять языковой и психологический барьеры.

4. Компонент «лингвистическое партнерство»
Данная составляющая программы обеспечивает: 1) организацию разговорной практики русского языка с носителем; 2) адаптацию участников программы CLS к образовательному процессу и социализацию; 3) погружение иностранного студента в новую культурную и языковую среду с целью освоения компетенций, позволяющих успешно функционировать в российском обществе.

Механизм организации: парные встречи иностранного студента (участника программы CLS) и российского «лингвистического партнера». Для каждой пары организуются 16 встреч: 2 раза в неделю по 60 минут (8 недель) в Zoom (в офлайн-формате встречи длились 90 минут, сокращение времени было обусловлено переходом в онлайн-режим, так как лингвистической паре не требуется время на совместное передвижение в транспорте до места назначения, стояние в очередях для покупки билетов в музеи, театры и пр.). Расписание встреч определяется в индивидуальном порядке в удобное для обоих участников время с учетом занятости в академической и культурной программах, а в онлайн-формате с учетом часовых поясов.

Ежегодно координатором «лингвистических партнеров» анонсируется набор на позицию «лингвистического партнера» среди российских студентов Университета Лобачевского. Сбор заявок проводится с 1 апреля по 1 мая. Количество полученных заявок варьируется от 215 до 265.

Этапы отбора российских участников на место «лингвистического партнера»:
1) Заявка. Проводится с помощью сервиса Google Forms. Заявка содержит серию стандартных вопросов (Ф.И.О., возраст, контакты, паспортные данные) и мотивационное письмо на тему «Почему я хочу стать «лингвистическим партнером» для американского студента».
На данном этапе отклоняется 15-20% заявок по причинам чрезвычайной занятости соискателя во время программы, желании практиковать иностранные языки, несоответствие возрастному цензу (младше 18 лет).

2) Собеседование. В ходе индивидуальной личной встречи (в связи с условиями COVID-19 - в Zoom) координатор оценивает кандидата (доброжелательность, открытость при ведении диалога и пр.) на место «лингвистического партнера», мотивационный статус, наличие или отсутствие психологического барьера у соискателя, проводит анализ экстралингвистических факторов, а также вводит будущего «лингвистического партнера» в коммуникативную ситуацию с помощью экспресс-теста на умение просто и ясно объяснять лексические единицы русского языка с помощью вербальных и невербальных средств.

После собеседования 45-55% интервьюированных допускаются до следующего этапа.

3) Анкетирование. При условии успешного прохождения собеседования кандидат на место «лингвистического партнера» заполняет анкету на совместимость с участником программы CLS (такая же анкета заполняется и иностранными участниками). Вопросы анкеты направлены на выявление информации о возрасте кандидата, профессии или изучаемой специальности, знании иностранных языков, хобби, темпераменте и т.д. На основании этих данных формируется «лингвистическая пара».

После трех этапов отбора 20% кандидатов допускаются до организационной встречи, в ходе которой дается общая информация о программе, обсуждаются обязательства «лингвистических партнеров», в том числе особенности онлайн-формата:

1) Использование исключительно русского языка для общения на протяжении всей программы с целью погружения иностранного студента в языковую среду.

2) Ответственность за качественное интернет-соединение во время онлайн-встреч (отсутствие шумов, перебоев, своевременное подключение к видеоконференции Zoom с включенными микрофонами и камерами).

3) Соблюдение регламента и критериев: 16 встреч по 60 минут с элементами погружения в культурную среду посредством использования пакета внешних интернет-ресурсов.

4) Ведение отчетности о проведенных встречах (табель в Google Docs с указанием даты и времени встречи, описанием...
тем, которые обсуждались, ссылок на внешние ресурсы и скриншота экрана во время дискуссии).

После формирования окончательного списка «лингвистических партнеров» в соответствии с количеством иностранных участников программы, проводится серия тренингов, в частности, участие в культурно-дискуссионном клубе с иностранными обучающимися Университета Лобачевского для получения опыта межкультурной коммуникации, лекции по темам расово-этнического состава жителей США, разъясняются понятия «сексуальное домогательство», «толерантное отношение» (в соответствии с требованиями программы), а также участники программы прошлых лет делятся своим опытом.

В онлайн-формате первая встреча осуществляется в группах до десяти человек с помощью видеоконференций Zoom, включает в себя мини-презентации о себе и игры на знакомство, после чего иностранным участникам предлагает пройти онлайн-игру на определение своего индивидуального «лингвистического партнера». Данная игра основана на ответах на вопросы в анкетах участников, так как «лингвистические пары» подобраны по принципу схожести интересов, возраста, выбранной профессии, то именно эти данные ложатся в основу игры. В конце игры иностранный обучающийся получает контактную информацию его «лингвистического партнера» и письмо с приглашением присоединиться к индивидуальной видеоконференции Zoom. Далее общение продолжается в парах, «лингвистический партнер» проводит индивидуальную онлайн-экскурсию по городу для иностранного участника с помощью Google Maps, далее «лингвистическая пара» договаривается о следующей встрече, времени и способе организации встреч онлайн с учетом разницы во времени между городами и индивидуальных предпочтений. Впоследствии «лингвистическая пара» встречается, согласно установленному графику, два раза в неделю по 60 минут. Общение состоит из индивидуальных встреч, проведения интерактивов, участия в студенческих мероприятиях Университета Лобачевского и посещении городских мероприятий, например, «походов» в музеи, участия в викторинах и квестах в онлайн-формате.

В первые недели общения онлайн «лингвистической паре» предлагается изучить заранее подготовленную координатором данного направления «карту интерактивов» и выбрать наиболее подходящий вариант для реализации в зависимости от личных предпочтений. Содержание «карты интерактивов» разнообразно, опираясь на
уровень владения студентами русским языком, выбирается тот или иной вариант.

Элементарный уровень:
1) Экскурсия «Мой дом». Участникам предлагается нарисовать план / схему своего дома / квартиры, продумать и написать рассказ о том, что где находится; последняя остановка — кухня, где участники могут рассказать о том, что и когда едят в их стране, какие у них есть традиционные блюда, любят ли они готовить, могут попить вместе чай во время онлайн-встречи.
2) Мастер-класс «Готовим вместе». Предлагается приготовить вместе с «лингвистическим партнером» (параллельно) традиционное блюдо.
3) Экскурсия «Мой город». Участникам предлагается показать любимые места в родном городе, используя режим «Просмотр улиц» в Google Maps. Необходимо рассказать об этом месте, почему вы его любите, проложить маршрут от одного места до другого.

Средний (пороговый) уровень:
1) Тема «Праздники». Каждому участнику предлагается выбрать любимый праздник и рассказать о нем. Также нужно объяснить, почему это их любимый праздник.
2) Тема «Песни». Нужно выбрать песню, которая нравится участнику, найти текст, обсудить с «лингвистическим партнером» сложные слова, слова в переносном значении, затем рассказать о своем любимом музыкальном исполнителе (певце, группе) и стилях музыки, которые нравятся участнику и которые сейчас популярны.
3) Тема «Фильмы». Необходимо выбрать любимый русский фильм, обсудить его с «лингвистическим партнером»; рассказать, какие герои фильма нравятся и почему, узнать о других фильмах с этими актерами, рассказать о своем любимом актере или режиссере, какие жанры фильмов нравятся и почему; можно посмотреть трейлеры к фильмам.
4) Тема «Поэзия». Нужно обсудить с «лингвистическим партнером» любимое стихотворение, проанализировав новую лексику и сложные грамматические конструкции; рассказать биографию автора, посетить онлайн-музей памяти этого поэта.
Продвинутый уровень:
1) Сопровождение на онлайн-экскурсии, посещение театров и онлайн-концертов.
2) Участие в онлайн-играх, квизах, викторинах и квестах с помощью мобильных приложений или погружение в аутентичную ситуацию, например, городского квеста в онлайн-формате.
3) Совместное прохождение тестов по русскому языку как иностранному, русской культуре, истории и страноведению.

Опора на данные материалы позволяет смоделировать первый опыт общения «лингвистической пары», снять психологический и языковой барьеры, найти точки соприкосновения для развернутого диалога на последующих встречах, так как вызовом организации функционирования компонента «лингвистическое партнерство» в дистанционном формате стало отсутствие общения «с глазу на глаз», которое позволяло завязать дружеские отношения между участниками, но тактика, примененная в 2020 году, и результаты опроса иностранных студентов показали высокую степень удовлетворенности студентов. По итогам 3–5 встреч устанавливается более тесный контакт, и «лингвистическая пара» может перейти к выбору собственной траектории дальнейшего общения.

Поддерживающим методом данной работы в аспекте изучения русского языка как иностранного становится системное проведение разговорных клубов. Данные клубы подразделяются на тематические, проектные и личностно-ориентированные. Существуют также особые форматы проведения разговорного клуба – «Живая библиотека» и «Квартирник», в ходе которых иностранные участники программы имеют возможность практиковать русский язык не только в паре, но и в группе, расширить круг своего общения, увидеть другие поведенческие модели русских людей. Основой «Живой библиотеки» является общение с приглашенными спикерами различных профессий, вероисповеданий, возрастов и т.д., «Квартирник», в свою очередь, нацелен на общение в группе студентов и «лингвистических партнеров» в неформальной обстановке.

Таким образом, компонент «лингвистическое партнерство» обеспечивает практику разговорной речи с носителями русского языка, направленную на устойчивое формирование и закрепление коммуникативных навыков студентов, адаптацию иностранных участников к образовательному процессу, погружение в русскую
культуру и языковую среды, позволяет овладеть новыми компетенциями для успешного функционирования в российском обществе.

5. Заключение
Анализируя и оценивая опыт по прошествии значительного периода времени после завершения программы, можно с уверенностью сказать, что наш опыт был успешным. Об этом свидетельствуют, конечно, прежде всего результаты тестирования по русскому языку как иностранному студентов. Как уже говорилось выше, 23 из 25 участников программы повысили свой уровень владения РКИ. При сравнении с результатами студентов, принимавших участие в очной программе, мы увидели, что они такие же, что также свидетельствует об эффективности курса.

Также мы получили положительные отзывы студентов об их опыте участия в программе:
- общий результат по степени удовлетворенности программой студентов – 93%;
- 24 из 25 студентов считают дистанционный формат реализации программы успешным;
- средняя оценка академического компонента – 4,9 (из 5);
- средняя оценка культурной составляющей программы – 4,5 (из 5);
- средняя оценка компонента «лингвистическое партнерство» – 4,8 (из 5).

На наш взгляд, положительная оценка программы со стороны студентов обусловлена именно обеспечением взаимодействия всех трех компонентов программы, что позволило организаторам реализовать программу максимально эффективно, а студентам – достичь высоких результатов. Как организаторы программы, разумеется, мы проанализировали полученный опыт и учтем те трудности, с которыми мы столкнулись летом 2020 года при реализации программы в 2021 году: представляется целесообразным проводить культурные мероприятия не для всех участников программы в одно время, а в каждой учебной группе отдельно, используя русский язык разной сложности, что будет способствовать, на наш взгляд, большей вовлеченности студентов в такие мероприятия.

На сегодняшний день в условиях мировой пандемии дистанционный формат реализации языковых программ представляется перспективным направлением для развития
Развитие межкультурных коммуникативных компетенций
Ерушкина, Смирнова, Нгома

в Университете Лобачевского. Преподаватели, работающие в дистанционных программах, постоянно проходят курсы повышения квалификации, направленные на приобретение и развитие компетенций, связанных с разработкой цифрового учебного контента, способами повысить эффективность онлайн-обучения, психологическими вопросами, возникающими у преподавателей и студентов при реализации образовательных программ в дистанционном формате. Весь имеющийся опыт будет учтен при подготовке к программам 2021 года.
Student Engagement in a Remote Language Learning Environment: The Case of Ukrainian

OLENA SIVACHENKO, ALLA NEDASHKIVSKA

1. Introduction
The new digital realities presented during the COVID-19 pandemic opened avenues for furthering our knowledge of technologically enhanced education, based on lessons learned from our emergent digital language classrooms. The sudden transition to remote learning was disruptive to both instructors and students, who found themselves forced to adapt to new routines in a new setting without time to fully consider best practices. This article examines and reflects on students’ engagement with the crisis-driven, remote environment.

Teaching observations, communication with other instructors, and research (e.g., Coleman et al. 2012, 166) indicate that students learning remotely often feel disengaged or find it challenging to engage with peers, instructors, and course material. This problem prompted our investigation of engagement in learning Ukrainian as a foreign language remotely.

2. Engagement
Engagement has been a familiar concept in educational theories since Moser and McGowan’s (1985) introduction of the term. Engagement is “what students do, say, think, feel, and make, in classrooms,” and “about the energy learners actually spend toward their achievement” (Oga-Baldwin 2019, 2). More recent developments stress its multidimensional nature (Reschly and Christenson 2012; Reeve 2013; Philip and Duchesne 2016; Oga-Baldwin 2019). In language learning, classroom engagement involves an interconnected combination of “behavioral, emotional, cognitive, and agentic factors” (Oga-Baldwin 2019, 4). This article examines five types of engagement: the four mentioned by Oga-Baldwin (behavioral, emotional, cognitive, agentic), and social (Svalberg 2009; Philip and Duchesne 2016), which adds to this discussion.

Behavioral engagement refers to learners’ actions, such as course participation, including academic, social, and extracurricular activities. Oga-Baldwin stresses that behavior is “the logical ignition moment for
the other aspects of engagement,” the impact of which had not been fully recognized in earlier work. He notes that “engagement in class at least partially begins with behavior, and the other parts of the process, including cognition, agency, and emotion, all result in part from students’ initial, subconscious decision to engage or disengage behaviorally” (2019, 5).

Emotional engagement concerns students’ feelings about and reactions to their instructors, peers, the learning context, or institutions, all of which influence their willingness to complete learning activities. This category includes task-facilitating emotions such as interest, curiosity, and enthusiasm, and the absence of task-withdrawing emotions such as distress, anger, frustration, anxiety, and fear (Reeve 2012, 150-51).

The cognitive dimension refers to “the intentional thoughts that students put into their school work” (Oga-Baldwin 2019, 5), namely student investment and readiness to put in the work to understand course content and to master the skills that are being taught. Cognitive engagement “remains the most difficult to both quantify or describe qualitatively” (Oga-Baldwin 2019, 5).

Agentic engagement relates to students’ constructive contributions to the learning environment as well as the quality and the flow of the instruction that they receive (Reeve and Tseng 2011; Reeve 2013). Agentic engagement refers to “the actual actions learners take in the classroom” in order to request changes or adjustments to their learning context (Oga-Baldwin 2019, 6).

Although social engagement is not present in all models of engagement, it can be significant in the context of remote learning. Social engagement, closely related to the emotional dimension, refers to students’ relationships within the learning process (Svalberg 2009), which includes paying attention and listening to their peers, “draw[ing] from one another’s expertise and ideas, provid[ing] of feedback to one another” (Philip and Duchesne 2016, 57). It also can include learners’ willingness to work collaboratively and a desire for group projects, including those that go beyond what is required in the classroom.

3. The survey
This paper discusses the results of a survey administered in Ukrainian classes at the University of Alberta during the transition to emergency remote teaching. Our goal is to examine students’ behavioral, emotional, cognitive, agentive, and social engagement in the remote learning of Ukrainian as a foreign language at the postsecondary level. In this empirical exploration, we are guided by the following questions:
• What are students’ perceptions of their experiences in learning Ukrainian remotely?
• What do these perceptions reveal about students’ engagement in the learning process at the behavioral, emotional, cognitive, agentive, and social levels?
• Do attitudes toward engagement differ by course level?

4. Participants and procedures
This empirical exploration involved 23 undergraduate students (17 female, 6 male) at a Canadian postsecondary institution. Participants came from three instructional levels: first-year (5 female and 2 male), second-year (5 female and 3 male), and third-year (7 female and 1 male).

To examine learners’ engagement in remote Ukrainian language courses, we administered an online survey at the beginning of the winter semester of the 2020-21 academic year. The survey was designed according to Oga-Baldwin’s (2019) and Reeve’s (2012; 2013) engagement frameworks, with certain elements adopted from Reeve and Tseng (2011). In total, the survey consisted of 22 items: 12 questions (3 closed-ended and 9 open-ended) and 10 question clusters (each containing a multiple-choice grid, followed by an open-ended question). Questions elicited participants’ demographics (gender and remote Ukrainian language course that they took), their overall experiences of learning Ukrainian remotely, (dis)advantages of the format, and recommendations for improving remote instruction. Each question cluster focused on one of the four levels of engagement: behavioral, emotional, cognitive, and agentic.

The open-ended questions concerned students’ overall effort in the course, during in-class sessions, and while working in Breakout Rooms (behavioral); how they felt about the course in general, in-class activities, and working in Breakout Rooms, including their connections with others (emotional and social); strategies that they used in and outside of class to understand course content and master skills that were taught (cognitive); and how they contributed to the course (agentic).

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1 The response rate to the survey was 44% at the first-year level, 80% at the second-year level and 89% at the third-year level. As remuneration for participation, respondents were offered $20 gift cards.
2 To respect respondents’ anonymity, we did not collect data on students’ age, program of study, and Ukrainian-language background.
Table 1. Question clusters

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Engagement levels</th>
<th>Engagement components</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Behavioral</td>
<td>(3 Question clusters): Learners’ effort; preparedness; participation; paying attention to what is happening in class; communication in the target language; staying focused in the course in general, during in-class activities, and while working in Breakout Rooms.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional</td>
<td>(4 Question clusters): Feelings of being engaged, motivated, interested, relaxed, overwhelmed, isolated, bored, anxious, and/or indifferent in the course in general, during in-class activities, and while working in Breakout Rooms; feelings of the amount and quality of interaction between students and between students and instructor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive</td>
<td>(2 Question clusters): Actions undertaken during in-class sessions and outside of class to understand course content and master skills that were taught.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agentic</td>
<td>(1 Question cluster): Learners’ input in deciding how to learn in class, which topics, which materials and activities to choose; making suggestions on how to improve the course.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5. Results
In order to mitigate subjectivity, each author approached the data independently and used an “interpretive analysis to sift through data and group similar ideas together, to discover patterns of behavior and thinking” (Croker 2009, 9). The responses were coded to find common themes (Huberman and Miles 1994). The following themes emerged: general impressions of the remote format (format quality and effectiveness, flexibility and accessibility, material benefits) and those pertaining to behavioral (efforts in the course, class participation, staying focused, paying attention), emotional (comfort, enjoyment, respect, isolation, anxiety, stress), social (interaction, connection), cognitive (learning and troubleshooting strategies), and agentic engagement (providing and abstaining from feedback, control over learning). These themes are presented and analyzed below.
5.1. Learners’ experiences

The data reveal varying perceptions of the quality and effectiveness of remote learning across the three language levels. First-year learners perceived the remote format mostly positively:³

(1) The interactive Zoom classes and the website activities keep me on task. I do not feel like I am missing out on a crucial part of the course. Zoom allows me time to practice my Ukrainian with other students while the website is a good resource for at home practice.  
(2) It hasn't been an issue at all! [Instructor] is extremely patient and very good at taking time so that the students understand over Zoom. The class is organized and efficient. We speak in class then complete homework on our very well-put-together website [...].

Examples (1) and (2) reflect a general trend for this group: students’ perceptions of their success in the course stem from its organization and the resources used. In our first-year course, we use an e-textbook that incorporates a blended model, 50% of which consists of an online self-study and 50% of which consists of in-person synchronous lessons; this textbook most likely enabled a more successful transition of the course to the remote format. Example (2) emphasizes the positive role of the instructor in the process of learning Ukrainian remotely at this level, which echoes the opinion of other students in the group.

The opinion of second-year learners,⁴ who had previous experience learning Ukrainian in-person, was split:

(3) It [the Ukrainian course] was better prepared for than my other courses, but it’s been difficult with [...] extra technology-related work and I find it harder to understand what’s being said in class.  
(4) It’s unfortunate that there are fewer ways to engage both in and outside the classroom with the Ukrainian language and culture, but in terms of education quality, I don’t feel that the quality is significantly different than [...] in person.

Examples (3) and (4) complement the course organization, although, as (3) demonstrates, the use of technology can make learning remotely more challenging. However, in terms of educational quality, most learners

³ Due to space limitations, we provide the most representative examples for each point.  
⁴ At the second-year and third-year levels, the instruction is not blended and includes only in-person synchronous online classes accompanied by homework assignments.
did not see significant qualitative differences between the two formats, as is illustrated by (4). In the view of some participants in this group, interesting topics and creative assignments compensated for disadvantages that the format brings. At the same time, (4) shows that second-year learners were beginning to express their need for engagement outside the class, which was not fully satisfied by the remote format.

The third-year respondents also perceived the remote format positively overall, particularly appreciating their learning activities related to Breakout Rooms. What stands out is the third-year learners’ feelings of disconnectedness between students and instructor:

(5) Learning Ukrainian remotely definitely had challenges. Like all remote learning, it required our technology [and Wi-Fi] to work at all times. In class, we were often put in Breakout Rooms, which was nice to interact with other classmates. However, it felt slightly disconnected not having an instructor there at all times. But overall, it was a good interactive experience.

Other positive aspects of the remote format on which students commented are its flexibility and accessibility. Respondents across all levels pointed out that the new format offered them the convenience of working from home or joining their class from anywhere with Wi-Fi. Additionally, respondents noted that online office hours made connecting with the instructor easier, and remote instruction allowed easier access to external resources during in-class sessions.

A number of students reported on the material benefits associated with the transition to the remote format: students saved money on transportation and avoided lengthy commutes and heavy backpacks. Some said that they used the time which they saved on commuting to put more effort into their assignments by approaching them more creatively, which in turn brought more enjoyment to learning.

5.2. Behavioral engagement
Participants’ overall effort in the courses, class participation, staying focused, and paying attention are aspects of behavioral engagement. The majority of participants said they invested a great deal of effort to do well in the course, handed in assignments on time, came prepared to class, actively participated in activities, tried to stay focused, and paid attention to what was going on in class. Our analysis yields some interesting findings as to what kept students engaged.
Some first-year and second-year respondents felt that they stayed engaged in the synchronous classes in part because the interface of videoconferencing meant that it was more difficult for them to fade into the background since every person’s face was equally visible. The class format prompted learners to pay attention to what was happening in class and to stay on task, thereby promoting engagement. Some first-year respondents noted that the online course activities helped them stay on task even outside class. Some of them also did more than what was required and pushed themselves hard to learn the language. Several second-year learners indicated that interesting and creative assignments such as blogs and vlogs kept them engaged with the language outside class.

A number of factors deterred participants from being engaged. Many students mentioned phones, social media, and home distractions as engagement deterrents. Several respondents indicated that they struggled to put in their best efforts due to a lack of motivation in general and anxiety issues, and for some, the remote format contributed to this. One noted that they were more likely to stay in bed and miss class than they had been in the past because Ukrainian was usually the only synchronous class, they had each day.

Various technology-related factors affected learners’ engagement during in-class activities. Many respondents complained about the effects of a poor internet connection on the quality of their class participation, with internet issues sometimes even preventing them from attending class. Some students noted that it can be difficult to properly hear someone with a bad microphone, while others commented that it is difficult to volunteer to speak in a remote class, because several students can accidentally talk over each other. One respondent wrote that unmuting also delayed students’ engagement.

During synchronous Breakout Rooms, distractions did occur, such as occasional conversations with other students about things not pertaining to Ukrainian, often conducted in English. However, this was usually done after the assignment was completed:

(6) In Breakout Rooms, I [would] complete the assigned task [...] and did not distract myself with outside things. However, I did occasionally talk with other students about things not pertaining to Ukrainian, almost always in English [...] after the assignment was completed.

Example (6) demonstrates that in Breakout Rooms, focused learning was intact, instructor supervision was minimal, and the potential
for distraction was high. This example also signals the need for social interaction with peers, a point which we discuss below.

5.3. Emotional engagement
In the category of emotional engagement, participants mentioned level of comfort, enjoyment, and respect on the one hand, but also isolation, anxiety, and stress on the other. The majority of first-year learners felt comfortable and engaged in class, most often thanks to opportunities for interaction, helpful and respectful peers and instructors, effective learning resources, and the perception of progress in language learning. At the same time, many expressed that remote instruction cannot replace in-person interaction and did not allow for social connections. As a result, some students had increased feelings of isolation, which, in their view, exacerbated mental health issues.

Some participants felt stressed and anxious in class. However, these feelings decreased when participants worked in pairs or groups in Breakout Rooms:
(7) I felt a little nervous at times to speak in class but in breakout rooms I was very comfortable.

The feeling of discomfort in class gained prominence at the second-year (8) and third-year (9) levels:
(8) Due to the presence of more fluent speakers in the class, I definitely felt overwhelmed and intimidated by them, and that contributed to my unwillingness to volunteer, for fear of being wrong and embarrassing myself, as well as my anxiety. Therefore, I tended to adopt a demeanor of indifference to cope.
(9) Sometimes, I also felt there was more pressure to answer questions with everyone looking right at you on the screen.

Examples (8) and (9) are representative of those participants who felt anxious and disengaged in class, especially if intimidated by students with more advanced proficiency levels in the same class (8). Such situations can lead to the emotional and behavioral disengagement of less advanced students at the second-year and third-year levels, and the remote format, requiring students to speak facing others via screens, only added to their anxiety (9).

5 At the second-year and third-year levels, students were of different language proficiency backgrounds: students continuing after the first-year course, students from bilingual and heritage programs, and heritage speakers.
As with first-year students, anxiety and pressure decreased for second-year and third-year learners as they moved into Breakout Rooms. Working in Breakout Rooms reduced stress and made the environment more conducive to learning. One respondent noted that Breakout Rooms increased the quality of in-class interaction because, unlike in a regular classroom, students had complete privacy and did not have to worry about having to talk over other students in a nearby group. Also, because of the cameras, students were always looking at each other, and did not have to try and look across the classroom to see or hear someone.

Third-year respondents also made positive comments about Breakout Rooms:

(10) It was a highlight of my remote Ukrainian courses. Breakout Rooms functioned similarly to group work in class, and I enjoyed having that time to interact with others and work together.
(11) It was interesting to work with new people. It helped connect and get to know some of the classmates better.
(12) Working with peers was a nice chance to compare each other’s answers and questions and simply to have some interaction with other people outside my house.

The level of emotional engagement increased when participants worked in Breakout Rooms. Examples (10) through (12) demonstrate the respondents’ perceptions of Breakout Rooms as an important learning tool that assists in creating and maintaining social presence and enables instructors to recreate a physical classroom environment (10). The respondents emphasized the importance of Breakout Rooms for promoting social interaction (11) and producing feelings of social connection (12).

5.4. Social engagement

The category of social engagement surfaced in our analysis of emotional (10-12) and behavioral (6) engagement and is worthy of separate attention. Although all the students actively commented on their feelings of social interaction and social connection, the importance which they attached to the two components varied across the levels. Responses by first-year students include:

(13) Breakout Rooms were a great opportunity to get to practice Ukrainian with other students. They helped me become more confident in speaking the language. The time after we finished an activity also provided time to get to know one another better. This made me more comfortable to speak Ukrainian around them.
Example (13) shows the perception of social interaction as essential for the students to gain more confidence with the language. Social connection, as they viewed it, was closely linked to getting to know peers so that learners can feel comfortable speaking Ukrainian around them in the classroom. Thus, social interaction and social connection for first-year students overlapped, serving the same goal of making the in-class environment comfortable for learners using the target language.

The perceptions of social interaction and social connection differed with second-year respondents:

(14) [...] While my interaction with my classmates in class was always positive, I found that once class was over [...] it was like I was unknown and a stranger to my classmates. [...] In short, while I think that, during class, we were all friends, [...] outside of class, I did not feel the same sentiment.

(15) I didn’t feel as connected to my classmates, unfortunately, with remote learning. During in-person classes, I felt that the classroom environment felt more like a second family [...].

Examples (14) and (15) demonstrate that both social interaction and social connection were present and constructed, but unlike their first-year peers, the second-year respondents perceived differences between the two (14). In their view, interaction did not necessarily translate into connection. This perception is particularly highlighted in (14), in which the respondent noted that good relations with peers did not go beyond the classroom, unlike during in-person instruction (15). The difference in perceptions between first-year and second-year students may stem from the difference in their needs for social engagement. For first-year students, community is essential in order to feel comfortable using the target language around each other. Most second-year students already know each other from their previous language courses, and they often feel comfortable speaking Ukrainian in class. Therefore, they generally seek to extend their interaction beyond the classroom, which they are largely unable to do in a remote format, and a greater need for social connection develops.

Some third-year students’ responses are similar to those of the second-year students:

(16) Working with peers was a nice chance to compare each other’s answers and questions and simply to have some interaction with other people outside my house.

(17) Remote learning doesn’t really let you connect with new people. If we would have group projects that required us to meet outside of class hours, it would help with the connection.
In (16), the respondent notes the importance of interaction, noting that Ukrainian classes were their only opportunity to interact with someone outside their household. The comments in (17) reinforce what second-year respondents had stated earlier: remote delivery is not conducive to promoting a feeling of social connection among learners outside of class sessions, which may result in increased feelings of isolation. The respondent in (17) offered a practical suggestion for fostering social connection outside the remote classroom. These results point to a critical need for social connection, especially at the third-year level of instruction.

5.5. Cognitive and agentic engagement
Findings at the cognitive level of engagement are not specific to the remote format and could pertain to any language course. Students used various learning strategies to master the course content and skills both in and outside of class. For example, when respondents had any questions or concerns, they tried to find a solution on their own; when they failed, they reached out for help from their peers, the instructor, or other speakers.

At the agentic level, students’ contributions to the course design were different at the three instructional levels. Unlike their first-year and second-year peers, who mainly limited themselves to completing instructor evaluations at the end of the course, third-year learners actively requested changes and offered suggestions on how to make the course more engaging and less stressful. They expressed a desire for less course weight placed on homework, advocated for more focused in-class interaction and group activities in Breakout Rooms, suggested various extracurricular activities through which students can become acquainted or reconnect with their peers, proposed creative and group projects that could enable students to work together outside of class and allow them to choose their own partners.

6. Engagement facilitators and deterrents and some pedagogical advice
Interpreting our results using the concept of engagement facilitators adapted from Egbert (2020) allowed us to draw pedagogical implications for remote learning. Egbert’s categories of engagement facilitators and engagement deterrents are particularly relevant; they stretch across the various types of engagement outlined above, underscoring the interconnectedness of the various levels of engagement.
Table 2. Engagement facilitators and deterrents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories (from Egbert 2020, 315)</th>
<th>Engagement facilitators</th>
<th>Engagement deterrents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interest:</td>
<td>personal; individual; relevance; creativity</td>
<td>[no clear indicators in the responses]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning support:</td>
<td>organization; clarity; balance; instructor</td>
<td>imbalance of class and homework; different proficiency levels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learner agency and autonomy:</td>
<td>ability to contribute to course flow; control over learning; choice of assignments and partners</td>
<td>no role in choice of assignments and partners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotions:</td>
<td>comfort; enjoyment; respect; fear or expectation of being called on</td>
<td>fear of embarrassment; anxiety; stress; being put on the spot prompted by technology; low motivation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technology and external factors:</td>
<td>flexibility and accessibility</td>
<td>technology-related challenges; social media as a distraction; home distractions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social interaction:</td>
<td>with peers—peer support and assistance; with instructors; focused and with clear expectations</td>
<td>fear of embarrassment; anxiety; stress; being put on the spot prompted by technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social connection:</td>
<td>with peers; with instructors; focused in and outside class</td>
<td>a lack or insufficiency of social connections with peers and instructors in and outside of class</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As Table 2 shows, students perceived relevant learning materials, as well as creative and personalized assignments and projects, as engagement facilitators. Many students stressed the importance of individualized and creative projects, with some expressing a preference for group projects that would lead to elevated interest in the learning process.
Recommendation to instructors: Provide relevant and engaging activities that extend beyond the classroom and promote creativity, including group projects such as blogs and vlogs.

In terms of learning support, as factors in engagement students listed clear course structure and organization, clarity of expectations and objectives, fair balance of course elements, and predictability of classwork and homework. A few suggested that in a remote environment, instructors may consider placing more weight on class work, with the amount of homework reduced. The presence of learners of various levels of proficiency working in a shared learning environment can be a deterrent to engagement and, if not addressed, can lead to disengagement, particularly at the emotional and behavioral levels.

Recommendation to instructors: Strive for clarity, organization, and balance of course components. In a classroom with students with more than one level of language proficiency, instructors should communicate with their students about their awareness of and attention to these different levels of language proficiency.

For learner agency and autonomy, third-year learners appreciated being able to contribute to the course design. They requested changes aligned with their needs and facilitated greater engagement. A lack of attention to student desires could be an engagement deterrent.

Recommendation to instructors: Endow advanced language learners with more agency and autonomy in course practices.

In the category of emotions, students referred to comfort, enjoyment, and respect. An expectation of being called on was an engagement facilitator for students, which led to students paying attention in class and staying on task. However, fear of embarrassment, personal anxiety, stress, and low motivation are deterrents to engagement.

Recommendation to instructors: Since feelings of comfort, enjoyment, and respect stem from positive interactions in class, regularly use spaces such as Breakout Rooms for group work that promotes peer support and be aware of students’ comfort level with technological tools used for class participation.

Technology and external factors are mostly engagement facilitators, especially with the many benefits technology brings into language learning. However, several engagement deterrents appeared in this category, including unreliable internet connections and inadequate physical surroundings.

Recommendation to instructors: Avoid the assumption that every student has equal access to technology and physical surroundings.
Student Engagement in a Remote Language Learning Environment

SIVACHENKO, NEDASHKIVSKA

... conducive to language learning. Be open to accommodations or alternatives in certain situations.

Students emphasized social interaction throughout their responses. Peer support raised their comfort level and lessened their fear of speaking in class. Interaction in groups created a place for collaboration, practice, and peer assistance. Students also valued interaction with instructors, and foregrounded the significance of synchronous classes. At the same time, for some, technology created an environment that heightened their personal anxiety. Many stressed that class interactions must be focused and have clear expectations.

*Recommendation to instructors:* During synchronous classes, create spaces for collaboration and peer support, design interactive group activities with clear objectives and expectations to assist students with staying on task, and develop additional Breakout Room activities for those groups that finish early in order to maintain student engagement.

The category of social connection is of great importance; while the majority of our students enjoyed social interactions, many felt socially disconnected, particularly outside the classroom. This leads us to stress that interaction is not always connection. Many students mentioned that while interacting in their Breakout Rooms, and when finishing tasks early, they would like to connect with others, to get to know their peers better, to “bond” and learn more about them. They admitted that in such instances, they might switch to English in order to connect by checking in with small talk, and students loved this part of their classes. These practices demonstrate that students themselves took steps to initiate social connections in the classroom. Our results reveal that our remote learners wished to establish and maintain personal connections that could lead to socializing in and outside of class. These desires were particularly felt at the second-year and third-year levels. Satar (2015, 498) has pointed out that learners need opportunities for off-task talk, and instructors need to think about how to do this best in a remote context in order to connect our learners socially.

*Recommendation to instructors:* Design out-of-class activities to assist learners in staying connected, ensuring in- and out-of-class socialization, using collaborative projects, chat rooms, and extracurricular events.

7. Limitations

The survey was carried out with a limited number of participants from...
our overall small population of students learning Ukrainian. Its results ideally would have been supplemented by data from student focus groups, student diaries, or journals, as well as more formal participant observations. An examination of the differences in perceptions at different instructional levels, and factors that influence such differences, would be of particular interest. The instructors’ reflections could also have provided a valuable perspective on remote delivery.

8. Conclusion
This paper reported on students’ perceptions of their learning experiences in this crisis-driven environment. It explored engagement at the behavioral, emotional, cognitive, agentic, and social levels. This exploration of the various levels of engagement added to the view of engagement as a multidimensional concept whose various levels are often interconnected. This approach established categories that should be considered in a remote environment: interest, learning support, learner agency and autonomy, emotions, technology and external factors, social interaction, and social connection (see Table 1). The results have implications for instructional approaches and are of interest to those involved in pedagogical design of language teaching materials, technologically-assisted ones in particular.

References


From Blended Learning to Emergency Remote and Online Teaching: Successes, Challenges, and Prospects of a Russian Language Program before and during the Pandemic

OLGA KLIMOVA

1. Introduction
In the Spring of 2020, many programs faced the challenge of having to quickly switch to a remote format as a result of the global pandemic. Emergency remote teaching (ERT), as defined by Mohmmed et al., is “a sudden interim shift of instructional delivery to an online delivery mode as a result of an immense catastrophe, in contrast to the online courses which are initially planned and designed to be delivered virtually” (2020, 72). A number of instructors and teaching specialists have reported that they faced numerous problems and roadblocks while redesigning their curricula for ERT (Lederman 2020; Green, Burrow, and Carvalho 2020). These challenges included a lack of time for preparation and grading and a difficulty in motivating students, who were also experiencing a significant amount of stress related to the abrupt shift to online teaching and the global health and economic crisis (Aguilera-Hermida 2020; Mohmmed et al. 2020). Many instructors did not have sufficient background in the technology that would allow them to design effective online course activities and assessments, nor did they have the methodological knowledge and supporting pedagogies and resources to successfully redesign course tasks (Lederman 2020; Marshall, Shannon, and Love 2020; Mohmmed et al. 2020; Russell 2020), which led to frustration and emotional distress among educators, and other negative emotions such as anxiety, anger, sadness, and loneliness (MacIntyre, Gregersen, and Mercer 2020, 12).

A number of articles have been published on ERT over the past year (Connolly and Hall 2020; Dubreil 2020; Gacs, Goertler, and Spasova 2020; Ferri, Grifoni, and Guzzo 2020; Karakaya 2020; MacIntyre, Gregersen, and Mercer 2020). Many of them analyze pre-pandemic models of curriculum design and explore ways of improving the process of course design in the future. Instructional design, one of the most important tasks of any instructor, has received insufficient attention in pedagogical literature (e.g., Goodyear 2015; Bennett, Agostinho, and Lockyer 2017). According to
Bennett, Agostinho, and Lockyer, the current research in higher education teaching “tends to include design as a minor component, with a greater emphasis on conceptions of and approaches to teaching, particularly face-to-face teaching, which is conceptualized as acts of lecturing, tutoring or assessing student work” (2017, 126). The global switch to ERT and subsequent online and hyflex learning models has drawn the attention of educators and college administrators to the lack of focus on and training in curricular design, especially in the post-secondary setting.

Despite the stressful environment created by the COVID-19 pandemic and the uncertainty regarding the duration of the lockdown, the Russian language program at the University of Pittsburgh (Pitt) was able to switch to ERT and later to an online delivery relatively effortlessly due to the previously implemented hybrid, or blended structure of its first- and second-year Russian language courses. The blended model can be especially productive in a language classroom with the goals of developing language proficiency in all modes—speaking, listening, reading, and writing—as some of these skills (reading, listening, and writing) can be practiced asynchronously with feedback from the instructor, while other skills (speaking and listening) can be polished during face-to-face classes or synchronous sessions through videoconferencing platforms. This instructional model can offer more customized, student-driven, and student-centered language practices and assessments and provide language instructors and language programs with more flexibility, consistency, and preparedness for future unpredictable situations. It may also benefit the language programs that need to repurpose blended learning activities while switching to a new textbook, for using them as stand-alone learning modules, or for including them in special thematic language courses. Finally, the blended language curriculum can be a training model for instructors and students in online language learning and teaching, thus, eliminating stress and emotional discomfort that might be associated with online instructions. The effectiveness of the blended language curriculum at Pitt during the pandemic may serve as an example of a curriculum model that can be optimal in different situations.

1 In the online education literature, the terms “blended” and “hybrid” are often used interchangeably (Gecer and Dag. 2012; O’Byrne and Pytash 2015; Ali 2018). At Pitt, the blended courses, with a mixture of synchronous face-to-face class meetings and asynchronous, independent assignments that are completed by students usually through the university learning management system, are referred to in the course catalog as “hybrid.” I will use “blended” and “hybrid” interchangeably.
2. An Overview of the Blended Russian Language Curriculum at Pitt
The initiative to transform the Russian language curriculum at the
Elementary and Intermediate levels came originally as a request from
the Pitt administration in 2017 to provide language instruction to a wider
and more diverse student audience and to accommodate the schedules of
students from engineering, business, nursing, computer sciences, and other
professional programs and schools. Many students in other areas of the
university (particularly STEM majors) were unable, for scheduling reasons,
to enroll in a five-credit course not required by their major. Therefore, the
Pitt administration requested that language programs reduce the number
of course meetings and credits in their courses. For first- and second-year
Russian courses, the number of weekly face-to-face meetings decreased
from five to three (from 250 minutes to 150 minutes), and an asynchronous
day including reading, listening, and speaking activities was added (the
number of credits awarded for the course went from five to four). One
goal of the proposed hybrid curriculum was also to preserve instructional
rigor and to maintain previously established proficiency goals despite the
decrease of in-class instructional hours.

The program started with re-designing Intermediate Russian 1 and
2 in 2018-2019, since these particular courses had already incorporated
instructional technology such as Kahoot, Flipgrid, VoiceThread, Quizlet,
Edpuzzle, and PlayPosit. These modified language courses utilized a
flipped learning model to maximize time on task during class sessions and
the principles of backward design with the national proficiency standards
(World-Readiness Standards for Learning Languages) and performance
descriptors (The ACTFL Performance Descriptors for Language Learners)
from ACTFL as the driving principles behind course development.

The language instructors who were redesigning the course received
professional development preparation by attending and presenting
in several panels on online teaching and teaching with instructional
technology at national conferences. The redesign team also received
training in computer-assisted language teaching to address the problem
of insufficient knowledge and design skills common among teachers
who want to design online or blended language courses (Goodyear 2015;
Bennett, Agostinho, and Lockyer 2017). With financial support from the
dean’s office, the Russian program was able to hire undergraduate research

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2 In addition to fitting more easily into student schedules, the four-credit Elementary and Intermediate Russian are more affordable than the previous five-credit versions.
assistants and experienced consultants in the field of online language pedagogy to assist with this project.\footnote{I would like to express my gratitude to Shannon Donnally Spasova, Anna Szawara, Edie Furniss, Dagny Felker, and Marika Oljiar for their support and assistance with this curriculum redesign project. This curriculum redesign project was possible thanks to a generous Curriculum Innovation Grant awarded by the Dean of Arts and Sciences at the University of Pittsburgh.}

Based on the consultants’ recommendations, we assigned a specific day (Thursday) for the asynchronous online portion/component of the blended first-year and second-year Russian courses. Because the asynchronous section served as a summative assessment for the chapter, it required more time and effort from students to complete. For that reason, they had four days to finish their work for this part of the course, while regular homework assignments needed to be completed by the beginning of the next class (with two days on average required for the completion). The asynchronous online component of these Russian blended courses followed the general topics and the proficiency level of the assigned textbook for each level but was based on authentic language and cultural materials.

For the asynchronous listening and reading activities before COVID (and during ERT in Spring 2020 and remote learning in Fall 2020 and Spring 2021), students were required to check weather forecasts, watch TV programs, read business cards and daily horoscopes, select food from a menu, book apartments through Airbnb, navigate lost and found websites, and complete other tasks. The activities and assessments in this self-paced, independent mode of instruction incorporated web-based materials such as infographics, statistics, surveys, blogs, vlogs, forums, social media, online news, and websites for restaurants, universities, stores, theaters, activity clubs, and hospitals. The same online unit tests at the end of each learning module (5-6 tests per semester), used before and during the pandemic as summative assessments, mirrored the activities and the authentic tasks from in-class/Zoom meetings and the asynchronous section of the course, thus, providing instructors with comparable information on how successfully students reached their learning outcomes. Thus, the four blended Russian language courses – Elementary Russian 1 and 2 and Intermediate Russian 1 and 2 – were already prepared by the time the pandemic was announced in Pennsylvania in March 2020 as the curriculum structure had been already completely developed, tested, and polished.
3. Language Assessment through Digital Portfolios before and during the Pandemic

In the blended language courses at Pitt, a portfolio-based assessment approach was implemented in response to student interests, needs, and their personal and professional goals. In both first-year and second-year Russian courses, digital portfolios (created by students in Google Sites, Wix, Weebly, or Google Docs) that included students’ digital projects and their recorded asynchronous activities with their self-reflections continued to be used as the final assessment of students’ proficiency in Spring 2020. During the academic year 2020-2021, our students also used the same instructions and resources for their digital portfolios as the cohort of students from the previous years. All student activity from the asynchronous section of the curriculum is included in the portfolios (listening and reading comprehension activities, Flipgrid videos, and four digital projects). A selection of in-class activities for interpersonal communication (through online interactive whiteboards and other web-based tools) and homework social media posts (presentational and interpersonal writing) is also included.

The description of each Russian language course includes the range of proficiency goals—Novice Low through Intermediate Low for first-year students and Intermediate Low through Intermediate Mid for second-year students. In their digital portfolios, our students reflected in English on their own progress toward these established proficiency goals and on their ability to create with language and to negotiate the meaning in Russian referencing the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines, the ACTFL World-Readiness Standards for Language Learning, and the NCSSFL-ACTFL Can-Do Statements. They collected evidence of their proficiency, organized them into sections, wrote short descriptions, and chose the specific World-Readiness Standards for Learning Languages (5Cs – Communication, Cultures, Connections, Comparisons, and Communities) that were relevant to the particular pieces of evidence, added can-do-statements, and included self-evaluation, by choosing whether they were “approaching,” “meeting,” or “exceeding” the specific proficiency goals set for their level. These digital portfolios were used for their annual program assessments to complement
annual OPI testing. As a portfolio-based assessment in Elementary and Intermediate Russian involved the use of digital tools from the beginning of the curriculum redesign process in 2018, during the ERT period and in the 2020-2021 academic year, the Russian program was able to continue utilizing the same assessment techniques with no modifications.

4. The Transition from Blended Language Learning to ERT to Online Teaching
When the pandemic began, Pitt’s blended Russian courses already had pre-designed course shells in the learning management system (LMS) with learning modules, online quizzes through Kahoot, online vocabulary flashcards through Quizlet, tests, listening and reading comprehension homework activities, and audio assignments through Flipgrid. These modules had been revised several times over the course of two years from 2018 to 2020 and were easily transformed to a completely remote mode, utilizing the hybrid curriculum framework (with 3 face-to-face credits and 1 asynchronous credit). During ERT in Spring 2020 and remote teaching in Fall 2020 and Spring 2021, we followed this class structure using Zoom for the three synchronous meetings with the instructor. The pre-pandemic surveys and official student evaluations in Fall 2018, Spring 2019, Fall 2019, and Spring 2020, suggested that the curriculum redesign team limit the platforms for blended learning courses to ones that were more user friendly. The same instructional technology was utilized in our Russian language classes during ERT and online teaching.

In addition to moving the blended curriculum structure and the learning modules into a new LMS (Canvas) in Spring 2020 (for Elementary) and Fall 2020 (for Intermediate), all instructions, examples of students’ previous work, and links to digital tools for homework assessments, projects, and digital portfolios were used from the pre-COVID blended language curriculum.

Before the pandemic, in-class content and learning activities were presented through interactive PowerPoint slides. The use of the slides

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4 Annual program assessment includes OPIs for all four levels of Russian and has been used for reporting submitted to the Dean of Arts and Sciences. However, in Spring 2020, the annual report to the Dean’s office was cancelled in recognition of the negative effect of the pandemic on students’ mental and emotional health as well as on their performance. The digital portfolios included examples of students’ proficiency-based assessments and progress between August 2019 and April 2020.

5 Pitt switched from Blackboard to Canvas in Fall 2020. However, Elementary Russian was allowed to use Canvas in Spring 2020 as an “early course adopter.”
with pop-up answers, displayed in class immediately after students had given their responses, was beneficial for students’ understanding of new vocabulary or grammatical concepts as they received immediate feedback. Students also had access to these slides through the LMS and, therefore, could review the interactive slides and check the answers. The same slides were used during ERT and online teaching in 2020-2021, with added interactivity through the Zoom annotation function, Breakout Rooms, reaction buttons, and the chat box during synchronous online sessions.

Prior to March 2020, in addition to interactive PowerPoint slides, instructors also utilized digital tools such as interactive online whiteboards (Padlet and Miro), interactive quizzes through Kahoot, or interactive web-based video-assignments through PlayPosit or Edpuzzle, for in-class communicative and task-based activities. The in-class “authentic” tasks included booking an appointment with a doctor, ordering groceries online, shopping online for clothes, selecting restaurants, using dating websites, etc. These instructional strategies continued to be effective during ERT in March-April 2020 and were used and expanded in online teaching in Fall 2020 and Spring 2021.

Enabling homework submission was among the challenges that the Russian program faced during the pandemic. For the Elementary Russian course, we have used the textbook Beginner’s Russian, which includes an online workbook with self-graded assessments for vocabulary and grammar as well as reading and listening comprehension activities. The completion of self-check exercises online with immediate corrective feedback benefits students by permitting them to repeat these activities as many times as they need and allows instructors to redirect time spent on grading to the development of interactive proficiency-based activities and other supplementary materials and tutorials.

While the Elementary Russian web-based workbook was effective for all formats, a problem arose with homework assignments for Intermediate Russian. The students in this course had been completing their homework exercises in paper workbooks with occasional web-based assessments through the supplementary online website for our textbook, V puti. A paper workbook required the instructors to grade each assignment manually. ERT revealed the challenges of checking and grading handwritten homework regularly, and for that reason, we had to abandon the paper workbook entirely for the 2020-2021 academic year.

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6 The students also received the answer keys to the workbook exercises and had to complete self-corrections in a different color pen before showing the workbook to the instructor in class.
5. Student Surveys and Feedback

During the pre-COVID curriculum redesigning process, we relied on regular feedback and evaluations from students. Student-centered curricular design, according to Bennett, Agostinho, and Lockyer, takes into consideration “student needs and prior knowledge as a starting point for design, involve[s] students in the design process if possible, and result[s] in an adaptable design” (2017, 127). In the blended language classes, the learners’ feedback and critique can be used not only for choosing the authentic content based on their interests and backgrounds, but also for selecting assessments and user-friendly digital tools that require less preparation and less special technology training.

We collected student feedback on language learning and the use of instructional technology from all four levels of Russian through several online surveys (in 2018, 2019, and 2020). In the midterm survey, conducted in October 2018, our students evaluated their experiences with the new blended instructional model, and their feedback overall was positive. In the March 2019 survey, despite an overall positive assessment of their technological competence, 43% (out of 41 participants) of students indicated that they might need some or a lot of assistance with image editing tools, 42% expressed some need for additional training and guided instructions for screen capturing tools, and 39% required assistance with video editing tools. Based on this feedback, we provided students with several choices, and, for some of their projects, they could choose either to use a video editing app, to record a PowerPoint presentation with their voiceover narration, or to prepare a presentation through Zoom while sharing their screen.

Students suggested improvements to the navigation of online modules and the organization of digitally created activities and assessments, and since then, we have added a list of weekly tasks in the beginning of each module with specific deadlines, recorded a video tutorial on how to navigate the Canvas site, combined some links to activities, assessments, and supporting materials and resources into one document or one page, and integrated Flipgrid speaking activities directly into Canvas. Additionally, students requested more individualized, immediate feedback on their asynchronous and homework assessments, which can be improved in the future by increasing the number of self-check exercises and by providing them with more personalized feedback from the instructors and/or undergraduate teaching assistants (TAs).

In both pre-COVID surveys in 2018-2019 and final student evaluations in April 2020, students suggested incorporating more diverse
cultural content in the classroom and we included some new content and assessments with a focus on cultural, ethnic, social, economic, and gender diversity in Russophone cultures. Students also requested more exposure to peers, possibly through a pen pal program, or other interactive language experiences with native speakers. We were able to include some virtual synchronous and asynchronous interactions with young native speakers from different parts of the Russian-speaking world through Zoom and Flipgrid. In addition to introducing students to the diversity of the Russian-speaking world through in-class activities and reading and listening comprehension homework assignments, the focus of students’ individual digital projects has also been shifted to the discovery of the diversity of Russophone countries and different regions of the Russian Federation. During the 2020-2021 academic year, students created video essays, slide presentations, interactive posters, interactive maps, children’s books, and other cultural products dedicated to Russia’s regional cultures and to post-Soviet cultures, thus expanding their intercultural competence. We were able to meet our students’ needs by adding language content and activities related to diversity, equity, and inclusion during the pandemic because we did not need to spend much time on developing online modules and designing online assessments from scratch but instead had an opportunity to repurpose our pre-pandemic blended language curriculum.

6. Conclusion: Benefits and Future Implications of the Use of Blended Learning in a Language Classroom

For any successful online curriculum, course design is a key component that requires a significant amount of time and effort (Moore, Schmidt-Crawford, and Valai, 2019), and, for the language curriculum redesign project at Pitt, it took more than two years of careful planning, choosing and testing the appropriate instructional technology, and developing special learning activities and assessments. As demonstrated in the Elementary and Intermediate Russian language classes, some benefits of the blended learning model have become even more evident during the switch to ERT and remote instruction—already designed learning modules with asynchronous learning activities for listening, reading, speaking, and writing, web-based, self-graded homework assignments, and a web-based assessment system have freed instructor time for developing other activities and diminished the stress level related to a rapid switch to online teaching.

Despite some challenges and an extra effort that the instructors had to make to build an online community and to engage students in active
online learning during the pandemic, the blended Russian courses at Pitt have presented a number of benefits for professional development as well. In world language teaching in particular, the switch to emergency remote instruction has revealed that instructors have not been receiving adequate online language training that would combine “language pedagogy, pedagogy for educational technology, and online pedagogy” (Russell 2020, 339). However, the instructors at Pitt, who were teaching Elementary and Intermediate Russian in Spring 2020, spent less time adjusting to the new environment as they were already trained in hybrid language teaching and were well familiar with the online structure of the course, the learning modules in the LMS, the technology-based assessments, and instructional technology in a language classroom in general. As the popularity of online language teaching grows every year both in secondary and post-secondary educational systems, developing and integrating blended modules into language classes can serve as training for future language educators, thus, preparing them for both face-to-face and online teaching.

During the pandemic and remote learning, many students in other language programs were overwhelmed with the need to switch to online or hyflex language learning models and the use of new, unfamiliar technology, however, the students from Pitt’s Russian program were already familiar with digital course tools (chosen during the curriculum development stage in 2018-2020), which did not require a steep learning curve.

The switch to online teaching during the pandemic has also incentivized the Russian program instructors and TAs to create more interactive activities that helped to engage students more actively in the learning process and to build a stronger online community of language learners. Various activities and games, developed through Edji, Worldwall, and Miro, will be used in the blended language curriculum when the classes move back to the face-to-face format. They can also be repurposed and reused in Intermediate Russian 1 and 2 in the 2020-2021 academic year while adapting a new textbook.7 A number of instructional activities and strategies, developed or polished in Fall 2020 and Spring 2021, can now be used for the blended language curriculum that would make the transformation of regular classes into blended smoother, thus “making class time more active and student-centered and […] making the entire learning experience more flexible” (Spasova and Welsh 2020, 406). As teaching during the pandemic has shown, a well-designed blended language course,

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7 The Russian program is switching from V puti to a new textbook, Russian: From Novice High to Intermediate by Anna S. Kudyma, which has a web-based interactive workbook.
exemplified in first year and second year Russian courses at Pitt, can offer numerous opportunities for students’ independent practice, guided instruction, and time on task with a high level of flexibility and an ability to be quickly rearranged and modified in accordance with circumstances.

References


Language Gains in Intensive Synchronous Online and Face-to-Face Russian Immersion Programs: A Comparison

JASON MERRILL, EVGENY DENGUB, DMITRII PASTUSHENKOV

1. Introduction
The COVID-19 pandemic not only necessitated a wholesale turn to delivery of language instruction online, but also forced a reconsideration of what is meant by “online instruction.” Generally, online instruction can be defined as instruction “in which learners and education providers are physically separated from each other, and learning is essentially supported by online education technologies” (Wang and Chen 2013, 17). Before the pandemic, the term online instruction usually implied asynchronous delivery; for example, Goertler’s definition of online instruction as “courses that meet F2F minimally, if at all” and in which “instruction and practice time is completed independently and/or online (i.e., more than 80%)” (2019, 53; see also Russell and Murphy-Judy 2021). Before 2020, there had been limited experimentation with online Russian language instruction.¹ A growing body of research has shown that, measured in terms of outcomes, language instruction conducted online can be at least as effective as traditional face-to-face classes (Lin and Warschauer, 2015), and it may also present some advantages over face-to-face instruction (Goertler 2019, 57-68; Thoms 2020, 91).²

¹ Murphy-Judy and Johnshoy (2017) reported the results of surveys from 2012, 2014, and 2015. The 2014 survey found 15 fully online sections of Russian language in the United States (seven first-year, four second-year, one third-year, one fourth-year, and one professional course) (154). The 2015 version of this survey showed 146 students enrolled in online first-year Russian, which represented 2% of overall first-year language enrollment (155) and 272 students enrolled in second-year Russian online, 9% of all online language enrollment at the second-year level (156). The authors conclude that, as of 2015, the primary users of online language courses were four-year public institutions (156).

² One important benefit of online education, whether asynchronous or synchronous, is access; online teaching has the potential to reach students who do not have access to face-to-face education (see Dharma, Asmarani, and Dewi 2017, 273). For Russian programs, teaching online could mean the potential to reach students who desire to study the language but for health, work, or family reasons might not be able to be away from home for extended periods of time.
The COVID-19 pandemic forced language instructors into a large-scale turn to teaching online, often as emergency remote teaching. By the summer and fall of 2020, however, much of the emergency nature of these courses began to disappear as instructors had more experience, support, and time to plan delivery of their language courses online. This situation meant that the term “online” was potentially understood in a wide range of ways, from fully asynchronous to fully synchronous courses that were delivered much like traditional face-to-face courses, only through videoconferencing.

The need to teach language classes online throughout much of 2020 provided additional opportunities to develop online teaching methods and study online learning outcomes. To date, outcomes of online instruction have not been compared with one common mode of face-to-face language instruction, the full domestic immersion model, in which students study a language in programs “that require many more hours per day of classroom instruction than are typical with normal academic-year formal classroom settings” and “promote language use outside of the classroom in a variety of ways” (Dewey 2004, 304).

This study aims, as closely as possible, to compare the language outcomes of students enrolled in two eight-week summer programs taught by the Middlebury College Kathryn Wasserman Davis School of Russian; the 2019 face-to-face Russian language immersion program and the intensive synchronous online program in the summer of 2020. The synchronous online Russian courses (2020) examined in this study cannot be considered completely emergency remote instruction because instructors had close to two months to plan a curriculum that would best fit the fully online delivery. Students in 2019 and 2020, nevertheless, studied in drastically different learning environments. The results of this study hopefully will contribute to the conversation regarding the effectiveness of face-to-face and synchronous online language instruction, as well as to add to the existing literature on expected language gains in intensive short-term programs.

2. Outcomes: Immersion vs. traditional classrooms and study abroad

There is a modest amount of literature that compares language proficiency gains in face-to-face immersion settings to gains made in traditional classrooms and during study abroad (see Merrill 2020, 169-176 for a
summarizing). Examining languages such as French, Japanese, Portuguese, Russian, and Spanish, these studies show that learners in an immersion setting significantly outperform those in traditional classrooms (Freed, Segalowitz, and Dewey 2004; Rifkin 2005; Dewey 2007; Martinsen et al. 2011; Isabelli-García and Lacorte 2016) and that immersion outcomes are comparable to those from study abroad and occasionally exceed them in certain areas (Dewey 2004; Freed, Segalowitz, and Dewey 2004; Cowles and Wiedemann 2008). Scholars identify two keys to the increased gains in immersion. First are the different sources of linguistic input students receive through formal and informal interaction with peers, instructors, and various other native speakers (Campbell 1996; Dewey 2004; Cowles and Wiedemann 2008; Pastushenkov 2020; Pastushenkov and McIntyre 2020). The other are the increased contact hours offered by the total immersion setting; in several studies, students reported spending more hours using the target language in immersion than in traditional classrooms or study abroad (Freed, Segalowitz, and Dewey 2004; Dewey 2004; Dewey 2007; Isabelli-García and Lacorte 2016).

Drawing on data from listening, reading, writing, and speaking assessments based on the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines for 352 second language (L2) Russian students in a 9-week immersion program, Rifkin (2005) concluded that students who had 400 to 450 hours of traditional classroom instruction when beginning study in an immersion setting that featured 140 hours of in-class instruction typically reached Advanced proficiency level in listening, reading, speaking, and writing, while students without an immersion experience who had 600 or more hours of traditional classroom instruction “barely reached intermediate-high proficiencies” (11). He hypothesized that students’ greater proficiency gains in the immersion environment were likely due to the number of hours spent listening to and interacting in the target language during extracurricular and out-of-class experiences, which might, according to Rifkin, add up to as much as over 100 hours of in-language interactions per week (11).

3. Asynchronous online vs. face-to-face class formats
Summarizing existing studies, Lin and Warschauer (2015) concluded that online language education “is at least as effective as its offline counterpart” (394). Researchers have looked at the outcomes for specific language skills when comparing face-to-face and online language instruction. Speaking of a first-year French course offered in parallel face-to-face and online sections in spring 2000, Chenoweth and Murday (2003) found that the online students made comparable progress and in fact in written production,
the online students scored higher than the face-to-face students (300). Blake et al. (2008) compared outcomes in face-to-face, hybrid, and fully online sections of Spanish and found that the hybrid and online students had oral proficiency outcomes similar to those of first-year students working in traditional classrooms and that “these students are not being disadvantaged by taking Spanish in a non-traditional format” (123-124). Studying oral proficiency (additionally broken down into areas such as pronunciation, vocabulary, and sentence formation) in a first-year Spanish class offered in online and face-to-face formats, Moneypenny and Aldrich (2016) determined that L2 instruction with a required oral component can be equally successful online (128). Paepe, Zhu, and Depryck (2018) found that online learners of beginning Dutch, despite having fewer contact hours than face-to-face learners, performed significantly better in reading, listening, and speaking skills, whereas writing skills, they conclude, are better achieved face-to-face (101). On the other hand, in a second-semester Spanish class taught in parallel face-to-face and online sections, students in the online group significantly outperformed those in the face-to-face group in two measures of writing quality (Cahill and Catanzaro 1997, 109).

To date, to the best of our knowledge no studies compare online and face-to-face program outcomes for lexico-grammatical knowledge, i.e., knowledge of morphosyntax and vocabulary, but some researchers suggest that L2 vocabulary acquisition benefits from negotiated interaction (Luan and Sappathy 2011; Yi and Sun 2013). If this hypothesis were true, face-to-face instruction, especially in the more intensive immersion context with its many opportunities for informal interactions outside the classroom, would be more beneficial for lexico-grammatical competence. Researchers, however, come to various conclusions about the role of the type of learning environment in the acquisition of lexico-grammatical competence. Studying advanced students of English as L3, Juan-Garau, Salazar-Noguera, and Prieto-Arranz (2014) found that, on a cloze test, participants’ lexico-grammatical performance improved in traditional classes, although not significantly, whereas it improved significantly after study abroad. On a sentence-rephrasing test, participants made significant improvement in lexico-grammatical skills in both learning contexts, with no statistical difference between traditional classroom study and study abroad (251). Their conclusions disagree with other studies (Walsh 1994; Longcope 2003; Collentine 2004; Kinginger 2008; Isabelli-García 2010) that did not find significant progress in grammatical competence after study abroad.
4. Language learning online: synchronous vs. asynchronous

A key distinction in language learning online is between asynchronous and synchronous formats. Pérez (2003) compared vocabulary acquisition in asynchronous (email) and synchronous (chatroom sessions) exercises and found that students in the synchronous chatroom sessions produced more words but otherwise both modes had a place in the language learning process, and exactly half the students preferred asynchronous and half synchronous learning. Lotfi and Pozveh (2019) also examined vocabulary acquisition; an asynchronous group learned by email, while another was exposed to the same content face-to-face. They found that the synchronous group significantly outperformed the asynchronous group.

Amiti (2020) reviewed 20 studies on asynchronous and synchronous language instruction in an attempt to discover which mode is better for learners (66). She noted that researchers are divided on this question because each has advantages and disadvantages and concluded, as have others such as Wang and Chen (2011) and Perveen (2016), that some combination of the two may prove to be the most effective solution. Students seem to be similarly split; echoing Pérez (2003), in a fall 2020 survey of undergraduates at UW-Madison (n = 5328), “47% of students reported that synchronous learning worked better for them, and 50% selected asynchronous.”

5. Technology and synchronous online course delivery

In the summer of 2020, the Middlebury Russian School conducted its eight-week synchronous online session using Zoom, an online conferencing platform that features chat, Breakout Rooms, screen sharing, a whiteboard, and other functions that make it potentially attractive to language instructors (https://zoom.us/). Studies conducted about attitudes toward Zoom found that students find it very usable and overall give it high marks (Dharma, Asmarani, and Dewi 2017; Rahayu 2020). Nevertheless, some instructors have complained of “Zoom fatigue” (Blum 2020), to which scholars have responded with ideas for use of other digital tools (Guillén, Sawin, and Avineri 2020). The pandemic has accelerated language instructors’ use of Zoom as a platform for synchronous online learning, and this technology is likely changing existing notions regarding distance learning, due to functions that did not exist even a few years ago, including Breakout Rooms

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4 For an overview of asynchronous and synchronous pedagogy, see Johnshoy and Spasova (2020).

5 University of Wisconsin-Madison, n.d., 4. For further discussion of this survey and these numbers, see Evans-Romaine, et al. in this issue.
that allow uninterrupted focused conversation between two people or in small groups.

6. The study

6.1. Research question

To the best of our knowledge, scholars have yet not compared language outcomes in face-to-face immersion and fully online intensive programs, particularly with regards to the development of lexico-grammatical competence. Moreover, research on the effects of learning environments on second language acquisition is dominated by more commonly taught languages such as English, Spanish, and French and more research is needed with languages like Russian. In this study, we aimed to address these gaps with the following research question:

How do the gains made in Russian oral proficiency, writing proficiency, and lexico-grammatical competence in a face-to-face immersion format compare to gains made in a synchronous fully online intensive course?

6.2. Academic contexts

The test results were gathered from two programs administered by the Middlebury College Kathryn Wasserman Davis School of Russian. In the 2019 face-to-face immersion program, students were in class 21 hours a week (four hours per weekday plus one mandatory weekly phonetics hour) for eight weeks. Classes were mostly held in the morning, with the afternoons and evenings reserved for office hours, homework time, and a busy (mostly optional) co-curricular program that included sports clubs, films, weekly clubs on topics such as Russian current events or Russian poetry, lectures by guests and faculty members, and summer-long choir and theater programs that culminated in performances attended by much of the program. In the face-to-face program, students lived together in dormitories and ate lunch and dinner (in a special area and time reserved for the Russian School) side-by-side with instructors and staff who all understand and work toward the school’s educational mission, surrounding them with a range of the “sympathetic interlocutors accustomed to non-native speech” frequently referenced in the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines. All face-to-face students began the summer by taking a formal pledge to use only Russian for the duration of the summer session that is enforced by the Russian School staff and administration. Responses to anonymous annual surveys (Merrill 2020) suggest that students in the immersion environment
for the most part adhere to the language pledge and believe that doing so will help them make larger proficiency gains.  

In the summer of 2020, the Russian School held all its courses remotely due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2020, students were in class 15 hours per week for eight weeks; the decision was made to reduce the daily number of formal contact hours from four (2019) to three (2020) to avoid Zoom fatigue. The lead instructors for each course all had previously taught in the face-to-face program. Classes were held in the late morning and early afternoon (Eastern Time). Each course had dedicated tutors/conversation instructors who worked with students and held additional office hours. The co-curricular program included weekly lectures, academic and social clubs, talks by guests, and weekend events such as karaoke and quiz shows. Despite the school’s best efforts, these activities were not well-attended and often the same cohort of 10-12 students would come to the extracurricular events and, even then, the interaction among students, at least partially due to the nature of Zoom, was usually minimal. Significantly more students in the face-to-face program regularly attended school events. Students in the summer of 2020 took a modified language pledge in which they promised to speak Russian “as much as possible.”

One key difference between the two formats being compared is the amount and type of exposure to Russian students received. The face-to-face program created opportunities for the spontaneous use of Russian with faculty and other students in a wide range of contexts. Students in the 2020 online program had only three hours of formal instruction per day; some attended online office hours and co-curricular activities, but many did not, meaning that they spent far fewer hours per day in Russian and received none of the passive effect of simply being immersed in the target language, an important aspect of immersion learning cited by researchers such as Rifkin (2005) and Isabelli-García and Lacorte (2016).  

6.3. Participants
We collected data from 219 students (118 females and 101 males) who participated in the face-to-face program in 2019 (n = 136) and online program

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6 See Merrill (2020) for a description of the Russian School, its language pledge, and a qualitative study of students’ attitudes toward the total immersion environment.

7 Instructors teaching online will look to technology for any attempt to replicate an immersion environment. The Russian School attempted to create community by establishing channels on Discord, a group chatting platform in which various channels can be created, but response was tepid at best.
in 2020 (n = 83). The average age of the participants in the two programs was 25.41 (SD [standard deviation] = 9.52). Six participants withdrew from the programs and were excluded from the analyses; 29 students who did not complete the placement and/or exit tests in the programs were also excluded. For the analyses, we divided the participants into groups (see Table 1) based on their initial OPI scores (scale from 1 to 9: Novice Low: 1, Novice Mid: 2, etc.) and calculated their language gains in the face-to-face and online programs for Novice (OPI scores 1-3), Intermediate (OPI scores 4-6), Advanced (OPI scores 7-9), and all levels combined. The final number of participants used in the analyses was 184.

Table 1. Age and Entry Proficiency Level (N = 184)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Initial oral proficiency level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean age</td>
<td>Male/Female</td>
<td>Novice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>F2F (2019) n = 125</strong></td>
<td>Mean age 25.78</td>
<td>Male 46%/Female 54%</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(SD = 10.08)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Online (2020) n = 59</strong></td>
<td>Mean age 24.81</td>
<td>Male 47%/Female 53%</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(SD = 8.55)</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6.4. Methodology
6.4.1. Oral proficiency. The Russian School tests students upon entrance and exit as a means of measuring progress during the eight-week session. During the 2019 face-to-face session, oral proficiency testing was conducted by language instructors in the eight-week program. In 2019, of the 21 instructors who participated in entrance testing, five were ACTFL certified testers and one had completed the introductory workshop. The remaining 15 instructors had completed the Russian School in-house proficiency level.

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8 We used this numerical scale following Rifkin (2005), Isbell, Winke, and Gass (2019) and many other researchers. As was pointed out by one of our reviewers, the ACTFL proficiency scale is non-linear in the sense that the distance between the levels differs, increasing with progress up the scale. Future research may consider using a different instrument to assess learning gains measured by the ACTFL proficiency guidelines.

9 It is important to note that the SDs for age are large. However, the mean age and SDs are similar in the two groups, which makes it more feasible to compare the groups in terms of learning gains.
testing orientation, which lasts approximately six hours and includes the theoretical aspects of the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines, recorded sample interviews, a live interview conducted in front of the entire group, and live interviews conducted in smaller groups, each of which is led by an experienced faculty member. It also includes a two-hour refresher session before exit testing, which is conducted at the end of the seventh week of instruction. In 2019 only two of the instructors were new and therefore participating in the orientation for the first time, and they completed additional mandatory practice for new faculty. The remaining 19 testers had completed this orientation multiple times. In 2019, 48 of 115 oral tests (41.7%) were conducted by certified testers either by phone before the session or face-to-face on testing day. Another 12 (10.4%) were conducted by groups of faculty members led by a certified or experienced tester. The remaining 55 (47.8%) interviews were conducted on testing day by individual faculty members; each conducted 3-4 interviews. For the 2019 exit testing, 42 of 134 interviews (31.3%) were conducted by certified testers and eight (6%) were conducted by groups during the refresher session. The remaining 84 interviews (62.7%) were conducted by other faculty. All interviews were recorded and rated by a second instructor. If their ratings did not match, the interview was rated a third time by an ACTFL-certified OPI tester.

In 2020, the availability of financial support from the Kathryn W. Davis School of Russian Fund allowed the Russian School to use official tests administered by Language Testing International (LTI), the exclusive provider of ACTFL assessments, for all speaking proficiency assessments. All incoming Russian School students with previous experience in the language took a single-rated Russian OPIc as their entrance oral assessment. Upon exit, all RS students took a single-rated OPI interview.

6.4.2. Writing proficiency. All students entering the Russian School in 2019 and 2020 (except true beginners) completed entrance and exit writing proficiency tests. The prompts on these tests (see Appendix A for samples) are aimed at specific functions in the ACTFL Guidelines; successful completion of the task in each question signifies meeting the criteria of the ACTFL level toward which the prompt is targeted. In 2019, entrance and exit writing tests were proctored by Russian School staff and were rated by Russian School instructors who underwent in-house training for rating writing proficiency (which included a refresher session before exit testing) and all ratings were checked by a certified Writing Proficiency Test (WPT) rater. In 2020, the same certified rater from 2019 rated all of the 2020
writing tests. The exit writing test is conducted during the seventh week of the program.

6.4.3 Lexico-grammatical competence. Following Juan-Garau, Salazar-Noguera, and Prieto-Arranz (2014), the Russian School created its tests according to the belief that “lexis and syntax cannot be but artificially separated from other language-related knowledge” and should be measured as one continuum (236). In 2019 and 2020, the Russian School used lexico-grammatical tests (LGT) that are automatically graded. Students were given 60 minutes to complete each test, after which, if the test had not been submitted, it was locked and automatically submitted. The first was a 150-question multiple-choice test (MC) with items covering Russian grammatical topics of increasing complexity from Novice to Advanced. The MC had English-language instructions and translations in a few contexts where the expected outcome could be ambiguous. Students completed the same MC at the beginning and end of the session. The second grammar and vocabulary test consisted of 100 fill-in-the-blanks (FB) questions with English prompts.\(^\text{10}\) Two versions of this test exist, and one was used as the entrance test for 2019 and exit test for 2020, and the other the exit test in 2019 and entrance test for 2020. Testing of the two Russian School FB LGTs determined they are of approximately the same difficulty (Pastushenkov 2020, 1116).\(^\text{11}\) The FB tests were created based on authentic texts of various genres (memoirs, interviews, literary texts) where certain words/phrases were omitted and, based on an English prompt, students were asked to supply the proper form of the words that fit the context. The computer answer key strives to include possible variant options, including synonyms or spelling variations where appropriate. As with the MC test, the FB items range in difficulty from Novice to Advanced. Both tests were administered

\(^{10}\) The Russian School uses two different formats (fill-in-the-blanks and multiple-choice) for assessing grammar and basic lexical items because of their complementary nature; a FB test removes the element of guessing, while MC tests remove spelling errors and check students’ passive knowledge.

\(^{11}\) In private communication, the author informed us that, due to word limits, he was forced to delete the following additional information from his final manuscript: “The fill-in-the-blank quizzes (200 items) were distributed during a Saturday session to a group of five students who at that time had completed the summer immersion component of a Russian immersion program and were in their second semester of the follow-up academic year. The students were given 100 minutes to complete the tests. The items were presented in random order. The learners demonstrated a ‘floor’ effect, with the mean scores for both the placement and exit tests hardly reaching 10% and thus suggesting that they were of approximately the same difficulty. Due to the lack of statistical power, these results should be interpreted with caution.”
at the same time, after seven weeks of instruction. See Appendix B for sample items from both tests.

In summary, for oral proficiency results this study compares in-house interviews conducted by certified testers or trained faculty that were double-rated (2019) with the results of single-rated tests conducted by ACTFL-certified testers through LTI (2020). The writing proficiency results were from the same test both years, and the LGTs, while different, were essentially of the same difficulty.

7. Analysis and results

We calculated the descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) along with 95% confidence intervals (CIs) in the two programs (face-to-face and online) for the entrance and exit scores along with the learning gains for speaking and writing (as measured by ACTFL OPIs and WPTs respectively) and two lexico-grammatical tests (LGT): fill-in-the-blank (FB) and multiple-choice (MC). These results are shown in Tables 2 (for all levels combined), 3 (Novice), 4 (Intermediate), and 5 (Advanced). The results are also represented visually in Figure 1 for the speaking, writing, FB, and MC gains. We used listwise deletion for the missing cases (a case was dropped if it had a missing value in at least one of the variables). The final number of valid cases used in the analysis was 184 (see Table 1). The reliability statistics for the entrance and exit tests (eight tests total) were the following: face-to-face (α = .85) and online (α = .86). These findings indicated relatively high levels of internal consistency (Plonsky and Derrick 2016).

Confidence intervals (CI) indicate a high level of measurement precision (even when the sample size is limited) and have become more common in SLA research, partially due to sample size issues (e.g., Plonsky 2015; Loewen and Isbell 2017; Pastushenkov et al. 2020). If the lower and upper confidence intervals of the sample means do not overlap, we can infer that there is a statistically significant difference between the population means (p ≤ .05). In our case, if the 95% CI did not overlap for the mean gains on the speaking, writing, FB, or MC tests in the two programs, these intervals indicated that there was a statistically significant difference in the Russian language gains in the face-to-face and online summer programs.

The mean scores on the entrance tests were similar in the face-to-face and online programs. In most cases, the 95% CIs for the entrance scores in two programs considerably overlapped, suggesting that there was no statistically significant difference between the entrance scores in the two programs. The students in the face-to-face and online programs started at similar proficiency levels and thus comparing the language gains in the
two programs was feasible. However, the 95% CIs for the entrance scores at the novice level only slightly overlapped (see Table 3), suggesting that the results for the novice learners in the face-to-face and online programs should be interpreted with caution.

From the data presented in Tables 2-5 and Figure 1, we identified the mean gains in the face-to-face and online programs, for which the 95% CIs did not overlap or slightly overlapped (these instances are marked in bold in Tables 2-5):

1. Mean writing gains at all levels combined: face-to-face < online (95% CIs slightly overlapped);
2. Mean FB gains at all levels combined: face-to-face > online (95% CIs did not overlap);
3. Mean FB gains at the Intermediate level: face-to-face > online (95% CIs did not overlap);
4. Mean MC gains at the Intermediate level: face-to-face > online (95% CIs slightly overlapped).

The differences between all other gains measured in this study were not statistically significant, based on the considerable overlap of the 95% CIs. For example, even though the mean language gains on the FB and MC tests were higher in the face-to-face program, the 95% CIs for the means considerably overlapped and included 0, which was at least partially due to the low number of participants in the advanced level in the two programs \( n_{F2F} = 12, n_{Online} = 7 \). The lexico-grammatical competence mean gains were higher in the face-to-face program at the Advanced level, but this difference was not statistically significant.
Table 2. Entrance scores, exit scores, and language gains in the face-to-face and online programs (all levels combined).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Entrance scores</th>
<th>Exit scores</th>
<th>Language gains</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>95% CI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Lower</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaking</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F2F</td>
<td>4.12</td>
<td>1.92</td>
<td>3.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online</td>
<td>3.69</td>
<td>2.31</td>
<td>3.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F2F</td>
<td>4.39</td>
<td>1.85</td>
<td>4.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online</td>
<td>3.75</td>
<td>2.31</td>
<td>3.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LGT (FB)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F2F</td>
<td>30.40</td>
<td>23.21</td>
<td>26.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online</td>
<td>26.22</td>
<td>27.63</td>
<td>19.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LGT (MC)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F2F</td>
<td>38.26</td>
<td>25.64</td>
<td>33.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online</td>
<td>31.16</td>
<td>28.93</td>
<td>23.62</td>
</tr>
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</table>
Table 3. Entrance scores, exit scores, and language gains in the face-to-face and online programs (Novice).

<table>
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<th>Entrance scores</th>
<th>Exit scores</th>
<th>Language gains</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>Lower CI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaking</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F2F</td>
<td>1.88</td>
<td>0.98</td>
<td>1.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online</td>
<td>1.44</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>1.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F2F</td>
<td>2.49</td>
<td>1.62</td>
<td>1.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online</td>
<td>1.63</td>
<td>1.24</td>
<td>1.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LGT</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(FB)</td>
<td>7.23</td>
<td>10.34</td>
<td>4.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(MC)</td>
<td>3.30</td>
<td>6.94</td>
<td>0.55</td>
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</table>
Table 4. Entrance scores, exit scores, and language gains in the face-to-face and online programs (Intermediate).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Entrance scores</th>
<th></th>
<th>Exit scores</th>
<th></th>
<th>Language gains</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>M  SD</td>
<td>95% CI</td>
<td>M  SD</td>
<td>95% CI</td>
<td>M  SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Lower</td>
<td>Upper</td>
<td>Lower</td>
<td>Upper</td>
<td>Lower</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaking</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F2F</td>
<td>4.96 0.65</td>
<td>4.80</td>
<td>5.11</td>
<td>6.20</td>
<td>0.81</td>
<td>1.24</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online</td>
<td>5.12 0.73</td>
<td>4.82</td>
<td>5.42</td>
<td>6.20</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td>1.08</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F2F</td>
<td>5.20 0.81</td>
<td>5.01</td>
<td>5.39</td>
<td>6.21</td>
<td>0.93</td>
<td>1.01</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online</td>
<td>5.24 0.88</td>
<td>4.88</td>
<td>5.60</td>
<td>6.28</td>
<td>0.84</td>
<td>1.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LGT (FB)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F2F</td>
<td>40.03 16.90</td>
<td>36.00</td>
<td>44.06</td>
<td>59.04</td>
<td>16.83</td>
<td>19.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online</td>
<td>40.00 19.43</td>
<td>31.98</td>
<td>48.02</td>
<td>50.64</td>
<td>13.19</td>
<td>10.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LGT (MC)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F2F</td>
<td>49.22 17.38</td>
<td>45.08</td>
<td>53.36</td>
<td>68.93</td>
<td>15.78</td>
<td>19.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online</td>
<td>47.31 16.36</td>
<td>40.55</td>
<td>54.06</td>
<td>62.08</td>
<td>14.86</td>
<td>14.77</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CI = confidence interval.
Table 5. Entrance scores, exit scores, and language gains in the face-to-face and online programs (Advanced).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Entrance Scores</th>
<th>Exit Scores</th>
<th>Language Gains</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>95% CI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lower</td>
<td>Upper</td>
<td>Lower</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaking</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F2F</td>
<td>7.25</td>
<td>0.62</td>
<td>6.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online</td>
<td>7.29</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>6.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F2F</td>
<td>6.50</td>
<td>1.09</td>
<td>5.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online</td>
<td>6.57</td>
<td>1.72</td>
<td>4.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LGT (FB)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F2F</td>
<td>57.25</td>
<td>19.93</td>
<td>44.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online</td>
<td>65.43</td>
<td>26.73</td>
<td>40.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LGT (MC)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F2F</td>
<td>68.61</td>
<td>17.27</td>
<td>57.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online</td>
<td>74.57</td>
<td>15.46</td>
<td>60.27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Levene’s Test for Equality of Variances indicated that the variances between the four types of gains in the face-to-face and online program listed above were not equal. Therefore, to further investigate the differences between the four types of gains identified using the 95% CIs, we conducted a series of Welch’s unequal variances t-tests. The t-test indicated that the difference between the writing gains for all levels combined was marginally significant: $t(106.75) = 4.05, p = .047$. The gains on the FB test for all levels combined were significantly higher in the face-to-face program compared to the online program: $t(115.04) = 8.45, p = .004$. The differences for the FB and MC gains at the Intermediate level were statistically significant: $t(42.63) = 10.90, p = .002$ and $t(47.33) = 4.89, p = .032$, respectively. These findings indicated that the gains on the LGTs (FB and MC) were significantly higher in the face-to-face program compared to the online program at the Intermediate Level. In summary, the descriptive statistics, 95% CIs, and Welch’s independent unequal variances t-tests

Figure 1. Mean learning gains in the F2F and online programs.
indicated that the differences in the language gains in the face-to-face and online programs were significant for the following types of gains:

(1) Mean writing gains at all levels combined: face-to-face < online (marginally significant);
(2) Mean FB gains at all levels combined: face-to-face > online (statistically significant);
(3) Mean FB gains at the Intermediate level: face-to-face > online (statistically significant);\(^{12}\)
(4) Mean MC gains at the Intermediate levels: face-to-face > online (statistically significant).

In this study, we also investigated whether the learning environment (face-to-face or online) affected the number of students who progressed from one ACTFL proficiency level to another for speaking and writing. The results are shown in Table 6 for speaking and Table 7 for writing. The percentages included in Tables 6 and 7 are based on the total number of students in each oral and writing proficiency level. Overall, we observed that the participants’ speaking and writing proficiency had generally increased in all levels at similar rates in the face-to-face and online programs (based on the number of students who moved from one level to another and not their mean learning gains). From the data represented in Tables 6 and 7, we can also conclude that, in both face-to-face and online environments, lower initial proficiency yielded faster language gains for speaking and writing, whereas students with higher proficiency experienced slower progress. For example, all 23 Novice Low students in the face-to-face program and 19 out of 21 Novice Low students in the online program reached Intermediate proficiency in speaking. Even though Intermediate Low and Advanced Low students generally improved their speaking and writing over the course of the face-to-face and online programs, they did not reach Advanced and Superior levels respectively with the exception of one student in the face-to-face program.

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\(^{12}\) The largest group among the three proficiency levels in the face-to-face program, the Intermediate group may be the “driving force” for the face-to-face group and affect the FB results for the all proficiency levels combined.
Table 6. Students’ speaking development in the face-to-face and online programs (n of students and % of all students in each level).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pre-program speaking proficiency level</th>
<th>Post-program speaking proficiency level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NL F2F</td>
<td>0 0 0 0 9 (39.1%) 13 (56.5%) 1 (4.3%) 0 0 0 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NL Online</td>
<td>0 0 0 2 (9.5%) 10 (47.6%) 9 (42.9%) 0 0 0 0 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NM F2F</td>
<td>0 0 0 0 0 1 (50.0%) 1 (50.0%) 0 0 0 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NM Online</td>
<td>0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NH F2F</td>
<td>0 0 0 3 (16.7%) 13 (72.2%) 2 (11.1%) 0 0 0 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NH Online</td>
<td>0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IL F2F</td>
<td>0 0 0 1 (6.7%) 6 (40.0%) 7 (46.7%) 1 (6.7%) 0 0 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IL Online</td>
<td>0 0 0 0 0 2 (40.0%) 3 (60.0%) 0 0 0 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IM F2F</td>
<td>0 0 0 0 0 4 (8.5%) 31 (66.0%) 9 (19.1%) 3 (6.4%) 0 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IM Online</td>
<td>0 0 0 0 0 1 (8.3%) 0 7 (58.3%) 4 (33.3%) 0 0 0 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IH F2F</td>
<td>0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IH Online</td>
<td>0 0 0 0 0 0 3 (33.3%) 5 (55.6%) 1 (11.1%) 0 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AL F2F</td>
<td>0 0 0 0 0 0 1 (9.1%) 0 5 (45.5%) 3 (27.3%) 2 (18.2%) 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AL Online</td>
<td>0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 1 (16.7%) 3 (50.0%) 2 (33.3%) 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AM F2F</td>
<td>0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 1 (100%) 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AM Online</td>
<td>0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 2 (100%) 0 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AH F2F</td>
<td>0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 1 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AH Online</td>
<td>0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N = Novice, I = Intermediate, A = Advanced, S = Superior; L = Low, M = Mid, H = High


Table 7. Students’ writing development in the face-to-face and online programs (n of students and % of all students in each level).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pre-program writing proficiency level</th>
<th>Post-program writing proficiency level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>NL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NL F2F</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NL Online</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NM F2F</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>NM Online</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NH F2F</td>
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<td>NH Online</td>
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<td>IL F2F</td>
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<td>IL Online</td>
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<tr>
<td>IM F2F</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>IM Online</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>IH F2F</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>IH Online</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AL F2F</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>AL Online</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>AM F2F</td>
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<tr>
<td>AM Online</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>AH F2F</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>AH Online</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N = Novice, I = Intermediate, A = Advanced, S = Superior; L = Low, M = Mid, H = High
8. Discussion
The goal of this study was to compare Russian learning gains in oral and writing proficiency and lexico-grammatical competence in face-to-face immersion and fully online intensive programs. Based on the analyses, students in the two programs made comparable learning gains with the exception of the following instances: 1) marginally higher writing gains were found in the online program at all proficiency levels combined; 2) significantly higher gains in lexico-grammatical competence in the face-to-face program as measured by the fill-in-the-blanks (FB) test at all levels combined, 3) significantly higher FB gains at the Intermediate level in the face-to-face program, and 4) significantly higher lexico-grammatical gains as measured by the multiple-choice (MC) test at the Intermediate level in the face-to-face program.

Our study supports findings by Magnan (1986), Bernhardt et al. (2015), Davidson (2015), Goertler, Kraemer, and Schenker (2016), and Isbell, Winke, and Gass (2019) that lower initial proficiency yields faster language gains and students with higher proficiency experience slower progress. The Novice Low students in both face-to-face and online programs mostly reached Intermediate proficiency by the end of the program, whereas the majority of Russian learners in the Intermediate Low and Advanced Low groups did not reach Advanced or Superior levels respectively.

The amount (and, arguably, the quality) of interaction, a major predictor of successful second language acquisition (Loewen and Isbell 2017; Pastushenkov et al. 2020), was drastically reduced in the online context. Nevertheless, students in the online program made Russian proficiency gains comparable (with the exception of lexico-grammatical gains) or even (marginally) higher than those in the face-to-face program in the case of writing (all proficiency levels combined). These results are similar to those of Chenoweth and Murday (2003), who found that online students made comparable progress to those who studied face-to-face and that the online students scored higher than the face-to-face students in writing (300). Students in the face-to-face program, where they had one more contact hour per day and more opportunities for informal interactions outside class, did not show higher scores in speaking. Our data, thus, is in line with the findings of other scholars (Freed 1990; Ginsberg and Miller 2000; Segalowitz and Freed 2004; Mendelson 2004; Magnan and Back 2007) who compared two different learning contexts, in this case traditional classrooms and study abroad, and did not find a significant effect of language environment on students’ speaking gains. Remaining consistent with previous propositions regarding the benefits of online instruction
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MERRILL, DENGUB, PASTUSHENKOV

(Lin and Warschauer 2015; Goertler 2019; Thoms 2020), these findings, although counterintuitive for many language instructors, also indicated that there are other factors and individual differences (such as curricular interventions and motivation) that need to be investigated further as they affect the development of language proficiency (Pastushenkov 2020).

As for the effects of face-to-face vs online settings at different proficiency levels, the data suggested that, for Novice learners of Russian, synchronous online intensive programs clearly yielded language gains comparable to those of face-to-face programs despite the online programs’ reduced exposure to language and fewer classroom hours. Given the fact that online programs are more flexible, accessible, and affordable, and provide an additional entry point into a language program for students who might otherwise not be able to begin learning the language due to family or work obligations or other obstacles (Dengub 2021), we recommend that institutions expand their offerings of online elementary language programs. It is important to note that the Novice learners started at slightly different levels based on the entrance tests (even though these differences were not practically significant). Overall, future research will need to include a larger online sample (particularly at the Novice and Advanced levels).

Online programs provide flexibility and affordability for students of all levels, as well as speaking gains comparable to those of face-to-face programs. For online programs, however, curricular adjustments and/or enhancements, including increased exposure to input of various kinds, are necessary to bridge the gap between lexico-grammatical scores at the Intermediate level. In addition, instructors and program administrators should adjust their outcome expectations assuming that the measurable progress students make might be more limited compared to traditional face-to-face programs. However, the results for writing gains, which were marginally higher in the online program, are promising. Even though Russian language immersion programs often focus on speaking and listening (Pastushenkov and McIntyre 2020), adding an online writing component may be beneficial for some institutions.

While the data on Advanced students show some interesting trends and are in line with the acquisition gains for the Intermediate level, the small number of participants prevents us from making claims about the gains at this level and more data are needed before drawing any firm conclusions. Overall, more research is needed at advanced proficiency levels (Winke 2013; Pastushenkov 2020).

The increased interaction provided by the face-to-face immersion program may have yielded larger gains in lexico-grammatical competence
among Intermediate students and Advanced learners, although this effect was not evident among Novice students. This finding is consistent with the findings of Mackey and Goo (2007), who examined the results of 28 recent studies on interaction and concluded that “interaction plays a strong facilitative role in the learning of lexical and grammatical target items” (438). As for the stronger lexico-grammatical gains found in the face-to-face immersion program at higher proficiency levels, it is possible that most vocabulary and grammar at the Novice level is learned in the classroom setting. The Novice students did not benefit from the face-to-face immersion setting and increased opportunities for informal interactions outside formal classes, including negotiated interaction (Luan and Sappathy 2011; Yi and Sun 2013), as much as students at higher levels. Possibly this is because they do not have the necessary base to absorb new words and structures from the interaction with other students and faculty to the same extent more proficient students can. Overall, more research and analysis are needed on the role of language exposure (a combination of linguistic input and output) and interaction in both face-to-face and online immersion settings.

9. Limitations
The findings of this study must be considered in the context of several potential limitations. For the oral proficiency testing, different means were used to assess students’ oral proficiency. For the face-to-face program, double-rated tests were conducted partially by certified raters and mostly by trained but not certified testers; for the online program, entrance results were from a single-rated OPIc test and exit results from a single-rated OPI. These measures are all tied to the ACTFL proficiency guidelines and conducted by testers familiar with the guidelines, but they are obviously different tests. Even within the official measures, scholars are still lacking reliable data about the reliability of the OPIc as a substitute for the OPI (Surface, Poncheri, and Bhavsar 2008; Thompson, Cox, and Knapp 2016; and Isbell, Winke, and Gass 2019).

While in-house testing was done under the supervision of an ACTFL-certified tester and the testing program and training was built

13 This result is likely related to Cummins’ Threshold Hypothesis, which argues that students of a second language must pass a certain proficiency “threshold” before they can benefit from the immersive effects of instruction in that second language. See Cummins 1976, 1979. While Cummins examines immersive bilingual K-12 education, the question of the effectiveness of immersion language study for true beginner language students, examined in the context of Cummins’ hypothesis, warrants further research.
using strict uniform protocol, we only calculated interrater reliability for
the entrance and exit OPIs in the 2019 face-to-face program. The findings
indicated relatively high levels of internal consistency (Plonsky and Derrick
2016): OPI entrance ($\alpha = .86$) and OPI exit ($\alpha = .88$).

Another limitation of this study is that it uses holistic measurements
of language development (such as the OPIc and writing proficiency test)
and does not include more specific and more nuanced measures, such as
measures of speech accuracy, fluency, and complexity (Barkhuizen and Ellis
2005; Mora and Valls-Ferrer 2012) that would allow for a more granular
analysis of progress made in a short-term program.

The statistical tests used in this study were designed to find
differences, not to prove that there are no differences between the programs.
To confirm that there are no differences, we would need to study this same
data using equivalence tests (Godfroid and Spino 2015).

10. Directions for future research
The results of this study suggest several possible areas for improvement
and future directions. A larger-scale study should be done that includes
more data, especially from several similar immersion and online programs
to ensure that these findings are generalizable to other programs and
contexts. In the analysis, we combined the OPI levels 1-3 into “Novice,”
4-6 into “Intermediate,” and 7-9 into “Advanced.” A larger quantity of data
would allow for enough cases to further investigate learners’ gains for each
sub-level (Novice Mid, Novice High, etc.). The number of participants in
the Advanced levels in our study in both face-to-face and online programs
was low ($n_{F2F} = 12, n_{Online} = 7$). More research is needed at the Advanced level
of Russian (Pastushenkov 2020) and other LCTLs (e.g., Mandarin Chinese,
Winke 2013). Lin and Warschauer (2015) point out that almost all research
on online learning has been conducted with lower-level courses, meaning
that questions remain about whether the positive results reported to date
for online language learning also hold true in advanced language courses
(395). The additional data could include outcomes for other language skills
such as listening and reading, and more specific language measures such
as fluency measures, as they seem to be affected by the amount of target
language use (Freed, Segalowitz, and Dewey 2004).

11. Conclusion
For years, scholars and Russian language educators have continued to
develop best practices for designing and conducting hybrid and online
Russian courses (see Spasova and Welsh 2020). The COVID-19 epidemic
has forced language instructors to refine online teaching techniques and employ the best available technology. After the pandemic, as acceptance of online courses likely will grow, many programs will continue or even expand their online offerings, and these courses will be taught alongside regular face-to-face courses. Our data suggest that as far as proficiency is concerned, intensive synchronous online language courses can help students make similar gains, at least at the beginning level of language acquisition. As Collentine and Freed (2004) concluded, there is “no evidence that one context of learning is uniformly superior to another for all students, at all levels of language learning, and for all language skills” (64). This study adds to the growing literature examining the effectiveness of online language learning, which in 2020 became a concern for almost all language instructors and will likely increase in importance, as even after the pandemic the percentage of language classes taught online is likely to grow.

Appendix A. Example prompts from the writing proficiency entrance and exit tests.

Prompt 1
When you return from the Russian School, you receive an email from your friend who is curious to know how you spent the past two months. Write your friend an email in which you:

- write a detailed description of the RS campus and the town. Be sure that your description paints a picture in the mind of the reader.
- describe a funny or memorable experience from your time here. Be sure to tell the whole story, including how it began, what took place and how it concluded.
- explain why learning foreign languages is a good investment of time and money.

Prompt 2
You volunteer for an online Russian magazine that reports on social issues. Write an article about a recent news event related to social issues that you believe will be of interest to the readers. The article can relate to a local or international event.

- Provide detailed background information about what led up to the event. Be sure to recall the story from beginning to end, giving information about what took place, and how it concluded.
• Fully explain why you think this story is significant for your readers.
• State your opinion as to the importance of remaining educated about social issues. Provide arguments that support the idea that events related to social issues are worthy of news reporting.

Prompt 3
Some people believe that honesty and integrity are important qualities of a politician. Others think that in the political arena, honesty often becomes an obstacle in achieving important goals, and a politician’s main strength is an ability to manipulate others. Which position reflects your views and why?
Write a position paper on the topic. In the same paper, discuss possible changes in the society if politicians are prosecuted for public lying.

Appendix B. Example questions from the lexico-grammatical pretest-posttests.
1. Fill in the blank test
В школе (1. every morning) __________ учительница говорила: «Дети, (2. sit down) __________ », но в классе было много учеников и иногда мне (3. there was nowhere to sit) __________ . В школе мы писали все упражнения (4. with a pencil) __________ . Я очень любил учиться и часто (5. brought) __________ книги домой из школы. Утром я вставал поздно и (6. did not have) __________ времени толком одеться. Вернее, так: одеться, добежать (7. up to) __________ школы, раздеться всё это требовало много (8. [of] time) __________ . И (9. in order to) __________
(10. it) __________ сэкономить, сохранить, я не одевался, а пулей летел (11. to school) __________ (12. without a coat) __________ – и сразу за парту.

(Correct answers: 1. каждое утро; 2. садитесь; 3. негде было; 4. карандашом; 5. приносил; 6. не было; 7. до; 8. времени; 9. чтобы; 10. его; 11. в школу; 12. без пальто

2. Multiple choice test
Question 1
– Где твой брат? – Он ________________ в Москву.
a. ездил
b. ходил
c. поехал
d. пошёл
Question 2
Это ________________ дядя.
a. мой  
b. мои  
c. моя  
d. моё

Question 3
Студенты учатся в ________________.
a. известному университету  
b. известного университета  
c. известном университете  
d. известный университет

Question 4
Где машина ________________?
a. новому профессору  
b. новом профессоре  
c. нового профессора  
d. новый профессор

Question 5
Когда я спала, моя сестра ________________ телевизор.
a. будет смотреть  
b. смотрит  
c. посмотрит  
d. смотрела

(Correct answers: 1. С; 2. А; 3. С; 4. С; 5. D)

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Service-Provider Virtual Exchange as a Viable Alternative to Face-to-Face Speaking Practice: Data From Second- and Third-Year Russian Learners

LIUDMILA KLINANOVA, VALENTINA VINOBUROVA

1. Introduction
Building a working fluency in a second language (L2) begins with learning to understand and communicate ideas in authentic communicative situations. With this goal in mind, language instruction in L2 speaking must provide opportunities for learners to practice (1) using language in a range of situations and contexts likely to be encountered in the target culture; (2) carrying out a range of interpersonal tasks; and (3) expressing personal meaning as early as possible (Omaggio Hadley 2001). The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted many of these established classroom practices in language departments, leaving language learners with limited opportunities for practicing interpersonal speaking skills in the L2 (Gacs, Goertler, and Spasova 2020). Unsurprisingly, in the context of emergency remote teaching during the pandemic, many language instructors identified the need to provide learners with ample opportunities to practice communication as their biggest challenge.

While common in other disciplines and fairly new in foreign language instruction (O’Dowd 2018), service-provider virtual exchange (SPVE or SPVEs) platforms may be one possible solution to this challenge. SPVEs were gaining popularity in world language programs in universities and high schools even before the COVID-19 pandemic. Various for-profit companies, such as Conversifi, Boomalang, TalkAbroad, iTalki, and LinguaMeeting proposed a way of enriching students’ language learning experience by offering paid videoconferencing sessions with a native-speaking (NS) coach at the students’ convenience. After the transition to online teaching during the pandemic, SPVEs were re-envisioned and re-purposed as an alternative to some of the classroom speaking practice that was no longer possible due to remote teaching.

The difference between SPVEs and reciprocal (learner-to-learner) virtual exchanges is that NS coaches are trained and supervised by a service provider (Echevarría 2019). Although often the same age as
their non-native-speaking interlocutors, SPVE tutors have an economic incentive to work with learners because the company pays them for their services. Additionally, instructors using SPVE avoid the challenges of planning class-to-class partnerships. Finally, SPVE companies provide access to stable Internet platforms, trained tutors, and technical support. Comparing SPVEs to traditional virtual exchanges, Tecedor and Vasseur (2020) summarize the benefits of SPVEs as follows: “(1) SPVEs do not require high levels of logistical and technical involvement on the part of the instructor; (2) they eliminate the interinstitutional curricular imbalances; (3) they allow students to focus exclusively on the development of their L2 (as they are not required to speak their L1 to their interlocutor); and (4) they do not require training students on how to provide appropriate, sensitive feedback to their interlocutor” (5).

In addition to organizational benefits, SPVE has potential for enhancing language skills. Research shows that regular videoconferencing with NS peers - a key format of SPVE - may improve speaking ability (Saito and Akiyama 2017) and foster intercultural competence (Tecedor and Vasseur 2020). The research on SPVEs, however, is scarce and, to our knowledge, there is no research on the use of SPVEs in Russian language programs, particularly, as an online alternative to classroom speaking practice. To address this gap, the present study set out to investigate the learning opportunities that SPVEs can offer to Russian learners in the wake of the transition to emergency remote course delivery. In particular, we use a mixed-methods approach to analyze the structural and interactional features of SPVE sessions and triangulate these findings with the data on learners’ beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions regarding the use of SPVE as a learning activity. This investigation is guided by the following research questions:

(1) How are SPVE sessions structured in terms of student and tutor speaking time, turn-taking, and participant roles?
(2) How do students and tutors negotiate meaning in instances of miscommunication in SPVE sessions?
(3) How did Russian 2nd- and 3rd-year learners perceive SPVEs as an instrument for developing speaking proficiency in the time of emergency remote teaching during the COVID pandemic, and what attitudes and belief systems had an impact on their judgement?

2. Theoretical underpinnings
To understand how SPVE sessions may be beneficial for developing L2
speaking skills, let us turn to acquisition theories. In this section, we will consider the theoretical considerations underlying the acquisition of L2 speaking and draw on existing research on SPVEs to identify the areas of L2 ability that were found to be most affected by synchronous voice interactions with native speakers.

2.1. Acquisition of L2 speaking and L2 oral proficiency

As it consists of acts of communication, L2 speaking ability involves the expression, interpretation, and negotiation of meaning (Savignon 1998). In language teaching and assessment, this ability is closely connected to the notion of oral proficiency, the ability to speak a language in unrehearsed situations. Oral proficiency is described by a set of benchmarks or learning targets identified for each level of language ability, including the length and type of produced oral text, communicative functions, a range and depth of vocabulary, and the degree of accuracy that a speaker can maintain in spontaneous conversation (American Councils for the Teaching of Foreign Languages). These components of oral proficiency constitute instructional targets for language instructors.

From the interactionist perspective (Gass and Mackey, 2007), teaching speaking begins with providing learners with “comprehensible input” (Krashen 1985), or linguistic data at or slightly above their level of understanding. This way, students can understand linguistic elements with the help of contextual and interactional cues, leading to “intake” (Long 1983), and produce context-appropriate and meaningful utterances, or “output” (Swain 1985). Input needs to be both comprehensible and meaningful for form–meaning connections to happen (Lee and VanPatten 2003, 27). To become comprehensible, input can be modified through the use of strategies for negotiating meaning (e.g., requests for repetition, clarification requests, recasts, confirmation checks, or code-switching) to facilitate intake. In other words, speakers adjust their linguistic output to make themselves comprehensible and hearers negotiate the flow and quality of input to facilitate meaningful interaction. This process was termed negotiation of meaning (NoM) and found to be instrumental in developing communicative competence in the L2 (Varonis and Gass 1985, VanPatten 2004).

These principles of language processing in interaction and NoM were applied and tested in computer-mediated contexts (Chapelle 1997). More recent findings suggest that input processing and NoM occur in computer-mediated communication to the same degree as in in-person communication, resulting in the improvement of syntactic, pragmatic, and
intercultural competencies and potentially building greater confidence in using the L2 in other formats of communication (see Chapelle 2005 for a meta-analysis).

2.2. Negotiation of meaning as evidence of oral proficiency development in videoconferencing

Despite the lack of research, it can be proposed that SPVEs have many of the same affordances that face-to-face classroom practice and traditional virtual exchanges do for developing language proficiency. As such, such exchanges present opportunities for negotiating meaning and form (Saito and Akiyama 2017, 47), which may lead to increases in oral proficiency (Champakaew and Pencingkarn 2014). Saito and Akiyama (2017), for instance, propose that videoconferencing allows speakers to learn through trigger-feedback-uptake sequences, where one speaker’s problematic utterance can trigger feedback from the hearer through a negotiation strategy and lead to the uptake of this feedback by the speaker (54).

Recent studies of NoM in virtual exchange have focused on identifying specific strategies (Clavel-Arroitia 2019, Van Der Zwaard and Bannink 2020), exploring the effectiveness of such strategies (Bower and Kawaguchi 2011, Cordero and Leralta 2020), comparing strategies used in text/chat- and video-based exchanges (Van Der Zwaard and Bannink 2014, Van Der Zwaard and Bannink 2016), and analyzing the use of multimodal affordances of videoconferencing for negotiating meaning (Satar 2016; Lee, Hampel, and Kukulska-Hulme 2019). Their overall findings suggest that in videoconferencing, students rely on voice, text, image, gesture, and facial expression to ensure mutual comprehension. However, Van der Zwaard and Bannink (2014) note that the video component can be face-threatening, as learners may find themselves torn between the unwillingness to admit their inability to understand their native-speaking partners and the need to engage in NoM to complete their learning task (140). Threats to face seem to guide the preference for specific strategies for negotiating meaning, with learners opting for less direct ways of demonstrating or resolving misunderstandings (Cordero and Leralta 2020). These findings are relevant in learner-to-learner exchanges; however, their validity needs to be examined in the context of SPVEs.

2.3. (Service-provider) virtual exchange

Virtual exchange is typically defined as a pedagogical instrument “connecting language learners in pedagogically structured interaction and collaboration” (Dooley and O’Dowd 2018, 14). In the field of L2
teaching, such exchanges involve two groups of students, where each group consists of native speakers of the target language of the other group. Usually, students spend half of their exchange time speaking in L1, and half speaking in L2. Various studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of virtual exchanges for improving speaking skills (Kinginger 1998; Satar and Özdener 2008; Lin 2015; Akiyama and Saito 2016; Lenkaitis 2020), and producing affective gains (Satar and Özdener 2008; Jauregi et al. 2012; Klimanova and Vinokurova 2020).

Given the differences between the “traditional” virtual exchange and SPVE, these findings, however, are not directly transferable to the SPVE context and more research is needed to examine the effects of SPVE videoconferencing on L2 development. However, due to the recent appearance of SPVEs on the market, only a handful of empirical investigations have examined their utility. Of the few studies that have been published on SPVEs to date, Marull and Kumar’s study (2020) focused on task design and the implementation of such exchanges in a Spanish language course. Tecedor and Vasseur (2020) discussed how task design for SPVE sessions can facilitate specifically the development of intercultural competence. Finally, Sama and Wu (2019) investigated the efficacy of SPVEs in developing oral proficiency and fostering self-confidence. The results of these studies suggest that SPVEs can be effective for developing oral proficiency and that learner experiences with SPVEs tend to be positive, with students reporting perceived gains in language skills, intercultural competence, and confidence to speak their L2 (Sama and Wu 2019; Marull and Kumar 2020; Tecedor and Vasseur 2020). Still, more research is needed to make definitive conclusions about the efficacy of SPVEs for language learning.

From the teaching perspective, Echevarría (2019) found that SPVEs are much easier to implement for the instructor than traditional intercultural virtual exchanges and that they effectively solve the issue of unreliable partners. At the same time, SPVEs are transactional, while telecollaboration is purely collaborative. Echevarría (2019) also conceded that because of SPVE tutor training, these sessions may resemble classroom talk rather than natural conversation (176). Tutors are typically instructed to speak slowly, repeat, rephrase, and simplify their speech. Still, while tutors’ language may thus not be fully natural to offer an authentic conversation with a native speaker, SPVE “remains conducive to language acquisition and thus retains a high level of language learning potential – especially at the Intermediate-level of proficiency – by affording learners optimal conditions and freedom from the time pressure of a normally-
paced conversation so that they may concentrate on the language that they
must process and produce” (176). This format allows students to build self-
estee precisely because of tutors’ ability to adjust their language.

2.4. Learners’ attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions
The efficacy of innovative class activities, such as SPVEs, is often dependent
on how learners perceive them as instruments of learning. Foreign language
teachers and learners have been found to have diverse ideas about what
effective language teaching is (Brown 2009). Previous studies show that
learner attitudes, perceptions, and beliefs (APB) have a significant impact on
how learners engage in L2 communicative activities (Yashima 2009). While
all three relate to L2 learners’ experience with language use, each signals
a unique set of observable and non-observable evidence that manifests
itself in reactions towards a particular learning context. More specifically,
attitudes are reflected in learners’ behavior based on their understanding
of an ideal language learning situation. Perceptions are how learners make
sense of themselves in and react to a learning situation. Finally, learner
beliefs constitute a deeply rooted understanding of oneself as an L2 learner
(see Wesely 2012 for a detailed discussion of these constructs). Attitudes,
perceptions, and beliefs affect learners’ motivation and their L2 willingness
to communicate (Kubanyiova and Yue 2019) and L2 willingness to engage
(Dörnyei 2009, Sert 2015), and may cause anxiety toward L2 use. This
anxiety can make language learners unreceptive to comprehensible input,
raising their “affective filter” (Krashen 1985) and inhibiting language
progress (Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope 1986, 30).

When it comes to SPVEs, the involvement of native speakers and
unfamiliar learning contexts combined with low proficiency in the target
language may exacerbate learners’ anxiety and hinder their processing
of input. Drawing on L2 learners’ attitudes, perceptions, and beliefs may
add rich qualitative data to the understanding of SPVE as a medium for
L2 speaking development, particularly in unprecedented educational
situations, such as the COVID-19 emergency transition to remote teaching
in Spring 2020, which was the context of this research study.

3. The study
3.1. Participants and context
The present study reports on the experiences of two groups of Russian
learners from a public university in the United States. The first group
consisted of two sections of an intermediate Russian language course
(n=35) (second year of instruction, first semester), and the second group
included Russian learners in an advanced Russian course (n=17) (third year of instruction, first semester). The regular section of the intermediate course met four times a week for 50 minutes via Zoom, and the hybrid section met twice a week for 50 minutes. The advanced course met twice a week for 75 minutes, also via Zoom.

The Zoom teaching modality was implemented as an alternative to face-to-face instruction due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Before the pandemic, both courses followed a curriculum standardized for the second and third year of Russian language instruction and based on the ACTFL proficiency benchmarks for Intermediate and Advanced Level learners (ACTFL 2012). Both courses emphasized speaking proficiency as one of the primary learning objectives. This orientation was reflected in the course schedule, which included two to three oral examinations and weekly conversation practice with course instructors.

When the COVID-19 pandemic forced the program to transition to remote teaching mid-semester in the spring of 2020, and continue with remote modality in the fall of 2020, conversation practice was replaced with bi-weekly videoconferencing sessions with a Russian (NS) tutor administered by LinguaMeeting, an SPVE platform based in the United States. SPVE packages were included in the list of required course materials, and were purchased by students at the university bookstore or via the LinguaMeeting online platform. To offset the overall cost of course materials in each course, the language textbook in the third year was replaced by a free electronic copy provided by the University Library via the course management system. In the second year, students were asked to purchase a cheaper version of the textbook package. Each SPVE package ($35) offered six 30-minute speaking sessions with NS tutors which were scheduled evenly over the period of 15 weeks (one semester). Learners met with native Russian speaking tutors in small groups (1-3 students per group) for 30 minutes. Sessions with LinguaMeeting tutors took place outside of class meeting times and were scheduled by students at their convenience.

The two tutors employed by LinguaMeeting for these sections were Russian students at a private college in Moscow, Russia. During the exchange, one tutor was residing in Mexico City for a semester abroad, and the other was based in Moscow. Both tutors were in their early 20s. Following the training session with LinguaMeeting staff, both tutors were encouraged to converse solely in Russian during SPVE sessions and resort to English only when communication broke down and repetition and rephrasing were not effective. For each session, course instructors prepared
a list of questions and discussion prompts, which were shared with tutors and students in advance. Students were not required to prepare for SPVE sessions, but they were able to consult questions and prompts if needed (see Appendix A for a sample prompt). Prompts were based on the themes and the vocabulary that were covered in class in the two weeks preceding each session, but tutors could modify questions as they saw fit. While learners could choose tutors and change meeting times, most students met with the same tutor for all six sessions, which contributed to building relationships between tutors and learners.

3.2. Method and data collection
This study used multiple data sources to investigate the nature of SPVEs as an alternative to face-to-face speaking practice in college-level Russian language courses. First, we examined the interactional structure of SPVE sessions and overlay it on the construct of L2 speaking proficiency. Our analysis of interactional structure focuses on student and tutor speaking time, the type of discourse produced (e.g., individual words, sentences, strings of sentences, simple paragraphs, or extended discourse), and communicative functions (e.g., asking and answering questions, reporting a current event, describing a place or object, or presenting an argument).

The second line of inquiry focused on identifying instances of negotiation of meaning and examining students’ and tutors’ prevalent strategies. We conducted an exploratory analysis of data to test and refine Renner’s (2017) categorization of strategies for negotiation of meaning. This preliminary analysis called for the adoption of four of Renner’s (2017) categories: Clarification Requests, Confirmation Checks, Requests for Repetition, and Requests for Help. One more of her categories - Comprehension Checks - was refined based on the data and a new category - Confirmation Offers - was introduced to respond to the patterns found in our data. These categories were operationalized as follows:

1. Clarification Requests: moves by which a speaker stated their non-understanding and sought assistance through questions or statements such as “I don’t understand.”
2. Confirmation Checks: moves by which a hearer ensured that they understood the speaker (for instance, by repeating the speaker’s utterance with a rising intonation).
3. Requests for Repetition: the request to repeat an utterance.
4. Requests for Help: moves by which a speaker requested help from the hearer to formulate their utterance (for instance, requesting translation of a vocabulary item).
(5) Comprehension or Accuracy Checks: moves by which a speaker attempted to determine whether the hearer had understood them (for instance, use of rising intonation in one’s original utterances to elicit a reaction from the hearer).

(6) Confirmation Offers: moves initiated to prevent a misunderstanding before it occurs (for instance, a speaker’s code-switching into English to translate a part of their utterance before any misunderstanding had been indicated by the hearer).

Once these categories had been established, two focal participants were selected to exemplify different patterns of interaction (one participant primarily worked one-on-one with the tutor, while the other worked in a group with two other students) and different learner profiles. Three recorded sessions from various points in the semester (sessions 1, 3, and 6) were analyzed for each participant. We counted the number of NoM sequences, noted whether the negotiation strategy involved a code-switch, and coded each NoM sequence based on the categories operationalized above.

For the third line of inquiry, we examined learners’ attitudes towards SPVEs, including perceived improvement over time and efficacy for language development. Data on learner perceptions were collected via a post-course survey and individual interviews with selected learners from both language levels (Table 1).

Table 1. Student participation in the research instruments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Level</th>
<th>HS\L2</th>
<th>Survey</th>
<th># Sessions</th>
<th>Interviews</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Julie</td>
<td>2\textsuperscript{nd} year</td>
<td>HS*</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gretchen</td>
<td>2\textsuperscript{nd} year</td>
<td>L2**</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carol</td>
<td>2\textsuperscript{nd} year</td>
<td>L2</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeremy</td>
<td>2\textsuperscript{nd} year</td>
<td>L2</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frank</td>
<td>3\textsuperscript{rd} year</td>
<td>L2</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michael</td>
<td>3\textsuperscript{rd} year</td>
<td>L2</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Heritage Speaker (Russian spoken at home); **Russian learner whose L1 is not English.

The survey contained a series of questions and open-ended prompts addressing (1) learners’ attitudes and perceptions; (2) challenges associated with SPVE sessions; and (3) logistical issues. Follow-up semi-structured
interviews targeted individual accounts of SPVE experiences of students from both levels. Six students, four second-year and two third-year Russian learners, were recruited to participate in one-on-one interviews. The multiple sources of data allowed for triangulation, which helped enhance the validity of the findings (Merriam and Tisdell 2015). Other measures taken to confirm validity included searching for discrepant evidence and negative cases, comparing, and contrasting coding categories, obtaining rich data, and using simple descriptive statistics (Maxwell 2005).

4. Results
This section reports on three independent analytical queries and is organized by research question. These three sets of results are then triangulated in the discussion section in the analysis, where the findings from CMC data are integrated with the findings from the qualitative data to outline the pedagogical implications for Russian language instructors (King and Mackey 2016).

4.1. Structure of SPVE sessions and L2 speaking development

**Research Question 1.** How are SPVE sessions structured in terms of student and tutor speaking time and the proportion of Russian and English use to support L2 speaking development?

Our SPVE sessions typically began with a brief greeting and the introduction of the session’s topic. Tutors used PowerPoint to structure the session: their slides contained questions and prompts as well as their answers, written out on the slides. After the tutor read a question and modeled the answer, they would call on each student to answer the question in their own words. Thus, students were given equal opportunities to participate.

As mentioned earlier, one to three students could sign up for each session. The instructors expected speaking time to be equally distributed among all participants. For instance, in 30-minute sessions with two students and one tutor, the instructors expected that each participant would speak for 10 minutes. In reality, speaking time was typically split approximately in half between the tutor and the students, no matter how many students were present. Based on the recordings, in a session with one tutor and one student, each would get to speak for about 15 minutes. In a session with two or three students and a tutor, the tutor would still speak for 15 minutes, and the other 15 minutes would be split equally among the students. This distribution of speaking time was likely because the tutor was in charge of structuring the turn-taking procedure (calling on
students) as well as acknowledging and evaluating responses (providing corrections, clarifications, approval, affection, and relating to students’ answers). The tutor’s leading role in sustaining the conversation allowed students to process linguistic input and formulate their answers, but also restricted all interactions to the initiation-response-evaluation sequence and thus resembled classroom talk rather than natural conversation (Echevarría 2019, 176).

The length of students’ responses varied from ellipticals to short paragraphs (of up to eight sentences), depending on the topic and the type of question posed by the tutor. As may be expected, students produced more language on familiar topics, and their utterances were longer when the question was designed to elicit a narrative rather than a one-sentence answer (e.g., “Describe the house you grew up in” vs. “When will you graduate from the university?”). Even though (drawing on the ACTFL proficiency descriptors for Intermediate and Advanced Levels) we were tempted to look for the development of a paragraph or at least for consistent production of a string of sentences, it is important to remember that these tutoring sessions were framed as informal conversations with native speakers. Students were not coached to produce paragraphs and they were evaluated on their attendance records rather than the quality of the language produced in LinguaMeetings. For this reason, instead of focusing on evaluating students’ oral proficiency, the next section focuses on the opportunities that the LinguaMeeting platform presents for developing strategies for avoiding and repairing miscommunication.

4.2. Code-switching, negotiation of meaning, and interactional sequences in SPVEs

Research Question 2. How did students and tutors negotiate for meaning in instances of miscommunication in SPVE sessions?

This section reports on the instances of NoM in the tutoring sessions. The recorded sessions of two focal participants (Frank and Michael, 3rd year) were coded using the categories of NoM developed from Renner (2017). These students were selected because of the striking differences in their experiences with negotiating meaning. The contrast between these two students provides a more accurate portrayal of the LinguaMeeting experience. The following findings report the proportion of Russian-English use for negotiating meaning and describe the strategies used by Frank, Michael, and their tutors.
Figure 1 reports the number of NoM sequences in the three LinguaMeeting sessions analyzed for Frank and his tutor and the proportion of Russian and English use in the initiation of such sequences. For most of his sessions, Frank and his tutor worked in a one-on-one format, with a second student joining in only for Session 6. This format seems to have enabled – or even made necessary – frequent negotiation of meaning. Both Frank and his tutor preferred to use Russian to arrive at a mutual understanding, although both occasionally used English as well.

![Figure 1. Negotiation of meaning and code-switching (Frank)](image)

The specific strategies for negotiating meaning that were used by Frank and his tutor are reported in Figure 2.

Frank’s most frequently utilized strategy was Comprehension/Accuracy Checks. This strategy is proactive in that it ensures comprehension before the hearer indicates an issue. Frank typically used rising intonation to elicit feedback from the tutor and to confirm that his utterances were correct and understandable. For instance, speaking about his date of birth, Frank said: “Я родился семнадцати? Марта?” (I was born of the seventeen? Of March?) and paused, allowing the tutor to provide feedback. Frank’s second most-used strategy was Requests for Help. This strategy is similarly proactive, allowing him to seek help in formulating his answer. For instance, speaking about one of his university majors, Frank asked “Как по-русски machine learning?” (“How do you say ’machine learning’ in Russiap-n?”), explicitly requesting the tutor’s help in formulating an understandable utterance. Frank’s third most-relied on strategy was Clarification Requests which took place without code-switching into English, using phrases such as “Что?” (“What?”) or “Я не понимаю” (“I don’t understand”).
Frank’s tutor relied on a variety of strategies to clarify either her own or Frank’s words. In all three sessions, the tutor used Comprehension Checks to ensure that Frank could follow her speech. For example, whenever her utterance appeared too complex, she would follow it up a Comprehension Check as follows: “Мы изучаем очень глубоко все детали, которые нужны для формирования успешного бизнеса. Ты понимаешь?” (“We study in depth all the details that are necessary to establish a successful business. Do you understand?”).

The following excerpt provides examples of two other strategies commonly used by Frank’s tutor - Confirmation Checks and Clarification Requests:

**Tutor:** Считаешь ли ты обязательным высшее образование, и нужно ли оно?
**Do you think higher education is something everyone must have and is it necessary?**

**Frank:** Если человека нет высшего образование, его uh его uh как это warped?
**If a person doesn’t have higher education, his uh his uh what is warped?**

**Tutor:** Warped?

**Frank:** Я не знаю… Он не может видеть мир как… классный? Maybe?
**I don’t know… He can’t see the world as… cool? Maybe?**
Tutor: Uhhh so, I’m trying to understand you, you were saying that if a person doesn’t have a degree, he won’t see the world like other people see?”

Frank: Да.

Yes

Tutor: Мhm, я с тобой согласна.

Mhm, I agree with you.

As demonstrated in this example, in sessions with Frank, Clarification Requests could extend not only to negotiating Frank’s use of Russian, but also his use of English. Note how the tutor repeats the word “warped” with a rising intonation to elicit a clarification from Frank. The tutor’s use of Confirmation Checks also often involved a switch into English. For instance, in the example above, after Frank explains why higher education is necessary, the tutor uses English to confirm whether she had understood his point and, having confirmed it, switches back to Russian to express her agreement.

It can be argued that Frank and his tutor’s use of NoM strategies and code-switching were motivated by Frank’s proficiency level and his confidence in speaking Russian. Given that the student had difficulty formulating sentences and retrieving key vocabulary items (as evidenced by the high frequency of Requests for Help), the tutor had to rely on more explicit ways of ensuring understanding, such as switching directly into English.

Figure 3. Negotiation of meaning and code-switching (Michael)
Now let us compare Frank’s experience to the experience that Michael had in his sessions. The overall use of negotiation of meaning in Michael’s sessions is presented in Figure 3. Note the difference in scale between Frank’s and Michael’s graphs (the overall number of NoMs for Frank = 73; for Michael = 4).

Unlike Frank, Michael always worked in a group with two other students from his course. While it may be easy to assume that this format provided fewer opportunities for negotiating meaning (as it was necessary to provide time for all three students to respond to each question), a glance at Michael’s recorded sessions proves otherwise: Michael’s partners did engage in many NoM sequences. Michael’s answers, on the other hand, were well-formulated and typically fully answered the prompt. For example, consider the following excerpt:

**Tutor:** Считаешь ли ты обязательным высшее образование, и нужно ли оно?

*Do you think higher education is something everyone must have and is it necessary?*

**Michael:** я знаю, что есть карьеры, на котором- которых тебе нужно получить степень бакалавра, но я ещё думаю, что это важно, потому что высшее образование - это не только образование, это стать лучшим человеком.

*I know that there are careers where you need to get a bachelor’s degree, but I also think that it is important, because higher education is not just education, it is becoming a better person.*

**Tutor:** Хорошее замечание, спасибо!

*Good note, thank you!*

It is noteworthy that Michael spoke with confidence, at a natural pace. He was not lacking vocabulary, he had control of the “который” (“that”) clause: he did not need Requests for Help and did not use Comprehension Checks, which conveys his confidence in his command of the Russian language. Given that his answer was clear, the tutor, too, did not need to negotiate meaning and was able to acknowledge Michael’s contribution and move on.

Although, as has been pointed out above, Michael did not systematically engage in NoM, Figure 4 presents the strategies that were used by him and his tutor for comparison with Frank’s experiences of NoM.
As noted above, Michael engaged in NoM very rarely. As such, there is not much to say about his use of various strategies, except that he used four different strategies in the four times that he did need to negotiate meaning. It can be extrapolated (tentatively) that Michael did not have a preference for one single strategy and instead relied on context to decide how to negotiate meaning. In addition, note that like Michael, the tutor uses NoM strategies very rarely, which suggests that Michael was able to make himself understood. The lack of instances of NoM in Michael's case thus points to a high level of comprehension between him and his tutor.

The vastly different NoM profiles of these two learners from the same level point to a certain flexibility of SPVEs. In these sessions, students and tutors have plentiful opportunities for negotiating meaning, and they align with each other and adjust their participation and negotiation of meaning to each other's conversational styles and needs. In Frank's case, successful communication involved such work: Frank and his tutor actively supplemented gaps in his knowledge and made sure that they could understand one another. In Michael's case, negotiation of meaning was not necessary, and it was instead supplemented with follow-up questions, which extended the conversation. Furthermore, the fact that tutors were proficient in English allowed them to use this language as a resource.
to accommodate less proficient students and focus on the task at hand whenever negotiating meaning in Russian became difficult or inefficient.

4.3. Students’ attitudes, perceptions, and beliefs (APB) about SPVEs

**Research Question 3.** How did Russian 2nd- and 3rd-year learners perceive SPVEs as an instrument for developing speaking proficiency in the time of emergency remote teaching during the COVID pandemic, and what attitudes and belief systems had an impact on their judgement?

For this section, we triangulated the data obtained from the post-semester survey and the interviews with focal students to examine student perceptions of LinguaMeeting as an instrument for developing oral production skills.

Of the entire group (n=52), 12 students from the intermediate sections and 16 students from the advanced section participated in the post-semester survey (55%). Students were asked a series of questions addressing APB, challenges associated with SPVE sessions, and logistical issues related to scheduling, length, and frequency of sessions. Open-ended responses were coded by theme, and percentages were calculated based on the frequency with which each topic was discussed in open-ended responses. Follow-up interviews targeted students’ individual accounts of SPVE sessions and were structured around the themes identified in the survey data. Transcripts were coded using the concept coding approach and iterative and recursive content analysis (Saldaña 2021), drawing the definitions of the key concepts from current literature. First, the researchers read the transcripts independently to identify participants’ APB and emerging themes. Then, they compared codes and coding categories, and selected six recurring themes for further analysis. The following coding categories have emerged from the analysis of the qualitative datasets: (1) learners’ self-reported learning outcomes and perceived impact; (2) continuity in the learning experience; (3) tutor identity; (4) affective factors and foreign language anxiety associated with SPVEs; (5) students’ general beliefs about foreign language learning; and (6) logistical issues interfering with the development of oral proficiency. These themes are described in greater detail in the following sections.

4.3.1. Learners’ self-evaluation and perceived impact

The first set of questions addressed self-reported learning outcomes from participating in SPVEs. Among the most improved skills, learners in both groups noted “conversation skills,” “listening comprehension skills,” and
“pronunciation and intonation.” The least improved area was the “range and depth of Russian vocabulary” (Table 2). In response to the open-ended question regarding one skill that showed the most significant improvement, learners almost unanimously named spontaneity in conversation and improved listening comprehension. Spontaneity was cited as the most valuable in connection to the ability to create with language (ACTFL Intermediate Level): to think on one’s feet, use language with greater automaticity, and express ideas using familiar language. According to the participants: “[The most affected language skill was] coming up with what to say automatically, compared to most assignments, which I have a lot of time to think about generally” and “the ability to think on my feet and figure out ways to say what I want, even if I don’t know the particular words for it.”

Table 2. Survey question: How did your participation in LinguaMeeting contribute to your Russian learning? Rate your skills in terms of improvement over time.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Target Skill</th>
<th>No change</th>
<th>Somewhat improved</th>
<th>Improved</th>
<th>Significantly Improved</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Listening comprehension skills</td>
<td>10.71% 3</td>
<td>28.57% 8</td>
<td>57.14% 16</td>
<td>3.57% 1</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range &amp; depth of vocabulary</td>
<td>14.29% 4</td>
<td>46.43% 13</td>
<td>35.71% 10</td>
<td>3.57% 1</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of grammar in spontaneous communication</td>
<td>14.29% 4</td>
<td>28.57% 8</td>
<td>50.00% 14</td>
<td>7.14% 2</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pronunciation and intonation</td>
<td>10.71% 3</td>
<td>28.57% 8</td>
<td>53.57% 15</td>
<td>7.14% 2</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conversation skills</td>
<td>17.86% 5</td>
<td>14.29% 4</td>
<td>64.29% 18</td>
<td>3.57% 1</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Learners were also asked to evaluate the impact of LinguaMeeting sessions on their motivation to study Russian and engage with Russian people and culture on the scale from “no change” to “significantly improved.” The responses to this question varied highly across two levels, with the impact on attitudes toward Russia and Russian people being rated somewhat lower than other benefits (Table 3). Among positive factors, many students noted an “increased confidence when speaking Russian to strangers” and “confidence speaking in Russian in Zoom class,” followed by “increased motivation to continue with Russian study” in future semesters.
Although the option for “decreased motivation” was not provided in this question due to limited space, learners were encouraged to add comments about each impact category in the following open-ended question.

Table 3. Survey question: How did your participation in LinguaMeeting contribute to your motivation to study Russian? Rate your skills and knowledge in terms of improvement over time.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Impact category</th>
<th>No change</th>
<th>Somewhat improved</th>
<th>Improved</th>
<th>Significantly Improved</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge about Russia and Russian people</td>
<td>28.57% 8</td>
<td>28.57% 8</td>
<td>25.00% 7</td>
<td>17.86% 5</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive attitudes toward Russia and its people</td>
<td>42.86% 12</td>
<td>17.86% 13</td>
<td>25.00% 7</td>
<td>14.29% 4</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivation to continue Russian study</td>
<td>25.00% 7</td>
<td>25.00% 7</td>
<td>25.00% 7</td>
<td>25.00% 7</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivation to study abroad in Russia</td>
<td>35.71% 10</td>
<td>25.00% 7</td>
<td>17.86% 5</td>
<td>21.43% 6</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confidence when speaking Russian to strangers</td>
<td>21.43% 6</td>
<td>39.29% 11</td>
<td>32.14% 9</td>
<td>7.14% 2</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confidence when speaking Russian in class</td>
<td>25.00% 7</td>
<td>35.71% 10</td>
<td>32.14% 9</td>
<td>7.14% 2</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.3.2. Continuity in the learning experience

This section of the survey explored learners’ perceptions of their progression in the L2 speaking development from grammar instruction and controlled production in class to semi-authentic conversations with NS tutors in SPVE sessions. Participants described how classwork prepared them for SPVE conversations and what specific components of classwork were particularly instrumental for scaffolding SPVE sessions.

Overall, 85% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that classwork prepared them adequately for SPVE sessions. However, when compared across two language levels, learners in the 3rd-year group showed greater variability in responses, as shown by the larger standard deviation.
in this group (M=2.43; SD=.73) compared to (M=2.00; SD =.0) in the regular 2nd-year section and (M=1.67; SD=.47) in the hybrid 2nd-year section. This variability can be explained by the complexity of prompts (e.g., describe a place; tell a story; present a simple argument) presented to 3rd-year learners during SPVE sessions. Participants in the 2nd-year group almost unanimously named grammar, vocabulary, and communicative activities covered in class meetings as their support systems for successful engagement in SPVEs. As one participant wrote: “it always seemed as though I had just gone over the topics in class and so I was well prepared for the meeting.” At the same time, students whose SPVE session was scheduled on the first week of the bi-weekly SPVE cycle felt disadvantaged because they typically began to learn the new material in the same week that their session was held. A similar sentiment was expressed by several 3rd-year learners. Since speaking prompts in the 3rd-year group extended to broader social and cultural issues requiring a solid grasp of more formal vocabulary and syntax (e.g., relative clauses, conditional sentences), thematic vocabulary was listed as the main predictor of productive communication in SPVEs – “I felt like I had a decent vocabulary from class and was able to express ideas using this vocabulary during the LinguaMeetings.” Unlike 2nd-year learners, 3rd-year learners did not consider grammar a necessary component of class preparation for SPVEs.

4.3.3. Tutor identity
Although tutor identity was not singled out in the survey as a separate impact factor, more than half of survey respondents (62%) noted that communicating with NS tutors was the most enjoyable component of SPVEs. Tutor identity was linked to (a) engagement in naturally occurring conversation; (b) low stress explained by the young age of tutors and their no-judgment approach; (c) communication “in Russian only”; (d) acquisition of informal vocabulary; and (e) first-hand experience with Russia “right now.” Tutor identity was often described in connection to the naturalness of conversation and authentic language use in “a controlled environment” but was also linked to increased foreign language anxiety.
Table 4. Perceptions of interaction in SPVE linked to tutor identity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coding categorization</th>
<th>Examples from coded survey data (open-ended responses)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(a) engagement in naturally occurring conversation</td>
<td>“The conversations felt pretty natural, which was beneficial, I think.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(b) low stress explained by young age of tutors</td>
<td>“Being able to speak with a native speaker in a low stress but still high expectation environment”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(c) communication in Russian only</td>
<td>“The most enjoyable and rewarding part of the LinguaMeeting experience was being able to communicate with native speaker and have them understand me.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(d) acquisition of informal vocabulary and natural language use</td>
<td>“It was interesting to speak to a native speaker who used conversational slang.” “It was nice to learn new vocabulary from native speakers and to get to practice using it.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(e) a first-hand experience with Russia “right now”</td>
<td>“Being able to find similarities in taste and interest with a native Russian speaker of my age.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.3.4. Affective factors and foreign language anxiety associated with SPVEs

Reports of L2 anxiety were linked to (1) the number of learners in each session; (2) the identity of tutors; and (3) anticipated awkwardness caused by the possibility of a communication breakdown. Several learners in both levels noted the presence of Russian heritage speakers in LinguaMeeting sessions as inhibiting their willingness to communicate [L2WTC] (Kubanyiova and Yue 2019). As one learner noted, “I usually had a lot of anxiety going into the [SPVE] meetings because I was always with heritage speakers - during the sessions, I would get very confused because they would speak to the instructor using vocabulary I did not know, which she [tutor] would then expect from me.” Carol from the 2nd-year group, who did not connect with the personality of her tutor, was particularly stressed and described her whole experience as “nerve-racking” because she felt uncomfortable engaging in conversations with a stranger who was also a native speaker of a language she could not speak confidently. Jeremy from Carol’s section
used the same attribute – “nerve-racking” – to convey the angst that preceded each of his SPVE sessions.

The fact that Carol’s sessions were one-on-one with the tutor made her even more anxious: “It was just me and the tutor which added some extra stress on me because I was definitely not getting what she was saying most of the time.” The learners from the 3rd-year group who had one-on-one sessions with SPVE tutors, however, reported that they felt less stressed in one-on-one sessions compared to the meetings where they were joined by one or two other students from their class. Michael (3rd-year), for example, noted:

I had two [sessions] where I had other people, and that was a little more stressful but not too bad… I had to respond to what they [the tutors] were saying and at the same time respond to the other person and it was a little more stressful, I guess, I don’t know how exactly… I think it was just being judged, but sort of like having someone else in the class watching me struggle with speaking Russian.

As post-semester interviews took place at the beginning of the second semester of SPVE, all six interviewees reported increased self-confidence and ease with which they could now communicate with native speaking tutors, noting a sense of pride and achievement, and demonstrating evidence of strengthened ability to create with language (ACTFL Intermediate Level) and deal with complications in a communicative situation (ACTFL Advanced Level). For example, consider the following excerpt from Frank’s interview:

I was impressed by my ability to say something, explain something, and I missed the word, and I was able to find my way around it and was able to understand what I was trying to say, or I was able to fully flesh out what I was trying to say.

4.3.5. Students’ beliefs about foreign language learning
To gauge deeply-rooted beliefs and attitudes toward SVPE and language learning in general, the data from the survey responses were used as a springboard for in-depth questioning about individual learning experiences. Interviewees were first asked to describe their favorite or preferred in-class activity. Then, they were asked whether they believed if SPVE alone would be sufficient to learn to speak a foreign language. Finally, participants’ general beliefs about foreign language learning were elicited through a series of questions on effective strategies for L2 learning.

One of the striking findings in this line of inquiry was the fact that participants’ desired competency in Russian was not one they wanted to
practice during class activities. All but one focal participant named grammar activities and drills as their preferred learning activity in class and speaking or writing fluency as their desired learning outcome (Table 5).

Table 5. Learners’ attitudes and beliefs about learning to speak Russian (L2) via SPVE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Julie (2)</th>
<th>Gretchen (2)</th>
<th>Carol (2)</th>
<th>Jeremy (2)</th>
<th>Frank (3)</th>
<th>Michael (3)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>desired skill</strong></td>
<td>Speaking fluency</td>
<td>speaking fluency</td>
<td>conversation</td>
<td>writing reading</td>
<td>writing reading</td>
<td>speaking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>preferred class activity</strong></td>
<td>whole group activities</td>
<td>grammar activities</td>
<td>grammar, test study guides</td>
<td>grammar exercises</td>
<td>grammar drills</td>
<td>grammar activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SPVE as a tool to learn L2</strong></td>
<td>casual, good as additional help, but cannot replace classroom instruction</td>
<td>effective way to practice speaking &amp; vocabulary</td>
<td>a way to connect with other L2 speakers during the pandemic</td>
<td>not as good as speaking practice with the instructor; not the same as speaking to someone in real life</td>
<td>“involved learning” learning how to “get this point across”</td>
<td>effective for learning to participate in a natural conversation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The analysis of the interviews also revealed that Russian learners had disparate beliefs and attitudes towards SPVE as (1) a course component; (2) a temporary alternative to out-of-class conversation practice sessions with the instructor; and (3) a language learning activity. All six focal students stated that SPVE sessions helped them improve speaking, reading, and comprehension skills, and indicated that SPVE was a much-needed component of their Russian course during the COVID-19 pandemic. At the same time, the artificiality of the SPVE conversation structure, the lack of thematic depth, and the predictability of conversations were cited as factors making SPVE sessions less desirable for speaking practice. Jeremy (2nd year), for example, stated that in-person conversation practice sessions with his course instructor felt more authentic:

The problem I have with LinguaMeeting is the format of it, where they [tutors] usually go through slides, and then they ask you a question, and you give your response; they give their response, they ask some questions you know. And then, like they cut off that topic and move to the next topic. The conversation does not really flow in a natural way and it doesn’t really teach you to have a full conversation... It seems like it just teaches
you to come up with your response, and then it just stops before it really progresses. Whereas in the conversation practices that we have done in the classes with our professors, usually they have one or two prompts that they spend the entire time on. Personally, I think that’s more effective.

Extending the discussion of SPVE to a more general conversation about language learning, Gretchen noted that the conversation in SPVE sessions felt forced because she did not have a personal connection with the tutor: to her, conversation partners should have common interests or a shared affinity, which is not usually the case with SPVE. Michael noted that language cannot be learned entirely through conversation: “[Conversation] is a good way to practice it but I think grammar exercises and vocab exercises and stuff are the fundamentals that you can practice through LinguaMeeting and conversation.” A similar belief was expressed by Carol who stated that, with all the benefits SPVE can bring to the learning process, grammar was more important for learning to speak along with listening to Russian music and news podcasts. For Carol, LinguaMeeting resembled having a private tutor who helps you with your language study. However, Carol was disappointed that her tutor did not know how to explain Russian grammar and vocabulary, which discouraged her from asking questions during her sessions. Frank echoed some of these sentiments stating that learning a language by conversing and immersing in it was helpful but only when one enters this “immersive” context fully prepared in terms of grammar, particularly, the case system.

A distinct set of beliefs was shared by Julie, the only heritage learner in the interview group, who appreciated an opportunity to learn to speak from a native speaker: “In the past, where I learned from a nonnative speaker and I would pronounce certain words differently, my mom would start laughing like “No, that's not how you say it,” so I definitely like native speakers, that is just my preference” and also “if I’m exposed to a group of people who speak [the] language, it’s just so much easier for me to learn, so I feel like if you surround yourself by people who speak that language it’ll be easier to learn [it].”

4.3.6. Individual learning styles and logistical issues associated with SVPEs

Several questions on the survey targeted various logistical details linked to learners’ experiences with SPVE sessions. Students were asked about their preferred frequency and length of SPVEs, and their experience with the SPVE platform.

The length of SPVE sessions is connected to the concept of “time-on-task,” or the amount of physical time a L2 learner engages with the target
language. Increasing a learner’s contact time with the foreign language is believed to contribute significantly to oral proficiency learning outcomes (Omaggio Hadley 2001; Rifkin 2003). According to 73% of the participants, 30-minute biweekly sessions in groups of 2-3 students were an adequate arrangement for Fall 2020. However, students’ responses varied when they were asked whether they wished to continue with the same set-up in the following semester (Table 6). About a half of the respondents felt that one-on-one meetings can be more beneficial than small group sessions, while other students wanted to continue with group sessions on a weekly, bi-weekly, or monthly basis. This variability in learners’ responses may be explained by their sense of agency and the belief systems underlying their individual learning styles and objectives. Their first experience with SPVE informed their understanding of their individual best learning routine, and motivated them to re-evaluate their participation in light of what they felt made SPVE sessions effective for their own learning.

Table 6. What is your preference for your LinguaMeeting schedule next semester? Choose one.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Preferred Length and Format of SPVE sessions</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>30-minute group meeting (with 2 other students) every week</td>
<td>19.23% 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-minute group meeting (with 2 other students) every other week (bi-weekly)</td>
<td>26.92% 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-minute individual meeting with a tutor every week</td>
<td>15.38% 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-minute individual meeting with a tutor every other week (bi-weekly)</td>
<td>26.92% 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-minute group meeting with a tutor 2-3 times a semester</td>
<td>7.69% 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-minute individual meeting with a tutor 2-3 times a semester</td>
<td>3.85% 1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Participants were also asked about pricing and the amount they were willing to pay for SPVEs in future semesters. 36% of the participants were fully satisfied with the rate of $5 for one small-group session, while 40% indicated that they were willing to pay a larger fee to have individual sessions with a tutor. Finally, 24% of the respondents stated that they preferred to have an alternative (non-SPVE) weekly speaking practice. While this variation may be due to socio-economic variables, individual
learning styles, beliefs, and experienced anxiety may have contributed to these diverse preferences.

5. Discussion
Given the lack of research on L2 speaking development in SPVE, this study took an unconventional approach by examining both the interactional features of SPVE sessions and L2 learners’ perceptions of these features as conditions for language learning. This approach was grounded in two frameworks: one that explains language learning through interaction and negotiation of meaning and one that draws on the notion of discourse features and communicative functions, such as ask and answer questions, narrate a story, etc. as targets for oral proficiency development (ACTFL 2012). Combining these two distinct epistemological lenses allowed the researchers to triangulate the analysis of SPVE conversations and the analysis of learner perspectives to zero in on the efficacy of SPVEs and develop a comprehensive understanding of SPVEs as a platform for teaching L2 speaking.

The analysis of the structure of SPVE sessions revealed several trends. First, while speaking time was equally split among students in each session, tutors’ speaking time alone constituted half of the session. These findings can be explained by Tecedor and Vasseur’s (2020) characterization of SPVE compared to traditional virtual exchanges: “NSs in SPVE are paid and exchanges do not operate under the same principles of reciprocity and collaboration” (5). Indeed, tutors and students in our sessions were in a hierarchical relationship: tutors assumed the role of session moderators, and students’ role was to simply participate in the conversation.

The predominant pattern of communication was thus “initiation → response → evaluation” and it was influenced both by the hierarchy of participants’ roles in SPVE sessions and by the prompts prepared by course instructors. By sending tutors the lists of questions and asking them to share their answers, instructors unwittingly contributed to the artificial nature of SPVE conversations: tutors thought that to be effective in their role, they had to complete all of the prompts that they had received. This, in turn, meant that they avoided follow-up questions to save time. From the students’ point of view, the fact that they had to switch from question to question without developing a naturally-flowing conversation contributed to the perceived artificiality of SPVE conversations.

From the instructors’ point of view, on the other hand, this design of prompts was intended to provide a scaffold for a continuous conversation as well as to train the level-specific types of language that
learners are expected to perform (ACTFL 2012). Instructors realized that students and tutors may need time to connect as human beings and may never find shared interests; for this reason, specific prompts and questions were meant to keep the conversation going without awkward pauses. Thus, while free-flowing conversations on a certain topic may feel more authentic, without a structure, conversations could peter out quickly. The design of the prompts additionally had significance in reaching some of the benchmarks of oral proficiency: while prompts in the second year were designed primarily to elicit responses consisting of sentences and strings of sentences, and occasionally simple paragraphs; prompts in the third year encouraged learners to offer extended responses from several sentences to full paragraphs and extended discourse. Communicative functions ranged from answering a short question to producing a narrative and to making and defending an argument. Still, despite the multiple considerations that went into designing these prompts, our data analysis demonstrated flaws in their design. For this reason, we recommend that instructors consider various speech acts when designing prompts for SPVE sessions. For example, sessions can be structured not only as informal conversations, but also as interviews (where students interview their tutors) or debates. For more meaningful integration of SPVE sessions into the curriculum, instructors can ask students to report the results of their interviews in class or to write them up as short papers. Furthermore, when providing instructions to tutors, instructors can highlight the importance of developing topics rather than covering all of the prompts.

Despite these imperfections of prompts, the triangulation of NoM and interview data pointed to both linguistic and affective gains as a result of the LinguaMeeting experience (also see Sama and Wu 2019). While our detailed analysis of NoM focused on two students with vastly diverse experiences, interview data suggest that no matter how much (or little) students negotiated meaning, those NoM sequences greatly contributed to the development of their L2 speaking skills which then fostered confidence in using Russian. For students, like Frank, who struggled to express themselves, these struggles were highly productive for improving speaking skills. Frank notes:

I think I’ve felt more comfortable using “который” clauses and being able to describe words with more words. [...] Cause you have to use that to get around words you don’t know. I think there was definitely a shift between the first and the last one [LinguaMeeting session] in comfort and confidence, especially I’d get more comfortable speaking.
Thus, instead of feeling upset at the fact that he had to struggle to express himself and to negotiate meaning frequently, Frank eventually felt more confident in his ability to do so. His interview responses suggest that he has learned strategies for resolving misunderstandings and expressing his opinions on topics that were beyond his range of vocabulary. This experience resulted in perceived linguistic and affective gains.

Students like Michael, on the other hand, who rarely had difficulty expressing themselves and felt fairly confident about their speaking ability, experienced greater affective (as opposed to linguistic) gains. For Michael, for instance, misunderstandings – on the rare occasion that they arose – always “got smoothed out instantly,” after a single clarification question. Expectedly, when asked about his biggest area of improvement in terms of his command of the Russian language, Michael answered: “I was definitely more confident. And I could express more intricate ideas, like, beyond just answering a question with just a noun. I feel like I could elaborate more. I think it’s just the confidence from that.” Thus, while Michael did indirectly report noticing linguistic gains, he was more aware of and focused on the affective gains from his LinguaMeeting experience. Like Sama and Wu’s (2019), our findings suggest that while linguistic gains in SPVE settings may vary from student to student, affective gains are almost unavoidable.

Finally, the qualitative analysis of survey results and interviews allowed us to trace the origin of learners’ communicative strategies to their belief systems and attitudes toward SPVE as a mandatory course component. Our findings confirm Brown’s (2009) conclusion that teachers and students often have disparate notions of effective learning, and the intersection of the two sets of beliefs has long-term ramifications for the effectiveness of instruction. In the present study, Russian learners instinctively equated fluency with the acquisition of grammatical structures, which is evidenced in their penchant for discrete-point grammar instruction in the classroom. They did not show a strong belief in SPVE as the bridge to L2 oral proficiency due to its artificiality and scriptedness. Researchers and teaching practitioners thus need to look more closely at Russian learners’ previous experiences with L2 learning, particularly at the pedagogies and assessment instruments in the first year of Russian language instruction, which may establish a deep-seated belief about grammar instruction being the only necessary condition for L2 speaking development.

L2 anxiety caused by SPVE was another important factor for understanding its impact on learners’ self-confidence. While the fact that tutors were native speakers added to the feeling of apprehension (see also Lee 2004), the main source of anxiety reported by the learners came
from seeing SPVE sessions as a space where their L2 speaking skills were tested in front of (often more capable) peers and an NS stranger. Although anxiety was not measured in this study, learners’ reports echoed Satar and Özdener’s (2008) findings that videoconferencing can trigger strong anxiety in less proficient students. The high variation in the preferences for individual or group sessions with an SPVE tutor point to the diverse origins of L2 anxiety among participants: L2 anxiety is an individual phenomenon and it needs to be treated as such when designing SPVE activities. In particular, greater flexibility and choice in the structure and length of sessions may help accommodate individual insecurities and learning styles. Additionally, hierarchical relationships between students and SPVE tutors may have further contributed to anxiety among Russian learners because they were always positioned as respondents and interviewees, and never as moderators or interviewers. Building a more productive space for collaborative work may help strengthen student-tutor connections and equalize tutor and learner roles in SPVEs.

Finally, our findings show that heritage speakers may present a source of anxiety for regular L2 learners in SPVE, and they need to be grouped together for individual small group SPVE sessions. While placing heritage speakers in a special language section may seem impossible in some programs, SPVE may become a place where heritage speakers and their unique learning needs can be accommodated.

6. Conclusion
The current study examined the structural features of SPVE sessions managed by a for-profit provider, LinguaMeeting, and implemented in the 2nd- and 3rd-year Russian courses during the COVID-19 pandemic. SVPE was implemented as an out-of-class activity to replace in-person conversation practice. In addition to interactional data, this study explored students’ belief systems and traced their perceptions and attitudes towards SPVE to their interactional moves and their willingness to communicate in the target language.

It is important to acknowledge that this study has limitations that restrict the generalizability and interpretability of its findings. The principal limitation lies in the exploratory nature of this research. The effects of the pandemic and the rapid transition to remote instruction may have forced Russian learners in this study to consider SPVE as a temporary solution to the sudden lack of opportunities to practice conversation skills and to overlook the benefits of SPVE outside of the pandemic. Examining students’ learning gains from SPVE over a longer period and measuring
their progress with a series of proficiency tests and L2 anxiety instruments may provide more concrete evidence for the impact of SPVE on L2 speaking development. Furthermore, a more thorough quantitative analysis of the interactional dynamics of SPVE may allow researchers to trace learners’ speaking development over time, particularly in L2 oral proficiency descriptors (e.g., the length of utterance, communicative functions, etc.), potentially with a larger number of participants from various levels of Russian instruction. In addition, a conversation-analytic approach could shed light on the artificiality of conversation that was perceived by our participants. Due to limited space, this study reports only a fraction of data on students’ use of English in SPVE, which in itself is an intriguing topic to explore in the era of the multilingual turn in applied linguistics. More research is needed to understand how translangaging in SPVE may create an ecology where multiple languages are validated and used to navigate meaning-making. Finally, as a paid service, SPVE may add to the overall cost of course materials, and ultimately restrict access to Russian instruction for some underprivileged groups of students. Providing greater flexibility in the choice of packages or offering an alternative assignment to SPVE may be a way to address socio-economic disparities among students in a single section. Overall, SPVE shows great potential for teaching L2 speaking, and may become a new norm in foreign language instruction beyond the pandemic.

Appendix

Sample SPVE prompt

LinguaMeeting – Session 3
Instructions for Tutors (RUSS 300)

Topic – Свободное время, образ жизни

Общие вопросы для обсуждения:

здоровый образ жизни?

Hypotheticals: Куда бы вы хотели поехать на отдых? Если бы у вас были деньги и время, в какую страну вы бы хотели поехать? (practice subjective with БЫ) Что вас привлекает в этой стране? Или в этом месте?

Есть ли у вас какое-нибудь хобби? Чем бы вы хотели заниматься, если бы могли выбрать новое хобби или увлечение? Почему вы хотели бы этим заниматься?

Past tense narration: Расскажите подробно (в деталях) о вашей последней поездке – по работе или в отпуск (на отдых) до пандемии. Куда вы ездили? Вы ездили в эту поездку с друзьями или с родителями? Когда (в какое время года) была эта поездка? Какие интересные места вы посетили? Что вы делали в этой поездке? (ходили в походы, посещали музеи и исторические места, ходили в ночные клубы, танцевали, ели экзотическую еду в ресторанах, загорали на пляже, занимались рыбалькой или охотой? Что вам больше всего понравилось в этой поездке?


References


Make Me Talk: A Bichronous Russian Language Course for Beginners

OLGA GARABRANDT, IRINA SIX

1. Introduction

Even before the pandemic, the Russian faculty at the University of Kansas (KU) had considered creating an online Russian language program. The goal was to make courses of all levels accessible for a wider audience of learners, such as non-traditional students, students in distance learning programs, and high-school students. It was the COVID-19 pandemic, however, that spurred the urgent development of online courses.

During the summer of 2020, a team of three people, Dr. Irina Six, the Russian Program Coordinator, and two graduate students, Olga Garabrandt and Chul Hyun Hwang, with the technical support of the university’s Center for Online and Distance Learning, designed an online bichronous beginning Russian course which means that it integrates asynchronous components with synchronous sessions (Martin, Polly, and Ritzhaupt 2020). Before launching the work on the bichronous course, the course developers had already completed substantial background preparation, such as surveying the student population to identify the limitations of the existing in-person instruction and considering tactics to overcome the main challenges of asynchronous teaching. Some of the challenges of online instruction include a lack of interpersonal communication, online fatigue, and limited opportunities for speaking.

The course developers chose to create the new course on the Blackboard learning management system, utilizing the free web-based textbook Mezhdu namı by DeBenedette, Comer, Smyslova, and Perkins (www.mezhdunami.org), pioneered at KU in 2009. Grounded in processing instruction theory (VanPatten 1996; Comer and deBenedette 2011), this open-access interactive textbook provides explicit explanations of Russian grammar and offers structured input activities that engage learners in a gradual process of mapping forms to meanings. Other advantages of this textbook for using it in asynchronous teaching are the abundance of both reading and auditory input, the online format, and the variety of resources to choose the tasks from. In addition to the main online component, Mezhdu namı includes Classroom Activities and Homework Assignments workbooks, and it provides curricular support (classroom handouts, PowerPoint presentations, transcripts of audio recordings, lesson plans, sample tests, etc.). Additionally, the Mezhdu namı website includes downloadable files.
with vocabulary lists for each chapter and an online dictionary with a search bar. The first semester course covers the first four units of the textbook.

The development of the bichronous language course was a new experience for all members of the team. Driven by the desire to provide students with high-quality remote instruction that enables learners to work independently, the course development team set the goal of creating an attractive product that would eliminate the risk of COVID exposure, and in the long run, open the study of Russian language to audiences outside the university. The course development process included formulating the course vision, deciding on the course structure, and selecting the technology tools and methods for their user-friendly implementation at the beginner level.

Through the asynchronous components, the new bichronous course allows learners to work at their own pace and adjust their focus based on their individual needs and interests (Chen, Liu, and Wong 2007; Sazonova and Ivanova 2020). The course does not require the immediate guidance of an instructor or any communication with peers during four asynchronous weekdays, but it includes intensive interpersonal interaction in the target language during a synchronous group summary meeting on the fifth weekday. Outside of conducting the synchronous session, the instructor’s work in this bichronous course involves daily grading, recording video messages to students, making minor adjustments to the coursework, and being available to students during office hours and by email.

This article will describe the key course design principles, best practices for teaching it, and the key outcomes of implementing a bichronous course at KU.

2. Course Development Principles
One of the primary goals of the bichronous course development was to ensure that the instruction is at least of the same quality as in the face-to-face classes. Remote students are expected to learn the same amount of material and take the same tests as students in traditional classrooms. The development of students’ speaking skills was of special concern because it is an expected weak spot in fully asynchronous courses (Wang and Chen 2009; Perveen 2016; Sazonova and Ivanova 2020). The course creators had to ensure that bichronous students do not fall behind in speaking. Another critical need was the adoption of appropriate teacher-student communication channels that would enable the instructor to guide, monitor, and encourage learner progress. Finally, the course developers aimed at designing ways of keeping students motivated by stimulating peer-to-peer interaction and introducing them to Russian culture.

Summarizing the information gained from multiple training sessions, student feedback, and personal experience in online language
teaching, the team formulated five key guiding principles that were applied throughout the course development process. Adherence to these principles listed below has proven to be a significant factor in the successful implementation of the course.

(1) **Manageability.** A frequent complaint of remote students is their struggle to keep up with the course material due to the overwhelming amount of work they need to do on their own (Khoirin and Azimah 2020, 133). Therefore, the bichronous course activities must be maximally efficient and manageable, yet, at the same time, the course must align with the number of credit hours and keep up with the language program standards. When it comes to adapting the textbook and modifying face-to-face teaching practices, the asynchronous format requires instructors to select and create materials in such a way as to ensure the efficiency of each daily activity to avoid overwhelming the students with online work.

(2) **Consistency.** In asynchronous teaching, consistency makes expectations clear and promotes discipline (Drucker and Fleischhauer 2021). Uniformity in daily and weekly work enables users to move through the course efficiently once they have an established routine. Hence, the course had to be designed in such a way that the structure of the weekly activities remains uniform. All the elements of the course, such as the ratio between synchronous and asynchronous learning, the types of tasks, the nature of non-graded and graded assignments, as well as their sequencing need to remain uniform and predictable from day to day with only the content changing. The principle of uniformity and consistency in online tasks and assignments decreases the time and effort that students need to put forth in order to organize their own learning.

(3) **Focus on speaking.** Creating classroom environments where students easily develop their speaking abilities is a challenge in any language course, and even more so with asynchronous delivery. The asynchronous format of instruction can have advantages for teaching reading, listening, and writing, but shows limitations when it comes to the development of speaking abilities (Wang and Chen 2009; Perveen 2016; Sazonova and Ivanova 2020). Therefore, course developers needed to devote special attention to speaking when designing the course which has a large asynchronous component. Asynchronous instruction allows students to work on presentational speaking and pronunciation. However, authentic interpersonal speaking involves unscripted interaction, negotiation of meaning, and real-time adjustments (Cutshall 2012), which can only be achieved in the synchronous mode of instruction.

(4) **Focus on communication.** A common reason for a decrease in student motivation in asynchronous courses is the lack of interpersonal connection and a sense of community (Bernard et al., 2009). In asynchronous instruction, students cannot receive immediate answers to questions that
arise while they are studying alone, for instance, when they need to clarify the information about grammar that they did not understand. Therefore, shifting language instruction from face-to-face to the bichronous mode required the setting up of new communication arrangements between instructor and students, as well as among peers.

(5) Focus on culture. The desire to engage with the target culture is another component which plays a major role in student motivation to study the language (Celik and Yildiz 2019). The remote mode of instruction, as well as the recent rapid growth of culturally relevant content online due to the pandemic allow for rich and diverse online cultural experiences. Therefore, the new bichronous course takes full advantage of this resource. Cultural encounters were designed to stimulate students’ cognitive and emotional involvement in the course and to organize online peer-to-peer interaction through discussion boards. Additionally, culture-related tasks provide students with a much needed break after the cognitively demanding independent work on the acquisition of language structures.

The five above-mentioned principles guided the course developers in the choice of course structure, techniques, tasks, and tools throughout the process of bichronous course building and implementation.

3. Course Structure
The curriculum of the bichronous Russian course follows the schedule of KU face-to-face five-credit Russian language classes that meet daily. It also reflects the requirements of the KU Russian program, which include student participation in cultural encounters. The course is 14 weeks long.

The weekly schedule of the bichronous course incorporates the following three components:

(1) Asynchronous days (Monday – Thursday). Students reported that each daily module takes between ninety minutes and three hours to complete.

(2) Summary day (Friday). A 50-minute synchronous group session with the instructor.

(3) “Russian weekend.” Weekend work involves online cultural encounters and participation in the Blackboard discussion board forum.

Figure 1 shows the beginning page of an asynchronous daily learning module on Blackboard.
Prior to the Friday synchronous meeting, students access the list of the language topics that they need to review. Before the meeting, they download the handout which lists the meeting activities and serves as a guide for the synchronous oral work.

The learning modules of the asynchronous days target all language skills, except for interpersonal speaking, and they are strictly uniform in daily tasks and sequence. Each asynchronous day consists of the following components:

Each day begins with a set of learning goals that are displayed on the first page of the module. Students watch a short video from their instructor that draws their attention to the possible challenges in the daily input. They also read the “A Little about the Language” section on the textbook website and complete the related assignments.

3.2. Engagement with the input.
Students are asked to read and listen to the Mezhdu nami input dialogues, and to repeat after the speakers. Following that, they complete the comprehension activities in the section in the online Mezhdu nami lesson titled “Did You Understand Everything?”

3.3. Blackboard practice assignments
The course included four to six online Blackboard practice assignments that provided automated feedback (correct/incorrect), but did not count toward the overall course grade. These assignments were multiple-choice, matching, and short answer exercises. Most of them were digitized from the Mezhdu nami Classroom Activities and Homework Book, however, some were created specifically for the course. For example, the course developers
designed quizzes that help students review a few topics at a time at the end of the week or of a chapter.

3.4. Graded assignments
Three graded assignments are due by the end of each day: a review quiz (graded automatically), a writing assignment, and an oral assignment (both uploaded and graded manually). The course developers initially considered using the VoiceThread online recording tool for oral assignments, however, the recordings submitted through VoiceThread do not appear in the Blackboard “Needs Grading” page, which causes unnecessary complications to the grading process. For this reason, the daily oral assignments are submitted as uploaded audio files.

4. Best practices
The bichronous course titled “Elementary Russian I” was offered at KU in the Fall semester of 2020. In the Spring of 2021, it was offered again, in addition to its second part Elementary Russian II. The bichronous section has replaced one of the three face-to-face sections that were offered at KU before the pandemic. This section summarizes the practices and activities that have worked well in teaching the bichronous Beginner Russian course.

In the daily video recording, the instructor highlights the key grammar, vocabulary, and/or pronunciation topics focusing on the issues that might present a potential problem for students in the absence of an immediate opportunity to ask questions or receive the instructor’s feedback. The length of the videos ranges from two to eight minutes. The videos provide another channel for communicating the material to students in addition to the book, which only has written grammar explanations. The videos are meant to be reused; however, instructors could create their own videos to meet the needs of the current group or to address the observed mistakes. The platform Kaltura Capture has been a useful tool for recording and embedding videos, as it supports simultaneous recording of the screen and the web camera view, and allows for an instructor to lecture with the use of PowerPoint presentations.

4.2. Balancing input and output.
The texts in *Mezhdu nami* are designed as reading and auditory input predominantly in the form of dialogues between the characters. However, the text-related exercises are mostly limited to answering comprehension questions in English. Furthermore, the tasks in *Classroom Activities* seldom call for recycling the text phrases. One of the concerns observed during
previous teaching with *Mezhdnu nami* in the KU Russian program was students’ struggle to recall many of the details from the storyline, which suggested insufficient engagement with the input and comprehension.

Consequently, an important feature which the course developers agreed on was to design asynchronous activities that focus students’ attention on the original input texts. The daily writing and oral assignments uploads may include: (1) reading a few lines from the input texts aloud, (2) recording Russian equivalents of the provided English sentences with the input text lexica, (3) answering questions about the input text in the target language, (4) recording short monologues or dialogues using the input texts as a model, (5) writing or recording short texts about the characters using words and expressions from the input texts, (6) recording their own stories using elements of the input texts as a model.

Concentrating on the original input in individual asynchronous work has helped students to retain active vocabulary and improve their asynchronous and synchronous output, which is one of the course’s priorities.

4.3. Balancing non-graded practice and graded assignments.
One of the problems that the course developers faced was the limitations of the Blackboard gradebook. Since every time a graded assignment is created in Blackboard, it automatically creates a column in the gradebook, the course developers soon found the course gradebook filled with a large number of columns, making it difficult to manage. To simplify the gradebook display, the practice tasks were designed to give only automated feedback (correct/incorrect), while the daily review quiz and two daily uploads would be graded.

4.4. Pronunciation practice.
Due to a lack of training in Russian phonetics, students’ struggle to read and speak with the correct pronunciation was one of the shortcomings of previous face-to-face classes. The bichronous course presented an opportunity to address pronunciation in a structured way, which had not been done previously in KU Russian classes.

To address the need of teaching pronunciation asynchronously, specific instructional materials were created for the new curriculum. They included video explanations recorded via Kaltura Capture or at the university’s Media Production Studio designed to be:

a. contextualized (embedded in the textbook content)

b. awareness-raising (presented as instructor commentary on the Russian sounds, sound combinations, vowel reduction, stress patterns, and phrasal intonation that native English speakers typically find difficult).
After listening to the instructional video recordings, students complete non-graded assignments in which they may be asked to listen, repeat after the speaker, or complete a dictation. Then students complete an oral assignment in which they use the target phonetic features for different tasks that require reading and speaking in Russian, while paying attention to the pronunciation. In the subsequent daily oral assignments, students are expected to follow the pronunciation rules they already know. The consistent attention to phonetics in the course tasks, coupled with regular instructor feedback through the learning management system and during synchronous interaction has helped to avoid the fossilization of incorrect pronunciation. Overall, designing the new course has provided the opportunity to incorporate phonetics in the course structure, without the pronunciation work being rushed or sporadic.

4.5. Unlimited corrections and resubmission
Allowing unlimited corrections and resubmissions of graded assignments appears to be beneficial for students and appreciated by them. When grading assignments, rather than correcting students’ errors, the instructor usually marks them and indicates directions for improvement in the written feedback. Students have an opportunity to resubmit the corrected version of the assignments for full credit. This way, students work on the problem on their own rather than simply receiving the correct answers. Additionally, this practice may ease students’ language learning anxiety.

4.6. Synchronous summary day for interpersonal speaking
*Mezhdu nami Classroom Activities* has an abundance of pair work activities and communicative tasks to develop speaking; however, they are meant for face-to-face settings. Even though some *Mezhdu nami* activities were adapted for the synchronous summary days, for the most part, the tasks and exercises were created anew to fit the remote mode of communication and to provide maximum opportunity to practice interpersonal interaction for largely asynchronous learners. Furthermore, the specifics of the bichronous delivery called for adjusting the role of the instructor to organizing or facilitating carefully scaffolded speaking activities, which are provided to students in the Friday handout. Based on the grammar and vocabulary of the week, the speaking tasks incorporate structured pair work activities that begin with the easiest ones and proceed to those that require more independent speaking from the participants, enabling them to stay in the target language for most of the session. In some cases, videoconferencing can provide an extra personalized communicative resource for students because they are communicating about things that are in their homes. The example in Figure 2 shows this kind of personalized prompt.
The synchronous meeting begins with a warm-up in which students ask one another a simple question in Russian, such as, “How are you?”, “What kind of music do you like?” or “What are you doing tonight?” Next, students split into Breakout Rooms to continue working on the interactive tasks following the provided guidelines. The instructor circulates among the Breakout Rooms to give feedback or correct errors if needed. In activities organized in this way, peer-to-peer feedback is encouraged and often occurs naturally: students help each other recall the needed Russian vocabulary and grammar. As a rule, one of the speaking activities is a roleplay, which the pairs prepare and perform at the end of the session, when everyone returns to the main video conference room. Students are welcome to stay after the end of the session to ask questions or to talk to the instructor. They are usually happy to take advantage of this opportunity and initiate a few minutes of discussion about Russian language and culture. According to the course instructor, students have been able to complete the speaking tasks without much difficulty and stayed in the target language most of the time with little or no help from the instructor. In the course evaluations, the students indicated their gratitude for the opportunity to meet synchronously once a week and interact with their peers.

4.7. Academic integrity policies
The bichronous beginning Russian course has strongly benefited from the word lists available on the Mezhdu nami website at the end of each unit and the Mezhdu nami online dictionary. First, these resources diminish students’ temptation to use external resources such as Google Translate to complete their assignments. Second, to ensure academic integrity and the fairness of grading, the course developers adopted a policy which does not allow using any words and expressions borrowed from resources other than the textbook. Instead, students are encouraged to download the vocabulary lists from each textbook unit and use the search bar in the Mezhdu nami online dictionary. This rule is included in the syllabus, with a warning that the grade for students’ work will be reduced if the use of external sources is detected. Adopting this policy has helped in discouraging students from violating academic integrity. It has kept students’ focus on
the target vocabulary and stimulated vocabulary learning and retention in
the absence of traditional closed-book vocabulary quizzes.

Another policy of the asynchronous course requires students to
write the graded written assignments and tests by hand only, rather than
submitting typed documents, to keep students from copying and pasting
text.

4.8. “Russian weekends”
The “Russian weekend” asynchronous work consists of three steps. First,
students explore the assigned cultural material, for example, they virtually
visit a museum, watch a movie, explore Russian cooking on assigned
websites, or independently research a certain cultural topic. For example,
during one of their “Russian Weekends,” students choose three museums
to explore on the website museumstudiesabroad.org/region/russia.
Afterwards, they post a response in English to a prompt question in the
Blackboard discussion forum, commenting on the cultural material and
their interpretation of it. As a final step, students read their peers’ posts and
respond to at least two of them, or more for extra credit. Presented in this
way, the weekend assignments, while not involving the language directly,
play an important role in putting the language in its cultural context for
beginner learners and serve as a way for the group to be in touch.

Each of the practical ideas presented above reflect the course
concept and principles developed prior to course design and make up for
the limitations observed in asynchronous language teaching, such as lack
of interaction, intensive online course load, and confusion in the use of
new technology (Lin and Gao 2020).

5. Assessment
The bichronous format allows for a variety of regular formative and
summative assessments. The following components are used in the KU
Russian bichronous course assessment.

5.1. Daily assessment
The daily review quizzes were created specifically for this bichronous
course with SoftChalk, a content authoring software that is easily integrated
into most learning management systems, including Blackboard, and
allows for user-friendly online assessment. Each quiz includes seven to
ten automatically graded multiple choice or matching questions that check
students’ comprehension of the input text and the language features of the
day. Together with the daily graded assignments, they help to ensure that
students have not fallen behind on the important material and serve as a
review of the day’s key information.
5.2. **Weekly assessment**

Since students learn the new material independently, the weekly synchronous sessions provide an opportunity for regular informal assessment by the instructor. The synchronous meetings serve as an indication of the extent to which students are able to use the material learned asynchronously in a synchronous and spontaneous setting. Overall, the Friday speaking activities indicate to the instructor the level of attainment of the weekly learning goals.

5.3. **Chapter tests and final exam**

Along with the bichronous course, in the Fall of 2020 the KU Slavic department offered face-to-face and hybrid (combination of face-to-face and Zoom) Beginner Russian classes. All these classes had the same chapter tests and final exams which served as a point of comparison. The tests are borrowed from face-to-face classes from previous years at KU; however due to the pandemic situation they are offered as open-book tests in all three sections. For the final exam, in addition to the written part, students also submit an oral portion that requires them to tell the stories of the textbook characters and talk about themselves.

Overall, the bichronous course offers the opportunity for close monitoring of the students’ daily and weekly performance as well as a multi-level evaluation of student progress throughout the semester.

6. **Students’ Feedback**

In Fall 2020, the number of KU students who enrolled in the Beginner Russian course and completed it without failure or withdrawal was higher in the online bichronous course (15 students) than in the hybrid (10 students) or fully face-to-face class (10 students). Students in all classes used the same textbook, and their results on the final exams were similar: the number of students who received a grade not lower than B- in their final exams were similar in the bichronous (69%) and face-to-face/hybrid classes (71%). This is consistent with studies that reveal no significant differences in learning outcomes in traditional and e-learning modes of delivery (Hrastinski 2008).

In general, according to students’ evaluations, most of the students in all three groups found their course work as challenging as they expected. Some students in the bichronous class (20%) perceived their workload to be less challenging than they expected. Meanwhile, 22% of students in the traditionally taught classes reported that the course was more challenging than they expected.

For the majority of students in the bichronous section, the time spent on coursework did not exceed 15 hours per week on average, whereas about 20% of students in the traditionally taught classes reported spending
more than 16 hours on the course per week, suggesting that bichronous course might be less stressful and more manageable to students.

Students indicated in the course evaluation their appreciation of the consistency in the bichronous course structure. They reported that the well-organized syllabus and daily learning modules were very helpful in their learning. They noted the usefulness and convenience of the consistent daily oral and written assignments. The students reported that the frequent feedback provided by the instructor on grammar, spelling, and pronunciation had enhanced their coursework. Finally, in their feedback, the students pointed out the usefulness of the explanations provided in the instructor’s “Start of the day” videos.

The students explicitly expressed their appreciation for the opportunity to explore culture. The weekly tasks kept the discussion board live and abundant in opinions and student interactions. The students appreciated the chance to focus on cultural aspects that were most interesting to them. For example, one student frequently brought up folklore, another one focused on music, while a third looked at the tasks throughout the course from a political angle in their cultural discussions. In their evaluations, the students described the cultural activities as one of their favorite types of activities in the course, calling them interesting and enjoyable.

7. Outcomes
The effectiveness of the bichronous course, as well as the specific principles and practices described in this article are yet to be confirmed with more precise data. Nevertheless, some preliminary observations of student performance in the beginning Russian course look promising and beneficial for both students and departments.

Firstly, the bichronous format has increased the overall enrollment and student retention. First-year enrollment in the KU Russian program grew to 40 students in Fall 2020 (more than a 20% increase from the previous year) and retention was solid. Also, possibly affected by the COVID situation, only 40% of students from classes with traditional (face-to-face and hybrid) delivery in Fall 2020 continued with learning Russian in Spring of 2021, whereas in the bichronous group 80% of students enrolled in the next Russian class of the same learning format. Secondly, the bichronous format has enabled offering Russian to a wider audience. After the bichronous course was developed and successfully taught in Fall 2020, the KU Slavic department received a U.S. Russia Foundation grant for $120,000 to build a pipeline for the study of Russian in Kansas high schools by funding instructors and outreach events. Currently, the department is planning to offer the course to military personnel who can benefit from bichronous delivery. In addition, the department is developing a second-
year Russian bichronous course aiming to build a complete online Russian language program.

Overall, regardless of the initial uncertainty about the efficiency of online language learning, the implementation of the bichronous course has been successful, and it has shown students’ willingness to study using the new methods of learning a foreign language.

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1. Introduction: the value of inclusion

The possibility of succeeding in distance education has been discussed by a consistent number of authors in literature over the past two decades (among others, see Kanuka and Conrad 2003, Moore and Kearsley 2012, Vu, Fredrickson, and Moore 2017). The defining element of distance education is the lack of physical interaction between teachers and students. In itself, distance education offers a series of benefits, most prominent of which is the removal of barriers in accessing learning: “[d]istance education has the goal of providing access to quality education and equity in educational opportunities for those who otherwise would have been denied” (Apata 2014, 19). As Kelland (2005) outlines, distance education historically has become prevalent in developing countries and in rural areas of industrialized countries in order to offer training to disadvantaged groups of students excluded from conventional means of learning.

The power of distance education in removing access barriers in education has emerged with unprecedented strength following the outbreak of the COVID pandemic. The pandemic has contributed to raising a new awareness of the importance of ensuring that all students have access to instruction as well as their full inclusion within the teaching environment. Traditionally, the notion of ‘inclusion’ within the educational context has been, and still is, widely associated with the idea of vulnerable groups of learners, such as the socially disadvantaged or ethnically marginalized subjects, people that may be discriminated against based on their gender, and people with disabilities or with special educational needs (see, for example, Stubbs 2008; Boston-Kemple 2012; Suleymanov 2015). However, the massive transition to online instruction as a result of the COVID pandemic has demonstrated the extent to which the traditional notion of inclusion in education is limited.

The issue of inclusive education does not refer exclusively to particular groups of learners; instead it concerns all learners. We must assume that (1) potentially anyone can become a “vulnerable subject” and
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thus experience exclusion, even if it is just on a limited basis – it may be as a result of a short- or long-term illness, a (temporary) inability to access educational spaces – as is the case for students residing abroad or working students, or a global pandemic crisis which prevents the free movement of people; (2) every learner is unique insofar as s/he has peculiar capabilities, cognitive characteristics, learning times and styles, memorization strategies, motivations, and psychological/emotional attitudes towards learning. Essentially, as Moriña (2017) puts it, “[i]nclusive education focuses on the need to provide a high-quality educational response for all students […]. Within the inclusive philosophy, diversity is conceived in a broad sense comprising the different capabilities, gender differences and differences in social and cultural origin. These differences are seen as a benefit rather than as a problem” (3).

A broader conception of ‘inclusion’ has recently made its way into the international debate with the UNESCO International Forum on Inclusion and Equity in Education, held in Cali, Colombia in September 2019. Under the motto “[e]very learner matters,” the Forum finally acknowledged the importance of “moving away from the vision that inclusion is restricted to disability” and at the same time, recognizing the “diversity of all persons” (UNESCO 2020, 4).

The experience of the COVID pandemic has encouraged us to explore and develop new models of distance education in a re-conceptualization of the notion of inclusion in education, which transcends the assumption that inclusive learning is about disadvantaged students. Inclusive education addresses all students and aims at promoting and supporting the full and equal participation of every single learner in the learning process.

This paper approaches the intersection between distance education and inclusive education from the perspective of language learning and teaching. Specifically, we present the experience gained in the design and delivery of an online course of Russian as a foreign language (FL) which was delivered to a group of Italian native learners, including some who are visually impaired (VI). The course was held in Autumn 2020 and, while originally planned as a conventional in-person class, due to the pandemic it underwent a radical reconsideration in terms of instruction mode, tools, strategies, and materials.

2. An overview of inclusive education policy at European and Italian levels

Inclusive education started to appear on the international policy agenda in the 1990s and since then has been represented in many policy documents
Within the European Union (EU), the active commitment to inclusive education saw the foundation of the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education in 1996. The Agency’s aim is to provide member countries with guidance on how to implement inclusive education following the United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (CRDP) and the EU policy initiatives. In 2009, the Council of European Union adopted the Education & Training 2020 Programme (ET2020) – a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training for the period up to 2020. Fundamentally, the framework addresses four strategic objectives: “(1) making lifelong learning and mobility a reality; (2) improving the quality and efficiency of education and training; (3) promoting equity, social cohesion, and active citizenship; (4) enhancing creativity and innovation, including entrepreneurship at all levels of education and training” (ET2020 2009, C119/3). In order to monitor the progress made by every member state, the Council elaborated on a series of reference levels of the European average performance (European benchmarks), that every country is invited to consider. The ET2020 Framework is implemented by the establishment of Working Groups composed of experts nominated by member states and key stakeholders. Their role is to support policymaking at the EU and national levels, and offer a forum of the exchange of experiences and best practices on ways to accomplish the key educational challenges. In 2015, the EU Ministers of Education approved the Paris Declaration on Promoting Citizenship and the Common Values of Freedom, Tolerance, and Non-Discrimination through Education. In order to implement the commitment undertaken by member states of the Paris Declaration, the Council of the European Union issued a Recommendation on Promoting Common Values, Inclusive Education, and the European Dimension of Teaching in 2018. The Recommendation reaffirmed the importance of promoting inclusive education for all learners, “including those from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds, those from a migrant background, those with special needs and the most talented learners” (Council 2018, C195/4). We must not forget that, as Smyth et al. (2014) outline, within the EU context, each country is responsible for the design and delivery of educational provisions (e.g., integration of students with special educational needs in mainstream schools, personalized support for students with special educational needs in schools and universities), and it is apparent that the standards defined in the international initiatives have not been incorporated into the legal systems of many EU countries.
Turning our attention to the Italian context, the principal reference on matters relating to the rights of persons with disabilities is Law no. 104/1992 (“Framework Law for Assistance, Social Integration, and Rights of the Handicapped”), which was further integrated and amended by Law no. 17/1999. Articles 12–17 establish the right of disabled persons to be integrated in educational institutions, from kindergartens to universities, requiring that students with disabilities are to be guaranteed (1) specific technical and educational aids, (2) the support of specialized teachers (in schools) and specialized tutors (in universities) who assist the student during classes, studying, tests and exams, (3) the presence of Italian Sign Language interpreters within universities to help deaf students in their learning process, (4) the establishment of specific personalized tutoring services in universities, (5) individualized educational plans, and (6) personalized support, in terms of compensative technological tools to assist students in taking tests and exams. In addition, the amended Law no. 17/1999 stipulates that every university should designate a delegated teacher to coordinate, monitor, and support all initiatives relating to integration within the university. In 2001, the National University Conference of Delegates for Disability (CNUDD) was founded in Italy. The CNUDD meets regularly with the aim of exchanging information and good practices in the field of inclusive education, as well as promoting the sharing of common guidelines for activities and initiatives that could be undertaken by universities throughout Italy. Further provisions on inclusive education are contained in Law no. 4/2004 (“Provisions to Help Persons with Disabilities Access Technological Tools”). Law no. 18/2009 stipulates the ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and the establishment of the National Observatory on the Status of Persons with Disabilities. The Observatory is composed of representatives of central and local administrations, the National Institute of Social Security, the National Institute of Statistics, labor organizations, national association representing disabled persons, as well as experts in the field of disability. The Observatory’s main objectives are to implement the CRPD and the Italian national legislation, collecting data on the condition of persons with disabilities, and reporting on disability policies.

3. Foreign language education for visually impaired people

3.1. Who are visually impaired (VI) persons?

‘Visual impairment’ is an umbrella term that includes low vision and blindness and generally refers to “any degree of impairment to a person’s
ability to see that affects his or her daily life” (Sapp 2010, 880). In other words, low vision or partially sighted individuals have an impairment to their visual function that cannot be (fully) corrected with glasses or surgery. On the other hand, the term ‘blindness’ is commonly used to indicate the total absence of vision. However, it should be noted that the term “blindness” may also be used to refer to people who are able to perceive lights, colors, and shapes.

For our purposes in this educational context, we must bear in mind that, while blind students cannot use their vision at all, the partially sighted are able to use their residual vision in the learning process aided by special equipment. Furthermore, it is important to consider that vision loss emerges as disabling under diverse conditions and at various times. Coupland, Giles, and Benn (1986, 55) suggest differentiating between: (1) congenital blindness; (2) gradual loss of sight in the early or middle years due to an illness of hereditary conditions (e.g., diabetes); (3) instantaneous loss of sight caused by an unexpected event (e.g., an accident); (4) gradual loss of visual acuity due to degenerative diseases associated with aging. It goes without saying that the cause and the process of visual loss has a strong impact on the person’s attitude towards his/her impairments, self-perception, psychological condition, social behavior, preferences when choosing assistive devices, and level of proficiency in using compensative tools and technology. All these aspects must be taken into account when designing a course that involves VI students.

According to the data collected by the Vision Loss Expert Group (VLEG), it is estimated that in 2015, 36 million people worldwide were blind, 216.6 million had moderate to severe visual impairment, and 188.5 million had mild visual impairment (see Bourne et al. 2017). With regards to Italy, the VLEG, together with the Global Burden Disease, report that in 2020 there was a total of 6.2 million people with vision loss, of which 510 thousand people were blind (the data are released by the International Agency for Prevention of Blindness; see IAPB 2021).

3.2. Current literature and research on teaching foreign language to VI learners
Since the late 1980s, there has been an extensive discussion of inclusive educational practice with reference to VI children and youth (e.g., Chapman 1986; Webster and Roe 1998; Bishop 2004; Salisbury 2008). At the same time, together with digitalization, which has impacted the educational system in the last few years, there has been an increasing number of research studies discussing the potentials of assistive technology (Alves et al. 2009; Mulloy et al. 2014; Kamaghe, Luhanga, and Michael Kisangiri. 2020) and e-learning
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tools (Bocconi et al. 2007; Leporini and Buzzi 2007; Calvo, Iglesias, and Moreno 2011; Kharade and Peese 2012; Periša, Peraković, and Remenar 2012) with specific reference to VI individuals.

As far as foreign language education is concerned, there exists a relatively consistent body of literature devoted to VI learners (see Aslantaş 2017 for a general overview of the most relevant studies). Most of the publications report on the practice of teaching English as a foreign language within mainstream school environments in different countries, such as Spain (Araluce 2002), Turkey (Başaran 2012), Estonia (Lõvi 2013), and Greece (Efstathiou and Polichronopoulou 2015). However, there are limited research studies that pertain to language instruction for VI university students or, more generally, adult learners.

In 2010, the “Pedagogy and Language Learning for Blind and Partially Sighted Adults in Europe” project consortium published the edited volume, Good Practice for Improving Language Learning for Visually Impaired Adults. The book provides some general insights about the needs of blind and partially sighted adults when learning a foreign language, although it lacks a discussion of methods and specific educational strategies. Practical suggestions for accommodating VI students within the university setting are given by Hamilton (2008), who refers to her experience of teaching German as a foreign language to English-speaking college students in the U.S. Hamilton offers useful instructions, as well as sample activities to support teachers “making the classroom not only accessible to students who are blind but also as inclusive as possible” (24). A study by Kocyigit and Artar (2015) presents the results of in-depth interviews conducted with VI students and teachers of English as a foreign language who reflect on their learning/teaching experience in prep schools of two foundation universities in Izmir, Turkey. The data obtained from the interviews reveal that, although the learning/teaching process was considered a success by all respondents, there were two main criticisms: on the one hand, students claimed that they were not totally autonomous in participating in the learning process, but it should be noted that they had benefited from the extra support given by their families in the form of taking them to and from school, as well as helping them with their homework; on the other hand, teachers highlighted their own lack of formal education, experience and adequate methodology for teaching learners with special needs in general and VI students in particular (a fact that is echoed by many; see, for example, Başaran 2012; Efstatiiou and Polichronopoulou 2015). Malinowská and Ludíková (2010) discuss the advantages of using
Information and Communications Technology (ICT) in a course of English FL – A2 level specially designed for a group of four adults (older than 25) with visual impairment. The course was organized by a specialized center for VI persons in the Czech Republic. As shown by the authors, the use of digital material for in-class activities and homework, as well as of emails for communication, facilitated the students’ access to the learning process. The study by Sokolova and Balakova (2019) is, to our knowledge, the only one which reports the practice of teaching Russian to VI students within an institution of higher education. The research was conducted over six semesters in a class with one visually impaired student – Balakova herself – at Masaryk University (Brno, Czech Republic). Sokolova and Balakova provide practical suggestions, focusing on class activities which involve working with texts and the blackboard.

Given the research studies here mentioned, we can outline the following recommendations for language teaching to VI learners in conventional in-person classes. First of all, the instructor should be aware of what visual impairment is, in order to understand the varying needs of his/her students (e.g., while blind students are prevented from using any printed material, partially sighted may work with it, as long as it is provided in a large format). Secondly, the instructor should consider organizing an individual meeting with the VI student(s) prior to the course, giving them a tour of the classroom, discussing the seating and the kind of light exposure they need in order to create an accessible setting. Thirdly, the instructor is required to develop specific teaching strategies, using alternative modes and favoring the use of audio or audio-visual methods. When writing on the blackboard, it is important to use a large and neat handwriting, frequently repeat what is being written, and spell out new lexical or syntactical items. Lately, the instructor should use multisensory teaching materials, combining multimedia, digital materials, and tactile materials. In particular, the use and handling of real objects (so-called ‘realia’) is recommended to help students learn vocabulary or concepts.

From the literature review, it can be established that there is limited reported experience in the literature with regards to the teaching of foreign languages to VI students in tertiary education. Furthermore, it is important to note that all the existing research studies relate to conventional in-person classes. For this reason, our online Russian language course may be considered to be breaking new ground in the field of inclusive FL distance education.
4. The online course of Russian language for beginners

4.1. General plan of the course

The course was organized as part of the project “Towards accessible and inclusive teaching practices in Russian FL. An experimental study,” which was launched in 2019 by the Department of Foreign Languages and Literature of the University of Verona (Italy). The project involves a group of researchers and professors of Russian language, Russian literature, and linguistics, and aims to design models for accessible and inclusive FL courses, with a particular focus on VI students as the target group, and the introductory level of Russian as the target subject. The project is in partnership with the Italian Union of the Blind and Partially Sighted.

The course took place in October and November 2020 and lasted for six weeks. It was delivered remotely in blended mode and consisted of 36 hours in total, divided as follows: 15 hours of synchronous learning (two lessons per week, one hour and 15 minutes each); three hours of asynchronous learning (30 minutes per week), which consisted of short videos recorded by the instructor that students had to watch outside of lesson time; and 18 hours of digital work (three hours per week) that incorporated homework that each participant was required to do individually. The final goal of the course was to develop students’ Russian language skills to a beginner level (comparable to A1 level of CEFR) and to improve their knowledge of Russian culture. The course instructor was the author of the present article.

4.2. Participants

The target group included 20 participants, of which nine were sighted and 11 were visually impaired. Among the VI population, there were six blind and five partially sighted students. The age of the participants ranged from 21 to 65. Out of the 20 learners, 18 were L1 Italian, and two were bilingual Italian-Arabic. In addition, eight of the participants were majoring in FL, while the remaining 12 participants declared to know – with different levels of proficiency – at least one foreign modern language (English, Spanish, German, or French), which they had acquired either at school or in university or extra-university courses. No participant was familiar with any Slavic language.

An individual online meeting with each participant was organized prior to the course, with the dual purpose of (1) getting acquainted with the

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1 Together with the author, the project team includes Manuel Boschiero, Daniele Artoni, Luisa Ruvoletto, Jacopo Saturno, and Rimma Urkhanova.
participant and to take note of their linguistic background, their motivation for participating in the course, the availability of technological devices and the possibility of having a stable internet connection, and (2) testing to ensure their total lack of knowledge in Russian language. VI participants were asked additional questions in order to collect information about the various tools and equipment that they use to read. It emerged that among the blind, only one did not know (Italian) Braille, and two of them regularly used the Braille bar on their keyboard to read the computer display. All of them used a screen reader program installed on their computer and on their mobile phone. As for the partially sighted population, only two knew Braille. For paper texts, four used magnifying glasses, while for digital texts, three used a screen reader – although not regularly – or an electronic magnifier. All of them enabled a zoom magnifier on their computers and turned on color inversion – which applies to everything on the device – that allows black text on a white screen to become white text on a black screen. Such mode of visualization reduces eye strain.

4.3. Technological tools
The course was delivered remotely through a blended learning approach that combined synchronous lessons similar to a traditional classroom approach with online learning. As pointed out by Choy and Quek (2016), one of the main advantages of blended learning is that “students have more control over their learning through asynchronous online learning, and at the same time, the face-to-face instruction enables them to maintain quality faculty-student interaction in the classroom” (106). The three technological platforms used were Zoom, Panopto, and Moodle, all of which are regularly employed for (remote) course delivery within the University of Verona.

Live classes were conducted on the web conferencing app Zoom, which can be downloaded as a desktop or a mobile app on any type of device. Zoom has an intuitive and user-friendly interface, in addition to being highly accessible to the visually impaired, since it fully interacts with any screen reader and supports (customizable) keyboard shortcuts to manage main workflows. As a learning environment, Zoom has proven to be extremely effective in terms of both teaching and learning processes. Basically, Zoom was able to replicate the traditional classroom environment, allowing teacher-student and student-student interaction. In addition, it enabled the instructor to share materials (visual, audio, and audiovisual) and to organize collaborative (pair or group) activities by means of Breakout Rooms. Throughout the course, Zoom was also used to arrange individual meetings with the teacher for office hours.
The asynchronous learning part of the course was delivered using Panopto, a platform that allows for the recording, editing, and sharing of videos. Every week, the teacher recorded videos, up to 15 minutes each, which the participants were required to watch individually. Each video incorporated a narrated presentation whose didactic objectives might vary: (1) schematically recapitulating contents already addressed in the classroom, (2) deepening some aspects pertaining to phonetics, grammar, lexicon, the alphabet, etc., or (3) introducing new topics (following the educational model of the flipped classroom; see 4.4). Panopto turned out to be a valuable tool for inclusive education: it allows students to have a more personalized training experience – videos can be paused, rewound, and reviewed on demand – and fully interacts with any screen reader.

Moodle served as the learning management system (LMS) of the course: a specific page of content – under the name “Russian course for beginners” – was created on which all course materials were posted. In particular, the Moodle page contained the Zoom link for the class meetings, all the content that was presented in the classroom, the videos for asynchronous learning, as well as a wide range of activities students were tasked to do individually. In order to facilitate the navigation, the course format was set so that one section per page was shown. Each section corresponded to a lesson. Every lesson had a fixed structure that was composed of four subsections: the first subsection (“What did we do?”) contained the materials addressed in the classroom, the second subsection (“Let’s sum up!”) displayed the URL to Panopto videos, the third subsection (“Homework”) contained activities for individual work – usually in the form of Moodle quizzes and assignments, and the fourth subsection (“Russian culture in a nutshell”) presented heterogeneous materials which focused on particular aspects of Russian culture (short videos, songs, etc.). The language used on the Moodle page was exclusively Italian to ensure that a screen reader could fully interact with it without any interference resulting from a multilingual situation. Overall, Moodle has proven to be an effective – albeit imperfect – technological tool in terms of accessibility. As reported by the students who used the screen reader, the main problems that they encountered were restricted to the procedure for submitting a Moodle assignment and the navigation of the page using a device other than a computer.
4.4. Teaching strategies

The presence of VI students in the classroom encouraged us to implement a range of pedagogical techniques that combined communication-oriented models with more traditional approaches. An immutable characteristic of the course was the use of alternative sensory modes to design activities which involved simultaneously different senses (sight and hearing).

The main teaching method adopted throughout the course was a communicative approach that involved a high degree of interaction. Basically, during classes, the students were required to carry out activities or solve tasks that consisted in understanding and producing Russian language, as well as focusing on conveying the meaning rather than on forms. Activities and tasks were matched to the students’ authentic needs, such as debating on what they like or dislike (Я люблю/не люблю…, потому что…), interacting with locals in order to understand where to find something that they needed (Где возможно…?), collecting information at the hotel reception (В номере есть wi-fi? Когда завтрак? Где ресторан?), etc. During the interaction, the students received corrective feedback – either explicit or implicit – from the teacher with the purpose of improving their accuracy and further developing the discussion. PowerPoint presentations were used to orient the activities and display linguistic elements that students were asked to apply. Language input was offered in the form of individual sentences, short texts, or dialogues. Structuring the lesson on communicative activities enabled collaborative work from the students and, ultimately, had a significant impact on their communication skills, engagement with the lesson, and self-confidence.

Another teaching strategy applied was that of the flipped classroom. This instructional model requires the students to complete pre-class preparatory work – e.g., reading the textbook or watching a video – in order to get acquainted with theoretical contents. In doing so, class time can be used for practical activities in which students can demonstrate comprehension of the content previously studied. During the course, participants were at times required to watch pre-recorded videos at home which presented new grammar or lexical structures (such as personal pronouns, professions, past tense of verbs, идти/ходить, etc.) so that the class became the place to discuss and review concepts, organize dynamic and participatory activities, and work on completing activities. Flipping the classroom enabled participants to actively contribute to the construction of knowledge, as well as to optimize their exposure to Russian language. However, this approach requires students to be very concentrated while watching a video that presents linguistic structures.
they have never encountered before, and the pre-class preparation of new contents demands a significant commitment outside of lesson time. Taking that into consideration, we carefully rationed the use of this learning/teaching strategy.

More traditional activities were organized throughout the course by means of PowerPoint presentations shared on the screen in which the instructor presented various topics (e.g., the alphabet, plural of nouns, expressions to talk about the weather, prepositional case). When introducing new lexical structures, the instructor spelled out the single letters so that VI students could familiarize themselves with the new word(s) and possibly take note of them. The explanation was usually followed by exercises – gap-fill, substitution, matching, reformulation, correcting errors – that students were required to solve, either collectively or divided into groups.

4.5. Digital materials

It is well established that multisensory activities have a positive impact on the process of language learning. Based on the assumption that “as a primary channel for acquiring information, the sense of touch is often highly developed in blind students and underdeveloped in sighted students,” Hamilton (2008) suggests to “look for opportunities to use tactile objects” in the lesson, “as all students will clearly benefit from … doing so” (36–37). Originally, our course of Russian language was intended to be a traditional in-person class, where we planned to actively use tactile materials to make the classroom as inclusive as possible. The transition of the course to remote delivery prevented us from using tactile objects and forced us to switch to entirely digitally conceived materials. This had a direct consequence in particular on the techniques and materials we used to teach students the Russian alphabet.

The alphabet was introduced in the second lesson – when students already possessed a little vocabulary (e.g. Кто это? Это мама, Что это? Это касса, etc.) – by means of a PowerPoint presentation where letters were first presented in sequence and with reference to words containing them, and subsequently, they were grouped into categories as follows: (1) letters that are identical to Latin ones (A, Е/ё, К, М, О, Т), (2) ‘deceitful’ letters, e.g., letters that look familiar but represent a different set of sounds in Russian (В, Н, Р, С, Х, У), (3) letters resembling something else (З, И, Й, П, Э, Я), (4) letters unique to Russian (Б, Г, Д, Ж, Л, Ф, Ц, Ч, Ш, Щ, Ы, Ю),
and (6) signs (Ъ, Ь). For each letter, the instructor provided a description of its graphic asset, stimulating sighted students to help. At the end of the lesson, the students were asked to write some words (e.g. ‘мама,’ ‘кот,’ ‘вино’) on the Zoom chat using the phonetic Russian keyboard on their computers. A video summary – where letters were presented as grouped into vowels, consonants, the semivowel and signs – was later posted on Moodle, together with a series of exercises designed to improve the students’ skill in pronouncing syllables and words (through listening and repeating activities), as well as in writing with the keyboard. In particular, an audio file was created where the instructor dictated some simple sentences (e.g., ‘это музыка,’ ‘это хлеб и борщ,’ ‘это январь’) and assisted the students in the process of writing with the keyboard, specifically focusing on “special” letters – letters whose position does not correspond with the Latin keyboard or letters that require a combination of keystrokes to produce. The same file was created in two versions: one for the Windows PC mnemonic keyboard, and one for the Mac phonetic keyboard.

The whole set of digital materials was created ex novo by us and designed in the spirit of multimodality: textual contents were always accompanied by audio descriptions and/or saved in a screen reader-friendly mode in order to ensure that students could alternatively use the sight and hearing channels with equal ease. For example, each PowerPoint presentation that we posted on Moodle in the subsection “What did we do?” was followed by an audio file (saved in .m4a format) where the instructor narrated the presentation, providing the spelling of words when necessary.

All quizzes were presented as both a Moodle activity and a Word document, so as to ensure that students with visual impairment could choose the most convenient format, completing them in either place. Quizzes might include various question types, e.g., multiple choice (see Figures 1, 2, 3), short answer (see Figures 4, 5), etc., and might have different goals, such as or comprehension or fixing grammatical and lexical structures. The instructions were provided in Italian.

2 The course did not include Russian Braille, because its main purpose was to design a course that ultimately was inclusive for all students. Teaching the blind students Russian Braille potentially could have excluded the sighted students from the learning process.

3 Prior to classes, participants received instructions on how to install the phonetic/mnemonic Russian keyboard on their computers.
Figure 1. Example of a multiple-choice quiz in Moodle where students were required to indicate the gender for some nouns by selecting the correct pronoun.

Figure 2. Example of a multiple-choice quiz in Moodle where students were required to indicate the “intruder”.

Figure 3. Example of a multiple choice quiz in Moodle where students were required to select the correct answer.

Figure 4. Example of a short answer quiz.
Moodle assignment activity modules were used to test participants in both oral and written production; once the assignment was completed, students were asked to submit it on the dedicated section or send it by email to the instructor, who reviewed it. Concerning the development of oral skills, students were required to submit oral monologues (e.g. “Record your answers to the following questions: Ты знаешь английский язык? Ты работаешь? Ты завтракаешь утром? Ты слушаешь джаз?”; “Record yourself describing what you did yesterday”) or dialogues (“With a partner, record yourself asking questions about three things s/he owns). In order to improve writing skills, students were at times asked to submit short texts (e.g. “Complete the following sentences: По профессии я…, Моя страна – …, Мой город – …, Мой язык – …”; “Answer the following questions: Что ты делаешь утром? Что ты делаешь днём? Что ты делаешь вечером?”). Instructions were provided in Italian in the form of an oral or written text.

All text materials were designed in accordance with the guidelines for accessibility. For example, PowerPoint presentations, either those displayed in the classroom and then posted on Moodle, or those shown in the videos devoted to asynchronous learning had high contrast with a simple, non-graphic, black background and white letters. The font used was Verdana – which offers optimal readability – in a font size no less than 38. We avoided the use of italics, which is harder to process, and when there was a need to emphasize any element, we used boldface type. The text was displayed in paragraphs aligned left with 1.5 line spacing. Any picture was accompanied by an alternative text which enabled blind students to enjoy its content via screen reader or marked as “decorative” if not important for the understanding of contents. In Word documents posted on Moodle for individual work (quizzes or assignments) the information was organized by headings so that a screen reader could easily read the document. The font used was Verdana in size 18; colors and italics were avoided; the text was aligned left with 1.5 line spacing. As a general rule, PDF documents
were avoided since they may pose readability problems with the screen reader. To reduce the risk of a misreading of words by the screen reader in the event of a multilingual situation, Word documents were compiled entirely in Russian.

5. Concluding remarks
In this paper we provided a critical survey of the tools, strategies and materials used in a remotely delivered course of Russian language for beginners. Our participants consisted of a group of Italian native speakers, some of whom were visually impaired. On the basis of this experience, we came up with a set of recommendations which address any instructor who is committed to teaching Russian FL (A1) in an online course, designed for a group that includes VI students:

(1) Acquire knowledge about visual impairment, so as to gain awareness about your students’ needs.
(2) Prior to the course, organize an online individual meeting with the VI students, in order to collect information about tools and equipment they use to read and, more in general, to work with digital materials. Avoid private questions (e.g., How did you go blind?), and ask only questions that pertain to the learning process (e.g., How did you learn to read?). Bear in mind that the more specific your questions, the more informative the answers will be. So, do not be afraid of asking questions that may help you in improving the effectiveness of your teaching.
(3) Prior to classes, provide VI students with technical instructions about the tools that will be employed during the course (what platforms will be used, how they work, how to install the phonetic/mnemonic Russian keyboard, etc.).
(4) When planning in-class activities, make sure they involve alternative sensory modes that entail simultaneously different senses (sight and hearing).
(5) Do not avoid visual resources just because of the presence of VI students in your class. If they are considered useful for your learning purposes, continue to incorporate photographs, paintings, and pictures of any kind, making sure – if necessary – to provide an oral description of visual materials for VI students.
(6) When providing explanations or conducting activities, frequently repeat the grammar or lexical structures you are considering: this will help VI students (especially those who
are blind) become familiar with them; at the same time, such practice will be beneficial for sighted students as well, ultimately improving their pronunciation;

(7) When introducing new lexical items, spell them out loud, so VI students can memorize and eventually take note of the new words.

(8) Bear in mind that, since the course is delivered remotely, you can count only on digital materials (no tactile materials can be used). In designing your digital materials, follow the guidelines for accessibility (high contrast, large font, at least 1.5 line spacing, etc.). Be sure that all the materials can fully interact with screen readers (try to avoid multilingual situations, use headings for Word files, provide alternative texts for pictures, etc.);

(9) Construct a set of homework that privileges listening and speaking activities. Ask your students to record themselves when completing a speaking assignment, as so you will be able to give them feedback about their oral skills. At the same time, do not exclude writing and reading activities. When asking students to complete a writing assignment (e.g., a quiz), make sure it can be carried out with a screen reader. If you are asking students to complete a reading activity, you can attach an audio file where you read the text; in this way you will avoid any problem of mispronunciation caused by a misreading by the screen reader.

(10) In general, throughout the course, ask your VI student(s) if they are encountering any technical problems (e.g., in reference to the platforms used, the materials, the homework, the Cyrillic keyboard) in order to monitor the accessibility of the tools, resources, and materials you are providing. If they report any difficulty, you must find a solution (bearing in mind that there is always ‘another way’!). Do not be afraid to ask students to help you with suggestions: most of the time, they have a better knowledge of what assistive technology allows them to do, how it works, and what accessibility truly means.

Our experience confirms the assertion that “the shift towards adaptation of the curricular materials and the teaching methods for VI learners ... appeal[s] to sighted people as well because of the variation of the methods and the instructional materials” (Coşkun 2013, 289–90). In fact, the presence of VI students encouraged us to implement multisensory activities (all written input was also given as audio input as well) and
double-channel materials (visual and auditory) that proved to have beneficial effects for sighted students as well in terms of oral production (pronunciation, intonation, fluency), motivation, and general engagement. It is important to note that the inclusive spirit that guided the instructor in designing and conducting activities ultimately affected the general atmosphere of the classroom, fostering the development of a collaborative environment, where sighted students always displayed a positive attitude towards implicitly helping VI students (e.g., by spontaneously offering to be the team leader in group activities that required a reading moment to accomplish a task).

Converting the class into an online course turned out to have positive effects on the learning process as a whole. In particular, holding the course remotely ensured the regular participation of all students in the classes, since they did not have to travel in order to attend face-to-face lessons. This in itself demonstrates how distance education is truly able to overcome physical borders – whether created by a global pandemic or an individual disability. In addition, the transition to distance delivery mode enabled us to explore alternative pedagogical practices that ultimately opened new horizons in teaching Russian as a FL. Among the most interesting and significant results of our course, there is, for example, the fact that at the end most students were able to write almost without errors using the Russian keyboard (a skill that is usually neglected in traditional A1 in-person courses).

Given the experience here reported, it would appear that the COVID-19 pandemic has inadvertently contributed to the way in which innovative contexts and tools can be explored and developed. While access to education for people with disabilities is enshrined in legislation at the international and national levels, the actual implementation of inclusive practices in university teaching programs is still an emergent and ongoing process. The technical solutions, together with the creativity and a renewed attitude towards the issues of inclusion and access(ibility) that we have experienced during this emergency will definitely have a significant impact on inclusive education and will continue to be influential long after the pandemic.

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Lessons from the COVID-19 Pandemic: Boosting Student Engagement

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1. Introduction
The COVID-19 pandemic reshaped education in previously unimaginable ways. After the initial shock caused by the sudden change to emergency distance learning, both teachers and students concluded that online instruction might have certain advantages: a lack of a commute, the ability to attend classes from the comfort of one’s home, and access to class recordings and additional materials. But most importantly, the shift from traditional face-to-face settings to the online mode has enriched teaching with new ways to increase student engagement. Emergency remote teaching pushed teachers to master a useful skill to keep their students focused on the lesson amidst digital distractions behind the screen and despite emotional issues surrounding the pandemic and the switch to an unfamiliar learning mode. While distractions existed in the face-to-face classroom even before the pandemic, many teachers who are new to teaching online have been challenged to find ways of engaging students when the students are not sitting in front of them and may be behind a blank screen and a muted microphone.

Engagement is defined by action and active involvement in the process of learning (Mercer 2019) and it has always been an inherent part of language learning and language research (Hiver et al. 2021). Language teaching constantly engages learners into action through communicative tasks, ongoing feedback, and frequent peer interactions in partner work. Language teachers further spark their learners’ interest by teaching target language culture, using authentic materials, and even connecting them with native speakers to provide a link between the classroom and the real world. The pandemic imposed a considerable challenge on teachers: they had to transform these traditional activities into the online format to maintain the same degree of engagement while simultaneously dealing with additional factors that hinder engagement. Educators learned new techniques of creating engaging activities using videoconferencing platforms, interactive tools, and a myriad of individual techniques in order to keep their learners engaged in lessons during a crisis despite
stress, a possible aversion to remote learning, ubiquitous Zoom fatigue, and constant digital distractions.

Many institutions plan a return to traditional face-to-face classrooms for the Fall of 2021. But there is no doubt that remote teaching has earned a place in education: as a safe go-to option in emergency situations, as an alternative to snow and sick days, and as a flexible option to acknowledge students’ preferences in tranquil times (Superville 2020). It is important for educators to feel comfortable and prepared to switch between face-to-face and online modalities, if needed, and be skilled in best practices of online learning. Make-shift techniques of pandemic teaching should give way to a more systematic use of tools and methods to deliver engaging and high-quality instruction in future remote learning, be it to weather the next crisis, offer more flexibility, or to engage students whose phones and other devices offer close and powerful distractions.

This article presents an overview of lessons learned from the pandemic that show ways to boost learners’ engagement in online classes. To an extent, these lessons can transfer to post-pandemic teaching and be applied in Russian language classrooms to better engage students. The techniques described best fit lessons with young adults in formal language classes at the post-secondary level but can also be applied to a wide variety of teaching settings, such as online tutoring, community classes, and teaching heritage learners.

2. Principles of engagement learned during the pandemic
The coronavirus pandemic has changed education in many ways. Previously little-known terms such as online/distance/remote learning, hybrid and hyflex learning, and synchronous and asynchronous learning have entered instructors’ active vocabulary. Educators have delved into instructional design to adapt their existing courses into a new digital environment. Without face-to-face contact in a physical classroom, learner engagement has become even more important in designing an effective online course, and now teachers must consider the format of the class in many more possible iterations than before. The format may even change during a given semester, which means that having multiple ways of engaging students that work well in a variety of formats has become that much more important.

This article discusses ways to improve learner engagement by presenting lessons from the pandemic that fall into four main categories: 1) keeping students on track with course progress; 2) course design
approaches that increase engagement; 3) engagement through interactive techniques; and 4) emergency-specific techniques.

2.1. Keeping students on track with course progress
One of many things that educators learned during the pandemic was the importance of clearly-defined course policies and procedures for helping students to stay on track with course progress. An online class environment, especially one hurriedly created, can overwhelm students with new procedures. The consistency of course design (whether at the institutional or individual course level) can greatly contribute to student engagement if class procedures are clearly structured and students receive initial training in following these procedures (see Gacs, Goertler, and Spasova 2020, 386).

2.1.1. Learning Management Systems (LMSs)
Before the pandemic, LMSs were already used at educational institutions, but not always to their fullest capacity, primarily to establish consistent structure and functionality across courses and disciplines (McDaniel et al. 2020). The pandemic emphasized the benefits of using LMSs to create interactivity and approximate traditional classroom procedures. Most LMSs include a set of often-used online templates for quizzes and surveys, including multiple choice, fill-in-the-blanks, matching, and essay. Even in traditional settings, using an LMS adds consistency to course design, and in online settings, using the LMS’s functionality to the fullest helps promote students’ engagement with the course and its content during online classes, for assignment submissions and feedback, as well as for examinations.

2.1.2. Consistency of course procedures
In traditional face-to-face classrooms, teachers can collect and return homework, distribute necessary handouts, easily assign pairs and groups, and administer written and oral exams. These attributes of the traditional classroom form routines that engage students because the class procedures are familiar. Online courses need to provide the same level of consistency and clarity. A course syllabus can specify guidelines for the mode of access to online classes (e.g., with cameras on/off, permission to access class from various gadgets), participation (e.g., what behaviors earn or decrease participation credit, group work rules), the format of assignments (e.g., guidelines for scanned or recorded assignments), and communication with the teacher and classmates (e.g., link to office hours, rules for using Zoom chats for communication).
Engagement in an online class can be more difficult than in a traditional class where teachers can more easily keep track of students. Online, the physical proximity of the teacher and the students is replaced by a microphone and a webcam feed that sometimes stays turned off. To avoid situations when students drift into digital distractions behind the screen, teachers can employ simple techniques, such as simply calling on students whose cameras are turned off to keep learners engaged in front of the screen. Teachers can consider implementing policies for what happens if a student fails to react to the teacher’s questions on more than one occasion. Thinking these rules through at the course design stage, providing clear instructions to learners at the beginning of the course, and keeping this structure intact throughout the semester can create helpful routines.

It is also equally important to include activities that require learners to practice these procedures early on in the course to address and prevent future technological difficulties. For instance, time should be set aside in the first week of instruction for students to practice submitting various forms of assignments (e.g., scanned written notes, audio or image files). Students should practice submitting various types of files by using appropriate tools and according to the expectations set out by the instructor.

2.2. Course design approaches that increase engagement
As the COVID-19 pandemic pushed us into distance modes of teaching, educators faced challenges achieving their curriculum goals, including transforming existing lesson plans into engaging online lessons. The section below discusses ways to apply existing approaches and strategies to online learning to improve students’ engagement through course design.

2.2.1. The flipped classroom
The flipped classroom approach, which uses instructional videos as homework to introduce most theoretical aspects of a course and devotes class time to applying this theoretical knowledge, existed long before the pandemic. The flipped approach lends itself well to online teaching. Besides the obvious advantage of having more time in class for communicative activities, a flipped classroom provides a simple solution to two significant problems that affect both equity and engagement in online classes: learners who frequently experience technical problems will not miss the teacher’s explanations, and struggling students (or those who had reasons to miss class) get a chance to spend more time with course content outside of class and thus be more engaged. Moving the teacher’s explanations to an asynchronous mode of work makes flipped classroom methods contingent
on the learners’ ability to work independently. With many distractions available to students, it is good practice to include some kind of check on the material, such as a short quiz after the instructional video, to check understanding, or a requirement to submit written notes to ensure that students have completed the tutorial. Such checks allow teachers to identify problem areas so that lesson plans can be adjusted.

2.2.2. Microlearning
In large part influenced by the prevalence of mobile devices, the idea of how to engage with texts has changed in recent years. Most of our students represent Generation Z, the newest generation of digital natives. Similar to Millennials, Gen Zers tend to prefer shorter segments of learning (Mosca, Curtis, and Savoth 2019), and this will likely continue to accelerate even after the COVID crisis has passed. Today’s students are more likely to be used to swiping through a large number of text and video posts in a short amount of time on popular social media platforms, like Twitter and TikTok. Educators can mimic this experience by turning to microlearning, a strategy that presents content in a series of short learning activities (Alqurashi 2017) to reflect new ways of learning and socializing that are characteristic for this new generation of learners. According to the principles of microlearning, students perform better when content is presented in a series of small segments with short evaluations after each segment (Giurgiu 2017). Microlearning targets segmenting content into bite-sized chunks that reflect a growing preference among students for shorter learning segments and can lead to more consistent engagement.

2.3. Engagement through interactive techniques
The pandemic led to a surge of new online tools and platforms for interactive learning, all of which have potential for increasing student engagement. While it is tempting to explore all of the new and exciting interactive tools that have emerged in the past year, it is crucial to limit their number for the sake of establishing consistent and familiar routines. The techniques described below refer to online teaching, but they will also be helpful going forward into post-pandemic teaching for hybrid courses, for situations that call for a temporary switch to remote classes or for occasions when students cannot be present in class (due to travel or sickness, for example), but are allowed to attend class virtually.

2.3.1. Videoconferencing platforms
One of the most crucial elements of the foreign language classroom is
interactivity. In face-to-face classes, paired and group work ensures that students are actively using the language, while immediate teacher feedback provides important formative assessment to learners. At first, the shift to online learning meant losing many physical components of the traditional classroom. During the pandemic, videoconferencing platforms, such as Zoom, Google Meet, and Microsoft Teams helped recreate some of the elements of the traditional classroom. The leading platforms share similar sets of features: they enable participants to hear and view each other, allow screen sharing, provide cloud storage and meeting recording options, and they incorporate built-in tools for interaction among students and the course content like chats, polls, Breakout Rooms, control of other people’s screens, control of the background and layout of the screen, and screen annotation (which allows all participants to draw, type or use stamps on the screen simultaneously).

2.3.1.1. Screen sharing and annotation
Educators choose between platforms based on their unique interactive features, but it is the tools common to all platforms that shape the best practices of online teaching. The most used feature—screen sharing—allows instructors and students to present any content directly from their personal computer screen. The benefits of screen sharing during online courses is obvious and it is widely used by educators. However, there is one additional benefit to screen sharing that might be overlooked: screen sharing can be a very useful tool to better organize teaching in the hyflex classroom. Hyflex classes include both face-to-face and synchronous online instruction (students in a physical classroom and students attending via Zoom or a similar platform) at the same time. The use of a traditional dry erase board can be problematic in such classes due to camera and microphone limitations. To enable both face-to-face and online learners to easily see the same presentation or digital whiteboard in good resolution, teachers can simultaneously start the screen share for the online learners and the screen projection for the face-to-face ones.

Annotation tools are also useful in a variety of ways. The teacher can share their screen with a picture, text, or presentation, and learners can type or draw on these projections (see an example in Figure 1).
Figure 1. Students draw on a shared slide on Zoom in response to the teacher’s prompt to find examples of the Prepositional case.

The annotation can also be used for students to vote on a specific answer before the teacher reveals the correct answer or as an integrated polling feature for polls that do not require statistical results (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Students anonymously vote on the screen by using stamps from the Zoom annotation toolbar.

The annotation on the screen engages all students in class at the same time and such direct engagement can help keep learners focused on
the lesson. Some of these tools may be ones that teachers use even after they return to face-to-face classrooms.

2.3.1.2. Breakout Rooms
Breakout Rooms are another widely used videoconferencing tool that allows the meeting host to divide the participants into groups, recreating traditional partner and group activities online. Like in the traditional classroom, the teacher can divide students into teams of certain sizes either at random or teachers can give rooms names relevant to class tasks and let students select where they would like to complete the activity. For example, for text discussions, one group can be named “I liked this story” and another one “I didn’t like this story” for students to join a specific group and contribute to the discussion.

Breakout Rooms are a great tool for student collaboration during online lessons (Chandler 2016), but they lack teacher control compared to partner and group work in face-to-face classrooms. Once students join the Breakout Rooms, the teacher cannot observe what is happening there unless the teacher joins a specific room. Common problems with Breakout Rooms observed in practice are students misinterpreting the task, teachers’ miscalculations of the time needed to complete the task, use of L1, and extraneous conversations. To alleviate the first two problems, teachers can give students control to move in and out of Breakout Rooms as well as making a list with important information and procedures for their work while in Breakout Rooms (Chandler 2016). To reduce the use of L1 and extraneous conversations, teachers can enhance teacher presence by sending regular broadcast messages to groups reminding them to stay on task, joining rooms at random to check on students, and by assigning one student per group to be a moderator who is responsible for following the teacher’s directions.

Like screen sharing, Breakout Rooms are essential in hyflex classrooms. When face-to-face students work with partners on a task, the teacher can send the online learners into Breakout Rooms. Depending on the task, teachers may have online and face-to-face work together in Breakout Rooms, increasing classroom community.

2.3.2. Interactive platforms and tools
A certain set of basic interactive features in LMSs and videoconferencing platforms could be sufficient to successfully engage learners in online classrooms. There are many other online tools and platforms that offer a range of additional interactive tasks and attractive interfaces. In contrast
to LMSs, online platforms, such as Nearpod, Quizizz, LearningApps.org, H5P, Kahoot, Menti, and Quizlet, offer appealing designs and additional quizzing features that enhance interactivity and engagement in synchronous and asynchronous activities in language classrooms. New platforms appear regularly, offering exciting new features, but it is still important to not overwhelm students, so teachers have to make their use of these tools intentional and consistent throughout the course.

2.3.2.1. Quizzes and polls
Some teachers increase student engagement using quizzes and polls that are integrated into the synchronous online classroom, for which there are many available formats. Learners can collaborate on completing elaborate tasks, such as answering questions embedded in a video, crossword puzzles, or putting story elements in the correct order. Combining quizzing with other interactive features, such as screen sharing, screen control, and screen annotation, allows multiple participants to engage with the same task simultaneously. Finally, accessing quizzes, polls, and surveys on smartphones can create real-time competition or an engaging brainstorming session. The gamification of language tasks, sometimes coupled with elements of friendly competition, instantly engages learners and promotes camaraderie. The team-building factor of online quizzing is important for any type of a learning environment, but especially for online and hyflex classrooms. Hyflex courses can sometimes have an inherent imbalance because the presence of face-to-face and online learners in the same class can put either group at a disadvantage: either face-to-face students must work on their laptops in class to access online content, or online students are limited to submitting their responses via chat. To alleviate this imbalance and engage both online and face-to-face students at the same time, teachers of hyflex classes can integrate quizzing or polling via smartphones to simultaneously engage learners in class and online in the same activity. Such tools can be used for vocabulary checks, brainstorming, grammar review, and answering questions. Figure 3 demonstrates an activity that lets hyflex students respond to teachers’ prompts via smartphones: a teacher in the hyflex setting used a Menti quizzing tool to collect responses from the learners in class and online simultaneously. The teacher used Zoom annotation to fix minor mistakes and projected the responses on the screen and through screen sharing. In the follow-up task, learners “gossip” with partners about what their classmates did on the weekend.
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Go to www.menti.com and use the code 3252327

Figure 3. An example of a Menti-based quiz in a hyflex classroom.

Integration activities on smartphones into lesson plans engage learners in language learning through appealing formats. These activities and competitions using smartphones can remain useful in traditional face-to-face classrooms in the post-pandemic world to engage students by occasionally breaking traditional routines.

2.3.2.2. Interactive documents

Many language teachers have traditionally used printed materials to supplement the textbook. In the pre-COVID classroom, distributing printouts and working on these tasks was straightforward, but online the traditional printed worksheet quickly becomes problematic, because learners cannot always easily annotate or turn in the materials received from the teacher. Fortunately, there are several different ways to make interactive documents that can be annotated by students with some LMSs, Adobe Reader, Google Slides, Google Docs, Kami, TeacherMade, or liveworksheets.com. Some of these online platforms require some training, but they allow teachers to easily create and distribute interactive documents and provide learners with a set of user-friendly annotation tools that make completion and submission of the activities easy (Figure 4).
Integrating interactive worksheets into synchronous online lessons requires learners to engage with each other and with the screen (they need to type in answers) in a more convenient and faster way than printed worksheets. Face-to-face teachers may also want to incorporate some of these tools to facilitate students’ typing skills or streamline assignment submission once they are back in the physical classroom.

Similarly, teachers can create interactive documents using tools such as PowerPoint or Google Slides and then have students manipulate them. The use of traditional presentation formats allows teachers to proceed through the lesson presentation and invite students to collaborate on specific slides in real time. Figure 5 shows a screenshot of a synchronous activity using online PowerPoint for group work. Students work in four Breakout Rooms on Zoom to simultaneously add their typed responses to the slides with prompts. The content slide was duplicated for each group and marked with the group number for easy navigation. These slides (7-10) are embedded into the teacher’s main presentation for this lesson. All changes appear on the PowerPoint in real time and the teacher can observe changes appearing on the slides while students work in Breakout Rooms.
Students can draw, add pictures and text, record audio, and move elements. Teachers can follow each group’s progress on the screen and can support groups by immediately joining a specific room if students seem to be off task or not completing the task correctly. Another benefit of using a presentation in this way is that all learner-created content is saved in the same presentation as the teacher’s explanations and examples for later reference. This same technique can also be used in face-to-face classes post-COVID, with students participating by using mobile devices or computers.

2.3.2.3. Interactive online boards
Interactive online whiteboards like Miro, Jamboard, and Padlet can be valuable tools for student engagement in group projects because they afford unlimited space, integration of plugins and media links, as well as collaboration online and offline. Unlike annotation or whiteboards in Zoom or other videoconferencing applications, these boards are not limited to the synchronous session and are accessible from anywhere in the world. This makes interactive boards and their embedded messaging tools ideal for connecting students with native speakers to communicate or collaborate on projects, a practice which can be integrated back into post-pandemic face-to-face teaching. Teachers can use the interactive online boards for synchronous and asynchronous tasks, ranging from short projects (brainstorming, word maps, writing a story together, etc.)
to lengthy multi-step projects with simulations and real-life applications. Interactive online boards fit well within this framework, because they allow for organizing multiple perspectives and multiple data formats into a multimedia presentation that can be saved, shared, and re-used in different educational contexts.

2.4. Emergency-specific techniques
The pandemic highlighted the need to engage students in learning amidst stress and uncertainty. In the U.S., enthusiastic K-12 teachers put stickers on their faces, integrated Bitmoji digital stickers into materials, and sent virtual gifts to their students to improve class participation. Caring college instructors likewise sent encouraging messages and provided various kinds of support to keep their students from dropping out. This section describes techniques to engage learners by lowering stress and increasing mental comfort.

2.4.1. Prioritizing content
It became apparent for many instructors that the pace of online instruction is somewhat slower than in face-to-face classes (Moorhouse, Li, and Walsh 2021). Planning an online course in crisis situations needs to start by prioritizing content that students must master at their course level. The decision to cut or keep specific topics in existing Russian language curricula should be based on national and international language proficiency guidelines (ACTFL language proficiency levels, TORFL, CERFL). Once the main priorities of a course have been identified, the instructor can move those topics toward the beginning of the semester, leaving leeway at the end of the term in case course outcomes need to be adjusted. This clustering of important topics alleviates possible delays brought on by the slower pace of online learning and/or issues relating to the crisis. If online instruction is able to proceed at a pace similar to that of traditional lessons, the topics that were previously set aside can be reintroduced into the curriculum at the end of the semester. In this way, instructors may be able to help to lower student stress at the end of the semester by managing and adjusting expectations.

2.4.2. Building a community of learners
Language, more than other subjects, requires learners to regularly communicate and collaborate with each other. Collaboration can be equally challenging and stimulating for Gen Z students, who are called the “loneliest” generation (Manning-Schaffel 2018). Students who feel lonely
might be excited about working with peers, but they also might feel self-conscious when talking to someone less familiar. Feeling uncomfortable around peers can also lead to increased anxiety during partner work, especially online. In contrast to the traditional classroom, students’ work in Breakout Rooms is more awkward because students are usually assigned to rooms randomly and stay with their partner one-on-one in this virtual space. The time after the task is done and before the teacher closes the rooms can be uncomfortable. And it can be equally awkward for a student to return to the main room early and find him or herself one-on-one with the teacher.

Teachers can help learners feel comfortable around peers and develop a positive mental attitude toward class and themselves by creating a strong community within each group and promoting team building. This sense of belonging to a community of language learners becomes even more important for online classes, where students only sporadically see or hear each other. For instance, conducting regular team-building activities, involving learners in group activities in Breakout Rooms, pairing them up for speaking practice, assigning group projects, as well as designating some homework assignments as partner assignments, can help build a stronger online community.

2.4.3. Showing care
Demonstrating a caring attitude toward students is especially important during emergency remote teaching. To make students feel that the teacher cares, teachers’ attention to their students can extend beyond the classroom. Before the course starts, teachers can create a welcome video or a welcome letter in which they verbally express their care and instill learners with confidence that the teacher is cognizant of and willing to be flexible with regard to situations when learners’ progress in class is affected by pandemic or related stress. During the semester, teachers can check in on students, perhaps via email, letting them know in what ways the teacher is available for help when students struggle with course content or stress.

3. Conclusion
The pandemic tested educators’ ability to adjust to a sudden change in course delivery. Rising to this challenge rewarded us with some profound lessons that can be taken back into the face-to-face world. This article presented an overview of techniques for boosting engagement that we learned during the pandemic. This engagement can further be improved by designing content tailored to the needs of Gen Z learners – shorter
segments, frequent evaluation, and appealing design. During online classes, teachers can use a variety of interactive features, tools, and platforms to keep their learners’ attention on the screen. Finally, learners will appreciate the teacher’s expressions of care that might help them through the stress of online learning.

The pandemic-induced shift of instructional format confirmed what many have known for years: that instructional success depends in many ways on how well teachers can keep their learners engaged. Many of the new lessons of engagement that we have learned during the COVID crisis can continue to enhance our courses even after we move back to teaching in familiar modes.

References


Using Authentic Online Resources in Russian for STEM Coursework for Novice through Superior Level Learners

MOLLY THOMASY BLASING

1. Introduction
In Fall 2020, as the COVID-19 pandemic raged across the world and upended so many aspects of our lives, I was faced with two completely new pedagogical challenges. Like many world language instructors, I was teaching language courses online for the very first time. Fall 2020 was also the semester I was scheduled to teach the pilot version of a course that I have been developing for Advanced level learners of Russian at the University of Kentucky called Languages for Special Purposes: Russian for STEM. In this article I have two main goals: to make a case for increased inclusion of STEM language instruction in a Humanities framework in Russian programs across the country; and to offer models of asynchronous learning activities at all levels using content from STEM fields. These activities, on topics such as climate change, epidemiology and vaccine development, and the past and future of space exploration, are based on authentic online resources and could be used either in online instruction or as preparation for face-to-face engagement.

I first began to imagine a Russian language course designed around material from STEM fields in 2015, when a chemistry major in my second-year Russian course was preparing a presentation on Mendeleev and the Periodic Table. As we worked together to access the language she needed to talk about this tool at the Intermediate level, I had important realizations about student-instructor partnerships in STEM language learning. As we pored over the Periodic Table in Russian and conceived of how to explain its structure, we were essentially on equal footing: I had more facility reading and writing Russian, but she knew the chemistry. The student reminded me how the Table of Elements was organized, and I used internet resources on chemistry to find the right verbs to express these key concepts in Russian. Working together, we developed a simplified definition that she was able to use in her presentation. Two lessons remain with me from that time: how enthusiastic and motivated this student was to be able to talk about
her intellectual passion in a second language, and how it was possible for me to collaborate with other people to combine STEM content knowledge and language pedagogy in productive ways.

My Russian for STEM course is taught at the Advanced level (ACTFL 2012), and its content modules incorporate field-specific lexical development, advanced work with numbers, the language of experimental design and data analysis, and historical and sociocultural aspects of the topics we study. In Fall 2020, my students worked through units on COVID-19 vaccine development, climate change and the Russian Arctic, and the history and future of space exploration with a focus on Mars. They also interviewed science and engineering graduate students at Skoltech, a graduate institute on the outskirts of Moscow, as part of a virtual exchange opportunity to connect with native Russian-speaking scientists. While a semester-long course is one approach to establishing connections between Russian language and STEM content, I offer in the Appendix to this article stand-alone lesson plans that can be used in Russian language courses at all levels, from Novice to Superior. These are lessons that were developed as part of the online course taught during the pandemic, but regardless of whether they are employed as part of in person or online courses, they are meant to be completed asynchronously, as preparation for interpersonal or presentational communication during subsequent synchronous sessions.

2. Why Russian for STEM?
We have data suggesting that student professional interests in Russia-related fields have shifted and diversified since the collapse of the Soviet Union. Careers in government service, business, journalism, education, and the military are of increasing interest to our graduates (Merrill 2013; Martin 2020, 30-31). Being proficient in discussing developments in STEM fields in a second language is excellent preparation for our students to enter these career areas, which require both intercultural competence and an understanding of technological and scientific innovation. STEM language courses are potentially useful recruiting tools as well. Advertising a Russian for STEM course at student orientations may entice learners who are planning to major in STEM fields to join our beginning Russian language classes. The promise of a course integrating student interest in the sciences, alongside international policy discussions, cross-cultural exchange, and perhaps even STEM internships abroad, could boost enrollments in lower-level language courses and motivate students to continue into the third- or fourth- year level to take this specialized course.

As Grandin and Berka (2014) argue in their article about an innovative
dual degree program in engineering and world languages at the University of Rhode Island, “the realities of a technologically driven global society demand a reconsideration of the roles of the humanities. To be liberally educated today demands significant background in both humanistic and technical endeavors” (29). The University of Rhode Island’s International Engineering Program (University of Rhode Island n.d.), as well as a similar dual degree STEM + World Language program at the University of Kentucky (University of Kentucky n.d.) and MIT’s Road Maps to STEM + Languages degree and career options (Massachusetts Institute of Technology n.d.) are model programs for showcasing the pathways available to combine student interests and professional ambitions in STEM and world language fields. Developing stand-alone Russian for STEM courses, or even simply integrating STEM content into our existing language classes may be useful first steps toward demonstrating to administrators the interest students have in these kinds of dual degree programs as well as our programs’ ability to adapt to student preferences.

Even if institutions do not aspire to dual degree programs, students at all levels, from Novice to Superior, can benefit from lessons on science and technology as part of the regular curriculum. At the core of this vision for Russian for STEM is a recognition that students graduating from our programs should be poised to engage with Russia as a fully modern, technological, and scientific global power. The Russian for STEM lessons I propose here are not aimed primarily at supporting future Russian-speaking scientists, although that is one possible outcome. The central goal, rather, is to begin to prepare students for careers as global language professionals—translators, business leaders, public health experts, intelligence specialists, diplomats, and journalists—by equipping them with a solid foundation in the lexical, conceptual, and communicative strategies that are employed in the fields of science and technology.

3. Russian for STEM as Humanities Pedagogy
Higher education administrators, politicians, and parents in recent years have forcefully advocated for the usefulness and employment potential of STEM majors for college students (Cohan 2012; Gates and Mirkin 2012; Lewin 2013; Jay 2014; Jaschik 2016; Stover 2017). There are equally powerful voices advocating for students to develop the critical thinking, historical understanding, analytical writing, and intercultural competence skills that emerge from training in the humanities (Bérubé 2013; Hirsch 2013; Schmidt 2018; Ruggeri 2019). One lesson that has emerged from teaching STEM topics in a fully online format during a global pandemic is just
how much the humanities, social sciences, and sciences have in common. Although these distinct fields approach questions and problems from different perspectives, each discipline takes an interest in how humans exist in the world. STEM content lessons in world language classrooms are based on human exploration and observation of the world, and the way humans and nature interact in this world and in outer space. A Russian for STEM course should not be seen as capitulation to the forces in higher education that suggest that STEM is the only guaranteed path to success. Rather, STEM language learning makes use of Humanities methods in ways that challenge the unnecessarily limited, anti-Humanities way in which some people imagine STEM (Beam 2016). Russian for STEM is wonderfully subversive of this disciplinary divide because the course is as much about culture, history, politics, and everyday life as it is about science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. A language and culture course that empowers students to talk about science and technology and their connections to history, culture, and the natural world will prepare students well to take positions in the twenty-first century working world, where connections increasingly need to be drawn, as the World-Readiness Standards suggest, among the products, perspectives, and practices of people around the globe (National Standards Collaborative Board 2015).

Russian for STEM has broad appeal not only among STEM majors, but also among those majoring in the Humanities and Social Sciences. My course, for instance, attracted students from several different areas of campus: an Honors College Russian major who was also pre-med; a heritage learner chemistry major who was applying to pharmacy school; an international studies major who was a member of Air Force ROTC; a retired community member enrolled in our institution’s program for citizens in our state aged 65+ for continuing education; and two MA students from our Patterson School of Diplomacy and International Commerce who were pursuing a diplomacy concentration. The varied composition of student interests and foci meant that the group approached the material from different perspectives and knowledge bases, which allowed for productive collaboration on assignments and a diverse array of presentation topics based on the students’ personal interests. As one of the diplomacy graduate students put it, “My favorite part of the course has been learning from other students with expertise in the hard sciences. At the Patterson School we study many global issues — like COVID-19 and climate change — that can only be resolved through policy informed by science. The class feels like a practice interaction between the science and policy focused students
that needs to happen in the real policymaking world” (Piercy 2020).

While colleagues across the U.S. seem to recognize the value of teaching subject matter that may align better with our students’ future careers in Russia-related fields, instructors of Russian may hesitate to teach Russian for STEM. A major point of resistance to such a course is that instructors of Russian may not feel capable of teaching a STEM topics course because we ourselves are not specialists in these content areas. I operate, however, from a belief that language instructors are absolutely qualified to teach STEM language courses. It is precisely our training as specialists in language, literature, and culture that positions us well to support students in meeting these challenges. The fact that we are not specialists in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics means that we must necessarily cede the “sage on the stage” model of pedagogy in favor of the “guide on the side” paradigm (King 1993). Our personal subject matter gaps enable us to embrace more collaborative, student-centered learning models, which we know work well for cultivating lifelong learners. At the same time, we possess skills, knowledge, and organizing principles that are critical to the process of teaching and learning the language of STEM fields. Language teachers are skilled at scaffolding assignments, guiding textual analysis, building new lexical bases, and illuminating grammatical structures. Philologists are particularly adept at helping students make sense of the stylistic and genre conventions of texts, including science journalism, research articles, and informational presentations about developments in STEM. STEM texts are conducive to supporting students’ acquisition of grammatical structures, including verbal governance, participles, passive constructions, nominalization of verbs, devices of coherence and cohesion, and complex syntax.

Teaching the subject matter of STEM fields in another language is not substantially different from teaching about literature, art, film, business, or history. At the core of any work on Languages for Special Purposes are vocabulary development, lessons on complex syntax and stylistics, and the facilitating of opportunities for improving intercultural competence, all areas in which traditionally trained language teachers are more than equipped to support our students (Humbley, Budin, and Laurén 2018). Russian for STEM lessons also work well for engaging the World-Readiness Standards because the material offers numerous opportunities for exploring cross-cultural comparisons of responses to disease, climate change, or natural disasters; connecting with Russian-speaking scientist communities at home and abroad; learning how scientific inquiry relates
to politics, diplomacy, and international relations; and analyzing linguistic and stylistic differences in science communication.

4. Russian for STEM as Cultural Content
Reflecting on data from recent studies, Kraemer, Merrill, and Prestel (2020, 57) ask whether Russian instructors might look in new directions for potential course material that connects with broader cultural competence:

The main focus of traditional Russian programs has been on developing language skills, with cultural content often understood as literature, usually in translation (Merrill 2013). Programs should ask if this approach achieves the objective of preparing globally competent students who can meet the challenges of the 21st-century job market. If they decide the answer is no, one solution is to move toward a model that emphasizes global competence as defined in the World-Readiness Standards; that is, developing students’ ability to “use the language to investigate, explain, and reflect on the relationship between the products and perspectives of the cultures studied” (NSCB 2015).

One of the key takeaways from my pilot semester teaching Russian for STEM was that materials from STEM fields can be harnessed for discussions of a wide range of topics related to cultural practices, products, and perspectives across different national traditions. In the World-Readiness Standards, the term “practices” refers to “patterns of social interactions accepted by society” (Cutshall, 33). “Products” are “[tangible and intangible] items required or justified by the underlying beliefs and values of that culture” (Cutshall, 33), and “perspectives” are understood as meanings, attitudes, values, and ideas that “represent that culture’s view of the world” (Cutshall, 33). Within this Standard, students are meant to “demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between practices and perspectives of the culture studied” as well as the relationship “between the products and perspectives of that culture” (Cutshall, 33). What are some examples of how these relationships can be studied in the context of STEM content?

Our units exploring vaccine development and climate change in Russia and around the world enabled students to explore the dynamic relationships between the cultural concepts “products, perspectives, and practices.” We discussed perspectives and products as we studied how and why the Russian Federation became the first nation to release a COVID-19 vaccine. A video we used featuring a Russian-speaking vaccine researcher in Israel led to inquiries into the broader topic of diaspora communities
and Jewish emigration from the former USSR. We investigated culturally specific responses to the global pandemic by comparing our own Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website to that of the Russian Ministry of Health to observe different practices, products, and perspectives connected to informing the public about mitigating the spread of the coronavirus. At the same time, we read and discussed how different countries had different priority populations for early vaccine distribution. In studying the way climate change is shaping the Russian Arctic, we looked at the economic potential of and cultural perspectives on the Northern Sea Route, an engineering “product” that is transforming the shipping industry around the world. We also explored how climate change is impacting the way of life for native peoples in communities in the Russian Far North, which allowed us to explore ethnic, linguistic, and cultural diversity across the regions of Russia.

The topic of outer space also intersects with aspects of culture in compelling ways. Developments in space exploration relate to major questions about the future, but space is also integral to everyday life and the relationship between the practices and products of people living in twenty-first century developed societies. As Gen. John Raymond noted in a recent interview about the importance of space for the average person living in the US, Russia, China, or Europe today, “If you did any kind of internet banking, that was enabled by space capabilities. If you went to the gas station and bought gas at the pump and didn’t have to walk inside to pay, that was enabled by space station [sic]. If you got a weather report, that was enabled by space station. It is fused into everything that we do… everything that we do is enabled by space” (Swisher 2021, 19:25-20:39). Furthermore, the history of the space race and contemporary competition and cooperation in space has as much to do with politics, diplomacy, and cultural history as it does with science and technology. Studying the history, structure, and mission of the International Space Station and U.S.-Russian cooperation and competition in space creates myriad opportunities for analysis of cultural perspectives, practices, and products related to technology, but also to other aspects of culture such as visual art. Moscow’s Muzei Kosmonavtiki (https://kosmo-museum.ru/) and the Smithsonian’s National Air and Space Museum (https://airandspace.si.edu/) each have robust websites available for exploration and cross-cultural comparison. Space also offers to cultural studies a vast archive of Soviet and American posters and artwork celebrating and commemorating major developments in space exploration which can be used to analyze the history of technology, as well as visual rhetoric and artistic innovation. Soviet posters on space
themes are widely available and easily accessible online (Jones 2019). The United States also commissioned work from major artists, including Andy Warhol, Norman Rockwell, and Annie Leibovitz, to visually document the U.S. space program, materials that are ideal for exercises in description and cross-cultural comparison (Halliday 2019). Even the part of my course in which students learned about and practiced identifying the distinctions between different genres of scientific and scholarly reporting (annotatsia, referat, retsenzia) offered an opportunity for cross-cultural comparisons of data analysis practices and research reporting methods within scientific communities. Additional topics of cultural and political relevance might include science and literary creation (doctors as writers; Soviet and post-Soviet science fiction); the social history of technology (the periodic table, cinema, photo-journalism, satellites); and the biochemistry and politics of doping in Olympic sports.

While Russian for STEM is not what typically comes to mind when we think about teaching culture, these instructional materials offer surprising avenues for meeting students’ desire for curriculum that prepares them for a globally interconnected society. Science and technology are in many ways the study of everyday life, of interactions between humans and the natural world. The history of science informs and illuminates other aspects of cultural history, and science and the arts can inspire one another in profound ways, as any lover of science fiction knows. Indeed, we might think of the culture of scientific inquiry as a cultural category unto itself, one that will prepare our learners to be successful global language professionals in jobs as diverse as translator, journalist, diplomat, doctor, or scientist.

5. Blended Learning and Lesson Plans for Novice to Superior Levels
In the absence of a formal textbook for my course, almost all the materials I developed were housed in OneNote, a free, highly customizable note-taking app from Microsoft. A key benefit of OneNote is that it handles a variety of media extremely well and it has excellent functionality for collaborative work. Instructors can embed links, videos, podcasts, maps, and images in pages of the virtual course notebook, and learners who have a stylus and tablet can write directly into the document, which is updated in real time, while others can annotate using built-in annotation tools. Students can easily copy learning materials to their own personal folders in the course notebook, or they can work together on collaborative activities. Homework and personalized vocabulary lists can be stored in the private folders accessible only to the individual student and the instructor.
learning platforms and a pedagogical approach that asked the students to co-create the material under study affords participants the flexibility to respond to the ever-evolving nature of scientific discovery and technological innovation. Remote learning also facilitates student-centered approaches to teaching and learning a language and encourages the types of practices needed for students to become life-long learners (Martin 2016).

As we reflect on the experience of teaching online during the pandemic and contemplate our return to “normal,” many instructors are assessing the benefits of continuing to engage learners in asynchronous learning activities to build certain skills, while ensuring that our more limited face-to-face instructional time is used for activities that demand more interaction and shared physical space. Blended learning is not a new concept (Spasova and Welsh 2020), but it is one that we anticipate will have broader appeal in the post-pandemic learning environment (Gacs, Goertler, and Spasova 2020).

The lesson plans that follow in the Appendix are primarily asynchronous learning activities that emerged from tasks I created for the fully online Fall 2020 Russian for STEM course. The lessons are substantially revised to fit the needs of learners at each level, Novice through Superior. Each activity includes an interpretive reading or listening task designed around an authentic video, audio, or reading text from a variety of Russian news and popular science sources. In most cases this is followed by a presentational or interpersonal speaking or writing activity to apply the lessons of the interpretive mode tasks. The activities are meant to support a blended learning approach to Russian for STEM and offer students ample time to process and explore the lexical, grammatical, and cultural factors at work within the topics under investigation. The activities that appear here are presented as asynchronous learning activities, but they can function as the point of departure for activities an instructor may develop for in-person sessions as well.

The Novice level activity asks learners to read, listen to, and map the geographic regions that comprise the Russian Arctic. The activity also includes a suggestion to extend this activity and build learners’ knowledge base about the effects of climate change on Arctic communities and the environment through a reading in English and a task in which learners add the locations mentioned in the article to their digital map. While a 2020 article in The New Yorker is suggested, any recent news article on this topic would be a suitable substitute. The Intermediate activity is built around a short news story about the 2016 return of the participants in the “Year in Space” project on the International Space Station. The activity asks learners
to employ new vocabulary to answer a set of simple questions about the mission. The Advanced level activity focuses on vaccine development. A BBC Russian video about work on a coronavirus vaccine at a laboratory in Israel asks students to employ new vocabulary and structures to explain the typical stages of vaccine development and testing protocols. Suggested Superior level activities build on the vaccine development work to engage students in a debate about the benefits and drawbacks of releasing a vaccine during a global health crisis before it has undergone all stages of clinical trials. Another activity offers an exercise in reading and translating key passages from published research studies related to COVID-19 stored in a database of scientific journal articles from around the world on the website of the World Health Organization.

6. Recommended Resources and Textbook on Structure of Scientific Texts

Instructors will find a wealth of STEM content resources on the websites of the Arctic Council, ROSATOM, ROSCOSMOS, and the Russian Ministry of Health, as well as the popular science portal PostNauka and the website Arzamas, which features a short course on the history, culture and engineering technology of the Moscow Metro (https://arzamas.academy/courses/79) and a course on the history of Soviet cybernetics and its impact on everyday life in the USSR (https://arzamas.academy/special/cybernetics). Students working at the Advanced level and above will also find useful E.V. Orlova, Nauchnyi tekst: annotirovanie, referirovanie, retsenzirovanie, a 2013 textbook designed for advanced level learners of Russian and aimed at foreign medical students and graduate students in health sciences who are studying in Russia. The book is intended to help students to solidify their understanding of the written and genre conventions of the three main types of scientific summary text in Russian: annotatsia, referat and retsenzia. The textbook employs examples of scientific articles that are all drawn from the field of nutrition sciences, which students from most academic backgrounds are generally equipped to follow. The subject matter is clear and accessible, and the exercises are constructed around authentic scientific publications in top journals in this field. The book opens with charts explaining the purpose and discursive structure of each of the three text types. The book then takes learners through exercises in stylistics to train them to recognize and produce their own versions of these text types. Exercises include topics such as bibliographic conventions; nominalization of verbs; devices of coordination and conjunction in various semantic contexts; common constructions for introducing evidence and examples;
the use of verbal adjectives and verbal adverbs in academic discourse; passive constructions; and direct and indirect reported speech. Although it targets students at the Advanced level and above, the Orlova book is a strong model for curriculum designers interested in developing new Russian for STEM coursework at any level because of the way it balances content with key aspects of scientific discourse strategies and training in grammar and syntax.

7. Conclusion: Support Structures and Future Directions in Russian for STEM

Instructors interested in incorporating more STEM content into their courses will find that a number of colleagues are already teaching Russian for STEM courses or are using topics in science and technology in Russian as the foundation for Russian language learning. For more than 20 years, Wellesley College professor of Russian Thomas Hodge and aquatic ecologist Marianne Moore have co-taught a Spring semester course on the history, culture, and biology of Lake Baikal, followed by a summer of limnology research on site in Siberia (Mogolov 2017). Svetlana Abramova teaches a STEM Russian course at the University of Washington and developed a summer STARTALK program for high school heritage learners of Russian that features Lego robotics projects, lessons on the history and mechanics of aerospace technology, and site visits to the local Museum of Flight, all conducted in Russian (STARTALK 2021). Valentina Zaitseva at the University of Washington teaches a 1-credit add-on course in Medical Russian for first year Russian learners in which students acquire a variety of medical terminology and gain opportunities for practicing medical communication, as well as reading and analyzing written texts (University of Washington n.d.). Maria Khotimsky at MIT has also developed a new Russian for STEM course at the Advanced level that includes study of historical contributions of Russian scientists and inventors in a global perspective as well as explorations of problems in technology and society (MIT Global Languages 2021). Olesya Kisselev and William Comer (2019) coauthored a paper about their interdepartmental collaboration with colleagues at Portland State University to develop a Russian Environmental Sustainability course. In fact, colleagues across the federally funded Russian Flagship programs that support students of all majors in acquiring high-level Russian language skills are working to integrate the principles of Languages for Special Purposes (LSP) and Languages Across the Curriculum (LAC) by featuring lectures by local Russian-speaking STEM scholars (Alsufieva et al. 2021).
The activities and lesson samples that accompany this article are intended as models; they may be adapted to fit the needs, interests, and proficiency levels of students at your institution. Whether these lessons are integrated into traditional Russian language courses—the way one might integrate the study of a poem, an artwork, a film clip, or a popular song—or as the basis for a stand-alone Russian for STEM course, instructors of Russian should feel empowered and capable of bringing these topics into our classrooms. Living through and teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated that scientific inquiry and innovation are inextricably tied to education, politics, culture, history, and the ordinary lives of individuals around the globe. Envisioning STEM content as a variation on the more traditional culture or history lesson means that we can train our learners to engage productively—and in Russian—with human aspects of scientific innovation and discovery in cross-cultural perspective.

While the lesson plans offered in the Appendix present STEM content in place of other kinds of content-based instruction, there is more work to be done to further align our learning goals with the realities of how global languages and STEM topics come together in the working world. If we as a field are truly committed to preparing our graduates to enter professions that demand both proficiency in world languages and facility with the content and discourse of STEM fields, we must cultivate more robust partnerships with individuals working within these areas and industries. Developing stronger partnerships with professionals in STEM fields or STEM-adjacent fields (like military, government, translation and interpreting, and journalism) will enable curriculum designers to understand the language needs of professionals in these sectors more fully. As a first step, we can look to our college and university colleagues who are working in STEM to learn more about what is happening on the ground and what kinds of international partnerships are possible in their fields. We can draw on resources about occupational standards from entities like the National Career Clusters (https://careertech.org/career-clusters) to access clear articulations of specific skills that are essential to each scientific domain of the STEM or STEM-adjacent professions. We must also work to develop curricular programs that enable the combination of Languages for Special Purposes frameworks with Project-Based Learning activities (Neville and Britt 2007) to provide students with high-impact opportunities for immersive experiences navigating STEM-related contexts and problems in the target language.
# Appendix

## Mapping Arctic Geographies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme/Topic</th>
<th>Regions of the Russian Arctic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Skill Area(s)</td>
<td>Interpretive Listening, Reading, and Writing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Target Proficiency Level Details**

**Novice**: Novice-level speakers can communicate short messages on highly predictable, everyday topics using isolated words and phrases that have been encountered, memorized, and recalled (ACTFL 2012, 9). Writers at this level can produce lists and notes based on practiced material. Listeners at this level can best recognize items from lists of keywords, cognates and formulaic expressions that are contextualized and predictable. (ACTFL 2012, 14, 19)

**Essential Question(s)**

What areas (oblasts, autonomous okrugs, major cities) of Russia are considered part of the Arctic? How is climate change affecting these regions?

**Description and Objectives**

While many learners of Russian can locate Moscow and St. Petersburg on a map, the regions that make up the Russian Arctic are less well known. However, these regions of the Far North are essential for the study of climate change and its effects on the Russian economy, the ecology of the region, and the way of life of the peoples of the Far North.

This activity asks learners to listen to, read, and map the major regions of the Russian Arctic using the opening segment of the Тоже Россия (Also Russia) podcast episode on “Города Арктики” (Arctic Cities) and a digital mapping program such as Google Maps or Яндекс Карты. A follow-up activity prompts them to read (in English) about the effects of climate change on the communities and ecology of the Russian Arctic, add additional key locations to their maps, and summarize key aspects of the article in English.

**Resource / Text**

Тоже Россия Podcast Episode Link:
https://soundcloud.com/polka-academy/tozhe-ep-16
### Activity/Activities
**What will learners do?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instructions and Materials for Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Instructions and materials may be copied directly into worksheets, your campus LMS, Microsoft OneNote, or other online platforms for remote or asynchronous learning.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Students are provided with the transcript of the first minute of the podcast, in which the host introduces the program.

**Here is a transcript of the first minute of the podcast in which the host introduces the program (English translation below).** After a very brief intro extract from the main interview, you will hear the text transcribed below (it comes approximately 20 seconds into the recording). As soon as the host finishes this introduction, he will list the major regions from west to east.

«Всем привет, это подкаст Тоже Россия, беседы о нашем неочевидном наследии. С вами Дмитрий Опарин и Мария Семендыева. Сегодня мы будем говорить об Арктике и о крайнем севере, и о районах крайнего севера. Мы будем говорить об арктической урбанизации и наверно нужно сразу пояснить что значит север, что мы понимаем под районами крайнего севера и наверно надо сразу перечислить эти районы. Во-первых, если мы идём от запада на восток к крайнему северу относится:»

"Hello everyone, this is the podcast “Also Russia”, conversations about aspects of our heritage that are not well known. With you are Dmitrii Oparin and Maria Semendyaeva. Today we will be discussing the Arctic, the Far North, and its regions. We will talk about Arctic urbanization and first we should explain what we mean by the North, what regions comprise the Far North, so first of all we will list them. If we go from west to east, the Far North includes:"
Students are provided the list and asked to number them in order as they hear them in the podcast. They should expect to listen multiple times, as the host speaks quite quickly.

Listen to the speaker and number the territories in the order in which he lists them. You will probably need to listen multiple times.

**Far North:**
- Камча́тка (Камча́тский край)
- Коря́кский автоно́мный округ
- Магада́нская область
- Мурманскáя область
- Нéнечкий автоно́мный округ
- Таймы́р (Таймы́рский (Долгано-Нéнечкий) автоно́мный округ)
- Чуко́тка (Чуко́тский автоно́мный округ)
- Эвенки́я (Эвенки́йский райо́н)
- Яку́тия (Республика Са́ха)
- Яма́л (Ямalo-Нéнечкий автоно́мный округ)

**Additional territories:**
- Арха́нгельская область
- Каре́лия
- Ко́ми
- Нори́льск
- Сахали́нская область
- Ха́нты-Мансийский автоно́мный округ
### Using Authentic Online Resources in Russian for STEM Coursework

**Molly Thomasy Blasing**

Students create a Google map and mark the locations from the list.

Nearly identical instructions can be followed on [www.yandex.ru](http://www.yandex.ru), which will provide geographical locations entirely in Russian.

Now create a Google Map and place each location on your map.

1. Open Google Maps and click the menu button in the top left corner.
2. Click Your Places > Maps > Create Map.
3. Name your map and enter a description.
4. Add markers for your desired locations. You can label these markers, add descriptions, change the color or shape, and add an image.

**Alternative:** Create a Yandex Map and place each location on your map.

1. Open [яндекс карты](http://www.yandex.ru) and click the menu button in the top right corner.
2. Click Мои карты > Создать карту.
3. Name your map (Название) and enter a description (Описание).
4. Use the search box (Адрес или объект; Найти) to find your key locations.
5. You may adjust the settings and then click Готово (Ready) to place a mark or Удалить (Delete) to delete it.

Use Russian Wikipedia to find the locations if you are struggling to locate them via the map programs.

Students rehearse the list of locations with attention on stress placement and vowel reduction and record themselves reading the list. This can be done with audio alone, or with accompanying video.

You will now create an audio recording of yourself reading these locations from West to East. You may record using audio only or record with video and show the locations on your map as you recite them.

To prepare, listen to the podcast multiple times and imitate the speaker’s pronunciation of each location. Pay particular attention to stress placement and vowel reduction as you work to pronounce them correctly in Russian. When you are ready to record, begin your list with the phrase:

Гла́вными райо́нами росси́йской Арктики явля́ются (“The main regions of the Russian Arctic are”):
Read the article linked below by journalist Carolyn Kormann about the effects of climate change on Russian Arctic communities. Locate each city or region mentioned in this article and label them on your digital map. Then complete the short written response described below.


**Extended Reading**

**Short Response Paper.** In this article “A Disastrous Summer in the Arctic” from June 27, 2020 in The New Yorker, Carolyn Kormann reports on the effects of a warming planet and record high temperatures on the people and ecology of Russia’s Arctic regions. Explain in 1-2 paragraphs (in English) the most important takeaways from the article. What surprised you? What was most concerning?

If you were to conduct more research on some aspect of this article, what would you like to investigate further? Formulate 2-4 research questions you would like to investigate.

**Estimated Time**

Listening and Mapping Arctic Regions: 1 - 1.5 hours
Practice Reading Aloud and Recording: 45 min - 1 hour
Additional Reading, Mapping and Short Response Paper: 1-1.5 hours
**Suggested Assessment**

| | Check number order and map points for completion.  
| | Offer holistic suggestions about pronunciation of location list; model correct stress placement, vowel reduction and devoicing in recorded feedback to students.  
| | Assess the Short Response Paper on a 1-5 scale:  
| | 5: exceptionally detailed, thoughtful response with well-formulated future research questions  
| | 4: response includes details from the text and the research questions follow logically from the text  
| | 3: response includes general summary of text with few details; research questions are unrelated or unclear  
| | 2: summary shows little relationship to the text; research questions are difficult to understand or not closely related to the topic  
<p>| | 1: incomplete and/or missing research questions |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Year in Space (Год в космосе)</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theme/Topic</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Skill Area(s)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Target Proficiency Level Details</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Essential Question(s)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Description and Objectives</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity/Activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What will learners do?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resource / Text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Кёлли и Корниёнко вернулись на землю, пробы́в в ко́смосе це́льный год</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Астронавт Кёлли и космонавт Корниёнко успе́шно завершили ми́сию на МКС</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>02.03.2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Америка́нский астронавт Скот Кёлли и росси́йский космонавт Михаи́л Корниёнко верну́лись на Зе́млю после выполне́ния годи́чной ми́ссии на Междунаро́дной ко́смической ста́нции (МКС).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Как сообща́ет Национа́льный комите́т по астрона́втике и иссле́дованию ко́смического про странства США (НАСА), капсула корабля «Сою́з ТМА-18М» с уча́стниками экспеди́ции приземли́лась в Казахста́не.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>В соста́в ми́ссии наряду́ с 51-ле́тним Ско́ттом Кёлли, вошли росси́йские космонавты 55-ле́тние Михаи́л Корниёнко и Серге́й Волкóв. Последний провёл в ко́смосе 6 меся́цев. Кёлли приве́тствовал встреча́ющих словами «как чуде́сно сно́ва вдохну́ть вóздух Земли́».</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Во вре́мя ми́сси на МКС, Кёлли и Корниёнко выполнили 5440 оборо́тов вокру́г Земли, преодоле́ли 232 млн. киломе́тров и 10 880 раз ста́ли свиде́телями восхо́да и захо́да Со́лнца.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Оба они́ провели́ столь дли́нный пери́од вре́мени в ко́смосе в ра́мках иссле́дования по выявле́нию влия́ния длительного пребывания в откры́том ко́смосе на те́ло челове́ка. Этот прое́кт явля́ется одни́м из эта́пов пла́на НАСА по вы́садке челове́ка на Марс.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Key vocabulary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>земля́</td>
<td>Earth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>космос – space, outer space</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>возвраща́ться / верну́ться – to return</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>заверша́ть / заверши́ть ми́сию – complete a mission</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>МКС (Междунаро́дная Косми́ческая Ста́нция) – International Space Station</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>сообща́ть / сообщи́ть to convey, inform</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>уча́стник – participant</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>приземли́ться – to land, to return to earth</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>соста́в – composition, membership</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>выполни́ть / вы́полни́ть – to complete, fulfill</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>преодоле́ть – to overcome; to traverse</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>эта́п – stage</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>вы́садка – landing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Study the following key vocabulary to prepare for the reading assignment. Can you combine some of the words to form a sentence? (e.g. Yesterday the participants on the International Space Station landed at 2:35pm.)

### Pre-reading Questions

1. Кто уча́ствовал в этой ми́ссию «Год в ко́смосе»?
2. Ско́лько лет этим космонавтам?
3. Ско́лько вре́мени они́ провели́ в ко́смосе?
4. Когда́ они́ верну́лись?
5. Где приземли́лась ка́псула корабля́ «Сою́з ТМ-18М»?
6. Как сказа́ть по-ру́сский NASА? (write out the full translation)
7. Ско́лько оборо́тов вокру́г Земли́ выполнили Ке́лли и Корниё́нко?
8. Какую ми́ссию пла́нирует НАСА в бу́дущем?
9. Как сказа́ть по-ру́сски “sunrise” and “sunset” и ско́лько видели Ке́лли и Корниё́нко?
10. What word do Russians use for the American term “astronaut”?

**Bonus:** What is the name of the Russian space agency? (look it up online)

Students answer the discussion questions using information from the text.

Read the text (see “Resources / Text” above) and underline and/or number the parts of the text that provide answers to the discussion questions. Answer the questions in writing (or record spoken answers) using complete sentences.
Grammar and Syntax: Talking about scientific research

Return to the final paragraph of the text where it explains one of the main goals for the Year in Space mission.

One thing they were testing was the:

влияние длительного пребывания в открытом космосе на тело человека

Analyze the case endings for each phrase to help make sense of the sentence. Consider the glossary of words in the nominative case as you work to translate these phrases.

влияние длительного пребывания

What case are the underlined endings in this phrase?______

длительный – prolonged
пребывание – presence

Your translation:

в открытом космосе

открытый – open
космос – space

Your translation:

влияние ... на тело (case:  ) человека (case:  )
tело – body
человек – person

Your translation:

Now put it all together. How would you translate the full phrase?

влияние длительного пребывания в открытом космосе на тело человека

Using this phrase as a model, compose 3 sentences in Russian explaining what your scientist colleagues are studying. Use the chart below and put each element into the correct case.
They are studying the influence of what where on what

e.g. “the influence of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere on global warming”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>чего? (GEN)</th>
<th>где (PREP)</th>
<th>на что (ACC)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“of what”</td>
<td>“where”</td>
<td>“on what”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1) углекислый газ  
2) загрязнение  
3) глобальное потепление  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>углекислый газ</th>
<th>атмосфера</th>
<th>глобальное потепление</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>carbon dioxide</td>
<td>atmosphere</td>
<td>global warming</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>загрязнение</th>
<th>океан</th>
<th>морская экология</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>pollution</td>
<td>ocean</td>
<td>marine ecology</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>глобальное потепление</th>
<th>Арктика</th>
<th>местное население</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>global warming</td>
<td>Arctic</td>
<td>local population</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Estimated Time

Vocabulary and Pre-Reading: 30-45 minutes  
Reading and Discussion question responses: 45 minutes  
Grammar and Syntax Extension Activity: 30-60 minutes
### Suggested Assessment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Written Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5 Student answered the questions with full, detailed sentences using the vocabulary from the exercise and the accompanying text. Answers are accurate and contain almost no grammatical or spelling errors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Student answered the questions with full sentences using the vocabulary from the exercise / text. Answers contain few factual errors and few grammar or spelling errors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Student attempted to answer with full sentences, but the answers contain multiple factual errors and grammar errors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 No attempt to answer in full sentences, many errors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Incomplete or student has obviously used online translation software</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For the Grammar/Syntax section, grade holistically, circling incorrect case endings in the phrases.

Offer students the opportunity to correct their errors (in both sections) for up to full points.

---

### ΓΩΑ В КОСМОСЕ (an alternative assignment)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme/Topic</th>
<th>Joint U.S.-Russia “Year in Space” Project on the International Space Station</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Skill Area(s)</td>
<td>Interpretive listening</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Target Proficiency Level Details | Advanced: At the Advanced level, listeners can understand the main ideas and most supporting details in connected discourse on a variety of general interest topics. They can compensate for limitations in their lexical and structural control of the language by using real-world knowledge and contextual clues. Listeners may also derive some meaning from oral texts at higher levels if they possess significant familiarity with the topic or context (ACTFL 2012, 17). |
| Essential Question(s) | Who participated in the Year in Space mission, why were they selected, what training was involved, and what were the goals of the project? |
**Description and Objectives**
For an Advanced level activity on the Year in Space, instructors assign a ROSCOSMOS video “Долгая дорога к Марсу,” which offers additional details about US astronaut Scott Kelly and Russian cosmonaut Mikhail Kornienko’s “Year in Space” mission. The discussion questions that follow prompt learners to engage in interpretive listening and to explain in writing or in speech the goals of the mission, the selection criteria for participants, as well as nature of the training for, and execution of, the mission.

**Resource / Text**
«Долгая дорога к Марсу», ROSCOSMOS, April 2, 2016 video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J8jDm0ktLfw

**Activity/Activities**
What will learners do?

**Instructions and Materials for Students**
Instructions and the reading text may be copied directly into worksheets, your campus LMS, Microsoft OneNote, or other online platforms for remote or asynchronous learning.

**Key Words**
Look up unfamiliar words and abbreviations from this list before you begin.

- РОСКОСМОС
- год в космосе
- сотрудничество
- экипаж
- МКС (международная космическая станция)
- опыт полёта
- корабль
- стартовать
- подготовка, тренировка
- стыковка, расстыковка
- ЦПК (Центр Подготовки Космонавтов)
- Звёздный Город
### Вопросы к обсуждению

1) Что такое год в космосе? Когда произошла эта миссия?

2) Почему выбрали именно этих космонавтов для миссии?

3) Как космонавты готовились к миссии?

4) Почему Михаил Корниенко участвовал в таком эксперименте? Какова цель этой миссии?

5) Напишите 2 вопроса, которые вы хотели бы задать космонавтам.

### Extension activities

**Advanced+ Level:** The website for ROSKOSMOS currently features a set of short videos explaining and demonstrating some of the experiments currently being conducted on the International Space Station. Students can work through these videos and accompanying written descriptions of the experimental design to generate additional vocabulary lists and offer paragraph length summaries in Russian of the purpose and design of these experiments. [https://www.roscosmos.ru/29966/](https://www.roscosmos.ru/29966/)

### Estimated Time

Video and question responses: 45-60 minutes  
Extension activity: 2 hours
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>COVID-19 Vaccine Development in Israel</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theme/Topic</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Skill Area(s)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Target Proficiency Level Details</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Essential Question(s)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Description and Objectives</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Resource / Text</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Activity/Activities</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What will learners do?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Using Authentic Online Resources in Russian for STEM Coursework
Molly Thomasy Blasing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pre-Viewing Cognates quiz</th>
<th>Pre-Viewing: Cognates quiz. Read this list of cognates aloud. Mark the ones you recognize.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>коронави́рус бакте́рии ви́рус лаборатори́я вакци́на микробио́лог кри́зис генети́ческий код адапта́ция имму́нная реакция эффекти́вность спрей-аэрозо́ль синтезиро́вать мутация</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activating Cognates and Orienting to Video</th>
<th>Watch the video on COVID-19 vaccine development and listen for the cognates.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>New Vocabulary Work</th>
<th>New Vocabulary: Translate the following words and phrases that you will hear in the video into English.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>белок (производи́тели белка́, стро́ение белка́) произво́дство вакци́ны ферме́нтар разрабо́тка, си́нтез вакци́ны вакци́на против + чего́? (GEN) труди́ться на бла́го челове́чества использо́вать в ка́честве + чего́ (GEN) разраба́тьвать / разрабо́тать поража́ть / порази́ть (заража́ть / зарази́ть) сравни́ть что / с чем (ACC/INST) по сравне́нию с чем (INST) заболевание к на́шему / моему́ удивле́нию обнару́жить клини́ческие испыта́ния, экспериме́нты (на ком / на + PREP) проверка вакци́ны этап / фа́за (до)клини́ческие испыта́ния (на ком) приви́вка безопасно слизи́стая оболо́чка явле́ние позво́ля́ть / позво́лить</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comprehension Questions</td>
<td>Watch the video again and answer the following questions based on information from the video.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1. What is in the petri dishes shown at the opening of the video? What are they for?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. What is the English name for the organization whose acronym is ВОЗ?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. How many vaccines were in development at the time the video was filmed?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. What were these scientists working on before COVID-19 hit?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5. What advantage do scientists in this lab potentially have over other vaccine developers?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6. What evidence do they have that their technique could work?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7. What does the first stage of vaccine development entail?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8. What happens in the second stage?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9. What is the third stage?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10. Will the vaccine be given as an injection? Explain.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11. How long does the lab director estimate it will take to produce the vaccine?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12. What does the scientist say about viruses that move between animals and humans?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Written summary (paragraphs) with focus on stages of clinical trials</th>
<th>Writing in Russian</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Write 2-3 paragraphs in Russian summarizing the video. In particular, focus on explaining what happens during the three stages of clinical trials.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bonus: Create a Russian language quiz for fellow students based on the content of the video (~10 items total). You could create short answer questions, fill in the blank questions, multiple choice, true/false (верно/неверно), etc.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cultural Investigation</th>
<th>On language and culture: Why is this scientist who works in a laboratory in Israel speaking Russian?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Estimated Time | Cognates quiz: 5 mins  
|               | Additional Vocab Work: 30-45 mins  
|               | First viewing: 5 mins  
|               | Listening to respond to questions: 15-30 mins  
|               | Written responses to questions: 10 mins  
|               | Paragraph summary: 30-60 mins  
|               | Cultural investigation: 30 mins+  
| Suggested Assessment | Check English language comprehension answers for accuracy. Provide students with opportunity to correct factual errors for full credit.  
|                   | Focus assessment on paragraph length summary of key portions of the video with an emphasis on the three stages of clinical trials. Offer students the opportunity to revise their paragraphs following the feedback for up to full credit.  
|                   | **Paragraph summary evaluation**  
|                   | 5 Student produced a detailed, coherent paragraph that is well structured, incorporates new vocabulary from the video, and addresses with clarity and accuracy what happens at each stage of clinical trials.  
|                   | 4 Student produced a detailed, mostly coherent paragraph. There may be some problems with the organizational structure, but student has accurately explained what happens at each stage of clinical trials.  
|                   | 3 Student struggled to produce a coherent paragraph, significant problems with structure. Sentence level writing is satisfactory, but more work is needed to incorporate new vocabulary and explain with more clarity or accuracy the stages of clinical trials.  
|                   | 2 Major errors in accuracy, missing required information about clinical trials, little success with composing a paragraph, writing is difficult to understand OR the work obviously relies heavily on translation software instead of working from structures in the video.  
|                   | 1 Incomplete assignment  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Vaccine Debate</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theme/Topic</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Skill Area(s)</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **Target Proficiency** | **Superior**: At the Superior level, readers are able to understand texts from many genres dealing with a wide range of subjects, both familiar and unfamiliar, that use precise, often specialized vocabulary and complex grammatical structures. Superior-level readers are able to understand lengthy texts of a professional, academic, or literary nature. (ACTFL 2012, 21)  

Writers at the Superior level are able to produce most kinds of formal and informal correspondence and demonstrate the ability to explain complex matters, and to present and support opinions by developing cogent arguments and hypotheses. They organize and prioritize ideas to convey to the reader what is significant and typically make arguments requiring at least a series of paragraphs. (ACTFL 2012, 11)  

Speakers at the Superior level are able to communicate with accuracy and fluency in order to participate fully and effectively in conversations on a variety of topics in formal and informal settings from both concrete and abstract perspectives. They are able to construct and develop hypotheses to explore alternative possibilities, and they employ a variety of interactive and discourse strategies, such as turn-taking and separating main ideas from supporting information through the use of syntactic, lexical, and phonetic devices. (ACTFL 2012, 5) |
### Description and Objectives

For a Superior level activity on vaccine development, use Brown et al. 2014 *Mastering Russian Through Global Debate* to prepare students for a debate about the merits and drawbacks of releasing a new vaccine during a global health crisis before it has undergone all stages of clinical trials. Students prepare by reading articles from online news stories about Russia’s Sputnik V vaccine. They develop position papers “for” and “against” such a decision and then devise counterarguments to anticipate their opponents’ comments. Position papers and counterarguments are edited and revised ahead of the live debate.

### Resource / Text

To prepare ahead of the debate, students should conduct independent research into the case of Russia’s Sputnik V vaccine. They should work to find news reports from Russian and American perspectives related to Russia’s early release of the vaccine ahead of the completion of third stage clinical trials. Students may also benefit from this podcast (link below), which examines the history of Soviet vaccine diplomacy to contextualize historically Russia’s decision to make its vaccine available early and widely (in English).


### Estimated Time and Assessment

Debate preparation should be staged over several weeks. See Brown, et al. 2014 for detailed guidance on researching, writing position papers, anticipating counterarguments, staging the debate and assessment instruments.
### Extension Activity

**Working with Published Research Studies on COVID–19**

Throughout the pandemic, the World Health Organization maintained a continually-updated database of COVID research and clinical trials happening around the world (World Health Organization, n.d.). While clinical trials reports were not available in Russian, it was possible to narrow the results of the research studies to show only Russian-language papers. This interpretive mode assignment allowed students to put their knowledge of the structure of scientific texts to use in deciphering a new research study related to the material from the coronavirus unit.

### Reading and Translation Role Play Prompt

You have just moved to Atlanta to begin work as a language analyst at the headquarters for the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Your supervisor oversees gathering briefs on COVID research happening around the world. As a Russian language analyst, you’ve been assigned to her team. Your first task is to summarize in English a recent article published by Russian scientists reporting research on some aspect of the coronavirus. Use the WHO database of global research on coronavirus disease to locate an article of importance. In addition to the summary, you are also asked to prepare a translation of a short passage (~½-1 page) that you find to be the most salient part of the article.

Acknowledgements
The Russian for STEM pilot course was developed with support from a University of Kentucky Libraries Alternative Textbook Grant. I created some of the lessons as part of Shannon Donnally Spasova’s summer Online Language Teaching course at Michigan State University. I am grateful for support and encouragement from my Russian studies colleagues at the University of Kentucky and to my students who took part in the pilot version of this course. Thanks also to Maia Solovieva, Tom Newlin, Nicholas Bujalski, Lee Roby, Maria Khotimsky, Evgeny Dengub, Benjamin Rifkin, Stayc Dubravac, Svetlana Abramova, and Anna Alsufieva for conversations about course materials and design. I am grateful to the anonymous reviewers from Russian Language Journal for their extremely helpful feedback. Thank you to the special issue editors for their patience and guidance, and to Liang Luo, Kevin McGowan, Echo Ke and the UK CHSS summer writing burst program for writing support.

References


Developing Russian Oral Skills in the Online Environment

ELENA DOLUDENKO

1. Introduction
The COVID-19 pandemic forced universities all over the world to switch to remote learning over the course of a few days. Unlike planned online classes, the classes that were shifted to a remote mode were not designed ahead of time but could instead be considered emergency remote teaching and learning. These classes did not necessarily include activities that could be easily transferred to an online mode. Students who suddenly faced a new modality had to navigate not only new ways of using technology, but also learn how to be more autonomous in their learning and be more in charge of their learning process.

The switch to remote learning brought up drawbacks that have been discussed in the literature before, such as the absence of face-to-face interaction and increased self-regulation (Gilbert 2000). In a language class, face-to-face interaction is essential for developing and practicing oral skills because to speak a language effectively, students need to acquire how to use the language in different social contexts (Kang 2002). Without regular class meetings, it can be more difficult to provide students with opportunities for oral practice. This article presents various activities and techniques used in online beginning Russian classes during the spring and summer semesters of 2020. The goals of these activities were to continue developing students’ oral skills in an effective way both during synchronous meetings via Zoom and when students worked asynchronously.

2. Speaking activities online
2.1. Individual recordings
One way to keep students speaking every day is to ask them to record short audio responses to questions posted on their learning management system (LMS). The LMS Canvas, for example, allows students to upload recordings or record themselves directly on the assignment page.

In the spring of 2020, the University of Missouri switched to a remote mode, and the university administration asked instructors to keep online synchronous meetings to a minimum. Following the switch, instead of five in-person classes per week, my first-year Russian class only
Developing Russian Oral Skills in the Online Environment

Elena Doludenko

met synchronously twice a week by Zoom. On the other three class days, students studied and practiced the material on their own from my pre-recorded lectures and the textbook. As a part of their independent work, students were instructed to record themselves responding to a prompt related to a topic they studied on their own: this task was used to practice a grammatical point or new vocabulary covered during that week. These recordings were similar to pair work, but instead of hearing a question from a partner, students read the prompt in Russian in the assignment. In response, students recorded themselves speaking for at least a minute two or three times a week.

This assignment is similar to the audiotaped journals described in Dantas-Whitney’s study (2002), where 18 students recorded themselves over the course of ten weeks. The participants were asked to reflect on the topics studied in class and analyze them through personal experience. Eleven students agreed to participate in a group interview after the course to discuss how they perceived this assignment. Based on the information from the individual and group interview recordings, the author concluded that the audiotaped journals provided students with additional oral practice and thus prepared them for giving speeches in other contexts, allowed them to work on their pronunciation and receive private feedback from the instructor, and gave them opportunities for self-evaluation.

During the spring of 2020, first year students were assigned two or three weekly recordings, which were graded for completion. The recordings ranged between 11 and 180 seconds each. Students were not given instructions about the length of their recordings, but they were asked to answer all questions in the assignment. Such practice is especially beneficial for those students who are too shy to speak up in class. In these individual recordings, they did not have to worry about how other students view them and they could speak freely. Students were asked to answer questions in the task, describe a picture, or think aloud what they would say in certain situations (see an example of a speaking prompt in Appendix A). As an instructor, I could provide individualized oral or written feedback to all students, which is more difficult to do in a face-to-face classroom. This feedback was available only to the student, and other students in my class could not hear the corrections, unlike in the classroom where anyone could be “put on the spot.” Since the response was recorded I could listen to it several times, unlike in a classroom where a student says a phrase just once, and something that needs to be corrected can just be forgotten by the end of their answer.
In response to their videos, I recorded feedback, including my comments on pronunciation, and sent it to the students through the LMS. As research shows, individualized feedback on recordings helps to develop oral proficiency and progress towards student's goals (Kim 2014), and students appreciate instructor feedback and encouragement (Lee 2016). The delayed feedback in asynchronous classes, as opposed to the immediate feedback common in face-to-face classes, provides more time and opportunities for cognitive engagement (Lee 2016). Thus, individual recordings promote student-centered learning, shift the focus to each learner’s needs, and encourage students to speak Russian regularly.

2.2. Paired recordings
Another type of recording that students were asked to complete for the class was a paired recording in Zoom, which were graded for completion only. Instead of attending their regular language lab hour, once a week during the remote learning period students met with a partner via Zoom and completed the conversation tasks from a handout provided to them on Canvas. This task provided an additional activity for students to work on their oral skills with another student, to review the vocabulary and grammar of the week, and to practice them in meaningful communicative tasks.

It is also important to keep in mind that beginning learners prefer tasks with guided questions, but these tasks should be connected to real-life language for the greatest learning effect (Lee 2016). Thus, the handouts for this type of activity included contextualized drilling activities, asking and answering questions, describing pictures, and acting out situations. For example, students discussed their hometowns and described them using a provided word bank, thus ensuring that they used a variety of endings (see an example in Appendix B). For these types of activities in handouts where a word bank was given to students, the answers were provided at the end of the handout, so students could check themselves. For more creative tasks, I provided written or oral feedback on their vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation. Similar to individual recordings, I could provide individualized feedback to students, which is something logistically impossible to do in a classroom where several pairs are completing the same activity simultaneously. Students’ recordings lasted from 20 minutes to an hour. The hour-long recordings were problematic as it took more time to provide feedback to such recordings. A possible solution would be to create a specific rubric for completing the assignment, take off points for switching into English, and to ask the students to edit the recording
and cut out non-relevant parts (See Appendix C for a sample rubric). Since these were times when everyone was self-isolating, for some students, this activity was the only time they had a conversation with someone outside their family, as some of them mentioned in the recordings. Even though I asked students to be respectful of my and each other’s time, I did not take points off for the length or the use of English. Despite the fact that students sometimes switched to English, this activity allowed them to learn more about each other and create a sense of online community.

2.3. Individual work on pronunciation

Working on pronunciation is usually not a priority for language instructors teaching with the communicative method (Morley 1991; Elliot 1997; Loewen and Isbell 2017). When there are many students in the classroom, any work on repeating words and work on pronunciation is usually done in chorus. Students cannot hear just themselves, and an instructor hears everyone at the same time. I believe synchronous sessions via Zoom allow more possibilities for working on pronunciation than a regular classroom. During the Zoom session, students can turn off the microphones and repeat after the recording. Thus, they do not hear other students and do not get distracted. They can also work by themselves in Breakout Rooms where they are not distracted by other students and can receive feedback form the instructor as the instructor moves from room to room.

For beginning learners of Russian, I created a series of materials about Russian phonetics and uploaded them onto a Google site - https://sites.google.com/view/russianphonetics. The site includes sections for Russian stress and vowel reduction, voiced and voiceless consonants, palatalized and non-palatalized consonants, and intonation. For each section of the site, there is a written explanation in English, recordings of the sounds or sentences, and quizzes that help students check their understanding of the concept. Students can play the recordings and repeat the words or phrases to work on their pronunciation (see an example in Appendix D).

During the summer of 2020, in another of my classes, the first-year intensive Russian class at Arizona State University, students met five times a week synchronously in Zoom. When we were covering the topic of Russian phonetics, students worked with the above-mentioned site in individual Breakout Rooms, listening to and repeating the recordings. Before students joined the Breakout Room, they received instructions about which part of the website to work on and what was expected of them. I could join a Breakout Room at any time and provide feedback on their pronunciation.
The students were asked to keep practicing repeating after the recording until I would call everyone back to the main session.

Short quizzes on the Google pronunciation site allowed me to monitor their progress because the results were updated in real time, so I could see how many students completed which exercises without checking with each student in the Breakout Room. The quizzes included multiple choice questions about pronunciation, and if there were many wrong answers, I could explain the problematic material again and provide additional practice immediately after the activity when students returned to the main session. These activities can also be used during in-person classes when students work with the website on their phones or computers using headphones, and I can monitor their progress on my computer and listen to students’ pronunciation and provide immediate feedback.

2.4. Breakout Rooms

Breakout Rooms in Zoom allow students to work in pairs or in small groups, thus imitating paired work during a regular in-person class. To ensure that students understood each Breakout Room assignment, I provided them with a handout (posted on Canvas or Google Docs) that outlined their activities for the class. The list included contextualized drilling activities (similar to the ones described in Section 2.2), practice questions, descriptions of students’ surroundings, and roleplays.

For one of the activities, I created a shared Google Doc file where I listed different topics and assigned different colors to each pair of students to use for typing while working in this Google Doc in Breakout Rooms. For example, for one task, students working in pairs were asked to brainstorm possible questions for a potential roommate in the following categories: studies, hobbies, eating habits, and daily activities. Students had to formulate and type two questions for each category using their assigned color (each pair typed eight questions total). Students could not repeat a question if another group had already typed it in the file, so they had to think of a new question. Since all students were typing in the same document, I could see what everyone was doing at the same time without visiting specific Breakout Rooms. I could also correct mistakes within the same document or provide hints on how to correct something. The next part of the task was to discuss all questions from all categories, working with the partner in the Breakout Room. This task was a suitable review of the material at the end of the chapter and allowed students to ask each other a variety of questions and answer them. This task also prepared them
to participate in oral interviews or oral exams at the end of the chapter or the semester. The entire activity took about 30 minutes.

The main drawback of Breakout Rooms is the instructor’s inability to be present in all rooms at once. In the classroom, an instructor can walk around and overhear multiple conversations and provide immediate feedback. In Breakout Rooms, one pair may need additional time and feedback from the instructor, thus, the instructor might not have an opportunity to visit another Breakout Room. A possible solution is to ask students to record their work in the Breakout Room (e.g., record their roleplays) and submit it for feedback. Another possible drawback is an unstable internet connection that might inhibit conversations between students or prevent a student from joining a Breakout Room at all.

2.5. Final video project
A video project is a type of a project where students demonstrate their communication skills using digital media and technology (Ecke 2019). Video projects in a classroom provide students with opportunities to display their speaking, organizing, and critical thinking skills (Meyer and Forester 2015). In an online class, it can be used as a substitute for an in-person final presentation. Since the popularity of short videos is only increasing (YouTube, TikTok), incorporating them in the language class allows students to work on something familiar to them. Students can create a movie about something of interest to them and can demonstrate their Russian speaking skills through the narration and description that accompany their movie.

Previous research suggests that video projects are beneficial for students in different ways. In their study, McNutty and Lazarevic (2012) observed that students who were asked to work on video projects for their language classes were highly motivated to complete them and improved their pronunciation and presentation skills. In addition, McNutty and Lazarevic claim that when students know that they will be seen by their peers, they invest more time and effort in their presentations. In Gaunt’s study (2002), students were motivated to create their videos and thus became more involved in their learning process. Ecke (2019) claims that video projects are student-centered and allow for student autonomy, authentic language use, and a video that can be shared with classmates and people outside of the class.

For the final project in my first-year class in Spring 2020, students were asked to make a 3–5-minute video about their life in quarantine (See the detailed instructions in Appendix E). As it was something that students
were experiencing at that moment, they all made very creative movies that showcased their Russian skills. Students were then asked to upload their videos to Canvas and watch each other’s videos before the synchronous Zoom session. Then, during the Zoom class meeting, students asked questions of their classmates based on the videos that they had watched. Thus, students were engaged in meaningful conversations, asking clarifying questions and negotiating for meaning while practicing their speaking skills. These videos and the question-and-answer sessions helped to foster an online student community because students authentically learned more about each other and their hometowns from the videos.

3. Challenges and drawbacks
Using these activities to develop students’ oral skills in a remote modality creates certain challenges for instructors. One of the issues is the failure of technology when students’ or instructors’ internet connection is unstable, and instructors cannot hear or provide feedback to students during synchronous sessions. Students through private conversations and in Zoom meetings expressed their lack of motivation and fatigue from online learning. As a result, students did not turn in all recordings assigned to them, or they easily became distracted during the paired recordings or their work in Breakout Rooms.

For instructors, the creation of materials and grading of recordings requires additional time, especially if the instructor provides individualized feedback to all students or if students submit longer recordings. Rubrics with specific instructions and time limits should help instructors to keep the amount of work manageable.

4. Conclusion
This article described activities that were used to help students work on their oral skills during emergency remote teaching caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. A balance of individual and paired work focused on learners’ self-awareness allowed for a more learner-centered experience. Regular individual and paired recordings helped students to continue speaking Russian regularly even when they did not meet in person. Students received individualized feedback on their pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary during their individual work in Breakout Rooms and on their recordings. Using Google Sites and Google Docs allowed the instructor to monitor student progress in real time during synchronous sessions while students were working on activities in Breakout Rooms. The instructor could provide immediate feedback to multiple students and address
students’ questions. Through these activities and instructor feedback, beginning Russian learners continued developing their Russian oral skills in synchronous and asynchronous learning environments.

Appendices
Appendix A. Example of a recording task

Figure 1. Screenshot of a recording assignment.

Appendix B. Example of a paired recording prompt

6. Take turns telling each other about your hometowns using the words from the table:

Remember to use genitive plural after words for many, few, and negation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>В моём городе</th>
<th>В центре города</th>
<th>На улице</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>много</td>
<td>несколько</td>
<td>нет</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>дорогое рестораны</td>
<td>недорогие кафе</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>хорошие парки</td>
<td>небольшие здания</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>небольшие здания</td>
<td>широкие улицы</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>узкие улицы</td>
<td>молодые люди</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>удобные автобусы</td>
<td>старые церкви</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>небольшие мосты</td>
<td>новые памятники</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>старые дворцы</td>
<td>ночные общежития</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2. Screenshot of a paired recording task.
Appendix C. Sample rubric for a paired recording task

Sample rubric:
- All exercises are completed – 5 pts
- Students checked their answers at the end of the handout – 5 pts
- Students did not switch into English – 5 pts
- Students edited the recording cutting off any irrelevant conversations – 5 pts

Total: 20 points.

Appendix D. Example of a paired recording prompt

Figure 3. Screenshot of the Google site with tasks on pronunciation.
Appendix E. Instructions for the Final Video Project.

Final Project

Due May 5, 2020 by 11 am  Points 100

For the final project this semester, record a short movie about your life in quarantine. Your movie should be 3-5 minutes long and include material covered in the class.

Then you should upload it in the discussion on Canvas by 11:00 am on May 5. On May 5, watch each others’ presentations and come up with 2 questions for each presentation. We will meet on May 6 and May 7 in Zoom to discuss presentations. You will ask your questions to your classmates, and they will ask their questions to you.

Your movie will be graded based on the following:

- Content coverage (the movie has a plot, you address different topics, the movie is 3-5 minutes long) - 20%
- Range of used vocabulary - 25%
- Language control - 25%
- Pronunciation - 10%
- Delivery/creativity - 10%
- Ability to ask and answer questions (in class) - 10%

Total: 100%

Figure 4. Screenshot of the Final video project assignment

Acknowledgements
I express my sincere gratitude to the anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments and suggestions.

References


Assessment Design in Online Russian Language Courses: Lessons from COVID-19

YULIANA GUNN

1. Introduction: Online language instruction

After the rapid spread of COVID-19 in early 2020, universities were permitted to initiate individual pandemic response plans by the Department of Education, and by the end of March hundreds had transitioned from in-person to online course delivery platforms (Cevasco et al. 2020, 5). The abrupt switch to online teaching necessitated teaching in various modalities such as synchronous, asynchronous, hybrid, and hyflex. The sudden nature of the transition to online instruction left educators with little time to acquire the technical skills needed for effective online teaching, to adjust course material for online delivery, or to support and accommodate student needs during this crisis. While the move to online instruction may be temporary, it has become clear that the pandemic has permanently altered approaches to online language teaching and pedagogy.

Since the shift to online learning, instructors have had time to reflect on online teaching practices, and certain limitations of online instructional tools and methods, specifically in the area of language assessment, have become abundantly apparent. Although Learning Management Systems (LMSs) can effectively deliver certain course content to students (facilitating written and oral discussions, grading, reporting), the assessment tools and features of LMSs are limited and may not provide an accurate reflection of student language gains.

The pandemic has encouraged language instructors to reconsider existing assessment and testing practices. One potential drawback to written online testing lies in the easy online access to translators, digital course materials, and textbooks, which can pose a challenge for instructors designing written online language assessments. On the other hand, the online environment, especially video communication platforms, has removed certain obstacles to assessing oral language proficiency gains. For example, individual and group student presentations and spontaneous speech production can be recorded and available to the instructor to assess at a later time.
This article discusses ways traditional assessments can be retooled for online implementation and administered in communicative and interactive activities, always in the context of ACTFL’s three modes of communication. It ends with initial student responses to this new online assessment method.

Both formative and summative online assessments can be used to measure language production across the three modes of communication (interpersonal, interpretive, and presentational) as defined by ACTFL. In the interpretive mode, language learners must understand, interpret, and analyze authentic information, such as audio that they hear, written excerpts that they read, or a video that they watch (NSFLEP 2015, 3). In the interpersonal mode, learners participate in an “active negotiation of meaning” among peers and target language speakers and conversations are non-rehearsed and spontaneous (Cutshall 2012, 35). In the presentational mode, language learners present information, share their ideas and opinions, and discuss and narrate on a variety of topics in the target language (NSFLEP 2015, 3).

2. The hunt for the perfect assessment

In discussing assessment types, an important distinction must be made between performance-based and proficiency-based assessments. Performance-based assessments consider information learned and practiced language in inauthentic contexts and test “students’ ability to acquire, store, and recall knowledge in a test situation” (Nemtchinova 2020, 340). Traditional classroom tests and quizzes usually fall under this category, as they evaluate student performance in grammar, vocabulary, and orthography (Chirimbu 2013, 92).

Proficiency-based assessments, on the other hand, measure students’ communicative competence in the form of spontaneous and non-rehearsed language production across the three modes of communication. Communicative competence can be measured by alternative assessments, which can include thematic short- and long-term projects, portfolios, student dialogs, roleplay scenarios, interviews, and peer and self-assessments. While grammatical accuracy continues to play an important role in proficiency-based assessments, such assessments are not limited to solely testing linguistic production (Nemtchinova 2020, 341). In addition, proficiency-based assessments take into consideration “the learning of each student, as well as each student’s cultural background and level of knowledge” (Chirimbu 2013, 92).
The assessments described in this article are a hybrid of traditional (performance-based) and alternative (proficiency-based) assessments, which are delivered in an online format. These assessments evaluate vocabulary usage and grammatical accuracy, as in traditional assessments, but are embedded in communicative and interactive activities.

2.1. Context for assessment: Classroom transparency and assessment rebranding

Specialists agree that transparency in online courses is essential. As was suggested by Sadler, “…the criteria for evaluating any learning achievements must be made transparent to students to enable them to have a clear overview both of the aims of their work and of what it means to complete it successfully” (quoted in Black and William 2012, 18). The instructor must make a deliberate effort to describe learning goals in the syllabus, continuously revisit learning outcomes, discuss all assessment expectations and to encourage students to make connections between content covered in class and the assessment.

Instructors should emphasize the purpose of each assessment; for example, the purpose of an assessment could be to provide students the opportunity to show mastery of lexical and grammatical content. Instructors must describe the grading criteria; for example, the assessment grade is based on specific categories such as: (1) addressing all aspects of a prompt, (2) sentence organization, (3) usage of vocabulary covered in the unit (vocabulary counts), (4) practiced grammar and mechanics from the unit. Other questions should be addressed, such as whether online translators are allowed. Some instructors may choose to deduct points for the use of unfamiliar vocabulary and grammatical constructions, which may discourage students from relying on online translation tools and emphasize recalling familiar, practiced class material.

To reduce student stress, instructors could consider describing online assessments with more neutral terms, for two reasons: (1) neutral terms may reduce student stress levels, and (2) neutral terms for assessments provide the instructor with flexibility to use authentic content in various assessment formats. For example, when drafting the course syllabus to reflect new assessment changes, the author renamed formative assessments as language checks, and summative assessments as language tasks. The English terms may not carry a negative connotation for many students. Another option is to use Russian equivalents such as proverochnaia rabota for formative assessments, and kontrol’naia rabota for summative assessments, as it encourages students to use Russian without code-switching and prepares them for studying abroad in Russian-speaking countries.
2.2. The framework of communicative modes
There are two types of assessments, formative and summative, that are integral in measuring student language gains. Formative assessments (such as traditional quizzes), which the author called language checks, are generally given throughout the course of a language unit and are designed to assess a specific grammar or discrete set of vocabulary. Summative assessments (such as traditional chapter tests, midterms, and final exams), which the author renamed language tasks, are cumulative and generally given at the end of a unit or semester. Summative assessments also typically include end-of-the-unit projects, presentations, or tasks that can be integrated into end-of-semester student portfolios, allowing the student to present their best polished work (Sandrock 2010, 18).

2.3. Online formative assessments
The online environment can enable the more purposeful design of interactive and engaging assessments utilizing authentic material. Formative assessments can include authentic production of written or spoken responses, brief listening comprehension checks, and authentic dialogic conversations, in which the information requested is new and the information students share is personalized and new (Meskill and Anthony 2015, 16).

Low-stakes formative assessments are “integrated throughout the unit and happen when the teacher determines that the learners are ready to demonstrate what they know and are able to do” (Clementi and Terrill 2013, ch. 2). In online delivery formats, formative assessments can be conducted frequently and be integrated into lessons and become an essential part of class activities. Since formative assessments can be situated in the three modes of communication, they can be differentiated to accommodate diverse learning preferences and reflect unit content in real-world scenarios.

While vocabulary usage is essential in providing students the ability to speak freely on a topic (Brown and Bown 2015, 74), specific grammatical structures are needed to convey the message (Sandrock 2010, 39). However, vocabulary is generally assigned from a list, and students are assessed primarily in their ability to recall terms from that list without applying it in any meaningful context, and therefore it is not surprising that retention drops significantly over time (Clementi and Terrill, 2013, ch. 2). Formative assessments should not only assess commonly used vocabulary and grammatical structures from the unit, but also provide students the
ability to apply them in authentic contexts. In designing such assessments instructors must consider their applicability to real-life situations, so that “the activities become ‘minds-on’ rather than merely ‘hands-on’ (Clementi and Terrill, 2013, ch. 3).

In the interpretive mode, formative assessments can include written responses to a thematically relevant image, such as an Instagram picture, graphic, or a GIF. For example, students can be asked to provide a hashtag for an image to check vocabulary or write an Instagram or Facebook post in which they share a reaction, opinion, or emotion evoked by the image, which constitutes both a vocabulary and grammar check.

In the interpersonal mode, students can record conversations in Zoom Breakout Rooms in pairs, which can either be peer-assessed or graded by the instructor using a rubric. The numerous benefits of recording interpersonal tasks are discussed by Meskill and Anthony (2015, 14). In addition, students can conduct timed interviews in Breakout Rooms, record mock phone conversations, or communicate with peers on a given topic in written form by using chat applications such as the Zoom chat feature, or other messaging application. Working in small groups, students can read part of a story and be tasked with creating an interesting ending.

In the presentational mode, formative assessments can include in-class activities where students are asked to present information about themselves, their lives and experiences, opinions, etc. in either written or oral formats. Formative tasks in this mode can include rough drafts of compositions, essays, outlines, resumes, and written correspondence such as letters and emails (Sandrock 2010, 18). These can be graded according to rubrics that emphasize accuracy and conveyance of a message.

2.4. Online summative assessments
Summative assessments are intended to “present students with a new application of the skills previously assessed at the formative level” (Clementi and Terrill 2013, ch. 2). As summative assessments are cumulative and therefore usually longer in length than formative assessments, the author used an approach inspired by Miller’s cognitive strategy of “content chunking,” as opposed to the common approach of devoting an entire class period to summative assessment (Miller 1994, 349). For example, if a typical class unit is a fifty-minute block of time, the summative assessment tasks can be broken up over the course of two days and administered as a part of the class period, where students, for example, complete an interpersonal section one day as a class, and interpretive and presentational sections the next.
There are several advantages to “chunking” a summative assessment. Spreading out an assessment reduces student stress and allows the instructor to differentiate assessment tasks to accommodate varying student learner preferences by providing student options in content choice for class discussions, which can be accomplished by creating composition prompts in which students can share personalized information and opinions.

In the interpretive mode, instructors can design summative assessments by embedding authentic, level-appropriate video or audio into LMS quizzes. For example, students can answer multiple-choice questions based on the content, summarize the main points of a video, or write a short reaction in the form of tweets or social media posts, or online forum responses. Assessment can be modeled after the Writing Proficiency Test, in which students read a paragraph of authentic text in a timed environment, summarize the content in their own words, and provide an appropriate title for the text in the target language (Clementi and Terrill 2013, chap. 2).

In the interpersonal mode of communication, assessments can include recorded student conversations such as basic introductions, expression of agreement or disagreement based on an open-ended question, or role-playing scenarios. Similarly, students can conduct phone conversations, where the main goal is to negotiate meaning, and dialog sustainment exercises, where they must sustain a conversation for a certain duration of time (Clementi and Terrill 2013, chap. 2). Many of these assessment tasks can be completed and recorded in Breakout Rooms and can take the form of an “on demand task” that students complete on the spot, without prior preparation and provide insight into what students “… can do independently without feedback and editing” (Clementi and Terrill 2013, chap. 2).

In the presentational mode, learning tasks can vary depending on the structure of the course (asynchronous or synchronous). Presentational learning tasks can include the following: writing a detailed composition on a given unit topic with specific criteria included in the question; providing detailed answers to open-ended questions; drawing cultural comparisons on common topics, stances, and interpretations of current events or issues; or personal opinions on controversial issues.

Other possibilities for presentational mode assessment tasks are summative multimodal projects “whereby language learners combine written, visual and oral information into a public product” (Meskill and Anthony 2015, 218). These projects consist of several stages, where the initial planning, researching, and drafting stages serve as formative assessments,
and the completed, polished product is a summative assessment. Various class themes can be used in assignments that range from writing a formal letter or email to a Russian professor, an informal letter to a friend about culture shock, creating a Russian resume and/or cover letter, a dating profile, providing advice on a forum, to researching a city and planning an itinerary.

3. Student reception
The author piloted many of these online assessment suggestions in the 2020-2021 academic year. This section offers some preliminary findings largely based on student reflections, impressions, and testimonials.

In an anonymous feedback form consisting of twelve questions, second- and third-year students of Russian were asked to reflect on the online adaptation of formative and summative tasks. In this survey, students were asked to rate the new assessment types on a scale of one through five (one being least effective and five most effective) in terms of assessing unit content and providing the student with the ability to use Russian creatively and in a personalized way. In addition, students were asked whether they prefer traditional assessments over the newly piloted assessments. Students were asked to provide written feedback about what they liked and disliked about the new assessments.

The overwhelming majority of students surveyed favored keeping the new formative and summative assessments, as opposed to traditional assessments. Student responses are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Student reactions to new assessments.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions:</th>
<th>Student Responses (n=22):</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Do you like the new format of language checks (quizzes)?</td>
<td>91.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Would you prefer to go back to the traditional paper style quizzes?</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Do you like the new format of the language tasks (exams)?</td>
<td>91.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Would you prefer to go back to the traditional paper style exams?</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The majority of students commented that the new online assessments provided them with the possibility to produce new personalized content in Russian, a task they found more enjoyable, relevant, and useful than traditional vocabulary and grammar-based assessments (see Table 2). Students found the new formative assessments less stressful. Overall, students noted that they preferred more frequent checks, appreciated that the assessments tested across the three modes of communication, and that the material they were asked to produce was related to real-life situations. For example, one student stated, “I like that they feel more focused on making sure we learn the language rather than taking a quiz just to take a quiz.” Similarly, another student noted, “I like that these quizzes feel more applicable to real life rather than just normal vocab quizzes. Having to actually apply the vocab helps with remembering and learning.” In addressing vocabulary recall in particular by moving away from assessing vocabulary acquisition in list form, one student noted, “Before I would memorize and forget.” Despite their overwhelmingly positive reactions to these new assessments, some students noted that grading rubrics or grading scales for formative assessments were unclear. Since this assessment approach is still a work in progress, amendments will have to be made in creating more cogent rubrics in the future. However, the same issue was not noted by any students on formative language task feedback.

Table 2. Student rating of effectiveness of new assessments.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions: (5 = most effective; 1 = least effective)</th>
<th>Student Responses (n=24):</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Rate the new format of quizzes (language checks) in terms of providing you with the ability to produce a new, authentic product in Russian?</td>
<td>5  4  3  2  1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>50% 41.7% 4.2% 0% 4.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Rate the new format of exams (language tasks) in terms of providing you with the ability to produce a new, authentic product in Russian?</td>
<td>70.8% 20.8% 8.3% 0% 0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Several students emphasized that they enjoyed the creative aspect of the new summative experiences and the freedom to apply new vocabulary and grammatical structures in authentic contexts, as opposed to solely being graded on linguistic production. In a reflection on summative assessments, one student wrote, “I like the fact we are challenged to speak and write genuine compositions. It’s all well and good defining and filling in blanks, but fluency comes from knowing how to speak well and I really like doing them.” Another student commented, “Personally, I think the format as it is [sic] fantastic. I think with classes online, this setup makes the most sense.” Students also appreciated the chunking of assessments; one noted, “I like that it’s broken up because I feel like it’s less like testing my memory. Giant end-of-unit tests can be difficult because there’s always something that I forget to review.”

4. Conclusion
Adjusting assessment is a natural step as more language instruction takes place online. Adjusting online assessments using the alternative assessment approach received support from students studying Russian online. Revisioning traditional assessment types can aid in reducing student anxiety, while providing instructors with more flexibility in creating varied formative and summative assessments in online classrooms. These revisioned online assessments can be used and adapted for in-person classes when the return to face-to-face instruction becomes more realistic.

References


Memes: Learning, Bonding, and Emotional Support in Times of COVID-19

Valentina Vinokurova

1. Introduction
The COVID-19 pandemic has created various new challenges for language teachers. For instance, the online teaching/learning environment makes it difficult to create peer-to-peer relations in the classroom and to engage students in language learning in or outside of class (Sun 2011). Even worse, many students today have a difficult time focusing on school assignments because they are emotionally affected by the pandemic. In fact, Fruehwirth, Biswas, and Perreira (2021) compared mental health data before and after the beginning of the pandemic in a university in North Carolina and found that cases of anxiety and depression had increased. This paper proposes that memes – used as a pedagogical tool – can help teachers address these issues in the classroom and provide an outlet for students’ emotions. Memes are a relatively new internet genre and they typically involve a witty juxtaposition of image and text that expresses their creators’ emotions about a widely relatable situation. As such, because memes use image and text in complementary ways, they can be a conduit for teaching and learning about multimodality and developing digital literacy. Furthermore, the analysis of the textual message of memes can be a productive way to engage students in conversations about grammar and vocabulary. Finally, the fact that the purpose of memes is to express a commonly-felt emotion in relation to a current situation makes memes useful for learning about culture, expressing emotions, and bonding with real or imaginary others through these shared emotions (Harshavardhan, Wilson, and Kumar 2019).

Memes have been used in English language classrooms (e.g., Purnama 2017, Dominguez Romero and Bobkina 2017, Harvey and Palese 2018, Harshavardhan, Wilson, and Kumar 2019, Dominguez Romero and Bobkina 2021), but their application in RFL (Russian as a foreign language) classes has not been discussed in previous literature. Therefore, this paper aims to describe a meme-based project implemented in an intermediate Russian language course in Fall 2020. The purpose of the project was to
address the new challenges presented by COVID-19 and distance learning: to relieve coronavirus- and school-related stress, foster a sense of group membership, and increase engagement. As part of the project, students were asked to explore, collect, and create memes in Russian.

The following sections elaborate on the design and the results of this project. Section 2, “Rationale for project design,” provides a conceptual-theoretical framework for understanding the affordances of memes for teaching and learning. Section 3, “Project design and implementation procedure,” elaborates on the specific instructions written for the project as well as the ways in which classroom discussions were structured to support students throughout the project. Section 4, “Examples of students’ work,” examines the project’s effectiveness in engaging students, creating healthy peer-to-peer relationships, and providing an outlet for COVID-related emotions using examples of student work. Finally, the conclusion revisits the design of this project, making recommendations for improving the project for future courses.

2. Rationale for project design
The decision to use memes to engage students during the pandemic was inspired by two in-depth accounts of the affordances of memes for language, culture, and literacy learning and teaching. First is Harvey and Palese’s (2018) article that was among the first to provide detailed instructions for using memes in the classroom. The second paper is Harshavardhan, Wilson, and Kumar’s (2019) paper that followed suit in documenting the value of meme humor for ESL learning.

Harvey and Palese (2018) claim that “memes are the building blocks of society and culture” (261). Indeed, memes are imbued with an inherently social function and are packaged with affect: they are concise expressions of widely relatable feelings within or among cultures that people can bond over. Consider, for instance, the function of the Facebook group “grad school memes with relatable themes” (Full of Schist). This group brings together graduate students from all over the world and gives them a place to share their frustration with graduate school through meme-making. In addition to fostering social ties and giving students an emotional outlet, memes can also help develop what Harvey and Palese (2018) call a “critical memetic literacy,” or “the ability to engage with and question all parts of the meme (re)production and consumption cycle” (260). In essence, this new type of literacy proposed by Harvey and Palese (2018) is a combination of intercultural and linguistic competencies as well as digital literacy. To clarify, digital literacy refers to the understanding of
multimodality and digital norms of communication, and the ability to use
digital tools (Reinhardt and Thorne 2011).

In their article, Harvey and Palese (2018) also develop a sample
framework for introducing memes in the classroom that is reminiscent
of Reinhardt and Thorne’s (2011) “bridging activities,” which consist of
“observation and collection, exploration and analysis, and creation and
participation, of Internet texts and practices” (15). First, Harvey and
Palese (2018) propose that class time can be utilized for modeling how to
analyze memes using a set of guiding questions (265). Second, teachers
can optionally assign additional meme analysis for students to complete at
home. This step can be supplemented with a flowchart that guides students
through a series of questions, enabling them to understand memes more
deeply (Harvey and Palese 2018, 266). These activities then culminate with
an in-class meme creation task. Students can be divided into groups and
presented with 10 uncaptioned meme templates. They then have to work
as a group to caption these templates to fit a series of themes announced
by the instructor. According to Harvey and Palese (2018), such activities
can help students become critical consumers and producers of this highly
relevant contemporary genre. Moreover, these scholars argue that being
able to create successful memes can grant language learners entry into
various communities of practice, many of which today utilize memes to
communicate or bond (e.g., Full of Schist).

The article by Harshavardhan, Wilson, and Kumar (2019) corroborates
Harvey and Palese’s (2018) argument: the authors propose that humor is an
invaluable tool for language teaching. Given that digital technology has
made learners more autonomous, less patient for lectures and drills, and
less prone to note-taking, the teachers have no other choice but to adapt
their teaching strategies to this new reality (Harshavardhan, Wilson, and
Kumar 2019, 42). Citing a wealth of previous literature, Harshavardhan,
Wilson, and Kumar (2019) argue that humor has great educational value,
that it can motivate and engage learners, create and sustain good teacher-
student and student-student relationships, reduce stress levels, and create
trust (44). However, to sustain students’ interest, teachers must seek humor
in the same place as their students, i.e., in internet memes.

In terms of memes’ teaching value, Harshavardhan, Wilson, and
Kumar (2019) point out that memes sometimes contain puns, intentional
misspellings, slang, and baby talk for humorous effect (49-50). This can be
valuable for teaching students about language itself as well as its phonetic
system, spelling, vocabulary, and grammar. Besides, the conciseness of
meme language may be especially helpful for teaching gendered and pro-
drop languages: students may be forced to pay attention to the grammatical form to fully understand the elliptical constructions often used in memes. Harshavardhan, Wilson, and Kumar (2019) also believe that “[t]he sharing of internet memes is considered as a sharing of the culture that is infused in those memes” (45). Thus, meme collection and analysis can present plentiful opportunities for developing intercultural competence: learning what is and is not humorous in the L2 (second language) culture(s) as opposed to students’ L1 (first language) culture(s), tracing multimodal intertextual references contained in the memes (references to popular TV shows, cuisines, cities, literary characters, etc.), and deciphering the text itself which may contain names of culture-specific concepts.

Harvey and Palese’s (2018) and Harshavardhan, Wilson, and Kumar’s (2019) powerful papers inspired the pedagogical innovation described below. The following section lays out the structure of the meme activity (final project) designed for an intermediate Russian language course. This design largely follows Harvey and Palese’s (2018) proposed instructional sequence.

3. Project design and implementation procedure
The following meme project instructions, presented in full in Appendix A, were heavily influenced by Harvey and Palese’s (2018) recommendations for teaching with memes. The project was implemented at the end of the semester in an intermediate (third semester) Russian language course. It consisted of three out-of-class assignments that students completed individually. However, each of the project activities was supplemented with an in-class discussion that typically took place a week before the activities were due. A summary of the sequence of project activities is presented in Figure 1.

It is important to note that as per the instructors’ judgment, this specific group of students was not linguistically prepared to engage in in-depth discussions of memes in Russian. As such, much of the in-class discussions took place in English. While many CLT (communicative language teaching) language instructors – including the author of this paper – will disapprove of such use of L1 in the classroom, there were two reasons to do so. First, L1 was used to provide genuine emotional support to students at the close of a difficult semester during the pandemic. Second, L1 allowed in-depth discussions of cultural similarities and differences, redressing a popular criticism of the CLT approach: for instance, Paesani, Allen, and Dupuy (2016) validly note that there are “two main limitations
of CLT in its current form: (1) its heavy focus on oral, functional language use; and (2) its superficial treatment of cultural and textual content” (8). Ideally, for Paesani et al. (2016), instructors could address these limitations by revising their curricula to provide opportunities – and tools – for critical analyses of texts in the target language. However, given that this meme project was introduced in a traditional CLT classroom and that the design of the project was rushed due to the pandemic, the instructor did not have space in her curriculum to prepare students to discuss memes in Russian. The in-class discussions were designed to engage students in a deeper analysis of memes and to address any questions that students might have about the project. During the first in-class discussion, students were asked to examine several memes, in English and Russian, and to answer guiding questions for meme interpretation designed by Harvey and Palese (2018, 265). The discussion focused on the interplay of image and text, the cultural knowledge required to understand some memes, and the language that is used in memes. The instructor also provided examples of commentary, modeling the first task of the project for the students. After this in-class discussion, students had a week to find and post four memes with commentary on a Padlet board, with each of the four memes addressing a topic assigned by the instructor. Specifically, students were directed to look at memes related to four specific topics: Russian language, School/university, COVID-19, and New Year’s. These topics were selected for two reasons. The first was that these topics would inevitably lead to discussions of similarities and differences between American and Russian cultures. The second reason was that many of these topics were related to students’ pent-up frustration with having to study during the pandemic. The topics Russian language and COVID-19 were anticipated to elicit discussions of cultural similarities and were a major source of frustration for students. The topics University and New Year’s, on the other hand, were expected to elicit discussions of cultural differences and were selected based on their relevance to students’ lives (students completed the project in late November – early December, close to the end of the year). The additional task of writing commentary for collected memes was intended to foster critical and digital literacy: as proposed by Chun et al. (2016), L2 learners “should be able to critique, analyze, and evaluate both the meanings they want to convey as well as the meanings produced by others” (71). Thus, by commenting, students engaged more deeply with the content of their collected memes and had to think about the cultural and vocabulary knowledge that other students might need in order to understand the memes that they posted.
The second in-class discussion took place after all memes had been collected and shared by students. This discussion focused on cultural similarities and differences as well as on student strategies for interpreting collected memes. After the discussion, students had several days to go back to the original Padlet board and comment on the memes collected by their peers. The purpose of this portion of the project was to expose students to more examples of memes and to give them an idea of their peers’ interests and sense of humor – to foster bonding among students. For this reason, it was important for the instructor to provide the students with a platform and an opportunity to exchange ideas and review each other’s work. The design of Padlet allows the instructor to create a semblance of a social network: one can enable the ‘liking’ function so that students can leave likes under each other’s posts, and enable commenting, thereby giving students the means to express group membership and build social bonds.

Finally, students were asked to create and post two of their own memes on a separate Padlet board (with accompanying commentary). This step of the project was followed by an in-class discussion of the meme creation process. The instructor prompted students to talk about conceiving and designing a meme: what difficulties students experienced while creating their own memes and what cultural or linguistic knowledge would be necessary from the audience to understand the memes they had created. This sequence of activities allowed the instructor to engage students in a deeper analysis of memes as a genre, to foster critical and multimodal literacies, to allow students to expand their intercultural competence by analyzing memes produced by representatives of another culture, and to give them an opportunity to develop their digital (meme-making) skills.

The outcomes of the project are discussed below, on the basis of students’ collected and created memes, the commentary that they wrote, as well as their reflections about the project shared in informal in-class discussions of the project. Overall, the topics that were used for the project – in tandem with the requirement to comment on each other’s work – facilitated bonding as well as a sense of group membership and allowed students to express their emotions about living and learning during the pandemic.

4. Examples of students’ work
This section presents several examples of discussions around memes as well as several memes created by students. Based on these examples, I examine the affordances of such meme projects for language and culture learning, expressing emotion, and developing a sense of group membership.
Overall, in class discussions, students reported spending vastly different amounts of time working on the project. Some students stated that they spent around 20 minutes looking for memes online (the first task of the project), while others reported spending over 5 hours trying to find a meme that represented them and their sense of humor. One student reported being pleasantly surprised about finding a Russian dark humor meme page on a social network. This student noted that this discovery was instrumental in motivating them for continued engagement with Russian memes – the student followed this page intending to continue monitoring the memes that are posted there every day. Quite a few students also stated that they spent time Googling various Russian vocabulary items, traditions, and cultural artifacts mentioned in their collected memes to understand them better and to be able to write good commentary for others. Many mentioned researching Russian New Year traditions and the foods that are associated with them. Several students also expressed feeling excited about understanding some of the cultural references in memes about school/university, as we had discussed the differences between the schooling system in the U.S. and Russia in class at the beginning of the semester. Overall, student reactions and comments demonstrated good engagement with the project – they went above and beyond the requirements to post something interesting and meaningful to them. It can be proposed that this level of engagement was fostered by the use of memes – which are highly entertaining – for an educational purpose, as well as by the requirement stated in the project instructions that in their commentary, students had to address why their chosen memes are relevant to their own lives.

4.1. Student-collected memes

As mentioned above, several activities revolved around finding existing memes. First, students had to select the memes to which they could relate; second, they had to post these memes with commentary; and third, they had to comment on each others’ memes. One example of what Steps 1 and 2 of the project looked like when they were completed is presented in Figure 2.

The student who found and posted the meme in Figure 2 approached the topic of University from the perspective of COVID-19. Readers might find the idea presented in the meme to be very relatable as well: indeed, many of us have developed a certain paranoia in the times of Zoom – what if we left our mics and cameras on by mistake? The student’s commentary highlights three “acts” that are performed by posting this meme. First, the student acknowledges that there may be similarities between Russian
and American cultures, because distance learning has been an experience that we share: “This meme does not really require you to know anything about russian [sic] culture, as American students can also relate to the experience.” Second, the student relates to others through the content of the meme (which refers to a common real-life situation): “I think most students have had the experience at least once of thinking they muted theirself [sic] and turned off their camera before talking to someone in real life and then realizing their camera or mic was still on.” Third, the student shares their own experience and thereby expresses their own anxiety in relation to this situation: “I thought this was funny because it happened to me last Tuesday because I accidentally hit the spacebar which is apparently the push to talk button on zoom.” In this way, even in a short comment, a student was able to reflect on cultural issues, relate to other students, and express their own frustration.

The relatability of this meme (Figure 2) allows other students to express their own Zoom-related anxieties. Their comments both allow them to experience relief (as they are not the only ones going through such a situation), and to offer support to the student who posted the meme in the first place. Note the abundance of first-person pronouns in these comments – instead of being abstract or distant, students’ comments are very personal, offering their own feelings on the matter and even providing examples (“my roommate...,” “I have witnessed...”).

Figure 3 presents another example of a meme that students found relatable (judging by the number of comments). Notably, in addition to taking a stance on a relatable issue and proposing a similarity between Russian and American cultures, the student who posted this meme demonstrated an active engagement with Russian grammar: “To understand this meme you need to understand verb conjugation, and use of the accusative case.” This student is highlighting the fact that the second-person singular pronoun ‘you’ requires a different conjugation from the third-person singular pronoun and that an understanding of verb conjugation is this crucial to understanding the text of this meme. In addition, the student points out that the use of the accusative case enables the reader to know who is the subject that ‘sees’ and who is the object that ‘is being seen.’ The rest of the student’s commentary to the meme establishes the student’s point of view and acknowledges that people’s perspectives on COVID-19 vary (“In Russia as in most places, there’s a range of opinion on the matter”). Other students’ responses are personal, as was the case with the meme analyzed above. However, in this case, most students express their agreement with
the student who posted the meme by distancing themselves from the “people who would wear their mask that way.” In this particular case, group-building is both a matter of holding a shared belief and of standing in opposition to another group of people.

4.2. Student-created memes

The opportunity to create their own memes (Step 3 of the project) allowed students to express frustration with various realities of their lives and to build a sense of community (specifically, a Russian learner community) to an even greater extent. Of the four topics, the most popular for creating memes were COVID-19 and Russian language. Some representative examples are presented in Figure 4.

The memes presented in Figure 4 all evoke a sense of community, small and large. The first is an example of a student-created meme narrates student experiences in their current Russian language course. This meme refers to the instructor of the course by name, drawing on common experiences in our specific Russian language course and it thereby establishes the existence of a community of Russian language learners that is restricted to one course. The second meme in Figure 4 is similarly personal and its intended audience is limited. In this meme, a student comments on their peers’ behavior, specifically, on the unwillingness of most students to use any vocabulary except for the word ‘good’ to answer the question ‘how are you?’ in class. The intended audience of this meme includes all learners and teachers of the Russian language. The third is an example of a meme that focused on the general experience of being a student during COVID-19 pandemic. The experience narrated here will be relevant to most students, although the cultural reference to the movie will be lost on them. Finally, the fourth meme in Figure 4 enacts the identity of a person living in quarantine. People outside our Russian language course and even outside the university context should be able to relate to this meme. It is by evoking all of these different experiences and identities through their memes that students were able to claim their membership in these various communities. References to people, places, and situations as well as students’ use of pronouns (e.g., ‘we’) brings communities into being and simultaneously enacts their membership in them.

At the same time, the last two memes in Figure 4 allow students to release their frustration with the coronavirus pandemic. Students utilize pronouns ‘we’ and ‘you’ in their commentary because of how relatable they perceive these memes to be. The experience of sharing emotions through
memes not only enables them to evoke a sense of community in others but also allows them to feel like part of that community themselves: their feelings and experiences are justified because they are shared by others.

5. Conclusion
Overall, this meme project has been successful: student commentary and memes showed some evidence of increased engagement with the Russian language and culture, development of intercultural competence and digital literacy, and an increasing sense of belonging to a community. Besides, the project allowed students to express their frustration with distance learning as well as the difficulties of learning the Russian language specifically.

However, several improvements can be made in future implementations of this project. First, instructors can foster a deeper engagement with genre, multimodality, and the cultural and linguistic information contained in memes by asking students to submit longer reflective papers alongside Tasks 1 and 3 of the project. While the 50-70-word commentary was instrumental in helping students review and comment on their peers’ memes, it did not provide sufficient space for in-depth reflection. The reader of this piece may have noticed that while students’ commentary presented above provided some indication of reflection and thought, this reflection could be much deeper. According to Paesani, Allen, and Dupuy (2016), reflection is an integral component of learning that is often ignored in CLT approaches (37). However, it is through reflection that students can assess their learning, think about areas for improvement, and envision ways of applying new knowledge outside of the classroom. For example, after creating their own memes, students can be asked to 1) explain their linguistic choices and to discuss how text and image work together in their meme; 2) reflect on their intended message: whether that message was understood, how it was received, and why; 3) reflect on what did not work as intended and what changes could be made; 4) think about the skills that they had learned in the project and where these skills could be applied outside of the Russian language course.

Furthermore, to continue building a sense of membership, students can be asked to like and comment on their peers’ created memes (and not only on their collected memes). Given that memes are inherently a social genre, their creation needs to be legitimized through sharing and commenting. For this reason, a follow-up activity in which students can express appreciation for each other’s memes should be an integral part of the project.
Overall, through this project, students gained an opportunity to express pent-up frustration and to explain, in detail, how COVID-19 had affected their lives both during in-class discussions of memes and through their memes and comments. This opportunity was invaluable for students who are rarely allowed to complain about their ever-increasing workloads. It was even more important for the instructor who could now better understand her students and see how the demanding structure of her course was contributing to their anxiety during the pandemic. It is through humor that students were able to bring up truly important issues in the classroom. In times of isolation (in its strictest sense), we as teachers need to be mindful of our students’ well-being. This practice is important to maintain in post-COVID times as well, as even when we are physically co-present, we may still be emotionally isolated from others.

**In-class Discussion 1.**
What are memes? What do they typically look like?
How do we interpret memes?
What is multimodality?
Examples of memes and commentary.

**Project Task 1.**
Collect 4 memes and post them with commentary:
Russian language, school/university, covid, New Year

**In-class Discussion 2.**
Was it difficult to find memes?
Was it difficult to understand them? Why or why not?
Did you notice any cultural similarities or differences?

**Project Task 2.**
Comment on 3 memes found by peers

**Project Task 3.**
Create 2 memes on any of the following topics: Russian language, school/university, covid, New Year and post them with commentary

**In-class Discussion 3.**
Was it difficult to create memes in Russian?
Was it difficult to word the text for your memes?
What kind of cultural similarities or differences did you play on when creating your memes?

*Figure 1. The Sequence of In- and Out-of-class Meme Activities*
This meme does not really require you to know anything about Russian culture as American students can also relate to the experience. The meme is saying they don’t trust the mute or camera button on calls. I think most students have had the experience at least once of thinking they muted themselves and turned off their camera before talking to someone in real life and then realizing their camera or mic was still on. I thought this was funny because it happened to me last Tuesday because I accidentally hit the spacebar which is apparently the push to talk button on zoom.

больше всего в жизни я не доверяю вот этим двоим

Anonymous 3mo
I can relate to this comment because like the meme says, I do not trust the mute and camera button on zoom. I have witnessed a couple people say things they probably shouldn’t have when their microphone was on. Something about those buttons is just concerning.

Anonymous 3mo
I can relate to this meme because before I do anything I always check the mic and camera because I do not trust myself or zoom.

Anonymous 3mo
I think everyone can relate to this meme. The paranoia and fear of something embarrassing happening is just too strong. For the grammar, it seems that “больше всего” translate to “most of all” because всё is in genitive, and этим двоим seem to be in instrumental. Maybe that’s the case that goes with доверять.

Anonymous 3mo
My roommate likes to burst into my room and be super loud so I’m always paranoid that he’s gonna burst in and I won’t be on mute.

Anonymous 3mo
I can relate this feeling of paranoia. I often check the mute and camera settings on my computer and wonder if they can still hear me.

Figure 2. Student’s collected meme, topic: university
Note: The text in the meme reads: “I don’t trust these two the most in my life”
Figure 3. Student’s collected meme, topic: COVID-19
Note: The text in the meme reads: “If you cannot see the coronavirus, the coronavirus cannot see you.”
Sometimes conversations about my daily routines in 2020 get a little awkward. My breakfast habits certainly don’t always qualify as nutritious and complete.

This meme is about how often when asked “Как дела?” students will reply with “good” instead of any more expressive words. To understand this meme, you would need a basic understanding of Russian and Russian greetings.
This meme doesn’t follow an established format but I think it works. The text says “there are two types of Zoom rooms” because I wasn’t sure how “breakout room” translated into Russian. This semester I’ve had the type on the left where you actually talk for the most part but every once in a while I get into one of those rooms where you can just innately tell that nobody wants you to talk, which is the type on the right. This meme requires you to have seen the cinematic masterpiece Брат in order to fully get the reference.

Есть два типа Зум-комнат:

In order to understand this meme you need to know the word “которые” and what form of the word is used in which situations. This meme is relevant to me because I’ve done the most online shopping that I’ve ever done during quarantine and this semester since we can’t go out though I’d usually never want material stuff. I’m sure I’m not the only one and it seriously hurts the wallet.

Figure 4. Students’ created memes
Note: The text in the memes reads as follows: 1) “<Professor’s name>: what do you usually eat for breakfast? Me: Usually not too much;” 2) “Great, super, normal, bad, horrible --- Good;” 3) “There are 2 types of Zoom rooms;” 4) “We stay home due to Covid -> Buy stuff we don’t need -> No more money -> No more money.”

Appendices
Appendix A. Project Instructions
For our final project, we will be putting together a collection of memes. This will be a collaborative endeavor – each of you will contribute several memes, which you will post on a Padlet board.

Step 1: Collect memes. You will collect memes from the Russian segment of the internet (in Russian). You will need to select one meme that you like and understand for each of the following topics: School/university, Russian language, Coronavirus, New year.

Places to look for memes: Google; Facebook group Мемы; Instagram: thischarmingcatt, luchmgz; VK.com (Russian social network): https://vk.com/fckbrain.

You will post your found memes on Padlet with comments in English (50-70 words):
• What cultural/linguistic components does one need to know to understand this meme?
• Why do you find it funny and relevant to your life?

Step 2. Analyze memes collected by others. You will go back to Padlet and look at the memes found by your peers. You will identify three memes that you relate to and add to their descriptions.

Step 3: Create your own memes. You will select any of the four topics (school/university, Russian language, coronavirus, and new year) and create two memes of your own (in Russian). They do not have to be funny; they just have to make sense and be relevant to your life.

Easy-to-use online meme creator: https://imgflip.com/memegenerator (has most meme templates).

You will post them on Padlet with commentary in English (50-70 words):
• What cultural/linguistic components does one need to know to understand this meme?
• Why are these memes relevant to your life?

Due Dates:
• Step 1: Monday, November 30
• Step 2: Thursday, December 3
• Step 3: Monday, December 7

**Grading Rubric**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Критерии оценки</th>
<th>Максимум</th>
<th>Ваши баллы</th>
<th>Замечания</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Checklist (6 memes in total)</td>
<td>50</td>
<td></td>
<td>All components are completed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creativity and quality of reflections</td>
<td>50</td>
<td></td>
<td>Reflections satisfy the length and content requirements. Created memes are creative/meaningful.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall grade</td>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**References**


Harvey, Lauren, and Emily Palese. 2018. “# Neverthelessmemespersisted: Building Critical Memetic Literacy in the Classroom.” *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy* 62, no. 3: 259–70.


Raise Your Hand: 
Online Language and Culture Instruction, Inclusivity, and Critical Pedagogy

THOMAS JESÚS GARZA

1. Introduction
The effects of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic in the U.S., in addition to the devastating impact on health and human lives, were felt immediately across all educational institutions. From preschool to graduate programs, the majority of face-to-face classes shifted to online virtual instruction, both synchronous and asynchronous, forcing teachers and learners alike to accept and adjust to new modalities of communication and interaction via videoconferencing apps. While for the last two decades, U.S. world language programs, including Russian, have been at the leading edge of innovation and implementation of digital technologies in the service of instruction (Meskill and Anthony 2005; Meskill and Anthony 2015; Russell and Murphy 2020; Spasova and Walsh 2020), the sudden and unplanned shift to an entirely virtual mode of instruction left many instructors – and learners – struggling to cope with unfamiliar (to some) technologies and unsatisfactory (to most) substitutes to the face-to-face interaction that has been a distinguishing feature of the world language classroom since the beginnings of the communicative competence movement of the 1980s.

Concurrent with COVID-19, the spring and summer of 2020 also witnessed a profound and widespread support of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement in the U.S. and abroad, stemming in large part from the killing of George Floyd and other Black and Latinx men and women by members of various police forces.¹ This watershed moment in the U.S. experience has precipitated an ongoing national discussion and reckoning regarding the systemic racism in the nation and its institutions. For many educators, virtual classrooms in spring 2020 often became settings for asking “difficult questions” and having “uncomfortable conversations”

¹ Polls conducted in the first half of June 2020 by four polling organizations (Pew, National Opinion Research Center, Kaiser, and Civis Analysis) indicated that between 15 and 26 million people in the US participated in Black Lives Matter protests, making it one of the largest social/political happenings in the nation’s history (Buchanan, Bui, and Patel, 2020).
inherent to confronting issues of inequity and systemic racism. For teachers managing the novel structure of virtual classrooms, even if course content is very familiar, attending to issues of diversity and intersectionality poses a challenge. This essay, therefore, suggests ways and means of creating and supporting ecologies of equity and inclusivity within online delivery of Russian language and culture courses on videoconferencing applications such as Zoom. It will also argue that applications of critical pedagogy principles are the most effective means of achieving both desired course proficiency outcomes, as well as creating ecologies of social justice in the easily masked and, therefore, potentially non-inclusive, environments of online instruction.

2. Critical Pedagogy, Equity, and Online Instruction
The transition of world language classes to virtual delivery during the COVID-19 pandemic created opportunities for increased attention to issues of teaching practices, as well as to related issues of equity. The discussion of EQUITY in connection to synchronous online instruction falls into two relevant categories. The first is what Dahlwan (2020) calls “digital equity,” or equal access to digital devices, Internet, and a reliable wi-fi network for both learners and instructors, all *sine qua non* for effective online delivery of courses. This category of equity in access to material goods and services is not insignificant. Since the availability of Internet service and related hardware map closely to socio-economic status and race/ethnicity, the two are inextricably intertwined (Population Reference Bureau 2020). Individual instructors are not, of course, able to solve all issues of equal access in

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2 Classroom or instructional “ecology” is used throughout this work to refer to the environment and climate created in a teaching and learning space that engage, encourage, and support individuals and groups that have not had equal access to or representation in the learning process. The term was popularized in the 1990s in research on the inclusion of students with learning disabilities in the classroom (Speece and Keogh 1996; Vaughn and Schumm 1996), but was appropriated in the 2010s and 2020s in response to broader issues of equity, including race, ethnicity, and social justice in education (Anderson, Boyle, and Deppeler 2014; Kozleski 2020).

3 “Masking” refers to the practice of altering one’s personality or identity to conform to a particular environment (De Gere 2008). The term was most commonly applied to persons with autism or other personality disorders to describe their efforts to mask their conditions; however, virtual online environments, especially videoconferencing apps, provide users of any marginalized group with the functionality to mask their difference, including gender, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, or age (Wiszniewski and Coyne 2009).

4 2018 U.S. Census data referenced in the 2020 PRB study cited above show that lack of computer, high-speed Internet access, or both was nearly twice as high for Black and Latinx families and nearly three times as high for American Indian families as for whites; when income was factored in, the disparity in access among the groups remained the same.
terms of equipment or Internet service; they can, however, work to ensure that learners who do not have the resources needed to participate fully in online classes have alternatives available to them, such as telephonic access to the audio portion of classes, text messaging for short-answer responses in class, and/or use of postal services to submit and return written work. Unfortunately, it is not always possible to accommodate all learners who do not have means or access to technology in courses that are inherently technology-based. This situation is and remains a serious impediment to equitable applications of technology-based instruction, including virtual online classes.

The second category of equity in the teaching of world languages – or any subject matter – is that of social justice. Reagan and Osborn (2021) contend that social justice and critical pedagogy have become the most “significant change in the teaching of world languages in the last twenty years” (211), noting in particular ACTFL’s volume, Words and Actions: Teaching Languages through the Lens of Social Justice (Glynn, et al. 2020), and its impact on subsequent discourse on critical pedagogy in language teaching. Bell (2016) offers a useful frame for discussing social justice as both a goal and outcome:

The goal of social justice is full and equitable participation of people from all social identity groups in a society that is mutually shaped to meet their needs. The process for attaining the goal of social justice should also be democratic and participatory, respectful of human diversity and group differences, and inclusive and affirming of human agency and capacity for working collaboratively with others to create change. (3)

To be sure, the inclusivity and intersectionality Bell describes lie at the heart of efforts to decolonize our courses, syllabi, and curricula – especially given the circumstances of the COVID-related shift in delivery of instruction, since it offers us all the opportunity to reexamine, reimagine, and revise any or all parts of our programs.

For the language and culture course, “decolonizing the syllabus” goes beyond the addition and incorporation of diverse identities as characters in the textbook, though that is a good place to begin. Decolonization of world language education entails, as Kramsch (2018) argues, “engaging in the difficult two-way bilingual dialogue necessary to decenter Anglo-American theory and open it up to different epistemological perspectives” (68). Within the framework of “neo-colonial globalism” and “global competence,” decolonizing the world language and culture syllabus, for example, entails the inclusion of opportunities and objectives that require learners to “engage in dialogue with speakers from other educational
cultures on their own terms, and the willingness to enter the slow and difficult process of linguistic and cultural translation” (69). While the teaching of Russian in the U.S. is not a direct postcolonial intervention in the way that, for example, teaching English in the Philippines is, I would argue that the colonial experiences of both the United States and Russia have created postcolonial environments of diverse and intersectional populations in both countries that demand bilingual dialogue and exposure to varied human perspectives, as Kramsch suggests. For virtual courses in the age of COVID, digital access to the greater Russophone world can provide the means to implement these “difficult dialogues” in our courses by bringing together on one screen diverse identities from both countries; but our syllabi and the materials they engage must also be directed toward engendering this kind of dialogue.

3. Materials, Methods, and Inclusivity
Crucial to the success of any language classroom – whether face-to-face or virtual – are the materials used to present the language and culture to the learner. The “bells and whistles” effect of using digital technology that encouraged many of us to incorporate technology into our classrooms in the 1990s does not apply to the digital natives of Gen Z, born with digital devices in their hands. Thus, if technology by itself can no longer ignite and maintain learner interest, the content of our classes becomes even more important to the success of the course. The choice, form, and presentation of content, in our move toward equity, diversity, and inclusivity in our courses, is more salient than ever, requiring instructors to examine critically the materials they will use in online instruction.

As McNeil (2016) recommends in regard to the development of successful online courses, “Materials and instructional methods need to be continually re-examined and adjusted to ensure that they are helping students meet the desired learning outcomes as well as meeting the students’ own needs” (10). Using this recommendation as a starting point, instructors can apply critical pedagogy priorities to examine “students’ own needs” through the intersectional lenses of equity and inclusivity. This process begins with the central “text” of the course, be it a traditional print or digital textbook, an instructor-generated collection of materials, a dedicated website of digital materials, or whatever the primary source of instruction is for the course.

For most secondary and post-secondary Russian language courses in the U.S. the textbook remains the principal source of instruction, as
more and more publishers make the move from print to e-format texts accessible on digital devices. For many learners of Russian, some of whom have never been outside their home state, much less traveled abroad, the material contained in the world language textbook is the primary source of linguistic, cultural, and visual information about the country(ies) where the language is spoken. Too often, however, textbooks default to a Disneyfied presentation of a hegemonic, white-dominant, heteronormative world that neither fully nor accurately represents the demographics of the relevant country(ies). Macedo (2018), for example, provides compelling evidence of textbooks that “never dive more deeply into certain contexts, often leaving inconvenient facts out so that students come away with less than a fully nuanced comprehension” (21). In particular, writing of the erasure of people’s histories in our textbooks, he points out how “the erasure of dangerous historical memories constitutes not only a historical malpractice but is also part of the blueprint of dominant ideologies” (17). Not only do these myopic views of target landscapes fail to represent fully the diversity of their own resident populations, but they also inhibit non-binary and/or ethnic and racially diverse students from enrolling in our domestic courses, as they cannot see themselves as relevant or integral within the other culture. With small world language programs under the persistent threat of cancellation due to falling enrollments, it would behoove us all to make our course materials representative and inclusive of the greater student population at our institutions in order to make our courses more relevant and attractive to diverse audiences.

In the case of teaching Russian, textbooks and ancillary materials produced both in Russia and in the U.S. overwhelmingly portray Russia and the learner of Russian through a hegemonic lens of a white male-dominated, heteronormative, and affluent society (Azimova and Johnston 2012; Stauffer 2020). In reality, both Russia and the U.S. – including student populations -- comprise highly diverse and intersectional populations, as both the subject and object of the study of contemporary Russian language and culture. Significantly, the title of the preeminent publication for the dissemination of Russian abroad during the Soviet period, Русский язык для всех / Russian for Everybody [Emphasis mine. TJG] belied the fact that Soviet ethnic populations, non-binary identities, and non-urban social groups were not represented in the text; it further ignored, beyond the frame of the learner’s source language, any kind of diversity or intersectionality in its audience. The post-Soviet narrative forwarded in current publications does little better, often failing to “reject the
homogeneity that has been widely accepted as the cultural norm in both Russia and the United States” (Stauffer 2020, 297). Some of the more recent U.S. textbook publications, including the online program «Между нами» / Between You and Me (deBenedette, et al., 2017), «Панорама» / Panorama (Rifkin, et al., 2019), and the forthcoming revised edition of Russian Stage One: Live from Russia! (Davidson, et al., n/d), make substantial strides toward a more comprehensive representation of the diversity of Russia, as well as attending to the increasingly intersectional learner/audience of these materials in U.S. Russian language programs. «Между нами», for example, represents ethnic diversity in its cast characters studying Russian, including Amanda Li and Tony Morales; «Панорама» includes a discussion of the gay rights movement in Russia based on authentic readings; and Russian: Stage One includes characters in blended families and of different ethnic backgrounds.

The matrix in Figure 1 graphically illustrates the interrelationships of the categories that are in play for instructors seeking to decolonize their courses through the choice of textbooks and ancillary materials used in their virtual (or face-to-face) classes. The four categories shown indicate segments of identity to consider when reviewing a text, whether in print, audio, video, or digital form, for inclusion in a syllabus. Each of the four categories -- gender, race/ethnicity, sexual identity, and economic position -- can intersect one with the other. The goal of the instructor reviewing a text for possible adoption is to identify materials that present a broad diversity of identities in order to represent an accurate and inclusive portrait of the region(s) in which the language is used, and to provide a diverse array of learners to be able to identify and see themselves in the target culture in a productive way.

Figure 1: Considerations for decolonizing language texts
For the instructor of Russian in a virtual format, attention to issues of diversity and inclusivity in materials and methods is of paramount importance. This decolonization of world language materials and, consequently, of courses themselves, is particularly relevant in the virtual classroom. On the computer screen of the virtual classroom, instructors are no longer able to experience and respond to the energy – positive or negative – emanating from the learners. From the other side of a laptop screen, instructors cannot hear the murmur of learners’ approbation of a pop culture reference, nor their groan at the introduction of yet another case ending. The online classroom, on its surface, appears to the instructor as a reimagined set from “Hollywood Squares,” with twenty five learners’ faces, if they choose to turn on their video cameras, with names attributed to each image, voices muted unless called on: in short, not the most welcoming or hospitable learning environment. Thus, engaging, current, and inclusive materials can go far to help ensure that learners remain involved and active during every online session.

4. New Ecologies of Inclusive Instruction
Innovations in digital materials and media available for online instruction have in recent years made their application in world classes more feasible and desirable. Blake (2012), for example, cites the ways that “the proper use of technology can increase student access through anytime anywhere learning and the sharing of faculty among different institutions” (18). Indeed, in world language instruction, this functionality of being able to connect with native speakers/peers in their home countries held great potential for both instructor and learner.

For many of us, the teaching of Russian language and culture has been relegated to videoconferencing apps, such as Zoom, Skype, Google Meet, Slack, Adobe Connect, or Microsoft Teams. Though designed initially for business purposes as means of communication within internal corporate communication networks (Daly and Hansell 1999), all of these apps can be utilized for educational purposes as well, and offer particular functionality for language teaching and learning. Fischer (2021) affirms this position, stating: “Apps can help world language learners negotiate meaning with native speakers,” and goes on to indicate that they can “help learners achieve higher levels of proficiency in their own language and perform higher-level cognitive tasks” (162).

Indeed, beyond the potential benefits in proficiency gains that videoconferencing apps can support, perhaps the most significant impact afforded in the virtual online learning environment are the many and
varied opportunities to engage native speakers as interlocutors in virtual classroom discourse. These individuals may be recruited from partner institutions in Russia or other Russian-speaking regions with which the home institution already has relations, or via the instructor’s personal in-country contacts. This inclusion of peer native speakers in the online discourse without question provides learners – and instructors! – with authentic, contemporary, and age-appropriate language modeling in the given context of the course syllabus. Even at the early stages of instruction, these exchanges can be meaningful: a Kazakh partner living in Moscow reveals that Russian is not his native language; a Russian student says that he lives with his single parent; a female student in Yekaterinburg introduces you to her girlfriend. But beyond the substantial potential for positively impacting learners’ language and cultural proficiency gains, this interaction has tremendous potential for forwarding an ecology of inclusivity and equity.

By carefully recruiting and selecting diverse native speakers as partners in the course, individuals who represent ethnic, gender, and economic intersectionality, the kinds of interactions that can occur between the two cohorts transcend the “speaking partner” modality and produce the conditions for translanguaging, or the movement between two languages in diverse contexts that allows for natural scaffolding of instruction (García 2009), and intercultural communication in the service of critical pedagogy. Interactions among learners and native speakers of diverse backgrounds, identities, and cultures can quickly move our learners from the “one-classroom-one-language-pedagogical straightjacket” (Lin 2013, 540) and toward what Pennycock (2021) describes as “resourceful speakers” (174), able to function comfortably when encountering the linguistic diversity that accompanies all diversity. The intercourse between these speakers requires both sides to derive meaning through the context of each other’s culture and identity, following closely the recommendations of the Five Cs of the World Readiness Standards for Learning Russian (Garza, Merrill, and Shuffelton 2020). These resourceful speakers are not only able to reach designated proficiency benchmarks in these courses, but they also more readily attain intercultural competence through interaction with diverse perspectives (Garza 2016).

For most proficiency-based classrooms, the teacher-centered model is anathema to the learners’ development of autonomous interaction in the language; and yet, the starting point for a Zoom, or other videoconferencing, meeting is a “host” of a session who has full control over what the “participants” see, hear, and can do. Fortunately, these apps
also include a number of functionalities that can make the session much more proficiency-oriented, student-centered, and inclusive. Learners can, of course, “raise their hands” virtually on Zoom, indicating not only a question or comment, but also an indication of participation. Further, the Breakout Rooms function in Zoom offers instructors and learners a virtual alternative to pair/group work in class, and further allows for autonomous interaction in the language that promotes inclusivity and equity among the participants.

Breakout Rooms in Zoom can be randomly assigned by the instructor, which is useful for a quick, brief spontaneous practice session that emerges organically in the flow of a given session. But Breakout Rooms can also be designated ahead of time by the instructor for a planned, scripted assignment. It is in these contexts that Freirean notions of critical pedagogy from his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1998) most come to bear on the learning process in the Breakout Rooms. Freire pointed out that repressive educational establishments, in order to maintain the status quo, basic skills, such as those most affecting language education – reading, writing, reporting –eschewed critical thinking, reflection on meaning, and interpretation of that meaning into one’s own culture, focusing instead on group recitation, memorization, and repetition (77). Breakout Room activities that allow learners to engage critically with the language/culture material, to reflect on its relevance and significance in their own culture, and then express that interpretation to others is exactly what critical pedagogy in world language education entails.

Thus, a Breakout Room activity that asks learners to order food from a Russian menu may elicit a role play between students acting out a server and a patron in a café. But a more open-ended prompt that provides learners with the URL of a Google Map of a part of a Russian city and the information, “You and your friends are in the city of X and you’re hungry. You have 1780 rubles among you. Arrange an affordable lunch” will provide learners the raw data needed to negotiate and construct their own meaning with language that they collectively have. Because learners are in the “sanctum” of the Breakout Room as themselves, they are more willing to perform their own identities and personalities, making the interaction more authentic and relevant. Chandler’s (2016) study of learners’ session journals revealed “how spending time in a Breakout Room could embolden students to speak up about concerns and queries that they might otherwise keep quiet about” (20). By providing virtual spaces in the videoconferencing environment that encourage creative and personal use
of language, instructors can move toward more inclusive and equitable language classes.

Other functionalities of Zoom can also facilitate proficiency-based and inclusive, representative instruction. The Polling and Chat features have great utility during the Zoom class session. The Polling feature, on its surface, seems somewhat stilted, allowing only yes-no or multiple-choice questions. But even this simple application can be made more inclusive and open-ended by the simple addition of “Other” and/or “None of the above” to the list of responses to a query. Thus, binary or fixed sets of responses to questions are transformed into prompts for more engaging and extended discourse. For example, the simple poll question: “What language do you speak at home? A) English B) Spanish” becomes a source for a more extended discussion when the response reads: “A) English B) Spanish C) Other.”

Polling can also serve in the aid of lowering affective factors of anxiety, fear, hesitancy, etc. by using it as a warm-up activity before, during, and after sessions. Especially during the COVID lockdown and period of isolation, asking our groups of learners “How are you?” “How are you doing?” and “Are you all right?” went far – and continues to do so – in reassuring learners and reaffirming the virtual online class as a safe and welcoming space. In a similar way, Polling can be used during instructor or learner presentations to check participants’ comprehension or to sample learners’ responses to shape the content of the presentation. For example, as a pair of learners present a talk about Russian music, they might, in the course of the talk, poll the other participants about their musical preferences to determine what the presenters will then focus their comments on.

The Chat feature of most videoconferencing apps, including Zoom, allows all participants to enter written remarks and comments to others in the session. The instructor can determine whether these comments must be directed to the entire group, or if participants can also send private messages to any individual in the group. Chat supports non-Latinate scripts, including Cyrillic, so users can incorporate this feature into presentations, lectures, and other tasks as a means of eliciting written learner input. Like the Breakout Rooms and Polling features, Chat can be strategically used in the service of promoting equity and inclusivity by providing an additional modality of participation, especially for learners who are reticent to speak, but who are willing to express themselves in written form, or for whom putting their thoughts in writing serves as a precursor to oral communication.
Masked interactions/participation can occur when learners in the Zoom session “disappear” from the class interaction, either by not using the camera to show themselves “live” in class, or by un-naming themselves on the screen and/or using a visual avatar in lieu of their live videocam image. Some individuals will “mask” to receive attendance credit for the day, but not actually attend or participate in the session; others may want to mask their personal domestic situation/environment because of embarrassment or privacy concerns. This latter occurrence of masking disproportionately affects minorities (especially Latinx) student populations in videoconferencing environments (Esquivel, et al., 2020). The on-screen environment of Zoom provides numerous opportunities for masking and, for BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color), non-binary, and other intersectional learners, the ease of “disappearing” from the screen is too tempting. Instructors, already taxed by simultaneously attending to the connectivity, volume, polling, presenting, screensharing, and interacting in Zoom sessions, may not even realize that this or that learner has disappeared from the screen. In the current moment of online instruction, social justice, and critical pedagogy, however, we must strive to ensure that all learners are attended to during Zoom sessions, that all learners have the opportunity to participate, that all learners are included. It is time to reappropriate «для всех» to mean “for everybody” in Russian language classes.

One final benefit of conducting classes virtually via videoconferencing apps: the ability to record every class session and securely store the recordings in the Cloud. Recording class sessions on Zoom not only provide access to the material covered and interactions performed to students who might have missed class, or to those who wish to review and practice a class that they had attended, but it also offers instructors a valuable tool for helping them to create and maintain an ecology of equity and inclusivity during their online sessions. Instructors should periodically review their teaching and interaction with, between, and among the learners in the class by watching recordings of their classes – by themselves or with a peer instructor to offer an objective perspective – to assess their performance in terms of language pedagogy and critical pedagogy. Fortunately, incidents of overt racism and hate speech are relatively rare in classroom interactions; however, unintentional micro-biases, micro-invalidations, and micro-aggressions in a classroom setting may go unnoticed at the moment they occur and their deleterious effect on individuals in the class, not to mention the negative impact such actions can have on the entire cohort of learners. Careful, critical review of
recorded Zoom classes can help reveal not only these occurrences during classroom interaction, but also provide instructors with insight into what the circumstances are in which these micro-racisms can occur and then take steps to intervene and disrupt them before they become systemic in the class. These reviews and subsequent remediation must, of course, be conducted according to local institutional and federal (e.g., FERPA) regulations, especially in protecting individual learners’ identities and privacy.

5. In Lieu of a Conclusion: A Beginning
The COVID-19 pandemic and consequent shift of Pre K-16 courses to virtual online delivery has been a sea change for instructors and learners alike. Moving instruction onto new platforms of technology not by choice, but by necessity, has strained the resilience and energies on both sides of the computer screen. And, in the midst of this seismic social and pedagogical event, we find ourselves at a time of moral and ethical reckoning that poses one of the most basic of questions: Who are we as a nation? As teachers, we are bearing the massive responsibility of stewarding the next generations in their education. And yet we are aware that not everyone is afforded the same opportunities or access to receive that education. So we, as teachers of Russian language and culture, might ask, “What can I possibly do to have an impact on this grave situation of such massive scale? I’m just one Russian teacher.” In answer to this question, I offer the two following views.

First, movements toward equity and social justice do not necessarily require macro actions. Revolution is not the only way to precipitate change. Sometimes, even small actions, small changes, can have large impacts. Brown (2017), in her work *Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds*, posits a simple but persuasive argument: Small-scale solutions impact the whole system. Therefore, similar principles can be employed on all scales (33). In other words, making small changes, such as modifying a syllabus, selecting a different textbook, or being attentive to include all learners in every session, will positively affect the entire course. Any one of these small changes can, as time and energy permit, be used as a model for another, perhaps larger, change that will have a proportionally larger impact on the course, and so on. All of us can make a difference in some way in every course at every institution. Taken as a whole, these small changes make a significant impact on the *status quo*.

Second, Freire’s complex and complicated notion of *Conscientização*, usually translated as “critical consciousness” or “conscientization,” calls
for exposing the political and social inequities and contradictions that inhabit one’s worldview, and, perhaps more importantly, for acting against them to attain social justice (1998, 35-37). This outcome is the ultimate goal of critical pedagogy and our endeavors to achieve diversity, equity, and inclusivity in education. It is the goal that we, as human beings, should all set for ourselves as global citizens. Such an accomplishment in our Russian courses would certainly transform them: from the materials we utilize, to the ways we engage learners in activities in class; from our own interactions with learners in and out of class, to the ways and means of assessing their progress. These are not insubstantial changes; any one of them requires additional time, creativity, and effort. But the end product of such efforts would certainly outweigh this expenditure, because equity and social justice in our society should not be negotiable.

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Hybrids 2.0: Forward to a New Normal in Post-Pandemic Language Teaching

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1. Introduction
Faculty members who primarily use face-to-face instruction probably anticipate a post-pandemic time when groups will gather again in physical classrooms, and when facemasks will be special occasion accessories for Halloween parties. Once beyond the pandemic, faculty may feel an almost overwhelming desire to banish the pandemic and its effects to oblivion and to return to how life was before. And yet, that would suggest that language instructors who generally work in face-to-face formats have nothing to learn from their resilience during the pandemic or from their many pandemic-induced adaptations made since the sudden move to remote instruction in March 2020. In this article, we will reflect on how current changes to teaching practice can be adapted for post-pandemic language teaching.

We recognize that current COVID-related online or remote\(^1\) language instruction is new in three ways: 1) the pandemic brought into the world of remote teaching and learning practitioners and students who otherwise might never have considered delivering or receiving language instruction online; 2) much of the switch from face-to-face to online work was mandated by institutions rather than chosen by instructors or learners; 3) remote learning went from being a possible subset of a student’s coursework to the dominant form of instruction in virtually all of a student’s academic subjects. These factors cannot help but color both instructor and student attitudes towards online work in both positive and negative ways.

We also recognize, however, that in response to the necessity of providing remote learning, many second language (L2) instructors have worked hard to adapt and acquire additional tools and practices that facilitate communication online. Faculty have enriched face-to-face formats

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\(^1\) We will use the terms “online” and “remote” here as catch-alls since we know that institutions have tried out many delivery formats since the start of the pandemic, including synchronous remote; synchronous remote with limited physical classroom work (“hyflex”); mixture of asynchronous work with limited synchronous remote, and others. As local infection rates climbed, institutions sometimes changed formats or the admixture of formats in the middle of a term.
transplanted to remote instruction with new applications and new types of online activities. Although many of these applications and practices were new to face-to-face instructors, they had already been well explored by teachers and materials designers working in online asynchronous, hybrid and “flipped classroom” instructional models (Hojnacki 2018; Russell and Murphy-Judy 2020). However, many teachers doing remote instruction for the first time had to learn these new practices quickly and implemented them with widely varying levels of institutional support and training.

As Gacs, Goertler, and Spasova (2020) have noted, the relative speed with which crisis-prompted remote teaching practices were adopted in 2020 meant that there was little time for most instructors used to face-to-face instruction to think about how to implement these online practices in an intentional way following best practices in instructional design. As the pandemic-induced remote teaching ends, we have the opportunity to take some time and evaluate all our practices and tools; some applications and tools teachers have deployed in the last year may not transfer back to a world of face-to-face class meetings, while others, which have shown their utility in remote instruction, should be retained as valuable occasions for out-of-class learning. In other words, the waning of the pandemic presents an opportunity to create new models of hybrid language instruction, where instructors, informed by findings from second language acquisition (SLA) research, can select and deploy practices, matching them to the most efficient environments for students to complete them in. These new hybrid models ask us to rethink (and rationalize) how and where we draw the boundaries between face-to-face classroom activities, asynchronous online activities, testing and “homework.”

In evaluating online tools and practices used during the pandemic, we are guided by the SLA research notions of input and interaction, two essential elements for language learning (VanPatten 2001; Gass 2003; Mayo and Soler 2013). Input can be defined as “message-bearing discourse in the second language” (Comer 2020, 169). While input is necessary for language learning, and no language learning can happen without it, input by itself is insufficient (VanPatten 2001, 38). Learners need opportunities to interact with the input, and we conceptualize this interaction in two ways. First, learners need structured opportunities to interact with the input itself: first, so that they can demonstrate that they have understood its message, and then so that they can start to map the input's meaning to the lexical, grammatical, and pragmatic form(s) that express that message (Comer, 2020, 170-72). Second, learners need opportunities to interact and use the input in order to produce output in which they exchange message-
bearing discourse in order to complete various kinds of communicative tasks (Comer 2020, 176-78). Thus, interaction in our sense is a useful concept encompassing both learners’ output (i.e., communication in the interpersonal and presentational modes), but also in learners’ processing of input (i.e., communication in the interpretive mode).

In the last 25 years, language learners’ access to input and interaction online has greatly expanded. They can encounter many forms of authentic and semi-authentic input (in text, audio and video materials) in the target language. Similarly, the range and functions of Web 2.0 tools (i.e., chat programs, voice recording, video conferencing) that allow users to easily interact with each other by exchanging text, audio, and video messages have also greatly expanded since the mid-2000s. While it would seem that these internet communication tools have created sufficient opportunities for students to encounter input and to communicate with others using that language input, both well-planned online instruction and pandemic-enforced remote instruction have shown that these tools need curation and pedagogical structuring if they are to be efficient for instructed language learning.

In the rest of this article, informed by the concepts of input and interaction, we will consider which tools and practices should remain in the structuring of our teaching in the “new” post-pandemic normal, and where each tool or practice is best deployed. 2 We think that reflecting on the experience of remote teaching and learning will encourage teachers to construct new hybrids (i.e., courses that incorporate elements of face-to-face, synchronous remote and asynchronous learning and teaching) that prioritize those aspects of language instruction that are most valuable for learners’ communicative ability and growth in intercultural understanding, in awareness of effective learning strategies, and in conceptual knowledge of how language works.

2. Questions for reflection
To give this new iteration of hybrid shape, we will consider two sets of questions:

1. What do we want face-to-face classroom time for? For students,

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2 In this short reflection we will only consider the structure of the language teaching experience, primarily thinking about language learning at the first and second years of instruction. The conversation about the content of our teaching practice and how it addresses equity, diversity and social justice is vital for our profession and has started to be addressed elsewhere (Stauffer 2020; ASEEES 2020 webinar series “Race in Focus: From Critical Pedagogies to Research Practice and Public Engagement in Slavic, East European and Eurasian Studies”).
what is the “value added” of the face-to-face time in a classroom with an instructor? Are there face-to-face practices that we should make even more common post-pandemic?

2. What activities and practices can or should we do online? For a course with a face-to-face component, are there traditional face-to-face classroom practices that are more effective when converted into online learning activities, whether synchronous or asynchronous? In what ways can online instruction and activities increase learners’ interaction with language input, and with one another?

The discussion of these questions in higher education is not new, since the essential notion of “flipping the classroom” has been to move traditional teaching (i.e., lecturing) out of the classroom and learning activities into the classroom (Hojnacki 2018, 37; Vitta and Al-Hoorie 2020, 3). The pandemic offers us an opportunity to think anew about the division of activities among learning formats and the usage of classroom time and out-of-class time. What will we do now that we recognize that having students in the same physical space at the same time is a really precious resource?

3. What do we want face-to-face time for?

3.1. Conversational interaction
Teaching in a remote synchronous classroom in the past year in our experience has brought into stark relief the best aspects of face-to-face instruction. Face-to-face classroom instruction allows for the kinds of interpersonal interactions (both on and off task) that create community and a sense of comradery among students and between instructor and students. The strength of the interpersonal relationships that grow out of those interactions and the shared experience of the classroom can have a strong positive impact on learner motivation. For us (and we assume for some students) it has felt isolating and challenging when all interaction has been mediated through a screen. When we are able to meet again in face-to-face classrooms, our practice will need to capitalize on the potential for social interaction and community building. In a post-pandemic world, classroom activities should highlight even more interaction in student pairs and small groups and between learners and the teacher, in the co-construction of explanations when they are needed (Adair-Hauck and Donato 2010).

Face-to-face classrooms allow pairs/groups of students to exchange conversation with more natural turn-taking, which is characterized by
overlaps (when two people speak simultaneously) and spontaneity (which turning a mute button on and off in Zoom currently inhibits). For the teacher, managing the “cacophony” of multiple pairs and groups speaking in the same face-to-face space generally is not a problem, and the experienced teacher can be with one group while covertly listening in and monitoring the activity of other groups. Visual and auditory cues during paired and group work can let the experienced teacher know where in the classroom instructor support is needed. Since virtual breakout rooms exist in their own separate visual and sound spaces, a teacher has more limited ability to monitor pair work globally and pinpoint problems.

3.2. Providing immediate and collective feedback
While it is not impossible to deliver audio and visual feedback at the same time to a whole group in Zoom, it is harder to do so with an individual learner in a group Zoom class. The face-to-face classroom allows for side conversations between teacher and student that can address a specific learning problem, highlight an ineffective strategy, or arrange for additional consultation. Establishing a rapport between teacher and students and delivering effective individualized spontaneous feedback may be particularly crucial at the very beginning of learning Russian, where learners sort out visual and phonological processing issues (e.g., misprocessing это as ето, можно as можно, or хочу as хожу) at different rates, and a few may need sustained feedback to overcome these challenges or face falling behind.

3.3. Engaging the senses
The physical face-to-face classroom can engage all the learners’ senses, not just the sight and sound that videoconferencing currently affords them. Face-to-face teaching offers many instructors immediate visual feedback from learners based on their facial expressions and physical gestures. That non-verbal feedback from students can help modulate instruction effectively and pace classroom work. While Zoom and other videoconferencing platforms offer the ability to see one another in real time, that visual connection is not unproblematic: students without strong internet access often cannot effectively use their cameras; laptop screens – or iPhones – have limited space for video and text; students are inhibited in showing their workspace because it is shared with others in the family or shows aspects of their socio-economic status. Teaching remotely online to a set of avatars or plain black squares on a computer screen challenges a teacher’s sense of when to provide feedback and how to pace activities.
When teaching in general purpose classrooms, we will want to find ways of adding some culturally-appropriate visual stimuli to the four walls.

The physical classroom offers tactile and kinetic opportunities that can help connect language forms with the actions that they represent. This can encompass a really wide variety of activities, from using clapping (or foot stamping or table top drumming), when first helping students fix the stress placement in a new word or word form to sorting/matching physical cards (e.g., words with pictures for vocabulary learning, pronouns with verb forms for getting the notion of conjugation, sentence starts and endings, etc.). Classrooms are a natural place for language activities that have a performative or Total Physical Response (TPR) component: sing alongs, charades (i.e., pantomiming basic verbs while students guess the action), cued actions (i.e., learner draws a card with a phrase like выйти из аудитории and they carry out the action silently while the others in the class come up with words to describe the scene), roleplay situations with props, paired picture labeling (i.e., students using textual words and phrases to label elements in pictures that illustrate a text/story that they have read and then to narrate that episode from the story to the whole group), and readers’ theatre (i.e., students act out an episode from a text that they have read).

The physical classroom offers more opportunities for whole group mixers, where each student needs to note down on paper the responses of their classmates. Physical classrooms offer opportunities for students to work collaboratively to make a poster summarizing/capturing what they have learned on a topic. Those posters can be hung on the classroom walls and then students can conduct a “gallery walk” of those posters, looking for similarities and differences which they relay in a whole group after the walk.

3.4. Community building
In post-pandemic times, we will want to emphasize those activities that really build community and stimulate collaborative work that leads to tangible products. The experience most missing from virtual teaching has been sharing food or snacks from the other culture. While we do not necessarily need to make shared food a daily part of classroom culture, occasional treats that bring something from the target culture to students promote positive affect in the classroom and create moments of community.

Having a fixed class time and space does require students to organize their lives around those commitments to a space and time. But that fixed time also ensures the regular presence of Russian happening in a
student’s life. It is a truism that when a task can be done at any time at all, there is a great chance that the task will never be done. Students who have chosen to pursue higher education through asynchronous online learning have the motivation to continue their studies in that format. However, based on attrition trends at one of the authors’ institutions, it seems that for students who are used to face-to-face instruction, the remote pandemic experience may have decreased their internal motivation and commitment to language learning. The communal ritual of coming to class at a regular time in a designated space provides motivation and personal accountability as well as a structure for interaction and shared experience.

3.5. Neutral space
Physical classrooms create something of a neutral playing field for all students. Trying to participate in a virtual classroom as a student (or a teacher) when your physical environment is filled with reminders of your other social and intimate roles (e.g., parent, child, caretaker, cook, janitor, lover, etc.) requires significant concentration. In the Zoom classroom, the visuals of students in their private space can bring to the foreground all the social, economic, and educational disparities of our society. The physical classroom space, devoid of those personal reminders, can help students and teachers get into the mindset required for teaching and learning. In the post-pandemic times, we anticipate continuing efforts to address those disparities, as well as efforts to make the physical space of our classrooms more visually appealing and intellectually engaging.

4. What do we want online time for?
Surveys of university students’ reactions to COVID-era remote learning in formerly face-to-face courses suggests that students have found both positives and negatives about their new online learning conditions (Lederman 2020, Dengub 2021). Dengub’s survey of 100 university-level language students of Russian from 10 institutions doing remote instruction (2021) reports that, assuming no technology glitches (not always a given), learners value being able to “get to” class and office hours easily. Students note with approval that they can access reference materials and dictionaries

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3 We recognize that the face-to-face classroom has its own inequities: students arrive in face-to-face classrooms with enormous differences in academic, economic and lived experiences. Some people, because of those inequities and geography, do not have access to the physical classroom at all. However, seeing the home contexts that our students work in during remote instruction makes the disparities between learners much more visible and therefore less ignorable.
more quickly during a remotely conducted class. But they also mention difficulties with remote learning enumerated above: technology issues; harder turn-taking; loss of focus and motivation; distraction; stunted interpersonal relations. These considerations should inform what online work we deploy upon returning to face-to-face instruction.

Another factor guiding our recommendations is the role that comprehensible input and meaning-based interaction play in language learning. Online work can contribute to the pedagogical structuring of input and interactions.\(^4\) We suggest a sequence where front-loaded online work with new language input then segues into the classroom. Learners encounter new input (text, story, dialog, podcast, blog), presented in both aural and written form, and check their comprehension, pinning down details of the input’s message, all online. In class, they 1) interact with others using language from the input in scaffolded communication exchange activities; 2) notice new language forms; and 3) learn to manipulate new language forms in output (deBenedette 2020). Examples linked below come from the open-access first-year Russian textbook, Между нами (deBenedette et al. 2015), and from our own experience at our own institutions.

4.1. Encountering and comprehending new input
Instructors often introduce the texts, dialogs and conversations that form the basis of learners’ new language input in face-to-face class sessions, even when learners are asked to read and listen to input outside of class. However, in class it can be problematic to monitor all students’ comprehension, and some students need more “passes” through audio and written material to understand it well. Front-loaded online encounters with new language can collocate related audio and visuals on the same screen, allow easy access to glossing of new lexicon, and can link to an online comprehension checks incorporating both listening and reading, which create low-stakes but scored accountability. We may initially demonstrate in class how students should do this online work. But subsequently moving it largely online means that the instructor knows that learners have understood new input and that they can interact with each other in class using the new input.

4.2. Guided and enhanced explanations about language
Describing the flipped language classroom, Russell and Murphy-Judy (2020) suggest that “flipped learning allows for more interactive, engaging,
and meaningful instruction because classroom time is used to develop communicative goals while learners focus on grammar, vocabulary, syntax, and other linguistic features outside of class on their own” (135). We agree that the explanation of new grammar forms and vocabulary can occur productively online; however, we see just as vital a role for work with language input online outside of class. Online presentations should supply audio with any examples and check students’ comprehension of message (ex: Машу видит Коля vs Маша видит Колю) and of concept (ex: who is the do-er of the actions in the above sentences?) This is true whether the material is presented on a website or via an instructor-narrated video or slideshow.

4.3. Homework 2.0: increasing communication outside class
Even in a program with 4-5 contact hours per week, learners’ interactions with one another during the classroom session are limited. Certain formats of online tasks can allow us to increase those interactions. Instructors can use apps like GoReact that permit students to video (or audio) record themselves in pairs to record a dialog, act out a situation, interview one another, or even work together to read and comprehend a new text, filling out a reading matrix together in a shared Google doc. Rubrics for scoring those activities show students what is expected, and the online environment allows us to provide video and written models of speech for students to do the activity. This synchronous video pair work by students, done at convenient times for them and submitted online, can increase learners’ out-of-class work interacting in real time in the language. The recorded sessions also give the instructor the opportunity to offer more sustained individual feedback than would be realistic in a face-to-face class, where there are time constraints on every activity.

Note that we are not advocating increasing learners’ overall time spent outside of class on homework. Instead, we encourage instructors to prioritize those activities that increase interaction outside the classroom. This includes information-gap activities (e.g., each member of a pair of students is provided with half the info needed for a task; the pair must talk to share and write down all the information); problem-solving (the pair exchanges information and uses it to solve a problem like making room assignments for the guests). Such speaking activities – with clear instructions and ample scaffolding – can serve as interactive outside-class

5 Social reading apps like Hypothesis and Perusall also allow students to annotate text and demonstrate comprehension.
work that reinforces the interactions happening in the classroom. In other words, we advocate taking advantage of the possibilities offered by the technology to carry over the communicative interaction of the face-to-face classroom to learners’ online work.

For online work, instructors need to account for the challenges of learning to write in Russian, especially in the first year. Instructors might replace written exercises with regular assignments where students audiorecord themselves within the learning management system (LMS) or via an app while completing a specific activity. This regular, low-stakes work prepares students for performative assessments like show-and-tell videos (Это комната, где я живу / Что у меня в рюкзаке? / Вот наше общежитие). In this way students can regularly demonstrate that they are able to use the language independently to communicate. Options for feedback to learners depend on the format in which the assignment is submitted. For example, in GoReact the instructor can insert detailed audio and written feedback tied to specific places in a student’s recording. Assessment of these assignments can be done simply (completed / not completed) or using a rubric that targets features to be used in the learner’s output. For online writing, teachers will need to teach typing in Cyrillic early in the course and set reachable goals for online posting. Teachers need to encourage students to process words deeply both when typing and writing by hand, i.e., students should say what they write aloud as they write or type, think about meaning and sound out words they read on screen. We need to remind students why copy-pasting words into online activities and discussion posts is a poor strategy for learning the pronunciation and spelling of new words.

4.4. Leveraging the LMS: student accountability and improving learning strategies

In the new hybrids, the course’s LMS will become the central hub for connecting classroom work with online work and for instructors to use the online space to guide students in developing and deploying effective learning strategies. The “getting started” orientation modules that are essential to courses offered online should also become a regular feature of face-to-face instruction, including checking how students approached assignments (e.g., making sure everyone did the comprehension check after the text); presenting strategies for sequencing homework tasks; and

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6 Apps that allow students to make and respond to video posts, like Flipgrid or GoReact, or to post and caption images, like Harmonize, can take on this function.
modeling effective ways of learning vocabulary. Online instructor-made videos, low-stakes graded diagnostics and learner self-checks can help students understand and self-monitor for effective strategy use and check that they are meeting weekly goals (expressed as can-do statements such as “I can talk about a city, comparing its pluses and minuses”). The online space can become a forum for encouragement, guidance toward goals, and reminding about can-dos.

4.5. Increase student-instructor contact
Instructors should consider continuing to hold at least some of their office hours online. A student who may find it difficult to come in person may find an online meeting easier and less intimidating. The availability of online office hours is especially important at institutions where students commute to campus or may have jobs and family obligations that take up significant amounts of their non-class time. Brief online meetings can also be used at intervals during the term to check on students’ progress.

4.6 Virtual visits: interaction with other speakers of Russian outside class
One powerful way of bringing target culture perspectives to our students has been the relative ease of arranging “virtual visits” with Russian speakers, whether from other campuses, the local community, or from Russia or other parts of the former USSR. First-year students who practice doing an interview with the instructor can later conduct interviews with other Russian speakers in an online conference meeting. Alternately, students can post their videos and questions and receive answers the same way.

5. Assessment and accountability
Measuring student progress in language learning is one area that will require continued rethinking when face-to-face instruction becomes possible again. Options for assessment will grow significantly when teachers fully leverage the strengths and controls of both face-to-face and online formats. The move to remote synchronous instruction in March 2020 forced many teachers to step away from traditional classroom tests as the way to measure student progress; instructors recognized the difficulty of preventing students from using outside resources when completing tasks that have convergent answers, like discrete point grammar questions. With that kind of traditional testing unavailable, teachers who had previously relied on traditional forms of testing have worked to implement other kinds of measures of accountability, i.e., small low-stakes graded activities
that can signal to instructors that students are keeping up with the class work, are grasping key concepts, and engaging in specific performances that will help them learn and control the material. The assignments that students needed to complete for accountability often take advantage of the testing functions built into the course’s LMS, including automatic grading and feedback on incorrect answers. Such features allow teachers to monitor student progress without having to grade more assignments.

When face-to-face instruction returns, teachers may want to continue requiring more small accountability measures that students complete outside of class. The traditional classroom test that featured sections for listening comprehension, reading comprehension, discrete grammar work, writing activity, and possibly cultural reflection can be divided up when face-to-face instruction returns, with some sections – particularly listening and reading comprehension – conducted outside class time, using the LMS’s quiz functions. Vocabulary quizzes can use audio, rather than written, prompts to elicit words, which can prevent easy recourse to a dictionary. Removing these kinds of assessments from in-class work allows the teacher to reserve proctored, face-to-face time to check what learners can really do with the language on their own, both in writing and in speaking.

6. Conclusion
In Hybrids 2.0, face-to-face courses can have a more robust and purposeful online component than before the pandemic, one in which meaning-focused online components both feed into and segue out of face-to-face sessions. Online components of the types instructors have learned to deploy in the past year can enrich face-to-face work at every stage, from first encounter with new expressions to assessing student performance.

As the restrictions of the pandemic recede, universities will be counting costs. It is not unreasonable to expect that debt-challenged institutions may pressure faculty to limit face-to-face time and keep some former face-to-face courses online or to reduce in-class hours for courses rather than return to the previous status quo. As a profession we need to be prepared to fight for the precious face-to-face time we need with our students. And we also need to be ready to combine that work with online experiences that will help us make the most of the time we have with

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7 It will be important for instructors to learn more about the detail of designing online quizzes, considering question types and the implications for choosing different features offered (such as, number of attempts allowed, time allotted, etc.).
students in the non-virtual space that we now know is a most precious commodity.

References
Hybrids 2.0: Forward to a New Normal in Post-Pandemic Language Teaching

Comer, deBenedette


Русский ковидный: Новые языковые явления глобальной пандемии

ЕЛЕНА ШМЕЛЁВА

1. Введение
Язык отражает все значимые события, происходящие в обществе, поэтому не удивительно, что так изменившая в 2020 году жизнь множества людей пандемия COVID-19 не могла не найти отражение в языке. Сложился новый глобальный дискурс коронавирусной эпохи – не случайно в разных странах и разных языках, где выбирают слова года, победителями в 2020 году стали такие слова, как коронавирус, маски, локдаун, социальное дистанцирование и др. В статье мы кратко охарактеризуем основные особенности «русского ковидного», обращая особое внимание на новые языковые явления – изменения в лексике (появление новых слов и выражений, рост частотности редких слов, переход терминов в разряд общеупотребительной лексики), новые способы словообразования и синтаксические конструкции. Мы также попытаемся через призму языка проанализировать реакцию российского общества на действия президента и правительства по борьбе с пандемией.

2. Ключевые слова коронавирусного словаря
Менее, чем за год в русском языке появилась тематическая группа неологизмов, принадлежащих семантическому полю “пандемия ковид-19” (Gekkina 2021, 158). Эта тематическая группа отличается от других многочисленных групп неологизмов, появившихся в русском языке XXI века, тем, что она сформировалась одновременно и под влиянием одних и тех же событий, что и соответствующие группы в других языках, что позволило исследователям из России, Финляндии, Швеции и Испании говорить о появлении «исследовательской проблемы мирового масштаба в социокоммуникативном и лингвистическом аспектах» (Mustajoki et al, 2020, 1369), ср. также статьи, в которых сопоставляется коронавирусная лексика в русском, английском, французском и немецком языках (Severskaia 2020), в русском, английском и украинском (Zaiceva 2020), в русском,
бело-руском, польском и немецком (Miuller 2020), в русском и китайских языках (Savchenko and Lai 2020). Основу дискурса коронавирусного времени в русском языке, как и в других европейских языках, составила научная, медицинская терминология, а также медицинский жаргон – лексика, которая ранее имела узкую сферу употребления, а теперь массово обсуждается в средствах массовой информации, в Интернете и в разговорной речи. Прежде всего это названия заболевания – коронавирус (ковара) и ковид.

Слово коронавирус не новое, в качестве медицинского термина оно бытовало в русском языке уже более пятидесяти лет, более десяти лет это слово включается (с пометой мед. «медицинский термин») в русские орфографические словари и словари иностранных слов, но рядовые носители языка узнали его только в прошлом году. Косвенным подтверждением этого факта является огромное количество вопросов, поступавших в Справочную службу Института русского языка им. В. В. Виноградова РАН и на сайт gramota.ru про правильное написание этого слова. Дело в том, что в русских словах, образованных сложением двух корней, используется соединительная гласная о (машиностроение, формотворчество) То есть, если бы это было слово, образованное из двух русских слов – ковара и вирус, оно бы писалось короновирус, но поскольку слово коронавирус – это калька медицинского термина латинского происхождения coronavirus, оно записывается кириллицей также, как латиницей.

Вначале такое написание многим казалось неправильным, необычным, но буквально за два-три месяца в русском языке, как и в других языках, появилось большое число новых производных слов, начинающихся с корона (с A): короназаболевание, коронаподозрение, коронапроявления, коронакризис, коронапаника, коронавфейки, коронаскептики, коронадиссиденты, и написание коронавирус перестало вызывать удивление. Любопытно, что в начале эпидемии, весной в средствах массовой информации и в разговорной речи гораздо чаще встречалось слово коронавирус, а записанная латиницей аббревиатура COVID-19, как правило, встречалась, только в официальных или популярных текстах на медицинскую тему (Shmeleova 2020), ср. названия статей «Как мы всей семьей заболели коронавирусом» (20.06.2020);1 «Помогает ли водка от коронавируса на самом деле?» (29.12.2020);2 «Как в России поддерживают граждан во время COVID-

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1 https://www.baby.ru/blogs/post/2556732207-531969867/  

Поскольку ковид более короткое и легко произносимое слово, чем коронавирус, у него есть все шансы стать более частотным словом в разговорной речи и интернет-коммуникации. От слова ковид также очень быстро стали появляться производные слова: ковидный, ковидник 1 (больной ковидом), ковидник 2 (ковидный госпиталь, ср. также ковидарник, ковидарий), ковид-центр, ковид-бригада и др. После пандемии коронавируса, объявленной Всемирной организацией здоровья, заметно выросла частотность слова пандемия, которое, в отличие, например, от слова эпидемия, ранее практически не встречалось в разговорной речи. В общее употребление вошли слова штамм, антитела и даже такие специальные медицинские термины, как контагиозность (заразность), сатурация (насыщение крови кислородом), пульсоксиметр (аппарат, измеряющий сатурацию) и аббревиатура ИВЛ (аппарат искусственной вентиляции легких). В связи с массовым тестированием на коронавирус в обиход вошла еще одна аббревиатура – ПЦР (название теста на ковид, ср. «Почему после прививки положительный ПЦР?» (18.2.2021).⁷ При этом, хотя эта аббревиатура и стала широко употребительной, мало кто знает, что она расшифровывается как «полимеразная цепная реакция». Общепотребительными во время пандемии стали не только медицинские термины, но и слова из медицинского жаргона, такие, как бессимптомники (бессимптомные больные) и контактники (те, кто контактировали с больными).

Помимо медицинской лексики в тематическую группу слов коронавирусного времени входят слова, связанные с защитными мерами,

⁵ https://www.woman.ru/health/medley7/thread/5320388/
⁷ https://sprosivracha.com/questions/424834-pochemu-posle-privivki-polozhitelnyy-pcr

Еще весной прошлого года стало очевидно, что ношение масок и мытье рук не остановит рост заболеваемости, нужно не допускать скопления людей в общественных местах, в школе и на работе, в транспорте и торговых центрах. В целях ограничения распространения инфекции российские власти стали вводить комплекс мер, который получил название режим самоизоляции, например: Тридцатого марта в России введен режим полной самоизоляции для всех граждан из-за угрозы распространения COVID-19 («Что значит режим самоизоляции для всех с юридической точки зрения», 8.4.2020). Редкое слово самоизоляция – в Национальном корпусе русского языка (далее НКРЯ) зафиксировано всего 84 вхождения этого слова – не входит даже в большие толковые словари русского языка. Однако Экспертным советом конкурса «Слово года» самоизоляция была названа одним из трех главных русских слов 2020 года, а Институтом русского языка имени А. С. Пушкина – самым главным словом. И вот по какой причине. Что такое самоизоляция? Какой-то человек, группа людей или государство решает по каким-либо причинам изолировать себя от других людей или стран (примеры из НКРЯ): И. Ньютон никого не принимал, жил в самоизоляции, писал письма к Богу и пересматривал хронологию («Знание — сила», 2003); Русская эмиграция находилась до некоторой степени в самоизоляции («Наука и религия», 2007); Во второй половине XIX века Япония, отказавшись от длительной самоизоляции,

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9 https://ria.ru/20200408/1569764617.html
принялась активно заимствовать научно-технические достижения Запада (Овчинников. Своими глазами. 2006). Однако контексты, в которых используется это слово в настоящее время: ввести режим самоизоляции, отправить на самоизоляцию, принудительная/обязательная самоизоляция; В Москве самоизоляцию продлили до конца мая – показывают, что, как пишет Т. Б. Радбиль, «в функционировании лексемы самоизоляция вербализуется и клишированно воспроизводится внутренне противоречивая когнитивная модель ситуации законодательного принуждения граждан к добровольному ограничению своих прав на срок, определяемый опять же не гражданами, по их внутренней потребности, а законодательным образом» (Radbil’ 2020, 646).

С момента объявления режима самоизоляции работа, учеба и встречи друзей перешли в онлайн, на дистант (дистанционку) и удалёнку. Поскольку раньше только некоторые люди учились и работали из дома, эти слова были профессиональными жаргонизмами, а теперь, когда почти все перешли на удаленную учебу и работу, стали словами общего жаргона, ср. Дистанционка — от этого слова у одних мороз по коже, а кто-то и рад попробовать свои силы на удалёнке (Образование 4.0: Skillbox Media, 21.04.21). Большинство занятий, встреч и совещаний на дистанте и удалёнке проводилось в программе зум (zoom), что привело к появлению целого ряда производных слов с этим корнем: зумить, зумиться, зумер, зум-вечеринка, зум-свидание, зуминар (вебинар, проводимый в зуме), безумие (шуточное переосмысление слова безумие с корнем ум как слова с корнем зум — «долгое сидение в зуме»).

Помимо новых слов в коронавирусный словарь вошло еще несколько словосочетаний: социальное дистанцирование, лица старше 65 лет или 65+ (возраст, с которого начинались самые строгие ограничения во время самоизоляции – запрет на выход из дома, кроме посещения врача, запрет на работу, требующую присутствия на рабочем месте), нулевой пациент (первый заражившийся какой-либо инфекцией), красная зона (особая закрытая часть больницы, где лежат пациенты с коронавирусом и где врачи работают в специальных защитных костюмах и масках), бесконтактная доставка (доставка товаров, при которой покупка оплачивается онлайн, а курьер доставляет отправление до двери квартиры или дома, откуда его забирает клиент) и др.

10 https://www.facebook.com/skillboxmedia.education/
3. Словообразование

Русское словообразование является основным источником обновления и пополнения лексического состава русского языка. Ключевые слова коронавирусного словаря — коронавирус, ковид, маска, карантин, зум меньше, чем за год стали вершинами целых словообразовательных гнезд (Miturska-Boianovska 2021). Новые производные слова образуются как с помощью разнообразных аффиксов (-н, -ник, -ец, нового суффикса -инг и др.), так и разными способами сложения слов (Gekkina 2021). Конечно, не все новые производные имеют одинаковый статус, среди них много игровых, окказиональных образований-однодневок. Так, когда в первую волну пандемии народ массово кинулся в магазины скупать макароны и гречку, появились слова макароновирус и гречкохайп, а умонастроение, выражающееся в том, что везде и всегда нужно носить маску, характеризуется словом маскобесие (ср. также вирусобесие, шашлыкобесие — о массовых поездках на шашлыки во время объявленных в начале эпидемии каникул, см. ниже). Не слишком хороший ковидный госпиталь можно назвать ковидшником (ср. гадюшник), а общую обстановку в мире описать как ковидинг или ковидец (ср. конец, а также общеизвестное общенное слово, оканчивающееся на -ец). Путин в одном из первых обращений к нации после объявления пандемии предложил ввести неделю каникул, которые народ немедленно назвал карантикулами — одновременно и карантином, и каникулами. Это слово образовано с помощью недавно появившегося в русском языке, но давно существующего в английском, своеобразного способа сложения — блендинга, когда складываются не два корня слова, как в словах ковидоноситель или ковид-положительный, а часть первого слова заменяется на часть другого, при этом от первого слова может быть взята большая часть или одна-две первые буквы, а от второго — последняя его часть (Shmeleva 2015b).

В русском языке есть много заимствованных из английского языка «блендеров»: мотель (motel = motor + hotel), смог (smog = smoke + fog), относительно новое слово брекзит (Brexit = Britain + exit). Коронавирус привел к появлению в английском языке целого ряда новых слов-блендеров, которые моментально были подхвачены русскими интернет-пользователями. Это привело к появлению в русском языке новых заимствованных слов, таких, например, как инфодемия (ср. Как известно, наряду с пандемией коронавируса COVID-19 объявлена также первая в мире инфодемия («Инфодемия, алармизм и алармисты»,
или ковидиот (ср. Ковидиотами сегодня называют тех людей, которые либо отрицают существование коронавируса и его опасность, либо же, напротив, собираются уходить в тайгу, строить бункер, а кладовые у них завалены туалетной бумагой, спичками и консервами («Ковиднутые: как разговаривать о пандемии без нервов», 22.9.2020). Но слово карантинкулы было образовано блендингом непосредственно в русском языке, также, как и слова ковидло (ковид + повидло), короноик (коронавирус + параноик), коронавты (коронавирус + космонавты; медицинские работники, которые носят специальные антивирусные костюмы) и др.

4. Грамматика и синтаксис
Когда в языке появляется новое слово, оно начинает употребляться в тех или иных предложно-падежных конструкциях по аналогии с другими, близкими по значению словами. Так, когда в русский язык из английского было заимствовано слово Интернет, можно было бы предположить, что будет заимствовано и соответствующая конструкция с предлогом на – to find, to read on the Internet – найти, прочитать и т. п. на Интернете. Однако в русском языке значительно чаще употребляется конструкция с в – найти, прочитать в Интернете, по-видимому, потому что Интернет – это пространство, помещение или библиотека, ср. в пространстве, помещении, библиотеке (Shmeleva 2015а). Также с предлогом в употребляются в русском языке слова онлайн и офлайн, названия социальных сетей (в Фейсбуке), мессенджеров (в телеграмме, в вотсапе), сервисов для проведения видеоконференций (в скайпе). Поэтому не удивительно, что новое слово зум также стало употребляться с предлогом в, например войти в зум, работать в зуме, до встречи в зуме.

Изменения в значении слова могут привести к изменениям в сочетаемости с предлогами. Судя по примерам из НКРЯ, ранее слово самоизоляция употреблялось только с предлогом в. Однако у слова самоизоляция в новом значении «комплекс ограничительных мер для населения, который вводит правительство» наблюдаются колебания в употреблении предлогов в и на, например: «Кому в самоизоляции жить хорошо. О психогигиене вынужденного домоседства» (Огонёк, № 14, 13.04.2020); «Чем грозит долгое пребывание в самоизоляции?»

11 https://www.b17.ru/article/skurtul_infodemia_alarism/
12 https://vesti.ua/poleznoe/semtja/kovidnutye-kak-razgovorivat-o-pandemii-bez-nervov
13 https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/4316385
(7.5.2020);14 «Сидящим на самоизоляции должно платить государство – профсоюзы» (1.4.2020);15 В результате получилось, что ее оставили на самоизоляции без причины («Изолировать нельзя выпускать: москвичи, сдавшие анализ на антитела к COVID-19, оказались в заложниках статистики!», 11.6.2020).16 Это еще одно подтверждение того, что слово самоизоляция в 2020 году стало использоваться в значении, близком к значению слова карантин, которое давно употребляется с двумя предлогами (примеры из НКРЯ): Он продолжает болеть, на карантине, на работу его не выпускают (Аблаазов. Дневник. 1981); Три дня вместо месяца, как полагалось, мы находились на карантине (Никилин. Семь долгих лет. 1979); В карантине-то, если честно, сержанты дурака валяют («Столица», 1997.07.01); Тяжелые болячки надо переживать в карантине (Маринина. Шестерки умирают первыми. 1995).

Одним из показателей освоенности слова носителями языка, является появление новых синтаксических конструкций с этим словом. Не случайно в 2021 году появилось словосочетание быть на антителах, например: Я могу пойти на выставку, я на антителах; Приходите к нам в гости, мы на антителах, то есть ‘Я не боюсь заболеть, я не опасен для окружающих’. Интересно, что раньше в разговорной конструкции я на X-е в качестве X-а выступало слово, называющее название лекарства или наркотика: Ему нельзя сладкое, он на инсулине; Герой на героине, героиня на героине (песня группы БИ-2 и Сплин).

5. Языковые метафоры и идиомы эпохи пандемии
И. Т. Вепрёва отметила, что для описания борьбы с эпидемией в российской прессе часто используется военная метафора - сводки с фронтов мировой войны против коронавируса; пандемия – война без выстрелов, медики – герои-защитники, бойцы на передовой (Mustajoki et al. 2020, 1385). Л. В. Балахова показала, что милитарная метафора используется как способ формирования концепта КОВИД-19 в речи В. В. Путина (Balashova 2020). Однако, как кажется, в дискурсе российской власти в последний год часто используется также метафора тюрьмы и лагеря. Так, поскольку в советское время чаще изолировали не больных, а «врагов народа» и «общественно опасные элементы», слово самоизоляция (в отличие от слова карантин) ассоциируется не

16 https://newdaynews.ru/moscow/694580.html
столько с больницей, сколько с тюрьмой. Недаром появился анекдот: Вслед за режимом самоизоляции в России вводится режим самоликвидации. Выражения масочный и перчаточный режим, режим самоизоляции ассоциируются с выражением колония строгого режима; выражение красная зона – с зоной, местом лишения свободы. Конечно, и у слова режим, и у слова зона есть другие значения, не связанные с тюремным заключением (режим дня; зона турбулентности), но поскольку в течение всего советского времени, да и в постсоветское время тюрьма и лагерь являются постоянной темой литературы, кино, песен и фольклора, тюремная метафора является одной из постоянных метафор русского дискурса. Не случайно, когда в Москве и в ряде других городов ввели пропускной режим (опять режим!) и для любой поездки по городу нужно было заказывать пропуск, в Интернете и в разговорах людей замелькало выражение цифровой / электронный концлагерь: «Под прикрытием коронавируса, Собянин хочет в Москве установить электронный концлагерь» (1.4.2020);17 То, что делает мэрия Москвы – это не карантин, а цифровой концлагерь. Не Ухань, а Синьцзянь (Леонид Волков, 31.3.2020).18

Вообще в России действия правительства и особенно действия, а вернее, бездействие, президента Путина во время пандемии вызывали множество языковых шуток, и во многом изменили его имидж в глазах россиян. Почти одновременно с началом пандемии 10 марта 2020 года в Государственной Думе выступила депутат от «Единой России», первая в мире женщина-космонавт Валентина Терешкова, которая предложила обнулить президентские сроки Путина. Сразу же после этого слово обнуление обогнало по частотности слова, связанные с пандемией, в частности, именно слово обнуление было названо Экспертным советом словом года 2020. Путин получил у интернет-пользователей уничижительное прозвище обнулённый, и в сети появились карикатуры, на которых Путин меряет царскую корону, с подписями: Первый пациент с коронавирусом. Шутки про коронацию «заражение вирусом» и коронованных особ «больных коронавирусом» в русском языке приобрели популярность вследствие «омонимии слов корона 1 ‘золотой венец как символ власти монарха’ и корона 2 (от corona ‘коронавирус’» (Severskaia 2020, 756). Поскольку Путин переложил принятие решений о мерах по борьбе с ковидом на плечи губернаторов, по сети стали циркулировать слухи о том, что

17 https://eduard-456.livejournal.com/946826.html
18 https://www.facebook.com/leonid.m.volkov/posts/2927415003947780
он переехал из Кремля в обеззараженный бункер, что журналистам, прежде чем взять у него интервью, нужно сидеть две недели в обсерваторе (еще один медицинский термин, вошедший в общее употребление в 2020 году и обозначающий место, где временно содержатся здоровые люди, выехавшие из зараженной зоны) и пр. Если раньше Путину создавали образ секс-символа и альфа-самца, который скачет на лошади, гоняет на машине, летает на дельтаплане, ныряет на дно морское за амфорами, то теперь к нему прочно пристало прозвище бункерный дед / дедушка; бункерный обнулённый: «Чего боится вороватый бункерный дед / дедушка; бункерный обнулённый: царём всё Руси (благо дворец уже готов), переписать законы, отменить конституцию и начать играть по новым правилам («Тухляк, на который никто не пришёл, и росгвардейцы с печеньками», 24.1.2021). В августе 2020 года Путин заявил, что его дочь одна из первых в России вакцинировалась Спутником, но поскольку в это же время произошло отравление главного российского оппозиционера Алексея Навального ядовитым веществом Новичок, немедленно появился анекдот, что у дочки Путина вакцинация первой российской вакциной прошла без осложнений, а у Навального с осложнениями. В январе 2021 года, когда Алексей Навальный вернулся в Россию и был арестован в аэропорту сразу после прохода пограничного контроля, в Москве, Петербурге и в других российских городах прошли многотысячные протестные акции в его поддержку. После того, как против участников митингов были заведены уголовные дела «за нарушение санитарно-эпидемиологических норм» (так называемое «санитарное дело»), можно сказать, что языковая тюремная метафора борьбы с коронавирусом превратилась в реальные тюремные сроки.

Эпоха пандемии способствовала не только появлению «русского ковидного языка», но и к появлению коронавирусного фольклора – анекдотов и шуток, построенных на языковых играх, на переосмыслении значений идиом, лексических и структурных изменениях устойчивых выражений (Severskaia and Selezneva 2021).

6. Заключение
Итак, эпоха пандемии способствовала активизации всех языковых процессов, идущих в русском языке постсоветского времени, а также появлению коронавирусного фольклора. Время покажет, какие новые слова, выражения или идиомы останутся в активном словаре носителей русского языка, а какие сохранятся только в текстах 2020–21 годов как воспоминания о коронавирусной эпохе, но уже очевидно, что глобальная пандемия ковид-19 изменила не только нашу жизнь, но и наш язык.

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Русский ковидный: Новые языковые явления глобальной пандемии

Елена Шмелеева


1. Introduction
At the time of publication of this special issue of Russian Language Journal, most language programs will have been teaching remotely or in a hybrid format for more than a year. This volume is a testament to the collective effort of administrators and instructors determined not to lose sight of the opportunities to learn from the pandemic and the emergency transition to remote learning. Although students are not represented here as authors, they contributed to these efforts, and hence they figure prominently in every article of the volume. Initial expectations for learning outcomes for them for online teaching may not have been very high, but as Merrill, Dengub, and Pastushenko point out, it appears that language proficiency results from teaching online may be more encouraging than anticipated. As we prepare to return to in-person instruction in the Fall of 2021, there is no doubt that many of the lessons learned during the pandemic will impact both the short- and long-term future of our field. In that regard, a number of recurrent themes appear in this special volume: 1) we learned to make better use of our existing technologies; 2) student autonomy is crucial and we should be intentional about developing more autonomous, self-regulated learners from the very earliest levels of language learning; 3) differentiating instruction to meet diverse needs is possible in a more robust way given our experiences this year when many discovered new ways to teach to the whole class; 4) increasing student engagement and building a sense of community are key to our programs and student success; 5) cultural engagement and enrichment is an integral part of language learning not to be sacrificed because of a change in the medium of instruction; 6) we should perhaps rethink assessments to be more diversified and better reflective of student performance and progress.

In what follows I expand further on each of these overarching themes and refer to the articles in this special issue for representative examples.
2. Making better use of existing technologies
A number of authors in this volume share how their institutions used existing technologies in the emergency situation. Klimova, Comer and deBenedette, and Garabrandt and Six in particular share how the switch to remote learning was not as abrupt as it was for so many of us as a result of their respective programs having already developed a number of online learning options. For those who had not had much experience teaching remotely, it became clear that designing online instruction is not simply a matter of trying to replicate what happens when we are teaching in person, but rather requires rethinking what parts of a course or curriculum might work best online, what can be done, perhaps, even more effectively, by students working independently, and how to maximize the synchronous time together by spending it on activities that cannot be done by students working on their own asynchronously (Doludenko; Evans-Romaine et al.; Kolesnikova). One unintended positive consequence of the emergency transition to remote learning was the extensive, and intensive, faculty development that occurred. Most faculty have now become more experienced with a wider range of available learning technologies, not only those available on campus, but also those provided by private entities that offer students real-world language experiences (Klimanova and Vinokurova; Vinokurova). As a result of our forced use / experience with online course delivery, in the future we are likely to see increased remote and hybrid offerings that appeal to learners for a variety of reasons, not because this model is required by outside forces such as a pandemic or because of institutional financial constraints, but because such courses will actually help our learners reach their goals more efficiently (Comer and deBenedette). Although most of these technologies and online resources have been available for some time, this year forced us to take a closer look at many of them, and we are now much more likely to incorporate them into our standard curricula to the benefit of all.

3. Developing student autonomy
A second recurrent theme in this volume is the importance of student autonomy, agency, and self-regulation in the learning process. In addition to wanting our learners to grow their language proficiency, we also have the goal of creating independent learners. Language instructors recognize student autonomy as crucial for long-term success, but our pandemic experiences, in which students were asked to learn in isolation with more asynchronous work than before, placed a particular emphasis on this factor, and lessons learned can help us reflect on our strategies for developing
students as independent learners. Evans-Romaine et al. discuss the notion of “agency” extensively in their article about the Flagship experience this past year; Klimanova and Vinokurova analyzed and encouraged student self-regulation by having learners reflect on their experiences using an outside service provider for oral practice; Garabrandt and Six highlight the importance of student self-motivation and direction in a bichronous elementary Russian course, ideally leading to the inculcation of the habits of an independent, lifelong learner from the very beginning of instruction; Kolesnikova and Sivachenko and Nedashkivska directly address issues of student engagement, both in terms of boosting it and how students perceive that engagement as conducive to more impactful learning experiences.

As Kolesnikova notes, technological environments play a significant role in sustaining students’ continuous investment in the online learning process. It is much easier to keep track of learner engagement and progress in a well-designed learning management system (LMS) than when we are working in our traditional classroom setting. Regular use of an LMS can facilitate greater learner accountability since we can easily monitor “time-on-task” for differentiated activities, work can be completed and/or submitted online, and synchronous sessions can be recorded in real time to document student participation. Perhaps, just as importantly, effective use of an LMS allows students to track their own participation, reflect on their individual strengths and weaknesses, and become more fully engaged in the learning process.

4. Differentiating instruction to teach to the whole class
In comparing gains in both face-to-face and online immersion programs, Merrill, Dengub, and Pastushenkov quote Collentine and Freed (2004), who concluded there is “no evidence that one context of learning is uniformly superior to another for all students, at all levels of language learning, and for all language skills” (64). Teaching during the pandemic has pushed us to examine new ways to differentiate learning activities and expectations to be more inclusive of all of our students. Many articles in this special volume reference, either explicitly or implicitly, meeting the needs of diverse students not only in terms of what we normally think of as different learning styles or differing levels of skills and proficiency (Evans-Romaine et al.; Klimova; Comer and deBenedette), but also in terms of varying content, for example for STEM students (Blasing), addressing physical challenges to learning languages, such as visual impairment (Pomarolli), as well as in terms of the socio-cultural diversity of our contexts and learners so as to make our curricula more equitable and inclusive for all learners.
(Garza). One of the most significant impacts of the pandemic may be that we will be much better at differentiating instruction in order to teach to the whole class, a long-standing goal of ours but one that is difficult to implement when all the learners are physically together with the teacher for the majority of instructional time. Integrating learning technologies into our standard practices will unquestionably help us better serve the needs of diverse learners.

5. Encouraging student engagement and building a sense of community
Since the very nature of our endeavor is interpersonal communication, a great strength of language programs has always been their ability to create a community of learners, both inside and outside the classroom. Our programs have always connected students to one another, to faculty, to their campus, to the target culture(s). We may have to accept that although neither the organized nor especially the incidental interactions students have when we are in person can be replicated entirely online, efforts made to find new ways to form connections were remarkably successful (Erushkina et al.; Evans-Romaine et al.; Klimanova and Vinokurova). At my own institution, we had great attendance at our online informational sessions, such as ones we offered for students to get to know all the instructors in the department, or to discuss the major and minor, internships, or study abroad and scholarship opportunities. At major state institutions with large numbers of students who commute or are unable to attend in person due to work or family obligations, the opportunity to join such sessions remotely helps to promote greater access and inclusivity. We concluded that informational sessions may actually be more effective and reach more learners if done online, and we can then devote in-person gatherings to social and cultural events that are better experienced together. Additionally, visiting speakers are more easily and inexpensively able to join a class or program-wide event virtually than in-person. Though clearly possible pre-pandemic, virtual visits were less common than they are likely to become in the future because previously we were never forced to try them. Though we lamented the inability to hold our final departmental community event for majors – a graduation reception – in-person during the pandemic, one of our greatest surprises was the success of our online graduation event. Many attendees found the online event to be more intimate and personalized than the large in-person receptions, and the excellent attendance included many family members and friends who most likely would not have been able to join an in-person graduation under any circumstances. This event
was so well received that we plan to host a virtual reception in addition to our traditional graduation events for our majors in the future.

6. Integrating cultural engagement and enrichment opportunities
Another recurrent theme in this volume is the importance of cultural engagement and enrichment opportunities no matter the medium of instruction. Moving the academic content that usually forms the basis of our courses to an online format was challenging enough, but adapting cultural engagement experiences seemed especially challenging from the outset, due to the perception that there is no satisfying substitute for “being there.” Efforts to do so did bear fruit, as we see in examples shared by Evans-Romaine et al., Garabrandt and Six, Erushkina, Smirnova, and Ngoma, Blasing, and Garza. Shmeleva, in exploring the new linguistic phenomena that have appeared as a result of the pandemic, provides an example of how language both adapts to and shapes social and cultural realities, providing rich material for discussion. We can also use the linguistic adaptations and neologisms related to the pandemic to reveal for students the remarkable creative potential that the very structure of Russian slovoobrazovanie (“word building”) allows.

7. Rethinking assessment practices
As we improve our facility with various technologies, we are also finding new ways to diversify our approach to assessment. Current tools allow us to differentiate, customize, and accumulate a portfolio of student work throughout a course and even across the curriculum. Taking up limited in-class time to conduct one-size-fits-all assessments appears to be on its way to obsolescence in our post-pandemic practice. Current learning technologies allow us to develop a more robust range of assessments aimed at capturing student progress rather than at assigning grades. New approaches to assessment may result in activities that much better reflect our students’ knowledge, skills, and abilities (Comer and deBenedette; Gunn). Many of the tools we have become more comfortable using during the pandemic can capture and organize evidence from formative and summative assessment activities across the communicative modes, automatically creating portfolios of learners’ work throughout a semester, academic year or even the entire curriculum. Such evidence, organized and archived in an LMS, for example, not only allows both instructors and learners to see tangible results of their collective efforts, but in the aggregate, it can inform professional development of instructional staff, as well as help us
reflect on and adjust program goals and learning outcomes. Furthermore, as the results of Gunn’s student survey suggest, a more varied approach may be better received and more motivating than more traditional types of assessments.

In summary, many of the lessons learned from the shift to online learning in 2020-21 such as those shared with us in this special issue of *Russian Language Journal* will reverberate inside our programs and our field long into the future, resulting in many positive instructional innovations.
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