2019

Introduction to the Special Issue

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This issue of *Russian Language Journal* is dedicated to the life and work of Olga Kagan, who passed away on April 6, 2018. Olga was a giant in the fields of heritage language learning and Russian language pedagogy. She served for nearly 20 years on the Board of Directors of the American Council of Teachers of Russian, the organization that publishes this journal. Therefore, it is our pleasure to present this volume of articles dedicated to theory, research, and methods in the teaching of Russian.

To commence our volume, we have selected two of Olga's articles previously published in *Russian Language Journal*. The first article, "Russian Heritage Language Speakers in the U.S.: A Profile," published in 2010, represents a groundbreaking study examining the capabilities and the needs of Russian heritage language learners in the United States. The second article, "Heritage Language Learners of Russian and L2 Learners in the Flagship Program: A Comparison," published in 2012, compares the Russian of second language (L2) learners at the Intermediate-High level of proficiency with the Russian of heritage learners. The purpose of the study was to determine whether these two groups of learners could benefit from the same curriculum design.

These two articles demonstrate what Rifkin, in the first original article of this issue, calls a "pedagogy born of compassion," in that Olga sought to understand learners' capabilities rather than their deficits and sought out teaching approaches that would best meet the needs of all learners. In that spirit, the contributions to this issue honoring Olga focus on pedagogy and, in some ways, embody the pedagogy of compassion. Though we have divided this issue into two parts: "Pedagogy and Practice" and "Linguistic Approaches to Pedagogy," the distinction between these parts is somewhat arbitrary. Authors of submitted papers relate their research to the teaching of Russian in recognition of Olga's dedication to excellence in language teaching. Each part contains four articles aimed at improving and enhancing teaching practice while also contributing to theory and scholarship.

The first part of this issue, "Pedagogy and Practice," encapsulates the pedagogy of compassion, by directly addressing compassion as a learning outcome (Rifkin), promoting methods to reach all learners (Leaver and Corin), describing techniques for engaging with the broader Russian-speaking community (Roby), or proposing feedback and assessment practices that take into account learners' current competence (Ableeva and Thomason).

Rifkin's article, "Teaching Compassion in the Russian Language and Literature Curriculum: An Essential Learning Outcome," honors Olga's compassion for heritage speakers, reconceptualizing "intercultural competence" as a form of compassion. It suggests ways in which Russian language teachers, in particular, can cultivate compassion in their learners.

Leaver and Corin's article addresses a significant gap in the literature with regard to "Fields of the Mind" by employing the Ehrman and Leaver (E&L) Cognitive Construct. In particular, the researchers de-conflate the perceptual and manipulation aspects of cognition by expanding the field concepts (field dependence and independence as well as field sensitivity and insensitivity) into a quadrangular construct of two parallel categories. This clarification recognizes that learning styles are not necessarily "either/or." As such, the construct allows instructors to be more sensitive to the instructional preferences of their students and to tailor instruction in order to meet the needs of the whole classroom.

Roby's article, "Designing and Integrating a Community-Based Learning Dimension into a Traditional Proficiency-Based High School Curriculum," explores how to engage language learners with the broader community of target-language speakers. Roby offers practical suggestions for implementing cultural learning within a proficiency-oriented curriculum. This kind of engagement within a broader community also may contribute to the development of compassion, as learners develop an ability to comprehend other perspectives.

Ableeva and Thomason report on the use of dynamic assessment to facilitate the acquisition of Russian inflections and to promote the development of listening ability among students at the Intermediate level. Dynamic assessment is, in effect, a method of dialoguing with students about form by providing scaffolded assistance to help them

notice grammatical forms, make hypotheses, and draw conclusions. It is an approach to feedback that meets students where they are, reflecting the pedagogy of compassion that characterized Olga's work.

The second part of this issue focuses on linguistic approaches to language pedagogy. Kisselev's article on "Word Order Patterns in the Writing of Heritage and Second language Learners of Russian" combines both of Olga's research interests. Using a corpus of learner writing, Kisselev compares word-order choices of native speakers, heritage speakers, and second language learners of Russian, concluding that explicit instruction is necessary for both heritage and second language learners to use non-canonical word order in Russian appropriately.

Janda's article likewise makes use of corpus data. Janda presents the Strategic Mastery of Russian Tool (SMARTool), which facilitates learning inflectional morphology by strategically focusing on the highest-frequency word forms and the contexts that motivate their use. While under the tutelage of Olga in the early 1980s, Janda came to appreciate the emphasis that Olga placed on authentic language usage, and the SMARTool reflects an outgrowth of that approach to language learning.

Talalakina, Brown, and Kamrotov examine the degree to which stated proficiency levels for L2 Russian curricular materials align with frequency-based corpus data. The authors draw on textbooks published in the United States, the choice of which partly reflects an homage to Olga—a champion of L2 curricular materials designed for the Intermediate and Advanced levels. The researchers compiled a corpus composed of lexical items from the aforementioned textbooks and compared them with the general vocabulary lists of the 5,000 most frequent words by Sharoff, Umanskaya, and Wilson (2013) and fiction and mass media lists by Lyashevskaya and Sharoff (2009).

The final article by Six focuses on the teaching of verbs of motion to students at the Novice level and suggests categories that may be particularly helpful to students at the beginning levels of language learning. She further suggests story-telling and visualization techniques that will help learners to see verbs of motion "through Russian eyes," potentially leading to better retention and production.

Special thanks to our peer reviewers for their careful review of each submitted article. In keeping with the journal's standard editorial

practices, all submissions underwent a double-blind review. The time and effort of the reviewers help us to maintain our high standards.

With great appreciation of and affection for the tireless efforts of Olga Kagan, we commend to you the 69th volume of *Russian Language Journal*.

Tony Brown, Guest Editor
Jennifer Bown, Editor