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## Heritage Language Learners of Russian and L2 Learners in the Flagship Program: A Comparison

*Olga Kagan*  
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### **Abstract**

The paper will compare heritage language learners (HLL) with traditional learners of Russian as a foreign language (L2 learners). We will focus on the Intermediate-High and higher levels of proficiency in order to determine whether these two groups of students can profitably share the classroom and use a common curriculum. The findings of a new study as well as UCLA Flagship experience over several years confirm that these two groups are compatible at higher levels of oral proficiency as measured by oral proficiency tests.

### **Introduction**

In 2005, a consortium of schools consisting of Bryn Mawr College, University of Maryland, University of California Los Angeles, and Middlebury Summer School was formed in order to launch a Russian Flagship Program. Both participants and NSEP<sup>1</sup> felt that these universities would bring different strengths to the program: Maryland and Bryn Mawr, for example, would attract students returning from a year-long study abroad experience in Russia as administered by American Councils, and UCLA would attract heritage language learners from large Russian communities in both Northern and Southern California. As expected, the first cohort of UCLA Flagship students consisted of heritage language speakers only.

The Consortium was replaced in 2009 by several independent Flagship Centers, and the focus shifted from recent graduates or students in their senior year to undergraduate students at all levels. Since then, the UCLA Flagship program has steadily made a transition to a program with both HLLs and L2 learners.

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<sup>1</sup> NSEP: The National Security Education Program was established in 1991 to promote expertise in languages and cultures critical to U.S. national security. NSEP provides funding for the Language Flagship.

In this paper, the term heritage language learners (HLLs) refers to students who grew up in a home where a language other than English was spoken, and whose language development was interrupted by a switch to English once students started school (Polinsky & Kagan 2007). As a result, heritage learners typically have some oral/aural proficiency in the home language, but may not have any literacy. Kagan and Dillon (2005) argued that “At the beginning of the 21st century in the United States, Russian heritage learners are the children of the third, fourth, and later waves of immigration whose level of competency in Russian is directly tied to the amount of education they received in the former Soviet Union.” However, many of the heritage students in our program were born in the former Soviet Union, but came to the U.S. at an early age and therefore did not receive any education in a Russian-speaking country.

Kagan and Dillon (2001) and Kagan (2005) assert that heritage and non-heritage learners need to be offered different curricula in order to make their language learning efficient. This argument is mainly a reaction against placing HLLs, whom Valdes (2005) calls “unique language learners,” and traditional L2 learners, in one *beginning level* class. Other researchers also provide arguments against “mixed” classes (McGinnis 1996; Campbell & Rosenthal 2000; Webb and Miller 2000; Sohn and Shin 2007; Gambhir 2001; Wiley 2008; Li and Duff 2008), reasoning instead for developing a special curriculum, textbooks, and other materials for HLLs (Carreira 2003, 2004; Potowski 2008; Potowski et al. forthcoming; Kondo-Brown 2005, 2010a, 2010b; Kagan and Friedman 2004; Carreira and Kagan 2011). Most of the comparisons between HLLs and L2 learners, however, have been limited to lower-level proficiency (e.g., Lynch 2003) or Intermediate level proficiency at most (Montrul 2008); the body of research devoted to advanced level proficiency in languages other than English is minimal (Leaver and Shekhtman 2002; Maxim and Byrnes 2004; Byrnes et al. 2010). In addition, there are very few publications devoted to HLLs at the advanced or higher levels of proficiency (Laleko 2010; Edstrom 2007; Alarcon 2010 can be mentioned here).

The reason for this may be quite simple: the MLA Report of post-secondary enrollments (Furman et al. 2010) shows that only a very small percentage of foreign language students in the U.S. continue into advanced level classes. As Malone, et al. (2004) note, “Of the relatively small number of individuals in the United States who learn languages

other than English, an even smaller number achieve a high level of proficiency in the language(s) they study." Furthermore, though it is typical of college programs to designate upper-division language classes as "advanced," taking an "advanced" upper-division class does not mean that students are at the Advanced level of proficiency as defined by ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines (2012). As research shows (Thompson 2000; Rifkin 2005), after three to four years of foreign language instruction, college students typically graduate at the Intermediate level in speaking. Thus, their speaking competency may not be at the same level as typical HLLs without literacy or with minimal literacy (Yokoyama 2002).

In a Flagship program, however, an advanced class becomes advanced not in name only, but with regard to proficiency at the Advanced or higher-level in the domestic program, and Superior level proficiency in the Capstone overseas program. In a recent study, Moskover (2008) discusses placing students of different profiles in the same classroom and shows that, at the level beyond Intermediate, students of different language backgrounds can work well together. Taking this study as a starting point, then, our baseline will be students at Intermediate-High levels of proficiency, particularly as we typically accept students into the fourth-year Flagship class at this level of proficiency or higher. A recently completed study by NHLRC/ACTFL (Swender, in preparation) analyzed discourse of Spanish and Russian HLLs. Its results point to the similarities in the needs of higher level L2 students and HLLs. For more discussion, see the section on test results further in this paper.

To create a comprehensive picture of the students in the Flagship program, we will describe two recent cohorts of students.

## **Participants**

### **Class of 2008-09**

The second cohort to be featured here was Flagship students in the last year of the Consortium (2008-09), before the focus shifted to the undergraduate program. A total of six students (one male and five female) were enrolled in the Flagship courses. In order to enroll, students had to test at the Intermediate-High level or higher on the ACTFL scale, so each of these students were at this level or above. Three of the students came from Russian-speaking families: one student was American-born and acquired Russian literacy in college; another student

grew up in Armenia and studied Russian for ten years as a second language; and the third HL student was born in Ukraine to a Russian-speaking family and came to the United States when she was nine. Additionally, one student was born in South Korea to Korean-speaking parents, but moved to Russia when she was eight. She attended an English medium school in Moscow for eight years, and studied Russian as a second language. Her fluency in Russian was therefore the result of both classroom instruction and exposure to Russian in natural surroundings and in interactions with Russian speakers. Because of this background, her language had some similarity to the features displayed by heritage language speakers. The two remaining students were traditional L2 learners who both came to UCLA as post-undergraduates after taking Russian in college. One of them took two years of college Russian and spent a summer at Middlebury, the other took college Russian and spent a year in Russia on a study abroad program. At the beginning of the program, the unofficial OPI rating (conducted by a certified OPI tester) put all the students between the Intermediate-High and Advanced level. The HL students all scored at Advanced-Low.<sup>2</sup>

### **Class of 2011-2012**

Since 2009, the Flagship program has enrolled students at all levels of instruction and all levels of Russian proficiency. In order to compare the students to earlier cohorts, we will focus on two students who are currently attending the American Councils Overseas Capstone program in St. Petersburg (2011-2012 academic year), and seven students who plan to apply for the 2012-2013 program in St. Petersburg. We will analyse the same characteristics as for the 2008-2009 cohort, using data from the UCLA Flagship online survey in use since 2007.

Of six male and three female students, only two students are HLLs. One of the two HLLs grew up in a Russian-speaking family in Uzbekistan and immigrated when she was ten years old; the other was born in the United States. Additionally, one student spent two years in Russia as a missionary, and so his familiarity with Russian is higher than

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<sup>2</sup> This data comes from an online survey filled out by all Flagship students in their last year at UCLA, before departing for the Capstone program in St. Petersburg.

an average L2 learner's. The other students, however, can be considered typical foreign language learners. One of the L2s transferred to UCLA as a junior after teaching English in Russia for a year, and the other five students started language instruction in beginning Russian at UCLA. One of the five grew up in the United States in a Bulgarian-speaking family, one student spent two summers in Russia, and two students spent one summer in Russia. In Spring 2011, an OPI tester (unofficial OPI) rated one of the HLLs and four L2 students at the Advanced level. The second HLL was rated Intermediate-High, and two additional students scored at Intermediate-Mid. One student was abroad and could not be tested.

To complete this discussion of the 2011-2012 cohort, we will compare two interviews at the Intermediate-High level, and two at the Advanced level. In each pair, the first student is an HLL, and the second student is an L2 learner.

### **Procedure**

The data in this paper is drawn from the OPI interviews and Russian Federation tests of reading, listening, and grammar.

### **Intermediate-High Interviews**

The excerpts below are from the interviews conducted in Spring 2010-2011. Mistakes are bolded; correct forms appear in square brackets.

Question. Каковы, по вашему мнению, преимущества и недостатки учёбы в большом университете?

Answer. Ну, я люблю, что это университет большой, что есть много студентов. Я думаю, что здесь **учат** [учатся ]около, около сорока тысяч студен..., около сорока тысяч студентов, но, и это **мне** [для меня] хорошо, потому что значит, что я могу встретить ... встретиться с **многим** [со многими ], **многим** [многими ], **людей** [людьми ], но думаю, что плохо, потому что, особенно на, на первом курсе, на втором курсе классы очень большие и **профессоры** [профессора ] обычно не..., **профессоры** [профессора] обычно интересуются больше с собственным, как сказать, исследованием, чем, чем, и они не так интересуются **преподавать** [преподаванием], **преподавание** [преподаванием] **курс** [курсов]. (HLL)

Translation.

Question. What do you feel are advantages and disadvantages of being a student at a large university?

Answer. Well, I think it's good that the university is large, that there are a lot of students. I think we have about forty thousand students, about forty thousand students, but it's good for me because it means I can meet a lot of people, but it's [also] not so good because in the freshmen and sophomore years, classes are very large and professors, usually not professors... professors are more interested in their own research and are not so interested in teaching classes.

Question. Какие у вас соседи по квартире?

Answer. Интересный вопрос... Сначала, я думал, что эти два соседа... эти ...я считал этого соседа, я считал этих **соседей** [соседей] моими друзьями, но, в конце концов, я нашёл что, я узнал, что, я просто не могу справиться с одним [из них]. Он **громкий** [шумный], он жадный, и, не знаю, просто не могу жить с ним. Поэтому я думаю, что, если я буду жить в квартире в будущем году, я буду жить с **другом** [с другим], да... есть разница между хорошим соседом и хорошим другом.... Ну, например, потому что... я слышал такой совет, что нельзя жить с ближайшим другом. Я думаю, что, я считаю его одним из моих ближайших друзей, но невозможно жить с ним .. (L 2 student)

Translation.

Question. Who are your roommates?

Answer. That's an interesting question... At first I thought that these two roommates... they... I thought that this roommate, I thought that these roommates were my friends, but in the long run I found that, I realized that I just couldn't live with him, I can't cope with one of them. He is very loud, he is stingy, and, I don't know, I just can't live with him. That's why I think that if I live in this apartment next year, I'll have another roommate... Well, for example, because someone gave me advice that you shouldn't share an apartment with your best friend. I think I consider him my best friend, but I can't live [in the same apartment] with him.

As can be seen from the excerpts, both students produced paragraph length discourse, thereby demonstrating that they are on their

way to Advanced level proficiency. At the same time, both have some incorrect case endings. There is also some misuse of morphological forms including reflexive verbs, particularly in the HLL's sample. In fact, both students display mistakes typical of foreign language learners at this level of proficiency. The only differences are that the HL student has a near-native pronunciation and more general facility/fluency in speaking, and the L2 student is more adept at using parenthetical expressions.<sup>3</sup>

### Advanced Level Proficiency Interviews

The excerpts below are from the interviews conducted in Spring 2010-2011. Mistakes are bolded; correct forms appear in square brackets.

Question 1. Почему вы выбрали этот университет?

Answer. Во-первых, UCLA это очень, ... очень престижный университет, и плюс к **тому** [ этому ], он не стоит очень много денег каждый год, и .. он тоже близко от дома, и там очень... , этот университет предлагает очень разный интересный выбор специализаций и так далее ...

Question 2. Вы довольны своим решением?

Answer. Да, я очень довольна, потому что я считаю это, как бы , очень хороший выбор, и **тем не менее** [и в тоже время] он не является очень дорогим выбором. (HLL)

Translation.

Question 1. Why did you choose this university?

Answer. First of all, UCLA is a very... very prestigious university, and besides it does not cost so much every year, and... it is close to my house, and also this university offers a very interesting choice of majors and so on...

Question 2. Are you happy with your decision?

Answer. Yes, I am very pleased, because I think this was so to say a very good choice, and at the same time it is not so expensive.

Question. Удачен ли ваш выбор университета?

Answer. Да очень... я считаю, что мне просто повезло, что я .. меня приняли, вообще, что я смог здесь заниматься с такими хорошими

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<sup>3</sup> The importance of parenthetical expressions is made clear by ACTFL description of Speaking levels (2012).

профессорами, у нас очень хорошие профессора здесь по славянским язык... языкам. Просто я не только занимаюсь русским языком, но и чешским языком, и ,вообще, без флагманской программы у меня не было бы **возможность** [возможности]... **возможность** [возможности] **ездить** [поехать] в Россию, в Петербург, чтобы учиться год... Значит, вообще, мне просто повезло..., это решение было очень хорошее ... (L2 learner)

Translation.

Question. Are you happy with your decision to enroll at this university?

Answer. Yes, very [pleased] I think I am very fortunate that I was accepted, in general that I could study with such good professors, we have very good faculty here in the Slavic department. And I don't just study Russian, but also Czech, and in general without the Flagship Program I wouldn't have an opportunity... an opportunity to go to Russia for a year... That means I am really lucky, this decision was very good...

In their responses, both students produce paragraph length discourse. While the L2 learner uses parenthetical expressions appropriately, the heritage language learner makes several attempts at using the parenthesis, but the usage is nevertheless incorrect. Though the HLL's pronunciation and general fluency is better than that of the L2 (as is evident in the audio), the transcripts show that the students have very similar profiles.

We will now discuss the differences between the HLLs and the L2 learners in more detail, moving beyond the holistic assessment of functions and discourse. In order to do so, we will compare the results of two standardized tests.

### **Standardized Tests of Russian as a Foreign Language**

In this section, we will analyse the results of the Russian Federation tests (TORFL) given to all Flagship students. The first level test has been administered since 2009 and the second level test has been administered since 2010. It is important to keep in mind that, although the tests were administered to the Flagship students, they were also administered to students at large who shared their classes. The oral proficiency levels of all the students whose results are discussed below are Intermediate-High and higher.

In order to understand the requirements of the TORFL Certification and ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines, a comparison is in order. A document compiled by the faculty of St. Petersburg University and the University of Friendship, Moscow Yurkov and Balyxina (<http://ruscenter.axelero.net/2/2/5/component/torfl2.pdf>) explains that the first level is typically reached over 440 to 460 academic hours, in addition to the hours required for the basic level—180 to 200 hours. To be admitted to a university in the Russian Federation, it is sufficient to perform satisfactorily at this level. According to Yurkov and Balyxina, a student at level one is able to meet the basic requirements, at an appropriate level of socio-cultural proficiency, for communication with native speakers of Russian in everyday situations (в бытовой и социально-культурной сфере). The second Certification level requires an additional 720 hours, with at least 340 of those hours dedicated to the professional domain. A student at this level can be expected to satisfy the requirements for advanced post-graduate study in the humanities, engineering or natural sciences at a Russian university. Level one therefore roughly corresponds to Intermediate-High (see ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines 2012), while Level two is similar to Advanced and is likely to be somewhat higher. At the Level of TORFL three, there is a convergence with the ACTFL Superior/ILR 3 (Maria Lekic, personal communication, November 2011). The first test administered to Flagship students when they arrive in St. Petersburg is TORFL Level 2.

### **Results of the Russian Federation Certification Test of Russian as a Foreign Language**

At the end of the academic year (third year Russian), UCLA Flagship students take the First Certification level of the Russian Federation Test of Russian as a Foreign Language, «Типовой тест по русскому языку как иностранному 1-го сертификационного уровня». This is a computer-based practice test, the content of which is derived from a booklet of TORFL practice tests (TORFL, Level 1 and 2). The tests are in multiple-choice format and are computer-graded.

#### **TORFL -1 Results 2009-11**

Nineteen HLLs and eleven non-HLLs took the first level test. The HLLs scored an average of 94 percent, with a range from 75-97 percent. Non-HLLs scored an average of 89 percent, with a range from 80-97 percent. Both groups had difficulties choosing correct case endings (45 percent of

HLLs and 75 percent of non-HLLs). The second most pervasive difficulty was choosing the correct lexical items. While HLLs mostly made mistakes using unprefixing verbs of motion, L2 students' errors were in the area of prefixed verbs. Both groups made mistakes on aspect (equal percentage) and complex syntax (HLLs did slightly better). Incorrect answers are bolded, and correct answers are in cursive.

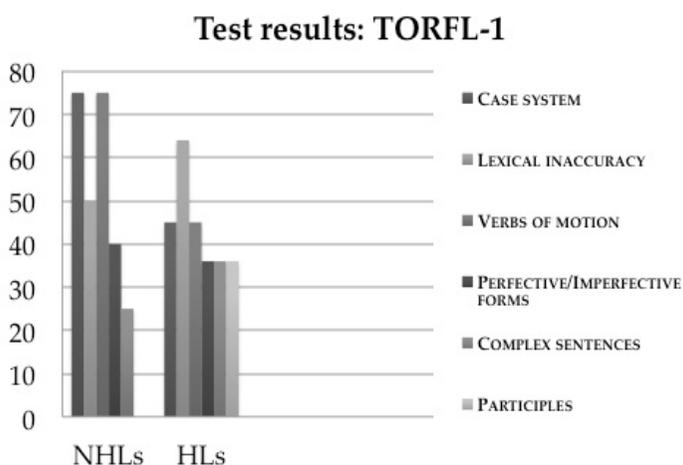
**Table 1. Test results: TORFL-1 2009-2011<sup>4</sup>**

TORFL-1 Examples	
L2 (Non-Heritage) – 11 students	Heritage – 19 students
<p><b>Categories of mistakes made by 75%:</b></p> <p>1. Case system:                      Работа водителя автобуса требует ... .</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">a. <b>большое внимание</b>                      b. с большим вниманием                      c. <i>большого внимания</i>                      d. о большом внимании</p> <p>2. Verbs of motion (uni/multi directional):                      Почему Вы решили ... завтра во Владимир?</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">a. <b>ездить</b>                      b. <i>ехать</i></p> <p>3. Verbs of motion with prefixes:                      На какой вокзал ... ваш коллега?</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">a. <b>заезжает</b>                      b. <i>доезжает</i>                      c. <i>приезжает</i></p> <p><b>Categories of mistakes made by 50 %:</b></p> <p>Lexical inaccuracy:                      Моя сестра не учится в школе, она ещё ...</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">a. <b>молодая</b>                      b. <i>маленькая</i>                      c. <i>младшая</i></p> <p><b>Categories of mistakes made by 40 %:</b></p> <p>Perfective/Imperfective forms:                      А где отец ... раньше?</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">a. <b>отдохнул</b>                      b. <i>отдыхал</i></p>	<p><b>Categories of mistakes made by 64%:</b></p> <p>Lexical inaccuracy:                      Моя сестра не учится в школе, она ещё ... .</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">a. <b>молодая</b>                      b. <i>маленькая</i>                      c. <i>младшая</i></p> <p><b>Categories of mistakes made by 45 %:</b></p> <p>1. Case system:                      Работа водителя автобуса требует ...</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">a. <b>большое внимание</b>                      b. с большим вниманием                      c. <i>большого внимания</i>                      d. о большом внимании</p> <p>2. Verbs of motion (uni/multi directional):                      Навстречу нам ... девушка с цветами.</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">a. <i>шла</i>                      b. <b>ходила</b></p> <p><b>Categories of mistakes made by 36 %:</b></p> <p>1. Perfective/Imperfective forms:                      Виктор шёл по улице и не ... родного города.</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">a. <i>узнавал</i>                      b. <b>узнал</b></p> <p>2. Participles (use of participle):                      Команда, ... игру с канадцами, стала чемпионом.</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">a. <i>выигравшая</i>                      b. <b>выигрывающая</b>                      c. <i>выигранная</i></p>

<sup>4</sup> Multiple choice responses contain between two and four choices, depending on the nature of the grammatical category.

<p><b>Categories of mistakes made by 25 %:</b>                  Complex sentences (ли/если, чтобы/что, который):                  Мама попросила, ... мы вернулись в 10 часов.</p> <p>a. <i>чтобы</i>                  b. <b>что</b></p>	<p>3. Complex sentences (ли/если, чтобы/что, который):                  Мама попросила, ... мы вернулись в 10 часов.</p> <p>a. <b>что</b>                  b. <i>чтобы</i></p>
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The comparison below shows areas of most difficulty for each group. NHL stands for non-heritage learners and HLs for heritage learners.



### Second Certification Level

At the end of the pre-Capstone academic year at UCLA, students take a second Certification level practice test. They take it again when they arrive at St. Petersburg University for the Capstone year.

#### TORFL -2 Results 2010-2011

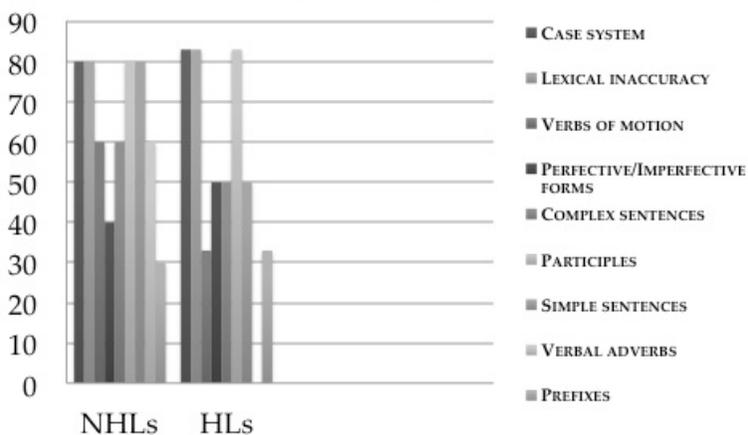
Thirteen HLLs and five non-HLLs took the second level test. The HLLs scored an average of 86 percent, with a range from 75-97 percent. Non-HLLs scored an average of 74 percent, with a range from 62-90 percent. A comparison of the results from the second level test shows an even higher rate of similarity between HLLs and non-HLLs than the first TORFL, even with regard to percentages. Incorrect answers are bolded, and correct answers are in cursive.

**Table 2. Test results: TORFFL 2** The comparison below shows areas of most difficulty for each group. NHL stands for non-heritage learners and HLs for heritage learners.

TORFL- 2 Examples	
L2 (Non Heritage) - 5	Heritage - 13
<p><b>Categories of mistakes made by 80%:</b></p> <p>1. Case system:                      Вопреки ... ударили сильные морозы.                      a. <b>всех прогнозов</b>                      b. <i>всем прогнозам</i>                      c. всеми прогнозами                      d. все прогнозы</p> <p>2. Lexical inaccuracy:                      Как хорошо, что я купил билеты на ... поезд!                      a. быстрый                      b. срочный                      c. <b>скоростной</b>                      d. <i>скорый</i></p> <p>3. Participles:                      Сыну особенно нравится зелёный чай, <u>который привозят из Китая.</u>                      a. привозящий                      b. <i>привозимый</i>                      c. <b>привезённый</b>                      d. привозивший</p> <p>4. Simple sentences ("говорят-type" sentences):                      ... , используя только натуральные продукты.                      a. <b>Эти йогурты приготавливаются</b>                      b. Приготовление этих йогуртов                      c. <i>Эти йогурты приготавливают</i>                      d. Эти йогурты приготовлены</p> <p><b>Categories of mistakes made by 60%:</b></p> <p>1. Complex sentences:                      Невозможно представить, ... Ольга ошиблась.                      a. как бы                      b. <b>если</b>                      c. <i>чтобы</i>                      d. как будто</p>	<p><b>Categories of mistakes made by 83%:</b></p> <p>1. Case system:                      Было интересно прочитать о взглядах учёных ... страны.                      a. <i>на экономическое развитие</i>                      b. экономического развития                      c. экономическому развитию                      d. <b>об экономическом развитии</b></p> <p>2. Lexical inaccuracy:                      За улучшение экологии выступает ... города.                      a. общность                      b. общительность                      c. <i>общественность</i>                      d. <b>общество</b></p> <p>3. Participles:                      Сыну особенно нравится зелёный чай, <u>который привозят из Китая.</u>                      a. <i>привозимый</i>                      b. привозящий                      c. <b>привезённый</b>                      d. привозивший</p> <p><b>Categories of mistakes made by 50%:</b></p> <p>1. Use of perfective or imperfective form of a verb:                      Финансирование этого проекта ... из года в год.                      a. <i>будет расти</i>                      b. <b>вырастет</b></p> <p>2. Simple sentences (subject-predicate agreement and "говорят-type" sentences):                      ... , используя только натуральные продукты.                      a. <i>Эти йогурты приготавливают</i>                      b. <b>Эти йогурты приготовлены</b>                      c. Эти йогурты приготавливаются                      d. Приготовление этих йогуртов</p>

<p>2. Verbs of motion: Завтра мы решили ... вещи на дачу. a. <b>переехать</b> b. <i>перевезти</i> c. внести d. перевести</p> <p>3. Verbal adverbs: Сейчас часто снимают фильмы, ... a. применяющие компьютерную технику b. <i>применяя компьютерную технику</i> c. применяется компьютерная техника d. <b>при применении компьютерной техники</b></p> <p><b>Categories of mistakes made by 40%:</b> Use of perfective or imperfective form of a verb: Какой тяжёлый чемодан! Его невозможно ...! a. <i>поднять</i> b. <b>поднимать</b></p> <p><b>Categories of mistakes made by 30%:</b> Prefixes: В нашей работе много недостатков, придётся её ... a. <b>доделать</b> b. проделать c. <i>переделать</i> d. сделать</p>	<p>3. Complex sentences: Много воды утекло, ... мы расстались. a. в то время как b. <b>когда</b> c. пока d. <i>с тех пор как</i></p> <p><b>Categories of mistakes made by 33%:</b> 1. Verbs of motion: Завтра мы решили ... вещи на дачу. a. внести b. переехать c. <b>перевести</b> d. <i>перевезти</i></p> <p>2. Prefixes: В нашей работе много недостатков, придётся её ... a. проделать b. сделать c. <b>доделать</b> d. <i>переделать</i></p>
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### Test results: TORFL-2



### **Test Results and the Advanced/Superior Curriculum**

A recently completed study by NHLRC/ACTFL<sup>5</sup> (Swender, in preparation) analyzed discourse of Spanish and Russian HLLs (162 Spanish interviews and 132 Russian interviews) in order to inform the OPI tester training. The results show that for both language groups, talking about a current event was the most challenging task at the Advanced level, while sustaining functions was the most challenging at the Superior level. This was because interviewees lacked the ability to support opinion, deal with abstract topics, and hypothesize in cohesive and internally organized extended discourse. Only those who attended college in Russian-speaking or Spanish-speaking countries had that ability. Some results specific to Russian-speaking students are relevant to this paper. Specifically, when attempting to discuss a topic from an abstract perspective at the Superior level, half of the interviewees could not deal with topic, and two thirds initiated the task, but could not complete it. Another important result is that two-thirds used examples of personal experience in order to support an argument. Predictably, the study found that, even at Intermediate levels of oral proficiency, fluency and pronunciation could sound native-like.

The results of the study confirm what experience with teaching HLLs at higher levels of proficiency has already made clear: HLLs need training in high-level discourse in order to get to the Superior level. The study described above supports the reasoning behind the curriculum that the UCLA Russian Flagship program has been offering to both HLLs and L2 learners over the past five years. Our experience and the results of OPI tests given to our students determined that the program's focus needed to be on increasing students' ability to deal with abstract topics, and to hypothesize and engage in a more formal discourse. In the Flagship program, special attention is therefore paid to markers of academic/professional discourse, such as complex sentences, parenthetical expressions, and introductions and closings in a formal context. The year-long course covers education and work-related themes, economics and banking, geography, social issues, religions, art, health and environment, international affairs and the military.

In addition, Flagship students take two courses in Russian for Social and Cultural Studies. These are content-based courses that in the

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<sup>5</sup> A study of HLLs' OPI results is a project funded by the National Heritage Language Resource Center, and carried out by ACTFL (E. Swender – PI) in 2009-2011.

last four years have focused on Russian history in particular. The goal is for the students to not only gain knowledge of Russian history (they may already be familiar with it from courses taught in English), but also to understand topics that are frequently discussed by Russians. The first quarter-long course is dedicated to pre-Soviet history, and the second deals with the Soviet and post-Soviet periods. All upper-division Flagship courses integrate language, literature, history, and culture. There are frequent oral presentations and large amounts of written practice. Academic discourse is emphasized in all courses.

As an example of the work students perform at this level, we include here a transcript of an oral presentation. The student recorded herself during an exam. Focusing on the areas in which both HLLs and L2 learners need extensive training, students are expected to produce paragraph-length discourse and to use discourse openings and closings, as well as parenthetical expressions. We have bolded the opening and the closing as well as parenthetical expressions. Mistakes are bolded, and correct forms are in square brackets. Parenthetical expressions and conjunctions are in cursive.

### 2010 (A.P. – HLL)

*Я хочу начать с того, что найти работу в Америке в данное время очень трудно, поскольку в стране происходит финансовый кризис. Благодаря **агентств-ом** [у ] по трудоустройству, возможно найти работу. Собственно говоря, американские работодатели ценят более всего опыт и высшее образование. Таким образом, работодатели ценят знание иностранных языков и умение работать на компьютере.*

*В общем, можно сказать, что мне не надо было заполнить анкету, но я предоставила три рекомендации, поскольку я работаю няней. На работе я ухаживаю за детьми. Я их забираю из школы, я им помогаю с уроками, и я готовлю обед, и кладу их спать. В заключение я хочу сказать, что даже если эта работа не имеет **отношени-е** [я] к **мои** [моей] специальности, в настоящее время, она меня удовлетворяет.*

Translation: I want to start by saying that it is not easy to find a job in America at present because the country is in the state of a financial crisis. One can find a job through an employment agency. In fact, American employers value experience and a university degree more than anything.

So employers value the knowledge of foreign languages and computer skills.

I work as a nanny, so I can say that I didn't have to fill out a questionnaire, but I submitted three letters of recommendation. My job is to take care of the children. I bring them home from school, help them do their homework, and I also make them dinner, and put them to bed. In conclusion, I want to mention that even though this work has nothing to do with my major, at this time in my life, I am pleased to have it.

### **Limitations of the Study**

Due to its small size, this is a pilot study. However, since few students reach advanced levels of proficiency in less commonly taught languages like Russian, we believe this study is an initial step toward research that will show whether HLLs and L2 students at the high levels of proficiency are able to work well together. We intend to add data as more test results become available.

### **Conclusions**

At the beginning levels of language instruction, HLLs and L2 students display diverse proficiencies: HLLs' speaking and listening comprehension is better than their L2 peers, while L2 learners have a more complete knowledge of the grammatical system. In addition, HLLs' knowledge of the language is not textbook-based, while L2 students typically depend on a limited textbook vocabulary. The disparity at lower levels is therefore marked, creating difficulties and leading to frustration for everyone concerned. However, while their linguistic profiles continue to differ (Swender, in preparation), once HLLs and L2s reach Intermediate-High/Advanced level of proficiency, the needs of both groups become very more alike. As has been shown, at higher levels of proficiency, they make similar morphological and syntactical mistakes, are similarly unaware of the intricacies of formal discourse, and require similar exposure to the topics that are typically explored at the Advanced/Superior levels. They therefore require similar instruction in order to move to higher levels of proficiency. This is confirmed by the NHLRC/ACTFL study (Swender in preparation) referenced earlier in the paper.

We conclude therefore that, because of their comparable linguistic needs and profiles, at the Intermediate-High and higher levels of proficiency, heritage language speakers and traditional foreign language

learners can be taught together in one classroom. Rather than creating the challenges for the instructor and the class that such placement creates at the lower levels, at a high level of proficiency, students tend to complement one another. At this level both HLLs and L2 learners can be regarded as a “national resource” (Brecht and Ingold 2002) as both groups are on their way to reaching professional level proficiency.

There are two steps that will strengthen this research: 1) broadening the study such that more students are compared and more languages are added; and 2) understanding how much time it could take a typical HLL to reach Intermediate-High or Advanced level of proficiency.

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