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## **The Overseas Immersion Setting as Contextual Variable in Adult SLA: Learner Behaviors Associated with Language Gain to Level-3 Proficiency in Russian**

*In Honor of Richard D. Brecht<sup>1</sup>*

*Dan E. Davidson and Maria D. Lekic*

Overseas immersion study for second language (L-2) acquisition is widely regarded not only as valuable educationally, but also essential for the attainment of upper-level proficiencies. Unfortunately, the mechanisms through which overseas language and cultural immersion training may (or may not) foster successful adult acquisition are still not well understood (e.g., Rivers, 1998; Ginsburg & Miller, 2000, Kinginger, 2011). As a result, researchers across a range of disciplinary backgrounds are examining cognitive, psycholinguistic, and cultural factors affecting linguistic outcomes within the study abroad environment, including increased efforts to account for the notable variation that has been observed in actual levels of L-2 attainment by students returning from study abroad, as previously reported in Freed (2004), Davidson (2010) and Kinginger (2009).

In one of the first ethnographic studies of foreign language gain in the overseas context, Richard Brecht and Jennifer Robinson (1995) investigated the relationship between formal study, target-language utilization, and current proficiency levels of young adult learners of Russian engaged in study abroad. Relying on a large-scale macro-investigation of second language gain (Brecht, Davidson, Ginsburg, 1994), Brecht *et al* (1995) presented empirical data on L-2 utilization in the semester-long advanced programs in Russia for students with measured oral proficiencies at the 1+ and 2 levels. Using calendar diaries and

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<sup>1</sup> Among his wide-ranging services to the study and teaching of languages in the U.S., Dr. Richard Brecht contributed substantially over the past ten years to the conceptualization and implementation of the Language Flagship Programs, sponsored by the National Security Education Program (NSEP). He was also one of the first scholars to draw attention to the relationship between language gains and the measurement of time-on-task in the overseas context, e.g., Brecht, 1996.

time-place maps, the authors calculated actual L-2 use by adult subjects, while Freed (2004) and Magnon (2007) have reported corresponding baselines for intermediate-level learners of French, as measured for in-country summer and semester programs. Similarly, a recent study by Martinsen *et al* (2011) examined target language utilization patterns within a domestic immersion context, the academic-year language-specific residential houses at a major American university, in order to relate language gains, as measured by pre-/post-OPI testing, to language utilization levels in the immersion dormitory context.

Previous quantitative studies (Brecht, Davidson, Ginsburg (1995), Davidson (2007, 2010) have provided large-scale, multi-institutional analyses of language gain by American students (N = 1,881) engaged in the formal study of language and regional studies at U.S. partner universities in Russia at the intermediate and advanced levels. Subjects represented statistically robust numbers at different initial levels of proficiency engaged in typical study durations of 8-weeks (summer), 15-weeks (semester), or 30 weeks (academic year).

The present study is focused on the advanced to superior levels (and above), providing updated outcomes and correlation data for this level (the Russian Overseas Flagship Program), noted for a smaller sample in Davidson (2010), and new data on the effects of different levels and varieties of on-program language utilization on ultimate proficiency outcomes.

Given the considerable variation in post-program L-2 outcomes from immersion students across languages and regions, even for students within the same programs, with similar backgrounds, and relatively equal initial levels of language proficiency, predicted proficiency results from study abroad are normally stated in terms of ranges, defined by the duration of the immersion program, pre-program proficiency, and a relatively small number of individual linguistic and other variables (Davidson, 2007; Wilkinson, 1998). On-program language utilization (formal and informal, interpersonal, presentational, and interpretive, within in and out the classroom) is one such variable which is broadly assumed to affect learning outcomes in the study abroad context. Levels and parameters of actual L-2 usage have relatively rarely been documented and linked to proficiency attainment, particularly at the "Superior" level; the present study is intended to address this limitation.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Given the increased importance of study abroad in U.S. education and the emphasis in the work place on professional-level ("Superior"/ILR-3) competence

in world languages, the current study will examine the relationship between the amount of target-language spoken in the overseas context and the participant's ultimate success in reaching the desired goal. The following research questions have guided the research.

- What is the typical level of L-2 utilization of an adult learner engaged in an intensive/immersion year-long overseas study program at the professional level?
- Is there a relationship between levels of language utilization and ultimate proficiency outcome for students at or near Level 3?
- Are there particular contexts of formal and/or informal language utilization associated with ultimate outcome, beyond sheer time-on-task measures?

The study is limited to analysis of U.S. overseas programs focused on training to ILR Level 3 ("Superior"), the Language Flagship Programs funded by the National Security Education Program (NSEP), specifically, the Russian Overseas Flagship (ROF) at St. Petersburg State University.

## **METHOD**

The present study makes use of global measurements of outcomes to compare adult learners in terms of ultimate levels of proficiency, attained in the course of a year-long intensive/immersion academic program in Russia, with systematically reported levels and varieties of informal and professional target-language utilization over the course of the same academic year. The approach, therefore, is both product- and process-focused, taking the measured ultimate proficiency outcome as the dependent variable and the levels and varieties of documented language utilization within the overseas context as independent variables. Its goal is to provide baseline information on L-2 acquisition related to successful language-acquisition behaviors, and, more specifically, to account for, if possible, some of the variation that has been observed by researchers in the measured outcomes of adult learners, who had otherwise undertaken training from comparable starting points.

The term, "outcome," reflects standard practice in the larger SLA community to denote progress along a sequence of stages that characterize the acquisition of a second language (Ellis, 2006). Within the present study, outcome is understood to refer to measured oral, reading and listening proficiency of

participant-subjects at the beginning and end of a nine-month overseas immersion program.

### Participants

Undergraduate participants in the present data set are drawn from five designated undergraduate Flagship programs (Bryn Mawr / Haverford College, Portland State, University of Maryland, University of Wisconsin, and UCLA). In addition, at-large students who hold a B.A. from any U.S. institution and who meet the uniform admissions criteria may also apply for the Flagship program. Admission to the Russian Overseas Flagship (ROF) is competitive and based on the prospective participant's ability to demonstrate ILR-Level 2 ("Advanced") proficiency or higher in speaking and at least one other skill at the time of the application in January of each year. Selection committees consider academic background, faculty recommendations, seriousness of purpose, motivation for the course of study, and successful prior participation in an academic program in Russia in accepting both domestic and at-large students into the Russian Overseas Flagship (ROF). A participant's ability to pay for the program is not a criterion for participation. Therefore, the findings reported in the current study may be generalized for other overseas programs at this level (Flagship and non-Flagship) of similar design to the extent that they place comparable constraints on the applicant pool.

**Table 1.**

<u>Demographic Data on ROF Subject Population</u>	
Population	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 66 Russian language learners</li><li>• Representatives of 43 U.S. universities and colleges</li></ul>
Age	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 65% of students were 22-24 years old</li><li>• Range: 21-36</li><li>• Average: 24</li></ul>
Gender	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 34 (52%) male students</li><li>• 32 (48%) female students</li></ul>

**Table 2.**

Language Demographics of Student Population	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Number of students that studied Russian in High School	10	15
Number of students that studied Russian in College	64	97
Number of Students with knowledge of other Slavic languages	11	17
Number of students with knowledge of 1 or more other Slavic languages	11	15
Number of students with knowledge of 1 or more other non-Slavic languages	52	79

### **Main Components of the Russian Overseas Flagship Program**

The subject group comprises 7 consecutive classes of ROF students (N = 66), whose program of study at St. Petersburg State University (SPBSU) has been developed in cooperation with American Councils/ACTR and utilizes a dedicated curriculum focused on the integration of speaking, listening, reading, writing, and cultural modalities at the professional level, ACTFL “Superior,” ILR - 3<sup>2</sup>. The structure of the Flagship Program can be seen in the outline below, which includes formal and informal language training and utilization activities.

- Direct enrollment subject course for credit at SPBSU (selected by the student)
- Core language/culture study cluster
- Language course work in small groups
- Independent research projects
- Individual language tutors
- Internships placements requiring presentational work and weekly reports
- Discussion groups
- Homestays

<sup>2</sup> Рогова, К. А., И.М. Вознесенская, Д.В. Колесова, И.В. Реброва, О.В.Хорохордина и М. Д. Лекич. «В добрый путь!» Учебный комплекс по русскому языку как иностранному для продвинутого этапа в семи частях. СПб: «Мирс» (2007, 2008).

- Integrated cultural program (bi-weekly, tied to thematic units of the Flagship language courses)
- On-going evaluation (testing, site visits, teacher/tutor reports, portfolio development, self-evaluation)
- Bi-Weekly Language Utilization Reports (LUR) (time-place mapping and self-management template)

### **Outcomes Measures**

Multiple outcomes measures have been used, given the need to establish generally recognized baselines for the Flagship program, both in the US and in Russia. The multiple measures include pre- and post-program Oral Proficiency Interviews (OPI), pre- and post-program American Councils Standardized Reading and Listening Proficiency Tests, based on the ILR proficiency scale, as well as the Test of Russian as a Foreign Language (TORFL), based on the Common European Framework and serving as the official state certified examination of Russian for foreigners in the Russian Federation. Pre- and post-program test results using the TORFL Certification Level -3 (corresponding to CEF Threshold Level C-1) and Certification Level - 4 (corresponding to CEF Threshold Level C-2) are juxtaposed below with ACTFL and ILR “Superior (ILR-3) and “Distinguished” (ILR-4) for the same population of Russian Flagship participants<sup>3</sup>.

### **The Language Utilization Reporting (LUR) System**

As part of a strong emphasis on self-managed learning and development of executive function in the advanced learner, each participant in the Flagship programs administered by American Councils in Russia, Central Asia, the Middle East, China, and Africa, is required to complete a bi-weekly language utilization report (LUR), which provides both an accounting of how the students spend time using the language in and outside of class, as well as an opportunity to analyze and reflect on successful and unsuccessful speech situations in which they have found themselves during the reporting period. The LUR, therefore, serves both as a diary for documenting language use, as well as a vehicle for personal reflection and communication with an academic advisor (in-country or

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<sup>3</sup> The “TORFL” (Test of Russian as a Foreign Language), a standardized, competency-based battery, based primarily on the Common European Framework (CEF) for Foreign Languages, is available at the “elementary,” “basic” (bazovyy), and certifications levels 1 through 4. For detailed description and sample tests for Certification Level 3, see Ivanova (2009), Andrijushina (2010).

at-home) for the purpose of goal setting for the next reporting period. (See Appendix 1 for the complete LUR template.)

The LUR is a monitored self-reporting online survey instrument, for which students are provided explicit deadlines and instructions to ensure comparability of responses. LUR's are not submitted by students during breaks or for a week that is interrupted by travel outside the host language area. The same reporting schedule has been observed on the LURs over the seven consecutive years represented in the present report, beginning from September 2004 through May of 2011.

Target language activities are listed on the LUR using 13 rubrics, one of which is "other." While all students within the Flagship program devote similar amounts of time to formal classroom activity, peer tutors, and internships, these activities are nonetheless listed on the bi-weekly report, as they constitute significant target-language performance areas which become part of the overall picture of each student's Russian language use while on-program. The full set of rubrics is as follows:

- |                     |  |
|---------------------|--|
| 1. Homework         | 8. Public Transportation               |
| 2. Internships      | 9. Other activities                    |
| 3. Tutoring         | 10. Reading for pleasure               |
| 4. Academic Reading | 11. Reading the press                  |
| 5. Cultural Events  | 12. Public transportation and shopping |
| 6. With friends     | 13. Local TV or radio                  |
| 7. In class         |  |

Classroom attendance is required of all ROF students and monitored carefully by on-site resident directors. Quantitative data, based on the American Councils LUR provide the principal focus of the analysis that follows; sample narrative material from open-ended responses have also been included here to assist the reader in better understanding the language utilization behaviors reported here.

## **ANALYSIS**

Analysis has proceeded along two lines: a) review of L-2 proficiency outcomes of the Russian Overseas Flagship for the current subject group in order to confirm post-program outcomes; b) presentation of data relating outcomes to overall levels and types of L-2 utilization activities of participants over the same period.



### Learner outcome variables

The proficiency-based outcomes report of the ROF to date can be viewed in the following tables, which compare pre- and post-Flagship program test performances across modalities. Tables 3 and Figures 1-7 below update the Davidson 2010 report on ROF proficiency-based outcomes through the inclusion of two additional years of Flagship Program data.

**Table 3.**

### Comparison of Pre- and Post-Program OPI Scores<sup>†</sup>: 2004-2010 ROF participants

Prof. Level	Pre-Program		Post-Program	
	# of Students	% of Students	# of Students	% of Students
1+	5	7.6	0	0
2	35	53	2	3
2+	24	36.4	4	6.1
3	2	3	34	51.5
3+	0	0	14	21.2
4	0	0	11	16.7
4+	0	0	1	1.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>100</b>

Note: ALL OPI testing was performed by ACTFL-certified or FSI certified testers.

Over the past seven years, approximately 90.01% of participants in the ROF have achieved the stated program goal of ILR Level – 3 (ACTFL “Superior”) proficiency (or higher) and a TORFL – “Level 3” (or higher). While the overall sample size of the ROF program is still small, the consistency of the results from two entirely independent but parallel systems of performance-based testing is notable.

### Predicting L-2 gain in the Flagship environment

Previous studies have identified certain linguistic correlates of L-2 language gain for US students of Russian which have remained reasonably consistent predictors over the past 15 years for American students of Russian participating in any of the American Councils/ACTR programs (Brecht, Davidson, Ginsburg, 1994, 1995; Davidson, 2007, 2010). For example, pre-program reading skills and

pre-program control of language structure have served as good predictors of ultimate oral proficiency gain for adult-learner study abroad at various levels<sup>4</sup>.

FIGURE 1

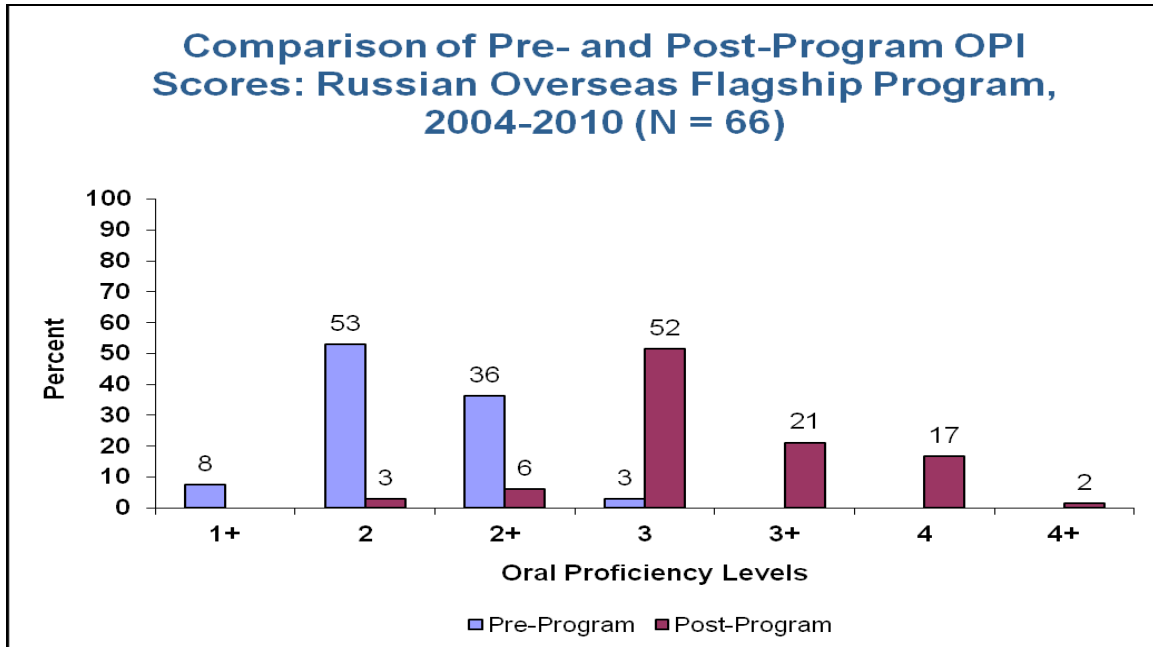
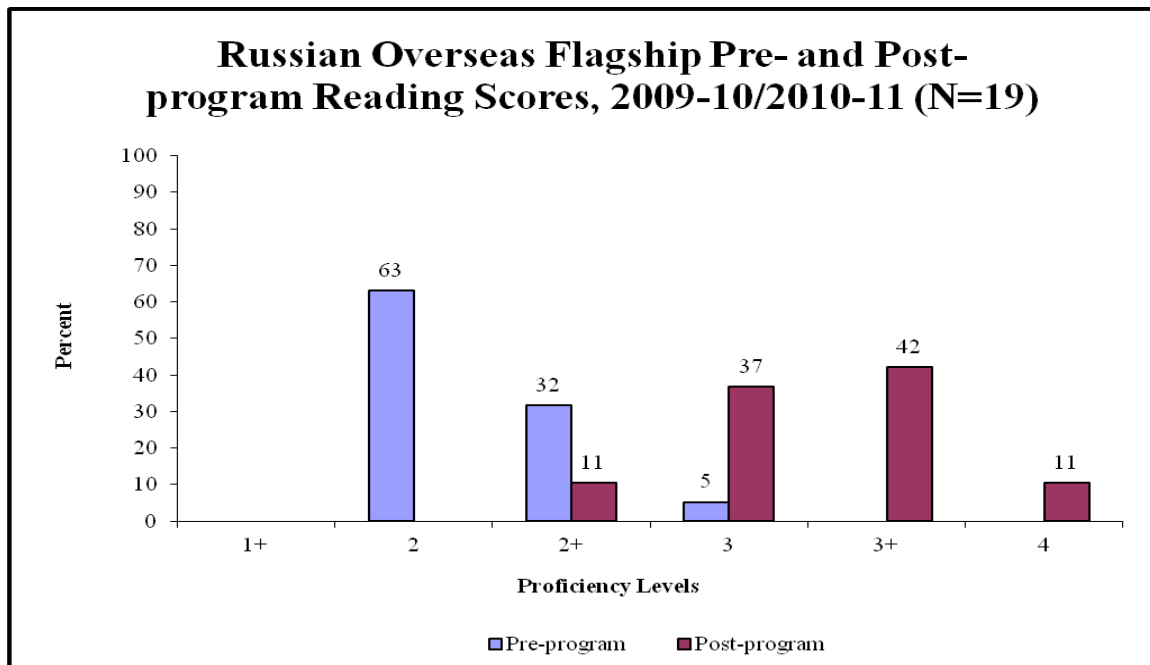


FIGURE 2



<sup>4</sup> The gender effect was not significant in the 2010 study as well.

FIGURE 3

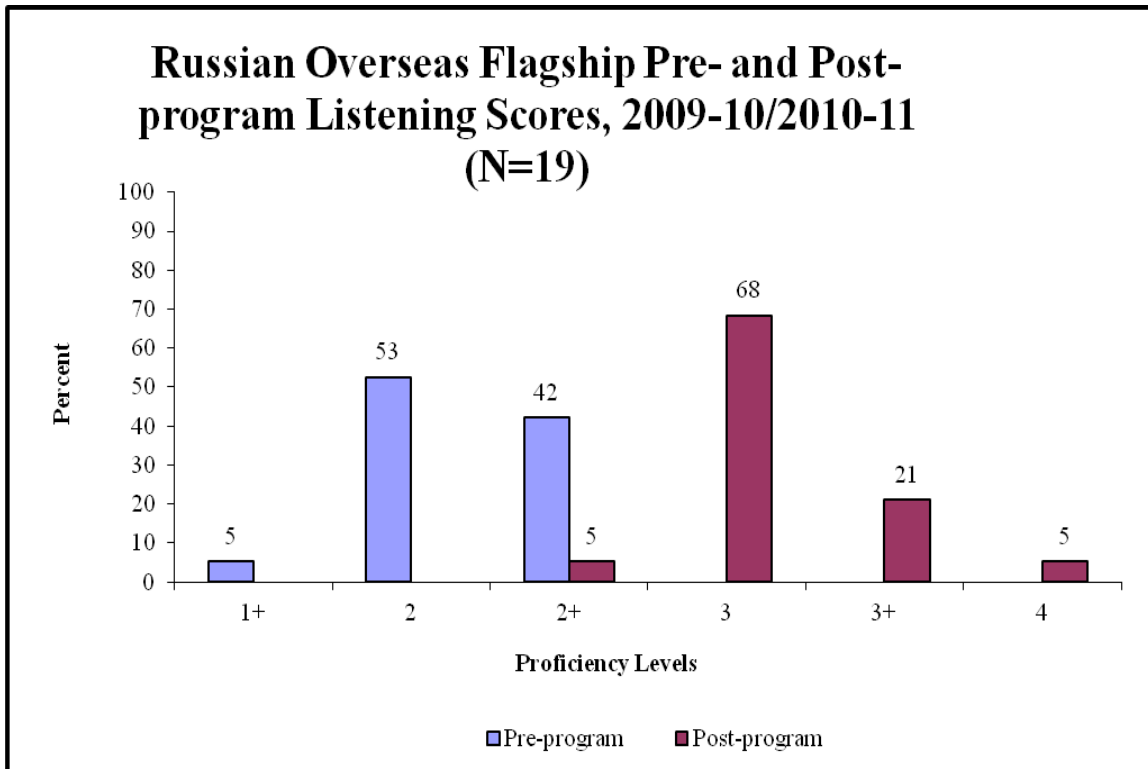


FIGURE 4

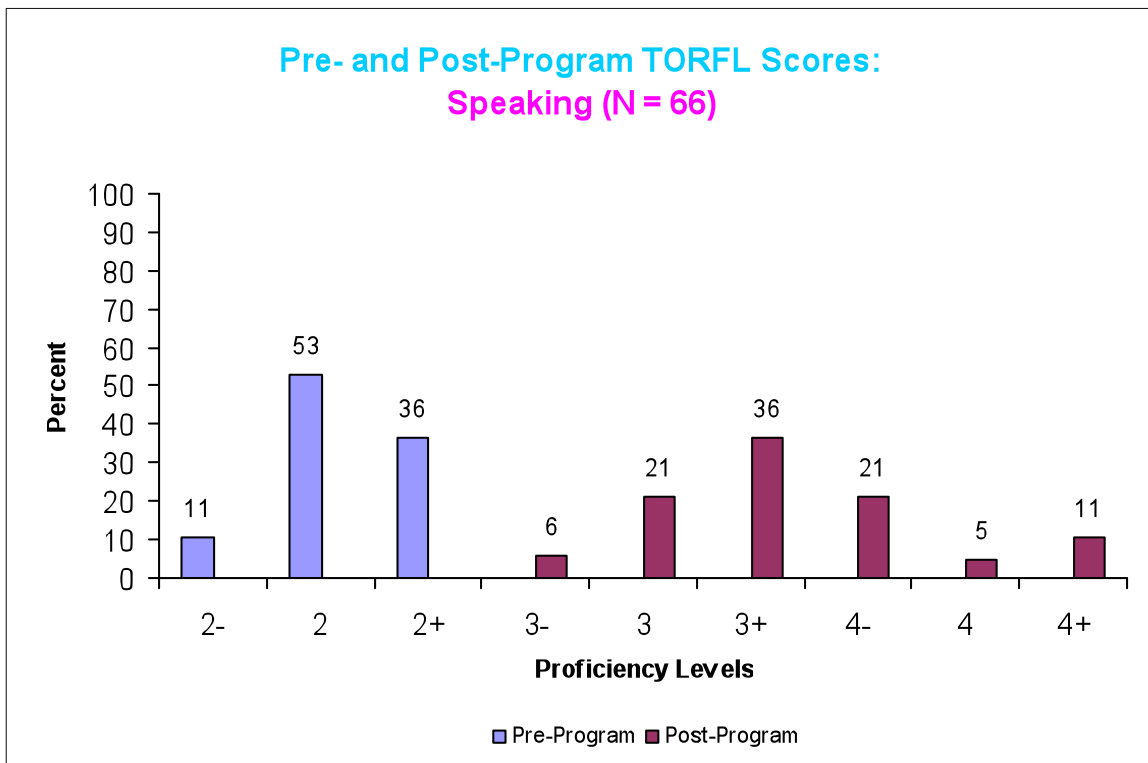


FIGURE 5

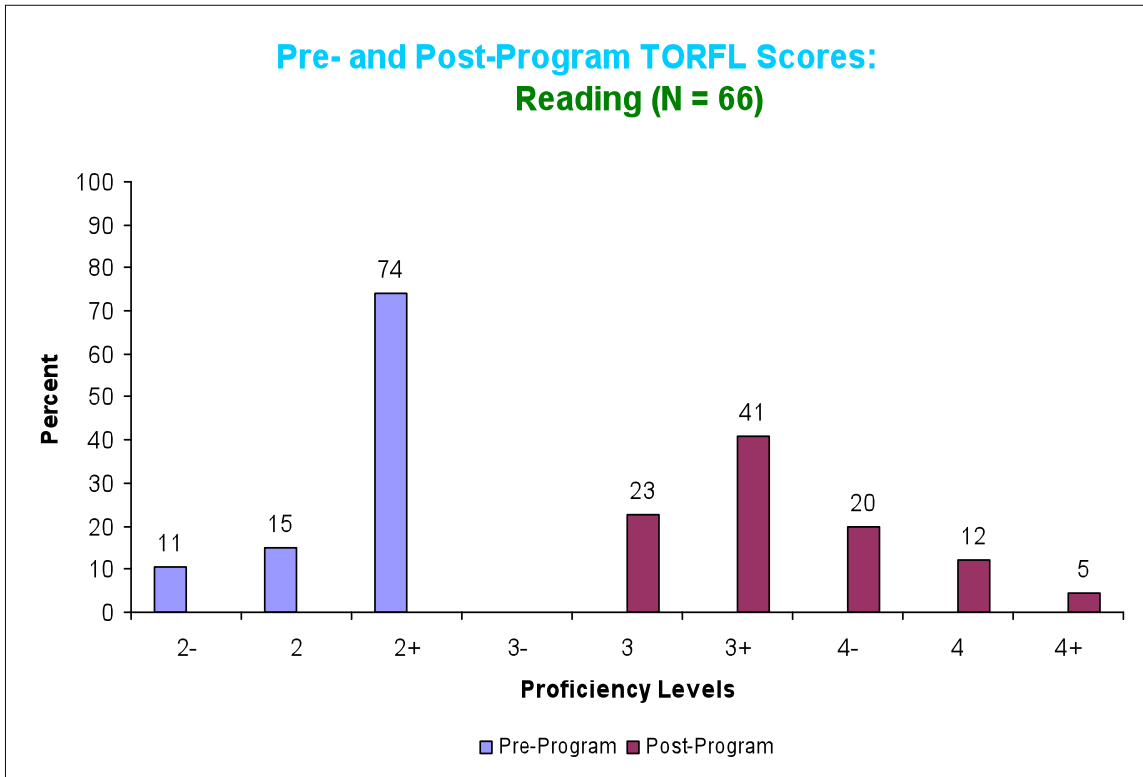
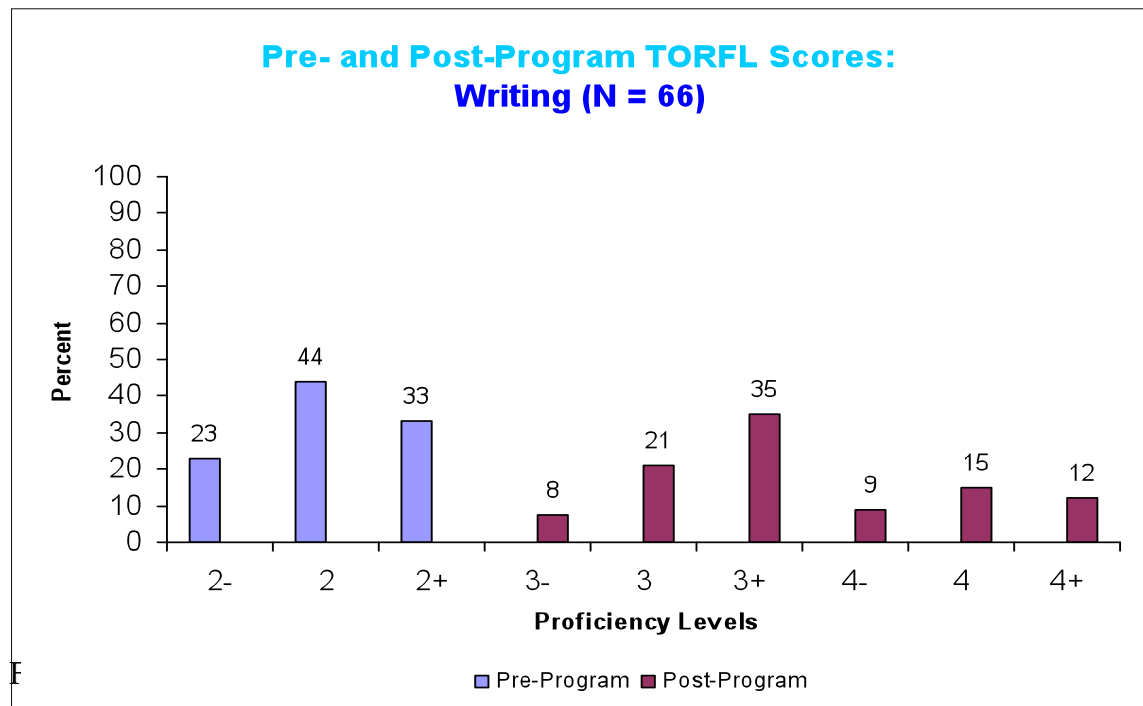
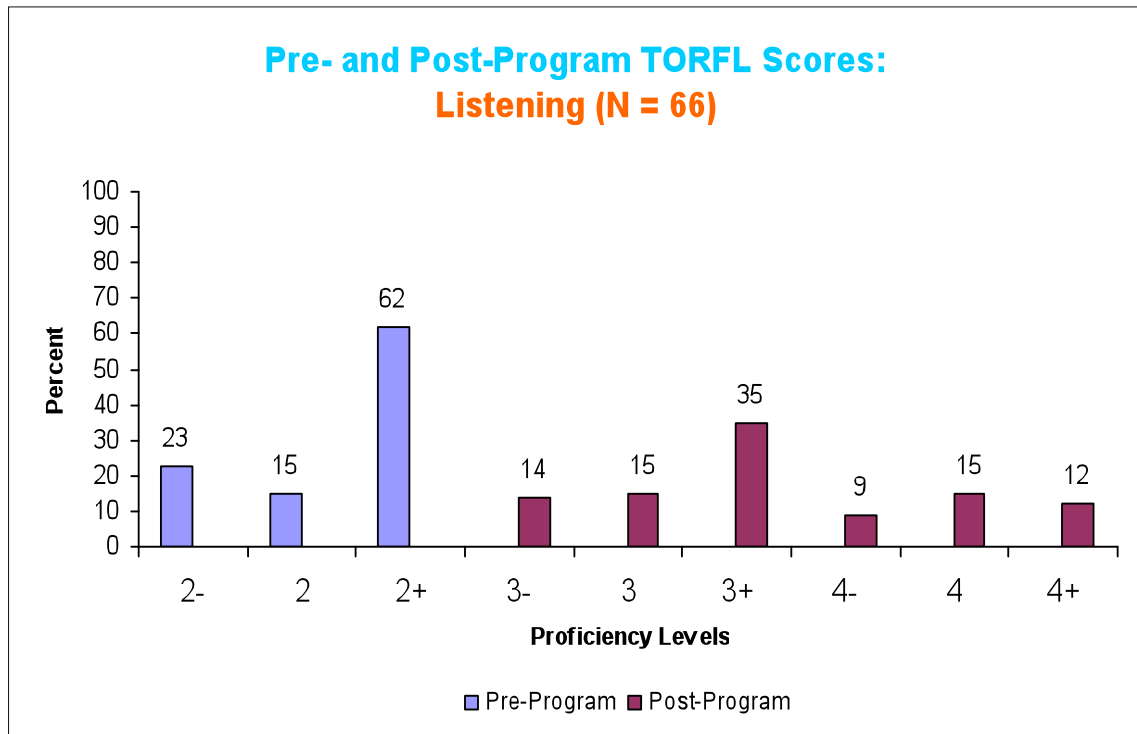


FIGURE 6





**Table 4.**

Summary of Multiple Regression Analyses for Variables Predicting Gain in Oral Proficiency: ROF (N = 66)

<i>Variable</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	<i>β</i>
Constant	2.30	1.15	
Pre-Program Speaking Proficiency Level	-0.76	0.11	-0.76*
Pre-Program Reading Proficiency Level	-0.11	0.11	-0.09
Pre-Program Listening Proficiency Level	0.54	0.14	0.48*
Gender	-0.53	0.34	-0.13
High School Russian	-0.38	0.44	-0.08
Knowledge of Other Slavic Language	0.52	0.49	0.09
Knowledge of Non-Slavic Language	-0.37	0.42	-0.07
Grammar Score	0.08	0.02	0.53*

Notes:  $R^2 = .50$ , adjusted  $R^2 = .45$ , \* $p < .001$

While the inter-correlation of reading and grammar skills is well documented in the literature on language gain, the emergence of listening comprehension as a predictor of oral proficiency gain at the professional level was first documented in Davidson (2010). The next section examines turns to certain non-linguistic variables that, like the above-identified variables, also appear connected to positive L-2 development in the study abroad context.

### **Target language activities**

The full cohort of 66 Flagship participants submitted on average 16 bi-weekly reports per year describing a total of 64,355.56 hours of target language use, distributed across the above ten activity rubrics. (See Appendix 2: LUR Descriptive Statistics)

Overall, L-2 language utilization increased for the group from the early weeks of the fall semester into the spring semester. No significant differences in utilization patterns by gender were observed, nor were there significant recorded differences in language utilization patterns between fall and spring semesters, other than that accountable in terms of the substitution of a direct-enrollment content course in the fall with a day-long internship in the spring. Finally, the year of program participation had no significant or observable effect on the language utilization pattern of the participants.

Noteworthy differences in language utilization were seen to distinguish three categories of learners within the overall group: those who completed the program with oral proficiency scores of 2 or 2+ (low gainers), those who completed the program at OPI Level 3 (gainers), and those who completed the program at OPI Level 3+ or higher (high gainers). Over the course of the academic year, the mean total hours per week of using Russian for the low-gain group was 50.45 (S.D. 14.31), the mean for the Level 3 group was 65.10 (S.D. 20.89), and the mean for the high-gain group was 68.57 (S. D. 18.88). In short, the amount of weekly target-language utilization differentiated the low-gain group from the gain/high gain cohort to a significant degree, and, to a lesser extent, the gainers from the high gainers, as well.

Turning now to the report of specific activities, summarized below, it is clear that participants completing the program at Levels 3 and Level 3+ invested their time somewhat differently than those who did not, keeping in mind that all students entered the program at 2 or 2+ in September.

Fixed components of the program, such as tutoring, internships, class-room related academic reading, and cultural excursions generally show similar time commitments by Flagship students over the seven years of reporting, regardless

of their ultimate attainment in the program. Discretionary activities, by contrast, varied considerably, such as the amount of time spent by students on homework, in discussions with the homestay family, in reading for pleasure, following the press, including local TV or radio, and passing time with friends, varied among the groups, some cases significantly, as the next charts makes clear.

**Table 5.**  
**Mean Weekly Time-on-Tasks (in Hours) by Activity Type**

Activity	Post-test OPI 2/2+ (N=5)	Post-test OPI 3 (N=34)	Post-test OPI 3+/4/4+ (N=26)
Homework	0.9	4.9	7.9
Internship	6.6	6.2	4.8
Tutoring	3.1	3.1	3.0
Academic Reading	4.7	2.0	2.4
Cultural Events	1.2	2.3	2.7
Host Family	5.3	6.8	8.8
Reading for Pleasure	0.7	3.7	4.2
Following the Press	2.1	2.6	3.0
Local TV/Radio	3.3	5.3	5.0
Time Spent with Friends	6.9	11.2	10.9

**Table 6.**  
**Percentage of Time Spent on Various Activities**

Activity	Percentage
Friends	15%
<i>Host Family</i>	13% (3+), 9.5(3), 8.6(2+)
Academic	40%
<i>Reading</i>	14% (3+), 11%(2+/3)
<i>Cultural events</i>	4%(3+), 3.1% (3), 1.7% (2+)
Internships	10%
Other	4%

Host family interactions appear to generate a regular pattern of language utilization situations reflecting the basic functional demands and pressures of daily family life, where the expression of greetings, gratitude, agreement/disagreement, paying and responding to compliments, requests, apologies, consolation, congratulations, and leave taking, become not only routinized, but also necessarily adapted and expanded to accommodate a range of socio-linguistic situations arising in the course of a year in the life of a well educated, professional family in St. Petersburg. One student described her language situation early on in the Flagship program in terms of the kinds of tasks and social situations that arise routinely in the home setting:

*"When we started making the pie, I realized how little kitchen vocabulary I know. It was more like a game of charades at first, but K. [the host sister] kept giving me the necessary vocabulary, and listened as I repeated instructions multiple times. I don't see this as a particular deficiency in my language, but the best way to minimize the charades would be to cook as often as possible with Russians."*

LUR Russian Flagship Report. (October)

Student reflection and self-management strategies are in frequent evidence in the LUR's, as vocabulary diversity and premium on extended discourse are noted by the student, as she compares speech performance in the spring with a similar situation in the fall.

*"Today I was talking to my host mom about her Easter cake and I felt like my command of the language was reflected in my ability to produce a diverse range of compliments about her cooking. I got a dialog going with her, all based on compliments on the cake, whereas in September I would have just said the case was "tasty", and left it at that."*

LUR Russian Flagship Report (April)

The student's ability to self-assess with respect to her overall ability to express a range of opinions and views resulting from her interactions with the host family is further evidence of her management of her L-2 learning, in this case in the homestay situation.

A male Flagship student reports on the importance of staying attuned to the life of his host family, for improving his language and cultural understanding, not relying entirely on media and outside sources for this important form of linguistic and cultural input.

*"It seems to me that the only approach here is to be as involved as possible in the everyday life of my host family, which I have already been trying to do. The main*



*thing to remember is taking an interest in the life in front of my eyes here at home."*

LUR Russian Flagship Report (January).

Reading proficiency also affects, positively or negatively, the pace of student progress at Level 3, as Table 5 indicates. Lower proficiency readers require more time to complete academic reading tasks, and, therefore, appear to have less time for reading for pleasure.

### **Language Utilization and Program-Final Proficiency Attainment**

While the above utilization reports are of inherent interest for program designers and Flagship advisors, not all rise to the level of statistical significance. For that reason, a number of standard statistical procedures were performed on the LUR data. Regarding the overall level of L-2 usage, the greater the mean number of hours per week spent using the target language (regardless of the type of activity), the more likely the learner was to attain Level 3 proficiency or higher,  $r(63) = .25, p < .05$ .

While the overall number of classroom hours and tutorials was roughly the same for all participants, investment of time in academic activities, i.e. attending language classes and tutorial sessions and completing homework assignments, was positively related to ultimate gain in the program,  $r(63) = .31, p < .05$ . It should be noted that homework assignments within the Russian educational system are modest by US Standards, 1-2 hours per day on average. The data shows, however, that an investment of two hours rather than one hour per day on homework paid considerable dividends for the learners,  $r(63) = .36, p < .01$ . Likewise, spending more time with host family was positively associated with higher levels of language skills,  $r(62) = .26, p < .05$ .

### **CONCLUSIONS**

The findings presented in the study underscore the importance of overall levels of L-2 utilization in the context of a nine-month structured Immersion training and professional internship program. Both overall utilization and, in particular, certain "high-yield" target-language (academic and informal) activities were associated with post-program proficiency attainment in Russian at ILR Levels 3, 3+, and 4 across modalities. By comparison, lower overall levels and smaller investments by students in key activities were associated across the seven generations of students covered by this study with lower post-program proficiency outcomes.

Regarding the first two research questions, the typical level of L-2 utilization for an adult learner engaged in an intensive/immersion study program at the professional level, such as the ROF, is documented over several years of Flagship students (N=66) at 50.45 hours per week for those who do not reach 3-level proficiency, 65.10 hours per week for those who do reach the professional level, and slightly higher still (68.57 hours per week) ( for those exceed 3-level proficiency. The relationship between the level of language utilization and attainment of level-3 proficiency in the course of the 9-month program is noteworthy and statistically significant.

By comparison, typical utilization patterns for students engaged in lower levels of study over the same reporting period have been observed elsewhere at 30-40 hours per week for students training to Level 2, and 15-20 hours per week for students training at Level 1 (Davidson, forthcoming).

With respect to the third research question, L-2 gain from L-2 utilization activities emerges in the current body of LUR data as statistically significant. In particular, the study indicates that while participants' discretionary L-2 usage over the course of the program varied considerably, those activities involving a more sustained engagement in homestay interactions, academic reading at Level 3, preparing homework assignments, professional internships, and following the press were associated with success in attaining the highest levels of proficiency.

Further research is needed using more ethnographically-oriented tools to explore the quality and quantity of individual L-2 language production in exchanges with native interlocutors that comprise the observed "high-yield" activity types noted above. For example, attention has been focused recently on the nature and effect of direct and indirect error correction feedback by native speakers and teachers (See SSLA, 2010), frequency of self-correction (Golonka, 2000), and the impact of study abroad on the modeling of written and oral L-2 socio-pragmatic skills (Shardakova, 2006; Moskala-Gallaher, 2011). L-2 listening comprehension (noted above) should also be considered in analyzing the role of corrective feedback, modeling, and the selection of communicative strategies at this level. Insufficient L-2 listening comprehension can seriously hamper learner uptake of culturally situated speech models and many forms of corrective feedback essential for student progress at this level.

The homestay environment, when functioning well, is a "high-yield" SLA environment for supporting, in a highly contextualized way, the development of a broad range of functional and socio-pragmatic skills in response to the normal round of family life. Some communication is routine and rapidly becomes automatic for the student, but unexpected communicative and cultural

challenges can also arise, as, for example, in the following student report concerning the unexpected death of a host family relative and the student's efforts to console them:

*"What do I do, keep silent? No. Pile on the optimism that made me famous? Not so much.... I understand that these types of comments are not what is expected by a Russian. So I listened. I found that they responded very well to my encouraging them that they had done the right thing, everything possible... It is difficult to console anyone in any language, to be sure, but when so many cultural factors affect the way an individual responds to death, an ordinary hill becomes the Cliffs of Insanity—without the rope."*

LUR Russian Flagship Report (January)

The student's reflection on strategy selection as well as on the underlying cultural differences that inform the proper expression of consolation and condolences are notable. Because this particular set of interactions played out in the homestay situation over several days, the learner was able to reflect on the situation and on her own position within the family, and evaluate the effectiveness of her speech efforts.

The homestay environment has the capacity to support the emergence of a broad range of functional and socio-pragmatic skills in the learner in response to the pressure of daily communicative needs that arise there. As Kinginger (2011) has noted, however, the homestay environment is successful only to the extent that it fosters observation, participation, and reflection opportunities for the learner. The student comments included in the present report provide examples of all three, in which the visiting student appears to have found effective levels of inclusion with the host family to enhance and support the improvement of the learner's socio-pragmatic skills as well as broader linguistic and cultural growth.

By contrast, students who spend too much time hanging out with friends, a behavior that undoubtedly benefitted their language development from Level 1 to Level 2, will discover that informal conversation cannot replace the professional language one requires in academic work, internships, or closely tracking professional media sources in one's field.

The overseas immersion context, represented in this case by the Overseas Russian Flagship program, is best regarded as first and foremost an academic context for learning and knowledge generation, in which good study habits, sound self-management skills, pursuit of related intellectual and professional interests, and the willingness of both visitors and hosts to take advantage of a range of opportunities for socialization within the target culture (host family,

professional circles, cultural groups, as well as informal friendships) are most likely to help the learner attain the desired program results. Students acculturation to the academic environment, home stay environment and internship environment, to observe it, participate in it, and reflect on the language learning process are critical for the successful immersion learning at this level.

As Pellagrino-Avani (2004) has shown, adult learners undertake study abroad with expectations, images of self, and models of the host culture which invariably change over time. Managing the image of self and the need for external validation of one's position and worth is a challenge for most young adults, as they carry on with their study and lives overseas:

*"And then we talked about her boyfriend and what's wrong with him. Maybe this is just a normal conversation for anyone to have, I only had to ask one word, and I was pretty mistake-free, not a big deal, except that I was trying to be convincing and be really supportive. She [the host family sister] thanked me for all the great advice and support and [said] she felt much better having talked to me about it. Among my friends at home I often play this role, and to have been unable to play this part until now is to have effectively become another person or, at the very least, to have not been fully me. It's like the American-me and the Russian-me are beginning to mesh better. I like that. I like that a lot. Being able to be (almost) completely yourself in a foreign language in a foreign land makes one feel a whole lot less like a monkey on a tricycle."*

LUR Russian Flagship Report (February)

The preceding LUR narrative depicts not only careful self-monitoring and use of direct feedback, but a remarkable appreciation of what Pellagrino-Avani has termed "identity competence."

The present study has examined the manifestations of some of these factors in the form of documented time-on-task, participant investment in specific categories of activities, and narrative comments supplied by participants at the time of their filing of the bi-weekly LUR's. If certain structural and cognitive factors have been shown over the past 15 years to correlate with learning success in the overseas environment, the present study provides initial evidence of the role of on-program behaviors and activity choices for ultimate proficiency attainment in this critical form of language acquisition.

## Appendix 1 Language Utilization Report (Specimen)

### Student Name

Started: **Not yet started** — Completed: **Not yet submitted.**

Due: **Sep 16**

### I. Language Use

*How many clock hours during the past 7 days did you spend using Russian in the following activities (remember that your individual language classes last for 90 minutes each). Please use decimal-point notation, i.e. 1 hr. — "1"; 45 min. — "0.75"; 30 min. — "0.5"; 20 min. — 0.30; 15 min. = "0.25"; 10 min. — "0.15". Please only record the activities for ONE week. Do not Add the time for the two week period of the report.*

#### Activity

Mon Tue Wed Thur Fri Sat Sun

**Formal language learning classes**

**Language tutorial sessions**

**Host family**

**Internship or specialization coursework**

**In public transportation or while shopping**

**With friends**

**Cultural events**

**Russian radio or television**

**Reading the press**

**Professional/or academic reading**

**Reading for pleasure**

**In homework and other preparation**

**for formal language learning classes**

**Other**

*Please list other activity*

## II. Communication Challenges

### A. What challenges did you encounter during the past week in operating in Russian?

*(Consider interpersonal, interpretive, and presentational modes in responding, e.g., scanning detailed text for relevant information, understanding detailed written instructions or spoken advice, note taking, letter writing, holding the floor in a discussion, reacting appropriately to a culturally "sensitive" situation, etc.) Describe the situation briefly.*

### B. In view of the challenges described above, what language/cultural resources will you need to master or have greater control over to deal more effectively, when a similar situation arises in the future?

## III. Communication Successes

**Describe a linguistic interaction in Russian during the past week which might be seen to characterize your command of Russian at its best.**

*(This may be an interaction of any kind which you consider you handled well.)*

## IV. Goals for the Month(s) Ahead

**Identify 2-3 thematic areas, language functions, or speech genres which you plan in the coming weeks to make stronger in your own Russian.**

*(E.g., getting better at making requests or offering apologies, understanding certain recurrent colloquialisms in the speech of friends, catching references to contemporary Russian culture and/or politics, mastering abstract expressions, learning how to keep up a conversation, improving phonetics/intonation, becoming more proficient at offering toasts, responding to compliments, invitations, leading a discussion, chairing a meeting, etc.)*

## V. Additional Comments

**Please note any other observations that come to mind about your use of Russian during the past week?**

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### Appendix 2 Language Utilization Reporting 2004-2011: Descriptive Statistics

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Activity	N	Minimum	Maximum	Sum	Mean	SD
Number of forms completed	65	7.00	32.00	1043.00	16.05	6.77
Formal language learning classes	65	105.00	265.50	11686.65	179.79	35.85
In homework and other preparation for formal language learning classes	65	0.00	410.50	6277.70	96.58	94.20

Internship or specialization coursework	65	9.00	225.00	5218.42	80.28	40.83
Language tutorial sessions	65	7.00	113.90	2994.50	46.07	14.97
Professional or academic reading	65	0.00	161.00	2212.60	34.04	37.26
Cultural events	65	0.00	104.50	2304.40	35.45	24.32
Host family	65	0.00	345.25	7514.68	115.61	83.59
In public transportation or while shopping	65	0.00	175.90	2980.57	45.85	44.53
Other	65	0.00	116.50	1427.10	21.96	28.59
Reading for pleasure	65	0.00	161.10	3623.45	55.75	38.66
Reading the press	65	0.00	114.00	2535.69	39.01	26.67
Local radio or television	65	5.30	220.00	4798.75	73.83	43.65
Time spent with friends	65	3.00	628.50	10761.05	165.55	107.52
Total hours in all activities	65	368.80	2140.60	64335.56	989.78	349.55
Total hours spent on academic activities (language class, homework, tutorial, and academic read)	65	147.30	720.50	23171.45	356.48	143.31
Total hours spent on three academic activities (language class, homework and tutorial sessions)	65	130.00	696.00	20958.85	322.44	129.25
Total hours spent on reading activities (professional/academic reading, reading for pleasure, and reading the press)	65	7.00	301.00	8371.74	128.80	71.50

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