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LANGUAGE SOCIALIZATION IN THE ABSENCE OF LANGUAGE AND SOCIETY?
A CASE STUDY OF HOW STUDENTS OF A LARGE PUBLIC AMERICAN UNIVERSITY IN THE MIDWEST CONSTRUCT SOCIOCULTURAL AND LANGUAGE KNOWLEDGE INSIDE AND OUTSIDE OF THEIR RUSSIAN LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

presented by

NATALIA YEVGENYEVNA COLLINGS

has been accepted towards fulfillment
of the requirements for the

Ph.D. degree in Counseling, Educational Psychology, and Special Education

Anne Hood Dyson
Major Professor's Signature

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By

Natalia Yevgenyevna Collings

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to
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ABSTRACT

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This study represents an ethnographic account of what it means to learn the Russian language in a sociocultural sense outside of Russia, in fact, in a classroom in a large public American university in the Midwest. Analyzed data included fieldnotes of classroom observations and interviews with four focal students and their teacher. The findings are presented in the light of the theoretical framework based on the works of Mikhail Bakhtin and Lev Vygotsky. The social work performed by the students and related to learning Russian was considered as a cultural practice in Vygotskian understanding, i.e., as organization of one's thinking that results in the social activities of taking a foreign language class and looking for other opportunities to use the language of choice. The nature of this practice was described based on Bakhtinian understanding of dialogue and monologue in culture. Students' practice of learning a foreign language proved to be dialogic, i.e., constantly evolving in a dialogue with multiple individually interpreted societal discourses related to classroom culture, the concept of an educated person, relationships between Russia and America, etc. Students' and teacher's interactions within the classroom and with the researcher during the interviews were described as constrained by social speech genres, monologic in nature, i.e., following rather rigid and closed forms of Initiation, Response, and Evaluation (IRE) and creating a

cultural narrative in a conversation. Based on these findings, the study provides both theoretical and pedagogical implications. It joins the literature discourse related to the notions of culture, practice, and socialization along the lines of a postmodern perspective building on Bakhtinian and Vygotskian ideas. For individual teachers who deal with the concept of culture in their classrooms everyday, it provides an insight into understanding culture as a multidimensional phenomenon co-constructed in a dialogue, but a dialogue often constrained by the monologic genres of classroom interaction, and helps them think of new ways of creatively weaving cultural knowledge into their unique pedagogies.

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CHAPTER ONE:

INTRODUCTION

Problem Statement and Purpose of the Study

Being a student, a teacher, and now a researcher of foreign language, I have never stopped wondering how people can learn a language in a classroom, a thousand miles away from the country where it is spoken. My thinking from early on was influenced by Vygotskian views of the internalization of mental functions through language in social contexts (Vygotsky, 1978). These views made good sense in the context of first language acquisition by children, as shown, for example, in the framework of language socialization studies (Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986). In a foreign language classroom sociocultural worlds are not immediately available; however, they are brought in to a different extent by the teacher, instructional materials, and the students themselves. How do students figure these sociocultural worlds into their language learning?

I see at least two reasons that provide a rationale for gaining insight into this question. The first one is to better understand the relationship between culture and language in a foreign language classroom at the level of the teacher, the students, and the whole field. Despite a variety of methods and perspectives, I do not think that many teachers, students, and even researchers might sound confident describing how sociocultural knowledge figures into the foreign language learning and how it may be conceptualized in order to make the process most successful.

The second reason is to better understand the goals of including "culture" in foreign language education. More and more emphasis is being put today on multicultural

orientations in education. Promoting a multicultural orientation in students draws from the landscape of poststructuralist, postmodernist, and critical understanding of culture and related constructs. A foreign language classroom is positioned as one of the primary arenas of multicultural education in the context of changing cultural conceptualizations:

> The time has come, in my view, to revisit language teaching as a domain of applied linguistic inquiry, but a domain that reclaims its full cultural and historical meaning. Language teaching not only as methodology, or even as a bounded instructional classroom activity, but as an institutional, societal profession, as a public and political act of cultural production and reproduction, as a discourse of power, linked to cultural ideologies and worldviews, and enhanced by new technologies that are currently totally transforming our habitual notions of text, discourse, communication, authenticity and the like (Kramsch, 1999, Section 4: Looking into the Future, ¶ 1).

Studying learning a foreign language in a sociocultural sense outside of its country seems to be helpful in terms of gaining insight into the relationship between language and culture, especially on the background of existing problems of inconsistent applications of sociocultural and other learning theories to foreign language pedagogy, increasing pressure for Americans to know other languages and cultures, and the unchanging format of classroom learning. A local understanding of this phenomenon also seems promising to me in terms of informing a broad societal discourse of American mono- or multi- cultural and linguistic orientation.

Thus, the first purpose for this dissertation study was to provide an in-depth ethnographic account of how Russian language and culture were learned in the context of

a classroom located in a large Midwest University and help, or at least spur, understanding of how language and culture are connected in the classrooms. In order to do this, I employ a theoretical lens that builds on the works of two famous Russian writers, Lev Vygotsky and Mikhail Bakhtin. Many of the authors from the sociocultural camp that I discuss in the literature review that follows used Bakhtinian and Vygotskian theories to various extents. These theories have been gaining popularity in many fields of inquiry, such as educational research, anthropology, literature, linguistics, etc. They have been interpreted and applied in many different ways. However, my interpretation of these theories is rather different, as you will see from the discussion in the "Method" chapter. Thus, the second purpose of this study is to offer a theoretical lens that builds on Bakhtin and Vygotsky for thinking about teaching and learning across cultures.

Literature Review

Purposes for the Following Review

There are three reasons for this literature review that I would like to explain here. The first reason is the researcher's reflexivity. Reflecting on my subjectivity as a researcher, I want to recognize that the views on language learning that I discuss in this section to a various extent and consistency inform my vision. It is my hope that the reader will not take my findings for granted, but will interpret them through the lens of the reviewed literature. As I found in the process of reviewing literature on the theoretical underpinnings of foreign language learning and teaching, the classifications of theories, perspectives, and views are rather controversial. As a result, I am organizing

my knowledge on this subject here in the way that best makes sense to me, and also in the way that will help me relate my later findings to the content of this section.

The second reason is that I believe that participants of this study, teachers and students, have their own personal theories of how a language is learned. Foreign language teachers received training that may have drawn on theories presented in this section; teachers also draw on their own experiences as students. Students make sense of foreign language in response to many things (the goal of this study is to unpack them as much as possible), and among these things, in response to societal discourses on how language is learned. Foreign language teachers, among many other interlocutors, represent these types of discourses. My interest is to see how the views, theories, and perspectives reviewed in this section are enacted in classroom discourses and consequently in students' understanding of learning a foreign language.

The third reason is that the goal of this study is not to stand alone, but to join the conversations that currently exist in research. This section of my work presents my understanding and interpretation of these conversations. It is intended to help the reader figure out what place I am trying to find for myself among the literature discourses.

Fundamental Views on Learning and Their Applications in Foreign Language Teaching

Foreign language teaching, as many other disciplines, has been influenced in its history by three fundamental views on knowledge and learning: empiricist (or behaviorist), rationalist (or cognitivist), and pragmatist-sociohistoric (or sociocultural) (Greeno, Collins, & Resnick, 1996). Empiricists view learning as a change in behavior that is observable; rationalists define learning as a change in mental associations, that is

not directly observable, but is predictable since the mechanism is innate and similar in all living beings; and pragmatists and the followers of sociohistoric school see learning as a change in activity due to individual's interaction with the environment.

Empiricist views were mainly utilized in behaviorist theories, introduced in the United States by John Watson and B. F. Skinner. According to behaviorist theories language should be treated simply as one of human behaviors (verbal behavior), part of general human intelligence, that is learned and functions through stimulus-response mechanisms. In the field of foreign language teaching this view favors drill-oriented audio-lingual exercises. Empiricist views have also lately been introduced in connectionist theories that to my knowledge are still considered to be too new to be widely applied to practice in foreign language teaching.

Rationalist views influenced foreign language methodology in at least two major ways. The first influence is represented by the theory of Universal Grammars, or UG, and was developed by Noam Chomsky and his followers. Chomsky positions linguistics as a branch of cognitive psychology and suggests that every human being has an innate "language acquisition device" (LAD) that is a mechanism through which a child learns the first language. The second or foreign language proficiency, according to Chomsky's theory, is achieved through conscious study of generative grammar rules, which are in their deep nature universal across languages (Chomsky, 2000). Such understanding of language learning process in the field of foreign language education yielded the so called cognitive-code method (Hadley, 2001), which is important to my study due to its premises, such as:

1. Language learning, as any other cognitive activity, benefits from being meaningful, i.e., connecting new knowledge to prior knowledge. Prior knowledge for second language learners is conceptualized as their knowledge of first language structure and developing knowledge of the underlying structure of the second language.

2. Learners must understand and analyze grammar rules to build their competence as a foundation for performance.

3. The goal is to develop the same types of abilities that native speakers have.

The second influence of rationalism on foreign language methodology can be found in acquisition models of language learning, stating that foreign language can be naturally acquired, rather than learned, under certain conditions that are similar to the conditions of a child learning the first language. Krashen's "natural approach" (Krashen & Terrell, 1983) is probably the most famous among the ones favoring acquisitionist view of learning. It describes language learning being most natural not as a result of consciously studying grammar rules, but as a result of understanding comprehensive input and then filling in the gaps by grammar rules (Krashen, 2004). Thus, the main difference between Chomsky's and Krashen's theory is whether grammar rules should be learned in foreign language consciously using knowledge about how the first language works, or unconsciously derived from input that is comprehensive, i.e., appropriate for student's level of proficiency.

Both cognitive and acquisitionist views in foreign language methodology are usually described as sharing three characteristics. First of all, they imply a hierarchal order of knowledge acquisition: when a lower level of knowledge is practiced, we are ready to move to the next level (Hadley, 2001). One of the most prominent traces of

rationalist influence in foreign language acquisition is the proficiency-oriented method, proposing several levels of learner proficiency in the same tasks. Secondly, when cognitivists and acquisitionists do account for cultural aspects of language learning, they treat text and context as separable entities (Ochs & Schieffelin, 1995). And lastly, they treat speakers as individuals, not as members of specific groups, thus confirming to an abstract ideal of a native speaker (Gumperz & Hymes, 1986).

The focus on grammatical structure was contested by the communicative approach to language learning that borrowed the notion of communicative competence from developments in sociolinguistics (Hadley, 2001). The notion of communicative competence (Gumperz & Hymes, 1986) built on Chomsky's grammatical competence, making it broader by accounting for the social, or functional basis of languages. The communicative approach also supplemented the Input, or Comprehension Hypothesis proposed by Krashen with an Output Hypothesis, favoring communication with language from beginning stages. It proclaimed that language is learned best through negotiation of meaning in task-based interaction with others.

The communicative approach is not a single method; rather, it is an orientation that can be applied to almost any method, including cognitive and acquisitionist. Because of its social makeup and closeness to sociolinguistics, in my view, the communicative approach is most closely connected to sociocultural views on learning. There are also more recent applications of sociocultural views to foreign language learning (Beltz, 2002; Kramsch, 1993, 1995, 1998, 2002; Norton & Toohey, 2004). I discuss these in the following section.

My description of the influences of fundamental learning perspectives on foreign language learning methods is by no means full or unarguable. As I mentioned earlier, the purpose of providing it here is to inform readers about my researcher's lens. This lens will be directed not at teaching "methods", understood as "static set of procedures", but at "pedagogy", understood as a "dynamic interplay among teachers, learners, and instructional materials", which is found to characterize the general turn in twenty-first century educational practice (Richards, 2002).

There are no distinct borders between views and perspectives on foreign language learning. In most of the cases, there are continuums and blends. When reading books and articles, I try to identify threads of conversations that can be placed along these continuums. People who share similar views on knowledge and learning usually build on each other, trying to advance the theory based on evaluating its applications in old contexts and applying it to new ones. Criticism and argument, based on my observations, often comes into the conversations when people have clashing views on the nature of knowledge and learning, for example, cognitivist versus sociocultural; or disagree on the method of inquiry, traditionally, positivist versus interpretive. Criticism also takes place when people see theories as being misinterpreted in applications to particular practices. This type of dynamics will help me describe the conversation that I am joining by doing my study. Identified by the focus of my interest, this conversation evolves around sociocultural theory and its applications in the field of foreign and second language learning and teaching.

Conversations about Applications of Sociocultural Theory in Foreign Language Learning and Teaching

There are several conversations in the literature, as I understand them. The two conversational threads that I was able to trace most saliently are woven by 1) sociocultural theorists pitted against "others": mentalists, cognitivists, and acquisitionists; and 2) researchers that can be placed along the continuum of sociocultural theory, involving old and new conceptualizations that belong to different views of different branches. My goal here is to describe how I understand these conversations and how I am positioning myself among them.

Thread one: sociocultural views against others. The social turn in second and foreign language learning and teaching originated as an opposition, or, in milder cases, alternative to rationalist and empiricist views and, in my opinion, is well expressed in the following quote: "From focusing on the abstract grammar system and treating learners as a bundle of psychological reflexes, we have begun to treat learners as complex social beings" (Canagarajah, 2004, p. 117).

Different conversations that fit under my category of "sociocultural views against others" range from building oppositions to seeking integrations. As I already mentioned, much disagreement comes from opposed views of the nature of knowledge in general, language as a phenomenon, and "what it means to be scientific." For example, mentalists, led by Chomsky, usually do not regard sociocultural theory as scientific, because it focuses on parole (speech), and not langue (grammar). They see only grammar as being important to understanding language as phenomenon. Moreover, cognitivists rely on positivist beliefs that the world is knowable through study of abstract universal

systems of rules, whereas sociocultural interpretive tradition tends to assume the existence of multiple realities that can only be interpreted in local contexts.

A good example of a conversation that evolved along these lines is a recent exchange between Marysia Johnson Gerson and Jan Hulstijn in *The Canadian Modern Language Review*. In her *Philosophy of Second Language Acquisition* Johnson Gerson proposed a "dialogical approach to second language acquisition" that builds on theories of Mikhail Bakhtin and Lev Vygotsky as an alternative to "cognitivist and linguistic views." Following the path of sociocultural theory, she advocated for viewing the development of second language ability as "the process of becoming an active participant in the target language culture, and stated that "the participation metaphor should replace, not compliment, the existing acquisition metaphor" (Johnson Gerson, 2004). Hulstijn published a review of Johnson Gerson's book, the meaning of which is nicely conveyed in the following quote: "the author [Johnson Gerson] chooses a confrontational approach, demanding the replacement of what she calls linguistic and cognitive theories of SLA. But one cannot legitimately reject other theories without proposing a testable alternative theory. Good ideas alone do not suffice to form a scientific theory; one must respect the scientific game and its rules" (Hulstijn, 2004). Johnson Gerson replied to this criticism by explaining that her real intent was not "to dismiss existing theories, but to show cognitive and experimental biases in SLA theory and practice," and also to contribute to developing "a more comprehensive framework that attempts to unite the two major scientific traditions – cognitive and sociocultural". She recognizes that the task is very complex because the views are diametrically opposed, but is worth undertaking, because SLA

should be able to benefit from different traditions of thought and research (Johnson Gerson, 2004).

Another exchange was carried out between James Lantolf and Kevin Gregg, as far as I could track it, from 1993 through 2002. It posts similar issues: Lantolf is trying to introduce a social and postmodern orientation to second language learning, while Gregg is being skeptical about the validity of such approaches. The bitterness of their arguments can be illustrated by the titles of their articles alone: "Taking explanation seriously; or, let a couple of flowers bloom" (Gregg, 1993), "SLA theory building: 'Letting all the flowers bloom!" (Lantolf, 1996), "A theory for every occasion: postmodernism and SLA" (Gregg, 2000), "Commentary from the flower garden: responding to Gregg, 2000" (Lantolf, 2002), and "A garden ripe for weeding: a reply to Lantolf" (Gregg, 2002).

Thread two: within sociocultural tradition. The sociocultural tradition emphasizes social aspects of human knowledge and activity, and a close relationship between culture and language. Within the sociocultural tradition it is now common to distinguish between older and newer notions of culture. The older notion of culture views beliefs and other psychological constructs are static, existing in the culture and affecting cultural practice; that is defined as a noun. This older notion is usually attributed to Hymes (1962)[1]. The newer notions of culture claim that meaning and cultural practices, psychological constructs and societal categories (such as race, class and gender) do not exist, but are being constantly constructed in the hybridity of

[1] Separating sociocultural views into categories of "older" and "newer" follows the line of sociolinguistic influence on qualitative research in education. On a broader theoretical scale, these notions can be presented as "static" (or "unitary") and "dynamic," and attributed to Edward Tylor (1871) and Karl Marx (in his manuscripts written in the middle of the 19-th century) as their originators.

everyday life. These notions originated in the works of varied sociocultural theorists, including Rosaldo, and are shared by many authors associated with sociocultural perspectives on knowledge and learning (e.g., new literacy and cultural studies, critical and feminist theory, the discourse theories of Foucault, and the dialogic framework of Bakhtin).

Analyzing most recent literature, I was able to identify several threads of what I generalize as sociocultural influence in foreign language learning and teaching. The ones that I was able to trace most saliently are 1) a critique of viewing culture and identity as unitary, stable, predictable, and learnable through text and in stages, 2) a critique of idealizing native speaker's skills as a model and end goal, and 3) critique of current views on diversity and multicultural education. These three critiques are interrelated and build on each other. Separation of them here is artificial and serves the purpose of a more coherent organization of my narrative. As a result of these critiques, new directions are being proposed. In this section, I am presenting my understanding of these critiques, the new directions, and how these new directions feed into my research.

Critique of viewing culture and identity as static and unitary. In response to emphasis on importance of cultural knowledge in foreign language learning and teaching as presented by a communicative approach, textbooks and teachers attempted to codify contexts and teach them as grammar rules; for example, students learned ten ways of excusing themselves instead of ten ways of conjugating verbs. Textbooks provided entries of "cultural knowledge" (Kramsch & McConnell-Ginet, 1992). This way of "handling" cultural knowledge was originated by the "older" notion of culture described earlier. Codifying cultural knowledge was not achieving the goal of social

meaningfulness of classroom interactions, and there was a lot of disappointment in the nineties. Meanwhile, the concept of culture was undergoing big changes under the influence of cultural and new literacy studies, feminist and critical theories, conceptualizations of discourse in the works of Michael Foucault, and dialogic approaches developed by Mikhail Bakhtin and his circle. The "new" notion of culture conceptualizes it not as stable and unitary, but as dynamic and fluid. The concept of culture under the "new" notion is substituted by the concept of discourses. Cultural differences are not seen as country-specific in this context. They are seen as discourses within and across cultures. For example, what could be analyzed under "older" notion of culture as differences in gender relationships in the United States and Russia, under the "new" notion would be researched as gender discourses within and across American and Russian societies as they relate to the categories of class, nationality or race, and power. These societal categories, in turn, do not exist, but are constantly co-constructed by individuals in everyday life.

Identity has always been a concept closely related to culture. A very comprehensive overview of identity concepts is presented in *Identity and Agency in Cultural Worlds* by Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, and Cain (2001). The unitary, or "western" view of identity "takes as its prototype a coherent, unified, and ordinary subject" (Holland et al., 2001, p. 7). In this extreme, the concept of identity treats culture and language as one of the knowledge systems contributing to the education of a holistic individual. In opposition to this "western" view, cultural studies are "concerned with "cultural identities" that form in relation to the major structural features of society: ethnicity, gender, race, nationality, and sexual orientation" (Holland et. al., 2001, p. 7).

Today, just like the concept of culture, identity is being reconsidered as dynamic and fluid, as "a huge variety of discourses, practices, concepts, means, and modalities of the self" (Holland et al., 2001, p. 20).

Critiques of unitary concepts of culture and identity in the field of foreign language learning and teaching led to rethinking the roles of the learner, the teacher, and the text. As Claire Kramsch put it, "learners themselves are to weave texts and contexts to make meanings and to give power to words: they can no longer passively recognize a transcendental realm of pre-made units of meaning associated with pre-built texts" (Kramsch & McConnell-Ginet, 1992, pp. 5-6). Claire Kramsch is one of the authors that introduce to the foreign language field the idea of the inseparability of text and context in production of cultural meaning. In describing this idea Kramsch tracks its origin to Mikhail Bakhtin and his circle: "Bakhtin reminds students of language how much every word they utter contains the words of others, how much they unconsciously reproduce the speech [...]. For Bakhtin, context is text" (Kramsch & McConnell-Ginet, 1992, p. 12).

Foreign language researchers today more and more often and consistently recognize that concept of culture in foreign language learning is closely connected to issues of identity. Suresh Canagarajah (2004) writes: "What motivates the learning of the language is the construction of the identities we desire and the communities we want to join in order to engage in communication and social life" (p. 117). Bonny Norton and Kelleen Toohey (2004) in their introduction to *Critical Pedagogies and Language Learning* set the themes by claiming that "language is not simply a means of expression, rather, it is a practice that constructs, and is constructed by the ways language learners

understand themselves, their social surroundings, their histories, and their possibilities for future" (p. 1).

Traditional communicative approaches recommended learning a language "under a foreign identity"; for example, in role plays the learner had to choose an identity of someone from a foreign culture, as different from his own as possible, in order to "free" oneself from the constraints imposed by existing identity and engage into play. Immersion programs consider banning L1 in foreign language classroom as one of the most effective techniques. Today, some researchers attempt to demonstrate that focusing on L2 alone is neither necessary, nor desirable. Julie Beltz (2002), for example, argues that language learner's identity is hybrid in nature, and that L1 may provide an insight into how "multicompetent language users inhabit and relate to a pluralistic, multilingual world" (p. 216).

Critique of idealizing native speaker. Building up her ideas about text as context, Kramsch also argues against the ideal of a native speaker. In her multiple critiques of the communicative approach she states that it "made language-learning settings a hostage of a questionable ideal of mainstream native speaker socialization" (Kramsch & McConnell-Ginet, 1992, p.11). In her argument, Kramsch refers to Fillmore's "incarnation theory" (Fillmore, 1979, p.13). "Incarnation theory" basically states that if a minor god would wish to pass as a member of human community, it would need to know the sociocultural contexts of the community inside and out in order to constrain itself enough not to give away its divine origin. The point that Kramsch emphasizes is that it is impossible to completely constrain one's origin and no language course can provide the learners with the complete knowledge of the sociocultural contexts of the foreign country. Moreover,

native-likeness is not always desirable. Kramsch explains that the goal is not to learn sociocultural contexts inside out, but to understand that they are central to knowing the language (not grammar rules). The teacher's goal then is not to set the ideal of a native speaker, but to try and make learners more culturally sensitive.

Once again relying on Bakhtinian dialogic framework and the idea of language as a mediator between conventionality and creativity, Kramsch offers that dialogue, and not individual performance, is a measure of communicative competence: "If we take the locus of the non-native speaker as a point of departure, rather than fixed linguistic rules of the text or the socially conventionalized patters of the context, we can reinstate the power of the individual speaker to shape his environment in dialogue with other speakers" (Kramsch & McConnell-Ginet, 1992, p. 13).

Julie Beltz explains the phenomenon of idealizing native speaker in foreign language instruction by the influence of modern rational thought: "Since the learner is measured against the objective and unitary grammatical competence of an L2 native speaker, he or she is necessarily an inherently deficient communicator" (Beltz, 2002, p. 212). Beltz argues that the deficient communicator is a myth produced by viewing code switching, or the use of the first language in the foreign language classroom, as a cause of underdeveloped grammatical and communicative competence. She cites several research studies that show that the use of L1 in the classroom can be interpreted as a conscious discourse strategy of multilingual speakers, that they use to aid comprehension, collaborate during group work, and explain grammar. Beltz paints a picture of the learner as a "multicompetent language user who carefully and consciously uses multiple

linguistic codes not necessarily for reasons of deficiency and failure, but rather to play, represent, experiment, create, juxtapose, learn and grow" (2002, p. 217).

The importance of the re-conceptualization of "native speaker" in foreign language learning and teaching has also been emphasized as a result of the recognition that the concept of native standard language (NSL) is problematic itself. Via a sociolinguistic lens NSL is problematic because it fails to account for the variation present in all languages and among "native speakers" of those languages. For example, French language in Quebec and in Paris are quite different, but they are both French language. This issue becomes the theme of the volume recently edited by Carl Blyth (2003). The author of the first article in this volume, Robert Train, suggests that because of problematic nature of NSL, language teachers should abandon the role of a "model," and instead become "cultural informants" who promote "critical language awareness" to their students (Sadler, 2003).

And yet another way to look at "nativeness" is offered in the research literature dedicated to the study of bilingualism. As summarized by Guadalupe Valdâes, this research concludes: "bilinguals unavoidably vary in their productive and receptive abilities in both languages" (Valdâes, 1993, p.9-10). In other words, since it is impossible to be equally proficient in two or more languages, we can consider an individual bilingual if s/he uses two languages, regardless of proficiency and circumstances. For my research, this would mean that the second year students of Russian could be viewed as bilingual individuals, and their knowledge of Russian language as a functional ability to participate (in various shapes and forms) in the Russian speaking community.

Critique of views on diversity and multicultural education. Another conversation that I was able to track in the literature and see as important to both the development and positioning of my study is a conversation about the views on diversity and multicultural education in American society and how these views are reflected in the practices of foreign language learning and teaching. This conversation can be most closely attributed to critical pedagogy, which sees the role of education not only as a reflection of social order but also as an instrument of social change. As Allan Luke (2004) put it, critical pedagogy argues that despite the efforts of promoting diversity and multiculturalism, "teaching remains about, within, and for the nation, tacitly about the protection and production of its Culture (and, by implication, its preferred ethnicities and races, languages and codes) and committed to the production of its sovereign subjects" (p. 24).

Ryuko Kubota (2004) in her "Critical multiculturalism and second language education" provides an insight into this problem by identifying three perspectives on multicultural education: conservative, liberal, and critical. Conservative perspective defends Euro-centric modes of thinking proclaiming European model as a norm and defining everyone else in the world against it. Liberal perspective reflects the famous American "melting pot" mentality. It is built on superficial views on diversity of which everyone is expected to approve, emphasizing common humanity and natural equality across race, class and gender. It argues that there is only one race – human race, which produces color (or difference) blindness. Critical perspective conceptualizes culture as dialectical and full of inherent tensions rather then as an orderly, coherent, and predictable system. It emphasizes that social transformation is needed to reach the social

justice and equality. It advocates multicultural education for all students, not just for minority students, who may need to raise their self-esteem.

My Voice

I see my position in the conversations I described as being mostly defined by the focus and nature of my research, and not by my personal beliefs on how a foreign language is learned. A research statement in Lantolf and Pavlenko (2001) describes my goals as well:

> We do not want to dispute the legitimacy of the scientific method and its extensions into social sciences ... However, we believe that there is also much to be gained by considering the relevance of an alternative approach to research – an approach sometimes referred to as the hermeneutic tradition (p. 141).

The qualitative nature of my study and its research focus on individuals in the context of social activity (foreign language learning) puts me into the sociocultural camp. Realization of the complexity of the foreign language learning phenomenon drives me to look for complex and dynamic constructs of learning, culture and identity. In short, I find my voice developing within the "new directions" of sociocultural theory, because they give me tools and a philosophy to learn as much as possible about foreign language learning from the learner's perspective.

Outline of the Chapters to Come

This dissertation study consists of nine chapters. After providing the problem and purpose statements followed by situating this study within the wide range of literature in

the first chapter, in the second chapter I take a more focused approach to positioning my work among the current perspectives by elaborating on my theoretical framework, which included such tools as sociocultural theory, Bakhtinian dialogic views, and constructs of social practice, culture, and identity. Chapter three is dedicated to the description of the qualitative method that shaped my formulation and presentation of the phenomenon, the case that framed it, the research questions, and the procedures of data collection and analysis. Chapter four sets the scene for the following four findings chapters. It is intended to give the reader a sense of the classroom where the study was conducted and also the understanding of how my research questions and theoretical focus have evolved during my presence in the Russian 202 classroom. In the process of data collection and analysis I arrived at two big themes that seemed to work as preliminary assertions and later organized my whole study. First of all, students often talked about norms and rules of communication in classroom activities, which turned my attention to classroom culture and social actions that students carried out in its context. Chapter five presents my findings related to this theme. Secondly, students seemed to take contextual and cultural work related to studying Russian outside of the classroom. This finding allowed me to conceive of students' foreign language learning as a unique practice of dialogic participation in social contexts that are much broader than the classroom. Chapter six elaborates on social contexts that my participants described as related to their foreign language use, whereas chapter seven describes some possibilities of the identity work that my participants engaged in. Chapter eight is an "overflow" chapter, which makes an emphasis on dialogic nature of human interactions often following the monologic genres established by the societal tradition, and intends to engage the reader in a Bakhtinian

discussion of monologic and dialogic aspects of constructing cultural knowledge. Chapter nine concludes my dissertation with a summary of the findings, implications, and ideas for future research.

CHAPTER TWO:

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The main theoretical tools that I used in this dissertation study were (a) sociocultural theory, (b) Bakhtinian views on discourse, dialogue, and monologue, (c) social practice as applied to language learning, (d) culture, and (e) identity. As my literature review showed, these tools have a history of controversial interpretations in the field of educational research. The purpose of this chapter is to further clarify my conceptualization of these terms in the context of this study.

Sociocultural Theory

As I pointed out in my literature review, sociocultural theory has a history that allows for its multiple interpretations. I also noted that I position myself within the new developments of sociocultural theory, viewing societal categories such as practice, culture, and identity as rather fluid categories that are being constantly co-constructed in the hybridity of everyday life. However, there are two potentially confusing points that I would like to clarify here: socialization as a social phenomenon and my connection of sociocultural theory to its principle theorist, Lev Vygotsky.

As I have noted earlier and will again show in the context of my findings, language socialization as a theoretical concept was originally developed in the context of an "older" sociocultural tradition embedded in sociolinguistics of Hymes and Heath. According to these researchers, learning a language is a part of becoming a member of society, coming to share its rather static set of meanings, values, beliefs, and norms. One

of the theoretical goals of my study is to problematize such an understanding of socialization and to try to imagine it as a more fluid, dynamic and multidimensional phenomena. However, in my study language socialization often became a theory of how a language is learned that my participants developed in the interviews. As such a theory, socialization was rather consistent with its "older" sociolinguistic representation. The students I talked to expressed the opinions that the language can truly be learned only inside of its country by coming to understand the true meanings of the natives. They also stated that their goal was perfection in Russian. I approached these findings from two directions: (a) I tried to show that students' static socialization theories were not stable beliefs, but rather a dialogic reflection on available social discourses, and (b) I tried to show how their language learning was a much more complex practice than taking on the static set of meanings that they attributed to Russian. Since I do see this flow of sociocultural understanding of language socialization in my study as rather confusing, I tried to reflect it in the following chain of explanations:

1. I initially encountered the concept of language socialization in "older" sociocultural traditions developed within American sociolinguistics of the seventies.
2. In the process on my study I came to understand language socialization as a complex, dynamic and multidimensional construct and theoretically moved myself into the camp of "newer" developments within sociocultural theory.
3. I once again encountered a static concept of language socialization in the theories of how a language is learned developed by my participants in the interviews.

4. I looked at the "older" theories that my participants developed in the interviews through the lens of "newer" sociocultural developments, and was able to imagine my participants' language learning experiences as a complex practice of individual interpretation of the societal discourses.

Even though I position myself within the "newer" developments of sociocultural theory, I consider my study sociocultural mainly because I built it on my understanding of the ideas of its founder, Lev Vygotsky. As I understand it from reading Vygotsky, cognition is mediated through language, and language is a system of meanings that are embedded in sociocultural contexts. I believe that a sociocultural context is both a very local and complex theoretical concept for Vygtosky. Sociocultural contexts do not simply exist, they are co-constructed by their participants. One's interaction within them is individually unique and can take many forms. Vygotsky's theory helps me understand (a) in response to which sociocultural contexts my participants make sense of their language learning experiences, (b) how they co-construct these contexts, and (c) their interaction within these sociocultural contexts as fluid and constantly evolving. In order to understand the nature of these phenomena even deeper, I turn to another Russian writer, a literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin.

My familiarity with how Vygotsky's thought has been applied to the field of second language acquisition comes from James Lantolf's conceptualization of activity theory. James Lantolf, working with a number of colleagues, has been very active in theoretical aspects of this conceptualization and also in conducting and editing studies that fit under the umbrella of activity theory in language learning. These studies set the task "to explore the implications of Vygotsky's theory in its contemporary formulation, the

activity theory, for understanding the nature of the relationship between real individuals and languages other than their first" (Lantolf, 2001, p. 143). It is important to the authors of these studies to understand language learners as people, unique and individual, and the activity of language learning as "developing, or failing to develop, new ways of mediating ourselves and our relationships to other and ourselves" (rather than simply acquisition of forms) (Lantolf, 2001, p. 145).

I anticipate that my reader may find my thinking rather consistent with that of Lantolf and his colleagues. However, I believe that limiting my theoretical framework to Lantolf's conceptualization of activity theory or making myself its follower in general is not beneficial for my study. Activity theory often operates with "older" socialization terms, such as community of practice, peripheral and legitimate participation, zone of proximal development, inner speech, etc. My main hesitation is that activity theory views community as a rather stable entity and human interaction within it as dialectical: "a dialectic struggle between the learner and the community out of which emerges the learner's position and identity" (Lantolf, 2001, 149). From my knowledge of philosophy, I understand "dialectical" relationship as the one that brings opposites to constituting a whole, tensions to agreement. My goals in this study is (a) to describe communities of practice (primarily, classroom) as simply the contexts for understanding the meanings of students' actions within them, and not as something that shape or define these meanings, and (b) to show students relationship with the communities of practice (now understood in a lot broader sense than the classroom) as dialogic, and not dialectical. In order to achieve these goals, I believe that I will have to add some theoretical tools to the activity theory arsenal (Bakhtinian discourse, dialogue, and monologue) and carefully describe

my understanding of others (practice, culture, and identity). Whether or not such perspective is helpful and how it can be used, I leave completely for consideration of my reader, who I think of as a free author of my text acting in his own uniquely woven universe of discourses.

Bakhtinian Discourse, Monologue and Dialogue

Discourse is an important theoretical construct in my study. The term discourse has multiple meanings. Mostly generally defined, discourse is a collection of statements that circulate in particular societies (Mills, 2004). Mills approaches discourse from the perspectives of various authors, including Mikhail Bakhtin. Bakhtin emphasizes the dialogical nature of discourse: discourses do not exist in the isolation, but always in relation, contrast or opposition to other discourses. At this point separating myself from Mills, I would like to elaborate on complexity of Bakhtinian understanding of dialogue and monologue in discourses. Whereas he deeply investigates the nature of human interactions as dialogic, he also points out that the prevailing traditions of western discourses are built on monologue. In a monologic tradition the relationship between two people are described as subject-object. The subject usually conveys the truth to the object. Monologue thus becomes a synonym of agreement on a final meaning, the truth. Bakhtin notes that the more established a particular society is, the more monologic are the interactions in it. Thus it is important to distinguish between monologue as a cultural tradition of human interaction and dialogue as its nature. The relationship between two people in a dialogue is subject-subject; the meanings are never finalized and determined. Bakhtin writes that the dialogic nature of human interaction best shines through the

monologic tradition during big changes in established societies and during the formation of the new ones, as for example, during Russia's turn to capitalism at the end of the nineteenth century. This analysis comes out in Bakhtin's works on Dostoyevsky, a Russian author who wrote most of his novels about that time (Bakhtin, 1984)[2]. In relation to my study, I will be identifying societal discourses that my participants interact with using the idea of a monologic tradition, whereas I will be trying to analyze the interactions themselves as dialogic, i.e., complex, dynamic, and constantly evolving.

Dialogue, as a theoretical concept, has a very rich history. Nicholas Burbules (2000) provided a summary of six distinct conceptualization of dialogue in education and based on them identified three broad ways that different models of dialogue attempted to address diversity: pluralism (or "melting pot" ideal), multiculturalism (or ideal of celebrating differences), and cosmopolitanism (or model of unreconciled coexistence of diverse cultures). According to Burbules, all conceptualizations of dialogue view it as a tool for reaching consensus, except for cosmopolitanism. Cosmopolitanism, on the other extreme, rejects the value of engagement altogether (Burbules, 2000). The debates about usefulness of various forms of the dialogue became one of the central issues in contemporary education.

With this dissertation, I will probably join in these debates through my readers. This is why it important for me to state here that I do not support or disregard any of the views described above. As it relates to dialogue, the goal of my work was to understand the nature of human interaction in one local site and not to provide any models for teaching practice. I believe that models, theories and practice prescriptions based on

[2] The 1984 text is a translation of *Problemi Poetiki Dostoyevskogo*, Moscow, 1963. The original publication was *Problemi Tvorchestva Dostoyevskogo*, Leningrad, 1929.

philosophical ideas can be limiting and unfaithful to these ideas, because their realization is inevitably local, and local is inevitably unique. I believe that this is what happened in many cases to activity theory which was built with the ideas of Lev Vygotsky: an idea calling for human thought and creativity was masked by readily available prescriptions, and the very nature of schooling and teaching changed very little.

I was hoping that the reader would think with me about the nature of human interaction. In my study and from my understanding of Bakhtinian thought, it comes out that consensus, so valued in other dialogic models, is the opposite of a truly dialogic mind. Dialogue does not know consensus: if a consensus is reached, what is there left to talk about? Constant disagreement does not become an ideal here; the key is that talk, conversations, or discourses (whatever we call them) always happen in many planes individually identified by humans in an infinitely stratified society.

Bakhtin distinguishes between external and internal dialogue (he also calls it macro and micro dialogue, or staged and real dialogue – translation is mine). I will first focus on external dialogue, and then try to connect it to my understanding of internal dialogue and how both figure out in my study. External dialogue consists of words that people say out loud among each other in various social contexts. These social contexts serve as a key to understanding the social actions that people's words only mediate. I believe that it is crucial to understand words as mediators of social actions embedded in meaningful contexts. I will attempt to explain what I mean by this statement by providing an excerpt from Dostoyevsky's novel *Idiot* that Bakhtin heavily relied on in building his dialogic theory:

"I would like you," she [Aglaya] said, "not to come here tomorrow until evening, when the guests are all assembled. You know there are to be guests, don't you?"

...

"Yes, I am invited," he [Myshkin] replied.

...

"I do not wish to quarrel with them about this; in some things they won't be reasonable. ... How mean it all is, and how foolish! We were always middle-class, thoroughly middle-class, people. Why should we attempt to climb into the giddy heights of the fashionable world? ..."

"Listen to me, Aglaya," said the prince [Myshkin], "I do believe you are nervous lest I shall make a fool of myself tomorrow at your party?"

"Nervous about you?" Aglaya blushed. "Why should I be nervous about you? What would it matter to me if you were to make ever such a fool of yourself? How can you say such a thing? What do you mean by 'making a fool of yourself'? What a vulgar expression! I suppose you intend to talk in that sort of way tomorrow evening? Look up a few more such expressions in your dictionary; do, you'll make a grand effect! I'm sorry that you seem to be able to come into a room as gracefully as you do; where did you learn the art? Do you think you can drink a cup of tea decently, when you know everybody is looking at you, on purpose to see how you do it?"

...

"Do you know what, I had better not come at all tomorrow! I'll plead sick-list and stay away," said the prince, with decision.

...

"Oh, my goodness! Just listen to that! 'Better not come,' when the party is on purpose for him! Good Lord! What a delightful thing it is to have to do with such a - such a stupid person as you are!"

"Well, I'll come, I'll come," interrupted the prince, hastily, "and I'll give you my word of honor that I will sit the whole evening and not say a word."

"I believe that's the best thing you can do. You said you'd 'plead sick-list' just now; where in the world do you get hold of such expressions? Why do you talk to me like this? Are you trying to irritate me, or what?"

"Forgive me, it's a schoolboy expression. I won't do it again. I know quite well, I see it, that you are anxious on my account (now, don't be angry), and it makes me very happy to see it. You wouldn't believe how frightened I am of misbehaving somehow, and how glad I am of your instructions. But all this panic is simply nonsense, you know, Aglaya! I give you my word it is; I am so pleased that you are such a child, such a dear good child. How charming you can be if you like, Aglaya."

...

"And you won't reproach me for all these rude words of mine -some day - afterwards?" she asked, of a sudden.

(Dostoyevsky, Idiot, part 4, chapter 4; or chapter 44 in electronic version available at http://www.online-literature.com/dostoevsky/idiot/44/)

In this dialogue Myshkin is seemingly being humiliated by Aglaya, who hates the idea of showing the prince to the high society as her possible future husband. Aglaya is

more than rude and very much distressed in her talk, Myshkin, on the other hand, seems to enjoy every moment of the conversation, which he concludes with translating Aglaya's words into her social action: she loves him and is dearly worried about him and their future. This ability to see social actions beyond words, or, to paraphrase it, to see words in their inseparability with social actions that they convey, is a hallmark characteristic of a number of Dostoyevsky's key personages. The ideological content of these personages was central to the concept of a dialogical narrative, so skillfully described by Mikhail Bakhtin in "Problems of Dostoyevsky's Poetics."

Let me now turn to the idea of internal dialogue. According to Bakhtin, people's thinking is always a process of interacting with multiple social sources. The meanings formulated in this process are never final; they are constantly evolving and unpredictably unique. People formulate meanings in external dialogues in response to particular social contexts formed by participants and conditions, following their interpretation of the rules of the present cultural tradition of interaction. In the process of these external formulations internal meanings change, but not only in response to these external factors. They change in response to many social sources that each person individually and uniquely constructs around him/herself.

Such understanding of internal dialogue, combined with Vygotskian idea of practice, helps me to conceive of cultural contexts related to foreign language learning as constructed through an individual practice that students engage in on a much broader scale than the classroom. External dialogue helps me understand teacher-students interaction in the classroom as socially limited by participants' roles that they attribute to this local context.

Foreign Language Learning as a Social Practice

My initial understanding of practice comes from reading Lev Vygotsky. As I understand it from his works, practice is organization of cognition, and consequently a social activity. Conceived as a practice in this sense, foreign language learning in a college course is organization of one's thinking in a way that results in the social activities of taking a foreign language class and looking for other opportunities to use the language of choice.

It is important for me to view practice as a social act that is performed in response to the "other" and is conceived by the actor as an interaction, and not as isolated action. I derived this understanding of practice from the works of George Herbert Mead, Lev Vygotsky, and Mikhail Bakhtin. Viewing practice as an interaction, as response to something and someone will help me to understand in what societal discourses and events students participate in (to which of them they respond) in their practice of learning a foreign language.

In traditional socialization studies practice as a term has a different meaning. The difference lays in the fact that practice is attributed first of all to a community, a culture, and not to an individual learner. In this sense practices are cultural and defined as "meaningful actions that occur routinely in everyday life, are widely shared by members of the group, and carry with them normative expectations about how things should be done" (Goodnow, Miller, & Kessel, 1995, p. 1). The problem that I have applying this definition to the context of my study is in the fact that participation in the community that I observe, namely the classroom, does not provide me with answers to what foreign

language learning means to the students. Even though the actions that occur there routinely seem meaningful and shared by the members, in each interview that I have conducted so far, the nature of the practice of learning Russian was individually interpreted by the students as embedded in deeper social contexts – discourses that vary in every case. On another level, I do believe that foreign language students indirectly participate in the practices of the community of the target language that they study. This participation comes from their understanding of foreign culture obtained inside and outside of the classroom. However, just as in the case of classroom practices, the practices of the foreign culture and participation in them seem to be individually interpreted in broader social contexts.

These findings lead me to shift the focus of my interpretive lens from the practices of a classroom as a culture to the individual practice of the students. I believe that foreign language for my participants "is not simply a means of expression, rather, it is a **practice** that constructs, and is constructed by the ways language learners understand themselves, their social surroundings, their histories, and their possibilities for future" (Norton & Toohey, 2004, p. 1).

Culture

The sociocultural tradition emphasizes social aspects of human knowledge and activity, and close relationship between culture and language. Within sociocultural tradition it is now common to distinguish, as I already mentioned, between "older" and "newer" notions of culture. The older notion of culture views beliefs and other psychological constructs are static, existing in the culture and affecting cultural practice,

defined as a noun. This older notion is usually attributed to such authors as Hymes and Heath. The newer notions of culture claim that meaning and cultural practices, psychological constructs and societal categories (such as race, class and gender) do not exist, but are being constantly constructed in the hybridity of everyday life.

In my research, I prepared to see culture as a societal category that does not exist, but is constantly constructed in the hybridity of everyday life. However, just as in the case with language socialization, my participants tended to talk about culture as a rather static phenomenon, a set of beliefs and norms. A Bakhtinian view of discourse that I described above helped me understand such representations of culture as reflecting on a monological tradition of human interaction. Thus, "cultural context" in my work will usually signify the participants' interpretation of such in their attempt to describe a coherent "package" in our conversations. Combining a monological tradition with understanding human thinking as dialogic in nature, I came to understand culture as a narrative that is being constantly produced, a voice in a dialogue, searching for coherence in multiple discourses. I arrived at understanding culture as a textual fluid narrative, deeply imbedded in an ideological environment.

With this view of culture I imagine myself joining a long history of denying a genetic view of culture as some traits that are biologically inherited and define the mental capabilities of ethnic and racial groups. Navigating through cultural determinism and structuralism, I find myself focusing on social contexts, but with the individual in the center. Moving beyond Hymes and Heath, I overcome the value, stability, and romanticism of the tradition. Tradition, or established cultural practice, focuses on social rather than biological aspects of human lives, but understands them as a "neat package"

and thus contributes to predetermining, reproducing, and labeling individuals as members of social groups. I join the dialogue of "ideational" theories of culture (Gonzalez, Moll, Amanti, 2005, p. 33) and build my understanding of culture as a symbolic interactive system drawing from anthropological tradition of Geertz. It is also Geertz, to whom I can track my focus on textual nature of culture as a narrative, further transformed to a voice in a dialogue, drawing from Bakhtin.

Textual and ideological nature of my concept of culture helps me shift the focus on symbolic systems available to certain individuals, language, of course, being the most important one. Within these systems, there are different systems of value for knowledge and ability. Fluidity of culture helps me picture individuals and their interpretation of symbolic systems as an open, changing process, where human thought is socially bounded, but free. People search for coherence, in individual ways navigating through available discourses. I believe that understanding culture as a search for coherence in a dialogue, an inquiry (Gonzalez et al., p. 39) is an idea that can help keep an open mind about the "other," and help people think about their cultural attributions and teachings.

Identity

Identity is a controversial theoretical construct that I need to clarify for my study. As I indicate in my literature review, there are several views of identity. Staying consistent with the representations of language socialization and culture that came out in my interviews, I could also see that traditional understandings of a cultural identity as a social role widely applied to my case. My participants talked about themselves (labeled themselves) as "students," "teacher," "Americans," "Russians," "white," etc. They

sometimes explained their own behavior and behavior of others by the social roles that they assumed in various situations. For example, not confronting a teacher's view could be explained by being a "student," being late could be explained by being a "Russian." In my understanding, social roles are ways of participating in (identifying with) societal discourses. I believe that the uniqueness of this identification with societal discourses can help me peek into the constantly evolving construct of Self. For example, I could identify a societal discourse of how a foreign language is learned in the classroom. This discourse was present in the classroom (site that is observable to me) in a way that prescribed certain student and teacher roles. Instead of assuming that roles (cultural identities) explained the nature of participation in this discourse, I approached this participation as many possibilities, for example, of compliance, struggle, and opposition. Then I tried to analyze such ways of participation as related to other societal discourses that the students seemed to be engaged in according to our conversations outside of the classroom.

In sum, I analyzed identity as a construct evident in my interviews with participants operating within monologic traditions of human interaction. As already mentioned, such a construct usually depends on traditional social roles understood by means of etic labels conveyed through language (e.g., student, teacher, American, parent, child). I define Self as the emic content of etc labels. In other words, Self is a unique interpretation (constantly evolving in social contexts) of what it means to be someone, for example, a student, an American, an English language speaker, and a Russian language speaker at the same time.

As I hoped to show in this chapter, my conceptualizations of the sociocultural theory, the Bakhtinian views, the social practice, culture, and identity provided me with the theoretical tools that allowed me to approach my phenomenon as fluid, dynamic, and constantly evolving. The next chapter will describe the methodological tools that helped me fulfill this approach in a research study.

CHAPTER THREE:

METHOD

Phenomenon and Case

The phenomenon that I studied can be introduced as learning a foreign language in a sociocultural sense outside of a country associated with that language. I believe that a second year Russian language university classroom is an extremely interesting backdrop for my phenomenon. The United States and Russia have a long history of a politically and economically complex relationship. Russia is now a developing democratic culture that attracts a lot of attention on the world arena. Russian literature and history, as well as stereotypical representations of reality, are quite popular. All these factors constitute a significant symbolic capital that somehow should figure into the relationship between language and culture that I am interested in.

The choice of the particular classroom as a case that would flesh out my phenomenon of interest was influenced by factors of familiarity and accessibility. I am a native speaker of Russian and know English, but no other languages. I taught Russian language at my university prior to admission to the doctoral program in education. I know the university teachers of Russian and I am familiar with the program. In their fourth semester of learning Russian, the students are still working toward a widely accepted two-year foreign language requirement and can be assumed to have developed a certain degree of familiarity with both Russian language and culture, as well as the process of studying them.

Research Questions

The main research question of this study is: "What does it mean to learn Russian in a sociocultural sense outside of Russia, in fact, in a classroom in a large public university in the Midwest?"

Various dimensions of this question were becoming clear to me as a researcher in the process of data collection and analysis. Following the recommendation for qualitative researchers (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Dyson & Genishi, 2005) I entered my site in January of 2004 with the intent to "hang loose" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, p.49). I was observing classroom events and activities, alert to patterns concerning how students connect language learning to Russian culture, and how both can be described. At that time, I was inspired by language socialization studies (Ochs & Schieffelin, 1995), developments in sociolinguistic theory associated with such names as Hymes, Heath, Mehan, and Cazden, and constructivist views tracking back to the works of Vygotsky. All these sources, explaining language learning as a process of socialization into certain cultures and speech communities, made me curious about applying this concept to a classroom, where society, or authentic speech communities, are not immediately present.

I identified potential socialization agents in the classroom, defining them as sources of familiarizing oneself with Russian culture. My list of socialization agents included the textbook with its references to cultural realia[3] in Russia (for example, a short passage about how to buy tickets in a Russian Movie theatre), the teacher, who was a Russian national and often provided descriptions of Russian life in the context of classroom activities, additional classroom materials (for example, a children's book or a

[3] Realia - objects or activities used to relate classroom teaching to the real life especially of peoples studied (source: Merriam-Webster online).

literary text), a Russian drama movie that students watched and discussed from time to time, and the classroom itself where students spoke Russian and English to each other and the teacher. However, I was quickly realizing, as I hope to show with my findings, that students did not perceive what I conceptualized as socialization agents as a representation of a community that they were joining. The relationship between language and culture seemed to be rather complex.

Two large patterns that came out in the process of data analysis were a student-led focus on grammar in almost all classroom activities and a variety of opinions when it came to talk about Russia. This made me wonder about the location and nature of what I was trying to conceive of as culture. At this time in my readings I turned to pieces incorporating postmodernist understanding of culture as a complex, negotiated, and dynamic. In the further process of observing lessons and interviewing six students and the teacher, I came to understand that Russian culture couldn't be conceived of as an objective unitary reality that the students are supposed to be socialized into. Rather, it can be described as a complex and dynamic discursive construct.

Thus, my sub-questions were built around methodological constructs of culture and practice that I initially had planned to use as an etic theoretical frame. How can Russian culture be described in an emic sense in the context of my classroom? What is the nature of the learning practice students engage in both inside and outside of the classroom? The goal of my study is to unpack the local meanings of these constructs while also describing my journey of understanding how learning a foreign language is connected to culture.

Data Collection

Timeframe. By the end of 2005 I had spent three semesters in the Russian language classroom. I would like to think about these three semesters as three stages of my research: a pilot study, formal data collection period, and maintaining connection during data analysis and write-up.

What I now consider to be my pilot study was a project for a class on qualitative methods of research. In the spring of 2004 I observed a second year Russian language classroom that consisted of 19 students, 10 male and 9 female. The class met four times a week, but I observed only two times a week. In addition to classroom observations I conducted interviews with the teacher, Rimma, and two students, Foma and Grigory, whom I selected as key informants.

The spring semester of 2005 was the period of formal data collection. This time I again observed a second year classroom, taught by the same teacher, Rimma. (I wanted to continue observing students who participated in my pilot study at their third year, but there was an irresolvable schedule conflict.) This classroom consisted of 27 students, 14 male and 13 female. I observed four times a week, i.e., I observed every session during a full semester. My key informants became Michael, Jacob, and Sophia. Yuri, who was in this classroom, offered me an interview, which I conducted in summer during a study abroad trip to Russia.

In the fall of 2005 I visited a combined third and fourth year classroom that consisted of the students from my first and second semesters of observations, but only those who moved beyond a two year foreign language requirement, had longer requirements, or made Russian their major. This classroom again consisted of 27

students, 14 male and 13 female. Foma, Grigory, Michael and Yuri were in this classroom. Sophia and Jacob couldn't continue because third year Russian didn't count towards any of their requirements and they could not afford to take it as an additional load. Sophia stopped by the classroom occasionally to meet up with her friends and eagerly talked to me. Jacob was taking a semester off, but kept in touch with me through e-mail. This classroom had a different teacher, James. There were three class sessions per week, but I visited it only from time to time. The purpose of doing so was to maintain contact with my key informants and get an idea of what happens past the second year of learning Russian in a classroom.

Key informants. Altogether, I had six key informants for my study: Foma, Grigory, Sophia, Jacob, Michael, and Yuri. I have selected these students based on criteria of internal sampling (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, p. 61). All these students sat close enough to my researcher's corner so that I could observe them during class and hear everything they said. All of them exhibited talk and behavior that triggered my interest in terms of insights into my research agenda. And finally, all of these students were willing to talk to me and participate in my study.

All of my key informants (as well as all other students in the class) were white Caucasians. Five of them were male, with Sophia being the only female participant. My key informants were not a group of friends; rather, they could be described as classmates. As classmates, they provided interesting accounts of each other and other class members' behavior and talk that I observed during class sessions. None of them had any Russian heritage; none of them had been to Russia before they started studying Russian language. Four of them went to Russia as participants of a Study Abroad program that I

coordinated. Even though visiting Russia was not my selection criteria, the information obtained in Russia gave me an idea of how these students extended their experiences inside and outside of the classroom in America to traveling to Russia.

The following table is intended to clarify when I observed which students and when the interviews happened:

Key informants	Semester observed	Trips to Russia	Interviews
Foma	Spring 2004 Fall 2005	Summer 2005	Spring 2004 Summer 2005
Grigory	Spring 2004 Fall 2005	Summer 2004	Spring 2004
Sophia	Spring 2005	Never	Spring 2005
Jacob	Spring 2005	Never	Spring 2005
Michael	Spring 2005 Fall 2005	Summer 2004	Spring 2005
Yuri	Spring 2005 Fall 2005	Summer 2005	Summer 2005

It's important to mention here that due to the process of data reduction only four of my key participants are consistently present in this study: Foma, Jacob, Michael, and Sophia. These were the people that I spent most time with and with whom I was able to establish the best contact.

Observations and fieldnotes. During all class sessions that I observed, I took detailed notes that were later written up as fieldnotes (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Dyson & Genishi, 2005; Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995). The fieldnotes focused on behavior and talk that I observed in the classroom coming from my key informants and the teacher, or directed to my key informants and the teacher. It was my intent to briefly describe the different activities that took place in the classroom, for example, grammar explanations and exercises, practicing dialogues, teacher's mini-lectures about Russian culture, etc. I

tried to describe events that were related to Russian culture more thoroughly. For each observation I tried to provide a short description of the physical setting of the classroom, including seating patterns and positions of the desks. When it seemed relevant, I jotted down the portraits of participants, including their dress, hair, and postures. In addition, I paid attention to informal interactions before, during, and after class. In the process of writing up fieldnotes I tried to be very explicit about my own reactions to what happened, addressing the issues of researcher's reflexivity.

Besides classroom observations, my fieldnote entries also included conversations that happened with my participants outside of classroom, for example, when I ran into them by chance in the cafeteria and other places.

Interviews. I have conducted interviews (that I often refer to as conversations) with all of my key informants and also with their teacher. For the teacher I developed a set of questions that focused on her rational for including classroom activities and also on her interpretations of students' reactions to them. When interviewing the students, I followed the approach of a guided conversation (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Rubin & Rubin, 2005). That is, I encouraged my key informants to talk about their experience of learning Russian inside and outside of the classroom, initially allowing them to define the content of the interview as well as the direction of my study. As the themes of my findings became more salient in the process of an on-going data analysis, I started to probe more deeply for the relevant topics that my subjects brought up. With the exception of the first three interviews conducted during the pilot study, all interviews were audio taped and transcribed. For the first three interviews I took detailed notes that were typed up immediately after the interview took place.

Data Analysis

As mentioned, data analysis was an on-going process that helped shape the direction of my study, final research questions and preliminary assertions. My method of analyzing data was informed by models provided in Bogdan and Biklen (2003), Dyson and Genishi (2005), and Emerson et al. (1995), and included three levels: (a) identification of routine classroom events, (b) thematic organization of the identified classroom events and students' response to them through open coding and writing initial memos, and (c) focused coding of fieldnotes and interview transcripts, writing integrative memos.

At the first level of analysis, I distinguished among several categories of classroom events that repeatedly and systematically took place in the classroom:

1. "Grammar / Vocabulary / Pronunciation related explanations by the teacher." Most of the formal planned explanations centered on grammar, most of the vocabulary and pronunciation explanations were corrective in nature, i.e., they were spurred by what students were trying to say in Russian. The teacher often used Russian realia to explain grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation, for example, a) she encouraged students to guess new meaning based on what they already knew about Russian language and "Russian way of speaking," b) she always tried to show connections between words and their etymology in explaining vocabulary, c) she incorporated examples of how particular grammar structures were used in authentic situations.

2. "Doing textbook exercises as a class." This often happened after grammar explanations or as feedback given after students received their homework back.

3. "Work in pairs." Following the teacher's task, students worked in pairs, most often to practice dialogues from the textbook, discuss a topic assigned by the teacher, or work on a translation together.

4. "Speaking Russian." The teacher sometimes suggested a discussion topic and requested students to speak in Russian. Often "speaking Russian" happened in the beginning of the class in a form of a speech warm-up; sometimes it was facilitated by other class materials and happened anytime during the class.

5. "Using authentic materials." Most often this refers to watching a Russian movie that was broken up into the episodes supplemented with exercises and vocabulary lists. Sometimes the teacher also brought in authentic Russian texts and read them to the students.

6. "Cultural discussions." Usually teacher-led discussions of Russian cultural realia spurred by "using authentic materials." These discussions were mainly in English, sometimes in both Russian and English.

7. "Meaning negotiations." Negotiation of word meanings between the teacher and the students. Because the teacher is a native speaker of Russian, she sometimes asked her students what certain things meant in English.

8. "Classroom management." Homework assignment and feedback, syllabus-related discussions, announcements, cleaning blackboard, etc.

9. "Informal interactions." Informal interactions between students before, during, and after class.

After performing this analysis I turned to the interviews in order to see how my key informants talked about the classroom events and what kind of meaning they

assigned to them. As a result of open coding of the classroom fieldnotes and the transcripts of interviews I developed two major preliminary assertions: a) students assigned grammar-related meanings to most of the classroom activities, even to those that I characterized as culture-related; and b) sociocultural learning seemed to be a taking place on a plane that was much broader than the classroom.

At the stage of focused coding and writing integrative memos I attempted to conceptualize learning Russian as an individual practice of producing cultural meaning, where classroom was assigned the function of supplying the "language base." I focused on variations in students' talk related to cultural meanings, which led me to developing the following themes, which organize my findings chapters:

1. "Language base" that is received in the classroom.

2. Language socialization as something that students look for outside of the classroom.

3. Understanding of Russian culture as an individually constructed narrative.

4. "An American speaker of Russian" (producing cultural meaning of knowing a foreign language).

5. Appropriating societal discourses to produce meaning of learning Russian, Russia as a country, and oneself as an American speaker of Russian.

While this chapter introduced the process of how my research questions and themes evolved in the process of ongoing data analysis, the next chapter will elaborate on this process by bringing in more classroom and theoretical context, thus setting the scene for the chapters to come.

CHAPTER FOUR:

CASING THE JOINT

This chapter starts with a description of one typical day that I spent in my classroom collecting data and interacting with the participants. It then transitions into the explanation of how I was able to relate my theoretical understanding of language socialization to the case, bringing in the first accounts of my participants and theorizing them as participation in societal discourses that I was able to identify.

Description of the site

It's Monday and after I wake up and spend a few hours in front of the computer, it's time to go to the Russian class where I conduct my observations for this study. This is the usual routine of my of my Mondays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays, unless there is a meeting in the morning – then I make it to campus early. The building where the Russian class is held is only a five-minute walk from the college of education, where I have a desk in a grad bay. When I enter the building, I run into a student from the classroom that I observe. He says hello in Russian, and I swallow my American "hi," changing it to Russian "zdravstvuite." He sounds coarse, and I ask him, in Russian, if this weather gave him a cold. He agrees, now in English, elaborating a little bit on the subject. By the end of this unsophisticated conversation we reach the third floor and he opens the staircase door for me. The classroom door is open, most of the students are chatting in their seats, Rimma is handing out homework. When Rimma sees me, she greets me in Russian with a smile. I great her also, making it to my corner, saying hello

in Russian to "my corner" students. Jacob, one of my participants, turns and smiles at me, waving his hand. Michael, another participant, comes over to talk about our next meeting (where I help him with Russian and he helps me with my dissertation).

Rimma, sitting down at the desk in front of the blackboard, asks the students if they are done exchanging social news and starts the lesson. She comments on the homework that she just handed out and leads into reviewing the verb conjugation that caused most of the mistakes. The back door (the classroom has two doors) opens and my third participant, Sophia comes in, apologetically smiling. The classroom is just big enough to fit 27 people; students sit an uneven double semicircle, and the back row is almost touching the wall. All this makes in very hard for Sophia to make it to her usual seat in the middle of the back row, but people move and let her in. Rimma asks Sophia why she is late. Sophia provides and explanation and Rimma comments on how there is always an explanation for being late. At this time Andrey walks in the front door and confidently heads to his seat in the middle of the front row. Rimma inquires about his reasons to interrupt her class.

The class evolves into the grammar explanation on the blackboard, reading dialogs from the textbook and a discussion that Rimma tries to build on the theme of the dialogues – buying movie tickets. Rimma asks the students how often they go to the movie theatres and what movies they've seen recently. From time to time she involves me in the conversation to get another "Russian perspective" either on some aspects of Russian culture or possibilities of sentence construction. I am also sometimes used as a resource by a heritage speaker who usually sits right in front of me. It happens if

someone asks her a question (quietly, during Rimma's explanations or group work) and she is not sure about the answer.

The 50-minute class period flies by, as I am trying to write down as much as possible in my notebook. Apart from what people say, it's important to me to catch if students whisper to each other, what the intonations of their voices are, how they sit today. Usually I have the same people in the same areas, but not seats. Neighbors often change, and I cannot find any consistency or identify relationships among students judging by whom they sit by. Today I will probably have time to type up these notes on the computer right after the class is over and I make it back to my desk. I teach an undergraduate educational psychology class on Mondays and Wednesdays, but that's not until 3pm. Sometimes I meet with Michael or Jacob right after class, and then I have to dedicate quite a bit of time for both typing up the class notes and transcribing my conversations with them. But today shouldn't be busy.

The class ends, but I am still writing as the students pack up and walk out of the class. I am trying to catch the last minute conversations. When everyone leaves, I walk out with Rimma and we talk about the class discussion that she was trying to engage the students in, sliding into the topic of who visited her during the office hours yesterday. I ask a few questions that are of interest to me. These after-class conversations are very valuable to me, and Rimma, with her full to insanity schedule, uses this time to provide me with the information I need, because we both know how hard it is to schedule hour-long interviews. This is probably what I will start my notes with – our conversation, as much as I can retain from it. I can later check with her on the important points that influenced my thinking in this work.

Relating Language Socialization to the Classroom Events and Activities

As I pointed out in the theoretical framework, my understanding of language socialization was initially derived from language socialization studies. In these studies, young children acquire language through participating in social activities, meaningful in the context of particular cultures (Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986). Words thus become not only the means of communication, but, most importantly, the mediators of meaningfulness of the social activities that children participate in.

Language socialization studies, as well as my thinking from early on, were powerfully influenced by Vygotskian views of internalization of mental functions through language in social contexts (Vygotsky, 1962, 1978). As I pointed out in my literature review, many foreign and second language researchers have recently called for our attention to social contexts of classroom and other settings. Because I was interested in language socialization, I first focused my attention on identifying social contexts related to Russian language and culture in classroom events and activities. Later it became obvious to me that (a) in the classroom, contexts of classroom culture were most important in providing meaning to activities through which students acquired foreign language, and (b) outside of the classroom, cultural contexts and activities within which students learned Russian were uniquely constructed by students in response to many social sources. Classroom cultural contexts and unique student practices of constructing cultural and linguistic knowledge became the focus of my study. But to make this narrative consistent, let me describe how my thinking evolved.

While attending a full schedule of Russian 202 it was easy for me to identify routine classroom events and activities. I think that many people who took or taught language classes will recognize them. They included language warm-ups (talking about the weather, a new movie, last night's football game, etc. for about 5 minutes in the beginning of the class), grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation explanations and drills, doing textbook exercises as a class, working in pairs to practice a textbook or teacher assigned dialogue, watching a Russian movie accompanied by vocabulary tasks, class discussions, and taking tests. It also soon became obvious to me that it would be very hard to find a better teacher if I was to look for Russian language and cultural contexts in the classroom. Rimma, a native Russian speaker, provided rich contextual explanations for grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation. For example, when students encountered the word *morning exercise*[4] in a textbook dialogue, she wasn't satisfied with the dictionary translation. She claimed that she thought that morning exercise was "a very Russian thing," and asked the student if they could relate it to any "American things." Rimma also used every opportunity to bring in Russian movies and texts into the classroom, from serious newspaper articles to children's stories.

One "language socialization" practice that received a very distinct, cultural "face" as appropriated by Rimma was giving American students Russian names. Traditionally, this practice serves three purposes: (a) it gives students a chance to get familiar with Russian names, (b) Russian names change according to grammatical categories which provides students with additional practice, and (c) some teachers and researchers believe that foreign names allow foreign language students to adopt a new cultural identity, at the

[4] Italicized text means that the utterance was originally in Russian and was translated into English by the author.

same time freeing them from the identity of a student who is afraid to make a mistake. I believe that Rimma also wanted to bring in Russian cultural contexts into the classroom with Russian names. Rimma allowed students to choose their own Russian names first. If they didn't, she named them herself. For example, one of my participants, Sophia, who did not choose her own name, was named by Rimma after a famous Dostoyevsky's character. Rimma used this opportunity to talk about Russian characters created by Dostoyevsky. Rimma often used various diminutives of Russian names that were chosen by students or assigned to them, also, I believe, in order to "Russianize" classroom communication.

When I started my observations, I thought that using Russian names in such ways was a very creative and effective teaching strategy. To my native ear classroom communication sounded very "Russian," which I attributed to the implemented ways of naming. Can you imagine my surprise when I found out that many students in the classroom not only didn't understand why they were named in a certain way, but often didn't even realize that Rimma was addressing them when she used, and especially varied, diminutives. "I heard her [Rimma] call me that [a diminutive of Jacob's Russian name], it seems like she calls me different variations of that... That's why I often don't know that she is calling on me... She's looking my way, but she says some different name," Jacob told me in the interview. Sophia claimed that she did not like her Russian name because in her mind it associated not with a literature personage, but a real person that she used to know and not like. Foma was probably the only one who stated that he absolutely loved his Russian name and that his goal of learning Russian was to become "Foma." He knew the biblical history of his name and always tried to find out more.

This type of relationship with the name was something that Rimma was clearly looking for, but as I said, Foma was the only one who established it, among all students to whom I talked.

In sum, I was fascinated by how much cultural and language context Rimma was trying to bring into the classroom. I was also fascinated with the seemingly weak response of the students to these efforts. Rimma's enthusiastic questions and cultural inquiries were often met with silence, uneasiness, and lack of enthusiasm.

In the interviews, my participants often talked about receiving a "language base" in the classroom, and rarely mentioned any contextual or cultural knowledge. Most often, they talked about contextual learning as embedded in communication with Russian speakers, existing or projected into the future. Most students seemed to see immersion as the only way to truly learn the language, but did not seem to believe that it was possible to socialize into the language outside of the country where it's spoken. An excerpt from my conversation with Foma demonstrates this finding:

> Foma: I am glad that I waited three years [before coming to Russia]. After three years of studying it's much easier to come here, you know, much, much easier than the first or second year. ... I know I speak only a little bit better, but I understand a lot, lot better. At first, and before I came here, I would listen to each word and then put it together, but now... I am getting more and more into the language, and it's so much fun, so much fun!
>
> Natalia: Yeah, I talked to many people, I think I talked to you about this too... You can't really learn the language being outside the country, right?
>
> Foma: Exactly, exactly!

Natalia: So what was... You know, you said that the three year before really helped. What were those three years?

Foma: The three years, you know, learning the basic rules. ... Knowing the rules helps you understand a little bit more, but now, I know the rules and I know even better the context that they are going to be used in... yeah, that's it! I know now, like being here now, like the context makes a lot more sense, a lot more sense! And that's cool.

Natalia: You know, they try to bring the context into the classroom, and they give you all these texts, and literature, and songs... Do they help at all?

Foma: Yeah, they do a little, but it's no comparison to being here, absolutely no comparison to being here.

Foma described three years of learning Russian in a classroom as a process of acquiring "basic rules." He knew from the beginning that he was learning these rules in order to use them later in Russia. He was "waiting" to grow context on them. From what he knew about classroom and language learning, one "couldn't really learn a language outside of the country." I later concluded that this was why he wasn't looking for this real, contextual learning in the classroom. In another conversation, with Jacob, I received even more support to this finding:

Natalia: So what's your theory of learning the language?

Jacob: I don't know, I think you just kind of get a feel for it. I mean you can't get a feel just studying, but it takes both. For me. I have to study a lot of grammar, but you don't really feel it until... the only way you can feel it is being in that culture extensively. At least probably a year or something like that. Inside

the culture, at least around people who are speaking it... all the time with you... because they say it the way that they say it.

Natalia: I remember when we talked before you said that you couldn't learn Russian in Poland when there were Russians around you, because you didn't have the basis...

Jacob: I didn't have the basis, now I have the basis and I don't have the people (smiles).

Natalia: So you need the basis before you...

Jacob: [joining in] Before you can do it.

Jacob continued to tell me that he didn't learn a lot about culture in the classroom, rather, he went in there in order to be "forced" to learn grammar, because "if you don't take a class, you never find time to do it." When I mentioned a few examples of Rimma's attempts to bring in cultural information to her lessons, he indifferently answered that he "already knew all that," and even if not, it did not interest him. Foma and Jacob, like many other students that I talked to, seemed to limit their work in the classroom to receiving a language base, leaving cultural learning to real and imaginary contexts.

Theorizing Language Base

As it comes out of my observations, foreign language was taught and learned in my focal classroom as a system of linguistic abstractions, or grammatical rules. The cultural form of language education based on grammar rules has roots in Saussure's

linguistics, which divorced "language from its ideological impletion" (Morris, 2002[5], p. 34). Knowing grammar rules seemed to be sufficient for studying "dead" languages, such as Latin. As Voloshinov explains, "any abstraction, if it is to be legitimate, must be justified by some specific theoretical and practical goal," and "at the basis of the modes of linguistic thought that led to the postulation of language as a system of normatively identical forms lies a practical and theoretical focus of attention on the study of defunct, alien languages preserved in written monuments" (Morris, 2002, p. 34). The goal of foreign language education today is rather different, it is acknowledged as active communication with the world's diverse population and learning about each other cultures. However, somehow, language education still seems to be based on Saussure's distinction between grammatical form and meaning.

I am not trying to say here that the methods of teaching a foreign language did not respond to a revolutionized need for foreign languages as means of live communication. They did, but it seems to me that one core issue remained the same: language is not perceived in the classroom as inseparably connected to social actions, and I believe that this leads to confusion with what a truly meaningful, authentic context is. For example, communicative approaches to foreign language learning offer to engage students in authentic dialogues instead of ordering them to repeat grammatical forms over and over again. However, asking students to compose a dialogue between a movie theater clerk and a customer cannot be assumed to represent an authentic social action of buying movie tickets. The social action performed by students as associated with this task in the context of the classroom is quite different.

[5] The *Bakhtinian Reader* published in 1994 by Morris contains excerpts from various Bakhtinian works with Morris's commentaries. I chose to cite this text throughout my dissertation because I read most of Bakhtinian works in Russian and in original publications.

The social actions mediated through routine activities in the classroom (most of which are considered authentic) can be described as language practice. Practicing language forms seems to fit into the genre of teacher-student interactions following the model of Initiation, Response, Evaluation, or IRE (Mehan, 1982; Cazden, 2001). When a student is trying to describe in Russian how she spent her winter break, she does not do it to be understood, she does it in order to practice abstract language forms to the point of their recognition by others. This is what's evaluated – the level of recognition, not understanding. Reading Bakhtin and Voloshinov, I came to see this situation as a conflict with real-life communication, because "the task of understanding does not basically amount to recognizing the form used, but rather to understanding it in particular, concrete context, to understanding its meaning in a particular utterance, i.e., it amounts to understanding its novelty and not to recognizing its identity" (Morris, 2002, p.33).

I would like to warn the reader ahead of time that this study is not designed to provide any prescriptions for foreign language instruction. I am not trying to criticize the foreign language methodology implemented in the curriculum of the classroom under study. But I do want to show you, my reader, how I was able to understand the social work performed in the classroom as deeply rooted in a cultural tradition of classroom teaching and learning which I believe has formed under a strong rationalist and structuralist influence, such as the one attributed to Saussure in linguistics. Indeed, as Voloshinov himself notes, this tradition can be tracked much further than to the Age of Enlightenment, all the way to ancient Romans and Hindus. It seems important to think about how this tradition evolved from "comparison of language to the system of mathematical signs" that is concerned not with "the relationship of the sign to the actual

reality it reflects nor to the individual who is its originator, but the relationship of sign to sign within a closed system already accepted and authorized" (Morris, 2002, p. 29). Language understood as a synchronic closed system of signs had the practical goal to "awaken the dead" (Morris, 2002, p. 34). However, as Voloshinov explains, there is no such thing as dead in language, because "any utterance – the finished, written utterance not excepted – makes response to something and is calculated to be responded to in turn. ... The [written] monument, as any other monologic utterance, is set forward being perceived in the context of current scientific life or current literary affairs, i.e., it is perceived in the generative process of that particular ideological domain of which it is an integral part" (Morris, 2002, p. 35). That is to say that utterances understood in rationalist tradition as monologic (i.e., as grammatical structures with a closed, predefined meanings) are indeed dialogic (i.e., only meaningful in particular present context that is uniquely interpreted by each participant) in nature. Similar to linguistics, European structuralism interpreted other meaning systems as closed, synchronic and universal. The dialogic nature of human thinking remained outside of it.

I believe that following the European structuralist monologic tradition of thinking in general, and especially in linguistics, my participants constructed the knowledge that they were supposed to receive in the classroom as a closed system of grammar rules, a "language base" that they can then apply outside of the classroom. Classroom culture of communication, regardless of how much it was being challenged by goals of learning foreign languages for real-life communication, remained rather supportive of such rigid understanding of knowledge with it's dominating pattern of IRE and evaluation of recognition being a substitute of understanding the message in a conversation.

I wrote this chapter to show the reader how I arrived at the assertion that organized the findings presented in this study. My main research question formulated as "what does it mean to learn Russian in a sociocultural sense outside of Russia, in fact, in a classroom in a large public university in the Midwest?" was answered through these assertions as "it means to receive a 'language base' that will be later utilized in 'true' cultural contexts, such as visiting Russia, interacting with Russian people, using Russian language for work, etc." The next chapter will contribute to answering one of my sub-questions: "how can culture be described in an emic sense in the context of the classroom," by showing that even though students focused on acquiring the language structure in the classroom, culture (American, Russian, and classroom) was a key component in how their learning was constructed.

CHAPTER FIVE:

GENRES OF CLASSROOM COMMUNICATION

Following the tradition of cultural studies and recent anthropology studies, I see culture as "a continual process of creating meaning in social and material contexts, replacing a conceptualization of culture as static, unchanging body of knowledge 'transmitted' among generations" (Levinson, Foley &Holland, 1996, p. 13). Culture in my study becomes a complex narrative construct that can be understood as a dialogic relationship among many cultures, such as Russian, American, and classroom culture, which the students engage in. With this vision of culture it is essential for me to analyze cultural forms (a term borrowed from cultural studies), i.e., social and material contexts, of the classroom that produce cultural knowledge and are, in turn, produced by the participants (the teacher and the students) of the classroom. These cultural forms of the classroom shaped the possibilities for language socialization in my foreign language classroom, or can be used to explain the lack of thereof.

Genres of Classroom Communication

One of the important theoretical tasks of this chapter is to conceptualize the cultural forms of classroom communication. Here, again, I turned to ideas of the Bakhtinian circle. If one conceives of words as cultural and ideological signs that are social, than each period and social group has to have its own repertoire of speech forms for ideological communication in human behavior (Morris, 2002, p. 54). These speech forms are also called genres:

> Language is realized in the form of individual concrete utterances (oral and written) by participants in the various areas of human activity. These utterances reflect the specific conditions and goals of each such area not only through their content (thematic) and linguistic style, that is, the selection of the lexical, phraseological, and grammatical resources of the language, but above all, through their compositional structure. All three of these aspects – thematic content, style, and compositional structure – are inseparably linked to the whole of the utterances and are equally determined by the specific nature of the particular sphere of communication. Each separate utterance is individual, of course, but each sphere in which language is used develops its own relatively stable types of these utterances. These we may call speech genres (Morris, 2002, p. 81).

Influenced by these insights, I could clearly see that my focal classroom, as a social unit had distinct repertoire of genres, which were, above all, "conditioned by the social organization of the participants involved and also by immediate conditions of their interactions" (Morris, 2002, p. 55). The social organization of the participants in my classroom placed them into the positions of (a) the teacher with the corresponding actions of teaching the "material" and checking understanding by asking questions, and (b) the students, who were supposed to learn the "material" and satisfy the teacher by answering her questions. Immediate conditions of teacher-students interactions were interpreted by students as learning the linguistic, and not cultural material, in other words, the students were receiving "a language base" instead of socializing into the Russian language.

The social organization of the classroom has been often characterized as an important contextual factor in the literature. In the 2001 addition of the *Handbook of*

Research on Teaching, Burbules and Bruce reviewed such conceptualizations of classroom organization that took several forms in the literature: Teacher/Student (T/S) model, Initiation-Response-Evaluation communication pattern (IRE) (Mehan, 1979; Cazden, 2001), and a transmission and recitation model of communication (Nystrand, et al., 1997, xiv). According to their summary, all three conceptualizations represent a "predominant pedagogical communicative relation" that has four distinguished features:

1. It assumes that the performative roles of teacher and student are given, distinct, and relatively stable: a teacher teaches and a student learns.

2. Activities in the classroom include expressing information, directing behavior, and evaluating performance, and are prerogatives of the teacher.

3. Teaching is centrally a matter of communicating content knowledge.

4. Education is an activity of instrumental practices directed intentionally toward specific ends, and therefore can be evaluated along a scale of effectiveness in meeting those ends (Burbules & Bruce, 2001, The T/S model, ¶ 1-5).

Burbules and Bruce note that this pattern is predominant in educational practices and institutions and so "ingrained" in memories of both the teachers and the students, that it is very hard to overcome it. In the rest of this chapter I will try to show how Rimma and her students, acting within classroom communication genres (which I found to be rather close to characteristics of the communicative pattern described above) were co-constructing cultural knowledge of Russia, America, and each other.

Rimma, as I noticed earlier, was a teacher who really cared about her students' cultural understandings of Russia. However, the genres of classroom communication (vocabulary and grammar explanations, class discussion, etc.) into which she tried

weaving precious cultural knowledge were quite different from the authentic genres of acquiring cultural knowledge, such as, for example, observing Russian people and engaging in informal conversations with them. In the process of knowledge co-construction it appeared that the thematic content of Rimma's utterances was not as important as their genre which students interpreted as vocabulary or grammar explanations in a lesson. As a result, the students limited their social work in the classroom to learning vocabulary and grammar, in most cases ignoring the cultural contexts that Rimma was trying to provide.

I would like to provide an example of how a genre of authentic communication, in this case, an informal conversation, can become a genre of classroom communication, thus completely changing the social and language themes, goals and rules. During one of my observations Rimma gave students five minutes to practice a dialogue from the textbook. The dialogue was about Brodsky, a famous Russian poet. When the five minutes were over, Rimma addressed the class:

Rimma: *Are you ready? Ready? Ready? OK. Who wants to try?*

Silence.

Rimma: I will start with a Russian and non-Russian. (Meaning a "heritage speaker" and a "regular" American student.) She points at Nadia and Alexandra.

Nadia and Alexandra each read one line out of the textbook.

Nadia: What else should we do?

Rimma: Well, I want a conversation between two people about Brodsky. For example, "I've just read about Brodsky," "What do you know about Brodsky?"

(She pronounces these questions with enthusiasm and gestures.) Make it... I don't know... Normal! And you guys all learn!

Nadia and Alexandra exchange two more lines. They try to copy Rimma's enthusiasm, but the rest of the class laughs and they pause. Rimma suggests a few more lines that they can exchange, but they don't say anything and Rimma calls on the next pair of students. One of these students is Kira, probably the best "heritage speaker" in the classroom.

Kira: *He wrote about God...*

Rimma: *Not only*, not only. He didn't work anywhere.

Kira: *Ah! And he didn't work anywhere.*

Rimma: But you had to work [in the Soviet Union]! You couldn't just... ... He was an interesting person, good thinker. You know what he once said? Poetry is acceleration of the mind. ... He wasn't against anything, he minded his own business, but he wasn't mainstream, he wasn't marching the march, so they thought that there was something dangerous...

During this mini-lecture Rimma repeatedly attempted to get students involved and make it a conversation, but received only weak responses, or none at all. Sometimes students repeated the words and phrases after her, sometimes provided one-syllable answers. If we apply the IRE model of discourse analysis (Cazden, 2001) to the conversation above, we will receive the following table:

Initiation	Response	Evaluation
Rimma: *Are you ready? Ready? Ready? OK. Who wants to try?*	Silence.	

Rimma: I will start with a Russian and non-Russian. (Meaning a "heritage speaker" and a "regular" American student.) She points at Nadia and Alexandra.	Nadia and Alexandra each read one line out of the textbook. Nadia: What else should we do?	
		Rimma: Well, I want a conversation between two people about Brodsky. For example, "I've just read about Brodsky," "What do you know about Brodsky?" (She pronounces these questions with enthusiasm and gestures.) Make it... I don't know... Normal! And you guys all learn!
	Nadia and Alexandra exchange two more lines. They try to copy Rimma's enthusiasm, but the rest of the class laughs and they pause.	
		Rimma suggests a few more lines that they can exchange, but they don't say anything.
Rimma calls on the next pair of students. One of these students is Kira, probably the best "heritage speaker" in the classroom.		
	Kira: *He wrote about God...*	
		Rimma: *Not only*, not only. He didn't work anywhere.
	Kira: *Ah! And he didn't work anywhere.*	
Rimma: But you had to work [in the Soviet Union]! You couldn't		

just... ... He was an interesting person, good thinker. You know what he once said? Poetry is acceleration of the mind. ... He wasn't against anything, he minded his own business, but he wasn't mainstream, he wasn't marching the march, so they thought that there was something dangerous...		

There are two interesting features in this conversation that I would like to focus on in this analysis. First of all, I think it is possible to separate teacher's initiations into personal (when she addressed a particular student or students) and impersonal (when she addressed the whole class). You could see that Rimma only received a response if her initiation was personal, directed to a particular student, and sounded as an instruction. If initiation sounded as a suggestion, students did not respond.

Secondly, teacher's evaluations in this conversation did not focus on whether the students pronounced the words and constructed the sentences correctly. In the previous chapter I talked about the Bakhtinian idea of the difference between monologic and dialogic traditions of "evaluation" function in communication as "recognizing identity" versus "understanding novelty" (Morris, 2002, p.33). In the conversation above Rimma did not seem to care as much about "recognizing identity" in students responses, but instead, tried to initiate a dialogue where students' responses would express their opinions, i.e., she wanted to "understand the novelty" of students' responses.

Thus, in my opinion, the teacher was really trying to initiate an authentic conversation, a cultural discussion between herself and the students. However, Rimma's demand and desire to engage her students in a "normal" conversation did not go along with the social work that the students were ready to perform within the limits of a classroom genre of practicing a dialogue, i.e., new grammar and vocabulary. Nadia's question "what else should we do?" proved that Nadia did not know what she, as a student responding to a teacher, was supposed to do except for repeating the lines in the textbook. Kira's first turn was an attempt to use information outside of the textbook dialogue (in response to the teacher's initiation), but it was brief and isolated, and her second response was a translation of the teacher's initiation. Most students' responses during Rimma's closing mini-lecture also focused on translating or repeating Rimma's phrases. All this evidence made me think that the students interpreted the genre and subsequently the theme of the activity as the language practice, whereas Rimma was trying to transition it to the cultural discussion about life of a nonconformist person in the Soviet Union.

Even though I find the idea of classroom genres very important, students' responses in the classroom that I observed were certainly not enough for describing their individual complex social work related to various topics covered in the classroom. The students' unique practice of constructing cultural meanings that crossed the classroom and went far beyond it will become the focus of the next chapter. Here, I would like to show my reader how one of the students, silent in the previous fieldnote excerpt, talked about the topic of Brodsky in our conversation and how Rimma's knowledge of her interest influenced the classroom activity. Before I recorded the above event, after one of

the classes earlier in that week, Rimma mentioned to me that Sophia was very interested in Brodsky and even came to her office hours to talk about him. She streamed this observation into the conclusion that students are, indeed, interested in Russian culture talked about in the classroom and how thus it is important to bring more and more culture in the classroom. In my conversation with Sophia this topic came out in a different context:

> Sophia: I told Rimma that one of my favorite things to do was to read the transcript of the Brodsky. That was my most favorite thing to do in the whole two years of Russian. There was that transcript of the trial on a poet, and it was abridged, but we had a list of questions and we had to find out everything that was important, and that was so exciting to me, because it was the first time when I felt like that my studying was paying off. I felt like wow, may be I could look at historical documents and study them. Even though it was really... they took meat of the document and left the real basic stuff, but... it was a most encouraging thing I've done. Because I felt like I have accomplished something as opposed to something like... to make a worksheet.

In my understanding, Sophia liked studying Brodsky not because she was interested in who he was in Russia, but mainly because the unit contained something resembling historical documents, which she wanted to be able to read with her knowledge of Russian. She interpreted this activity as authentic in regard to her professional interests, whereas Rimma interpreted her interest as being curious about Russian culture and used it as a rational for including more cultural discussions in the classroom, discussions, during which Sophia usually was silent or spoke English if allowed.

Assuming that it was important for her students, Rimma used every opportunity to provide them with more vocabulary and discuss the cultural meanings of the words that they encountered. Watching the movie was an especially rich soil for such interventions. Rimma often distinguished between two types of her vocabulary explanations: "it's practical for you to know" and "you won't use it too much, it's just for the recognition." For example, knowing the full array of vocabulary for "vacation" was introduced as a very practical knowledge, whereas adding the particle "to" to the end of the word was presented as a more local, historical thing that students should simply know about. Vocabulary in both groups usually was outside of the unit requirements and not expected to appear on the quiz. As a result, students rarely recognized it when they encountered it again. In the following excerpt from the interview, Michael explains how his social actions in the classroom are limited by genre of vocabulary learning that is required:

> Michael: I understand [Rimma's rational for contextual learning]... But when she explains the new vocabulary, I have no idea. Because I've never used it before, and she uses a ton of context. She says something is English and then she asks a lot of questions in Russian. Or, the same question in Russian, over and over. Then she'll give us one vocabulary word. I don't know if that's very helpful. Because vocabulary is out of context. I mean, it's in context for the movie, but it's just jotting it down, people aren't going to study that. ... Well, like today, she told us that this thing is very practical to use, but these students will never use it, because they never have to practically use Russian, you know...

There were a lot things that Michael was trying to say here, but I don't think I could pay him enough for giving me this phrase: "vocabulary is out of context." The way

I interpreted it, vocabulary explanation as a classroom activity, or genre, was out of cultural, conversational context in the context of a foreign language class. Students jotted it down, just like they were supposed to when vocabulary was taught. But because this vocabulary was not going to be on the test, or in exercises, they were not going to study it. Thus, all authenticity of presentation attempting to imitate spontaneous nature of real life language communication did not seem to be helpful.

However, in the same conversation, Michael also mentioned that Rimma's questions in Russian did help:

> Michael: I like when she [Rimma] asks the questions in Russian, it helps a lot. Even if you don't understand the words, or a word, you start getting the contextual knowledge... and that's the only way I survived when I was in Volgograd, because half the words they were saying – I had no idea, but if I caught one or two words, and I understood the context, I began to understand, and that's how I learned a lot of words actually, just hearing them, and saying them back immediately. Hearing them starts making sense in context, like when my host sister, her friend took me out and showed me one of the old houses that was turned into a museum, and he was talking about how his family lived in there before, and I know the word family, but I didn't know a lot of things... That's actually the best way to do it.

It sounds contradictory with the first statement, but whose thinking is not contradictory? Contradictions are indications of both internal and external dialogue. First of all, I was the one who led Michael into this, suggesting that Rimma tries to approach real-life situations with her vocabulary work. This is what Michael is

responding to, seeking coherence among my "authorized and educated opinion," his own strong views on language learning, and his "informal" feelings about benefiting from his classroom instruction. It seems to me that he wants to say, yes, it should work, but for some reason, it doesn't. One solution that he suggests is systematic presentation of classroom material, which I think can be understood as translating "real-life" genres of communication into the classrooms genres of explanation and practice:

> Michael: So if you make it an environment where... Like we had one class [in Volgograd] when it was just conversational Russian and we were graded on that, and it would really push people. Because they would have to learn how to speak. But we don't have that. And I guess that's not really a focus of ours... In my personal opinion, we should have one class on grammar, and one class on conversational, two separate classes, an hour a piece, that's how I think competence could be built. And they would have to parallel each other, like you learn the constructions, and then you learn how to speak them...

It turns out that in the context of classroom culture, foreign language communication only happened if people were "pushed," in other words, if they were graded. The grade became the aspect of evaluation in the genre of classroom communication. Conversational work was not immediately graded in Rimma's classroom, moreover, she mostly used it as an outlet for engaging Russian cultural knowledge. As Michael pointed out, this caused many of his classmates not to try as hard. Grading was missing as a regulator in the genre of classroom practice.

Let's come back to Michael's comment stating that vocabulary presented in the context of the movie became out of context as a part of the classroom activity. Watching

the movie "Adam's Rib" in class overall seemed to be a very controversial activity. The rationale behind doing it was to learn new vocabulary and practice the old one in the cultural contexts. However, the students seemed to construct the meaning of this activity following the cultural forms of watching movies familiar to them in American, student, and non-academic cultures. Making sense of new cultural phenomena through familiar cultural forms will become one of the main topics of chapter eight in this dissertation. Here, I would like to show how it affected the students' interpretation of the social meaning of the activity of watching a movie in the classroom. Sophia provided a very insightful explanation in this regard:

> Sophia: ... I think also because of the way we watched it for such a long period of time it became not cool, watching the movie in the class, that was my impression, because we were doing it for so long, that just like [imitating] "I am so sick of watching Adam's Rib," ha-ha. People do that kind of stuff, they'll tell something different that they actually feel, or believe, so I think people actually enjoyed it more than they let on, but... it just wasn't cool... "I don't want to watch it any more because we were watching it..." you know, watch it for 20 minutes, and then, you know, watch it again for 20 minutes... that was just a feeling I got. And a lot of people just went out and rented it... So I think... everybody was just like "let's just watch the damn movie so that I know what happens," and, ha-ha... And I think that a lot of people were not watching the movie to see the cultural value, as much as just, "I want to know what happens." ... I've already seen the movie because James [another Russian teacher]... he would actually give us 1 credit for attendance if we went and saw a Russian

movie, the Russian film series, so went to a couple of them to just... just get some absences erased, ha-ha... I saw Adam's Rib...

As Sophia noticed, the social action which the students were performing when the movie was shown could be described as "watching it to see what happens," just like they would have done watching any movie for pleasure. In my interpretation of Sophia's words, showing the movie in 20 minute increments did not provide a suitable genre for contextual vocabulary learning, instead, it simply frustrated the students. A simple way out that consisted of renting the movie and watching it outside of the class did not seem to help students refocus on language and culture learning, it just made the class showings boring. Sophia suggested a different, very simple change that would influence the construction of the activity meaning to her:

> Sophia: I really think that the best way would be twenty minutes and then talk about it a little, and then watch it again without the subtitles, when it's still fresh in your short-term memory and you are going to be able to take a lot more out of it. ... in those twenty minute increments I can get the basics of the plot and not have to worry about it, to focus on the language the second time, and that would be helpful.

According to these words, all Rimma needed to do was switch off the subtitles the second time the increment was shown. For Sophia subtitles became the defining factor in figuring out what it meant to watch a movie: if you watch with subtitles, than you watch for pleasure, if you watch without the subtitles, then you watch for the educational value.

I also believe that sometimes students were simply confused about what they were doing – having a discussion or practicing new vocabulary and grammar, as I think can be seen in the following excerpt:

After watching the first episode from the movie "Adam's Rib," Rimma asks her students: What did you learn about the family?

The students respond with silence.

Rimma: *Grandma lays down, grandma dances, grandma sings...* (Claps her hands trying to get the class going.) You can use your good new vocabulary here.

Andrey: *Grandma is always in... What's Russian for* bed?

Rimma: But Andrey, you have these words here, in the handout: lays in bed... Did you do that? (Asking everyone if they practiced the handout as their homework.)

Rimma continues asking other questions. She usually starts the question building on the vocabulary from the handout, but easily slips into new vocabulary, using every chance to talk about Red Square, assortment of Russian words for "boyfriend," character's relationships and actions that are "Russian," etc.

Andrey seemed to be confused about the goal of this activity. He started out trying to participate in a class discussion by constructing sentences out of the words that he already knew. Rimma corrected him and drew the class's attention to practicing new phrases from the handout. However, soon she herself broke out of this frame streaming the activity into what Andrey initially interpreted it to be: a class discussion involving creativity and "contextual" learning of new vocabulary. Here, once again, Rimma's rational was brilliant from the point of contextual learning: she encouraged sensitivity to

language contexts and students' creative independence of them. And once again, this did not seem to work well with the students who all performed their individual complex social work and tried to figure out the rules of performance in the classroom.

Sensitivity to cultural contexts that Rimma was trying to encourage by constantly shifting genres of classroom communication proved to be a very hard task to achieve in the context of genres of classroom communication. The following excerpt from my fieldnotes is another clear example of this phenomenon:

> In the beginning of the class Rimma wrote three Russian sayings on the blackboard and asked the students to guess their meaning. With the help of mostly heritage speakers she discussed the meanings and usage of these sayings. She finished this classroom event by giving students a task to write an essay using one of the proverbs. After this, she announced a vocabulary quiz. Students were expressing anticipation of bad grades while turning in the quiz.
>
> Rimma, when all the papers were collected: Did you figure out that two out of five words from your quiz were staring at you from the blackboard? (These two words were a part of the sayings that she wrote on the blackboard in the beginning of the class.)
>
> Several students responded negatively, shaking their heads.
>
> Rimma: I can't believe it, it's a phenomenon. (To me) Natasha, this is something for you to write about.
>
> Several voices: We didn't get it...
>
> Rimma: You didn't make the connection?! I just talked for fifteen minutes about it! Raise your hand if you figured it out!

No one raised a hand.

Alina: But it's on the blackboard, and we were having a quiz!

Rimma: So you were being honest, but you made a connection?

Alina nods.

Sasha: We were concentrating on the quiz...

A few students whisper among themselves.

Rimma: I just want to say – be cautious!

Even Rimma thought that this case was worth writing about. The proverbs that she wrote on the blackboard had a purpose of expanding the usage of the unit vocabulary. However, Rimma did not introduce them as such, instead streaming the opening event into a homework assignment of writing an essay. She was hoping that the students would use these proverbs as a cue for the test. The test itself did not matter to her as much as students' flexibility in using Russian. However, students interpreted the two activities as totally different, and did not pay any attention to the blackboard, acting within the genre of writing a test. Rimma first was shocked interpreting this event as students not making any connection to her cultural activity involving Russian sayings. She then negotiated with the students the meaning of what really happened and tried to encourage them to be more flexible and sensitive to the change of classroom genres: "I just want to say – be cautious!"

Another characteristic of classroom communication genres that distinguished them from corresponding authentic genres of real-life communication was the fact that the teacher and the students were usually not equal partners in a conversation. As you may remember, a lot of students did not like the Russian names that were assigned to

them. When I asked Sophia why she wouldn't tell Rimma about her association with the name, Sophia answered that she understood and respected Rimma's rationale, so "it was OK." When I asked Jacob why he keeps letting Rimma call him names that he didn't understand, he said: "What am I going to do? Stop it, ha-ha? ... I don't mind what she does." One time Rimma offered Andrey to make a bet with her about reflexive verbs being a lot less confusing topic in a week or so. Andrey's response was: "I am in no position to do that" (make bets with the teacher). As you can probably see, the students did not feel like negotiating, let alone arguing with the teacher's decisions. Classroom communication followed the teacher's rules and decisions, and very often, Rimma did not even realize it. In the context of classroom activities, equality between the teacher and the students had to change depending on what was happening, for example, a quiz or a discussion. When students asked questions, they were supposed to be more equal partners with the teacher, compared to when they answered her questions. However, the shift of these classroom genres sometimes was not well sensed by all participants, causing confusion, as can be seen in the following excerpt from my conversation with Michael:

> Michael: Rimma [when she tells the students that s/he is wrong] is not serious about it all the time, she kind of likes to joke about it, it's a way for her to get control, like, to say, I am right and you are wrong, and it stops conversation, so that she can talk about more things, or change the subject.
>
> Natalia: I've been thinking about it a lot, but, it seems to me, that in many instances when she says 'you're wrong,' the person really is wrong...

Michael: I know, too... Like when she was talking to someone today and the person kept saying bezhu (a mistake similar to runned instead of ran), and she is like, no, you're wrong, I am right. That's OK, that doesn't bother me, because I understand that she is really trying to communicate something... But sometimes she'll do that when a student is asking her a question, not giving her an answer, and she doesn't understand that they are asking her a question or that they are confused, and she says, no, you're wrong, I am right.

There is another important factor that Michael struggled with here, his classmates. From our conversations it is clear that Michael thought that most of his fellow students only took Russian because it was a two-year requirement for their major, an thus their attitude and goals for learning Russian were quite different from his. This was evident, for example, in the following phrase: "these students will never use it, because they never have to practically use Russian..." I will focus on distinction between "me" and "they" in the classroom in more detail in one of the chapters to come. Here, it is important to analyze this factor as something very crucial in the sociocultural context of the teacher's actions.

Rimma pointed out many times in our conversations that she had to tailor her instruction for a diverse audience. She knew a lot about her students, including information about why they took Russian, as well as what their majors, professional goals, heritage, and even daily schedules were. She talked about students who were very talented but extremely busy, talented and had enough time to dedicate to Russian, not so talented but put a lot of effort into their learning, and not very talented or interested overall. Apart from being aware of these differences in her classroom, Rimma as a

Russian national struggled with combining her "Russian" cultural understanding of how a foreign language was learned with the "American" equivalent of this phenomenon. She talked about not being able to be strict and critical with her students due to the pressure of keeping the enrollment numbers high. She talked about her understanding that people who really wanted to learn Russian would go to a college that had a better reputation for teaching it compared to our university. She also thought with me about how American students and system of education in general were different from what we got used to in Russia. In my understanding of our conversations, we often came to thinking about how in America students "had rights," which diminished teacher's freedom, and such system often benefited to students being spoiled and less motivated. As I understood it, because Rimma conceptualized the majority of her student population along these lines, she tried to make tasks easier, less of them grade oriented, and her own attitude "softer." This contributed to taking structure out of her lessons making some students that I talked to frustrated as they were trying to figure out their student roles in the classroom, as, for example, Jacob, who experienced the "Eastern European" teaching style in Poland:

> Jacob: And this woman [a Polish teacher] used to say to me, "you don't know anything." She would call my name and say, "you can't do anything" [repeats in Polish], when are you going to learn this? And the whole class was there, and she did it to everyone in the class.
>
> Natalia: So do you think it's unheard of here?
>
> Jacob: Yeah, they would never do it here. Because students would complain, because they are whiners, you know? Over there, who are you going to complain to, as a student, who are you? Nothing. What are you going to do, you are going

to tell the professor's boss on him? What are they going to do with the professor? Nothing. It's crazy, I mean, over here, you just have these babies, you know, they've been living at home, they've had everything they need, you know, "the teacher said this and that to me," crying...

As I hoped to show in this chapter, there were a lot of fluid contextual factors that contributed to co-constructing the meaning of classroom social work between the teacher and the students. So far, I have focused on genres of classroom communication that I was able to identify as routine and most influential. In the next two sections of this chapter, I will try to open a window to another two possible genres: role-play and informal observation. I was only able to get a glimpse of them during my study; however, I believe that this glimpse is important to mention here, because I find that thinking about these genres can very insightful for both the teachers and the students in terms of imagining and co-constructing meanings in the classroom.

Role-play as a Genre of Classroom Communication

Let's go back to a vignette describing the task where the students had to come up with the dialogues about a Russian poet Brodsky. Remember how Rimma asked her students to make the dialogues "normal"?

Rimma: Well, I want a conversation between two people about Brodsky. For example, "I've just read about Brodsky," "What do you know about Brodsky?" (She pronounces these questions with enthusiasm and gestures.) Make it... I don't know... Normal! And you guys all learn!

If you were in the classroom and could hear Rimma's intonation and see Rimma's gestures, which were quite theatrical, you would agree with me that by saying "normal" Rimma did not really hope that everyone in class would momentarily get genuinely interested in Brodsky and start exchanging opinions about him. She was trying to model a role-play, where students would not have, but play out, a "normal" conversation. As you may remember, that did not go very well. Rimma pointed out that despite many of her effort it was very hard to get students to play in the classroom. She explained her efforts as the following:

> Rimma: I simply took time and explained to them, that they have to be more responsible and active. That I understand that the level that we are working at is not the level at which they discuss world problems in English... That I understand that it is hard to be active and interested when you have a vocabulary of a five year old... And I told them – fake your interest and enthusiasm, get in this role, be playful about it. I told them that I myself am not really very interested in what time they get up and what they have for breakfast, but I fake this interest, and it helps me make a conversation. Foma did get it; he is now better at just getting into this role. There is a child inside of every person, and when you learn a language it is important to get that child out...

This interview was done at the end of the semester, and Rimma names only one student "who got it," Foma. Foma was a "Russian name," but it meant a little more to its owner than a usual "Russian name" assigned in the classroom. I found Foma to be an extraordinary person in many aspects, and especially in his passion to learn Russian. He described all his Russian experiences as "fun." He said that he "simply fell in love with

Russian language." It seemed like Foma found a new way to express himself in Russian language: "with Russian, I feel like I can be really happy, really angry." And more than that, he found a whole new Self: "I love being Foma. It's a different me who knows how to speak Russian. I want to become Foma."

Foma indeed was approaching "normal," trying to mimic Russian intonations and gestures, when Rimma was trying to engage the class in the role-play. However, his role of a Russian speaker did not seem to be limited to the classroom. Foma told me that he had a lot of Russian friends with whom he could be "Russian," he looked for every opportunity to engage with Russian and Russians, for example, he tour-guided Russians who visited the university. Thus, Foma's engagement in the classroom role-play could not be easily explained by his understanding of the role-play as a new genre of classroom communication that Rimma was trying to introduce. He identified with a Russian Foma on the individual level, engaging in a practice of language learning that was a lot broader than the classroom. Identities of other students, whose relationship with Russian was not as fulfilling, seemed to constrain their participation in the role-play. For example, as I noticed before, Sophia and Jacob did not associate themselves with their "Russian names." They were not an indication of a different identity; they were the rules that they followed in the classroom. In fact, Sophia said that knowing only a "Russian name" of someone in the classroom meant no personal relationship:

> Sophia: One thing that really bothered my a little... I talked by e-mail to James [another Russian teacher] when my backpack was stolen, and I instinctively signed [my real name], and he would write back: "Hi, Sophia," and it almost was like... I really wish he would call me [by my real name], in the e-mail at least,

especially... I could connect to Sophia in Cyrillic and be OK with that, but Sophia written in English...

Natalia: So you got used to it?

Sophia: I just learned to respond to it, but I never... the people I know personally, I never remember their Russian name. There are some people in the class, like Andrey, he'll always be Andrey to me, and Konstantin will always be Konstantin...(both Andrey and Konstantin are "Russian names.")

Because Foma was the only one who "got the role-play" last year, I sensed that this semester Rimma was trying to add to her classroom genres a different type of playfulness. Especially in the beginning of the semester, I heard a lot of laughter in the classroom. Students laughed at Rimma's comments on how "easy" Russian grammar was, on how "they were going to love grammatical aspect," they laughed at Andrey's singing during the class game for practicing the construction "I want you to do something," and they laughed with Rimma and with each other during class discussions. Rimma often took a role of a Russian who learns about American language and culture. She never hesitated to ask her students to explain certain things in English to her; she expressed rather extreme (but transparently not serious) judgments about what she perceived American or young generation ways. One day, for example, the topic was music and Rimma asked students what kind of music they liked and if they played any instruments:

Alina: *I like Russian music and trance.* (Everyone, including Rimma, laughs.)

Rimma: What is trans, you dance yourself into trans? (Laughter becomes hysterical.)

Alina: I'll play you sometime.

Rimma: No, I don't want to be anywhere near it. (Laughter increases even more.)

Alina did not seem offended or even embarrassed by this laughter. She laughed just as hard when it was Andrey's turn to announce to the class that he can play a "fagot." Fagot means a musical instrument in Russian, and of course, the students associated another meaning with it. This was a type of the game they engaged in, a playful, silly, and most importantly, informal negotiation of cultural differences. This game made the roles of the students and the teacher less formal and more flexible, without having to add a whole new "Russian" identity in a role-play. For some, for example, Andrey, it allowed to accept identities such as "class clown." I can imagine that a "class clown" identity helped Andrey to abstract from how he usually had to figure himself in his complex life. This thought came to me when I once saw Andrey driving his old car, which apparently saw many accidents, with a cigarette in his mouth, seemingly deep in thought about something. This image was strikingly different from the image of a student Andrey that I got used to see in the classroom.

Informal Genres of Constructing Cultural Knowledge in the Classroom

Even though I found traditional genres of teacher-student interaction to be very important for understanding how students constructed their cultural knowledge of Russia, America and each other, there were certainly more details to consider. Apart from my researcher's intuition, I was led in this inquiry, again, by ideas of Bakhtinian circle, which conceptualized speech genres as internal and external, more and less visible:

> ... speech performances ... engulf and wash over all persistent forms and kinds of ideological creativity: unofficial discussions, exchanges of opinions at the theatre or a concert or at various types of social gatherings, purely chance exchanges of words, one's manner of verbal reaction to happenings in one's life and daily existence, one's inner-word manner of identifying oneself and identifying one's position in the society, and so on. ... [these are] forms of the "utterance," of little speech genres of internal and external kinds... (Morris, 2002, p. 54.)

During my observations, I always tried to catch students' conversations before and after class, as well as unofficial exchanges in whisper during the class. During my conversations with Rimma I strived for understanding her interaction with the students outside of the classroom. During my interviews with participants, I looked for details describing how else they were making sense of Russia in class and how they connected it to their practice outside of the classroom. The winner in the last category was certainly Sophia, who shed a lot of light on my research by allowing me access into the more intimate layers of her Russian classroom.

"I watch things, I watch people..." said Sophia when I asked her about a sense of community in the classroom. She was able to tell me who was friends with whom, how relationships changed over time, and overall give me a fresh perspective on classroom events from the side of personal relationships that constructed them, in her understanding, of course. But what really fascinated me was how much sense she was able to make of Russia and Russians through her observations of the teacher, heritage speakers, myself, other students in the classroom, events in the movie, and textbook materials:

Natalia: And there is another thing in the research, that even if you take Russian for two years and don't get fluent... fluency is not the goal, but you gain cultural sensitivity...

Sophia: Cultural sensitivity, well... first of all, I was never exposed really... very many times in my life to people who grew up in Russia... and... I think that just that of and in itself would make somebody more culturally sensitive...

Natalia: Do you mean heritage speakers in class?

Sophia: Well, yeah, and, well, just Rimma and even you, you know... just I wouldn't be around you guys if I wasn't learning Russian. So I think it makes sense like that... I think that Rimma she does a very good job with that just because of her personality. ... What I like about Rimma is that she stresses that without standing there and lecturing about it for an hour... there are little bits and pieces of it that come out every day and every once in a while, and... this is the kind of stuff that interests me.

When I first heard this, I got all excited and tried to steer our conversation into what I conceptualized as "cultural knowledge" that Rimma was trying to incorporate into every aspect of her teaching, just like I discussed before. However, Sophia did not go there very far with me. Instead, she opened me a whole world of observing how Rimma speaks, addresses students, grades papers, etc. She compared these aspects with other teachers that she had, James, who was "very good at giving the students an American perspective on Russia," and Kornilov, who was "old school Russian." For example, she told me that if she went to Russia without having a Russian class she would think that Russians always yell at each other and perhaps at her. Now she knows that this is simply

a manner of speech that is more emotional than what Americans are used to. She also learned that Russians were more direct in their communication, not because they tried to be mean, but because this was a norm. She learned that it was impolite to eat candy in the classroom if your teacher was Russian by hearing a story about Andrey eating a candy in the middle of the class in front of Rimma, and Rimma scolding him for that. From observing heritage speakers, Sophia got an idea that Russian women dressed sexier than their American friends, and that perhaps, overall, Russia was more sexist than America. Sophia mentioned a lot of episodes from the movie "Adam's Rib," which never became a focus of the classroom discussions. For example, she thought she saw Nastya, one of the main characters, drinking while being pregnant, which made her contemplate an idea that perhaps there was more of a drinking problem in Russia, especially because she was able to connect her observation to a story that she heard from her friend who worked in an adoption agency about warranting American parents against adopting children from Russia because they might had come from families of alcoholics. Sophia also thought of a connection between Nastya stealing food from the grocery store where she worked with a story that came from her friend about a Russian girl here, in America, talking about stealing candy bars from a grocery store and how easy it was.

There is an important contextual circumstance that I want to draw the reader's attention to here. All of the above stories came out in response to my questions about Sophia's interpretations of Russian culture. I understand that Sophia was constructing a narrative, because I asked for a narrative. This does not mean that she herself had these stable stereotypical ideas of Russia. In fact, she often showed with her language that the nature of her cultural understandings was dialogic in a true Bakhtinian sense. The

language that indicated this to me consisted of (a) words expressing possibility, not certainty, such as "perhaps," "may be," "I thought," (b) asking for confirmations from me, such as "is this true?", "am I being horrible?", (c) statements such as "I know that not all Russians are like this," "I know that this sounds stereotypical." I found it fascinating observing Sophia engaging in a dialogue with her prior experiences, classroom observations, and myself in a complex endeavor of making sense of Russian culture within informal intersecting genres of observation and constructing a narrative in response to a question.

The idea that the meaning of the message can be best understood in the context of how, by whom, to whom and under what circumstances it was produced is certainly not new. Language enacted in the classroom received a special term in the history of educational and sociolinguistic research: classroom discourse. Cazden and Mehan (2001) distinguished between sequential and selectional dimensions of classroom discourse structure, positioning themselves in a row with such researchers as British linguists Sinclair and Coulthard, who focused on form-function language relationships, Frederick Erickson, who wrote about structure and improvisation in language, and Gordon Wells, who proposes to rename IRE to IRF, substituting evaluation with feedback (Cazden, 2001, p. 37-47). There is also more recent literacy research associated with rhetoric and dialogical framework advocating for seeing classroom and everyday communication as following certain speech genres (Dyson, 1997; Nystrand & Duffy, 2003). I definitely see myself joining the voices of these researchers with the outlook on the foreign language learning as happening within limitations of genres of classroom communication. I tried

to join these researchers in a dialogue; that is why I did not select and follow one system of classroom discourse analysis already established in the literature. I tried to show how I developed my understanding of genres of dialogic communication and figured it in the context of my study.

CHAPTER SIX:

OUTSIDE OF THE CLASSROOM

The goal of this chapter is to reveal the nature of the cultural practice of learning Russian, as experienced by the three key student participants, in each, this practice was complexly intertwined with societal discourses. As I tried to show in the previous two chapters, although Rimma tried very hard to communicate Russian cultural traditions to her students, they did not seem to respond to her teachings by "learning" cultural material. The main reason was that cultural and language socialization did not fit into the genres of classroom communication, and was quite different from the social work of acquiring "a language base" and socializing into the classroom culture. Another way to look at this is that socialization does not result from learning about traditions. Anne Dyson (1993) brilliantly worded the relationship between traditions and socialization in her book about young children:

> These notions of different cultural traditions — the sociocultural folk, the popular, and the written literary — are a helpful heuristic, a way of approaching and thinking about the complexity of the children's social and language lives. But societal categories for these fluid fuzzy concepts are just that — fluid and fuzzy, intertwined in complex, dialogic relationships (p. 14).

I found this insight to be very helpful for my analysis of the young adults' learning. My participants created cultural narratives in our conversations in response to my questions about Russian culture. These narratives sounded as interpretations of various cultural traditions. However, the way these narratives were constructed showed

the fuzziness, fluidity, and complexity of the societal categories that my participants engaged in to create them. One time, for example, the students in Rimma's classroom were reading a textbook dialogue referencing the names of several famous Russian poets:

Rimma: *Slava, do you know anything about Anna Akhmatova?*

Slava: *No.*

Rimma: *Kira, what about you?*

Kira: *No.*

Rimma: You need to fill out this gap in their education. Russians can't live without poetry because "it's accelerator of the mind."

"Poetry is the accelerator of the mind" is a famous quote from the Russian poet Brodsky, about whom Rimma talked earlier in the day. Another activity that Rimma did earlier that day was announcing a poetry day, for which each of the students had to learn a Russian poem of their choice. Similar to the examples in the previous chapters, Rimma's commentary about the importance of poetry in the lives of Russians remained without a response. No one asked why poetry was so important for Russian culture and what would be the best way to "fill in the gap in the education." None of my focal students, judging from our conversations, picked up a book of the Russian poetry in the library. None of them even continued this conversation with me. At another time, a similar conversation evolved around sports in the classroom, and ended with very similar results. Why? This is a complicated question. I don't think the answer is that the students did not care about Russian culture. It seemed to me that the nature of the practice of constructing cultural knowledge related to learning Russian was more complex, taking unique and individual form in case of each student. This cultural

knowledge involved Russian and Russia, but was not limited to them. In a sophisticated dialogue situated within many societal discourses students, as free authors, knitted their own intercultural understandings, picking the threads and combining them into unique patterns. This view made Rimma's comments on the role of poetry or sports in Russia important. However, who would pick these threads, and what threads they would be combined with, was hardly predictable. The students were not putting on Russian hats and acting Russian.

Practice becomes the key theoretical construct in this chapter. My initial understanding of practice comes from reading Lev Vygotsky (1962, 1978). As I understand it from his works, practice is organization of cognition, and consequently, social activities. Conceived as a practice in this sense, foreign language learning in a college course is the organization of one's linguistic actions and understandings through participation in the social activities of taking a foreign language class and looking for other opportunities to use the language of choice. Taking a language class was conceptualized by my participants as receiving a "language base," – a base for social engagement with the Russian language outside of the classroom. Here I will focus on how such engagement can be understood in the case of my three key participants, Michael, Jacob, and Sophia.

Sometimes, I use the word practice in a different meaning, constructed by the students in the interviews – conversations that followed the monologic genre of constructing narratives. This meaning is more consistent with Goodnow, Miller, & Kessel's (1995) conceptualization of practice as an attribute of a community that

individuals share (see p. 32 of this dissertation). In order to avoid confusion, I will try as much as possible to differentiate between these two meanings in the following text.

Michael

Michael became interested in Russian when he went to Ukraine on a study abroad trip for criminal justice students. Being a student of anthropology, in Ukraine he became very interested in the national group of Tatars, by informally interacting with the representatives of this group. When Michael returned to the United States, he started to read about Tatars on the Internet and was able to see how many news and historical accounts about Tatars were inseparable from their relations with Russians. Racism, nationalism, and language politics that already were keen interests of Michael about the US appeared to him from a new angle and in a new context. Michael got inspired to write about the history of these people by collecting their accounts in the informal conversations. In order to engage in the informal conversations, he needed the language.

Michael's interest in Ukraine and Russia was facilitated not only by his professional and civil interests, but also by the friendships that he brought back from Ukraine. He kept in touch both by phone and e-mail with a number of friends. He wanted to communicate with them in their language. He wanted to be able to discuss movies, going out, the university and private life, and many other common interests in their lives not only in English, but also in the language that was native to his new friends.

When Michael came back to his university, he realized that in order to find time for a new language in his busy life he needed to enroll into a class. Taking a class was a popular foreign language learning practice (practice is used here in its second meaning, as

an attribute of community) that Michael identified in available societal discourses and uniquely wove in his own individual practice of learning Russian (here practice is used in its first meaning, consistent with my theoretical framework) in the context of organizing his interests and life experiences (or, cognition and social activities, in Vygotsky's words). No surprise, Michael did not find any offerings of the Ukrainian language. However, according to his observations, everyone in Ukraine, including Tatars, spoke Russian. A lot of people there may not have wanted to speak it due to the complicated language politics, but they knew it. Russian also appeared suitable to Michael because it was giving him the means to reach out to the people who lived on quite a significant amount of land. He perceived their situation as critical, he wanted to get involved, and he desired to make a contribution to educating people about each other, especially taking into the account a complex relationship between the former republics of the Soviet Union from within and from outside, most importantly, with the United States, historically and presently.

Organization of social activities described above can be interpreted as Michael's motivation to learn Russian. I believe that it is crucial to approach such "history of interest" conceptually broader than motivation, as the societal discourses that students like Michael participate in and draw from. For example, it would not be hard to identify a societal discourse of relationship between the United States and the former Soviet Union. But Michael's participation in this discourse, from interpretation of the main issues to identifying his social position in it, is infinitely unique and constantly evolving, intersecting with the material from his classes, which included not only the Russian language, but also anthropological research, Russian and international history, literature,

philosophy, etc. On another level, Michael's dialogue with the socially available discourses was uniquely imbedded in his childhood history of growing up as a son of a deaf father, of a child who heard his mother's stories of the terrifying nuclear weapons in Russia, and of a grandson of the man who was a member of a communist party in New York before World War II. This dialogue has been changing and evolving, it took place inside and outside of the classroom, with his closest and not so close friends, while he was looking for and reading books on the topics that interested him.

Jacob

Jacob seemed to set a border between the classroom and his own life. This boarder helped me grasp and tighten the concept of the individual nature of a learning practice in this study:

> Natalia: I am trying to make sense of what I see in the classroom, and I am reading a lot of literature and a lot of literature says to bring more culture into the classroom, this and that, and that you should make students more culturally sensitive... and then I look at someone like you, and you have so many things going on outside of the classroom, you have Russian friends that motivate you to study, you are looking at other sources, listen to Russian music, so I am wondering, you know...
>
> Jacob: Every once in while I do learn something in the class, but really... I study on my own, I do my own work, and all my classes are always the same, I mean I do everything on my own and being in a class is more or less a formality, you know... I have to be there, and I have to take tests, why not. ... I am looking for

an excuse to study because... if I have to study for a test, then at least I'll do something. ... Because I am too busy doing schoolwork, and there is always a pressing demand of what you have to have done, because it... takes precedence over... over anything else you are doing.

In this interview, Jacob called being in class "a formality," as related to the actual learning that he performed "on his own." At the same time, being in the class sounded like a necessity, because schoolwork, as a social context of life, mainly defined his activities: if he did not take a class on a subject that interested him, he was not going to have time to learn it. Thus schooling became a frame for Jacob's activities, the frame, which was supposed to allow him to organize his life and fit in with the rest of the society. However, this frame remained formal, whereas his personal learning went far outside of it and took unique individual forms.

Jacob started learning Russian after spending three years in Poland, where he became fluent in the Polish language. In Poland, Jacob had many Russian friends who spoke Russian around him often. Jacob frequently mentioned a Russian guy named Gleb, whom he considered to be his best friend. Jacob spoke Polish to Gleb, although Gleb's Polish was worse than Jacob's. Jacob said that he often talked to Gleb and a few other Russian friends on the phone and they all wanted him to come back to Poland, or visit Russia. Speaking Russian to his existing Russian friends and to other Russians that he might meet seemed to be an important organizing center of Jacob's practice of learning Russian. But even if it was possible to single this goal out as an organizing center, it was impossible to ignore the web of other social sources, which Jacob drew from in his complex practice of learning Russian.

Practice is a social phenomenon, and Jacob's ways of learning Russian very well reflected this fact. He took a class in order to receive "the base," and his reasoning concerning why this was necessary was in a dialogue with societal discourses related to pedagogical research and practice (here practice is used in its second meaning, as an attribute of the community) related to how a foreign language was learned. Jacob considered immersion (a method when one is immersed into the language environment) as the best way to learn a foreign language, however, he did not have any opportunities for practicing immersion; this is why he had to start with receiving a language base. He further organized his activities as opportunities to practice Russian. These activities included watching Russian TV, memorizing extra vocabulary, and using supplementary grammar books. Jacob also wanted to spend a summer in the Russian immersion program. What was interesting, he seemed to prefer it to a study abroad program, where, as he heard, Americans stuck together and surrounded themselves with English speakers, so that there were few opportunities to speak Russian to Russians who didn't speak English. The social practice of learning a foreign language in a classroom was individually appropriated by Jacob in a dialogue with what he constructed as efficient social practices.

Learning Russian in Jacob's case seemed also somehow connected to his traveling to Europe, watching the History channel, taking anthropology and philosophy classes, and his childhood experiences, as they all came out in our conversations. In the research literature a factor considered to be influential for someone's decision to learn a foreign language is heritage. Jacob considered himself to be of Polish heritage, since his grandmother (his father's mother) came from Poland. However, Jacob was not sure if it

was his heritage that made him interested in Poland and Eastern Europe. Jacob's father spoke some Polish, but Jacob said that he learned very little Polish from him. He said that he never felt any pressure or encouragement from his family to learn about Polish or Russian culture, or to somehow identify with them. His dad just "told him a lot about it." However, as Jacob added, his dad told him a lot about everything, for example, about Samson and Delilah, about German occupation during the World War II, and about the relationship between Russia and Poland. Jacob remembered that when he was a kid, his dad would simply read to him, and then they would talk about all kinds of things. Jacob eagerly shared a lot of these stories with me, simply enjoying talking about them. All my attempts to identify any particular threads, which would make sense as connecting his childhood experiences to his interest in Russian, seemed to fail. When I readily suggested that his dad was the one who influenced his decision to go to Poland, Jacob replied that he didn't mind, but wasn't particularly happy about it since he wanted Jacob to finish his program of study in the US. When listening to Jacob's stories of German excellence in many areas, I probed for the Russian-German relationship, but Jacob took the conversation into the technical aspects of war methods, which both sides had used. When I mentioned the name of Karl Marx whose ideas inspired the Russian revolution, Jacob did not pick up on it.

The discourses that came out in my conversations with Jacob were individually and uniquely interpreted and woven together by him. Just as in the case of Michael, it was impossible for me to bundle them up into the rigid concepts of socialization agents. The fact that these discourses were directed to me, whom Jacob identified as the language learning researcher, only strengthened my opinion of fluidity, unpredictability, and

uniqueness of participation in the social discourses as building a learning practice. Jacob knew that I was looking for particulars; he also knew that I was interested in connections to the classroom, but even then he could not "organize" his experiences into coherent categories.

Sophia

When talking to Michael and Jacob I did not have to go far in order to get a deep insight into the nature of a practice of learning Russian outside of the classroom through the discourses that came out in our interviews. Both of them had much to share concerning their Russian experiences, so all I had to do was build on the information that they provided. I was hoping for a similar outcome in the conversation with Sophia, however, when we had talked for about an hour in an unstructured way and I still was not able to identify how she was building on those unique out-of-classroom discourses, I decided to ask a question: "What do you think you will do with you Russian after this class is over?" Sophia took this question in stride: "I don't know, that's kind of sad, I guess, I have never thought about this before you asked!" For a moment I felt bad, thinking that I had interfered with something more personal than what this study authorized me for, however, Sophia sounded lost only for a minute. The rest of our conversation focused on how Russia and Russian had been woven in her life since the childhood. One of the fascinating aspects for me was a feeling that Sophia was constructing her narrative purely in response to my questions, for the first time explicitly making sense of events in her life as constituting her unique practice of studying the Russian language outside of the classroom.

The reader may remember my discussion of how Sophia picked up a thread of classroom topic covering Russian poet Brodsky and wove it into her own unique practice of studying Russian, which went far beyond the classroom. Whereas Rimma and I hoped for cultural learning about "traditions," Sophia interpreted reading about Brodsky as working with the real historical documents, which was important and meaningful to her because of majoring in history: Being a history major constituted the frame of Sophia's practice of learning Russian in our conversation. Sophia explained that ideally she wanted to become a specialist in the Russian history with the ability to read real Russian documents. She further connected this aspiration with the absence of real-time Russian interests, including communicating with Russians or following Russian news:

> Sophia: Now that I think about that... and I think I've been so interested in imperial Russia that I haven't really studied modern Russia, or Soviet history at all... I think in a way I was fascinated with old stuff... Like, my interest in going to Russia would not be as much for the people and the culture now as for just seeing, experiencing the history... I've never thought about it, I don't know...

Even though the frame of Sophia's practice of studying Russian was of a professional nature and embedded in history, she was able to weave more and more experiences into it as our conversation evolved. Childhood experiences figured into her narrative in a similar way to Jacob's. She talked about her mother's stories about childhood during the cold war:

> Sophia: I remember my mom showing me the globe when I was a kid and showing me Soviet Union, and this is what's happening there, and telling me a little bit about it and I remember that fascinating me, and... because she was

brought up in the fifties during the cold war, when, um... you know, we just didn't get along so well, and she was just like, now, it's a little different, but people still can't speak their mind, and so... that fascinated me from early, early age...

Just like Jacob, Sophia did not confirm my suggestion of parents' influence in the choice of a foreign language:

Sophia: When I first signed up for Russian, my mom was like: "you signed up for what?" She was just like, why don't you just take French? And I was like, "because I don't want to take French, I want to take Russian," and she was like "it's going to be very hard"...

Stories told by the parents during childhood seemed to figure into Sophia and Jacob's language learning practice not as an external motivational factor (parent's will or support) but as a more personal and subtle construct of "fascination." Sophia further built on it by discussing her memories of the high school teacher who received a nickname "comrade Christopher" for his keen interests in Russia, which he always brought into the classroom, her unforgettable impressions of seeing the news about the change of power in Russia in 1991, her readings of Dostoyevsky when she was sick with anemia for a long time, her obsession with figure skating, where Russians were unquestionable leaders, and many other aspects of her life, which she did not think of explicitly connecting to learning Russian before our conversation.

In response to my questions Sophia was also able to think of her current connections with Russian culture, such as stories about Russians in America, which she heard from her friends, reading articles about the Russian cartoon character Cheburashka,

who was introduced to her by James, the professor of Russian during her first year of the language, stories about adopting children from Russia that she heard from her friend working in the adoption agency, and simply observing Russians (heritage speakers, the teacher and myself) in her classroom. I elaborated on many of these examples in the previous chapter.

After talking for about three hours, Sophia, who initially was lost after my question about her Russian connections outside of the classroom, was able to present me with a quite coherent practice of studying Russian, which went far beyond the classroom. It was precious for me to see the complex dialogic relationship not only within this practice, but also in its connection to other aspects of Sophia's life. Sophia often mentioned that she was "jealous" of other people's opportunities to learn foreign languages and travel because she was in a different position compared to many of them: "If I wasn't like a super-mom trying to get through school with a three-year-old..." Bringing up a child, graduating from school, and getting a real job were the social goals that prioritized her life, influencing all of the learning practices connected to the academic subjects. I believe that Sophia's case provides an extra dimension to the insight into the complexity of the dialogue that the students engage in when figuring the meaning of college learning in their lives.

None of my participants (by chance, not that I intentionally have chosen them that way) talked about interest in Russian as directly facilitated by their environment or background (e.g., heritage, support of the parents and peers, etc.). This fact problematizes many current models of human environment, which build on its

understanding as an ecological phenomenon with the components of the macro- and micro-systems (one of the original proponents of this theory is Brofenbrenner [1979]). Micro-system (family, school and peers) is usually recognized as the most powerful component or culture, where defining beliefs and values are constructed.

My findings are supportive of the dialogic, polyphonic view where the person is a free interpreter of the sources, which are defined by the intellectual, not the physical proximity. The intellectual proximity, in turn, is defined by the individuality of interpretation. The discourses which my participants engaged in were, in their nature, *not* official, *not* formal, and *not* local, but individual, dispersed and unpredictable. They had no past, as past only became important as an authored present (Bakhtin, 1984).

Looking at language learning from the perspective of an individual practice provides much insight for the teacher. Of course, no teacher will have a chance to become as familiar with her students' histories as myself being a researcher in this study. However, I believe this is not necessary. What is necessary in my opinion is to understand that students' learning of the academic material is social and cultural; it goes far beyond the classroom and constantly and uniquely evolves in a dialogue. The next chapter will continue the theme of the nature of a cultural practice, which the students constructed drawing from discourses that they engaged in inside and outside of the classroom, by describing some possibilities of identity work that my participants carried out as the students of Russian 202.

CHAPTER SEVEN:

LEARNING A LANGUAGE, CONSTRUCTING A SELF

My main research question for this study is: "What does it mean to learn Russian in a sociocultural sense outside of Russia, in fact, in a classroom in a large public university in the Midwest?" The goal of this chapter is to contribute to answering this question in terms of what it means to learn Russian for someone's identity, or in my conceptual interpretation, understanding of Self. Following my theoretical framework I will consider the understanding of Self as a phenomenon, which happens in the context of the learners' dialogic participation in a social and cultural practice, uniquely and fluidly constructed in each individual case through participation in the societal discourses. Through the analysis of my conversations with Michael, Jacob and Sophia, I was able to identify some fascinating dialogues, which they engaged in trying to figure their knowledge of Russian into their understandings of Selves as college students, American citizens, and future professionals.

Michael

College education in general is an important identity construct for young people who come from local communities. As Levinson, Foley and Holland (1996) point out, "no matter how the knowledgeable person is locally defined, regardless of the skills and sensibilities, which count as indicators of "wisdom" and intelligence in the home and immediate locale, schools interject an educational mission of extra-local proportions," thus providing "a contradictory resource for students who might benefit from their

teachings and credentials" (Levinson, Foley & Holland, 1996, p. 1). Even though this statement refers to schools in general, I believe it is particularly true in the case of higher education. In college young adults enter a complex dialogue of what Levinson, Foley and Holland call "particular visions of the society," "national priority," "university's cultural politics," and values of their home communities, both at the level of the family and peers.

In one of my conversations with Michael he told me about his home community where most of the communication happened in a vernacular English, usually referred to as African-American language. He told me that he used to use a lot of vernacular English, especially when he played basketball. He said that he now talked very different than before, because he was now used to college, and added – it's funny. He said that it was funny because when he spoke to people from back home he had to change his language, because even though they understood his English, it sounded weird to them:

> Michael: That's what college does to you... sometimes. I don't like that I don't speak the way I used to, because it kind of separates you from people. It makes me seem like I am educated and that makes me feel out of place. They think that I am better than them. I lost most of my friends when I started learning Russian, or economics – most of my friends don't care about that, they are interested in video games. How boring... hah, but that's my generation.

In these words, I was able to identify a complex dialogue that Michael participated in. On one hand, he felt a loss of being able to identify with his friends from home. This identity loss came out of his gain in "educated" language and interests. This loss-gain relationship indeed seemed to be very contradictory: "while feeling bad,"

Michael also uplifted himself from his "generation," calling their interests "boring." He also mentioned that it was not so much college in general, but his specific "college" interests in particular, which benefited to the loss of old friends. Being interested in learning Russian, or foreign languages in general, was not a mainstream social activity which could be easily shared. From my other conversations with Michael, I know that by economics he meant mainly global issues, also out of the mainstream, such as the environment, cultural politics, etc. Michael seemed to be engaged with the particular visions of society, identifying himself as someone who is against the mainstream vision of a monocultural locally limited American citizen.

The complexity of Michael's identity work related to learning Russian seemed to grow even more when we turned in our conversations to some of the political and economical issues. Imagining himself as a future bilingual citizen and professional, Michael was determined not to use governmental support. He pitted himself against the societal vision of a foreign language speaker who could be used as a resource in the military, political or business affairs, benefiting American globalization. This is where he also separated himself from "others" in the classroom, a phenomenon that I will elaborate on in the next few paragraphs. However, Michael's relationship with the mainstream "national priorities" seemed to be still somewhat dialogic, i.e., not radically defined and forever finalized. For example, Michael once brought a dictionary for my inspection. The dictionary, as he was told, was used by the CIA. Wanting to achieve the best possible excellence in Russian, Michael found himself referring to the best possible resources, which he identified as the resources used by the most powerful groups.

"Othering" oneself from people in the classroom seemed to come out as an important construct of my participants' understandings of Selves. In my Russian classroom, it came from many different sources, and one of the most noticeable ones was the perception of each other's goals and interests. Disagreeing with mainstream American international policies, Michael saw most of his classmates as future businessmen, politicians and military workers who would serve those interests. Even teaching English in Russia did not seem attractive to Michael, because, in his opinion, most Russians, especially those who could afford to take classes from native speakers, were learning English for business purposes. His desire to know Russian was different. He wanted to help people in the former Soviet Union. He wanted to write about them in order to educate American people and to help the nations communicate with each other.

Most of the time "othering" was not striking in the routine classroom interactions, however, I was able to identify it from time to time. A lot of it was fed by the textbook materials and resulting discussions centered on the existing stereotypes of Russians and Americans. For example, one of the textbook chapters was dedicated to the leisure types of activities and started out with the descriptions of how Russians and Americans spent their free time. Rimma brought this discussion into the classroom, initially asking students how much free time they had:

Rimma: *Do you have a lot of free time?*

Vlad: *No.*

Rimma: I thought Americans loved having fun! *Andrey, do you have a lot of free time?*

Andrey: *No, I study often.*

Rimma: *A lot* (correcting *often*). *Do you watch baseball?*

Andrey: *Yes, Yankee!*

Rimma: Then don't tell me you don't have free time. Americans are famous for having fun all over the world. Or, at least you can see my biases. Or, may be I envy you.

...

Rimma: *Is it true that all Americans love sport?* Let's do the voting. *All Americans love sport.* (About half of the hands rise.) You don't think that all Americans like sport. (About third of the hands rise.)

Andrey: Come on, all of America is obsessed with football!

Michael and Igor shake their heads: *Not all!*

Judging from my observations, Rimma was not serious or really determined in her opinion about Americans. Her voice, intonations, and facial expressions made me believe that she was trying to stream this discussion into the genre of a casual exchange of opinions. In my interviews with her she showed a deep understanding of how diverse her students and the American population in general were. However, we can see how some of the "othering" work happened within this discussion. Even though I believe that both Michael and Igor understood the genre established by Rimma as informal and humorous, they voiced their opinions against Andrey's call for the group identity.

Another important building block of Michael's identity was his awareness of the "cultural politics" of the American schools as they related to language learning. He regretted that he never had an opportunity to learn Russian as a child, commenting on the fact that foreign language classes for children were far from the top of the American

educational priorities. Positioning himself against those priorities, Michael stated that if he has children, they would for sure learn a foreign language from the very beginning, in his case, it would be Russian, of course. He told me with disappointment in his voice that it was not only the fact that foreign language classes were rarely available and not popular, but learning them was difficult, because it was not aided, and did not correspond at all to the English language instruction. For example, he did not know what parts of speech, such as adjectives, were until he was nineteen. All those factors came to constitute in my conversations with Michael the national language policies, which confined most of the American citizens to a limited, profession-oriented knowledge of the foreign languages and cultures. This was not Michael's goal, but this was how Michael saw the goals of many of his classmates.

In addition to all limitations described above, foreign language learning goals of others were also defined by a two-year requirement that many majors now have. Michael, as well as Jacob (as we will see later) was confident that most of his classmates would be gone after the second year of Russian. He was sure that "these people" were not genuinely interested in Russian culture or the language, and all they need was to satisfy the university requirement. This was how Michael explained the weak interactions and slow pace of his class. If students were genuinely interested, then things would be different. As an example of a motivated group, Michael talked about his class in Volgograd, where most of the people went because of their personal interest in the Russian language and culture: "in Volgograd, there were motivated people, so it was easy to learn among them..."

Michael also understood that the teacher responded to the audience, which was mainly interested in satisfying a foreign language requirement, which did not have to be Russian. From my conversations with the other people in the department, I could see that this type of audience was constructed as a typical audience for less common foreign languages in our university. Students who were really interested in Russian went to schools that were famous for their Russian programs, and that was not here. As a result, Russian recruitment here was not very high, and the language had a reputation of being difficult. This is why one of the main teacher's goals was not to scare anyone away. Understanding this type of reciprocity, Michael still wished for more discipline and pushing, like he found in Volgograd, where the audience was perceived by him as "motivated":

> Michael: What she [Rimma] needs to do, I think, is ask people. If they know that they don't have to answer, they don't care, because you need to force them. [...] she should stick to doing that, because she will go to English... When I was in Volgograd, they [meaning mainly the Russian teacher] would ask me a question in Russian, and I would say, "I don't know." And then they would repeat it slowly, and may be after two or three times, she [Russian teacher] would move to someone else, and then someone else would answer, and then I would understand their simple answer, because we were more or less at the same level. There were a lot of the second year students, and I was the first year student. And some of the second and third year students, they would understand the words and they would respond, and I'd be like, oh, that's why! That's what she's saying! And it helps, because everyone's at a different level and knows different things.

The identity work described above contributed to Michael's positioning of himself in the classroom and as a Russian learner outside of the classroom. A quiet and diligent student with no steady friends in the classroom, not exhibiting any extraordinary behaviors, Michael positioned himself without unnecessary conflict among the "others" in the classroom, limiting his activity to the academic work of receiving "a language base." An active worldly thinker, Michael viewed his Russian language learning as a social work of positioning himself as an anti-mainstream American citizen and an international actor. As I hope you were able to see, these two identities were externally quite different, however, internally, they were deeply interrelated in a complex dialogue of constructing Self.

Jacob

Jacob was not sure what his career plans were, but he hoped that they would involve Russian. He talked about many possibilities, from international business to military. One aspect that stood out in his thinking was the desire to find a serious occupation. He did not choose Russian, Spanish and mathematics because these subjects were connected into a well-thought-out career plan. He chose them because they interested and challenged him. However, I sensed that he wanted more determination and "self-actualization" in his life full of "crazy ideas:" "I never felt in my life that I have self-actualized myself... you know? I want to do something... I am not satisfied... somehow"... "Self-actualization," "seriousness," "craziness," and "challenge" all somehow combined in Jacob's dialogue of envisioning his Self. Learning Russian was

woven in this dialogue as something definitely challenging, potentially serious, but for now, simply a hobby.

Jacob claimed that he learned languages because he loved to talk to people. When I tried to suggest that many people in the world spoke English, he rejected such an opinion: "No, in Poland they don't speak English, in Russia I know they don't. Some people do, you do, but in general, nobody who was in my class... there was one girl... and there were one or two who knew a little bit"... Jacob then continued to clarify that even if people spoke English, "there are words that don't even have English equivalents. The way they think about something, you can't really understand..."

Because in my conversation with Michael Russian language learning figured as an important building block of his understanding of Self as a citizen, I started probing for similar connections while talking to Jacob. Indeed, I was able to identify very similar discourses in our conversation. Jacob talked about Poles and Russians having different perceptions of him and of each other due to the nationality alone:

> Jacob: It really makes me sad, what the state of affair in the world is... people don't understand, that when you have a government like I have a government right now, that I don't approve of... people don't see that it's the government, they don't separate the government from the people, you know. It's like, the Polish people, they don't think that Stalin... they don't think about everything that Stalin did to Russians, they don't see that Stalin did that to them, they see that Russia, Russians did it to them.

Then Jacob continued talking about a stereotypical image of Americans that he could easily identify in Europe:

Jacob: Stereotypical idea of an American for Europeans, for Russians, what is it, it is that we are stupid, that we are, for the most part, I mean, that we are ignorant of other cultures... because one of the problems I think is the American TV, and the second is that a lot of people that are traveling around, they are like rich little eighteen-year-old, nineteen-year-old kids that grew up and don't know anything about life, that always have been very wealthy and catered to their whole life, and they are spoiled, and because of this they have no manners and they think that if they go over there, they don't speak any other languages, and they don't want to hang out with the people, and they don't always behave very well, and they are not just aware of anything in the world.

Even though Jacob had a big problem with the existing stereotype, he seemed to have little problem with identifying himself as an American:

Natalia: See, you are clearly against it, but you still say "we."

Jacob: Ha? Because, you know, they are representing me. I feel like I can't be disconnected from it. We are Americans, I am an American, just like the people in my class. We, us in our class... I don't know, I am part of them, whether I like it or not. I don't like it, but I can't do anything about it.

Jacob seemed to see no escape from sharing group identities, except for nostalgia for the times when Kennedy had power and one could be proud to be an American. I felt that Jacob saw the category of nationality as a rather stable one. National identity for him was something you were born with, regardless of how much you agreed with its image. When he talked about his friends from Poland, he separated them into Polish and Russian groups, even though a lot of the people that he talked about seemed to have quite a bit of

diversity in their heritage and political inclinations. Jacob seemed to associate national views with the historical attitudes which were "in your blood," the history which was passed from generation to generation. He did not seem to think that him knowing foreign languages and spending time with people who speak it could change the matters in their essence: "you go some place and you feel like... like people don't like you... regardless of understanding who you are as a person... it really does not change much in the end." He did not seem to think that national prejudices could be broken with a civil action: "what can you do, you are helpless." When I tried suggesting that Jacob's desire to speak to people in their own language and not being satisfied with English alone spoke of his high citizen qualities, Jacob said that those were too broad terms for framing his interest in Russian, Polish and Spanish:

> Natalia: You know, what I am trying to get out of this study, I think that even you studying the language is a very significant action in trying to find a solution [to people stereotyping each other based on history and government alone]... because you already know Polish, and you are trying to learn Russian, and Spanish... would you agree?
>
> Jacob: Yeah... No, I am just doing it for myself, I mean... I don't know, I've never thought about it in such broad terms, I don't think I am doing anything heroic, I am just trying to talk to people, man, I just enjoy talking to people, I like being out, different places with different people.

Jacob did not respond to my probing regarding learning a foreign language as a way of achieving a multicultural, anti-monolingual identity. It is interesting that Jacob's microdialog seemed to involve issues of American monolingualism and monoculturalism,

which were similar to the ones that Michael talked about. But in the case of Jacob these issues were differently incorporated into his understanding of Self. Jacob persistently described his knowledge of the languages as simply the means of talking to people who interested him, and he consistently identified this interest as purely personal. He resisted my attempts to raise it to a citizen level, describing himself as an individualist, "a cat [that] go[es] on his own trail." Instead of following with my thread of having a multicultural identity and its importance for an American citizen, which I was all fired up about after the conversations with Michael, Jacob continued talking about how communicating with people in different languages was fun and interesting. He did say that he was interested only in certain countries, such as Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Armenia, but did not provide any political reasons for it:

> Natalia: So why, why all these places are interesting to you?
>
> Jacob: I don't know...
>
> Natalia: They are interesting to me because I grew up in the Soviet Union and very much attribute myself with it, but I am very interested why the former republics are so interesting to you? To an American?
>
> Jacob: I don't know... I just met these people [in Poland]... I don't know, I just get these ideas about some places where I've never been before. For example, you know what's a really fascinating place to me? Armenia.
>
> Natalia: Why?
>
> Jacob: Because... There are a few things about it, um... first of all, everybody I have ever met from Armenia is absolutely fascinating, everybody. And second... have you ever heard of a System of a Down? A group?

Jacob continued to tell me that System of a Down was one of his favorite music groups and followed up with their history and the meaning of their lyrics. But he was not, as Michael, associating former republics of Soviet Union with political need and importance. He just liked the people, but he did not like all the people. For example, he told me about his attempt to learn German. He studied it very hard for a year and then spent three months in Germany, all to find out that Germans were "not his kind of people." In our other conversations, he spoke very highly of Germans, and especially about their various technical achievements, but still expressed little interest in communicating with them directly. On the other hand, Serbs in his opinion were "fascinating" people, and it was their language that Jacob wanted to learn next.

Jacob seemed to be fascinated with things that were superior, from leading educational institutions to cutting edge inventions and animals with the most advanced intellect. Knowing certain foreign language in perfection seemed to be in line with those aspirations. He once again rejected my suggested thread of "multicultural identity" when I proposed that one cannot be equally fluent in two languages:

> Natalia: So what does it mean for you to get it [a foreign language] down?
>
> Jacob: When I can speak it how I can speak English.
>
> Natalia: There is this idea that you are never completely equal in two languages.
>
> Jacob: It isn't true. I've known people who have done it. Absolutely. Like this girl. She was only seventeen, she's never been to an English-speaking country. It was absolutely unbelievable, she was perfect! And I know another girl, from Krakov – she was the same. Absolutely, absolutely perfect! She spoke English better than me really, because she knew more vocabulary, more than in general

people know. Only English scholars, she was perfect. And she wasn't hyper perfect, she was just... it wasn't Queen's English, you know.

Natalia: I know exactly what you mean. I recognize it. But I didn't mean equal in that sense.

Jacob: You mean you always think in your own language?

Natalia: For example, I am not completely equal in two languages. I am writing my dissertation in English, so I know more academic terms in English, I learned them in English, I do not have enough time to think about translation... So my English may be stronger in academic area, and Russian is stronger in the areas that are not explored here, so this is the idea...

Jacob: Yeah. Well, I don't know. The ultimate goal is perfection. The idea is to be able to speak... I can't express myself in any way in Russian at this moment.

It seemed to me from my conversations with Jacob that knowing foreign languages, just as in case of Michael, was an important construct of his understanding of self which incorporated societal discourses similar to the ones that I identified while talking to Michael. However, while Michael seemed to talk about himself as a Russian speaker more in terms of a worldly citizen, Jacob limited his knowledge of Russian and other languages as serving his strictly personal interests and aspirations of perfection. At a citizen level, he seemed to desire to shape himself into a profession, which would be "serious" and might incorporate his foreign language knowledge, but not for the goals of communicating with people and ruining cultural borders. He envisioned the technical, military, or business projects where his knowledge of languages could be simply utilized.

As the reader may remember, solely professional orientation as a goal of learning Russian was a quality that Michael identified in many of his classroom. For Michael, it was important to "other" himself from people with such goal. Michael knew Jacob better than many other of his classmates, they often talked in class, and sometimes even outside of the class. Michael thought that Jacob was a serious language learner, which is why Jacob's career goals did not serve as a separating ground (or, if they did, it happened on a different level). Jacob, in his turn, also "othered" himself in a classroom, and I think it is interesting to see how his understanding of Self and others was at the same time similar and different when compared to Michael's.

"I just don't know those people. Some of them are so... they are just so different. That class just itself is ... different. I mean, the people are different... than in most other classes," Jacob told me in one of our conversations. Just like Michael, he talked about his frustration with people who were not serious about learning a language, who took it for a two-year requirement. Jacob articulated this issue very passionately, and we came back to it several times:

> Jacob: I was telling one of the students... there were a couple of people and we were outside one day... and they were talking about all the problems that they were having with one verb, and I said, why don't you just look at it, figure it out, and just say it, very slowly, over a few times, until you can say with some fluency. May be it would take you 20 minutes, may be it would take longer, I don't know, but wouldn't take all day, and wouldn't have this problem any more. And he says: well, I am graduating in five weeks, so I am not going do anything more than I have to here. And it was like, isn't that exactly the problem? All this

time he is not putting any effort into it because it's important enough to do for him, it's like, why are you here? I feel like I haven't really learned, hardly anything. ... I do when I am forced to do, you know? And I am not forced to do anything in here. In class I don't have to do anything, because people are fumbling around on these verbs that they had at the beginning of last year and they still don't know. It's irritating to me. It's irritating because it is not necessary. If they just couldn't do it, but there is no reason for this. I don't understand the whole process. It's just frustrating. I don't even know how someone can go to a university like this. What do they do? What will they do when they get out into the world? I mean, what kind of a professional person they are going to be? If they go into everything with the same attitude, that this is just a requirement, I am trying to get a paper... they become a substandard employee at some place, and look at them, and they see where they come from, and they came from [our school]. ... But I can't wait to get to at least the next level, because it seems like it's at least going to be people who are not taking it for just a requirement. I know that the university requirement is only two years for Bachelor's of Arts, which means through 202. So after this, it seems like next year it's going to be more challenging now, because people only are going to take it if they want to take it.

Whereas Michael seemed to associate the two-year requirement with career goals and saw these goals as limiting to how hard people worked in class, Jacob did not mind other people learning Russian as a part of their future profession. His big concern seemed to be that these people would not become good professionals with the attitude

that they had toward learning. Jacob thought that there were may be five people at the most in his classroom who were serious about learning Russian. It is interesting that among these people he named Michael and two heritage learners. As a matter of fact, he called Michael "serious," whereas heritage speakers were named "good."

Jacob often did not know the names of people in his class when I was trying to bring up examples. He said that somehow he simply did not have to know other people's names in many of his classes in America, whereas in Poland he somehow right away knew everyone's name and had some kind of relationship with everyone. This social practice of getting or not getting to know classmates, that was co-constructed in our conversation, blended with a practice of taking a foreign language in order to satisfy a university requirement and allowed Jacob's individual appropriation of the societal practice of "othering," or stereotyping people. I interpreted it this way because the category of the "two-year requirement people" seemed to be constructed by Jacob through overgeneralization (which is key to stereotyping) of his experiences in the classroom with people "fumbling around" and outside of the classroom when his classmate refused to do extra work close to the graduation. Othering seemed to be more related to how Jacob positioned himself, rather than to how he really built or did not build relationships with others. Othering was impersonal; it came into conversations when Jacob talked about his own learning experiences, not when we talked about certain individuals.

In my conversation with Michael we concluded that the slow and overly nurturing environment of his Russian class was connected to the fact that enrollment was low and that our university was not the school where most of the people would go if they really

wanted to learn Russian. In my conversation with Jacob, he often compared his Russian class to his Spanish class, where the demands were a lot higher and where he felt that he was actually learning the language. He often mentioned that his Spanish professor did not give anyone a break, and if someone could not keep up, they dropped out. To me, this seemed to be consistent with the assertion that how Russian was taught and learned in the classroom was to a large extent influenced by social factors of popularity of the Russian language and the reputation of our university as a place to learn it. Spanish enrollments were always high and the teachers did not have to fight for their students. However, Jacob explained it from a different angle. He talked about "a bad system that we have around here," a system where teachers are evaluated by students at the end of the semester and the evaluations are crucial to their careers. Jacob liked his experiences in Poland, where teachers had no problem pushing students very hard and reprimanding them for not studying hard enough.

I felt that Jacob, in the process of shaping who he was, was separating himself from a number of American practices, such as the two-year requirement for a foreign language, not knowing other people's names, and student evaluations. I also felt that this separation and the resulting understanding of Self was deeply imbedded in a dialogue with a variety of social sources, from his intercultural experiences in Europe to social practice of "othering." It was fascinating for me to see how much dialogue was involved in Jacob's understanding of Self as related to the rest of his classmates and learning Russian. On one hand, he was frustrated with people who were taking Russian for a requirement, who for that reason were not going to become good professionals, who were not ashamed to graduate with a bad preparation from his university. On the other hand,

Jacob was rather unsure what his professional plans were and whether or not he considered his university a good school. He often mentioned that he was taking Russian just for himself, and he often talked about his attempts to get into better schools. Jacob did not follow up with the third year Russian, probably taking on one of his ideas, that he inconsistently called crazy or challenging and serious. As I hope I was able to show, Jacob's understanding of Self was very much socially embedded, but at the same time very much individually woven in a constantly evolving process.

Sophia

Just as in the case of my inquiry into the learning practice that embedded the study of Russian, Sophia did not offer me as much material for conceptualization of identity work as Michael and Jacob did. I read through the interview transcriptions several times before I could identify themes that would relate to the student and citizen identities. Just like Michael and Jacob, Sophia seemed to be critical of the stereotypical images of Americans, which she identified mainly as spoiled by having too good of a life. In one situation we were talking about a Russian professor Kornilov who taught Sophia during her first year. She described him as "the cutest sweetest old man who scared her more than anybody else in the world." Sophia explained her and other students' fear of Kornilov by not being used to personal criticism that the teacher used in abundance as an effective teaching technique: "I think that a lot of American students are really just expected to be cuddled through the learning process in a lot of ways, and... they don't, like, get any true criticism of themselves, or there is an expectation that they do something better than they do it the first time." In another situation, partly in response to

my reactions, Sophia constructed the image of Americans who unlike Russians took things for granted because they did not have to work hard for them:

> Sophia: You know, it's funny, someone I know would always comment on my interest in Russia, and he would be like, you know, mother Russia is in a lot of trouble now, and so he would always pick on me, but his biggest joke about Russia was the toilet paper lines, ha-ha...
>
> Natalia: When was that?
>
> Sophia: That was... I would probably say it was around 1987 to 89, that's when you would see those pictures in the news, and the lines standing for toilet paper, that was kind of what you heard a lot, you stand in line for toilet paper, it was a big joke, ha-ha. It's horrible.
>
> Natalia: You know what, we did, that was the most horrible thing, probably. But no one thought it was the end of the world. I remember being in school, and there was a girl and during the breaks she would check in three lines, and come back.
>
> Sophia: (Nods very supportively when I try to emphasize that it wasn't the end of the world.) Yeah, and if you go to Meijer's and they don't have something in stock, like your favorite brand of cereal, people freak out, and I think there is something to be said to having to stand in line to get something you need, or want, that would make you appreciate it more, I think. When you have to work for it. Because a lot of people, especially students here, have never had to work for anything. So it was just a joke.

In the data that I obtained I could not find any explicit evidence of how Sophia identified herself with these images. However, I could definitely see that this

identification was rather complex and dialogic. She described herself as a hard-working single mom striving to get an education and provide for her son at the same time. She definitely sounded critical when producing the narratives that I cited above. But at the same time, I did not see any harsh borders that would separate Sophia from the rest of the Americans or her classmates.

As the reader could see, both Michael and Jacob separated themselves from the impersonal others in the classroom, generalizing them as people who's interest and engagement in Russian was very different from their own. Sophia's construction of her Russian class population was drastically different:

> Sophia: This group of people in Russian class... I thought, oh my, if I add their IQs together, they are probably the smartest group of people I've been in, ha-ha... But I really am impressed with the whole group; I am just amazed that anybody can learn the language at all... I really am, totally amazed. Because I feel like if I need 12 hours to get ready to take test... it says something, because I never had to study much in my whole life. If they are able to do it when they study for two hours and still do better than me, it's like, wow! It's the first situation where I felt like... it was humbling, because I've always really felt like I can do anything and succeed in it without putting in a lot of work, and this was when I felt that... I can do it, but it's not going to be my intellect, but my work, that gets me there. ... If nothing else, it taught me to be able to work hard... and do something that's not easy, and that's, ha-ha, that's a tough lesson to learn...

Sophia sounded proud to identify herself with the highly intellectual students of Russian, it seemed to be an important construct of her understanding of Self. She talked

very positively about most people in the classroom, unless she identified them as cliques that were too good to speak to her. Sophia told me many stories of running into people from her class in the parking lots, food court, and other places, and having long conversations based on only one thing in common: studying Russian. For example, this is how she described her relationship with Ellen:

> Sophia: I wouldn't say I am friends with her, I ran into her over the summer on campus, and I asked her if she wanted to get together to study, and we ended up having a long conversation, but... our worlds are two different places that do not intersect, you know, ha-ha... but I like her, she is sweet, we have zero in common beyond Russian, ha-ha...

In her Russian class Sophia was also able to find a couple of true friends who, as I understood it from our conversations, were very important to her as they made her a better person:

> Sophia: The only two people who I think I am friends with in this class are Larissa and Sasha... with the rest of them we are more like... you know, when the class ends the friendship is going to end... Like Nadia. Nadia and I have another class together, so we've spent more time together than I have basically have with anybody else in this class, but... we like each other, but we kind of... keep our distance, ha-ha. I am not sure exactly why... it's just not a friendship material, you know... Larissa and I are going to have a garden together. It's called a community garden project, and you can... they'll give you a garden plot and they'll give you the seeds and tools, it's so cool! Cause my yard is full of trees, there is no gardening to do there, and um... She's actually a vegan. She doesn't

eat meat, eggs, or dairy. She's going to starve to death, ha-ha. She's lost 15 pounds since I met her... And I can relate, because I don't eat meat myself, but it really bothers me with her... if you ever noticed, I bring her protein bars to class, because I am scared that she's going to die, ha-ha. I want to learn how to garden and I invited her to do it with me because she needs to eat food, ha-ha.

Sophia often talked about Larissa and Sasha as her best friends. When I was visiting the Russian classroom during the first semester of the third year (that Sophia was not able to take due to monetary issues), I saw her stop by to meet up with Larissa and Sasha. This friendship lasted beyond taking a class together. Sophia spoke very highly about Sasha and Larissa's intellect and knowledge, which sounded as a comparison to her descriptions of other, old friends, who did not have any educated interests and were not going to take her anywhere she wants to be. This separation from old friends and interests seemed similar to the identity work that Michael engaged in othering himself from his generation, however, as I hope I was able to show, Sophia judgments about people sounded a lot more personal and particular.

Thus, Sophia's dialogue of figuring her Self into the group of the Russian students was dramatically different from both Michael's and Jacob's. I believe that this data shows well that understanding a Self in relation to others and academic knowledge is unique and dialogic, and that both the categories of the others and the academic subject and the practices of identifying with them are being constantly constructed in a dialogue. Sophia's practice of identifying with the academic subject of Russian and her conceptualization of the two-year requirements again provided me with a whole new perspective on learning Russian in a large university.

As the reader may remember, Sophia described Russian as the most challenging subject that she encountered in her life. I could see how both Michael and Jacob could have easily classified her as one of the students who was slowing down the class (even though they did not do it and I may be wrong). They attributed weak participation of students like Sophia to their lack of effort. Sophia proved otherwise. She explained how much work she had to do in order to get a good grade in Russian, and how difficult it was for her to speak it regardless of all the effort. Whereas Michael and Jacob both described a two-year requirement of the foreign language as the reason for having a lot of unmotivated students in class, Sophia saw it as an obstacle to learning Russian enough to be able to use it for her future profession:

> Natalia: That [two-year requirement] does not make any sense, because just like Rimma was saying, take two years, third year you can really do something, and...
>
> Sophia: Exactly, exactly! And it feels like... I understand the point of having a requirement, but if you study history, you need to be able to read historical documents, and... But if they are not going to make you take it long enough, you can't read them... it is kind of pointless. ... Because I don't have any elective credits left, so I talked to James [the other Russian teacher] and asked him if there would be any way I could alter the requirements of that class to make it a history class by doing a research paper or something like that. Because the class is I guess one-third historical documents, and I am a history major, so that would really be a useful skill, and... I talked to my advisor, and she was really pretty... not impressed with the idea, and, yeah, she was... not very understanding, her attitude was: "it sounds like a cool class, so you should just take it anyways."

And I am like, well, I'd really like to take it, I am just trying to brainstorm and see if there is anyway that I can possibly do it and get credit for it, and what she said was, I think: "you need to bite the bullet, pay the money and take the class." And I was like... pay the money... my kid's daycare costs as much as my tuition, ha-ha, so, shut up, lady, ha-ha...

As we can see from this excerpt, learning a foreign language was very meaningful for Sophia, it was much more than simply satisfying a university requirement. Because the requirement was only for two years and Sophia was not able to afford taking Russian on the top of all the credits that she had to complete, she did not enroll in the third year of Russian. Separating from the Russian language was rather emotional for her; once I even saw her crying in class when Rimma was describing the third year with the purpose of convincing students to enroll in it. I felt that Sophia started a hard journey of conceptualizing the knowledge that was never learned well enough to transfer into the real life as "an accomplishment of itself," which you are proud of, but cannot use for the purpose that you were studying it:

Sophia: I've spent way too much time crying over Russian, ha-ha... (Sophia gets serious after a burst of laugh.) But... may be I don't know... I might just take it [next, third year]... I really want to. Just because I feel like... I really worked hard at it, you know, and... It would... I am kind of sad to see that... Because I feel like... I can't speak Russian, and... taking two years is an accomplishment by itself, but... there is not really any room... ... Even if I do stop, I am really proud that I've made it though, because it's not real easy, ha-ha, it really have not been...

The idea of conceptualizing a certain area of knowledge as a personal accomplishment rather than an existing skill was something I have thought about for quite a while. In one of our conversations Sophia said: "I have two years of French, but I can't really speak it fluently." It is interesting that very often people say: "I have" in the present tense. It seems to me that having two years of French, art, or swimming can become an important part of their Selves, but does not exist as a skill in present tense. Sophia's notion of taking French reminded me of many other stories, two of which I would like to discuss here.

My husband and I once visited the friends of ours, Earl and Dina. Everything looked picture-perfect in their house with two boys, ages 2 and 11, who were running around the house like crazy. While watching the energetic play of the boys, I was telling Dina about my experiences with the study abroad programs, and about my students trying to learn Russian. Dina joined into a conversation by saying proudly: "I used to be fluent in French, but of course now I lost it all." With these words she looked explanatorily at her two sons who at the time were trying to fit together under a small coffee table. Dina further proved that she could barely say a sentence in French, but her former knowledge of it seemed to be a significant construct of her identity. Knowledge of French did not exist any more, but her Self, as a French speaker, very well existed. It was something she was proud of, something that helped her to identify with me, "an educated foreign language person."

An important point in analyzing identity issues in my work is looking at assigning a value to knowing a foreign language, and thus perceiving oneself as a more valuable educated person, or, what is culturally constructed and valued in the immediate situation

as an educated person. I doubt that Dina's statement about her knowledge of French would be highly regarded in a conversation with other mothers of young children, who, as culturally constructed, assign more value to child-caring skills and routines.

Certain skills or experiences, valued as identity constructs, can be very abstract when compared to real life accomplishments. I first thought about it when a student of mine was interviewing me about my music education and the role of music in my life. I said that I do not have any skills left to show, but I am definitely glad that I received this education. I said that I didn't attend classical music concerts nor dealt with music in everyday life any differently due to this education, but I would definitely push my children to learn how to play a musical instrument. After the interview, I thought: "What kind of value does musical education have to me?" The only thing I can do is *say* that I have it. I can talk about music education, what the classes were like, etc. I can relate to other people talking about it. And I do feel more accomplished because of it. "A former musician" is an important part of how I identify myself, especially in the immediate situation of talking to musically inclined people.

Following this line of thought I conceptualized Sophia's knowledge of Russian as an important identity construct, a big part of how she figured her Self in a complex dialogue situated within multiple societal discourses of what it means to be an educated person, an accomplished professional, and an American citizen, a single mother, a good daughter, and a friend. The discourses were fluid and depended on an immediate situation in which Sophia co-constructed them with the people she was responding to, in my research study, it was in response to me as a native speaker, a foreign language teacher, and a Ph. D student in education.

CHAPTER EIGHT:

DIALOGUE AND MONOLOGUE IN CULTURES

Whereas the preceding three chapters presented my main findings answering the research questions, there was another finding, or, to be more exact, a theoretical consideration. Because this finding was very important to me as an author, I would like to emphasize it by dedicating a separate short chapter to it. The reader may even consider this chapter an "overflow" of the previous ones. In the process of conducting this study I was able to observe and hopefully communicate in my writing the complex relationship between the dialogic nature of human interaction and the monologic forms that it often adopts. I understand the nature of human interaction as dialogic and its forms as monologic following Bakhtin's conceptualization of the human thoughts, or ideas:

> The idea begins to live, that is, to take shape, to develop, to find and renew its verbal expression, to give birth to new ideas, only when it enters into genuine dialogic relationships with other ideas, with the ideas of *others*. Human thought becomes genuine thought, that is, an idea, only under conditions of living contact with another and alien thought, a thought embodied in someone else's voice, that is, in someone else's consciousness expressed in discourse. At that point of contact between voice-consciousness the idea is born and lives.
>
> The idea ... is not a subjective individual-psychological formation, with "permanent resident rights" in a person's head; no, the idea is inter-individual and inter-subjective – the realm of its existence is not individual consciousness but

> dialogic communion *between* consciousnesses. The idea is a *live event*, played out at the point of dialogic meeting between two or several consciousnesses. In this sense the idea is similar to the *word*, with which it is dialogically united. Like the word, the idea wants to be heard, understood, and "answered" by other voices from other positions. *Like the word, the idea is by nature dialogic, and monologue is merely the conventional compositional form of its expression, a form that emerged out of the monologism of modern times...* (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 88)

Inspired by the works of Bakhtin, I tried to understand my participants' thoughts about learning Russian as ideas that come to live in a dialogue with societal discourses. I wanted to describe not the true coherent meanings of those ideas, but only the moments of their construction in contact with the other (most typically myself, the teacher, or other students); and the dialogic nature of their construction. Seeing the forms of human interactions as traditionally monologic helped me understand the complexity of my participants' ideas. The two main monologic forms that I grasped in my dissertation were the interaction sequence of most classroom communication (i.e., IRE sequences) and the construction of cultural narratives in classroom conversations and my interviews with key participants dealing with the topic of culture. In Bakhtinian tradition both of these forms can be described as *genres* of human communication (Morris, 2002, p. 81). My goal was to show the reader that the monologic (closed and rigid) rules of the genres of classroom communication and producing cultural narratives did not define or disclose the true meanings of learning Russian. These genres could be understood as the contexts of the social actions that the students were carrying out, such as practicing language or

having a conversation about Russian culture. The true meanings of learning Russian were constantly being constructed by my participants through dialogic participation in multiple individually interpreted societal discourses.

One key feature of the monologic tradition that I was able to identify was making sense of the foreign culture through familiar cultural forms. This is the finding that I would like to emphasize in this chapter. Let me illustrate this idea with a small personal vignette. Last summer I went to the zoo with a small family party. We were standing by the monkey's cage when I overheard the following conversation:

Little girl: Mama, look at the monkeys! These two are a husband and wife, they are kissing, and that one for some reason just sits in the corner.

Mother: It must be mad or something... But these two are so cute! Look at how they pat each other on their heads!

Little girl laughs.

Doesn't this sound familiar? How often do we try to explain animals' behavior by associating it with familiar human cultural forms? Is patting on each other heads considered to be "cute" in the monkey culture? Were the monkeys really kissing? Does this behavior have anything to do with being a couple? What does being a couple mean in the monkeys' world? Was that other monkey really "mad"? I was going through all these questions and realizing that my answer to all of them was "I have no idea." But the conversation between the mother and the daughter seemed to be so natural. Their judgments were not much different from the judgments that I could make myself watching "Animal planet" with my husband.

Very often when people deal with foreign cultures, they seem to make sense of them through available familiar cultural forms. As you can see from my vignette, we can be socialized into these types of judgments, representing a monologic cultural form of interaction, beginning in childhood. This cultural form of making sense of foreign cultures is monologic in its form because, when engaging into it, people do not inquire about unfamiliar phenomena. Instead, they explain these phenomena through associations from their own world.

Returning to my data, I now want to show the reader how students in my classroom tried to make sense of Russian culture relying on familiar to them cultural forms in the context of cultural discussions. I have very few cultural discussions in my fieldnotes. Most of the data shows that students were mostly interested in learning grammar and pronunciation aspects of Russian language and drove the teacher's agenda into this direction. Cultural discussions like the one described below provided me with a lot of insight into the issue of how Russian culture could be co-constructed by the teacher and the students within the context of an American classroom.

I believe that the teacher's goal for cultural discussions was to develop a better understanding of the ways Russians did things. In the interview, I asked for her opinion on whether the students understood Russian culture. "It's hard to say, but I think that they understand... I think that they understand, but I don't know to what extent it seems weird to them," replied Rimma. From this answer and my other encounters with the teacher, I interpreted her understanding of culture as mostly the norms of behavior. Continuing her answer, she provided me with an example of how it took her several

explanations to make sure that the students understood why the Russian way of greeting each other was different from its American equivalents:

> Rimma: When the first shock is over and when you start to explain things... but one time is not enough, you need to always talk about... some kind of... obvious things... For example, I always tell them, and they know, that Russians never ask a question "how are you?" and reply "great," "no problem." Not because we are not friendly, but because it's a different culture, because when someone asks [how are you doing they want to know what really is good and bad in your life]... But you always have to remind them about that, this [the greeting] connects to something else [in culture], everything's so interrelated...

It seemed like Rimma believed that students could obtain cultural knowledge through her explanations, especially if they were systematic and frequent – just as in case of any other knowledge. At the same time students' understandings of cultural knowledge came out a rather complex phenomenon in her discourse. She noticed that even if students understood "Russian culture" it still could seem weird to them. Rimma's definition of "weird" seemed to have different dimensions: "In the beginning they were giggling, but then, I think, they understood it." Thus, "giggling in the beginning" was one type of weird; understanding in the end, but perhaps not agreeing – was another.

Most of the cultural discussions in Rimma's classroom centered on watching the movie "Adam's Rib." As I explained earlier, regardless of Rimma's efforts, her students did not seem to think about interpreting the movie as a realia of Russian culture, as we can observe in the following episode:

Rimma starts the movie. It the last part of Adam's Rib. Students seem to be engaged in the movie. I hear a lot of laughter. While the students are watching the movie, Rimma, as always, is writing selected words from the movie on blackboard. After the movie ends, Rimma asks the students what they think about the ending.

Alina: *I think it's an* optimistic ending. *It's a* miracle.

Frol: I was surprised.

Igor: It means women will survive by themselves.

Lyuda: It's a nice frame to the movie.

Rimma: *Life goes on, river...*

Dima: I didn't like it, it didn't fit with the rest of the movie. It was good until then.

Rimma says a few words about the director of the movie. She says that she agrees that the ending does not fit with the rest of the movie, but her question is why did they make an ending like this?

Jacob: The bell thing fell...

Rimma: But why?

Jacob: No, I meant...

Rimma, interrupting: Yes, but why?

Vlad: I didn't think it was optimistic at all. They, especially Nastya, did not look happy.

Rimma: Right, Nastya says: *It can't go on forever. Foreverness, eternity...* (points at the board where she wrote that phrase).

Jacob: Maybe they thought that they were deceived [by grandma] this whole time taking care of her [inferring that grandma was pretending to be sick the whole time].

Lyuda: Maybe they were shocked that the bell hit her so hard.

Sveta [heritage speaker]: I don't think that their shock means that they are not happy.

Ellen: I think that she [grandma] ruled their lives, they were hoping that it would end, and then she resurrects. "I am back!" [imitating grandma, sarcastically]. I don't think they are happy at all.

Sasha: Don't they have nursing homes in Russia?

Rimma: It's not in the culture at all to give old people away.

The discussion about nice and not so nice nursing homes continues for about two minutes. Then Rimma asks other people what they think about the movie.

Andrey and Konstantin answer "I don't know."

Rimma: These are not allowed: "I can't," "I don't know."

Konstantin: Was it necessarily a miracle? May be she wasn't that bad [meaning that grandma wasn't in a condition bad enough for her getting up to be considered a miracle].

Alina: Maybe she got a reason to get up when she lost the bell.

Ellen and Sasha, almost together: She was surprised when her hand moved, she was paralyzed! [insisting that grandma really was that bad and the fact that she got up was truly a miracle].

Inna: In American movies everything becomes clear at the end, here we don't get any answers...

Rimma: Right, what do you think is going to happen to the characters? (At this point Rimma clarifies that students can use whatever language they are comfortable, even thought the students were mostly using English already.)

Igor: Mishka is going down quickly. He is not a good decision maker.

Rimma says that this could be a part of a Russian character in general and reminds the class about Dostoyevsky's novel "Brothers Karamazovi." She talks about people who make the scenes. The discussion does not pick up from there and Rimma asks about Evgeny, another character in the movie.

Sasha: I liked him.

Andrey: I terms of maturity, I think he is the only one over 20 in this movie. The whole thing reminded me of a fourth grade cafeteria.

Sophia, interrupting Andrey: He doesn't have an emotional part in it!

Rimma: What else do you think?

Sophia: I think he is creepy!

Rimma: I think he is "what you see is what you get" kind of guy. What is another way to say it?

Igor: He wears his heart on his sleeve.

Sophia: This is a cultural difference. If someone showed up like this at my door with flowers, that'd be a red flag to keep him away, but obviously, this is accepted in Russia.

Rimma wraps the discussion by suggesting that everyone can keep thinking about cultural differences, the significance of the ending, and the goals of the director.

When Rimma attempted to bring in Russian symbolism with the metaphor of the river and explanation of the "Russian character" with the novel *Brothers Karamazovi* by Dostoyevsky, the students did not pick up her thread of the conversation. The teacher's initiations in this classroom discussion were followed by an awkward silence or responses not related to what she was trying to accomplish. One student talked about the movie as a piece of art (with a nice frame), a few stated how much they did or didn't like it, and some assigned a symbolic meaning to it (e.g., women will survive by themselves). Students did not built on each other, relying on familiar cultural forms, or genres, of watching a movie. Within the genre of classroom communication, understanding Russian cultural realia through the movie was not their goal. Their goal was to answer the teacher's questions. In her turn, Rimma did not built on her students' comments, because they didn't go along with her agenda of providing Russian contexts of understanding the movie.

Not building on each other, the students and the teacher seemed to act within the contexts of at least three different genres: explaining Russian cultural realia presented in the movie, American cultural forms of watching and interpreting movies in general, and interactional sequence of classroom communication. Rimma was trying to engage her students into a conversation with the goal of trying to understand Russian cultural forms that they encountered in the movie. Students offered interpretations that built on their practices of watching the movies in general, which included, but were not limited to, expectations of the plot, discussion of the characters, and expressing like-dislike types of

opinions. There was no dialogue in this discussion: the teacher and the students did not build on each other, they did not inquire about each other's knowledge, they each followed their own agenda. What was important, there was a very specific context for this discussion – a classroom activity. This context contributed, and perhaps even defined, the rules and the nature of this exchange. The teacher was trying to engage student in a discussion about cultures. But culture in the classroom, as a social phenomenon co-constructed by the teacher and the students, acting within familiar genres of classroom communication, became a subject, a material that needs to be taught, learned, and evaluated. The genre of classroom communication, where the teacher asked questions and students provided answers that were evaluated, seemed to be in conflict with the goal of having a cultural discussion where people play with meanings and build on each other opinions in a dialogue.

Whereas the compositional form (or genre) of classroom communication came out as monologic, when I turned to the interviews, my participants demonstrated unique dialogic constructions of the ideas about Russian culture. Sophia was contemplating in our conversation what it meant that Mishka was not weird, but just Russian. Jacob connected what happened in the classroom to his knowledge about the cultural practice of "not giving old people away" in Russia – knowledge acquired through his experience of living in Poland and having Russian friends. Neither Sophia's contemplations, nor Jacob's knowledge were engaged into a dialogue in the classroom. In the context of the monologic classroom discussion the students did not hear each other voices, instead, they interpreted each other messages in the context of their beliefs about classmates. Sofia interpreted Jacob's words as "dumb boy things," and grouped him with Andrey, even

though Jacob seemed to have no particular relationship with Andrey. Jacob interpreted Sasha's inquiry about nursing homes in Russia as evidence of "ugliness" in American culture. Jacob did not remember who said those words in particular, so he assigned an impersonal "they" to their author:

> Jacob: I didn't like everybody's interpretation of the movie; I thought they were all stupid. I thought everybody basically misunderstood everything. I think it brought out a lot of ugliness in our whole culture. I mean their whole idea of taking an old woman and taking her to some home... They thought that they were upset and angry because the woman was standing and she was going to live longer, and they were going to have a baby and kind of get rid of her, or something like that. You could see how shocked they were... I think that they thought that she was codependent, and they thought, why wouldn't she get rid of this woman, why wouldn't she put it in a home, how can she be doing this, and I think... that whole idea to me is just really, really disgusting. They didn't say it, but they started asking, "Isn't there anything in Russia, like a nursing home?" (Imitating intonation that is very quiet, abstractly questioning, but at the same time loaded.) And when she [Rimma] started to explain that they don't do it there, they started searching for it even further, "Isn't there anything?" You know, they were looking for it in some way, I mean, you can see that in their minds, while watching the movie, they are searching for a way... I don't know...
>
> Natalia: I feel that what you are saying is that they are trying to translate it into their reality, instead of trying to understand how things are in Russian reality...

Jacob: Exactly, exactly, that's what they are doing. That's exactly what they are doing. Exactly. They translate into their way, and they don't see it any other way. None of them. With the exception of maybe Michael.

Jacob's example showed how due to the absence of dialogic openness in the classroom communication the students produced each other as culturally insensitive Americans. They interpreted each other words as closed, finished, and monologic ideas – ideas signifying whom the other was. As I mentioned in the beginning, monologic tendencies of Western world come out of a long tradition of viewing society, culture, and language as closed systems. Being a well-established citizen with firm beliefs and values is a significant value in our culture. Last fall, when introducing sociocultural theory and Vygotsky's ideas in my educational psychology class, I asked my undergraduate students whether they perceived themselves as individuals with a relatively stable set of beliefs and values. Almost everyone said "yes." I challenged their thinking just a little bit, but got scared as we were going deeper into the issue. What alternative could I offer them? Because, drawing from discourses of the system, this is exactly where they took me: to looking for a coherent alternative. Neither Vygotsky, nor Bakhtin suggested an alternative to imagining our society and us as coherent entities with stable sets of virtues. Coherence does not survive in a dialogue. The great minds invited us to always *think about it.*

Thus, the monologic forms of human discourses dealing with making sense of other cultures come out of a dialogue with the societal traditions. It was the monologic traditions of the society that the students responded to. They responded to it by borrowing words and genres from it. But the relationship with the system remained

dialogic, which meant fluid, flexible, and individually authored. This is where the hope comes from. As long as a closed system of an alternative is not what we are looking for.

In the course of this study I understood that a teacher could be a lot more effective if s/he thinks about the students as social actors borrowing from established monologic cultural forms of interaction, but the process of borrowing and the relationships with the material taught in a class as dialogic. Classroom interaction, as any social interaction, is constrained by its established genres and assumed social positions, in this case, identities of the teacher and the students. The teacher is only one social source that the students respond to, and, especially at the college level, often not the most powerful one. In constructing their knowledge, no matter what it is, students participate in many societal discourses, which they individually interpret and uniquely weave together.

CHAPTER NINE:

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Summary of Findings

I used a rhetorical question as the title of my dissertation: "Language socialization in the absence of language and society?" and structured the dissertation around answering a more specific research question: "What does it mean to learn Russian in a sociocultural sense outside of Russia, in fact, in a classroom in a large public university in the Midwest?" At the end of my journey I can answer these questions in the following way. Learning Russian and about Russian culture in an American college classroom was constrained by monologic cultural forms of genres of classroom communication and conceptualizing ideas into coherent narratives. Acting within these genres, my participants conceptualized learning Russian in the classroom as receiving a language base, culture as an unnecessary sub-subject taught by the teacher, and classroom activities as practicing linguistic knowledge instead of understanding cultural contexts. By employing a theoretical lens based on Bakhtinian and Vygotskian theories I was able to see beyond these monologic conceptualizations and discover the complexity of the students' learning practice as unique and individual in each case, unbelievably rich, but very hard to grasp and coherently relate to actual events in the classroom, as it was constantly evolving in a self-constructed dialogue with social sources defined by intellectual, not physical proximity. I was also able to gain insight into how learning Russian was powerfully connected to the students' understanding of Self as foreign language learners and American citizens.

Theoretical and Pedagogical Implications

I see my theoretical intention being very close to the one Anne Dyson expressed in her book about elementary school children who incorporated their media experience into the development of their literacy practices:

> Through analytical narratives of the literacy actions and reactions of Sammy, Tina, and their peers, I situate child writing within the social and ideological complexity of children's lives and contemporary times. I hope to contribute to and extend sociocultural visions, which portray learning to write as learning to use medium to participate in cultural life in socially appropriate ways (e.g., Heath, 1983; Moll and Whitemore, 1993; Rogoff 1990). I illustrate that children's ways of writing are shaped, not only by their interaction in adult-governed worlds, but also by their social goals and ideological positioning in peer-governed ones. Moreover, social identification and social conflicts, not only social interactions, make salient new kinds of writing choices, newly imagined ways of depicting human relationships (Dyson, 1997, p. 6).

In my study I attempted to situate learning a foreign language within the social and ideological complexity of the classroom of a large university in the Midwest ("not a place to seriously study less common foreign languages"), student's lives and contemporary times. I worked towards this goal by co-constructing analytical narratives of the social actions and reactions of Rimma, Michael, Jacob, Sophia, and Foma inside and outside of their Russian language classroom. I hoped to contribute to and extend sociocultural visions, which portray the goals of the foreign language learning as making

it more cultural by providing authentic contexts (Kramsch, 2002; Beltz, 2002; Lantolf, 2002; Krashen, 2004). I tried to illustrate that students' practices of learning a foreign language are not shaped by their interactions in the classroom, rather, social genres of classroom interaction can help teachers understand the nature of the social actions that the students are carrying out in the classroom, and how these actions are connected to their foreign language learning practices – practices that are much broader than the classroom and involve a complex dialogue among students' social goals, ideological positioning, and social identification within the constantly evolving individual interpretation of the societal discourses.

On a broader scale, I see the theoretical value of my work in joining the literature discourse problematizing the notions of culture, cultural practice, and socialization. Culture came out in my study as being constantly constructed through dialogic participation in a cultural practice that is uniquely and fluidly interpreted by each individual. This dialogic participation is what I understand as socialization. Thus, language learning in a foreign language classroom can indeed be understood as socialization, however, the term socialization than needs to be understood in a sense very different to the one of "becoming a member of a particular society" (Goodnow, Miller, & Kessel, 1995; Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986). Socialization becomes a phenomenon of unique and individual interpretation of what students identify as a classroom learning practice in the context of organizing their life experiences outside of the classroom.

Interwoven with these theoretical implications are the pedagogical ones. I believe that an in-depth ethnographic account such as this study can provide insights for the teachers who deal with the idea of culture in their classrooms everyday. Understanding

culture as a multidimensional phenomenon co-constructed in a dialogue, but a dialogue that often follows the monologic genres of classroom interaction, may help teachers to think of new ways of creatively weaving cultural knowledge into the construction of their unique pedagogies. Understanding student practice of learning classroom material as a dialogic endeavor crossing the borders of the classroom in unpredictable directions may help the teachers to reevaluate the role of the classroom and their own part in students' learning. Thinking about the importance of learning a foreign language for the dialogue of understanding Self may help the teachers better understand their students on both social and academic levels, as it helped me to discover Michael, Jacob and Sophia's intricate ways of intertwining learning Russian with the social work of figuring their identities of students and citizens. Let me illustrate this idea with one more example from my own practice.

As a Ph.D. student of education I taught a course in educational psychology for 2 years. At the end of my second year I felt a great sense of progress in my pedagogy as I was trying to communicate complexity of modern interpretations and application of learning theories, being a strong advocate of the ones emphasizing social and cultural aspects of teaching and learning. This was when one of my students came over to talk about the final project and claimed that she still liked behaviorism. My first reaction was a shock: last century behaviorism after all the discussions about Vygotsky!? But I didn't show this reaction to my student. I thought about several things: the context of our conversation (preparation for a class project that demanded to utilize all theories, including behaviorism); the social sources that my student might have been drawing from (perhaps, a reflection of the fact that behaviorism is still very much present in teaching

practice and it is pointless to deny it); and the fact that this statement is not her stable characteristic, but a constantly evolving idea. As a reward, I was able to see the complexity of this idea as our conversation continued and as the final project came out. What I hope I was able to achieve as a teacher was understand the context of a student-teacher conversation as a monologic form that only for a moment packaged a very complex process of my student's understanding of learning theories into a neat, coherent, and shocking for me statement: "I still kind of like behaviorism." As one of my professors asked to clarify my thought: "When you talk about monologic, you talk about only the visible part of an iceberg, right?"

Limitations and Strengths

There are certain limitations to qualitative methodology. First of all, it makes my findings deeply embedded in the social context of the classroom where I studied them, as well as in the various social contexts outside of the classroom that my participants talked about. Secondly, it employs an interpretive mode of inquiry, which means that the data presented here is the result of my own researcher's interpretation of how my participants were interpreting their learning. I tried to reflect on this fact by describing words and actions of my participants as my understandings of their responses to certain social contexts, such as classroom activities and talking to a researcher (me), rather than portraying them as stable characteristics. These limitations do not allow for direct generalization of the findings from one case to others; however, I believe that interpretive research is extremely powerful in terms of exercising pedagogical imagination and

providing a model for thinking about the importance of small, local, fluid and dynamic details of the classroom life.

Implications for Future Research

Taking into the account the limitations and strengths described above, I can suggest the following implications for future applications of my study. First of all, I hope that this work will become a powerful template for thinking theoretically about culture in the classroom and outside of it, about what we understand by knowledge, about the role of the teacher, and about the complex identities of our students. Secondly, I hope that it can serve as a methodological template and join a strong tradition of ethnographic studies in education, turning the teachers' and researchers' attention to complexity of local specifics. I could see both templates to be applied in various settings, both where culture is conceptualized as a major influential factor (e.g., immigrant communities), and where culture often remains unnoticed but plays an important role (for example, I found that I utilized a lot of the thinking from this study in teaching an educational psychology class in a seemingly homogeneous setting that consisted of 99% of Caucasian students in a large university in American Midwest).

Personally, I believe that this dissertation study was an important step in establishing myself as a future educator and researcher. It helped me to engage in an in-depth dialogue with the theoretical perspectives on culture and society, and I see this dialogue continuing through my professional life. I intend to continue doing ethnographic research providing engaging insights into the concepts of culture, socialization, practice, dialogue, monologue, identity, etc. Taking advantage of my

international background I would like to continue studying the cultural experiences related to education of the American and Russian students inside and outside of their countries, thus helping them to deeply engage into these experiences in the contexts of study abroad programs and professional intercultural projects.

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