

## **Comparing Heritage and Non-Heritage Learning Outcomes and Target-Language Utilization in the Overseas Immersion Context: A Preliminary Study of the Russian Flagship**

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The heritage learner within U.S. foreign language education has received increasing attention over the past two decades, as university programs with substantial numbers of heritage students have developed improved diagnostic and curricular offerings for addressing the particular needs of those whose learning of their native language was incomplete or interrupted due to immigration to the U.S. (Valdés, 2000; Kagan & Dillon, 2004).<sup>1</sup> While the heritage learner within the domestic language learning context is relatively well represented in the literature, relatively little research has been devoted to the acquisition experiences of heritage learners engaged in overseas immersion study (re-learning) of their home language. (Freed, 2004; Kinginger, 2009). Those studies which do exist focus primarily on the issue of learner identity (Beausoleil, 2008; Moreno, 2009). Heritage learners have the capacity to reach near-native proficiency in their first language, to become “balanced bilinguals” with all the cultural and metalinguistic awareness that this entails (Polinsky, 2010). The present study examines one possible pathway to near-native proficiency (defined here as Level 3+ or Level 4 across modalities) for the heritage learner, based on an overseas immersion as a language learner, university student, intern and homestay resident.

Until recently, Russian heritage learners have been relatively rare among overseas Russian study program participants. Families of Russian-speaking background have sometimes been reluctant to encourage their children to return to Russia or other Russian-speaking former Soviet states for academic study. Moreover, visa granting policies

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for recent immigrants of East European and Eurasian governments have also varied considerably over the past decades. Fortunately, official attitudes in Russia and certain other Russophone societies today toward overseas heritage communities have changed and qualified Americans of Russian-speaking background are now generally welcome to study at host-country universities.

Within the Russian Flagship Program, the numbers of Americans of heritage background has gradually increased over the past nine years, now constituting an annual cohort of 4 - 6 students out of the overall annual group of 20 American students who take part in the Overseas "Capstone" Program at St. Petersburg State University (SPBSU). The program operates under the terms of an agreement between the University and the American Councils for International Education: ACTR/ACCELS as a part of the Language Flagship Program of Defense Language and National Security Education Office (DLNSEO).

Previous studies by Brecht, Davidson & Ginsburg (1995), Davidson (2007, 2010) have presented large-scale, multi-institutional analyses of language gain by American students engaged in the formal study at Russian partner universities at the intermediate and advanced levels. More recently, Davidson & Lekic (2010) examined in more ethnographic, individual learner-focused terms the transition within the in-country immersion context from advanced-to-superior levels of proficiency, providing updated outcomes information for the Russian Overseas Flagship Program along with new data on the effects of different levels and types of target language (L-2) utilization on ultimate proficiency outcomes.

The present study seeks to deepen that investigation by examining the overseas language learning outcomes and experience of heritage learners in comparison to the larger population of Russian overseas Flagship students. Measured outcomes are reflected in this case in the form of ACTFL-certified Oral Proficiency Test ratings as well as the official Russian government Test of Russian as a Foreign Language (TORFL) multi-modal score reports, presented and compared for both groups of participants at program-initial and program-final stages. Self-evaluation data on perceived language growth produced by the two groups is also considered, as are time-on-task online calendar/diary reports, in order to identify any notable differences in the allocation of time by heritage and non-heritage Flagship learners in their formal and informal target-language use. The overall educational purpose of such

study is to understand more deeply the impact of existing Flagship programmatic and curricular interventions, to contribute to ongoing assessment of overall program effectiveness, and to provide current and future participants and program faculty with well-documented examples of learner and teacher best practices within the study abroad environment.

## **I. RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

This study will compare learning outcomes for heritage and non-heritage students participating in the Russian Overseas Flagship between 2004-2012. Within an outcomes-based framework, it will examine the amount and kinds of target-language utilization reported by the heritage and non-heritage sub-groups within the overseas Russian Flagship students over the eight-year period under investigation. The following research questions are central to the study.

- What is the typical level of target-language outcomes of heritage students in the Russian Flagship program? How do heritage outcomes compare to those of non-heritage students in a parallel program of similar design and duration?
- Is there a relationship between levels of language utilization and ultimate proficiency outcome for heritage students at or near Level 3? Is the relationship comparable to that of non-heritage students at comparable levels?
- Are there particular contexts of formal and/or informal language utilization associated with positive outcomes that are unique to heritage student, beyond sheer time-on-task measures?
- Do heritage learners evaluate their own progress and L-2/C-2 acquisition differently than non-heritage students at the same level?

As noted, the study is limited to an analysis of training to ILR Level 3 (and above) in the Russian Overseas Language Flagship at St. Petersburg State University (SPBSU), however, these findings may have relevance to other overseas immersion programs for Russian, as well as for Flagship programs focused on other target-languages.

## II. METHOD

In keeping with other studies in the present series, this report makes use of global measurements of outcomes<sup>2</sup> to compare adult learners in terms of ultimate levels of proficiency, attained in the course of a year-long intensive/immersion academic program in Russia, with systematically reported levels and varieties of informal and professional target-language utilization over the course of the same academic year. Specifically, the present study will isolate the smaller heritage language student cohort (N = 10) within the larger population of overseas Russian Flagship students who have completed the program to date (N = 85) and compare the outcomes presented by the heritage group and the standard group. The goal is to identify any features of the performance profile of the heritage learner that are distinct from the larger group of overseas Russian Flagship students.

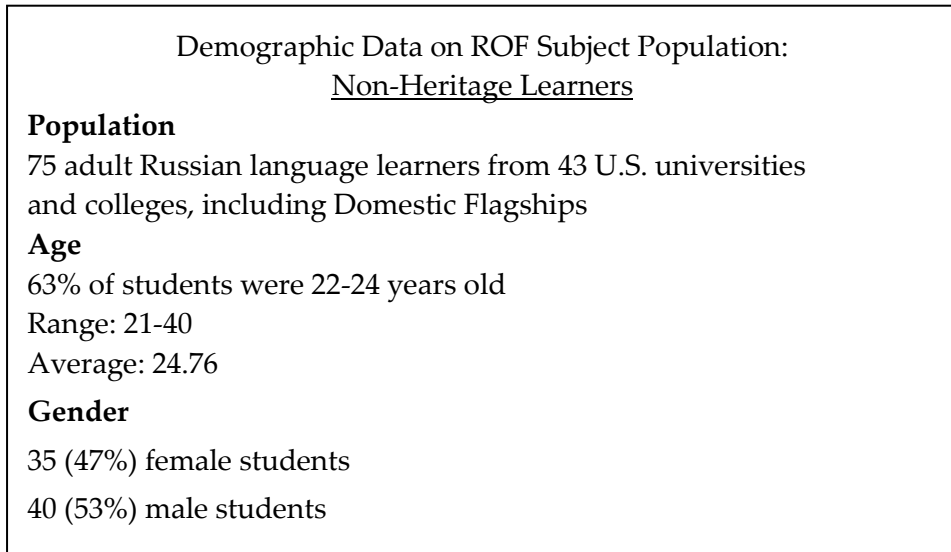
## PARTICIPANTS

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

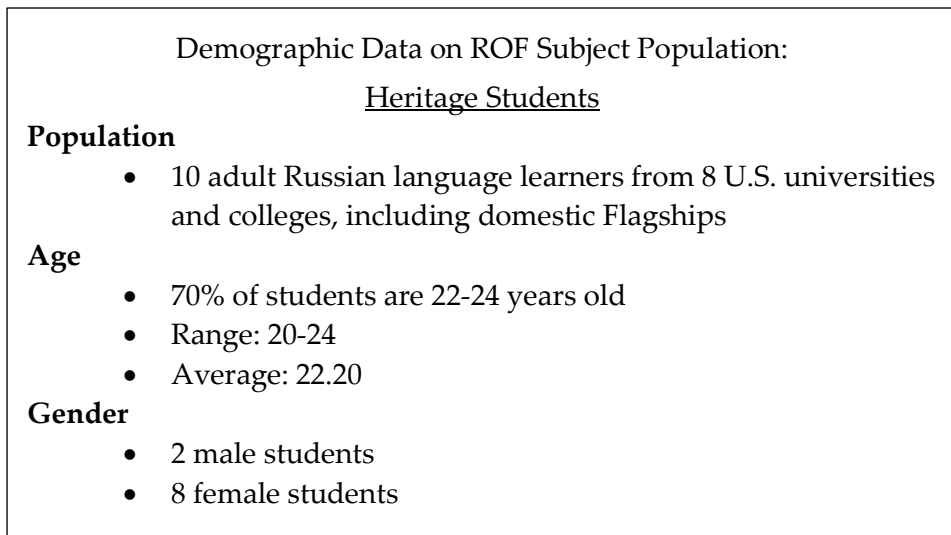
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<sup>2</sup> Within the present study, outcome is understood to refer to measured oral, reading, writing and listening proficiency of participant-subjects at the beginning and end of a nine-month overseas immersion program.

**Figure 1a.**



**Figure 1b.**



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

The subject group comprises 8 consecutive classes of ROF students (N=85), whose program of study at St. Petersburg State University (SPBSU) has been developed in cooperation with American Councils/ACTR and combines unsheltered direct-enrollment and

internship activities with a dedicated L-2/C-2 dedicated battery of small-group classes focused on the integration of speaking, listening, reading, writing, and cultural modalities at the professional level, ACTFL “Superior,” ILR - 3. The structure of the Flagship Program, therefore, focuses on both formal and informal language training and a broad range of *in-situ* L-2 utilization content-focused activities.

- Direct enrollment subject course for credit at SPBSU (selected by the student)
- Core language/culture study battery
- Language course work in small groups
- Independent research projects
- Individual language tutors
- Internships placements requiring presentational work and weekly reports
- Discussion groups
- Homestays
- Integrated cultural program (bi-weekly, tied to thematic units of the Flagship language courses)
- Ongoing evaluation (testing, site visits, teacher/tutor reports, portfolio development, self-evaluation)
- Bi-Weekly Language Utilization Reports (LUR) (time-place mapping and self-management template)

The formal L-2 training programs follow two correlated but separate models: 1) the standard curriculum; 2) the heritage curriculum.

### 1. The Standard Curriculum

The core language courses are each lead by a senior lecturer, assisted by a junior faculty member for small group work with no more than 5 students, and work from a literacy-focused integrated syllabus (Rogova et al., 2008, Revised 2012)

<i>Intensive Language Training Group Work</i>	<i>Hours per week</i>
• Reading beyond the lines: Russian literature and press	2
• Analytical reading (section-level)	2
• Mass-media: current issues in Russian society (spring semester)	2

- Contemporary norms of spoken Russian (phonetics and discourse) 4
- Advanced composition and Russian structure 2
- Language through culture: lecture plus discussion/excursion 4

*Individual:*

- Direct Enrollment seminar or lecture course (fall semester) 3
- Individual language tutorials 4
- Internship (spring semester) 7

**TOTAL** **21/30 Hours**

**2. The Heritage Curriculum**

Heritage students enroll in the same core language lecture sessions as does the standard group, but work as a separate group at the section-level of each, where they pursue enhanced readings of general cultural as well as in their respective areas of disciplinary specialization. Reading lists are enhanced, with less time devoted to comprehension of texts, more emphasis on interpretation and discussion.

*Intensive Language Training Group work* *Hours per week*

- Reading beyond the lines: Russian literature and press 2
- Analytical reading (dedicated section for heritage group) 2
- Mass-media: current issues in Russian society (spring semester) 2
- Contemporary norms of spoken Russian (dedicated heritage) 4
- Heritage writing (dedicated heritage course) 2
- Language through culture: lecture plus discussion/excursion 4

*Individual:*

- Direct Enrollment seminar or lecture course(s) (both semesters) 3
- Individual language tutorials 4
- Internship (both semesters) 7

**TOTAL** **21/30 Hours**

Heritage students have direct-enrollment courses and internships in both semesters, and normally take two direct enrollment courses in the fall term, and one or two in the spring together with the internship. Heritage language courses are intended to function as a “bridge” curriculum

between the non-heritage Level 3 core curriculum and the standard SPBSU student-level course work on the same topics. The heritage writing program, for example, introduced in 2011-12, is based, in part, on the rubrics and norms reflected in the Russian Federation National Standard for Writing, as reflected in the Unified State Examination (EGE) required of all applicants for university admissions (Ivanova, 2009).

### **Note on Outcomes Measures and Testing Instruments**

Multiple outcomes measures for both pre- and post-program assessment purposes have been used in the overseas Russian Flagship. They include pre- and post-program Oral Proficiency Interviews (OPI), administered by ACTFL-certified proficiency testers, pre- and post-program American Councils Standardized Reading and Listening Proficiency Tests, based on the ILR proficiency scale, as well as the Test of Russian as a Foreign Language (TORFL), based on the Common European Framework and serving as the official state certified examination of Russian for foreigners in the Russian Federation (Bazarova, Lekic & Marshall, 2009; Ivanova, 2009). Pre- and post-program test results using the TORFL Certification Level -3 (corresponding to CEF Threshold Level C-1) and Certification Level -4 (corresponding to CEF Threshold Level C-2) have been used since the beginning of the program (Andrjushina, et al., 2010; Aver'yanova, et al., 2000) ILR-referenced multi-modality reading and listening testing were introduced in 2009 by American Councils, but are not referenced in the present study. Currently ACTFL/OPI testers do not have the ability to rate speaking samples above the "Superior" level. For the purposes of the present study, TORFL testing results will be cited, unless otherwise indicated. (See Davidson (2010) and Davidson & Lekic (2010) for detailed descriptions of these measures).

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

As part of a strong emphasis on the development of the advanced learner's self-management of language learning, participants in each of the Flagship programs administered by American Councils in Russia, the Middle and Near East and Africa, are required to complete a bi-weekly language utilization report (LUR), which provides both a standardized accounting of how the students spend time using the language in and outside of class, as well as an opportunity to analyze and reflect on successful and unsuccessful speech situations in which they have found themselves during the reporting period. The LUR, therefore, serves both



as a diary for documenting language use, as well as a vehicle for personal reflection and communication with an academic advisor (in-country or at-home) for the purpose of goal setting for the next reporting period. (See Davidson & Lekic (2010) for a specimen of the complete LUR template.)

The LUR is a monitored self-reporting online survey instrument, for which students are provided explicit deadlines and instructions to ensure comparability of responses. LUR's are not submitted by students during breaks or for a week that is interrupted by travel outside the host language area. The same reporting schedule has been observed on the LURs over the eight consecutive years represented in the present report, beginning from September 2004 through May of 2012.

Target language activities are listed on the LUR using 13 standard rubrics, one of which is "other." The present study, however, will pay particular attention to language use outside the classroom and the formal learning components of the program. Classroom attendance is required of all ROF students and monitored carefully by on-site resident directors. Quantitative data, based on the American Councils LUR provide the principal focus of the analysis that follows; sample narrative material from open-ended responses have also been included here to assist the reader in better understanding the language utilization behaviors reported.

### **The Self-Evaluation Instrument**

A major component of the end-of-program evaluation 360-degree evaluation process of the Flagship program is a learning outcomes and self-assessment module developed by language program staff and the research department of American Councils. The self-assessment instrument is designed to elicit information on the following aspects of the overseas Russian language program:

- a) the impact of language courses on improvement in participants' language skills (reading, writing, speaking and listening) as well as improved cultural understanding;
- b) the usefulness of direct enrollment courses in helping participants improve their language skills (reading, writing, comprehension, speaking and listening) and gaining a better understanding of local culture;
- c) the role specific courses in helping participants make language gains, reflecting on the effectiveness of teaching methods,

- guidance, teacher availability to assist students with questions, issues or problems outside the classroom, class sessions, and the extent to which teachers incorporated cultural learning into their courses;
- d) the impact of co-curricular activities, which included one-day and overnight trips, internships, free time activities, living in dormitories or with host families on improvement in language skills (reading, writing, speaking and listening) as well as improved cultural understanding;
  - e) self-assessment of overall language skills in terms of participants' ability to comprehend, read, speak and write grammatically correct Russian and their level of comfort using the language; and
  - f) overall assessment of improvement in understanding the culture and everyday life in participants' host country.

Participants were asked to rate the extent to which they felt their language skills had improved, using a five-point scale where 5 is great improvement and 1 is no improvement at all. Similarly, they were asked to gauge the extent to which their courses helped improve their language skills using a five-point scale where 5 is great extent and 1 is not at all. The questionnaire was designed so that it could be administered online.

Data collection for the Russian Overseas Flagship program took place upon program completion. All participants were invited to complete a self-administered questionnaire to provide feedback on their overseas experience, program impact as well as self-assessment of their language skills and extent of cultural exposure and learning. Participants received email invitations providing them with individualized links to the online questionnaire. The first invitation email was sent to participants prior to their departure from their host cities and return to the United States. We adopted an online data collection method to facilitate the process for participants and allow them to submit their completed forms regardless of their physical location at the end of their program in Russia. In addition, the online survey instrument allowed survey respondents to exit the survey at any time and return to complete it. The respondents could re-access their online form and pick up where they had left off. To encourage cooperation and increase response rate, follow up and reminder emails were sent to non-respondents every three days over a two week period. Using this data collection protocol, we

achieved 100% response rate as participants in the program from 2009-2012 program submitted completed questionnaires, yielding completed questionnaires for ten heritage speakers and 49 non-heritage speakers. All data are kept confidential and reported in aggregate form. (*See Appendix 1.*)

### III. RESULTS

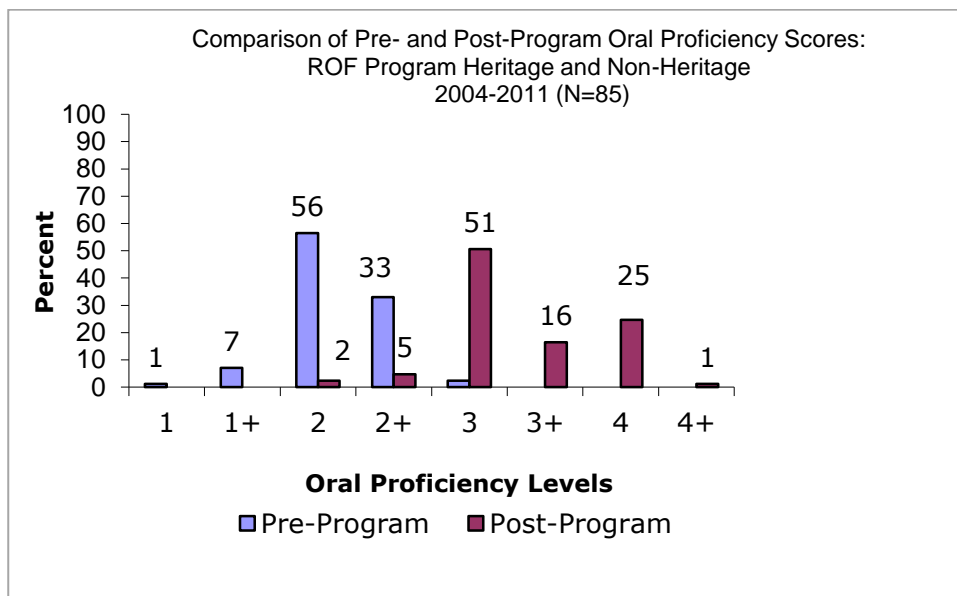
Analysis has proceeded along three lines: a) review of L-2 proficiency outcomes of the Russian Overseas Flagship for the current subject group in order to confirm post-program outcomes; b) presentation of data relating outcomes to overall levels and types of L-2 utilization activities of participants over the same period; c) heritage and non-heritage post-program self-evaluations are considered in light of the student's measured proficiency outcomes and individual allocation of time-on-task over the course of the program.

#### **Learner outcome variables**

The proficiency-based outcomes report of the ROF to date can be viewed in the following Figures, which compare pre- and post-Flagship program test performances across modalities. Figures 2, 4, 6, and 8 (below) update the Davidson and Lekic 2010 report on ROF proficiency-based outcomes through the inclusion of an additional year (2011-2012; N = 20) of Flagship Program data. The break-down and analysis of heritage and non-heritage outcomes and language utilization is presented here for the first time, as are count/row percentage charts for the aggregate group, the standard population, and the heritage population (Tables 1, 2, 3).

The outcomes results presented in Figure 2 above demonstrate that participants in the ROF program attain the 3-level proficiency at a success rate of approximately 90%. Figure 3 provides a comparison of OPI test outcomes of heritage and non-heritage ROF participants. Based on data collected to date, heritage students were somewhat more likely to have entered the Flagship program at a measured OPI Level of 2+ than their non-heritage counterparts (51% versus 31%), and were considerably more likely to have completed the program at Level 4 or 4+, than their non-heritage counterparts (60% versus 21%).

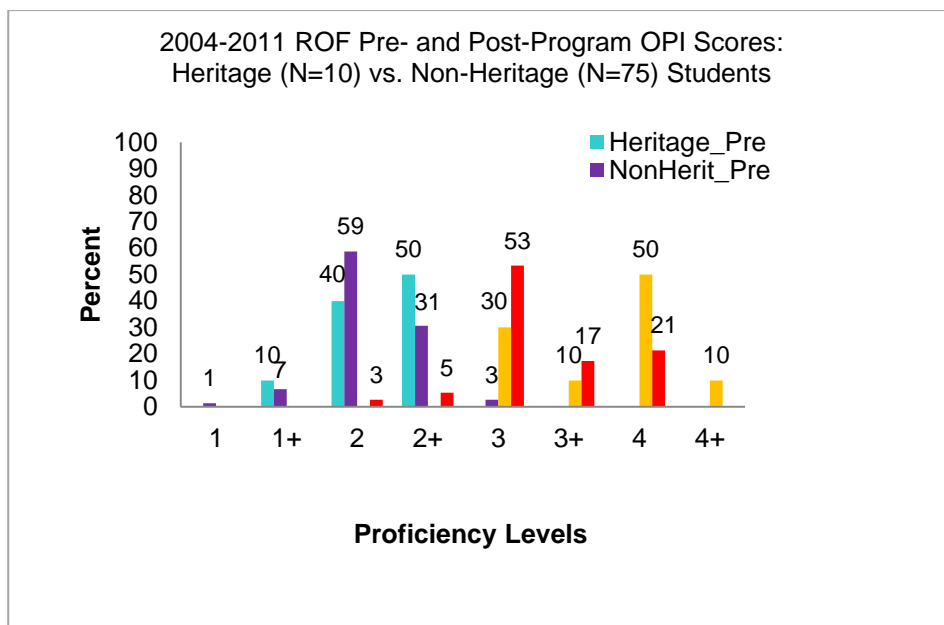
**Figure 2.**



**Table 1.**

Pre-program Speaking Proficiency Level	Post-program Speaking Proficiency Level						Total
	2	2+	3	3+	4	4+	
1	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
%	0	0	100.00	0	0	0	100.00
1+	2	1	3	0	0	0	6
%	33.30	16.70	50.00	0	0	0	100.00
2	0	3	24	9	11	1	48
%	0	6.30	50.00	18.80	22.90	2.10	100.00
2+	0	0	15	4	9	0	28
%	0	0	53.60	14.30	32.10	0	100.00
3	0	0	1	1	0	0	2
%	0	0	50.00	50.00	0	0	100.00
Total	2	4	44	14	20	1	85
%	2.40	4.70	51.80	16.50	23.50	1.20	100.00

**Figure 3.**



**Table 2.**

Speaking proficiency scores for non-heritage learners (N=75), Pre- and Post-program (Count/Row Percent)						
Pre-program Speaking Proficiency Level	Post-program Speaking Proficiency Level					
	2	2+	3	3+	4	Total
1	0	0	1	0	0	1
%	0	0	100.00	0	0	100.00
1+	2	1	2	0	0	5
%	40.00	20.00	40.00	0	0	100.00
2	0	3	22	9	10	44
%	0	6.80	50.00	20.50	22.70	100.00
2+	0	0	15	3	5	23
%	0	0	65.20	13.00	21.70	100.00
3	0	0	1	1	0	2
%	0	0	50.00	50.00	0	100.00
Total	2	4	41	13	15	75
%	2.70	5.30	54.70	17.30	20.00	100.00

**Table 3.**

Speaking proficiency scores for heritage learners (N=10), Pre- and Post-program (Count/Row Percent)					
Pre-program Speaking Proficiency Level	Post-program Speaking Proficiency Level				Total
	3	3+	4	4+	
1+	1	0	0	0	1
%	100.00	0	0	0	100.00
2	2	0	1	1	4
%	50.00	0.00	25.00	25.00	100.00
2+	0	1	4	0	5
%	0.00	20.00	80.00	0	100.00
Total	3	1	5	1	10
%	30.00	10.00	50.00	10.00	100.00

Listening comprehension skills have been shown (Davidson, 2010) to function as a predictor of oral proficiency gain at the advanced to superior level of acquisition of Russian. Listening comprehension tests assess both interpersonal as well as of the interpretive listening modes.

Figure 4 displays listening comprehension data based on 8 years of TORFL testing of this specific skill. Slightly more than half (60%) of all ROF participants enter the program with measured listening comprehension levels in the upper range of Level 2. By comparison, post-program proficiency testing indicates that all participants have crossed the Level 3 threshold in the course of the nine-month ROF program. Moreover, considerable variation may be observed in ultimate attainment in this particular modality with less than one third of the overall group (31%) testing at 3+ at the end of the program, and the balance of the participants' scores distributed more or less equally across all gradations of Levels 3 and 4.

Figure 4.

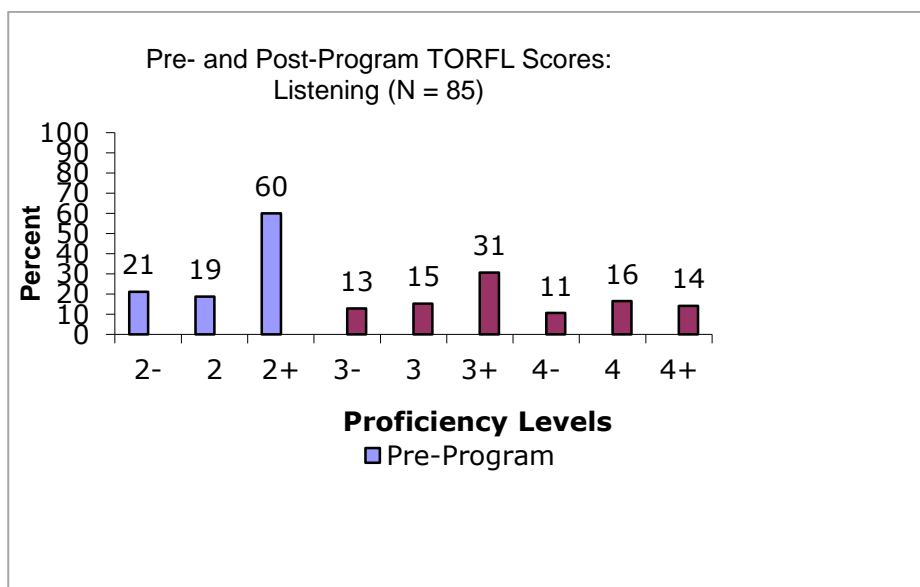
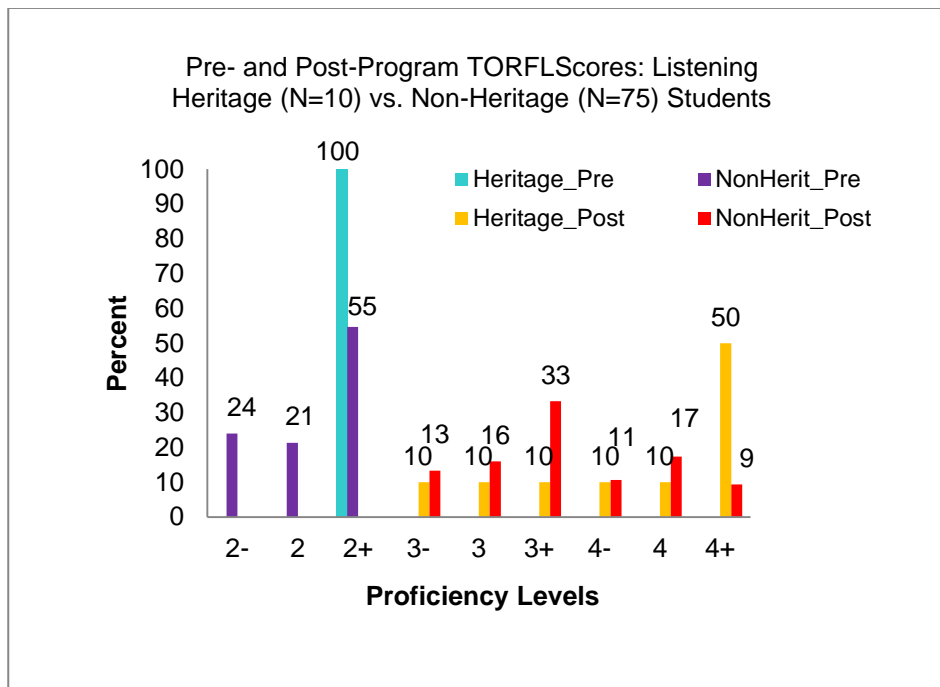


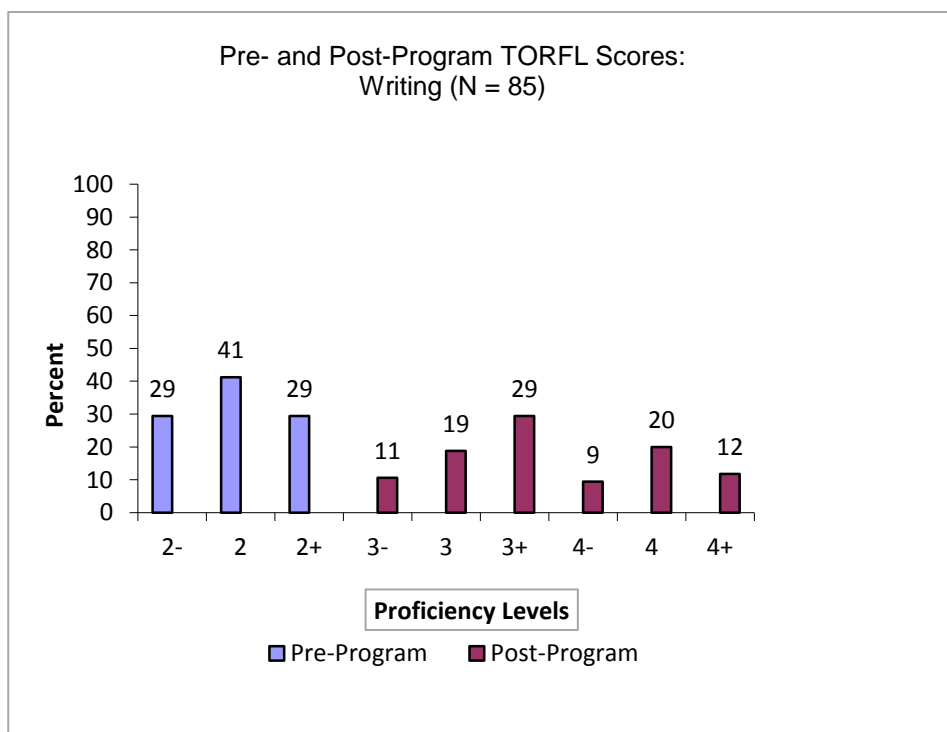
Figure 5.



Heritage learners demonstrate a slightly stronger level of listening proficiency (2+) on the pre-program tests in comparison to their non-heritage counterparts. Moreover, 70% go on to achieve Level – 4 proficiency by the end of the program. Non-heritage participants typically register gains from Level 2 (pre-program) to Level 3+ (post-program) during the same period of Flagship training. As noted above, there is a fair degree of variation among post-program proficiency outcomes for both groups, in comparison to the relatively narrow range of proficiencies demonstrated by the overall group at the outset of the program.

The Flagship Programs are intended to develop not only professional-level speaking skills in participants, but broad-based linguistic and cultural literacy as well, as is consistent with the demands of professional use of the language. Writing and reading skills are therefore an important part of the overall assessment strategy for ROF and the other overseas Flagship programs.

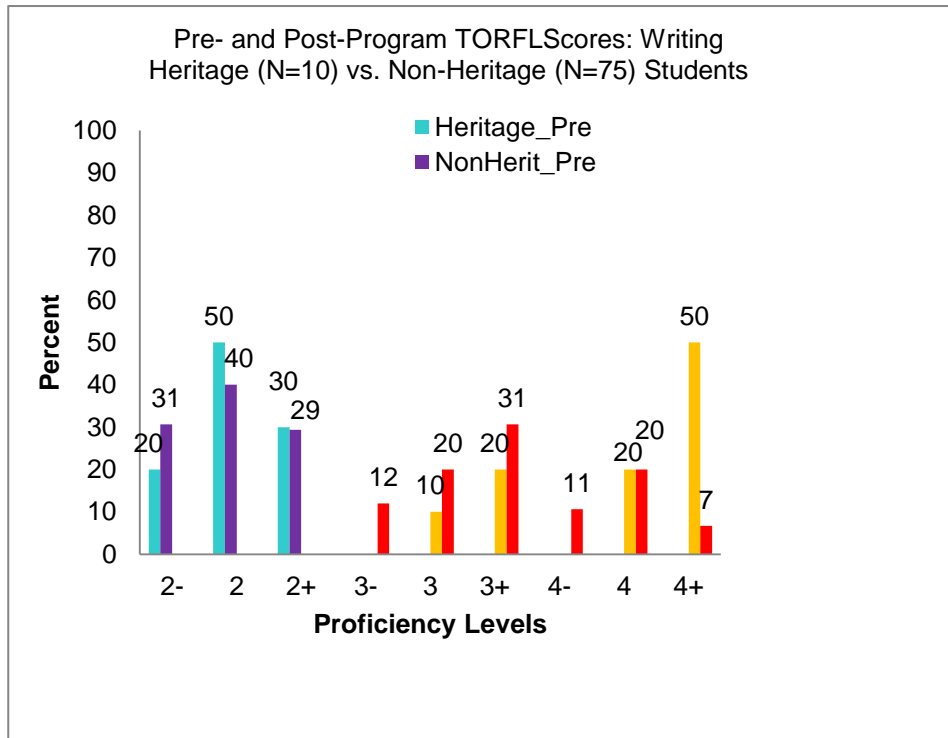
**Figure 6.**





The overall performance of ROF students on the pre- and post-program TORFL writing tests indicate entering levels for all participants in the “2” (advanced) range, and post-program outcomes ranging from the lower end of the 3-range (11%) to the upper end of the 4-range (12%). The mean pre-test score for the ROF population as a whole was “2”, while the mean post-program score was in the upper range of Level 3.

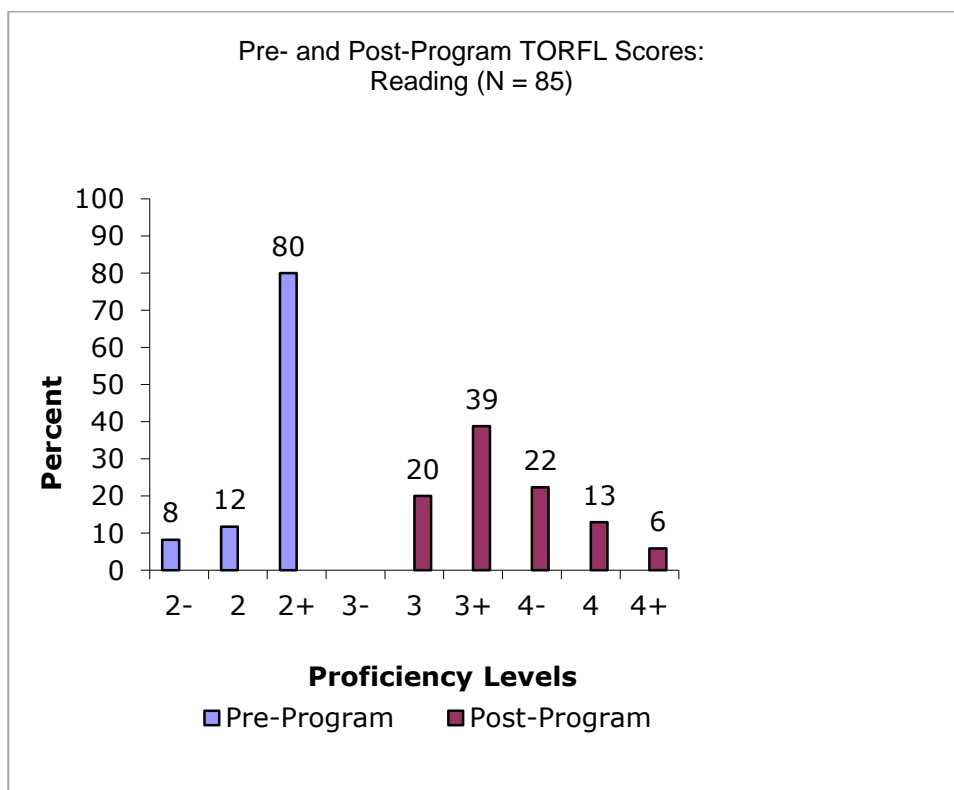
**Figure 7.**



Turning now to a comparison of the heritage and non-heritage sub-groups within the above data, one sees that the heritage group demonstrated pre-program writing levels at a similar level as their non-heritage counterparts. Post-program TORFL tests indicate that 70% of the heritage group experienced a gain of two proficiency thresholds, i.e., from Level 2 to Level 4. The typical gain for non-heritage students over the same period was from Level 2 to Level 3+, although 38% of the non-heritage group also demonstrated Level-4 writing proficiency on the post-program test.

Reading scores for the full group of ROF students indicate generally higher initial levels of proficiency than is the case of the other measures skills with 80% scoring in the upper range of Level 2. All participants demonstrated advancement beyond 2+ over the course of the nine-month ROF program.

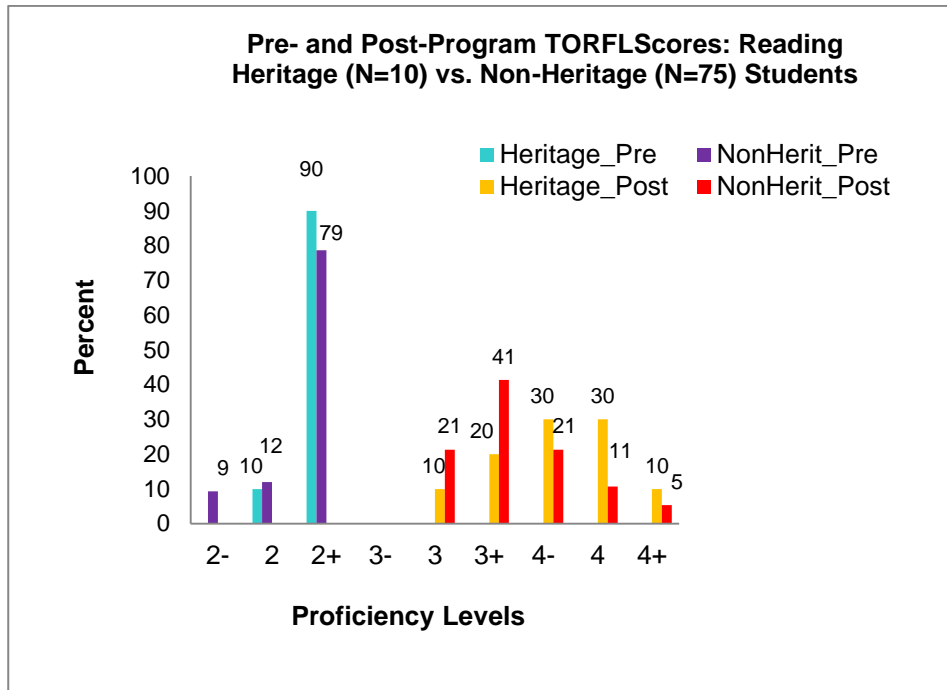
**Figure 8.**



Heritage students (70%) demonstrated very substantial gains (two proficiency thresholds) in reading, advancing from a pre-program reading score of 2+ to a post-program level in the 4-range.

As Figure 9 indicates, non-heritage participants typically advanced from 2+ to 3+ in reading (41%), although 38% of the latter group was able to demonstrate 4-level competence in reading at the end of the ROF program.

Figure 9.



### From Product to Process: How Different are the Language Utilization Behaviors of Overseas Heritage and Non-Heritage Students of Russian?

To date, 84 Russian Flagship participants have submitted on average 17 bi-weekly reports per year describing a total of 98,473.65 hours of target language use, distributed across ten activity rubrics (see below). A general analysis of language utilization within the overseas ROF context has been previously reported (Davidson & Lekic, 2010). The present study focuses on an analysis of heritage and non-heritage target-language utilization patterns, based on a dataset that is now about 30% larger than the one, on which the 2010 study was undertaken.

Data from the present study replicate previous findings regarding differences that obtain when comparing the way in which Flagship students invested their time in out-of-class language utilization.

Student discretionary activities, such as the amount of time spent completing homework assignments, or in discussions with the homestay family, in reading for pleasure, following the press, including local TV or radio, and passing time with friends, reflected certain consistent patterns,

when arranged according to post-program learning outcomes, as Figure 10 above illustrates. Three these activity types are statistically associated with high-level gain for the non-heritage population:

**Figure 10.**

**Average Weekly Number of Hours Spent on Activities:  
 By Post-test OPIs (Academic Year)**

Activity	Post-test OPI 2/2+ (N = 5)	Post-test OPI 3 (N = 44)	Post-test OPI 3+/4/4+ (N = 35)
Homework	1.8	6.6	8.4
Internship	6.8	6.0	5.2
Tutoring	3.5	3.5	3.0
Academic Reading	4.7	2.0	2.7
Cultural Events	1.4	2.8	2.9
Host Family	6.0	7.4	8.6
Reading for Pleasure	0.8	3.7	4.0
Following the Press	2.2	2.5	3.2
Local TV/Radio	3.7	5.4	4.9
Time Spent with Friends	8.1	11.6	11.4

An alternative way to view program outcomes is presented in Figure 11, where the analysis is based not on the comparison of ultimate outcomes but on the overall “change” in proficiency score from beginning until end of the 9-month Flagship program. A threshold-level gain, for example from Level 2 to 3, is an example of what one may regard as a “good” gain, whereas a shift from 2 to 2+, while clearly a measureable improvement, is categorized here as a “low” gain. By comparison, a double-threshold jump in proficiency from 2 at the pre-program level to 4 at the post-program level, would be considered a “high” gain by almost any available standard, particularly given the “artifact effect” inherent in the measurement scale itself, where the expected time-on-task between threshold levels increases greatly as one moves upward along the 5-point scale (Brecht, Davidson, Ginsberg, 1995).

**Table 4.**

**Bivariate Correlations Between Post-Program OPI Scores  
and Time Spent on Various Activities**

	Post-Program OPI Score	Homework	Reading for Pleasure	Following the Press
Post-Program OPI Score	----			
Homework	.246*	----		
Reading for Pleasure	.256*	-.025	----	
Following the Press	.255*	.049	.305**	----

\*\*  $p < 0.01$  level.

\*  $p < 0.05$  level.

The “high gainers” (i.e., two threshold gainers) in comparison to the other two groups, are distinguished by greater investment of time outside of class in the preparation of homework assignments, in host family contacts, and in following the press. By contrast, the two “higher-achieving” groups (i.e., one or two threshold-gains) show similar results with regard to academic reading, listening to local TV/radio and in spending time with friends. It may be assumed that time spent in tutoring and internships, which are scheduled activities of the RPF, would have been similar for all participants.

LUR data produced by the heritage cohort within the larger group is isolated and compared with that of the non-heritage students in Figure 12 below to ensure greater comparability of the sub-groups under study, Figure 12 provides a third column reflecting the same data for those non-heritage students, who also achieved 3+/4 levels of proficiency. Heritage students are seen as a group to devote on average 3 more hours per week to academic reading than do non-heritage students of similar overall achievement in the ROF. Based on their LUR reports, they also

devote somewhat more time each week to their homework assignments, internships, cultural events, reading for pleasure, and spending time with friends. By comparison, the non-heritage students among the “high gainers” are likely to invest more time in conversations with the host family, in following the press, local TV and radio. (The difference in time devoted to academic reading and homework, however, most likely reflects differences in academic workload required of heritage students by their direct enrollment courses and core language writing classes, noted above.)

**Figure 11.**

**Average Weekly Number of Hours Spent on Activities:  
 By OPI Gain (Academic Year)**

Activity	Low Gain (N = 4)	1 Threshold Gain (N = 55)	2 Threshold Gain (N = 25)
Homework	3.0	6.3	9.4
Internship	7.2	5.8	5.4
Tutoring	3.4	3.4	3.1
Academic Reading	1.3	2.3	3.0
Cultural Events	1.9	2.8	2.8
Host Family	2.7	7.7	9.0
Reading for Pleasure	2.8	3.6	3.9
Following the Press	1.5	2.5	3.5
Local TV/Radio	3.5	5.2	4.9
Time Spent with Friends	6.1	11.8	11.2

One additional analysis was performed to examine whether gender differences within the subject population influence the discretionary use of time across the RPF subject population as a whole. The results of that analysis are reflected in Figure 14 below.

While some minor gender differences appear to emerge from the data regarding homework and host family time, both slightly higher for women than for men, the overall trends for both genders are consistent

with the foregoing analysis relating ultimate proficiency outcomes in the program and the investments in discretionary time in specific activities.

**Figure 12.**

**Average Weekly Number of Hours Spent on Activities:  
By Heritage Status (Academic Year)**

Activity	Heritage (N=10)	Non-Heritage (N=74)
Homework	8.6	6.9
Academic Reading	5.0	2.1
Cultural Events	3.8	2.6
Host Family/Residence	8.2	7.8
Reading for Pleasure	4.7	3.5
Following the Press	2.6	2.8
Local TV/Radio	4.7	5.1
Time Spent with Friends	13.3	11.1

**Figure 13.**

**Average Number of Weekly Hours by Activity for Heritage and Non-  
Heritage Adjusted for Program-Final Proficiency**

Activity	All Non- Heritage (N = 74)	Non- Heritage Post OPI Above 3 (N = 28)	Heritage (N = 10)
Homework	6.9	8.1	8.6
Internship	5.6	4.9	6.8
Tutoring	3.4	3.0	3.0
Academic Reading	2.1	2.0	5.0
Cultural Events	2.6	2.8	3.8
Host Family	7.8	8.5	8.2
Reading for Pleasure	3.5	4.0	4.7
Following the Press	2.8	3.3	2.6
Local TV/Radio	5.1	5.0	4.7
Time Spent with Friends	11.1	11.3	13.3

**Figure 14.**

Average Weekly Number of Hours Spent on Activities: By Gender

Activity	Female (N = 43)	Male (N = 41)
Homework	7.9	6.2
Internship	6.1	5.4
Tutoring	3.2	3.4
Academic Reading	2.5	2.5
Cultural Events	3.2	2.2
Host Family	8.2	7.4
Reading for Pleasure	3.6	3.8
Following the Press	2.3	3.2
Local TV/Radio	5.1	5.0
Time Spent with Friends	11.5	11.2

Based on their language utilization patterns, heritage students demonstrate the kinds of discretionary behaviors that are consistent with the “high gainer” profile among ROF students overall. Beyond these modest differences, which are more notable if heritage students are compared to the non-heritage population as a whole, but less remarkable when compared with non-heritage students of similar proficiency attainment, there are no anomalies in the ways in which heritage students spend time outside of formal academic work in the ROF immersion context.

### **Heritage and Non-Heritage Post-Program Self-Assessments**

Student self-evaluations are submitted in advance of the release of TORFL or ILR-based program-final test scores. Figure 15 below compares the self-evaluations by non-heritage and heritage students of the impact of the various co-curricular components of the ROF program on their language and cultural learning. Specifically, students were requested at the end of the two-semester ROF to evaluate their progress in Russian using a 5-point scale in which 5 indicated “great improvement” and 1 indicated “no improvement at all.” Eight categories were requested for evaluation and all were rated 4.0 or higher on the 5.0 scale with “Understanding of everyday life in the host country” evaluated as the



highest area of gain by the students themselves (4.88), “ability to comprehend spoken Russian” and “understanding of the culture of the host country” at 4.78, and ability to speak and read the language at 4.56. The same rating was given to “overall command of the language.

**Figure 15.**

Mean Scores for Student Feedback on Impact of Co-Curricular Activities on Language Learning and Understanding Culture						
	All Participants			Russian Heritage Speakers		
	Number	Mean	Std. Deviation	Number	Mean	Std. Deviation
One day field trips - Speaking skills	48	2.77	1.057	10	3.20	0.919
One day field trips - Listening Skills	49	<b>3.90</b>	0.918	10	<b>3.90</b>	0.876
One day field trips - Understanding culture	49	4.27	0.908	10	4.50	0.707
Overnight trips - Speaking skills	26	3.27	1.151	5	3.40	1.140
Overnight trips - Listening Skills	26	4.04	1.113	5	4.00	1.000
Overnight trips - Understanding culture	27	4.56	0.892	5	4.80	0.447
Free time activities - Speaking skills	49	4.35	0.903	10	4.10	1.287
Free time activities - Listening Skills	49	4.57	0.842	10	4.20	1.317
Free time activities - Understanding culture	49	4.57	0.842	10	4.30	1.252
Host family – Speaking skills	49	3.69	1.294	10	3.60	1.174
Host family – Listening Skills	49	4.06	1.248	10	4.20	1.033
Host family - Understanding culture	49	4.29	1.000	10	4.10	0.876
Internship – Speaking skills	35	3.77	1.003	6	4.33	0.816
Internship – Listening Skills	34	3.85	1.105	6	4.00	0.894
Internship Understanding culture	35	4.46	0.980	6	5.00	0.000

5=Great improvement and 1=No improvement at all

Heritage students in the same program evaluated their overall progress at 4.43, but identified different areas of perceived gain than their non-heritage counterparts: comfort speaking the language, ability to speak grammatically correct language, and overall command of the language were evaluated at 4.43 out of a possible of 5.00. Heritage and non-heritage alike rated “understanding of everyday life in the host country” as highly, though in general heritage students were somewhat less generous in their self-evaluations (mean 4.29) than the non-heritage students (mean 4.52).

Non-heritage students consistently identified their host family experiences and free-time activities as the most valuable in their language and cultural proficiency development, while heritage students,, by contrast, consistently identified other program components as most valuable: field trips and internships, which the latter considered particularly valuable for improving their understand of culture (5.0).

#### IV. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Given the small size of the heritage datasets available, the present inquiry into heritage learner outcomes and performances is intended to present only a preliminary assessment of the emerging trends obtaining from a particular immersion learning model, the Russian Overseas Flagship, on the acquisition of Russian at the professional level. The model itself is therefore described in brief and the pre- and post-program measured proficiency outcomes of heritage and non-heritage participants in the ROF over the past eight years are then reported and compared.

Those comparisons provide a tentative answer to the *first of the research questions* posed. The typical measured target-language proficiency-based outcome of heritage students in the ROF, where all entering students demonstrate 2 or 2+ level proficiencies across four modalities, is Level 4, regardless of the modality, for 70% of the population, and Level 3 for the remaining heritage students in the study. These results compare favorably with the those presented for the non-heritage students taking part in the ROF over the same period of eight years, where the typical outcome is in the 3 to 3+ range.

Regarding the *second and third research questions*, heritage students appear to demonstrate through their online LUR reporting patterns of target-language utilization outside of class that are relatively similar to those of the non-heritage Flagship students. Their overall levels of language use (69.9 hours per week) are comparable to non-heritage use.

As noted, 70% of the heritage cohort completed the ROF at Level 4 across all four modalities and their LUR report results are demonstrated in the present study to be consistent with the pattern for “high gain” Flagship learners.

As a group, heritage students report devoting on average 3 more hours per week to academic reading than do non-heritage students of similar overall achievement in the ROF. Based on their LUR reports, they also tend to spend somewhat more time each week on homework assignments, internships, cultural events, reading for pleasure, and meeting with friends. The difference in time devoted to academic reading and homework, however, most likely reflects differences in academic workload required of heritage students by their direct enrollment courses and core language writing classes, as noted in the description of the heritage curriculum above. Heritage students also spend substantial amounts of time interacting with their host-family, as well as with friends, and in reading for pleasure. By comparison, the non-heritage students in the same proficiency range are more likely to invest discretionary time in conversations with the host family, in following the press, local TV and radio.

No significant gender effects were observed in the analysis of the allocation of time-on-task and program outcomes in the present study.

With respect to the *fourth research question*, analysis of end-of-program self-evaluations of the impact on their language and cultural proficiency growth of various curricular and co-curricular components of the ROF, showed heritage students to be someone more self-critical of their language performance than their non-heritage counterparts. While both heritage and non-heritage students rated the overall impact of the immersion program on their language improvement highly (heritage: 4.28 versus non-heritage 4.51 on a 1 – 5 scale, in which 5 represented “great” improvement), heritage learners singled out different program activities as having contributed most to their linguistic and intellectual growth, than did non-heritage learners. For example, heritage students consistently identified the field trip and internships components as particularly helpful among the co-curricular components. Internships, in fact, were uniformly rated as of “great” value for improving their understanding of Russian culture (5.0). Non-heritage students, by contrast, singled out homestays and “free time” as the components they perceived as having been most valuable for their linguistic and cultural growth, outside formal instruction.

This study has sought to raise the question of the value and impact of overseas immersion study for the Russian heritage student who has attained a proficiency level of 2 to 2+ in each of the four modalities and who is motivated to continue acquisition of the target language to the professional level or higher. The present dataset on heritage learning within the context of the Russian Overseas Flagship is still too small to provide empirical evidence in support of a positive claim in this regard, but it does reveal certain emerging trends that suggest the need for further attention within the Flagship programs themselves, and among all those concerned with heritage language acquisition at the professional level.

The data presented so far indicate that the acquisition of professional level language and cultural proficiency is entirely possible for the adult learner of Russian within the context of the Russian Overseas Flagship immersion model, whether or not the learner is a traditional English base-language learner or a Russian heritage learner. Moreover, outcomes-based data on the overall attainment levels of both groups (N = 85), demonstrate that heritage learners who complete the full two-semester of the ROF have a good chance of completing the program at TORFL Level 4, based on the 70% Level 4 completion rate of heritage participants in the ROF to date.

Further research is required to strengthen the statistical basis of the present study and concurrently to explore the actual quality and progression of individual heritage learner and non-heritage learner target language production and interactions over the course of the immersion year under study. All that said, score reports from two independent, recognized proficiency testing systems, measuring proficiency across all four communication modalities, demonstrate that the heritage subjects in the present study attained levels of literacy and communicative proficiency in the target language very close to that of an educated native speaker (level 4) as a result of participation in a year-long, structured, overseas immersion-learning program. While it is too early to generalize these findings to other languages and learners, researchers, teachers and advisors of heritage students are encouraged to consider these positive results in planning heritage language learning curricula in the future.

## Appendix 1. Post-Program Self-Evaluation Instrument

**End of Program Student Feedback Questions**

**1. To what extent did your courses help you improve the following:**

	Reading skills	Listening skills	Speaking skills	Writing skills	Understanding culture
Course 1	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Course 2	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Course 3	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Course 4	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Course 5	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

Please describe how you think your language skills have changed over the course of the program.

**2. In general, how useful were your direct enrollment courses in helping you achieve the following?**

	Very useful	Somewhat useful	Not at all useful
Improve your speaking skills	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Improve your listening skills	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Improve your writing skills	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Improve your reading skills	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Improve your comprehension skills	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Improve your understanding of the local culture	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please explain.

**3. To what extent have the activities listed below improved your language skills?**

	Speaking skills	Listening Skills	Understanding culture
One day field trips	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Overnight trips	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Free time activities	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Dormitory	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Host family	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Internship	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

**End of Program Student Feedback Questions**

**4. What suggestions do you have for improving any of these activities?**

**5. Please complete the following questions on your course teachers.**

	How helpful was the guidance provided by your teacher in improving your language skills?	How effective was your teacher's method in improving your language skills?	Was your teacher available to answer your questions outside of the classroom?	Did your teacher incorporate culture into the language classroom?	Was your teacher well prepared for the class sessions?
Teacher 1	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Teacher 2	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Teacher 3	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Teacher 4	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Teacher 5	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

Please explain how each of your teachers influenced your language learning experience.

**6. On a scale of 1 to 5, where 5 is great improvement and 1 is no improvement at all, how would you rate your own overall growth in the following:**

	Great improvement 5	4	3	2	No improvement at all 1
Comfort level with speaking Russian	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ability to comprehend spoken Russian	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ability to read Russian	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ability to speak grammatically correct Russian	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ability to write grammatically correct Russian	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Understanding of every day life in your host country	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Understanding of the culture of your host country	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Your overall command of Russian	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

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