



Exploring Oral Proficiency Profiles of Heritage Speakers of Russian and Spanish

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Abstract: *This article explores the linguistic profiles of heritage speakers of Russian and Spanish. Data from the 2009–2013 ACTFL-UCLA NHLRC Heritage Language Project included biographical information as well as speech samples that were elicited using the ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview–computer and were rated according to the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines 2012–Speaking by certified testers. The goal of the study was to better understand the multiple linguistic, educational, and experiential factors that contributed to the speaking proficiency of these heritage speakers as well as how those features affected the tasks and contexts in which the speakers could more appropriately communicate in the language. The data illuminate the linguistic strengths and weaknesses of speakers within certain ranges and highlight those language features that prevented the participants from being rated at the next higher level. The authors discuss implications for teaching and learning and make recommendations for both heritage speakers and their instructors.*

Key words: *implementation and assessment, interpersonal and presentational speaking, oral proficiency, program design, program monitoring and assessment*

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Introduction

Ample anecdotal information exists about the oral proficiency profiles of heritage language learners (HLLs), and it is sometimes assumed that HLLs are capable of accomplishing a full range of linguistic tasks because of their authentic-sounding language and apparent ease of communication. However, such assumptions are not supported by the broad spectrum in actual proficiency levels among HLLs—a range that includes those who understand but do not speak the language, those who can effectively carry out an assortment of basic daily tasks, and those who can use the language accurately and appropriately across a range of sophisticated professional and personal tasks and contexts. Given the complexities associated with teaching and evaluating HLLs, this study was carried out by the ACTFL in conjunction with the National Heritage Language Resource Center (NHLRC) at the University of California–Los Angeles (UCLA) to gather reliable data about the range and variety of profiles of HLLs' oral proficiency.

Review of Literature

Assessing the proficiency of HLLs is a particularly challenging task, and within the existing literature, a number of assessment measures have been considered. Fairclough, Belpoliti, and Bermejo (2010) reported that a large number of American universities continue to use second language (L2) assessments as placement exams for incoming students in Spanish heritage language programs. In addition, while self-assessment may not provide the most robust measure by itself, many heritage language programs use self-assessment or self-assessment in combination with oral interviews as a means of placing students or as a method of preliminary screening for separating HLLs from L2 students. Carreira and Kagan (2011), e.g., reported that of the 1,732 HLLs of 22 languages in their study, almost 68% felt that they were advanced or close to native speakers in listening comprehension and 44% felt

they were advanced or native-like in speaking; in comparison, a much smaller number (27 and 19%, respectively) answered that their reading and writing proficiencies were advanced or native-like (pp. 40–64).

Shortly after the development of the ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI) protocol and rating system, Valdés (1989) suggested that using the OPI to assess HLLs may not be appropriate because the test was originally designed to assess L2 learners who started learning the language from zero. Valdés also argued that OPI testers may unfairly penalize speakers of nonstandard or stigmatized language varieties, as did Draper and Hicks (2000), who stated that the use of the OPI for Spanish HLLs “has the potential to lead to the denigration of a rating based on the variety of the language spoken” (p. 32).

However, in 1995, Valdés also asserted (p. 322) that proficiency assessments for HLLs must provide information about the range of functions that can be successfully carried out by bilingual speakers in different contexts and, in 2001, the Heritage Language Research Priorities Conference Report concluded that existing “assessment instruments should be analyzed and reviewed or new instruments devised” (UCLA, 2001, p. 16) to assess the competencies of HLLs, including oral competency. In an investigation of the oral proficiency of Russian HLLs for placement purposes, Kagan and Friedman (2003) concluded that the OPI could be effectively used in the case of Russian HLLs and by extension perhaps also in those languages that have fewer manifested dialects or dialectal differences. Similarly, Martin (2010) argued that, since both the ACTFL proficiency scale and the ILR (Interagency Language Roundtable) scale are based on functional communicative ability and are totally independent of a specific curriculum or how or where a language was acquired or learned, standard instruments such as the OPI could serve as an effective general assessment tool for any adult learner, including HLLs.

However, although many foreign language programs use the OPI as a key element

in the formative and summative assessment of L2 learners, particularly candidates seeking teacher certification, a recent search of the literature found only five papers that reported OPI data for HLLs. In the 2003 study mentioned above, Kagan and Friedman found that Russian HLLs who had not received formal schooling in Russian demonstrated oral proficiency between Intermediate Low and Advanced (on the ACTFL scale). In this study, speakers' breadth of vocabulary, instances of code mixing, and speech rate were also compared with those of native speakers and foreign language learners (FLLs). The rate of speech of many of the HLLs turned out to be equal to that of the native speakers, while only one of the FLLs came close to a native-like speech rate. Conversely, only the least proficient HLL had a rate in the same range as the FLLs.

Ilieva (2012) reported data on practice OPIs with Hindi speakers who were tested during an OPI workshop. She compared the language produced by HLLs and FLLs whose levels of proficiency were between Intermediate Mid and Intermediate High, according to ACTFL descriptions, and asserted that the Hindi HLLs' speech production was natural: "HLLs consistently produced native-like intra-phrase articulation, accents and intonational contours" (p. 20) as well as faster speech rate than did FLLs. As in Kagan and Friedman (2003) above, Ilieva argued that "the FLLs typically spoke at a lower speed than HLLs." Ilieva's most important contribution may be a detailed description of what made HLLs' speech samples difficult to rate: As the interviewer tried to establish the ceiling and pursue more difficult topics, the HLLs used English words with increasing frequency. However, since urban native Hindi speakers in India are bilingual and "exhibit a similar tendency to code-mix or resort to English," it is difficult to know whether this was a display of native-like competency or the result of an inability to produce appropriate language in higher-register Hindi (Ilieva, 2012, p. 26). In the third recent study,

Polinsky (2008b) also found that HLLs' speech rate was slower than that of native speakers but faster than FLLs' speech rate of similar proficiency.

Montrul (2013) noted that "the vast majority of linguistic and psycholinguistic studies have investigated the lower end of the proficiency spectrum, characterizing the non-target-like linguistic abilities of HLLs as the products of incomplete acquisition and/or attrition" (p. 17). The same can be said about both teaching and testing: The vast majority of discussion of HL testing has focused on placement at the lower levels of instruction. To date, the only article dedicated to advanced levels of proficiency (3/4 per the ILR and Superior/Distinguished per the ACTFL) of HLLs is by Davidson and Lekic (2013, pp. 88–114), in which the authors compared the outcomes of HLLs and FLLs who began their overseas immersion program with an oral proficiency rating of ILR 2 (ACTFL Advanced-Low). After having spent a year in Russia, 70 percent of HLLs increased their proficiency to 4 (ACTFL Distinguished), and the remaining 30 percent increased their proficiency to 3 (ACTFL Superior) on the ILR scale. Non-HLLs typically attained between 3 and 3+ (ILR).

Thus, while much research on HL teaching has become available over the past decade (see reviews by Brinton, Kagan, & Bauckus, 2008; Malone, Peyton, & Kim, 2014; Schwartz Caballero, 2014), the five studies cited above show that the literature on the assessment of HLLs is not plentiful. Malone et al. (2014) noted the need to assess the interpersonal, interpretive, and presentational speaking skills of HLLs (p. 355) and identified five challenges that "impede heritage language proficiency assessment": (1) the absence of specialized proficiency standards for HLLs due to the fact that "current proficiency standards are designed for L2 learners"; (2) the lack of consensus in defining basic terms (for example, who is an HLL and how can language proficiency be defined?); (3) the lack of understanding of language variation; (4) the lack of assessment instruments for measuring various

linguistic modes—such as presentational or interpersonal domains—of HLLs; and (5) the scarcity of assessment-based research on HLLs, especially those who speak less commonly taught languages (p. 349).

Having established the validity and reliability of the OPI for assessing the skills of HLLs, a number of researchers have used a variety of protocols across a variety of languages to collect samples of heritage speech, then have used these samples to identify deficiencies in morphosyntactic and discourse features and thus determine the features that prevent a speaker from being rated at the next higher level (Friedman & Kagan, 2008; He, 2004, 2006; Isurin, 2011; Isurin & Ivanova, 2008; Kagan and Dillon, 2006; Karapetian, 2014; Montrul, 2008; Polinsky, 2008a, 2008b; Weger-Guntharp, 2006). Martin, with Swender and Rivera-Martinez (2013), recently reported preliminary findings from the ACTFL/NHLRC project to assess the oral proficiency of Russian and Spanish HLLs according to the 2012 ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines, with the goal of gaining a better understanding of what prevents HLLs of these languages from scoring higher on the scale. The full report from that study is the focus of this article. It addresses the following research questions:

1. What are the strengths and weaknesses of HLLs of Russian and Spanish at various levels of proficiency?
2. To what extent is there a correlation between the proficiency levels and the language background and experiences of HLLs of Russian and Spanish?

Methods

Participants

For the purposes of this study, HLLs were defined as those individuals who grew up speaking a home language other than the dominant language of the country in which they lived (in this case, the United States) and who switched to that dominant lan-

guage (in this case, English) at an early age and received the majority of their education in an English-speaking school while continuing to use their HL in some contexts, most often in informal settings, e.g., at home and in the community. All participants were required to be older than 18 and either currently or previously enrolled at the postsecondary level as an undergraduate or graduate student. Russian and Spanish were the languages selected for this study, with the intention to add other languages in the future. Participants also had to agree to provide biographical information about their education and their language background, language preferences, and use of the HL; to have their oral proficiency assessed using the ACTFL OPIc;¹ and to authorize the use of the resulting speech sample for research purposes. Those who completed all of the components of the study received a certificate documenting an official ACTFL OPIc rating of their oral proficiency in the HL and a check in the amount of \$25.

Recruitment and Screening

Participants were recruited from different regions of the United States via announcements on ACTFL's Web media sources and ads posted in the ACTFL trade magazine, *The Language Educator*, as well as at the 2009 and 2010 ACTFL conventions. ACTFL testers, other ACTFL members, and representatives of secondary and postsecondary institutions, language organizations, and other professional organizations with large heritage populations were also invited to recruit students to participate in the study.

Potential participants were initially prescreened for "heritage speaker" status using a qualification survey (Appendix A). The survey contained questions about the participant's age of arrival in the United States, current age, the contexts in which the HL was used, and whether they studied or had studied the language. The survey also asked for a self-assessment of the participant's language proficiency based on self-assessment statements, outlined the scope of the study, inquired as

to their willingness to participate in the study, and asked those interested to agree to the terms of the study. One hundred ninety-five Russian HLLs and 593 Spanish HLLs responded to the initial qualification survey.

This group of potential participants was then invited to complete a more detailed background survey (Appendix B), which addressed in greater detail the contexts in which participants learned and used the HL; whether they could read and/or write in the HL; if they had travel, study, or other experiences in a country or countries where the target language is spoken; and whether they had any formal education in the HL. An additional self-assessment of linguistic ability was also included in this survey.

Ninety-six HLLs of Russian and 100 HLLs of Spanish completed the background survey; of these initial participants, 53 Russian HLLs and 41 Spanish HLLs subsequently completed all phases of the project, including both surveys, the candidate authorization form, and the OPIc assessment.

Certified ACTFL raters were selected to rate samples and complete evaluation forms. A team of researchers then conducted a detailed linguistic analysis of each speech sample. The authors analyzed the findings of the linguistic analysis in relation to the proficiency levels assigned to specific samples in the aggregate, as well as against the backdrop of the demographic data collected from each participant, in order to identify patterns of strengths and weaknesses of speakers with different proficiency profiles.

Russian Heritage Demographics

Out of a total of 53 Russian HLLs, the majority of the respondents ($N = 26$; 62%) identified the Russian Federation as their country of birth, followed by the United States ($N = 11$; 26%) and Ukraine ($N = 6$; 14%). Other birth countries were: Austria, Azerbaijan, Belarus, China, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Moldova, Turkmenistan, the United Kingdom, and Uzbekistan (1 participant each).

The majority of respondents (70%) were in the 18–25 age group at the time of

the study. Almost half (45%) immigrated to the United States at ages younger than 10. Twenty percent were born in the United States. More than half (53%) of the respondents reported limited experience with formal studies in a Russian-speaking country. The majority of the respondents (62%) reported that they were more proficient in English, 17% considered themselves equally proficient in both languages, and 11% considered Russian their most proficient language.

Respondents reported that the language most spoken on the job was English (53%), with 26% using a mix of Russian and English at work. Some respondents (21%) reported that they did not work, and none identified Russian as the language most spoken on the job. In general, the language spoken most often was reported as English (60%) or a mix (34%). Only 6% reported Russian as the language most spoken.

Spanish Heritage Demographics

Of the total 41 participants in the study, the majority ($N = 28$; 69%) were born in the United States, followed by Mexico ($N = 6$; 15%). Other birth countries were: Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Spain, and Venezuela (1 participant each).

The majority of respondents (78%) were in the 18–25 age group at the time of the study. Of those not born in the United States, the majority (70%) immigrated at ages younger than 10. Seventy-two percent reported little or no experience with formal studies in a Spanish-speaking country. The majority (59%) reported that they were more proficient in English, 29% considered themselves equally proficient in both languages, and 12% considered Spanish as their most proficient language. The Spanish group reported the language spoken at home as mostly mixed (46%), Spanish only (39%), or English only (15%). Most Spanish respondents (46%) reported using a mix of English and Spanish on the job, followed by 29% who reported English only,

and 24% who did not work. No respondents reported using only Spanish at work. The majority (59%) of Spanish respondents reported speaking a mix of English and Spanish most often, followed by 37% who reported speaking only English. Only 4% reported Spanish as the language spoken most often.

Procedures

Surveys

Both the qualification survey and the background survey were hosted on a technology-mediated survey platform. A link to the survey sites was shared with participants, who completed the survey within a 30-day response window.

The ACTFL OPIc

Once qualified as a HLL of Russian or Spanish based on the survey results, participants were assigned a login and password and then completed the OPIc in their HL. A fixed form of the OPIc was selected for this study, rather than a live OPI or an adaptive OPIc, to ensure that all participants were asked to respond to identical prompts ranging from the Intermediate to the Superior level, presented over the telephone in the same order, thereby to eliminate tester and content variables and to minimize any computer or bandwidth issues that individual participants might have encountered. All samples were digitally recorded, archived on the ACTFL/Language Testing International database, and made accessible to certified ACTFL raters for assessment and for review by the researchers.

All samples were blindly double rated by two ACTFL-certified raters according to the standard ACTFL OPIc rating protocol, taking into consideration the assessment criteria of function, content/context, text type, and comprehensibility/accuracy across the entire test sample. When the ratings of two raters agreed exactly (major level and sublevel), a final official OPIc rating was assigned. In cases of discrepancies, samples

were arbitrated by a third rater and a final OPIc rating was assigned.

OPIc Rater Review Form

Following each OPIc rating, the rater(s) completed one of three versions of the OPIc Rater Review Form (Appendix C), based on the participant's overall proficiency rating. The three versions of this form included Intermediate, for samples rated Intermediate Low and Mid; Advanced, for samples rated Intermediate High, Advanced Low, and Advanced Mid; and Superior, for samples rated Advanced High and Superior. On the review form, raters documented their rationale for assigning a given rating and noted the primary deficiencies that prevented the speaker from functioning at the next higher level (e.g., ability to deal with topics beyond self, precision of vocabulary, expectations for accuracy, lexical and structural interference from English). The form facilitated the comparison of individual samples' strengths and weaknesses and permitted the researchers to identify aggregate trends among speakers who were rated at a given major proficiency level (Intermediate, Advanced, and Superior).

Linguistic Sample Review Form

A team of researchers who specialize in discourse analysis analyzed the specific linguistic features of each speaker's response to each individual prompt using the OPIc Heritage Speaker Linguistic Sample Review Form (Appendix D). The analysis included a general evaluation of the speaker's performance on selected tasks associated with the level of full performance at a particular proficiency level, as well as an evaluation of the tasks in which the speaker showed evidence of breakdown.² The focus was specifically on the features (e.g., fluency, accuracy, pragmatic competence, sociolinguistic competence, text organization) and linguistic deficiencies that contributed to functional breakdown and therefore to the inability to sustain the criteria of the next higher level. Researchers

provided specific comments related to the rating criteria and quoted examples from the OPIc to support their ratings.

the participants who incorrectly assessed their level of proficiency overestimated their proficiency.

Analysis

Possible relationships between OPIc rating and demographic factors were explored using correlations between survey data questions and OPIc scores.

Results—Russian

Distribution Across the Proficiency Levels

The distribution of official OPIc ratings for the 53 participants who completed the survey and the OPIc is shown in Table 1.

Comparison of Self-Assessments and Official OPIc Ratings

Russian participants’ self-assessments were compared with their official OPIc ratings; data are presented in Table 2. The largest group self-assessed in the Advanced range (42%), followed by those who self-assessed in the Superior range (32%) and those who self-assessed as Distinguished (28%).

As shown, 77% of the participants who self-assessed at the Advanced level (17 of 22) correctly self-assessed at the Advanced level while only about one-third of the participants at the Intermediate or Superior levels assessed their level of proficiency correctly. Fifteen participants self-assessed as Distinguished; however, although the OPIc does not assess the Distinguished level of performance, 13 of those 15 participants were officially rated Superior and two were rated Advanced High. Interestingly, all but one of

Analysis of Samples Rated Intermediate Mid and Intermediate High

In the Russian sample, five speakers received ratings in the Intermediate range: one at Intermediate Mid (IM) and four at Intermediate High (IH). While this sample was too small to be statistically relevant, and caution should be exercised when drawing any kind of inferences or conclusions, the following observations stood out as noteworthy for the speakers in this range. For samples rated IM and IH, functional breakdown occurred when learners tried to perform the Advanced-level tasks and was evidenced by either no attempt to perform the task or by initiating a response but not completing or unsuccessfully completing it. The respondents were unable to maintain the required paragraph-length text type, which is required at the Advanced level. Most responses were marked by English interference. Half were marked by lack of structural control and lack of appropriate vocabulary.

To better understand the linguistic breakdown that prevented these IM and IH speakers from being rated at the Advanced level, the researchers analyzed participants’ responses with respect to four specific Advanced-level functions: past narration, present narration, description on a topic beyond the personal or autobiographical, and participants’ ability to successfully handle a situation with a complication. Of the four tasks, participants were the most

TABLE 1

Russian Ratings Across Proficiency Levels

Superior	Advanced High	Advanced Mid/Low	Intermediate Mid/High
17	9	22	5

TABLE 2

Comparison of Self-Assessments and Russian Official OPIc Ratings

	Total number who self-assessed at each proficiency level	Correctly self-assessed	Overestimated skills	Underestimated skills
Intermediate	3	1	0	2
Advanced	22	17	4	1
Superior	13	5	8	0
Distinguished	15	0	15	0

successful when narrating in the past, perhaps because in Russian, the grammar associated with past narration (i.e., past-tense verbs) is relatively simple. Similarly, handling a situation with a complication did not appear to be particularly challenging for these speakers. The most challenging function for this group was the ability to narrate and describe when reporting a current event: In particular, participants had difficulty providing cohesive and organized text and meeting level-appropriate expectations for grammatical accuracy, including pragmatic and sociolinguistic competence. In addition, for participants who were rated at the IM and IH sublevels, the internal organization required for the development of the text type still presented challenges. While three of the five speakers in this rating range demonstrated near-native pronunciation, all five participants lacked the vocabulary that was needed to successfully speak about content areas beyond the speaker's everyday or autobiographical experience.

Analysis of Samples Rated Advanced Low and Advanced Mid

Of the total number of 53 Russian HLLs, 5 were rated Advanced Low (AL) and 17 were rated Advanced Mid (AM). All of these speakers demonstrated sustained performance in all the prompts intended to elicit Advanced-level functions. Regarding the specific types of breakdown that prevented them from reaching the Superior level, most

participants (99%) were unable to produce well-organized extended discourse, although most were comfortable speaking in paragraphs, the text type that is required at the Advanced level. Raters indicated the lack of highly precise vocabulary (38%).

To better understand the sources of linguistic breakdown that prevented AL and AM speakers from being rated at the Superior level, participants' responses to three Superior-level tasks—discussing a topic from an abstract perspective, supporting an opinion, and hypothesizing—were analyzed in greater detail. When they attempted to discuss a topic from an abstract perspective, the majority (88%) initiated the task but were unable to complete the task at the Superior level. Most (83%) avoided dealing with the topic abstractly by dealing with the topic from a concrete perspective and talking about personal experiences.

When attempting the Superior-level task of stating and supporting an opinion, the most frequent areas of weakness in the AL and AM groups were failure to address the task (94%) and failure to produce well-organized discourse (88%). Again, most (73%) avoided dealing with the topic abstractly by reverting to concrete personal experiences. Most (88%) demonstrated insufficiencies in their use of precise vocabulary.

When attempting the Superior-level task of hypothesizing, all of the AL and AM participants failed to address the task, although 38% made an incomplete attempt.

For 27%, the failure to use precise vocabulary contributed to breakdown and thus prevented a rating at the Superior level. More than half of those who avoided making a hypothesis (55%) were unable to produce well-organized extended discourse.

According to the ACTFL guidelines, Advanced Low and Advanced Mid speakers are characterized by their lack of control of the Superior-level functions. In the case of the Russian HLLs' samples, functional breakdown occurred when participants attempted to perform tasks at the Superior level either because the speakers reverted to concrete examples drawn from personal experience rather than addressing the issue or because the speakers were unable to deal with the topic from an abstract perspective, support an opinion, and/or hypothesize. In all cases, speakers reverted to Advanced-level performance, which was manifested when they reduced their text type to the paragraph level and treated the topic concretely and anecdotally.

Analysis of Samples Rated Advanced High

Of the Russian group of HLLs, nine were rated Advanced High (AH). In this study, the AH speakers were analyzed separately from AL and AM speakers precisely because AH speakers are more closely associated with the Superior level and are defined not in terms of performance at the Advanced level but rather in terms of their breakdown from the Superior level. Thus, the researchers looked for evidence from the same three tasks—discussing a topic from an abstract perspective, supporting an opinion, and hypothesizing—to determine if participants who were rated AH evidenced areas of deficiency that were different from those of the AL and AM groups.

Data showed that, when attempting to discuss a topic from an abstract perspective, all AH speakers failed to address the task at the Superior level. Of those who partially addressed the task, most reverted to sharing personal experiences rather than systemati-

cally and abstractly addressing the issue. A smaller number failed to use highly precise vocabulary (42%). A majority (57%) lacked the ability to organize their responses in extended discourse. When they attempted to support an opinion at the Superior level, the majority (86%) were unable to complete the task at the Superior level. Most avoided dealing with the topic abstractly by dealing with the topic from a concrete perspective and talking about personal experiences. The text type presented a significant challenge with this task: Most participants (71%) were unable to produce well-organized extended discourse or use precise vocabulary. When attempting to hypothesize at the Superior level, participants rated AH were still unable to handle the task functionally. Only 42% initiated a response that addressed the task, but they were not able to complete the task. More than 70% failed to use precise vocabulary adequate to the topic/task.

Results—Spanish

Distribution Across the Proficiency Levels

The distribution of official OPIc ratings for the 41 participants who completed the survey and the OPIc is shown in Table 3.

Comparison of Self-Assessments and Official OPIc Ratings

Spanish participants' self-assessments were compared with their official OPIc ratings; data are presented in Table 4. The largest group of Spanish respondents self-assessed in the Superior range (53%), followed by those who self-assessed in the Advanced range (39%), with only two respondents who self-assessed in the Intermediate range. None self-assessed as Distinguished. One participant's self-assessment was not reported. The HLLs who self-assessed as Advanced were the most accurate in their assessment, while those who self-assessed as Superior were the least accurate.

TABLE 3

Spanish Ratings Across Proficiency Levels

Superior	Advanced High	Advanced Mid/Low	Intermediate Mid/High
2	11	24	4

As shown, both of the two participants who self-assessed as Intermediate were rated in the Intermediate-level range. Eighty-eight percent of the participants (14 of 16) who self-assessed at Advanced were rated in the Advanced range, while two overassessed themselves and were officially rated in the Intermediate range. Only 2 of the 22 participants who self-assessed at Superior were rated in the Superior-level range: Twenty (91%) overassessed themselves and were officially rated in the Advanced range.

Analysis of Samples Rated IM and IH

As shown in Table 3, in the Spanish sample, four speakers received ratings in the Intermediate range: three at IM and one at IH. These intermediate-level speakers were characterized by English interference in their vocabulary and pronunciation. Errors affected their message and made it difficult for interlocutors to understand. Comprehensibility required a sympathetic listener accustomed to learners or nonnatives for the communication to be successful.

The features of the heritage Intermediate-level speakers were remarkably similar to those of true L2 learners in terms of their emerging development of the functions associated with the Advanced level; that is, their speech samples lacked structural control, exhibited limited vocabulary, and were characterized by an inability to perform the task. On the other hand, the speech of the HLLs in this study was marked by more fluency and confidence, and more ability to fill cultural and linguistic gaps than what is generally associated with Intermediate-level L2 learners.

To better understand the linguistic breakdown that prevented the IM and IH speakers from being rated at the Advanced level, the researchers analyzed participants' responses with respect to four specific Advanced-level functions: past narration, present narration, description on a topic beyond the personal or autobiographical, and participants' ability to successfully handle a situation with a complication. As with the Russian samples, when dealing with

TABLE 4

Comparison of Self-Assessments and Spanish Official OPlc Ratings

	Total number who self-assessed at each proficiency level	Correctly self-assessed	Overestimated skills	Underestimated skills
Intermediate	2	2	0	0
Advanced	16	14	2	0
Superior	22	2	20	0
Distinguished	0	0	0	0

Advanced-level probes, the Spanish HLLs initiated a response to the task at the Advanced level, but the response was either incomplete or unsuccessful. Speakers were unable to sustain performance at the Advanced level.

Of the four tasks, participants who were rated IM or IH most often experienced linguistic breakdown when attempting to speak about a current event. Providing detail, explanation, and description related to the event beyond personal and autobiographical experience proved most challenging. These Intermediate-level speakers were more at ease dealing with topics related to everyday routines and familiar topics. All lacked the vocabulary to engage in conversations on topics that went beyond their everyday and autobiographical experiences.

The production of cohesive and organized text was the least controlled feature in the performance of these speakers. Lacking were the connectors and internal organization needed to produce paragraph-length discourse. The ability to handle a situation with a complication proved to be less challenging for this group. The most successful task for the Intermediate HLLs was the past narration. They were more successful in using past-tense verb forms, aspect, and irregular structures than what is typically expected of L2 learners at this level.

Analysis of Samples Rated AL and AM

Of the total 41 Spanish HLLs in the study, 6 were rated AL and 18 were rated AM. These speakers demonstrated sustained performance in all Advanced-level functions with the appropriate text type and accuracy for the level.

The most evident weaknesses of this group that prevented a rating at the Superior level were the inability to organize and produce extended discourse, the lack of communicative strategies to deal with the topic abstractly, and the lack of precise vocabulary. When they attempted to discuss a topic from an abstract perspective at the Superior level, producing extended discourse pre-

sented a serious challenge: Participants were unable to connect ideas and produce language that was internally well organized. The majority (86%) were not able to deal with the topic from an abstract perspective. Most initiated the task at the Superior level but were unable to complete it. Limitations in the use of precise vocabulary (77%) also hindered their ability to handle the topic from an abstract perspective. Similarly, when they attempted to support an opinion, their most frequent area of weakness was once again in producing well-organized discourse (91%). Half of the group (50%) failed to address the task from an abstract perspective and instead reverted to concrete examples, with a smaller group resorting to personal experiences (27%). A common challenge in dealing with this task was the lack of precise vocabulary (64%). Finally, when attempting to hypothesize at the Superior level, none of the AL and AM speakers addressed the task at the Superior level, and none dealt with the topic abstractly.

As in the Russian group, Spanish AL and AM HLLs were characterized by their lack of control of the Superior-level functions. When participants attempted to perform tasks at the Superior level, functional breakdown occurred either because the speakers reverted to examples from personal experience rather than addressing the issue or because the speakers were unable to deal with the topic from an abstract perspective, support an opinion, and/or hypothesize. In all cases, speakers reverted to Advanced-level performance and reduced their text type to the paragraph level or treated topics concretely or anecdotally.

Analysis of Samples Rated AH

Spanish HLLs who were rated AH showed the ability to perform at the Superior level most of the time, but they were unable to sustain that performance across the range of functions and topics and thus meet expectations at the Superior level. The researchers checked whether speakers reverted to examples of personal experience rather than

addressing the issue, or if they were unable to deal with the topic abstractly. When describing breakdown at the Superior level, raters indicated deficiencies related to failure to use highly precise vocabulary, errors in structural control of low-frequency structures and discourse organization, and incomprehensibility of the content of the message.

The primary reason for AH instead of Superior ratings in the case of the Spanish HLL group was functional rather than structural breakdown. Speakers showed limited ability to develop abstract ideas while elaborating on and creating internally cohesive messages. Patterns of error were similar to those made by L2 learners. For example, speakers lacked control over the linguistic formulations that allow them to speculate and elaborate on outcomes and consequences, e.g., the use of the past subjunctive and other complex grammatical structures.

As in the Russian sample, researchers looked for evidence from three tasks—discussing a topic from an abstract perspective, supporting an opinion, and hypothesizing—in order to determine the areas of deficiency of the participants who were rated AH. When attempting to discuss a topic from an abstract perspective, the majority failed to address the task at the Superior level (86%). They partially addressed the task but reverted to examples from personal experience rather than addressing the issue and showed insufficiencies in their use of precise vocabulary. A majority lacked the ability to organize their responses in extended discourse (72%) despite evidence of precise vocabulary.

When they attempted to support an opinion at the Superior level, none of the Spanish participants in this study were able to deal with the topic abstractly. Most (86%) were unable to address the task and to control communicative strategies to organize a response in extended discourse. Finally, when they attempted to hypothesize at the Superior level, 38% failed to address the task; 71% were unable to deal with the topic abstractly, and all lacked the ability to orga-

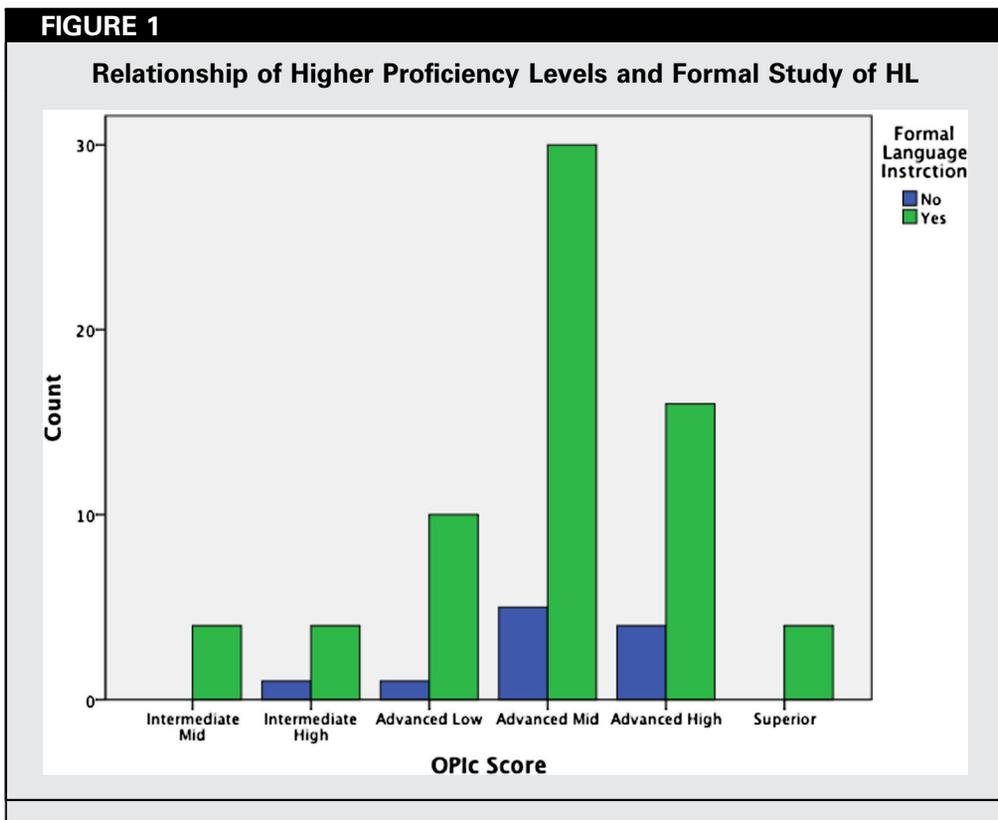
nize their response in extended discourse. A number of participants (43%) lacked the precise vocabulary required to address the tasks appropriately.

Comparing Heritage Profiles With Official Ratings

In addition to observing specific linguistic features of the heritage participants by level, the researcher conducted analyses to determine if any of a number of heritage profile features, (i.e., age of immigration, formal studies in the HL, use of the HL at home, and the ability to read and write in the HL) were associated with higher (Advanced and Superior) levels of proficiency.

In considering the strengths and weaknesses of Russian and Spanish HLLs at various levels of proficiency, the data suggested a relationship between explicit/formal language instruction at the college level and higher levels of proficiency. In the Russian group, there appeared to be a relationship between higher ratings and formal schooling in a Russian-speaking country. In the Russian HLL group that attained a rating of AL or higher, 28 speakers had formally studied in a Russian-speaking country and 24 had studied Russian formally in the United States. The majority (85%) of Russian HLLs identified the Russian Federation (or the former Soviet Union) as their country of birth. Only 15% identified the United States as their country of birth. In the case of Spanish, most speakers were born and raised in the United States, 13 had formally studied in a Spanish-speaking country, and 36 had studied Spanish formally in the United States. In both cases, formal language instruction (even in the United States, but at the college level) was a commonality among those participants who achieved ratings in the Advanced range and higher (see Figure 1).

The number of candidates who reported their ability and practice of reading (47) and writing (46) in Russian was another commonality among the Russian HLLs who attained a rating of AL or higher. Equally, the



number of candidates who reported their ability and practice of reading (37) and writing (37) in Spanish suggested a similar conclusion.

Additional demographic features appeared to have a positive relationship to higher levels of spoken language proficiency in the HL. These included age of arrival in the United States³ and language used most often (see Table 5). Interestingly, travel to a country where the target language is spoken appeared to have a moderate negative relationship to higher levels of proficiency.

The data also suggested some trends in terms of the HLLs' language use outside the classroom. Of all the participants in the study, only a few in the Spanish group indicated that Spanish was the primary language used at work. In all other cases, speakers in both groups indicated that they used a mix or English only at home and with friends.

Discussion

The first research question addressed the strengths and weaknesses of HLLs of Russian and Spanish at various levels of proficiency. Research has shown that the profiles of HLLs differ from the typical profiles of both L2 learners and native speakers. However, such qualities as native-like fluency and pronunciation do not compensate for lack of sustained functional ability as defined by the Guidelines. HLLs' confidence, fluency, and comprehensibility when speaking among peers, at home, or in the heritage community are not sufficient indicators of a high level (Superior) of professional proficiency. Furthermore, overconfidence on the part of HLLs or the instructor as a result of these features may possibly hinder learners' motivation to work systematically to improve linguistic skills.

Data showed that HLLs of Russian were only modestly successful in estimating their level of language proficiency (23 of the

TABLE 5

Language Survey Topic Correlations With OPlc

	Russian	Spanish	Combined
OPlc score	1	1	1
Age of U.S. arrival	0.282 ^c	0.439 ^a	0.322 ^b
Language used at home	-0.019	0.547 ^a	0.295 ^c
Language used most often	0.04	0.212 ^c	0.154
Student status	0.255 ^c	0.05	0.146
Travel to country	-0.078	-0.319 ^e	-0.224 ^d

- ^aStrong positive relationship
- ^bModerate positive relationship
- ^cWeak positive relationship
- ^dWeak negative relationship
- ^eModerate negative relationship

53 participants, 43%). Interestingly, participants who self-assessed at the Advanced level were more accurate than those at the Intermediate level, and all the participants who self-assessed as Distinguished were incorrect. Similarly, in Spanish, 18 of 40 participants (45%) were accurate in their self-assessment, and those who self-assessed at Advanced were the most accurate. This is interesting in that it confirms the general tendency of HLLs to overassess their abilities. This may be due in part to the ease with which these speakers can use their HL in informal contexts language, i.e., with family and friends, as well as their lack of familiarity with the requirements of functioning at higher levels of spoken language proficiency.

Among the many findings, perhaps the most interesting come from the analysis of the transition from the Advanced to the Superior level. Advanced-level speakers of Russian as a group demonstrated a variety of levels of control when attempting Superior-level tasks. As expected, AH speakers showed better discourse organization than AL/AM speakers and also demonstrated less frequent or marked breakdown than AL/AM speakers when dealing with a topic abstractly and when attempting hypotheses. Nevertheless, participants who were rated AH in Russian evidenced the same functional

breakdown as participants who were rated AL/AM: The general pattern across all members of the Advanced-level group was to respond to the demands of Superior-level functions by either initiating a response and then lowering the level of their discourse to the Advanced level by sharing personal experience, anecdotes, and examples without addressing the abstract nature of the topic, or by diverting their ideas to less complex concepts without returning to the abstract treatment of the question.

Similarly, while responding to Superior-level tasks, Advanced-level Spanish HLLs showed a variety of levels of control over the use of precise vocabulary and communicative strategies to express themselves. AH speakers showed better communicative strategies in the organization of their discourse and in their attempt to address the Superior-level tasks than those rated AL/AM. In addition, AH speakers showed less evidence of breakdown across all Superior tasks (i.e., dealing with topics abstractly, supporting an opinion, hypothesizing) than AL/AM speakers. Similar to the Russian speakers, however, when prompted at the Superior level, the Advanced-level speakers of Spanish in this study often showed functional breakdown: Superior-level tasks (i.e., dealing with topics abstractly and supporting opinions) were generally not addressed at the required

level of abstraction; speakers in this study tended to divert the focus of their attention to personal experience instead of addressing the level of abstraction and complexity expected at the Superior level. Their text type was predominantly limited to the single-paragraph level. In addition, despite their general control of the grammatical features of the language, the Spanish HLLs in this study evidenced patterns of structural errors and incorrect linguistic formulations when attempting to speculate and elaborate on possible outcomes and consequences, e.g., when the use of subjunctive mood and conditional tenses and structures for which there is no direct parallel structure in English were required.

The data suggest that a number of factors are associated with HLLs' proficiency scores. First, there appears to be a relationship between explicit/formal language instruction and higher levels of proficiency, confirming a misperception that HLLs "do not need" formal instruction because they already "speak the language." In addition, the age of arrival in the United States and the language used most often at home were shown to be strongly predictive of higher proficiency ratings.

Taken together, the findings suggest that the communicative strategies that are permissible when interacting in informal contexts, such as mixing languages, may actually hinder speakers who wish to achieve higher proficiency levels. The habits that are acquired when using a mix of languages informally do not appear to keep someone from achieving a rating in the Intermediate range, since comprehensibility at that level may still require a "sympathetic interlocutor." English interference observed as a characteristic in Advanced-level speakers did not hinder communication to the level of incomprehensibility when HLLs were speaking in informal contexts. However, this interference will cause miscommunication and/or disturb the educated speaker in more formal and professional contexts and will prevent a speaker from achieving a rating of Superior. If communicative patterns that are accept-

able in Intermediate-level tasks become fossilized patterns (learned or acquired), these patterns will affect the speaker's ability to function effectively in professional contexts in a monolingual environment.

The second research question investigated the extent to which there were relationships between the proficiency levels and the language background and experiences of Russian and Spanish HLLs. Data suggest that the use of the HL predominantly in informal contexts, i.e., with family and friends, together with the lack of use of the language in professional and formal contexts, may explain the difficulty these speakers encountered when attempting to expand communication beyond casual conversations and references to personal experiences. When prompted to speak about topics beyond self and their immediate environment, e.g., health policy, environmental issues, technology, or politics, the participants tended to revert to personal experiences. When prompted to discuss topics from an abstract perspective or to discuss issues, the participants tended to handle the topics concretely or provide anecdotal information.

Implications for Instruction

Based on these findings, a number of strategies and instructional practices can be recommended to support the development of higher levels of proficiency for Russian and Spanish HLLs. Clearly, educators cannot influence the age of immigration of HLLs nor the amount of time spent using the target language outside the classroom in home, community, or professional settings. Educators can, however, impact the quality of formal instruction provided for heritage learners.

Moving From Intermediate to Advanced

The few candidates rated Intermediate in this study showed emerging development of the functions associated with the Advanced level; that is, they demonstrated lack of structural control, limited vocabulary, and the

inability to perform the task. A better understanding of what is required to reach the Advanced level as described in the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines will serve to help instructors frame curriculum and learning experiences for speakers at the Intermediate level so as to identify and target appropriate goals for reaching the Advanced level. HLLs at the Intermediate level resembled true L2 learners in terms of their lexical limitations, limited structural control, and inability to consistently produce cohesive, paragraph-length discourse. While native-like pronunciation and fluency, as well as a high degree of confidence, can help their progress toward the Advanced level, Intermediate-level HLLs need to expand their vocabulary to go beyond the self and to use connectors to develop the internal cohesiveness and organization of the message in order to consistently produce paragraph-length discourse.

To improve proficiency, the data suggest the need for formal language instruction. The following strategies and instructional practices are likely to help HLLs progress from Intermediate to Advanced:

- Diagnostic feedback sessions to better understand the areas where improvement is needed
- Targeted practice on narration and description in all time frames, participation in conversations about topics beyond the personal and familiar experiences, and learning to organize interconnected discourse of paragraph length
- Activities that systematically allow for the expansion of content domains (vocabulary) and that go beyond the self and personal experience
- Targeted grammar instruction to eliminate patterned errors that often fossilize and hinder performance beyond the Intermediate level, focusing particularly on word order, agreement, and connectors, and how to produce internally cohesive paragraph-length discourse when narrating and describing in detail
- Frequent and sustained interactions with individuals who speak only the HL, and not English as well, so as to develop enhanced awareness of how code-switching (English interference) negatively impacts comprehensibility when communicating with monolingual speakers of Russian or Spanish. While code-switching may allow HLLs to communicate in a heritage speaking environment within a specific region of the country, the interference of another language will reduce the comprehensibility of interlocutors who are not familiar with English, or the vocabulary that has been switched.

Moving From Advanced to Superior

The great majority of Advanced-level HLLs in this study overassessed at the Superior level. This points to the need for speakers at this level to have a better understanding of the functional requirements at the Superior level, along with the other assessment criteria associated with the level. Familiarization with the description of the Superior level in the ACTFL guidelines can be a useful tool to assist instructors and learners in understanding the rather more complex expectations for language use, including the basic understanding that the Superior level represents a level of proficiency that is equal to the functional ability of an educated speaker of the language. In order to reach a Superior level rating, speakers must demonstrate the ability to deal with topics abstractly, support opinions, and hypothesize using precise rather than generic vocabulary in a variety of formal and informal contexts and without patterns of errors.

To improve proficiency, the data in this study suggest that instruction for Advanced-level speakers who seek to function at the Superior level should focus on the following:

- Diagnostic feedback to better understand the areas where improvement is needed
- Systematic practice in discussing issues and their implications from both concrete and abstract perspectives so as to elevate speakers' language to the required level of

sophistication and abstraction when attempting Superior-level functions

- Familiarization with discourse strategies and communicative devices used to support opinions and hypothesize on outcomes. Even at Advanced High, speakers in this study tended to initially address the function by stating an opinion but then tended to revert to a concrete personal example and not return to the function or issue at hand. Learning to develop formal discourse will not only increase their proficiency, but will also motivate and challenge HLLs beyond their personal level of confidence and toward an appreciation of their own control of the language.
- Systematic practice in constructing cogent arguments in extended discourse to support opinions and speculate on possible outcomes and consequences (hypothesis), including the use of strategies for elaboration and the use of transition devices to organize these arguments with a high degree of accuracy
- Practice speaking about a wide range of general topics with the objective of developing an expanded level of precise, sophisticated vocabulary as well as developing discourse and sociocultural strategies to communicate in professional and formal contexts
- Targeted grammar instruction to eliminate all patterned errors. Such patterns will prevent speakers from sustaining performance at the Superior level. While impeccable structure is not required to attain baseline proficiency at the Superior level, patterned errors or errors that distract from the message should be eliminated
- Focus on minimizing English interference that can prevent speakers from functioning at the Superior level, in terms of both accuracy and content domains. Data show that English interference does not appear to be a significant impediment to reaching the Advanced level, where strategies to circumlocute adequately compensate for lexical weaknesses. Nevertheless, this interference becomes a pattern of weakness

when addressing the functions of the Superior level, as these mistakes distract educated native speakers from the message

- Frequent and sustained interaction with individuals who speak only the HL and not English as well. Immersion and study abroad—not just personal travel—in a country where the HL is the language of higher education should be made available, based on findings from Davidson and Lekic's study (2013) in which participation in the Russian flagship capstone overseas immersion program resulted in even higher increases in HLLs' proficiency when compared with nonheritage learners. In addition, designated courses should be designed for Advanced-level HLLs at the university level so as to focus the instruction based on the requirements for Superior-level proficiency as well as their specific needs

Limitations of the Study

In spite of the extensive publicity and recruitment efforts, the greatest challenge was identifying a large number of HLLs who met the very specific criteria that were established for participation and who were willing to complete both surveys and have their oral proficiency assessed. In addition, many more HLLs who had higher levels of proficiency chose to participate in the study, resulting in a much smaller number of Intermediate-level speakers. In the end, the authors recognize that the sample size may be insufficient to produce wide-reaching conclusions about all HLLs. However, while the final number of participants in the study was smaller than originally anticipated, commonalities, trends, and definite patterns of abilities did emerge, including patterns of strength and weakness at each of the major levels. Further efforts should be made to add to the sample so as to expand, confirm, or adjust the initial findings and to continue to build a database of HLLs' samples across a range of languages on which to conduct further research. To this end, a similar study for Chinese HLLs is in progress.

Conclusion

This study has shown that ACTFL assessments of oral proficiency can be used to assess the functional ability of HLLs: In practical terms, a final rating is indicative of the functions and other assessment criteria associated with the major level (i.e., contexts and content, text type, accuracy) that a given speaker can perform in a sustained manner. Furthermore, the sample of language that is obtained from an OPI or an OPIc, in addition to being rated according to a national and international standard, can also serve as the basis for further, more fine-grained analysis. This study identified strengths and weaknesses of Russian and Spanish HLLs at various levels of proficiency and suggests some relationships between the proficiency levels of those HLLs and their linguistic backgrounds and profiles. In addition, the findings suggest a variety of instructional strategies and practices that will support HLLs' continuing language development. First, by examining the specific features of a speaker's strengths and weaknesses, language educators can use effective diagnostic feedback to serve as the basis for setting specific individual goals. In addition, by familiarizing HLLs and their instructors with the features, assessment criteria, and requirements for each major level of spoken proficiency, instruction and continuing assessment can then target effective strategies for improving functional ability. Such diagnosis will allow instructors and students to develop individualized "road maps" that will allow HLLs to systematically address those areas that prevent them from sustaining the next higher level of proficiency. Such road maps must include both in-class experiences as well as interactions with a variety of interlocutors in more formal contexts and across a range of content areas that require more precise vocabulary, use of complex structures, and organizational strategies for producing cohesive and extended discourse. In addition to formal study of the language, professional-level work experiences, including internships in an environment in which the

language is spoken, can also contribute to the development of proficiency at higher levels. Instructional programs should be designed in a way that motivates HLLs to aim for the Superior level and beyond by addressing linguistic weaknesses and building on their strengths.

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Notes

1. The ACTFL OPIc is a valid and reliable assessment that emulates the "live" ACTFL OPI, but with prompts that are delivered through a carefully designed computer program and via a virtual avatar. The goal of the OPIc is the same as that of the OPI, i.e., to obtain a ratable sample of speech that can be evaluated by a certified rater and assigned an ACTFL rating according to the descriptions in the *ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines 2012–Speaking*. The speech sample is digitally recorded, archived in a searchable database, and rated by certified ACTFL raters. According to a 2006 side-by-side validation study, OPIc ratings are consistent with OPI ratings (Surface, Poncheri, & Bhavsir, 2008).
2. Breakdown is defined as evidence that the speaker is no longer able to sustain the criteria of the major level. It is demonstrated in a variety of ways: the

inability to accomplish the task, avoidance of the task, or substitution of the targeted task with a lower level. The decrease in the type and quantity of discourse produced, an increase in errors, the disintegration of language, memorized responses unrelated to the prompt, and/or silence are also indications of breakdown.

- Age of arrival in the United States may also be related to number of years of formal instruction in the HL in the country of the HL.

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APPENDIX A

Sample (Spanish) Qualification Survey Questionnaire

Qualification Survey

ACTFL/UCLA NHLRC Heritage Speakers Oral Proficiency Study

The ACTFL is seeking heritage speakers of Spanish to participate in a research project. The purpose of this study is to gather information about the linguistic profiles of heritage speakers. In order to qualify for this research project, you must be:

- A heritage speaker* of Spanish
- 18 years or older
- Willing to complete a qualification survey pertaining to education and language background, preferences, and use

*For this study, the term *heritage speaker* is defined as an individual who:

- Learned the heritage language (HL) in an informal setting (i.e., at home, in the community) and uses the HL with family, friends, coworkers, etc.
- Lives in the United States and has received the majority of his/her education in English-speaking schools

Once qualified as a heritage speaker of Spanish, participants must agree to take an Internet-delivered assessment of spoken language proficiency—the ACTFL OPIc—in the HL and to allow the use of the speech sample for research purposes. Participants will be paid \$25* and

will receive an official ACTFL OPIc certificate indicating their level of spoken proficiency in the language according to the *ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines–Speaking*.

*Please note that the \$25 compensation is only provided to those who qualify as heritage speakers and agree to take the ACTFL OPIc.

Thank you for taking the time to complete this qualification survey.

1. Do you speak Spanish?

- a) yes
- b) no

If your answer to question 1 was yes, please continue to question 2.

If your answer to question 1 was no, you may end the survey now.

2. Where/how did you first learn to speak Spanish? (Please check all that apply)

- a) at home with family
- b) from your community (workplace, church, relatives, friends, etc.)
- c) in my native country where Spanish is spoken
- d) living abroad (Peace Corps, missionary, etc.)
- e) other _____

3. Which of the following best describes your speaking ability in Spanish?

- a) I can say only a few words and phrases. It may be difficult to understand what I say in Spanish.
- b) I can say enough to survive in a Spanish-speaking environment (i.e., order a meal, buy a train ticket, ask questions, deal with a simple social situation). A sympathetic listener will be able to understand what I say in Spanish.
- c) I can tell stories; explain situations; clarify miscommunications; and describe people, places, and things. I have enough language to make explanations even when there is an unexpected turn of events. Most native speakers of Spanish will understand what I say when I speak Spanish.
- d) I can support opinions, deal with abstract issues, and speak hypothetically with virtually no errors in language.
- e) My ability in Spanish is equal to that of a highly articulate, educated native speaker. I am able to tailor my language to all audiences and speak with subtlety and nuance.

4. Are you willing to participate in a compensated research study on your HL?

- a) yes
- b) no

5. Are you willing to complete a background survey about how you learned and use your languages? It will take approximately 3 to 5 minutes.

6. Are you willing to take an Internet-delivered test of spoken ability in your HL? It will take approximately 30 minutes.

7. Are you willing to have the sample of language used for research purposes?

If your answers to questions 4, 5, 6, and 7 are all yes, please provide us with your contact information (all information will remain confidential and will be used strictly for research purposes).

APPENDIX B

Sample (Russian) Background Survey Questionnaire

Background Survey

ACTFL/UCLA NHLRC Heritage Speakers Oral Proficiency Study

The ACTFL is seeking heritage speakers of Russian to participate in a research project. The purpose of this study is to gather information about the linguistic profiles of heritage speakers. In order to qualify for this research project, you must be:

- A heritage speaker* of Russian
- 18 years or older
- Willing to complete a qualification survey pertaining to education and language background, preferences, and use

*For this study, the term *heritage speaker* is defined as an individual who:

- Learned the heritage language (HL) in an informal setting (i.e., at home, in the community, or in the country of the language) and uses the HL with family, friends, coworkers, etc.
- Lives in the United States and has received the majority of his/her education in English-speaking schools

Once qualified as a heritage speaker of Russian, participants must agree to take an Internet-delivered assessment of spoken language proficiency—the ACTFL OPIc—in the HL and to allow the use of the speech sample for research purposes. Participants will be paid \$25* and will receive an official ACTFL OPIc certificate indicating their level of spoken proficiency in the language according to the *ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines–Speaking*.

*Please note that the \$25 compensation is only provided to those who qualify as heritage speakers and agree to take the ACTFL OPIc.

Thank you for taking the time to complete this qualification survey.

Please provide us with your contact information (all information will remain confidential and will be used strictly for research purposes).

1. Do you speak Russian?

a) yes

b) no

(If you answer no, you may stop the survey now.)

2. What is your country of birth? _____

3. If you were *not* born in the United States, how old were you when you arrived in the United States?

a) younger than 2

b) 2–5 years old

c) 6–10 years old

d) 11–13 years old

e) 14–18 years old

f) older than 18

4. Did you live in another country other than the former Soviet Union before coming to the United States? If yes, for how long?

a) less than 1 year

b) 1–2 years

c) 3–5 years

d) more than 5 years

5. What is your age?

a) 18–25

b) 26–35

- c) 36–45
d) 46–55
e) 56+
6. Which statement below best describes your profession? (please circle all that apply)
- a) I am a student enrolled in high school.
b) I am a student enrolled in a college or university.
c) I work outside the home.
d) I work from home.
e) I do not study or work.
f) Other _____
7. What language do you *speak* most often?
- a) Russian
b) English
c) A mix of Russian and English
8. What language do you speak most often *at home*?
- a) Russian
b) English
c) A mix of Russian and English
9. What language do you speak most often *with your friends*?
- a) Russian
b) English
c) A mix of Russian and English
10. In which language do you consider yourself most proficient?
- a) Russian
b) English
c) I am equally proficient in both English and Russian.
11. Have you formally studied/taken classes in the United States in Russian?
- a) Yes, I attended classes in the United States.
b) No, I have not attended classes in the United States.
12. Have you had any formal schooling in the country where Russian is the native language?
- a) yes
b) no
13. Which statement best describes the course(s) you took in Russian? (please circle all that apply)
- a) I studied Russian in high school.
b) I studied Russian in college or at university.
c) I studied Russian in a community language class.
d) Other _____
14. Do you read and write in Russian?
- a) yes
b) no
15. If you answered yes to question 14, did you learn to read and write in a country where Russian is the native/second language?
- a) Yes.
b) No, I learned to read and write in the United States.
16. How often do you travel to the country where Russian is the native language?
- a) annually
b) biannually
c) three to five years
d) five years or more

e) never

17. If you travel to your country where Russian is the native language, what do you do there?

- a) visit relatives
- b) visit as a tourist
- c) attend classes
- d) other _____

18. Would you be interested in participating in a compensated research study on HLs? If yes, you may be contacted by phone or e-mail with more information.

- a) yes
- b) no

APPENDIX C

OPIc Rater Review Form Summary

APPENDIX D

OPIc Heritage Speaker Linguistic Sample Review Form

Level of Sustained Performance	Level of Linguistic Breakdown
Rating Criteria	Evidence of Breakdown
Functions	Functions
Context/content	Evidence of linguistic breakdown
Comprehensibility	Text type
Text type	Comprehensibility
	Specify other forms of breakdown
Quantity and quality of performance	
Primary deficiencies that prevent the speaker from functioning at the _____ level are:	
Comments:	

Rating	Responses with Full Control	Responses with Evidence of Breakdown
Intermediate	Intermediate	Advanced
Advanced	Advanced	Superior
Superior	Superior	

Quality of Sustained Performance at Level	
Linguistic Features in Each Response	Signs of Breakdown
Fluency	Ability to address the task
Features of pronunciation	Functional breakdown
Vocabulary	Linguistic breakdown
Accuracy: grammar and structure	
Pragmatic competence	
Sociolinguistic competence	
Text type	
Quantity and quality of performance	
Primary deficiencies that prevent the speaker from functioning at the _____ level are:	
Comments:	