

**Computer Mediated Communication:
Tools for Instructing Russian Heritage Language Learners**

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Abstract

The unique needs, goals, and constraints of heritage language learners in U.S. higher education and the multiple ways that they differ from those of second and foreign language (L2) learners have been well documented (Brisk, 2000; Chevalier, 2004; Grosjean, 1982; Kagan, 2003). Each population uses its two languages in diverse ways, for differing purposes and with vastly dissimilar levels of proficiency. Shaping these distinctions are the contexts and purposes in which and for which learners are and/or become fluent. In the mother tongue, these contexts and purposes are most often interpersonal and involve home and family. By contrast, the contexts and purposes in which and for which a 'school educated' learner tends to master the foreign language are public and academic. This study examines Russian heritage learners in a U.S. university Russian language course and how computer mediated communication (CMC) was used to support their acquisition of academic literacy in the mother tongue. The CMC approaches reported can serve as models for accommodating heritage learners in post-secondary foreign language classes in ways that benefit all learners.

Introduction

As increasing numbers of heritage language learners appear in post-secondary language courses to study their mother tongue, foreign language faculty increasingly need to understand the nature of heritage language learning and the most effective processes for meeting these students' needs. Additionally, in post-secondary foreign language classes, an imbalance of linguistic/discourse knowledge can impede effective peer interactions in the live classroom, with the more verbally proficient heritage speakers dominating the conversation and/or tuning out when the conversation turns to forms, functions, and pronunciation patterns in which they are already proficient. While L2 learners of Russian need intensive work on pronunciation, the majority of heritage learners need less; where L2 learners of Russian need a broad range of vocabulary, heritage learners most often need academic vocabulary; where L2 learners of Russian need instruction in letter-level and sentence-level writing, heritage learners have some basic skills of sentence structure; finally, where L2 learners of Russian need to learn to speak and comprehend the language at the most rudimentary level, heritage learners possess a comparatively high level of oral/aural competence (Campbell & Rosenthal, 2000; Kagan, 2003). What is more, the relative fluency of heritage learners can indeed "scare off" L2 learners of Russian (Campbell & Rosenthal, 2000: 174).

In recent years, the need for careful study of the learning processes and outcomes of heritage language learners in higher education foreign language classes has been well documented (Hancock, 2002; Kondo-Brown, 2003). This case study is an effort to understand the role of Computer Mediated Communication and how such social/literacy

tools can serve Russian heritage learners in their effort to master reading, writing, and public/academic discourse in their home language. The study also models strategies for accommodating heritage learners via technology in post secondary foreign language classes in ways that are beneficial to all.

Meeting the Needs of Heritage Language Learners

The 2000 census revealed a population of some 600,000 Russians in the U.S. For these and other heritage learners, development of fluency within and across language domains has typically been limited by contact and experiences in the home language. It is widely documented that for heritage speakers, living and learning in a monolingual community discourages the use of the native language (Cummins, 1992, 2001; Grosjean, 1982; Portes & Hao, 1998), leading to a lack of textual competence and the absence of higher level reading and writing skills in the mother tongue. Some ability to read and write, however — what Tse (2001a) terms "latent literacy" — will still place heritage learners ahead of beginning L2 learners of Russian.

Because of the multiple characteristics of heritage learners that distinguish them from foreign language learners, some in the field have suggested there be separate tracks for foreign language and heritage language students of Russian (Kagan & Rifkin, 2000; Kagan & Dillon, 2001/2003). This is not always a practical option, but certain course design strategies can assist foreign language educators in accommodating the special needs of their heritage speakers. For example, in designing a course or course activities for heritage learners, there should clearly be an emphasis on writing: spelling, punctuation, sentence structure, and editing. To extend their repertoire of discourses, rich discussions of cultures and communities with opportunities to explore the corresponding lexicons and registers should be included (Aparicio, 1983). Finally, emphasis also needs to be placed on the more "high level" academic registers with which heritage learners are most likely unfamiliar in the mother tongue (Kondo-Brown, 2003).

Carreira (2005) suggests adopting the following practices when teaching heritage learners:

1. validate identity and linguistic needs
2. select materials and instructional strategies that address these needs
3. adjust curricular goals and instructional approaches according to students' sociolinguistic and family background.

In an attempt to integrate these three features into an advanced Russian as a foreign language course, and to fit the course to the student rather than the student to the course, a Computer Mediated Communication component was designed, implemented and evaluated.

Computer Mediated Communication in Language Teaching and Learning

The term Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) encompasses all forms of human communication that are mediated in some way by computer. These forms include email, instant messaging, listservs, blogs, chatrooms, gaming, and online instructional forums. In this study, heritage learners engaged in asynchronous discussions on language and culture with their instructor and with one another as a strategy for focusing on their linguistic weaknesses.

The rationale for orchestrating such discussion activities is well grounded in recent research on effective uses of CMC for foreign and second language instruction. For example, the research indicates 1) increased learner output as compared to teacher output (Hudson & Bruckman, 2002; Kern, 1995; Sullivan & Pratt, 1996); 2) increased opportunities to participate actively in the negotiation of meaning (Kern, 1996; Pellitieri, 1999; Warschauer, 1997); and 3) increased opportunities for implementing instructor strategies that can have a powerful impact on learning the language (Blake, 2000; Meskill & Anthony, 2004, 2005).

Discussion activities for this study were designed to take maximum advantage of these features of CMC. Because a primary need of these heritage learners, like many others in similar circumstances, was to read and write the home language across a range of discourses, the medium seemed a natural tool. Additional CMC affordances that made sense for these learners were 1) learners and instructors could see the target language in use, study it, access resources to make sense of it and compose, ask for clarification, and receive modeling; and 2) the oral version of the mother tongue, with which they were familiar, could be anchored to the written form in authentic, communicative conversations. This study set out to determine whether and how these particular affordances of CMC might be exploited in order to engage heritage learners in the kinds of instructional/authentic language practice they need: reading and writing in a range of registers in their native/target language. We were particularly keen to determine whether and how the medium can provide special advantages to heritage speakers.

The Study

Context

To begin to address these questions, a year-long case study of a small group of Russian heritage learners in an L2 Russian class was undertaken. This was a year-long undergraduate course in advanced Russian. Having initially assessed five of the registered students' oral/aural skills and having determined that the needs of these heritage learners/native speakers and those of the L2 learners were clearly different, and recognizing the heritage learners' need for reading and writing skills in their mother tongue, the instructor assigned the heritage learners two hours per week of CMC in lieu of attending the live class where oral/aural skills were the main focus. The CMC portion consisted of asynchronous text-based discussions conducted through the free course management software Internet Classroom Assistant (Nicenet, n.d.) during the fall semester, and WebCT during the spring semester. Both of these course management systems provide nearly identical forums for threaded online discussions. In addition to

the CMC portion, heritage learners were assigned to write weekly essays, complete grammar drills and practice exercises, and participate in occasional meetings with the instructor in order to discuss course materials in a face-to-face format. A visiting international student from Russia was also enrolled and ultimately functioned as a teaching assistant. Like the heritage students, he logged on regularly and completed online assignments.

At the beginning of each of the two semesters, the first of the CMC discussions was initiated by the instructor. This was done to set a formal, academic tone for the current, and all subsequent discussions by modeling appropriate academic discourse. For the fall semester, the first discussion was assigned as an analysis of the article “Jazyk s xrenom” (‘Spiced Tongue’) published in the popular Russian newspaper “Argumenty i Fakty” (‘Arguments and Facts’), which is available online. The article focuses on the Russian language, its recent changes, and the sources and consequences of these changes. The short story “Ferris Wheel” about the Russian Revolution of 1917 by author A. Averchenko, a first-wave immigrant, was also assigned. The story was selected as the first discussion topic for the spring semester because many of the students were either majoring in history or had expressed strong interest in Russian history from this period. In the fall semester, the students were also asked to find articles of their own interest on the Internet, provide links to those sites, and discuss them with their classmates. Articles chosen were on the following topics: “Ecology of the Modern World,” “Scott Peterson’s Crime,” and “Elections in Ukraine.” In the spring semester, the students were assigned to lead and facilitate discussions on a topic of their choosing that related to Russian history, politics, culture, literature, language, etc. During the spring semester, the students initiated the following topics: “Russian and American Life Styles,” “Democracy in Russia and in America,” “American and Russian Television and Cinema,” “Adapting to American Culture,” and “Favorite Sports.” As is apparent from the topics, all students, except the one who initiated the discussion about sports, were inclined to engage in comparative analyses of their two cultures and their struggle (“Adapting to American Culture”) to find their place in and between them.

In the fall semester, there were two heritage learners, Aleksei and Maksim, who were joined by two additional heritage learners, Kirill and Igor, in the spring (all student names are pseudonyms). The ages of the students at the time of the course ranged from 18 to 22 and their time in the U.S. from 7 to 11 years (see Appendix C). The course provided continual, supportive opportunities to practice writing in the heritage language for students who were orally fluent, but who lacked academic writing skills to a moderate or significant degree. Given that most heritage speaker experience in the mother tongue was with family, in the home, or with a small circle of peers, the variety of discourse practices outside of these contexts was limited. An additional aim, then, was to provide practice in written Russian discourses with which students were unfamiliar, in which they were not fluent in Russian; namely, skills in leading and participating in academic discussions, using high level vocabulary and complex syntactic constructions, structuring and organizing arguments, achieving clarity in expressing opinions, respecting interlocutors’ thoughts and feelings, and other behaviors characteristic of educated native speakers. In

addition, the goals of the CMC assignments included addressing the need for raising cultural awareness in heritage/native speakers of their own culture as well as developing tolerance for the differences between cultures.

The required number of postings per week was from three to five, with the CMC portion worth approximately 50% of the final grade and other traditional off-line assignments worth 50%. No requirements for word length were made. The heritage learners also completed a pre-course questionnaire and a post-course interview conducted by the instructor. In addition to these instruments (see Appendices A and B), archived transcripts of the CMC portion of the course were used to analyze the heritage learner experience, gains in their acquisition of written forms, and overall improvements in mother-tongue academic discourse.

Results

Vocabulary

Judicious use of CMC has been shown to positively impact vocabulary acquisition through authentic, motivated communication between learners and between learners and their instructors (Blake & Pagani, 2002, Meskill & Anthony, 2004, 2005). This was also the case with this group of Russian heritage learners. All reported a significant gain in vocabulary. Some reported the positive impact of their classmates' and instructor's postings, as well as the composition of their own postings, on their ability to retain vocabulary items with which they had previously been passively familiar but had had little chance to use actively. Participation in online discussions helped students retrieve those items from memory and use them in meaningful contexts. One of the students, Maksim, when asked to provide examples, pointed to such words as *обобщение*, 'summarizing', *оттенок*, 'shade of color/emotion', *ментальность* 'mentality', and *цензура* 'censorship' as new lexical items they had learned in the CMC context.

Spelling

The four heritage learners reported a strong influence of other students' postings on their spelling skills. Maksim said: "I always pay attention to the word spelling in other guys' messages. In their postings, I often see the words that I misspelled typed correctly, and I learn from this." Another student, Kirill, also pointed out the significant impact of online discussions on his ability to spell words: "I have noticed so many words and how they are spelled correctly." It was also observed that some students internalized the correct spelling of words after they were exposed to others' postings in which those words were written properly. For instance, Kirill misspelled the word *на счёт*, 'regarding' but after the word was used correctly in the instructor's, Ivan's and Aleksei's postings three times, he came to write it correctly – *насчёт*. Interestingly, three of the five students mentioned that they paid more attention to spelling in their classmates' postings than to that in the instructor's messages. When asked about their criteria for selecting model messages to which to heed closely, students mentioned that they looked to messages posted by the native Russian student and the one heritage student who seemed to be more advanced than the others. Students also said that participation in online discussions prompted them to use dictionaries, both paper and online, to confirm spelling.

Spoken Forms to Written: The Transition

...literacy is the first victim of language loss over generations. Even if the second generation retains the ability to speak the language to some degree, reading and writing seldom gets developed to any appreciable level. (Tse, 2001b, p. 32)

CMC can serve as a venue for exercising 'spoken writing' (Murray, 1995). In this way heritage learners can build on their extant proficiency in oral/aural skills as a means of developing written competencies. By reading and writing messages to one another and to their instructor, moreover, learners can engage in topics and content that are both familiar and pleasurable to them — a key element for successful language learning (Chevalier, 2004; Krashen, 1994; McQuillan, 1996; Tse, 2001a). The wide range of registers represented in the variety of topics possible in CMC is also conducive to the need of expanding the discourse domains in which heritage learners are fluent. At the same time, students can be guided to attend to spelling, punctuation, and sentence structures in an authentic, conversational context (Meskill & Anthony, 2004, 2005).

All five students reported that they communicated in written Russian via email with their peers. All of them described this communication as "illiterate." When corresponding via email, they said that they typed Russian words using English letters. In cases where they did type in Cyrillic, they did not follow grammatical, spelling or punctuation rules, and neither did those Russians with whom they exchanged emails. All the students recognized the advantages of the class's online discussions as an opportunity to engage in more formal, academic writing that at the same time was highly interactive and personal. Students reported that they had to pay attention to both form and meaning. As Igor noted, "I have to really watch what I'm writing. I have to pay attention to the language of my postings, not just the meaning, like what I would do writing informal emails in Russian."

Composing in the Heritage Language

All five students pointed out the advantages of CMC as compared to face-to-face discussion for developing their weaker native language skills. They observed that although CMC discussions lacked spontaneity and immediacy, they nevertheless encouraged students to think and plan carefully when composing messages. Kirill said that he always thought about the structure of his response before actually typing and posting it. He also mentioned that he observed from others' postings that most students in the class followed a certain structure: 1) making a statement of agreement/disagreement with the previous message; 2) providing support for the statement; 3) suggesting one's own solution; and 4) by way of conclusion, asking others what they think about the problem/question raised. Kirill noted that he in turn implemented this same structure, as he found it appropriate for such academic discussions. The following message about the use of improper language on the Internet, posted by Aleksei, the most literate of the heritage learners, exemplifies this structure:

Мне хотелось бы затронуть тему "cyber police." Я считаю, что существование реальных людей, которые могли бы следить за всем происходящим на Интернетe, просто невозможно. Интернет – это не реальное место, это огромное информационное пространство, где нет никаких языковых барьеров. Но есть другие способы, например, на американских форумах используются специальные фильтры, которые замещают ругательные слова всякими смешными фразами. Вы считаете, это хорошая идея?

I'd like to bring up the topic of "cyber police." I think it would be impossible to have real people keeping track of everything that goes on on the Internet. The Internet isn't a real place; it's an enormous informational space where there are no language barriers. However, there are other methods, for example, in some American forums they use special filters that replace swear words with all kinds of funny phrases. Do you think that's a good idea?

Two students, Maksim and Kirill, mentioned the advantages of the formal nature of the CMC discussions. Because they were actually graded on the number and quality of their messages, they approached these writing assignments as they would a formal essay, taking time to compose and edit carefully prior to posting. Maksim even called his messages "mini-essays." Indeed, four of the five students reported improvement in their writing as a result of their participation in the online discussions. Contributing factors were chiefly the multiple opportunities for extensive writing practice and the influence of other students' postings. Kirill, for example, said, "Some guys write so well. I was really impressed by the way they express themselves and their thoughts ... I thought, gee, I wish I could write that well. I tried to emulate their styles and how they write their messages, and I hope my last postings resemble theirs."

Students said that in order to prepare their messages on such topics as Russian history and Russian politics, they had had to search the web for relevant information to back up their opinions. For instance, Igor reported that for the discussion of the story "Ferris Wheel," he had had to read more materials about the Russian Revolution of 1917. Aleksei mentioned that he had searched the net for information about elections in Ukraine in order to contribute to the discussion on politics.

Grammar and Punctuation

Only one student pointed out the influence of online discussions on his grammatical competence. This student mentioned that he paid special attention to the use of Russian participles in other students' postings because these forms are characteristic of literary writing rather than oral speech. He appreciated the opportunity to observe the use of these forms and to include them in his own messages. When talking about acquiring grammatical rules, most students said they preferred grammar exercises over online discussions. Nonetheless, all appreciated the formal nature of the online discussions because it forced them to pay special attention to punctuation. For example, Igor reported

that Ivan's messages reminded him about the punctuation rule: commas before and after verbal adverbs and verbal adverb phrases.

Culture and Identity

...foundations of language teaching and learning must rest on the learner's personal connections to the HL [heritage language]. In particular, pedagogical practices must focus on a) validating the learner's prerogative to define him/herself in terms of their language and culture of ancestry no matter how remote or insignificant the connection to this ancestry may seem to native speakers of the HL or to any one else, and b) facilitating the learner's search for identity vis-à-vis the HL/HC [home language, home culture]. (Carreira, 2005, p. 7).

Because discourse is a form of social practice in which participants are ideologically positioned, language learners can struggle to be considered legitimate speakers; their ability to achieve legitimacy is strongly tied to the power dynamics of a given situation (Angelil-Carter, 1997). Language learners in particular have complex, continually shifting identities in light of the flux of self expression and the influence of two cultures (Pierce, 1995). One of the key reasons for heritage learners to take up the study of their home language is a desire to understand themselves better as a cultural entity and thereby locate their linguistic/cultural identity (Campbell & Rosenthal, 2000). Ethnic pride and a national social premium on diversity may be in play as well as individual unease with an unbalance of home and host cultures. The ways in which participation in CMC learning activities contributed to the learners' sense of bicultural identity was therefore of particular interest and formed the basis for a number of student interview questions.

All the students reported having found the online discussions enjoyable, perhaps mainly because they shared the same background; they had all left Russia when they were young and had met, and were still adjusting to a new language and culture. The discussion "Adaptation to American Culture," initiated by Igor, was one place where students could share these common experiences.¹

Maxim: Когда мы приехали в Америку, меня отправили в интернациональную школу в Бронксе. Мне было очень тяжело, так как я не знал английского языка. ... В первый день меня спросили[,] сколько мне было лет, а я[,] как дурак[,] смотрю человеку в лицо[,] ничего не[]понимая.

When we came to America, I was sent off to the international school in The Bronx. It was very difficult for me because I didn't know English. ... On the first day I was asked how old I was, and there I am like a fool, looking the person in the face and not understanding anything.

Kirill: Когда мы приехали, я пошел в американскую public school.

Когда я пошел первый день в школу[,] мои родители вооружили меня самой важной[,] по их мнению[,] фразой на ломан[н]ом английском: "Where is toilet?" :)

When we came, I went to American public school. On the first day of school, my parents armed me with what they considered the most important phrase, in broken English: "Where is toilet?" :)

In the interviews, students reported high satisfaction with the topic of adaptation to U.S. culture. Maksim: "It was nice to be able to communicate with someone like me, who had the same experience of coming over to this country from Russia and had the same difficulties and struggles. Igor: "I liked that we had so much in common and when I said something, like how I felt when I had just come to this country, everybody understood me because everybody went through the same stuff." Kirill: "I enjoyed the fact that I could make a totally Russian joke like the one about Georgians and their specific accent and be sure that all the others would understand me and I didn't have to struggle explaining the idea."

In addition, all of the students expressed optimism concerning the future of Russia. The possibility of using Russian in their future careers was given as a primary motivational factor in their decision to study the language. One of the students wants to become an immigration lawyer and believes that his knowledge of Russian and Ukrainian will help him a great deal. Students also mentioned that some of their relatives work in fields where there is a need for Russian competence. Aleksei posted the following message:

Возвращаясь к предмету о "потере интереса к России," я хочу сказать, что, во всяком случае, экономический интерес наоборот возрастает. Мой отец работает в большой американской компании по производству пресс-форм для получения изделий из пластмассы. Эта компания размещает заказы в двух бывших республиках СССР. ... Такого вида деловые отношения были бы невозможны без помощи людей, знающих русский язык.

Returning to the subject of 'loss of interest in Russia', I would like to say that, in any case, economic interest is, on the contrary, increasing. My father works for a big American company producing press-forms for making things out of plastic. This company has branches in two republics of the former USSR.... Business relationships like this would be impossible without the help of people who know Russian.

In online discussions, students often compared U.S. and Russian cultures. Even though they expressed their clear preference for Russian culture, they sometimes mentioned that they do not feel completely Russian any more or were otherwise ambivalent.

Ivan: *Я предлагаю обсудить русские традиции, стиль жизни, культуру. Считаете ли вы, что они отличаются от американских? Если да, то как? Какой стиль жизни подходит вам больше? ... Я затронул эту тему, потому что она меня как-то даже тревожит, ведь многие люди, переезжая в другие страны, забывают про свою родную. Когда я приехал в Америку, меня поразило то, как здесь ежедневно одеваются. Увидя вас в таком виде, люди бы подумали, что вы или бедны, или собрались красить ограду своего дома. ... Что же касается еды, так это просто ужас, я никогда за всю свою жизнь не видел такое огромное количество фаст-фуд заведений :0 Конечно[,] я считаю, что русский стиль лучше. ... А говоря про стиль жизни, Россия, слава Богу, не "страдает" "Американской мечтой".*

I suggest discussing Russian traditions, life style, and culture. Do you think that they are different from American ones? If yes, how so? What lifestyle suits you better? ... I brought up this topic because it's something that bothers me; lots of people who move to other countries forget about their homeland. When I came to America, I was shocked how people dress here. If people saw you like that [in Russia], they would think that either you were poor or you were going to paint your fence. ... As for the food, it's just awful. I've never in my life seen so many fast-food places :0 Of course I think that the Russian way is better. ... And talking about life style, Russia, thank God, is not preoccupied with 'the American dream'.

Kirill: *Иван, когда я прочитал ваши идеи,² я очень долго смеялся, потому что вы попали прямо в точку. Русский стиль жизни мне, также как и вам, больше по душе. Я чувствую себя приятней в русской компании, чем в американской. С большинством американцев практически не о чем разговаривать, кроме как о бейсболе, американском футболе, еде и о разных сплетнях.*

Ivan, when I had read your ideas, I laughed for a long time because you really hit the nail on the head. Like you, I prefer the Russian life style. I feel more comfortable in the company of Russians than Americans. There's nothing to talk about with the majority of Americans besides baseball, football, food and different gossip.

Maksim: *Кирилл, я на твоей стороне насчет русской компании. С нашими людьми есть о чем побазарить и пошутить. С американцами немного не так, у них свой юмор и свои интересы.*
Kirill, I'm with you here about spending time with Russians. With our own people there's a lot to shoot the breeze and joke about. It's not the same with Americans. They have their own humor and interests.

Some students were less categorical in expressing their disapproval of U.S. culture. For example, by his final sentence below, Igor already seems uncertain.

Igor: С тех пор, как я сюда приехал и пошёл в школу, я начал замечать, что здесь, в Америке, все начинается с личности, а в дальнейшем приводит к индивидуализму. Он присутствует в каждом аспекте американской жизни: будь то школа, колледж или работа. Все стремятся в первую очередь решить свои проблемы, не волнуясь о чужих. Я пока ещё не разобрался, что лучше...

Since I came here and went to school, I began noticing that here in America everything starts with the individual person, which later leads to [absolute] individualism. This manifests itself in every aspect of American life: school, college, or work. Everybody tries to solve his own problems and not worry about other people. I haven't figured out yet which is better....

Maksim (in contrast to his earlier posting): Я уже прожил в Америке около 9-ти лет, и я привык к американской жизни и культуре. ... Я был в России два года назад и скажу вам честно, я себя чувствовал как в чужой стране. Один раз я пошел в магазин за соком и, зайдя в магазин, я сразу полез в холодильник и достал две банки яблочного сока. Продавица просто офигела и начала на меня кричать, так как у них сначала платят, а потом берут ... Я себя чувствую комфортно в Штатах, просто как у себя дома.

I've lived in America for about nine years and am used to American life and culture. ... I was in Russia two years ago, and I'll tell you the truth, I felt like I was in a foreign country. Once I went to a store to buy juice, walked in, opened the refrigerator and got out two jars of apple juice. The saleswoman just freaked out and started yelling at me because there you have to pay first and then get what you want ... I feel comfortable in the U.S., completely at home.

Aleskei (responding to the discussion about friendship): Я считаю, что судить о дружбе нужно, основываясь на индивидуальных характерах людей, между которыми эта дружба существует. Нельзя судить о дружбе, основываясь на географическом месторасположении дружащих людей. ... Я считаю немного неэтичным, называть мусором то, что вам не нравится в чужой культуре, тем более, что я не думаю, что вы досконально знаете и понимаете эту культуру.

I think that you can judge a friendship based only on the individual personalities of the people between whom that friendship exists. You can't

judge friendship based on geographical location. ... I don't think it's quite ethical to call everything that you don't like in a foreign culture garbage; moreover, I don't think that you fully know and understand this culture.

The instructor also made attempts to tactfully point out to the students that they might not necessarily be seeing all sides of U.S. culture and that their attitudes might change over the time. For this purpose, she used a more informal, rather intimate, tone in responding to Ivan.

Ivan: Я считаю, что языковой барьер я преодолел достаточно быстро. Единственное, что меня до сих пор тревожит, так это американская пища, весь этот fast food, все никак не могу к ней привыкнуть.

I think that I overcame the language barrier relatively quickly. The only thing that bothers me even now is American food, all that fast food. I still can't get used to it.

Instructor: *Иван, а вы ходили в какие-нибудь дорогие, так называемые фансу, рестораны? Я думаю, что там еда очень вкусная Хочу поделиться своим опытом. Я, как и вы, сначала очень скучала по русской еде, а потом, где-то через год, купила русскую еду (колбасу, рыбу, хлеб) в русском магазине и поразила. Все какое-то соленое, невкусное. Оказывается, я постепенно отвыкла от русской пищи. Такое может и с вами произойти.*

Ivan, have you ever been to any expensive, so-called fancy, restaurants? I think that the food there is delicious. ... I would like to share my own experience. Like you, in the beginning I really missed Russian food, but about a year later, I bought some Russian food (sausage, fish, and bread) at a Russian store and I was surprised. Everything was salty and didn't taste good. It turned out that I had gradually become unaccustomed to Russian food. This could happen to you as well.

Learners clearly enjoyed these CMC opportunities to explore their feelings and experiences as biculturals with others of similar backgrounds. In addition to serving as a neutral and supportive venue for exploration of bicultural identity, the medium afforded learners the time and tools for the careful development and composition of their ideas in the language they were targeting for improvement.

Instructor's Roles

In terms of grammatical accuracy, syntactic competence, and spelling, the instructor's role was significantly less predominant as compared to that with non-native speakers using CMC to learn Russian (Meskill & Anthony, 2004, 2005). Students reported that they paid more attention to the linguistic forms in their classmates' postings than to those in their instructor's postings. This can be accounted for by the fact that heritage learners,

because they already have a relatively high level of proficiency compared to non-native speakers, exercise more independence when communicating. Two students, however, mentioned that they had observed such implicit instructional techniques as recasting and linguistic traps (see Appendix D for descriptions of these and other online instructional conversation strategies employed) but were reluctant to assess their effectiveness as compared to the explicit error corrections used by the instructor in grammar exercises. For example, one of the heritage students pointed out that he had incorrectly written the word *коллективизм* as '*колективизм*' with one *л* instead of two *лс*. He noticed that when the instructor asked him to clarify the meaning of the posting, she spelled the word correctly and thus modeled the right form for him. He, however, could not recall many other examples of such online behaviors. The native Russian speaker noticed such instances of gentle correction on the instructor's part and eventually began using the same technique when encountering heritage students' errors. The heritage students expressed their appreciation of the positive and non-threatening manner of this instructional technique.

All students saw the instructor mostly as a facilitator, and course administrator (providing the Russian keyboard stickers, opening new discussion spaces, giving directions on technical issues, etc.), and as a critical expert who sets and maintained a tone appropriate for formal academic discourse. For example, Russians are often inclined to see issues as black or white and quick to take sides. Immediate dismissal rather than deep analysis of a problem and its roots is common, especially for adolescents who, in general, tend to be absolutists. In the following dialogue with Ivan, a native speaker, the instructor explicitly acknowledged the structure and clarity of the student's posting as a strategy for calling the heritage learners' attention to such a model. By asking questions, however, she also prompted and encouraged all students to debate the merits of censorship.

Ivan: Применение множества слов иностранного происхождения, жаргонизма и мата является очень актуальной темой на сегодняшний день. Если слова иностранного происхождения будут замещать русские в таком же темпе, то исчезновение русского языка действительно вероятно. Я считаю, что главной причиной того, что молодое поколение стало заменять "нормальные" слова жаргонизмами - это нехватка словарного запаса и неумение общаться на литературном русском языке. ... На вопрос: "Что делать..?", я бы ответил, что необходимо создать закон, который бы ограничивал употребление иноязычных слов.

The use of so many words of foreign origin, jargon, and swear words is a real problem today. If words of foreign origin keep replacing Russian words at this pace, the disappearance of the Russian language is indeed possible. I think that the main reason that the younger generation has begun replacing 'normal' words with jargon is their lack of vocabulary and inability to communicate in literary Russian. ... As for the question "What should be done?", I would say that it is necessary to introduce a law

limiting the use of foreign words.

Instructor: *Иван, мне очень понравилось ваше высказывание. Вы чётко выражаете своё мнение и умело его аргументируете. Мне бы хотелось продолжить нашу дискуссию по вопросу огромного количества слов иностранного происхождения в русском языке. Вы считаете, что употребление слов иноязычного происхождения можно ограничить или урегулировать законом? Интересно, как это сделать чисто практически?*

Ivan, I very much liked your message. You clearly express your opinion and skillfully support it. I would like to continue our discussion concerning the enormous number of foreign words in the Russian language. Do you think that the use of foreign words can be limited or regulated by law? What about the purely practical aspects of doing so?

Whereas at the beginning of the fall semester students often expressed their outright disagreement with one another and with ideas in their readings, this behavior gradually decreased in favor of taking other perspectives into consideration. In the previous example, the instructor provided a model for expressing disagreement after praising some aspects of the posting and prompted the rest of the class to express their opinions on the subject. The following is an excerpt from a similar exchange between the instructor and Aleksei, the most advanced heritage student.

Aleksei: *Вызывает удивление мнение некоторых людей. История развития любого языка показывает, что все языки видоизменяются. ... Американский язык меняется еще быстрее чем русский, подвергаясь влиянию других языков, которые приходят с огромным количеством иммигрантов. И никто не говорит о том, что американский язык исчезает. Наоборот, с удовольствием принимаются слова, аналога которым нет в языке. Например, слова 'glasnost,' 'sputnik,' и 'perestroika' пришли в английский из русского.*

The opinions of some people amaze me. The history of the development of any language shows that all languages change. The American language is changing even faster than Russian, subject to the influences of other languages which come with the enormous number of immigrants. However, no one says that the American language is disappearing. On the contrary, the words that do not have equivalents in the language are readily accepted. For instance, the words 'glasnost,' 'sputnik,' and 'perestroika' came to English from Russian.

Instructor: Алексей, я с вами согласна. Все языки меняются со временем. Если бы вы сейчас начали излагать свои мысли языком Пушкина, это вряд ли было бы уместно. ... Но ведь новые слова

заимствуются из других языков не только в тех случаях, когда в русском языке нет подходящих эквивалентов, и это то, что, с моей точки зрения, беспокоит авторов статьи. По мнению многих, сейчас происходит «американизация» русского языка. Ребята, что вы все об этом думаете?

Aleksei, I agree with you. All languages change over time. If you were now to begin expressing your thoughts in the language of of Pushkin, it would hardly be appropriate. ... However, new words are borrowed from other languages not only when there are no suitable equivalents in Russian, and that, in my opinion, is what's bothering the authors of the article. Many people think that the Russian language is now undergoing Americanization. Guys, what you all think about this?

It was also one of the instructor's goals to challenge heritage/native students' cultural beliefs and attitudes, provide them with alternative perspectives, and help them learn tolerance toward and acceptance of another culture. Such an attempt is illustrated in the following exchange:

Ivan: Игорь, я с вами полностью согласен. Я и сам заметил какого-то рода эгоизм в американской нации. А нас ведь воспитывали совершенно по-другому: нужно помогать ближним, иногда даже ставить чьи-то проблемы на первый план... Я не понимаю, как можно всю жизнь посвятить только себе любимому?

Igor, I absolutely agree with you. I, too, have noticed a sort of selfishness in the American nation. We were brought up completely differently: you have to help others, you sometimes even have to put other people's problems first... I don't understand: how can you devote your whole life just to your own beloved self?

Instructor: Ну, Иван, не будьте так категоричны. Американцы тоже помогают ближним. Разница в том, что американцы помогают не всем ближним, а только беспомощным: детям, инвалидам и т.д. Это считается неприличным для, например, здорового молодого мужчины просить помощи в то время, как он в состоянии сам себе помочь. ... Challenge считается одним из ключевых слов для понимания американского национального характера, являясь, кстати, одним из труднопереводимых.

Well, Ivan, don't be so categorical. Americans also help others. The difference is that Americans help not everyone but only the helpless: children, the handicapped, etc. It is considered inappropriate for, let's say, a young healthy man to ask for help when he is capable of helping himself. ... "Challenge" is one of the key words for understanding the

American national character and, by the way, one of the most difficult to translate.

Finally, it is noteworthy that as soon as the instructor withdrew herself from the discussion, the tone changed to informal and, in some cases, even vulgar:

Kirill: Ненавижу [А]американские виды спорта. Этот [А]американский футбол это полное, изв[е]няюсь за слова, г[а]вно. ... А за слово "футбол" их всех повесить надо. Какой футбол если мяч все время в руках?

I hate American sports. That American football is a total, excuse my language, bullshit. As for the word "football," they should all be hanged. How is it football if the ball is always in your hands?

As is evident from the above examples, if the goal of CMC discussions is to develop students' skills in engaging successfully in academic discourse, the instructor's role should be that of critical expert and active participant who, by her consistent and guiding contributions, serves as a model and gatekeeper for acceptable communication. Through instructor modeling, guidance, and feedback, the heritage learners became familiar with, and more proficient in, the argumentation styles and structures characteristic of academic writing versus the informal speaking in which they were already fluent.

Conclusion

CMC may be one tool of many to increase biliteracy in the monolingual-dominant United States. Technology has, after all, been found to be a highly appropriate tool for language learning in general and language learning for bilingual/biliterate learners in particular (Meskill, Mossop, and Bates, 2000). Far from being mere skills acquisition, mastery of additional languages and literacies involves learners developing the competence to move fluidly between discourses, to mediate between two languages and cultures in a way that allows perspectives and insights not available to monolinguals (Kramsch, 1997). As illustrated in this case study, CMC is a viable tool to help heritage learners increase their lexical range and command of written registers in the home language. Moreover, it allows a forum for the exploration of cultural identity and the refinement of mother tongue competence in varying discourse domains. Although additional research on heritage learners and CMC is greatly needed, the field has nonetheless made great strides in evading the technological determinism of earlier decades and embracing the potential of telecommunications as a powerful tool for language teaching and learning. Rather than being viewed as a determining force in language education, technology is now more commonly viewed as a means of mediating human encounters. As such, it is seen as part of the complex narrative of human development (Haas, 1996; Tierney and Damarin, 1998). Its role in augmenting learning opportunities for heritage language learners is part and parcel of just such a story.

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Notes

1. Students' grammatical errors have been left intact. Spelling errors are indicated by brackets.
2. The use of the formal "you" in students' postings is typical of all informal Russian online chats.

Appendix A. Pre-course Questionnaire

- 1) When did you come to the U.S.? How old were you?
- 2) What language do your family members mainly speak?
- 3) In what contexts are you comfortable speaking Russian? (home, shopping, socializing, etc.)
- 4) Name two contexts in which you find it difficult or impossible to manage function in Russian.
- 5) Are you comfortable reading Russian? How often do you read in Russian and in what amount? What kind of materials? Do you read Russian for work or for pleasure?
- 6) Are you comfortable writing Russian? How often do you write/type in Russian and in what amount? Under what circumstances?
- 7) Write two sentences in English that you would find impossible to write in Russian.
- 8) What are your goals in studying your mother tongue?
- 9) How do you feel about Russia? Do you plan to return at any time?
- 10) What do you think about the future of Russia? Are you optimistic about it? Pessimistic?
- 11) Do you think you know a lot about Russian culture, literature, history, politics, etc? Would you like to learn more?
- 12) How do you feel about the US?
- 13) Do you find yourself comparing Russian and American cultures? If yes, which one do you prefer and why?
- 14) Do you find English easier or more difficult than Russian?

Appendix B. Interview Questions

1. What motivates you to learn study your native language?
2. For what purposes will you use Russian in the future?
3. How do you maintain your Russian skills? Reading? Writing? Conversations with family/friends?
4. How does participation in online discussions stimulate your interest towards Russian culture/politics/history? Do you think this is a good forum for such learning? If so, why? If not, why not?
5. How do you feel about discussing such topics with your classmates? Do you feel any pride in your heritage? Do you prefer discussing such things online or in the live classroom? Why?
6. Does communicating online stimulate your interest towards in the Russian language?
7. How does participation in online discussions help you improve your writing style? Does it help you express your thoughts? If so, how so?
8. Do you think it helps you increase your vocabulary?
9. Did you notice any grammar rules/uses from other's other people's online postings? How does participation in online discussions help you improve your grammatical proficiency? What helps you more to improve your grammatical accuracy and spelling: participation in online discussions or drill and practice exercises?
10. How does participation in online discussions help you improve your spelling?
11. Have you noticed that the instructor provides implicit feedback to your errors, trying

to correct your mistakes gently but without explicitly pointing them out? If yes, what is your reaction to that?

12. Have you noticed correct forms in your classmates' postings?

Appendix C. Participants

Participant	Status	Age of Arrival	Years in the US (by the end of the year of study)
Ivan	Native	16	1
Alexei	Heritage	14	7
Maksim	Heritage	12	9
Kirill	Heritage	7	11
Igor	Heritage	15	7

Appendix D. Instructional Conversation Strategies

- **SAT:** Saturation: When a particular form (sets of vocabulary items and/or syntactic forms) is introduced in the f2f (face-to-face) classroom, the instructor uses the CMC portion of the course to saturate the conversation with these forms.
- **PLT:** Providing Linguistic Tools: When a topic comes up in the CMC portion of the course, the instructor provides the vocabulary items and/or other forms that students would logically need to participate in discussion of that topic.
- **IM:** Incidental Modeling: The instructor models forms that learners appropriate and used in their f2f and online communications.
- **CAF:** Calling Attention to Forms: The instructor points out forms learners would either be using or need to be using.
- **FFF:** Providing Meaning/Form-Focused Feedback: The instructor integrates form-focused feedback into the communicative stream (frequently in the form of recasting).
- **PA:** Prompting Assembly: The instructor provides learners with models and tools that equip them to combine target language forms of their own.
- **LT:** Using Linguistic Traps/ Corraling Learning: The instructor corrals or traps learners into using specific target language forms under study (by asking questions, providing topics and tasks, etc.)