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Building the Russian World: Cultural Diplomacy of the Russian Language and Cultural Identity

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Abstract

This article explores the topics of Russian diaspora and the politics of culture and identity, expressed through Russia's humanitarian cooperation initiatives. The study posits that the Russian cultural diplomacy policy focuses on compatriots living abroad and the Russian Diaspora to create and solidify *Russkiy Mir* [Russian World] communities and turn them into Russia's advocates abroad. The study extends the argument that the Russian language is treated as one of the main tools in Russia's soft power arsenal to foster loyal and supportive attitudes toward Russia among the Russian-speaking communities. Such policy accentuates language as an important marker of stronger sense of belonging and self-identification (in this case with the Russian World) and a critical element in the construction of cultural and/or ethnic identity. The study highlights the complexity and diversity of Russian Diasporas and Russian compatriots that comprise *Russkiy Mir*, specifically in the United States, and discusses the socio-linguistic factors these efforts must take into account in the Russian-speaking Diasporas abroad.

Contributor Note

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Introduction

In recent years, Russia has rediscovered cultural and public diplomacy as a means to re-establish the country's presence in the international arena and improve its image (Feklyunina 2008). Realizing that it has an unfavorable reputation worldwide due to Soviet heritage, Russia has implemented a number of efforts to project a more positive image with the main goal to diminish negative perceptions and traditional stereotypes of Russia (Simons 2011). In 2005, the Kremlin initiated an extensive public diplomacy campaign to improve Russia's image abroad (Orttung 2010). The arsenal of tools ranged from traditional international broadcasting to sophisticated efforts that included lobbying, nation branding, cultural and educational exchanges, and public relations counseling services (Feklyunina 2008; Klyueva & Tsetsura 2015; Orttung 2010).

Stemming from Foreign Policy Doctrine that focused on developing 'effective means of influence on public opinion abroad' (MID 2007), early public diplomacy efforts of Russia largely focused on informational solutions to an image problem. Russia's more recent efforts have increasingly incorporated cultural aspects, restoring Cold War era cultural diplomacy institutions and growing capacity for effective outreach both in the near abroad and the West. As a result, Russia has developed a distinct cultural diplomacy policy with clearly defined goals, strategies and tactics.

In 2010, the Russian government introduced the Cultural Diplomacy Conception, which placed a significant emphasis on the promotion and

popularization of the Russian language and culture in the world and preserving cultural heritage of Russia in the near abroad (MID 2010). This conception shifted the focus from an attempt to foster a positive image of Russia to an attempt to foster a 'pro-Russian' identity beyond the country's borders, in which the Russian language and culture became central elements of Russia's strategic cultural diplomacy efforts.

While Russian public and cultural diplomacy efforts have received consideration in the research literature, the strategic intent behind those efforts and the socio-linguistic factors affecting them have not been addressed. The purpose of this study is to explore the politics of culture and identity by looking at how the Russian government uses the Russian language and Russian culture as two central components of its Cultural Diplomacy Conception. By examining cultural diplomacy initiatives related to the promotion and support of the Russian language and culture in the United States, the study aims to answer two main questions. First, what role in Russia's humanitarian cooperation efforts is ascribed to the compatriots and the Russian Diaspora abroad? Second, in what way does the Russian government rationalize its cultural diplomacy efforts, namely the promotion of the Russian language?

The study relied on primary sources obtained mainly from the official website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation (MID.ru), official website of the President of Russia (Kremlin.ru), and the website of the Russian World Foundation (RusskiyMir.ru). Other sources, found using a snowball

method, include a variety of secondary archives, published research, and media coverage. Tentative themes of analysis were (1) the strategic motives behind the Russia's cultural diplomacy initiatives; (2) the strategic focus on Russian Diaspora and compatriots abroad; and (3) the role of the Russian language in Russian humanitarian cooperation efforts. We applied these thematic categories to the data deductively, in a search for answers to research questions, and in order to confirm or disconfirm data. The qualitative approach used in this study is consistent with the methods of traditional humanistic research, as 'a form of empirical inquiry that uses theoretical constructs to attempt to make true statements about the past' (Nord 1989: 292).

The study starts with the discussion of the Russian perspective/approach to cultural diplomacy, placing it within political context as well as Russian academic thought. Thereafter, the study reviews the role of the Russian Diaspora and compatriots living abroad and argues that it constitutes an unofficial sphere of influence. Using the example of the United States, the article stresses the complexity and diversity of Russian Diasporas and Russian compatriots that comprise *Russkiy Mir* in the United States and places such discussion in context of identity formation through language. The article concludes with the discussion of challenges and opportunities of Russian humanitarian cooperation initiatives focused on the Russian language promotion.

The Russian Way: Humanitarian Cooperation as Cultural Diplomacy

While culture as an axis of propaganda has long been an essential component of the Soviet information efforts, the practice of cultural and public diplomacy in its modern understanding, closely associated with soft power (non-coercive power of attraction) and integrated within foreign policy, came to Russia only after the dissolution of the Soviet Union (Kelimeler 2013). The term *public diplomacy* in Russian has several approximated translations. Often, public diplomacy is translated as *obshchestvennaya diplomatiya* [public's diplomacy], *publichnaya diplomatiya* [public diplomacy], or *narodnaya diplomatiya* [people's diplomacy]. These terms have varying connotations and significant semantic differences, yet they are often used interchangeably (Saari 2014). As borrowed concepts from the Western scholarship, public and cultural diplomacy are not customary terms within Russian political thought (Sergunin and Karabeshkin 2015). A more accepted description of public and cultural diplomacy activities among Russian political elites is *gumanitarnoe sotrudnichestvo* [humanitarian cooperation] as illustrated in numerous foundational documents of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MID 2016).

Zonova pointed out that the word *humanitarian* in Russian has many different meanings that do not always coincide with the meanings ascribed in other languages (Zonova 2013). Traditionally, *humanitarian cooperation* implies cooperation in the spheres of human rights, organized crime, or human and drug trafficking. In Russian, *humanitarian cooperation* often refers to collaboration in the area of culture and

science, inter-civilizational relations, education and media policies, as well as supporting compatriots living abroad (Zonova 2013). Therefore, Russian cultural diplomacy efforts are often labeled as humanitarian efforts.

Humanitarian cooperation programs of Russia are enacted via three foundational documents: (1) the Cultural Diplomacy Conception (2010); (2) Russian Foreign Policy Doctrine (2013); and (3) the Charter of the Federal Agency for the Commonwealth of Independent States, Compatriots Living Abroad and International Humanitarian Cooperation (2008). Many of these programs were conceived as means to counteract the 'propagandistic' efforts of the West, and the United States in particular, aimed at 'containing' Russia (Cultural Diplomacy Conception, MID 2010: 3). For this reason, Russian policy-makers see cultural diplomacy efforts as an instrument of Russian soft power, capable of advancing Russia's influence in the international arena (Foreign Policy Doctrine 2013).

Of particular interest is the first Conception of the International Cultural-Humanitarian Cooperation Policy, first introduced in 2010 and commonly referred to as Cultural Diplomacy Conception. The document placed significant emphasis on the promotion and popularization of the Russian language and culture of numerous ethnicities found in Russia as an important contribution to the diversity of modern civilization. In the document, the Russian language is described as the staple of the cultural diplomacy strategy and as the most important means for socio-political integration across the post-Soviet space.

While the conception advocates for promoting the heritage of all diverse ethnic cultures and languages of the Russian Federation, the Russian language is prioritized and elevated to the level of a strategic foreign policy interest of Russia. Moreover, the conception politicizes the use of the Russian language by suggesting, 'it is necessary to appropriately resist any attempts of infringement or discrimination against the Russian language abroad' (Cultural Diplomacy Conception, MID 2010: 9).

The importance of the Russian language as a tool of social and political influence in the far and near abroad was highlighted in an addendum to the existing Cultural Diplomacy Conception, 'Russian School Abroad' (Kremlin 2015). Signed into law by President Putin on Nov. 4, 2015, it outlines the priority goals and objectives of the Russian government in promoting and supporting the viability of the Russian language across the world, specifically among the Russian Diasporas and Russian compatriots.

Such focus on Russian Diaspora and Russian compatriots abroad represents the strategic particularity of the Russian humanitarian cooperation and is clearly stated in the Foreign Policy Doctrine: 'protecting rights and legitimate interests of compatriots living abroad on the basis of international law and treaties concluded by the Russian Federation while considering the numerous Russian Diaspora as a partner, including in expanding and strengthening the space of the Russian language and culture' (Foreign Policy Doctrine, MID 2013: P39d).

Russian Diaspora and Compatriots Abroad: Strategic Focus of Russia's Cultural Diplomacy

Due to several waves of immigration in the 20th century, world wars and Soviet nationality policies, Russians are spread out around the world, organizing in communities and building numerous Russians Diasporas (Krainova 2012). The strategic use of the Russian language and culture as tools in Russia's humanitarian cooperation, therefore, aims to foster pro-Russian sentiments among the Russian-speaking communities, Russian Diasporas and compatriots living abroad. According to Astakhov, the basis for this approach lies in the realization by Russian political elites that there are 'discrepancies between the arbitrarily established borders of the Russian Federation and actual limits for the spread of Russian culture, the Russian language and Russian national consciousness' (Astakhov 2008: 5). As such, the virtual borders of Russian influence can be established through fostering the idea of *Russkiy Mir* (Russian World) – a global community of Russians, Russian-speakers, and those interested in the Russian language and culture (Russkiy Mir 2014). The Russian Diaspora and Russian compatriots living abroad constitute the largest Russian-speaking communities that comprise *Russkiy Mir*.

While both Russian Diaspora and Russian compatriots constitute *Russkiy Mir*, it is important to note that the scope of these terms and, thus, the groups of people they describe are quite different. Russian Diaspora is generally understood as consisting of émigré ethnic Russians and Russian speakers and their descendants and, while very diverse and multifaceted, generally includes people

who (or whose ancestors) left Russia or the Soviet Union voluntarily. Although many recent immigrants preserve the language and long for cultural affinity with Russia, they have also been well assimilated in their host countries and, by the third generation, their descendants often lose Russian as the main language of communication (Carreira and Kagan 2011).

Different from the above group are 'compatriots living abroad' (Astakhov 2008: 4), who were cut off from their motherland after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, which Vladimir Putin called 'the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the century' (AP 2005: 3). In an often-misquoted state of the nation address, he explained that for the Russian people 'it became a genuine tragedy. Tens of millions of our fellow citizens and countrymen found themselves beyond the fringes of Russian territory' (P3). Today, these ethnic Russians and Russian-speaking minorities in the post-Soviet space are essential constituents of the *Russkiy Mir*.

Importantly, compatriots living abroad, according to the latest changes in Russian law, are defined as any citizen of the former Soviet Union, even if he or she, or their forebears never lived in the Russian Soviet Republic and the Russian Federation, thus making any Russian-speaking individual in the post-Soviet space a 'Russian compatriot' (Krainova 2012). In the Law on Repatriation, described as an act of Russia's national self-assertion (Vykhovanets and Zhuravsky 2013), these people are described as those who were 'raised in the Russian cultural traditions, taught Russian and wished to maintain ties with Russia' (Law on Volunteer Repatriation of Compatriots Living Abroad to the Russian

Federation 2006: P4). We argue that under the latter scope, the term compatriot would then extend to many generations of individuals with Russian ancestry, including those defined above as *Diaspora*, who may not or no longer identify as Russian and whose connection to the Russian language and culture is potentially conflicted.

The inclusion of Russian Diaspora and compatriots living abroad significantly expands *Russkiy Mir* well beyond the borders of the Russian Federation and even the post-Soviet space and makes it a strategic sphere of influence for Russia. Kozin maintains that the claim to ‘the “outside” Russian communities as Russia’s “own”’ (2015: 286) extends the national identity outside the Russian territory, and an all-encompassing definition of a compatriot taps into the immeasurable resources of potential Russian sympathizers, including those within the Russian Diasporas.

Today, about 17 million ethnic Russians and Russian-speaking minorities reside within the borders of the Commonwealth of Independent States alone. In addition, Germany (4 million), United States (more than 3 million) and Israel (about 1.5 million) are the top three countries with the largest Russian-speaking communities within the *Russkiy Mir* (MID 2016).

To understand the Russian approach to cultural diplomacy and its strategic intent, it is important to understand the Russian view of the *Russkiy Mir* as well as the role and ethno-linguistic characteristics of the Russian Diaspora and compatriots living abroad. Predetermined by many economic, political and demographic conditions, the focus on Russian-speakers and

Russkiy Mir presents a conundrum for policy-makers. From a socio-economic perspective, repatriation and immigration of Russians and Russian-speaking compatriots could solve many labor issues and improve the demographic outlook of Russia (Vykhovanets and Zhuravsky 2013). From a political perspective, supporting Russian-speaking communities of compatriots and fostering Russian Diasporas could mean an outlet for influencing public opinion abroad, as shared cultural heritage makes Russian-speaking communities potential supporters of Russia.

In addition to Russian-speakers, although not as its primary goal, as our analysis shows, *Russkiy Mir* also does embrace any person who chooses to study the Russian language, Russian history or culture. As such, *Russkiy Mir* as a community (rather than just Diasporas and compatriots) becomes a strategic target for Russia to expand its political and cultural influence. To preserve and foster the *Russkiy Mir* further, the promotion and support of the Russian language are prioritized as a focal point of Russia’s humanitarian cooperation and cultural diplomacy policy.

Some of the burden of executing the cultural policy was placed on the *Russkiy Mir* Foundation (Russian World Foundation), created by a presidential decree in 2007 with the goal of ‘promoting the Russian language, as Russia’s national heritage and a significant aspect of Russian and world culture, and supporting the Russian language teaching programs abroad’ (*Russkiy Mir* 2014). Its creation demonstrated that a cultural component of public diplomacy was now deeply integrated within Russian foreign policy. In establishing the *Russkiy Mir*

Foundation, Russian government solidified the main direction of the Russian cultural diplomacy to unite Russian-speaking communities abroad and turn them into Russia's advocates via promotion of the Russian language and culture (Astakhov 2008; Klyueva & Tsetsura 2015).

The Russkiy Mir Foundation

The Russkiy Mir Foundation is a joint project of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Education and Science. The purpose and activities of the Russkiy Mir Foundation are consonant with the larger idea of building the *Russkiy Mir* or community. The word *mir* in Russian is polysemic and can be translated as 'peace', 'world', and 'community'. Fostering the *Russkiy Mir* community or communities of Russian speakers is one of the essential strategic goals of Russian humanitarian cooperation initiatives.

While the Russkiy Mir Foundation is dedicated to spreading awareness of Russian values and traditions to non-Russians, its main focus is preserving the Russian language through reaching out to Russians living outside of Russia and creating a sense of community among them, particularly those in the former Soviet Republics (Saari 2014).

In its efforts to disseminate the Russian language and culture and to support the Russian language study programs, the Russkiy Mir Foundation provides grants to organizations and individuals aimed at promoting translations of the works of Russian authors into foreign languages; supporting Russian schools in CIS countries and the Russian language studies abroad; and supporting the

Russian language instruction in higher educational institutions in countries all over the world (Russkiy Mir 2014). By sustaining these cultural initiatives, the foundation strives to affect the formation of favorable public opinion about Russia through the spread of knowledge about Russia and popularization of the history and philosophy of *Russkiy Mir*, which are its spiritual and cultural foundations. As such, the Russkiy Mir Foundation resembles many other cultural diplomacy institutions such as the British Councils or the Confucius Institute. Yet, the active support of the Russian community abroad also promotes Russia's geopolitical goals, especially in the post-Soviet space where the Foundation is most active (Saari 2014).

The foundation attempts to achieve these goals through the establishment of cultural centers and *Russkiy Mir* cabinets. Russian Cultural Centers usually are initiated and fully funded by the Russkiy Mir Foundation, and the *Russkiy Mir* cabinets are contract-based donations to a hosting organization that initiates the process. Russian Cultural Centers serve as a support structure to popularize the Russian language and culture and to provide access to Russian cultural and literary heritage. These centers are well-equipped and have extensive library and video collections.

Through its efforts to get in touch with Russians abroad to cultivate a strong Russian identity, the foundation aims to unite Russian speakers around the world. Currently, 105 Russian cultural centers operate in 45 countries around the world (Russkiy Mir 2016). In the United States, Russkiy Mir Foundation operates two Centers in New York and Washington D.C. and a Russkiy Mir Cabinet in San Francisco. As we show later, considering

both the size of the Russian-speaking Diaspora and the strategic designation of the Russian language (Laleko 2013), these centers fill an important niche and could be instrumental in the success of Russia's humanitarian cooperation efforts to target *Russkiy Mir* in the United States.

Russian speakers in the United States

Russkiy Mir in the United States is comprised of very diverse groups of Russian compatriots and Russian Diaspora, and therefore Russian speakers in the United States have very different socio-linguistic characteristics. As the promotion of the Russian language is essential for solidifying and building *Russkiy Mir*, it is important to understand the characteristics and needs of Russian speakers in the United States.

While earliest Russian settlers pursuing economic and religious goals in the U.S. were recorded in the Pacific Northwest as early as the end of the 18th century, their number fluctuated reflecting socio-economic changes within the Russian Empire and its relationship between the U.S. over the course of the next century and a half. Many of the later settlers in that time period due to emigration restrictions came from Russia but were not ethnic Russians and did not speak the language. The first large wave of Russian-speaking immigration is typically associated with the Bolshevik Revolution and the fall of the Russian Empire at the turn of the twentieth century. By 1920 there were 392,049 Russian-born U.S. citizens compared to 57,926 ten years earlier (Kagan and Dillon 2010). The second wave, following World War II, was much more difficult to document as it

consisted of many displaced individuals who refused to return to the Soviet Union and changed their identities to avoid persecution (Shmelev 2006). The third wave of emigration from the Soviet Union to the U.S. (officially to Israel) happened in the 1970–80s when the Soviet Union was pressured to release political and religious refugees and ethnic minorities. Finally, the fourth wave occurred after the collapse of the Soviet Union in the 1990s. Together, these four waves constitute the largest influx of Russian-speaking immigrants of various ethnicities to the United States. In addition, the often invisible wave of immigration that comprises Russian compatriots in the broad sense (e.g. those with a language and/or cultural connection) is the more than 81,000 children who have been adopted from Russia and the Russian-speaking countries in the post-Soviet space since the 1990s (U.S. Department of State 2015).

Russian is currently the eighth most spoken language in the U.S. (Kagan and Dillon 2010), with 879,434 speakers, over 400,000 of which report minimum English-speaking ability (U.S. Census Bureau 2013a) and the latest estimate is that 2,762,830 people in the U.S. are of Russian ancestry (U.S. Census Bureau 2014).

This number is more than four times higher than 35 years ago (see Table 1), and yet it may still not include what some (e.g. Kagan and Dillon 2006; Dubinina and Polinsky 2013) refer to as the fifth wave of the numerous temporary or permanent residents pursuing job and educational opportunities. These groups of Russian speakers do not necessarily intend to stay in the U.S. and have strong ties with

Russia, yet their children may need to learn and/or maintain their Russian at the age-appropriate level for the time they return to Russia (Kagan and Dillon 2006).

Most Russian speakers in the U.S. do not reside in large communities where the language can be sustained beyond home use. As a result, the language generally stops being used after the second generation in most immigrant families (Kagan and Dillon 2010), even if Russian identity is maintained otherwise. Even children born to Russian-speaking parents and those who emigrated at a young age, the so-called heritage language speakers of Russian, often do not use Russian beyond the family domain and as a result may not fully acquire it before becoming dominant in English or may gradually lose it under the influence of English (Kagan and Dillon 2010). Similarly, many Russian-speaking adoptees lose Russian after immersion in the English-only environment but pursue studying it later in life as a means of connecting with their roots (Lyon 2009).

According to Carreira and Kagan (2011), the majority of Russian heritage learners enrolled in college-level Russian classes in the United States were born outside the U.S. and arrived in the U.S. before puberty. For them, the main source of exposure to the Russian language is at home through parents and community (Carreira and Kagan 2011). Consequently, many heritage Russian speaking members of Russian Diasporas and the compatriots lack literacy-based knowledge of Russian as well as cultural and pragmatic knowledge such as an ability to use polite forms of address or differentiate between formal and informal language (Dubinina and Polinsky

2013; Laleko 2013). Despite being able to sustain basic conversations, these speakers, too, need and often seek educational support for the maintenance of the Russian language and culture.

Interestingly, heritage speakers of Russian in the United States identify five main reasons for studying Russian (Carreira and Kagan 2011): (1) to communicate better with family and friends in the United States (64.6%); (2) to learn about their cultural and linguistic roots (59.1%); (3) to communicate better with family and friends abroad (44.5%); (4) to fulfill a language requirement (39.6%); and (5) for professional reasons (36%).

Overall, there is a significant need for the Russian language instruction and educational support among Russian Diaspora members and Russian compatriots in the United States. Studies of heritage language acquisition demonstrate the importance of literacy and education for maintenance of heritage and community languages (and of Russian in particular) (Carreira and Kagan 2011). Preserving the Russian language, culture, and literacy is an integral part of identity for Russian Diasporas (Isurin 2011; 2014), as well as one of the strategic objectives of the Cultural Diplomacy policy.

However, there are not enough educational opportunities for maintenance of Russian in the United States, even with the increased activities of the Russkiy Mir Foundation and despite Russian being designated as one of the strategic languages. Russian heritage speakers are not likely to have received language instruction at a community or church school (Carreira and Kagan 2011). Thus, even the children

of recent immigrants face the risk of incompletely acquiring their familial language or gradually losing it by adulthood (Dubinina and Polinsky 2013; Laleko 2013). In this sense, the Russian language programs provided within the Cultural Diplomacy Conception and the 'Russian School Abroad' program can be not only timely but might find quite a welcoming reception within the *Russkiy Mir* community of the United States, if executed properly.

***Russkiy Mir*: Language and Identity**

A close look at the diversity of Russian speakers in the United States provides insights about the complexity of their cultural identity formation through language. Cultural identity is the way people understand their cultural context and their personal value within that context; and this is interrelated with and dependent on people's ability to articulate their understanding of self (Bartlett, Erben and Garbutcheon-Singh 1996). Language is thus understood as a major means of voicing or socializing these diverse identities. As such, the Russian language for many non-ethnic Russian speakers becomes a major instrument in revisiting the 'history-bound understanding about Russianness, Russian national identity and Russian culture' (Kozin 2015: 288) and, therefore, extends the scope of the Russian identity beyond the borders of the Russian Federation.

The role of language as a strong marker of various social identities and, thus, as a form of linguistic and cultural capital and a site of identity construction and negotiation, has been widely explored by scholars at the intersection of various fields of inquiry, and specifically

linguistics, anthropology, psychology, communication, and second language acquisition. Most scholarship on social identity sees it as graded, multiple and subject to change, which is often reflected in the linguistic repertoires of the speakers. Moreover, these many coexisting identities are constructed from 'available categories that both unite and divide people in society' (Laitin 1998: 16) and are influenced by a number of factors, such as gender, culture, profession, education, social status, religious and other beliefs, and above all – ethnicity and nationality. For example, there is an interrelation between the acculturation of immigrants, second language acquisition, and possible loss of the first language (see Blackledge and Pavlenko 2001; Norton 2013; Remennick 2007). Thus, for Russian Diasporas and compatriots, whose members are bilingual and often multilingual, languages often delineate the symbolic boundaries of communities of which they are a part.

Bilingualism studies have shown that balanced bilinguals manage to negotiate and juggle their ethnic, cultural and national identities. However, in immigrants, an identity crisis or identity shift may coincide with the acquisition of the second language at the expense of loss or attrition of the first language. When one of the identities is threatened or challenged, this may result either in the increased *salience* of that identity, or in an identity *crisis* and even identity *shift*, each of which might exhibit itself in both what people say and, importantly, in what language they choose (not) to speak. This is why language support, community building, and cultural opportunities, such as the ones offered through Russkiy Mir Foundation or which could be offered through the 'Russian

Schools Abroad' program, play an important role in language preservation and support in the maintenance of the salience of the Russian cultural identity for the members of the diaspora.

When Isurin analyzed the acculturation process and identity transformation as the outcome for immigrants from Russian-speaking Diasporas in the U.S., Israel and Germany, all participants indicated the importance of the Russian language, culture, and community for their sense of self (2011, 2014). The data from ethnically Russian and ethnically Jewish Russian-speaking immigrants revealed a complex, often conflicted, relationship between ethnicity, nationality, culture, and language. Such complex identities resulted in both a sense of belonging in the host country and in a sense of nostalgia for the cultural values carried through the Russian language from the home country.

In addition, no matter how prestigious and desirable, the target language and culture – including the practices and culture of the educational institutions that allow access to the majority language – may be culturally unfamiliar or unclear to the immigrant/minority learners. Thus, the learners may not be invested in learning the majority language and/or becoming part of that culture, putting more value in claiming or maintaining their minority Russian language and identity. For example, research on post-Soviet émigrés suggests that due to their high level of education prior to emigration (despite possible downward mobility after it), the Russian-speaking immigrants often found educational practices in U.S. and Israel lacking against the standard of

their own educational and cultural experience (Remennick 2007).

Laitin argued that language policies have profound effects on language use, ethnic pride and ethnic differentiation (1998). Language policies, fueled by the ideologies that enforce them, often not only favor and value certain groups based on the language they speak, but also 'other', marginalize, or erase other groups based on their native language (Irvine and Gal 2000). Thus, for Russian-speaking immigrants, pressure to become competent in the English language is high, but opportunities to master the language and fully become members of the majority culture community may not always be attainable. Although carrying less overt prestige than the majority language, for first- and even second-generation immigrants, their native language, Russian in this case, becomes a strong marker of ethnic and cultural identity (Blackledge and Pavlenko 2001). Kagan (2012) found that the majority of heritage language learners (i.e. Russian Diaspora members studying Russian in the universities) self-identify as hyphenated Americans or Americans with a dual or hybrid identity (e.g. Russian-American or American Russians). Some explained their self-identification through the influence of two or more cultures (sometimes drawing on both ethnic and national belonging) while others emphasized the role of language use and proficiency.

Therefore, Russian-speaking communities provide fertile soil for fostering pro-Russian sentiments through promoting and preserving language and culture, where networks of diaspora serve as a strong predictor of practical and symbolic support for

members of the network, as well as a reinforcement of their shared linguistic and cultural norms and resistance to the outside language and cultural norms. In other words, Russian-speakers who are part of a Diaspora are more likely to preserve their language, and thus its complementing ideology.

Conclusion

The Cultural and Humanitarian Cooperation Policy of Russia was developed in response to the social and political changes within the post-Soviet space, a traditional Russian sphere of influence. Specifically, through cultural diplomacy, the Russian government sought to consolidate its power among the Russian diaspora and its compatriots (Sergunin and Karabeshkin 2015). In addition, Russia sought to boost its soft power through the promotion of a positive image of itself, as well as through the promotion of the Russian language and culture abroad (MID 2013). Although the 'near abroad' is emphasized in the Conception, similar goals are outlined for other countries where large Russian-speaking communities reside, including the United States.

Using the example of Russian-speaking communities in the United States, this study aimed to answer two questions. First, we examined the role ascribed to Russian compatriots and Russian Diaspora in Russia's humanitarian cooperation efforts. These diverse Russian-speaking communities are strategic targets of cultural-humanitarian cooperation programs of Russia that aim to solidify *Russkiy Mir* beyond the borders of the Russian Federation. The inclusion of Russian Diaspora and

Russian compatriots into one ephemeral community of *Russkiy Mir* taps into immeasurable resources in the form of potential supporters of Russia. This allows the virtual borders of Russian influence to expand via fostering pro-Russian cultural identity through language, not only beyond the fringes of the Russian Federation, but also beyond the post-Soviet space.

The emphasis on Russian Diaspora and Russian compatriots abroad represents a strategic difference in approaches to cultural diplomacy between Russia and the United States. The cultural diplomacy of the United States, for example, has targeted foreign publics with the goal of promoting American values through art, cinema, music and other cultural products (Schneider 2005). In comparison, the Russian approach to cultural diplomacy bets on the pro-Russian sentiments among Russian-speaking communities, thus ensuring its success and making it competitive with American cultural diplomacy (Klyueva and Tsetsura 2015).

The second question asked in what way the Russian government rationalizes its humanitarian cooperation efforts, specifically the promotion of the Russian language. The cultural diplomacy and humanitarian cooperation efforts of Russia focus predominantly on the Russian language preservation among compatriots and the Diaspora. For Russian policy-makers, therefore, the Russian language represents a tool for influencing collective consciousness and public opinion of Russian speakers. Sergei Lavrov, Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs, on numerous occasions emphasized the value of the Russian language as a tool of Russian social and political influence and a means to

achieving Russian foreign policy goals (Voice of Russia, 2012). As such, Russia is focused on re-establishing the status of the Russian language throughout the world and specifically preserving its use to promote Russian national consciousness among compatriots and Russian Diasporas. As analysis indicates, the Russian language is used strategically in an effort to build and solidify *Russkiy Mir*, foster pro-Russian attitudes and nurture cultural identity. Further, the Russian language is treated as an important marker of self-identification and belonging to *Russkiy Mir*.

In addition, the Russian language is seen as a softer tool of influence or as an instrument of Russia's soft power. However, the soft power of the Russian language is limited to Russian speakers, Russian diaspora and compatriots living abroad. As Konstantin Kosachev, Director of Rossotrudnichestvo, observed, the successful and effective approach to Russian cultural diplomacy is based on humanitarian cooperation within *Russkiy Mir*. The promotion of the Russian language is an integral part of such humanitarian cooperation and is an underappreciated resource of Russia's soft power potential (Kosachev 2012). Thus, ensuring the preservation of the status of the Russian language in the world is a priority and a national interest of Russia.

The language-centric perspective of Russia's cultural diplomacy – that supporting the Russian language abroad can be used as a means of promoting Russian culture and values beyond its borders – has been criticized for its imperial inclinations. For example, Datsuk critiques *Russkiy Mir's* conception for trying to use the Russian language as

a way to norm or somewhat crudely adjust people's way of thinking in ways that fit Russia's ideology (2014). These critiques also frame the Foundation's perspective as one that makes a linear and oversimplified connection between language, cognition and a consequent positive view of Russia, along the lines of linguistic determinism associated with the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis (1956), the strong version of which has been long discredited by much cognitive science and linguistic research (see Pederson 2010). What is more relevant to the discussion of *Russkiy Mir's* investment in support of the Russian language abroad is the recent scholarship (Norton 2013, among others) on the complex relationship of language, shared cultural knowledge, power, and investment in identity construction and negotiation.

Today, the Russian language remains the world's fifth major language and its worldwide use is projected to increase (Shin and Ortman 2011). Due to a range of political and economic factors, Russian is once again among the leading strategic languages, with a number of government scholarships supporting the study of Russian both in and outside the U.S., and several flagship programs preparing speakers at the superior proficiency levels. However, despite these numbers, to satisfy the needs of the Russian cultural diplomacy policy and goals, the overall ethno-linguistic vitality of the Russian language in the world in general and the United States specifically needs support.

Despite the status of Russian as a language of strategic opportunity in the U.S., overall, the availability of educational resources for Russian speakers or learners is not growing. Based on the report from the Modern Language

Association, while Russian is listed among the languages that require 'extended learning periods for native speakers of English' (Goldberg, Looney and Lusin 2015: 7), the number of institutions reporting enrollments in students). In addition, only a quarter of the Russian courses offered at the advanced level. There is also a shortage of community and church-based schools, except in large metropolitan areas, perhaps due to the inherent resistance among the post-Soviet first generation immigrants to settling in tight communities.

Overall, Russian speakers, and specifically heritage Russian speakers, need more support and available resources for language maintenance. This need has not been fulfilled by the *Ruskiy Mir* centers and cabinets operating in the United States, and presents a strategic opportunity for Russian cultural diplomacy efforts. When

Russian courses has decreased from 450 in 2006 to 436 in 2013 and Russian enrollments dropped by 25.2% in two-year colleges and by 17.6% in four-year undergraduate programs between 2009 (26,753 students) and 2013 (21,962 policy-makers are to develop programs to help preserve the Russian language and Russian-speaking communities in the United States, they must take into account the socio-linguistic factors affecting the Russian language preservation in the United States. The Russian language educators and cultural ambassadors targeting the younger generation must know the community these learners come from and specifically know and value its history of immigration, as well as literacy practices and patterns of language use. Such an approach will require additional research before designing cultural diplomacy programs in an effort to ensure their effectiveness and success.

	1980	1990	2000	2010	2013
Speakers of Russian age 5 and older	173,226	241,798	706,242	854,955	879,434

Table 1: Number of Russian speakers in the United States. Combined data from U.S. Census (2013a) and U.S. Census (2013b)

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