

Title: Examining the Identity of American Students of Russian in Study Abroad
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Abstract:

For many American undergraduates studying abroad means intensive language and culture study. However, not only does their language proficiency change, but their identity—both American and L2—often does as well. According to Kinginger (2013), study abroad participants revisit their worldviews as new perspectives are presented, which requires that they negotiate the new perspectives with the old. Savicki and Cooley (2011) discovered that American identity is an important part of how study abroad students think of themselves. Unquestionably, study abroad can be a catalyst for reexamination and refinement of a psychological identity. Dolby (2004) illustrated this point in a study of how American students' identity changes during a sojourn in Australia. She found that the negative sentiments expressed about the United States and Americans made her participants realize they were not the sole creators of American identity. In order to examine the identity of intermediate- and advanced-level American undergraduates who completed a study abroad sojourn in Russia and/or a former Soviet republic I will conduct interviews with 20 participants to answer the following questions:

- How did these individuals negotiate an “American” identity within the context of their study abroad experience in a Russian-speaking country?
- How did they achieve voice in their L2 in order to negotiate a “Russian” identity?
- How do the ways that intermediate- and advanced-level Russian speakers negotiate a “Russian” identity differ based on their proficiency levels?

I hypothesize that students' negotiation of both “American” and “Russian” identity will largely depend on their perception of the L1 country, culture and Russians with whom they come in contact. Additionally, I think that the amount of social interaction students of different levels have with L1 Russian speakers will affect their negotiation of “self,” as well as their ability to regard themselves as Russian language “users” versus “learners.”

Dolby, N. (2011). Encountering an American self: Study abroad and national identity. *Comparative Education Review*, 48(2), 150-173.

Kinginger, C. (2013). Identity and language learning in study abroad. *Foreign Language Annals*, 46(3), 339-358.

Savicki, V. & Cooley, E. (2011). American identity in study abroad students: Contrasts, changes and correlates. *Journal of College Student Development*, 52(3), 339-349.