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**Initial Report to ACLS on the Project Titled „Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian Heritage Speakers in Four Major US Metropolitan Areas – Resources for the Attainment of Full Professional Linguistic Proficiency”**

**1. Activities**

All activities have been completed as envisaged in the project proposal. The project website (<http://www.public.asu.edu/~dsipka/heritage> with a backup at <http://www.asusilc.net/heritage>) was created at the very outset detailing the particulars of the project which were sent to all with whom I intended to meet or communicate in some other manner. Having previously studied the body of literature on heritage speakers, I used my first field trip to Los Angeles to meet with Prof. Olga Kagan and discuss my project with her. She kindly offered that I modify their general heritage learners questionnaire based on my field research and use it on their SurveyMonkey space for the survey phase of my research, which I gladly accepted.

Following the findings from my field work in Los Angeles, New York, Chicago, and Phoenix (see further in this message), I modified the aforementioned survey and created its B/C/S version at <http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/bcsheritagespeakers>. I am currently soliciting prospective subjects to fill out that survey. I expect over one hundred subjects to take my survey, which would allow inferential statistical analysis.

I completed my field research as planned, and so: a. data gathering in/about Los Angeles in August 2010, with a visit to Los Angeles 8/13-8/17, b. data gathering in/about New York in September 2010, with a visit to New York 9/17-9/20, c. data gathering in/about Chicago in October 2010, with a visit to Chicago, 10/22-10/25, and d. data gathering in/about Phoenix, where I live, in November 2010.

In addition to thirty heritage students, I interviewed their parents, B/C/S instructors, university administrators, diplomats, community organizers, religious leaders, journalists, and business owners. The following script for a structured interview with heritage students was used.

1. Warm-up, pleasantries
2. Personal background (general education, education in HL)
3. Family background (arrival to the US, general education, education in HL)
4. Community background (friends, clubs, visits to the HL country)
5. Habits (how often and with whom do they speak HL)
6. Motivation (their own, parent's)
7. Aspirations (work, community, etc.)
8. Self-assessment (general, the four skills)
9. Wind-down

I also visited numerous heritage places (restaurants, stores, bookstores, clubs, places of worship, etc.), which is chronicled in the following photo album with captions explaining where the places are: <http://picasaweb.google.com/thesipkas/nasijenci>. Having realized the importance of a high concentration of heritage speakers in a neighborhood such as Astoria in New York, I also visited well-known and longitudinally established Slavic neighborhoods of little Odessa (a Russian-speaking neighborhood in Brighton Beach, NY) and Jackowo (the best known Polish patch in Chicago) to see how these traditional heritage communities function. My research was mentioned in an interview in the most popular Serbian daily Večernje novosti (<http://www.novosti.rs/vesti/naslovna/aktuelno.69.html:309390-Bela-kuca-cuva-srpski-jezik>), on the occasion of the conferral of my Polish presidential (Belvedere) professorship, which should contribute to the popularization of the survey. Another story about me where this research was mentioned was published in Vesti, the largest diaspora newspaper: <http://www.vesti-online.com/Dijaspora/drzava/SAD/Vesti/101413/Kuca-cuva-maternji-jezik>.

## 2. Preliminary Findings

The aforementioned activities lead to the following preliminary findings, which were incorporated into the on-line survey to be tested and confirmed or refuted.

- a. The role of the parents in maintaining B/C/S as the heritage language is paramount and irreplaceable. This was an almost automatic answer in all categories of the abovementioned subjects to the question as to why some people retain their heritage language and others do not. Moreover, an organizer of a failed B/C/S preschool project in New York, claimed that the children spoke mostly English owing to the indolence of their parents on this score. A question about one's parents' attitude toward their heritage language was included in the survey. If this preliminary finding is confirmed in the survey, any heritage learner project would need to include a strong outreach component toward the parents, directly and through community organizers, religious leaders, etc. One extremely important point is to explain to the parents that losing one's heritage language is not a prerequisite for socio-economic advancement – that, in sharp contrast to this erroneous assumption, bilingualism can be a key to success. It seems that the loss of language among the heritage speakers, in addition to sheer indolence on the part of the parents, is driven by the parent's desire to facilitate their children's socio-economic advancement.
- b. A high concentration of B/C/S heritage speakers in the neighborhood and the existence of heritage places are important. This came out not only in the interviews but also in the stories about B/C/S children in Astoria who failed English-language entrance exams into New York school system. Questions about the concentration of heritage speakers and the frequency at which the subjects visit heritage places were included in the survey. While

the role of the parents is unquestionable, the role of the neighborhoods has a time stamp on it. The example of Jackowo shows that as heritage speakers climb up the socio-economic ladder, they tend to disperse by re-locating to various other areas and some traditional places change their demographic structure completely.

- c. There is a pattern in which one's heritage is lost. Language culture is lost first to a strong English interference, general language and culture competence come next, folklore and similar formal manifestations of the background follow, and the food comes at the very end. Illustrative in this regard are some older heritage neighborhoods such as Croatian community of San Pedro. This is important in that it creates entry points at which communication with prospective heritage learners can be achieved through common references, for example to slivovitz or cevapcici.
- d. There is a strong preference among the interviewed students for year-long on-line courses rather than for summer on-site courses. A question about that preference was included in the on-line survey.
- e. There is a prevalent awareness of one's own lack of accuracy (grammatical, stylistic, etc. correctness) among the subjects and a strong desire to rectify that problem. The question about such aspirations and also self-assessment on that score were already a part of Prof. Kagan's survey and that was retained in my survey.
- f. Similarly, awareness as to the deficiencies in writing and formal forms of expression was ubiquitous in face-to-face interviews. Again, Prof. Kagan's survey included several items covering this area, all of which were retained in my survey.
- g. In contrast to this kind of awareness, there is an inflated sense of the ability to communicate orally and about one's receptive skills in general. Again, Prof. Kagan's

survey included several items covering this area, all of which were retained in my survey.

If this turns out to be true, the envisaged course will have to include the mechanisms which will demonstrate to the students' deficiencies in speaking and understanding.

- h. The state of the university programs in high B/C/S heritage speaker areas is grim, with Arizona State University being the only exception. The most shocking discovery was that a longitudinal B/C/S program at University of Illinois at Chicago, vast majority of whose students were heritage speakers, was recently terminated. The current department head responded to my question about the program laconically that they offer only Russian and Polish because B/C/S specialists retired. My interview with a professor emerita of that program confirmed that one cannot expect any improvement in this outrageous situation. This finding further emphasizes a dire need for a heritage speaker course which would be available to all interested students, even those who could not afford taking two months off for this course.
- i. The well-known fact that a class of this type would be burdened with interethnic tensions was partially confirmed but large disparities exist between the New York City area, which turned out to be a true multiethnic and civilized environment and LA or Chicago which are plagued with traditional ethnic nationalism. For example, most heritage restaurants in the City that I visited had multiethnic staff and some of them, such as Marshall are multiethnic in their name and nature. On the other hand, I heard stories that it is dangerous to declare oneself as a Serb in San Pedro Croatian community and at a Chicago Serbian newspaper anniversary party Albanians were mocked in one of the scores of the program. Moreover, in all three communities there are intra-ethnic conflicts, e.g., between Yugoslav-oriented Croatians from Komiza and the remainder of nationalist-

minded Croatians in San Pedro, Serbian church communities with different political orientation in Chicago, more moderate and more radical Bosnian Islamic communities, etc. A question about the ethnic format (segregated or mixed) of the class was included in the survey. Any BCS heritage project will have to negotiate these intricate relations.

- j. One evident problem in maintaining BCS is the dispersion of its population. The example of Los Angeles, where a Croatian community organizer complained about the lack of interest in language classes for school children emphasized a vast dispersion of the speakers as the key problem. This was in sharp contrast with compact heritage communities such as Astoria in New York, where language is maintained with much more success. As previously noted, this dispersion trend which further emphasizes the need to include on-line courses. A question about high concentration of BCS heritage speakers was included in the survey.
- k. My general impression was that diplomatic representatives of Bosnia, Croatia, and Serbia, who could contribute to the preservation of BCS as a heritage language in the United States, exhibit little or no real interest in this issue. Their actions are almost exclusively declarative rather than substantive. My question about heritage speakers seemed to have been received as an annoyance. It is important to realize that every heritage program is actually out on one's own and that counting with substantial help from other sources is unrealistic.

Respectfully submitted on this 22<sup>nd</sup> day of December 2010