

Identity Options in Russian Textbooks

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This article introduces a new analytical approach to the study of identity options offered in foreign and second language textbooks. This approach, grounded in poststructuralist theory and critical discourse analysis, is applied to 2 popular beginning Russian textbooks. Two sets of identity options are examined in the study: imagined learners (targeted implicitly by the texts) and imagined interlocutors (invoked explicitly). It is argued that, while one text, *Russian Stage 1*, offers a richer variety of identity options for the students, neither book fully reflects the diversity of contemporary Russian society. The biases and oversimplifications identified in the texts represent lost opportunities for cross-cultural reflection; they may also negatively affect the students and deprive them of important means of self-representation and at times even self-defense. The discussion suggests some directions for future research inquiry, as well as for material writing and classroom practice that would promote intercultural competence and critical language awareness.

Key words: identity, critical pedagogy, foreign language textbooks, Russian

Recent second language acquisition (SLA) research convincingly demonstrates that many second language (L2) learners and users experience significant identity conflicts in the target language community. Their racial, ethnic, gender, or social identities may limit their access to interactional opportunities in the target language (Pavlenko, 2000). The learners may also experience denial or misunderstanding of their identities (Norton, 2000) or they may lack linguistic skills necessary to negotiate difficult encounters involving gender, sexuality, ethnicity, race, or social status (Ehrlich, 2001; Polanyi, 1995; Talburt & Stewart, 1999). A growing

sense of vulnerability and powerlessness may, in turn, decrease the learners' investment in the target language (Norton Peirce, 1995) and impede further learning or even lead to resistance to a particular language (Ehrlich, 2001; Ohara, 2001). Together, recent studies suggest that more attention needs to be paid to identity repertoires offered to learners in the L2 classroom. In this article, we will investigate two types of identity options offered by Russian textbooks: imagined learners (targeted implicitly by the texts) and imagined interlocutors (invoked explicitly). We will also consider identity options missing from the texts, thus highlighting marginalized learners and devalued interlocutors.

IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION IN FOREIGN AND SECOND LANGUAGE TEXTBOOKS

The study of identity construction in foreign language (FL) and L2 textbooks is a relatively recent phenomenon in applied linguistics, informed by feminist concerns and recent developments in critical and feminist pedagogy. Early studies focused on the treatment of gender and exposed sexism in L2 and FL texts published in the 1970s and 1980s. More recent analyses suggested that in the 1990s the situation significantly improved yet pointed to some textbooks that continued to reproduce gender biases. Siegal and Okamoto (1996) found that Japanese textbooks aimed at American students present highly stereotypical linguistic "norms" based on hegemonic ideologies of class, language, and gender. Poulou (1997) demonstrated that Greek textbooks reproduce traditional gender relations through discursive roles assigned to men and women, so that in situations where no expert on a particular issue was present, men tended to give rather than ask for information, while women did the opposite.

Recently, several scholars have attempted to expand the focus of inquiry to consider a range of social identities and the students' perceptions of identity options offered to them (Canagarajah, 1993; Cook, *in press*; Durham, 1995; Kramsch & von Hoene, 1995, 2001). Cook (*in press*), an SLA researcher and an experienced textbook writer, analyzed a set of beginning Italian, French, and English textbooks. He found that the subject matter addressed in such books is seldom adult; rather they portray "sanitized worlds of clean-living teenagers." As a consequence, the only readers targeted by the books and ones who may benefit from them are "lively young people without cares in the world or plans for the future, except for tomorrow's party." Cook argued that to make the materials more useful to the readers, texts aiming at adults should be adult in theme, teaching method, and language. He also advocated for inclusion of L2 users of the target language as positive role models for the students.

Canagarajah's (1993) examination of a U.S.-published ESL textbook used in a Sri Lankan classroom has a slightly different focus, namely to expose "the hidden curriculum," that is, implicit ideological values conveyed by the text. His analysis

reveals that dialogs and narratives in the text exhibit racial and gender biases, as well as implicit Western middle-class values like consumerism, thrift, delayed gratification, and social mobility. The author also considered the students' reactions to the text, focusing on glosses scribbled on the margins. He found that rural Tamil students adopted a range of discursive strategies to deal with ideological conflicts posed to them by the texts: In some cases, they expressed direct hostility and in others opted for parody, exaggeration, or mockery. To circumvent this resistance to the text and oftentimes to English itself, Canagarajah (1993) recommended for textbook authors to engage discourses that are relevant to the students' lives and social and political realities.

Other studies similarly suggest that students may be put off by stereotyping, biased representations, and discussions irrelevant to their own life experiences. Siegal and Okamoto (1996) argued that normative, stereotypical, and traditionally gendered worlds created in Japanese language textbooks elicit resistance from female American students who say that they would not speak Japanese if they had to use this kind of language. Race emerges as an important factor in Talburt and Stewart's (1999) investigation of experiences of an African American student on a study abroad. The student criticizes her Spanish textbook for not discussing race and thus being irrelevant to her own experiences in Spain, where she was singled out as the racial other and as a sexual object. Kinginger (2004) turned attention to class, pointing out that the implied audience of many French language textbooks are members of the middle-class who live in "maisons," "appartements," or "pavillons" and have the means "to envisage France in the modern-day version of the Grand Tour, ordering wine at refined cafés, buying silk scarves from obsequious salespeople, contemplating celebrated works of art" (p. 225). The researcher found that these texts alienated working-class students in her university French class, one of whom asked her, "Comment dit-on *trailer park*? Cause I don't live in no, like, *château*" (Kinger, 2004, p. 225).

The portrayal of an imaginary target language community as a bucolic enclave may also deprive students of linguistic resources they need to position themselves in difficult interactions involving their gender, sexual, racial, or ethnic identities. Polanyi (1995) argued that because American students are commonly taught Russian in a gender-neutral way, American women on a study abroad trip to Russia do not, at least initially, have the necessary linguistic means of self-protection and self-defense against sexual harassment. In her study, the women opted to engage in fewer interactions with target language speakers and, as a result, showed fewer linguistic gains than the men when tested upon return. Ehrlich (2001) placed these findings in a wider context, pointing out that immigrant and minority women, as well as women on a study abroad, commonly encounter sexual harassment and that resistance to it involves complex speech acts that need to be addressed explicitly in the language classroom.

Together, the studies above suggest that "imaginary worlds" portrayed in language textbooks may offer oversimplified and stereotyped identity options to FL

learners. These options, in turn, may influence—and at times even shape—the students' motivation, degree of engagement with the target language and culture, and development of their intercultural competence. None of these inquiries, however, entailed a comprehensive examination of all options offered in a particular text. In the next section, we will introduce a theoretical framework that would allow us to conduct such an analysis.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework of this study is grounded in critical discourse analysis (CDA) (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999; Fairclough, 1989, 1995; Luke, 1995), critical inquiry and poststructuralist thought (Anderson, 1991; Bourdieu, 1991; Pennycook, 2001), and explorations in critical pedagogy (Giroux, 1992; Pennycook, 2001). While there are important differences both within and between these paradigms, what is crucial for the present inquiry is a common concern, shared by all three paradigms, with critical language awareness. All three strive to theorize and investigate the role of language in the production of identities and power relations, and the role of identity politics in language learning and use. The perspective adopted here acknowledges that human beings exist in the real world, where their life circumstances are shaped by class, race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, socioeconomic background, and geopolitical location. As such it does not consider multiple discourses to be equally valid versions of "truth" but seeks to identify ways in which hegemonic discourses construct and impose particular versions of reality (Bourdieu, 1991; Fairclough, 1989, 1995), and in this case, of the learner community and the target language community.

As we have argued earlier, language textbooks play a unique role in the process of potential empowerment or disempowerment of language learners. From a critical perspective espoused here, textbooks are not a neutral repository of grammatical forms and lexical choices; rather they are an important genre that functions to offer the students a sanctioned version of human knowledge in a particular area, to confer objectivity upon the subject matter, and to socialize the readers into becoming a relatively homogeneous interpretive community (Apple, 1990; de Castell, 1990; Luke, 1995). In the field of language teaching, texts possess a unique authority to construct and mediate alternative cultural and linguistic worlds, in fact, "imagining" them for the students. Misrepresentation, stereotyping, and oversimplification of these imaginary worlds could lead to cross-cultural miscommunication, frustration, offence, and conflict, as well as to resistance from students in cases where their own linguistic and cultural values come into conflict with those imposed on them by the texts.

To highlight the key role played by the notion of imagination in the process of language learning, we draw on the work by Anderson (1991) and Pavlenko and Norton (in press). In his celebrated analysis of the role of language, literacy, and standardiza-

tion in the creation of nation-states, Anderson (1991) pioneered a view of nation-states as imagined communities "because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (p. 6). This view presents imagination as a social and discursive process, emphasizing the fact that those in power oftentimes do the imagining for the rest of their fellow citizens offering them certain identity options and leaving other options "unimaginable." Drawing on these insights, Pavlenko and Norton (in press) showed that identities available to FL and L2 learners in a variety of imagined communities, not necessarily limited to nation-states, have a tremendous power to impact language learning trajectories and to affect language learning outcomes. Desirable identities may motivate the learners, undesirable and powerless identities may hamper their learning or at least the achievement of desired proficiency, and "hidden identities" (Vandrick, 1997) may leave them without important linguistic means of self-presentation.

In this article, we explore imaginary worlds created by two Russian textbooks for American students. Russian is a particularly intriguing locus of inquiry, as dramatic sociopolitical, socioeconomic, and sociocultural transformations of the past decade have completely reshaped identity options available for appropriation by Russian citizens, devaluing some, such as a "socialist worker," and creating and legitimizing others, such as a "new Russian," that is, a successful businessperson (Pavlenko, 2002). Tomi (2001) has argued that these changes are not reflected in American business discourse on Russia, which continues to draw on old stereotypes and thus may promote miscommunication and conflict. In light of these findings, it is particularly important to see whether contemporary Russian textbooks have adjusted their "identity repertoires" to reflect the ongoing transformations.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHOD

Our study analyzes two popular Russian textbooks for beginning students: *Nachalo* (Beginning), Vol. 1 (Lubensky, Ervin, & Jarvis, 1996) and *Russian Stage 1: Live from Moscow*, Vol. 1 (Davidson, Gor, & Lekic, 1996). We chose to focus on beginning textbooks because they are the ones most commonly encountered by FL students, many of whom do not progress to intermediate and advanced levels of FL study (Hebel, 2002). In looking at these texts we wanted to examine whether the authors' attempts to simplify the language encountered by beginning students result in oversimplification of the social world in which the language is situated. Three criteria guided our textbook selection. We aimed to choose beginning textbooks that were (a) recent, (b) well known, and (c) had a range of characters and story lines. In our analysis, we viewed the characters in the texts as representative of two sets of identity options, learners and target language speakers, and thus asked the following two questions:

1. Which learners are targeted by the texts and which are not reflected, that is, which identities remain "hidden"?
2. Which speakers of the target language will the learners presumably encounter (according to the texts) and which speakers are missing from the texts?

Our critical discourse analysis of the two texts is predicated on the general framework proposed by Fairclough (1989, 1995) and modified by Chouliaraki and Fairclough (1999). This interpretive approach considers mediated connections between properties of texts and social and cultural structures and processes. In this study, this approach leads us to analyze assumptions underlying particular identity choices and omissions. Consequently, to answer the first question, we will examine which learners are portrayed in the texts (and thus implicitly targeted by them); we will also examine how they are portrayed. To answer the second question, we will consider which Russian speakers are represented in the texts (and thus presumed to be potential interlocutors) and which are missing; we will also consider how the interaction between Americans and Russians is depicted. In analyzing the two sets of identity options we will consider texts, dialogs, pictures, and, in the case of *Russian Stage I*, the accompanying video. While *Nachalo* also has an accompanying video, it will not figure separately in our analysis, as its main purpose is to illustrate the text, rather than to add a new dimension to it.

In conducting our analysis we openly acknowledge our motivation to see which groups of learners may be alienated and disempowered in the process of learning beginning Russian. We also agree with Chouliaraki and Fairclough (1999) that "a text does not uniquely determine a meaning, though there is a limit to what a text can mean" (p. 67). Different interpretations of the texts come from different combinations of the properties of the text and the social positioning and knowledge of its interpreters. In our case, we are both native speakers of Russian who arrived in the United States as adults, one before and one after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Since our arrival both of us have been involved with Russian and SLA, and spent several years teaching Russian as a foreign language to American students (one of us continues to do so). Consequently, our interpretations of the texts are informed by our theoretical framework, our knowledge of Russian language and culture, and our experiences in using the texts with American students. At the same time, we also aim to offer a valid and replicable analysis of the data, and thus provide the readers with numerical counts and quotes that led us to particular interpretations.

Clearly, just like previous textbook studies, our text-based approach has its limitations: Future studies will need to address directly ways in which students interact with texts and understandings they derive from this interaction. At the same time, we believe that the approach proposed here has several advantages over earlier analyses. First, it enables us to ask a wider range of identity questions than simply ones pertaining to gender and to examine representations also in terms of race, class, ethnicity, religious affiliation, (dis)ability, sexuality, and other identities.

Second, it allows us to consider both identities of the learners and of their imaginary interlocutors. Most important, a critical perspective allows us to see not only which identities are reflected in the texts but also which ones remain "hidden."

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

American Learners of Russian

The first issue examined in our study is that of the audience targeted by the two texts. Even though our analysis is limited to two books, the intriguing similarities we found between them warrant a separate discussion. To begin with, American learners portrayed—and implicitly targeted by—the two textbooks are invariably able-bodied White middle-class educated young people, members of the international elite. These young people are very similar to the ones encountered by Cook (in press) in his analysis of FL teaching materials. The main characters in the two texts share even more in common—both are White heterosexual middle-class college-educated men, with a professional interest in Russian. In *Nachalo*, the main character, Jim, is a graduate student working on his dissertation, presumably in history, and in *Stage 1* Dennis is a professional photographer who studied Russian at a university and now came to Russia to shoot his new photo album.

While sharing these uncanny similarities, the two texts also differ in how the main protagonists are portrayed and what discursive repertoires they employ. In *Nachalo*, Jim is depicted as a confident speaker of Russian whose exceptional linguistic knowledge sets no limits to his social interaction. He does not struggle for acceptance of his, obviously prestigious, identity of an American student, and appears to fit in with other Russian students. Jim is also socially accepted as a young male: He dates a Russian woman who chose him over his Russian rival (pp. 154, 228–229). He also manages to be extremely popular as a friend, and the readers witness how easily Jim blends into the group of young Russians, becoming the life of the party (p. 216). As a result, Jim not only becomes a legitimized member of the target language community but in fact acquires the status of a hero. When his Russian peers are incapacitated by broken elevators or stuck doors, Jim is extremely skillful and capable of prompt action, releasing a little boy from a broken elevator (p. 102) or unlocking the door of the professor's neighbor (p. 144). His highly prestigious status of an American visitor also allows him to communicate with his interlocutors without negotiating his identity as a nonnative speaker. An excellent example is the episode where Jim goes shopping and wins over the Russian crowd when he reveals (sic!) his American identity (pp. 245–246; interestingly, it is his lack of cultural competence and not pronunciation that gives him away as a foreigner). His superiority is also underscored by his friends who praise his cooking skills (pp. 206–207) and by the

mother of his girlfriend, who believes that marrying an American is the ultimate achievement for a Russian woman (p. 238).

Unfortunately, in its aim to provide a positive model of a highly competent American user of Russian, the text of *Nachalo* is devoid of any negotiation of miscommunication. Thus, the students do not get an opportunity to master the skill of negotiating misunderstandings, crucial for all levels of proficiency, but particularly for beginning students. In fact, Jim's high level of proficiency and the ease of establishing social connections cannot be easily reproduced by beginning learners for whom the book is intended and may alienate students, rather than facilitate acquisition. His exceptional mechanical, cooking, and interpersonal skills may further alienate the readers, many of whom may have experienced numerous problems in establishing social contacts, dealing with appliances, and performing everyday tasks in the new cultural context.

In contrast, *Stage 1* portrays the American learner as a recent arrival whose ability to speak Russian is rather limited and who had just started to gain memberships in various social networks. The text depicts several instances of miscommunication in which Dennis' lack of linguistic knowledge makes him vulnerable and powerless (pp. 261, 295–296). Helpless at first, Dennis gradually learns how to negotiate his way in the new environment. He manages to stay in his apartment in exchange for English lessons that he gives to the apartment owner's son (p. 287). Dennis also develops a friendship with Misha, a Russian whom he helps to search for business contacts in America (p. 352). Little by little Dennis acquires confidence as a Russian speaker and as a Moscovite. Not only does he learn about different features of everyday life in Moscow, he becomes a part of this life, a legitimate and functional member of the Russian society: Readers witness Dennis shopping, using transportation, going out, doing all of the things that his Russian acquaintances do as well. Rather than being presented with an individual who already possesses a high level of L2 proficiency, the learners can observe and take part in Dennis' language learning process. Witnessing his life in Moscow, they learn multiple ways in which acquisition of Russian could be tied to various aspects of a person's life and their sense of identity. In this, the authors of *Stage 1*—as opposed to the authors of *Nachalo*—have managed to demonstrate how advances in language proficiency translate into symbolic capital, an ability to negotiate successful interactions, and, ultimately, “the right to impose reception” (Bourdieu, 1991). In addition to the real benefit of offering multiple examples of difficult encounters, *Stage 1* may also facilitate learning due to the fact that it is much easier for the students to relate to Dennis, who, unlike the jack-of-all-trades Jim, is an ordinary guy, making all sorts of blunders.

At the same time, even though *Stage 1* takes a great step forward toward making the category of an American learner more realistic, we cannot help but wonder, what are the costs to our students and their linguistic investments of the kept-up pretense that all of us can identify with able-bodied heterosexual White males and experience similar learning trajectories? On the surface, the choice of a protagonist

as a "typical American man" may appear random and harmless. We argue that in reality it may be a harmful choice because it preempts all other choices and allows textbook authors to portray a privileged language learner and to avoid discussing difficult encounters faced in Russia by American women, African American, Asian American, and Latino students, and gay, lesbian, disabled, or working-class individuals. And even though White men may still get into difficult situations in Russia, on an everyday basis it is women and minority members who are most likely to be subject to sexual harassment (Polanyi, 1995) or ethnic and racial discrimination (MacWilliams, 2002). To ignore this fact and to reduce communication problems to locked doors or broken elevators is to deprive the students of important linguistic means of self-presentation and self-defense.

Russian Interlocutors

The second issue examined in our study is the range of identities of Russian speakers portrayed in the two texts. Our analysis will differentiate between main characters, who appear in more than one episode, and secondary ones, who make only one appearance. We will consider the following clusters of characteristics of the characters: (a) social class, professional occupation, and age; (b) gender, sexuality, and marital status; (c) ethnicity and religion.

Social Class, Professional Occupation, and Age

Our analysis suggests that both texts create similar immediate surroundings for the main protagonists, based on the assumption that young Americans in Russia are most likely to make friends with Russians of similar age and socioeducational background. Consequently, since both protagonists are middle-class men, they are surrounded by other middle-class individuals; neither text shows working-class individuals as plausible friends and acquaintances for American learners of Russian. In *Nachalo*, Jim, a graduate student himself, makes friends with other students; the only nonstudent in his environment is a young businessman Victor. In *Stage 1*, Dennis's friends are both students and young professionals.

Upon closer examination, however, the two texts do differ in ways in which they portray the learners' potential interlocutors. As seen in Table 1, in *Nachalo* we encounter mainly middle-class individuals, as well as one soldier and one working-class individual, a plumber. In the center of attention in *Nachalo* are three social groups: government officials, business people, and intelligentsia (commonly viewed as a group of people professionally involved in intellectual and creative activity [*Soviet Encyclopedic Dictionary*, 1983, p. 495]). The authors do not depict these three groups neutrally. Rather, intelligentsia, represented by the Moscow State University professor Ilia Ilyich and a group of students, is the only group positively portrayed. The authors avoid both irony and criticism in constructing the

TABLE 1
Russian Social Identities in *Nachalo* and *Stage 1*

Social Class	<i>Nachalo</i> Characters		<i>Stage 1</i> Characters	
	Main	Secondary	Main	Secondary
Middle class	Professor (1) Government official (1) Businessman (1) Pensioners (2)		Journalist (1) Veterinarian (1) Accountant (1) High school teacher (1) Architect (1) College dean (1)	Veterinarian (1)
Working class		Plumber (1) Soldier (1)		Salespeople ^a Waiter (1) Vendors ^a Police officers (2) 2 (students to be) students ^a
Students	4	0	3	
Schoolchildren	1	2	1	0
Undefined	3	1	2	4

^aToo many to count or shown as a group.

students and professor as socially and morally superior to others. In contrast, their portrayals of government officials and the new business elite are openly negative, suggesting that the ongoing political and economic changes have introduced new forms of corruption and social inequality. A cultural bullet that introduces *biznesmeny* (businessmen) as a new identity option states that "many Russians bitterly dislike their opportunism, flaunted wealth, and outright materialism" (p. 137) and posits that some of the new entrepreneurs "clearly have connections with organized crime" (p. 137). Interestingly, this negative view is limited to Russian businessmen, while marrying an American businessman is presented as a desirable option for a Russian woman (p. 238).

While we applaud the authors' attempts to introduce the students to new identity options and discourses dominant in the Russian society, we believe that future texts need to present a more nuanced and complex portrayal of the business elite, rather than portray it stereotypically and unidimensionally from a very specific subject position, that of members of educated—but financially unsuccessful—intelligentsia. In reality, contemporary business class in Russia comprises many hard-working and enterprising individuals—several successful women among them—committed to creation of the market economy (for portrayal of such individuals, see a series of articles on Young Russians to Watch in the *Russian Life* magazine, 2001–2002).

In comparison with *Nachalo*, *Stage 1* depicts a much broader range of characters. The video component that complements rather than illustrates the text helps to

increase the number of secondary characters and to enlarge the gallery of Russian social images. Thus, students encounter not only obligatory representatives of the Russian middle-class (students, professors, teachers, architects, and TV journalists) but also an array of working-class individuals: police officers, salespeople, waiters, cashiers, and so on. Even though these characters are not central in the text, they are given more significance than in *Nachalo*, and the students see them interacting with the American learner. Broadening the scope allows the authors to present students with a more varied and complex picture of Russian social life and to depict multiple facets of private life, work place, college life, and everyday interactions. Most important, it allows them to expand the range of encounters in which FL students learn to participate.

Both texts are sensitive to age, and in *Stage 1* age and occupational status appear to be the key aspects of social hierarchy. This is evident in situations where the youngsters generally comply, at least ostensibly, with their adult counterparts, and in naming conventions whereby all young people regardless of social status go by nicknames while the adults are addressed by full names that include patronymics. As a rule, middle-aged people are shown to have more rights and privileges than the younger ones (and, ironically, than retired "grandpas" and "grandmas"). In both texts, American visitors are shown to be aware of the social significance of the age factor and to monitor their linguistic behavior carefully to comply with Russian rules, in particular with regard to politeness and forms of address.

In sum, we found that both texts reflect social, political, and economic changes that had taken place in the Russian society and provide commentary on the new identity options that emerged as a result of these changes. We also found that *Stage 1*—as opposed to *Nachalo*—offers a representative description of social stratification in Russian society. At the same time, while both texts discuss and portray age-linked sociolinguistic conventions, they portray—but do not discuss—the implicit class-linked ones, according to which professors may be addressed with a name and patronymic and plumbers of comparable age with a first name or a nickname. Furthermore, we see an almost exclusive focus on middle-class individuals as most likely potential interlocutors as problematic. One may argue that this skewed portrayal is legitimate given that American students are most likely to come into contact with middle- and upper-middle-class Russians and that it is the language of intelligentsia that is considered to be "an ideal goal" for pedagogical effort in Russian instruction (Yokoyama, 2000, p. 472). We believe, however, that by reducing the target language community to a single group of highly educated native speakers, teaching materials run the risk of presenting imagined interlocutors as a monolithic and homogeneous group and target language as invariable. In doing so, they jeopardize two important goals of contemporary FL teaching—intercultural competence and critical language awareness—and obscure ways in which social hierarchies are constructed and negotiated through language.

Gender, Sexuality, and Marital Status

A previous quantitative analysis of Russian textbooks from a gender perspective resulted in identical and quite positive scores for both *Nachalo* and *Stage 1*, suggesting that they exhibit more equitability than other texts (Rifkin, 1998). Our examination of the two texts leads us to argue that formal numerical analysis is not sufficient when dealing with identities and that discourse analysis is in order to interpret the numbers. When subjected to critical discourse analysis, which considers both what is represented and what is missing, the two texts differ from each other, yet both reveal the tendency to stereotype gender roles and to depict women as less socially engaged, situated predominantly in the family domain.

The fact that the majority of women in Russia work escapes the attention of the authors of *Nachalo*. The text does not provide occupational information on female characters, including two major female characters, defining their roles exclusively through family ties, and more specifically through their relationships with men. One woman, for instance, is referred to as a wife of a director of an apartment complex. If she has a job, the readers are not told anything about it; she is shown exclusively at home busy with housekeeping and talking about family matters (pp. 35, 56, 228–229, 237–238). Another woman is defined as a professor's neighbor and a mother of a son who serves in the army (p. 144, 163–164). Seven out of eight pictures show women as occupied with household chores or shopping. In contrast, men of the same age are shown to have professional jobs, and it can be implicitly concluded that in the Russian context occupational status and professional engagement constitute an important part of a male—but not female—identity.

This bias is less apparent among younger people: All young women are shown in the process of acquiring prestigious professions of a doctor, a journalist, or a historian. However, a mother of one of these young women, a housewife Natalya Ivanovna (NI), still deems it best for her daughter to marry, and in particular to marry an American, as seen in a conversation with her husband, Sergei Petrovich (SP):

NI: *Serezha, u nashei Leny svidanie s Dzhimom.*

"Serezha, our Lena has a date with Jim."

SP: (Reading.) *Interesno.*

"Interesting."

NI: *Ty pomnish' nashu sosedku Veru Nikolaevnu? Dva goda nazad ee doch' poekhala v Leningrad, to est', v Sankt Peterburg, vstretila amerikanskogo biznesmena i vyshla za nego zamuzh. Seichas oni zhivut v Kalifornii, v Los-Andzhelese. Nedavno u nikh rodilsia syn. Teper' u Very Nikolaevny est' vnuk v Los-Andzhelese. (Sympathetically.) Pravda, ona redko ego vidit ... Mezhdū prochim, ona v noiabre poedet tuda. A my nikogda tam ne byli. Serezha, ty menia ne slushaesh'.*

"Do you remember our neighbor Vera Nikolayevna? Two years ago her daughter went to Leningrad, that is, St. Petersburg and met an American businessman and married him. Now they live in California, in Los Angeles. Recently they had a son. Now Vera Nikolayevna has a grandson in Los Angeles. (Sympathetically.) Of course, she rarely sees him ... By the way, in November she is going there. And we have never been there. Serezha, you are not listening to me."

SP: (Not listening.) *Slushaiu, Natasha.*

"I am listening, Natasha."

(*Nachalo*, p. 238)

In this dialog, Natalya Ivanovna draws on a popular Russian discourse that presents a marriage to a well-to-do Westerner as an ultimate achievement for a Russian woman (Pavlenko, 2002). The dialog also illustrates gender stereotyping encountered throughout the text in portrayals of cross-gender conversations, where either (a) women dominate conversation (like Natalya Ivanovna), while men are not even listening, or (b) men dominate conversation, dispensing advice, approval, or disapproval to attentively listening women. Our analysis of the content of conversations in *Nachalo* shows that in same-gender conversations women talk about mundane things, such as furniture and shopping (p. 64) or romantic affairs with men (p. 65). In turn, when in the company of men, they stop talking about shopping and fashion and become engaged in serious conversations about music, literature, or cultural differences. Women are also shown as dependent on the help of more knowledgeable and skillful men. For instance, all the rescuing acts of the American visitor are initiated to help out women and children (pp. 101–102, 143–144, 206–207). In many episodes, they are portrayed as lacking agency, as they would rather complain to men than act on their needs themselves (e.g., p. 35). Concomitantly, men are shown as disrespectful with regard to women: either ignoring them overtly (pp. 35, 238) or treating them as sexual objects (pp. 136, 154). In this portrayal, the text draws not only on patriarchal gender discourses circulating in contemporary Russia (Pavlenko, 2002) but also on cultural stereotypes continuously promoted by American mass media, which portray Russian women almost exclusively as sexually available to foreigners and as ideal prospective wives for American men yearning for traditional gender relations.

Stage 1 manages to avoid overt portrayals of women being inferior to men: Several women in the text have prestigious occupations, such as a dean, a journalist, or a teacher. The book also contains a separate unit portraying student life of young women where the readers can encounter the main character and her female friends participating in a variety of activities at the Institute of Cinematography (unit 7). At the same time, the text also contains a number of instances of gender stereotyping. Thus, the students see Russian women performing domestic duties much more frequently than work-related ones. Among the four working women one is shown

dealing with her professional responsibilities, while the other three are depicted as busy in the kitchen, shopping, or talking on the phone. A mother of one of the main female characters, who allegedly is a good and dedicated teacher, is continuously portrayed at home, wearing her apron and discussing fashion with her daughter (pp. 150, 177–178, 188–189, unit 3 of the video). In turn, young women, including the main character, are shown in pursuit of romantic relationships, oftentimes at the expense of their work, while for male characters having a career is a number one priority. Overall, it appears that family concerns, fashion, and romantic relationships are central to identity construction of Russian women in *Stage 1* (see discussions on pp. 61, 122, 150, 151, 182, 184, 433). Though we do not dispute the fact that current ideologies of femininity in Russia do privilege marriage, family, and household over independence and professional success (Pavlenko, 2002), such portrayal obfuscates harsh economic realities of life in Russia: feminization of poverty, double shift (which is still the fate of many Russian women), and the ongoing female rebellion against patriarchal ideologies dominant in the society.

Interestingly, *Stage 1* does portray the relationship between men and women as unequal socially and economically and, in doing so, does offer a space for exploration of gender ideologies. To begin with, the women in the text are often financially dependent on the men. Among the four couples presented in *Stage 1*, only one consists of two working individuals, while in the other two couples the women attend college and do not make money (the financial relationship of the fourth couple is unclear). Second, men are often imbued with greater authority than women who are oftentimes portrayed as children: They are continuously given presents and are held accountable for their bad—from the point of view of their boyfriends—behavior. For instance, Tanya's boyfriend buys her flowers, an expensive scarf, tickets to the Bolshoi theater, and keeps asking what else he should buy for her (pp. 367, 370–371). While we see how these descriptions could potentially be offensive to American learners, we suggest that a much more interesting option would be to explore such trends—and ways in which they shape cross-gender encounters—within the socioeconomic and sociohistorical contexts of the two cultures.

To sum up, a comparison of the two texts reveals that *Stage 1* deals with gender more equitably, showing women as professionals and not simply as domestic workers. At the same time, both texts appear to construct gender identities in rather stereotypical ways, suggesting that men's central occupations are with their careers, while women are preoccupied with romantic relationships. Unfortunately, this portrayal obscures the fact that women are consistently found among the highest achieving Russian academics, scientists, physicians, and business leaders. Similarly, compulsive heterosexuality and couplehood, which dominate both texts, obfuscate the lives of single individuals (including single parents) and sexual minorities, and thus disallow rich discussions of the status of these individuals in the two societies.

Ethnicity and Religious Affiliation

Looking at classroom materials for teaching Russian, one cannot help but notice how many Russian textbooks, readers, and conversation books published in the United States in the past decades proudly display the golden onion domes of Orthodox churches on their covers. Even though religious life was close to nonexistent in the former Soviet Union, these pictures continued to implicitly equate Russian language and culture with Orthodox Christianity and to obscure the fact that many native speakers of Russian—and, as a matter of fact, Russian writers and poets—are members of other ethnic and religious groups who nevertheless grew up speaking Russian as a first or second language.

In view of this persisting tendency, it is not surprising to see that both texts present an ethnically homogeneous Russian society. Although *Stage I* makes an attempt to introduce other ethnicities that reside in the former Soviet republics (p. 266), it does not refer to the fact that ethnic diversity not only continues to exist within Russia, but together with religion remains an important organizing feature of Russian life. A few pictures in the two texts make visual references to ethnic minorities, for instance, one of a fruit and vegetable vendor who looks as if he were from the Caucasus (*Stage I*, p. 154). Without the text, however, these pictures remain lost opportunities for introducing the students to ethnic diversity among Russian speakers and for exploring the nexus of language and ethnicity attitudes. To know more about these attitudes and linguistic varieties within the Russian society would be extremely useful for students who will have to negotiate meaning with a variety of Russian speakers. Some of these speakers will not be ethnically Russian, some may speak a nonstandard variety of Russian, and some may speak Russian as a second or third language.

Cross-Cultural Encounters

The final issue we examined was the representation of a cross-cultural encounter between Americans and Russians in the two texts. Our analysis indicates that both textbooks converge in portraying an unequal social encounter between the two worlds. In doing so, the authors appeal to discourses of adventure stories and ethnographic accounts to construct the in-country experience of their American protagonists as an exciting escapade. The two men are presented as explorers, taking risks in the unknown and strange world. The strangeness of the encounter is depicted in both texts through cultural bullets, which aim to explain away peculiarities of Russian character and traditions, and by accounts of miscommunication between the American “explorers” and the “locals.” The exoticism of Russia is visible in *Stage I*, where Dennis is continuously surprised by various features of everyday life in Russia: He is unable to distinguish between a bank and a store (video, unit 1), he cannot recognize a monument of the most famous Russian poet Pushkin (which comes as a surprise given that Dennis studied Russian in college),

he looks shocked witnessing how his Russian friend Tanya takes off her shoes when entering an apartment, and he cannot believe that there are no garbage disposals in Russian sinks (video, unit 2).

At times, such portrayal of Russia implicitly constructs the American visitor—and the American culture—as superior. This trend is particularly pronounced in *Nachalo*, where Jim's Russian friends and acquaintances are captivated and amazed by everything he is telling them—they cannot comprehend the fact that American men do not mind cooking (p. 207), that students can call professors by their first names (pp. 256–257), that people of opposite sex can rent an apartment together (p. 207), and that there are no lines in grocery stores (pp. 245–246). At times they also express beliefs in the American superiority, at least with regard to consumer needs. A good example is offered in a conversation in a bakery where Jim realizes that he doesn't have a plastic bag to carry the bread he bought and that the store does not offer one:

Prodavshchitsa: Vy chto, ne znaete, chto u pokupatelia dolzhen byt' svoi paket?

"Saleswoman: Don't you know that customers should have their own plastic bags?"

1-aia zhenshchina: On ne znaet.

"First woman: He doesn't know."

2-aia zhenshchina: On amerikanets.

"Second woman: He is an American."

Muzhchina: U nikh v Amerike vseгда est' pakety.

"A man: In America they always have plastic bags (i.e., everywhere)."

(*Nachalo*, p. 246)

In line with the adventure story discourse, the two protagonists, Dennis and Jim, are also presented as individuals driven by their own wishes and immune to circumstances, able to successfully overcome numerous obstacles, and ready to help and rescue others. In *Nachalo*, Jim literally saves a boy stuck in the elevator (pp. 101–102), while in *Stage 1* the dream of one of the Russian characters to open his own business only comes true due to Dennis' help. The adventure story line is intensified through the introduction of a romantic element into the lives of the American visitors, both of whom are involved with Russian women, while the superiority of America and its men is evident in Jim's winning the heart of his beloved over his Russian rival.

The Russian environment in *Nachalo* is depicted as friendly and sympathetic to American visitors. No one questions Jim's right to speak and to participate in different social networks. In fact, the power balance between the learner and the target language context is reversed: It is not the Russian society that decides on Jim's acceptance; it is Jim who decides who to date, who to be friends with, and who to interact with. This tendency in the story lines is also supported by our analysis of information exchanges in the text: In 38 instances, Jim asks for information 13

times and provides information 25 times, that is, twice as many. In contrast, in *Stage 1* Dennis' negotiation of identity is not always successful and his Russian listeners are not always sympathetic and friendly. In one episode he is unable to convince the owners of his Moscow apartment that he is their American tenant rather than an intruder (pp. 261, 295–296). In another episode, Dennis is questioned by a jealous pseudo-rival, Misha, who thinks Dennis is after his girlfriend (pp. 274–275). Even as a restaurant customer, Dennis, unfamiliar with Russian food, gets into trouble (p. 352). We see these portrayals of miscommunication as extremely beneficial for the learners who need to learn how to negotiate meaning in less than friendly environments.

Overall, we are concerned about the texts' skewed portrayal of the encounter between American and Russian cultures. While economic inequities and lack of consumer goods, or at least of financial resources to purchase them, are undoubtedly an important organizing feature of contemporary Russian life, the interactions in which Russians are continuously stupefied and amazed by American technological inventions or social and gender equality are not singularly representative of the American experience in Russia and may in such capacity oversimplify the situation and serve to reproduce problematic cultural stereotypes.

DISCUSSION

Our analysis draws attention to a number of hidden, that is, unacknowledged, identity options that could be productively explored in the future both by textbook writers and by language educators who, in our view, share the responsibility for raising critical language awareness. To begin with, we believe that additional steps need to be taken to represent the diversity of American learners of Russian who are not necessarily all White, male, able-bodied, or heterosexual. By making White men into the main protagonists, the authors of FL texts offer the language that is pertinent to their, often unproblematic, interactions in the target language society and ignore ways in which social interaction is shaped by gender, race, ethnicity, able-bodiedness, and a multitude of other factors. We argue that it is crucial for all language professionals to recognize that linguistic needs of women and minority members learning a foreign language may at times be different from those of heterosexual White men and to provide these learners with adequate linguistic repertoires that include the means of self-defense against racial and ethnic discrimination or sexual harassment.

Similarly, we advocate for more complexity where potential Russian interlocutors are concerned. At present students are learning how to interact with a particular segment of the target population, namely, White middle-class speakers of standard Russian, but not speakers of nonstandard varieties or L2 users. We fully agree with Cook (in press) on the need to include L2 users as role models for L2 learners.

In the context of Russian, this offers a rich array of possible characters, from American expatriates living in Russia, to Latvians, Ukrainians, or Georgians using Russian as a second language, to other foreign students who may offer the main characters their own perspective on life in Russia. Earlier, we have also argued for expanding the array of the social strata presented in the texts and for wider inclusion of working-class individuals. Where businesspeople are concerned we argued for a more nuanced and balanced portrayal that does not reduce *biznesmeny* to mafia, but shows the achievements of the new economy and women's role in it. Such an approach, which will showcase achievements and not just shortcomings of the market economy, will go a long way toward offering a more balanced portrayal of the Russian-American encounter.

Finally, future texts could also pay more attention to racial, ethnic, and religious diversity in contemporary Russian life. In terms of relevance, three groups may be of interest to American students: Russian Jews, other Russian-speaking ethnic minorities, and Black Russians. Portrayals of the latter group, a minority rarely acknowledged even within Russia, may include not only Pushkin's acclaimed ancestor, Hannibal, but discussions of Russian children and grandchildren of Black American communists who went to Russia in the 1920s and 1930s (cf. Haywood, 1978). The best-known among these grandchildren is Yelena Khanga, a famous Russian journalist, writer, and TV personality. Khanga's (1992) engaging memoir offers a beautiful and poignant example of a multi-voiced consciousness of a Black Russian Jewish woman searching for her roots in the United States. Excerpts from it could stimulate cross-cultural reflections on a variety of subjects, from hybrid identities and ethnicities to race and gender relations in the two societies.

Two objections could be raised to these arguments. The first objection involves the perceived necessity to simplify comprehensible input for beginning learners. Here we argue that inclusiveness does not necessarily involve unmanageable levels of complexity. For instance, to date we have not seen any textbooks that simply allow minority or disabled students to adequately present themselves. Thus, texts could simply start with offering more terms that signify currently "hidden" racial and sexual identities. We also believe that it is particularly important to present potentially problematic situations to beginning students since they are the ones with the fewest linguistic resources and are thus least able to improvise on the spot. The second objection commonly raised to the inclusive approach involves an understandable desire to avoid making students uncomfortable by portraying nonnormative identities or problematic situations. Here we argue that the focus on the typical and normative is also alienating for some students and may hinder their achievement (Kinginger, 2004; Polanyi, 1995; Siegal & Okamoto, 1996; Talburt & Stewart, 1999).

That said, we do not advocate that instances of sexual harassment or racial discrimination be converted into yet another set of textbook dialogs or classroom role plays. An outcome of such an oversimplified approach is analyzed in Durham's (1995) study of a controversy at Yale, where a group of students filed a complaint

stating that *French in Action*, a French textbook and accompanying video, were explicitly sexist and offensive. Durham (1995) showed that, in their interpretation of texts and images, both American professors and students imposed their own culturally informed beliefs and stereotypes on what could be alternatively perceived as an ironic feminist critique of Hollywood's sexual romance narrative and of conventional discourses of masculinity. The researcher places this instance of intercultural misunderstanding within the larger context of differences between American and French feminist thought, arguing that the students had engaged in an ethnocentric reading of the text and—since their teachers did not attempt to counteract such a reading—had lost an opportunity to access important dimensions of French culture and, we can add, acquire important linguistic and cultural resources.

Rather than seeing inclusiveness as a goal, we see it as a springboard for discussions of inter- and intracultural differences in the speech communities in question. We also believe that all learners benefit from discussions of multiple interpretations of potentially ambivalent speech acts, deciding for themselves if a particular utterance should be seen as a compliment or as verbal harassment. In this, we side with Kramsch and von Hoene (1995, 2001), who have repeatedly pointed out that FL study potentially offers a unique opportunity to call into question and reexamine assumptions and beliefs engendered by one's own culture. The authors argue that, in glossing over cross-cultural tensions, FL instruction in the United States promotes biased and ethnocentric knowledge, or "single-voiced consciousness," and does not allow the students to acquire intercultural competence, or "multi-voiced consciousness," crucial in negotiating cross-cultural encounters.

CONCLUSIONS

To sum up, our analysis of two Russian textbooks for beginning learners demonstrated that the main imaginary learner in these texts is a heterosexual White middle-class male who goes to Russia to experience titillating adventures and perhaps even to "educate the natives." The range of his interlocutors is rather limited—they are mostly White middle-class men, as well as women who constitute romantic interests and supportive characters. Of the two texts, *Stage 1* offers the reader significantly more diversity in terms of identity options and presents a more objective portrayal of a language learning odyssey. While *Nachalo* operates through generalization and ethnocentric stereotypes, portraying the main character as the savior of the Russians in need of help, *Stage 1* introduces a learner who is actually in need of help from his Russian friends and in doing so offers learners multiple opportunities to negotiate misunderstandings.

Clearly, this analysis is subject to a number of limitations. Our attempt to offer an in-depth discussion necessarily limited the number of textbooks we were able to examine. In the future, it would be advisable to examine more textbooks, for vari-

ous proficiency levels, and in a variety of languages. At the same time, our preliminary conclusions appear quite generalizable, as they are borne out in other investigations of FL textbooks in a variety of languages (Cook, in press; Kramsch & von Hoene, 2001; Siegal & Okamoto, 1996). Based on the results of our own and other studies, we suggest that FL textbook authors should try and incorporate difficult and unequal encounters which language learners are likely to negotiate in the target language context.

We also urge FL teachers to explore the cross-cultural reflection potential of these difficult encounters, since even the most challenging and insightful materials may be easily misrepresented and oversimplified in careless teaching, while biased and stereotyped representations may turn into great subjects for cross-cultural reflection (albeit at the expense of students losing respect for the text). Consequently, the most promising research direction in our view is not a numerical increase in kinds of texts examined, but a study of how various FL texts are used in the classroom and examination of the impact the textual diversity—or lack of it—has on the students and their language learning and use. The goal of critical pedagogy in L2 and FL education, as conceptualized in this article, is to raise the learners' critical language awareness, to assist in the development of "multi-voiced consciousness," and to help them find discursive means with which they can construct their identities, express their emotions and desires, resist oppression and marginalization, and participate in meaningful interactions with L2 speakers as valid and legitimate interlocutors.

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