

Title: The Use of Geospatial Technology to Augment Russian Language Learning in Beginning and Intermediate Russian

Author: Julia Houkom, University of Pittsburgh

The Modern Language Association advocates teaching language and culture together through interdisciplinary collaborations in order to foster empathy for culturally and geographically different peoples (2007). This research uses geospatial technology to integrate the study of Russian language and culture with geography and modern life vis-à-vis interactive, map-based explorations of Russia. Geographic Information Systems (GIS) allow for the input, storage, retrieval, display, and query of spatial data (Chang 2006; Bolstad 2005; Clarke 2003) and allow the investigators to embed the study of language and culture into spatial, social, and environmental contexts of Russia.

The investigators are developing GIS-based laboratory exercises that address learning objectives suitable for beginning and intermediate students of Russian. For instance, one exercise uses a country-map of Russia with layers for Russian regions, cities, mountains, and bodies of water. Students will collect information about these features by clicking on the geographic features, which work as hyperlinks to photographs and attribute tables, and reading the attributes in Russian. They will answer “where” questions using the prepositional case and describe features using adjectives. The exercise encourages students to produce longer segments of speech, such as sentences, during the early development of their language skills. Intermediate students will for example interactively explore Moscow and click on locations on the streets of Moscow that link to video recordings taken at those places. They will see and hear the recordings and answer “where to” questions using prefixed and un-prefixed verbs of motion.

The investigators will use qualitative research methods to evaluate language skills, the learning of cultural information, improvements in learning activities, and attitudes toward foreign language learning using geospatial technology. This presentation reports the results of this project in progress and suggests that additional teachers should adopt this teaching methodology in order to evaluate its efficacy at a broader level.

Bolstad, P. (2005). *GIS fundamentals: A first text on Geographic Information Systems*. White Bear Lake, MN: Eider Press.

Chang, K. (2006). *Introduction to Geographic Information Systems*. Boston: McGraw-Hill Higher Education.

Clarke, K. C. (2003). *Getting started with Geographic Information Systems*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Modern Language Association. (2007). *Foreign languages and higher education: New structures for a changed world*. New York: Modern Language Association of America.