

Title: Subtleties in Cross-Cultural Proficiency: Measuring the Importance of Sociolinguistic Variables for Study Abroad Learners of Russian
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The Simulated Oral Proficiency Interview (SOPI) has been the subject of numerous linguistic inquiries into the process of second language acquisition during study abroad (e.g. Hammer and Bennett 2003; Vande Berg, Connor-Linton, and Paige 2009). The effects of phonological accuracy in the target language on the students' SOPI scores have not yet been examined, however. As the SOPI raters have native speaker judgments, it is important to uncover any possible effects that accuracy in producing socially salient phonological variables may have. Two of the phonological variables that have been shown time and again to be sociolinguistically meaningful in Russian are palatalization and vowel reduction. Crucially, these are often difficult for native English speakers, but they are extremely common in Russian. This project looks to find if these variables should return as a major area of focus in Russian language classes in the United States.

The sample taken for this presentation includes a total of 12 recorded Russian language SOPI tests (pre-study abroad and post-study abroad for each of six students). There are three groups: (1) students who showed improvement on the SOPI, (2) students who did not show any improvement, and (3) students who remained at the home university and showed no improvement (experimental controls). Approximately 420 minutes of total speech time was analyzed for this project, which was made up of 22 tasks per student and a total of 6,260 tokens. By examining and rating the nativeness of the variables in question for these students, I was able to find that nativeness of palatalization and vowel reduction correlates positively with the SOPI scores received by the students. This project provides valuable insight into what native Russian speakers consider when judging "nativeness" as well as what future Russian language classrooms should look at when teaching students the Russian language.

Hammer, Mitchell R., Milton J. Bennett, Richard Wiseman. 2003. Measuring intercultural sensitivity: The intercultural development inventory. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, Volume 27,4: 421–443.

VandeBerg, Michael, Jeff Connor-Linton, and Michael Paige. 2009. The Georgetown Consortium Project: Interventions for Student Learning Abroad. *Frontiers*, XVIII: 1–76.

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