

## PROFILING GREEK HERITAGE LANGUAGE SPEAKERS IN THE USA AND RUSSIA

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### ABSTRACT

Heritage language studies have been gaining ground in the last decade while those in heritage Greek are in their early stages. The present study reports results from the MIS 5006199 project on Heritage Greek. It aims at initial profiling of Greek heritage language speakers who live in the USA (Chicago) and Russia (Moscow and Saint Petersburg), in order to gain a clearer understanding of their characteristics. For this purpose, we developed an online survey in order to collect information from different generations of Greek heritage language speakers about their backgrounds, attitudes, and goals in maintaining/studying Greek. More precisely, we sought to record the respondents' demographic data, language learning history, self-rated proficiency, language use, and language learning motivational profiles. Eighty-nine (N=89) Greek heritage language speakers living in Chicago (U.S.A), Moscow and St. Petersburg (Russia) participated in the research. The results show that they exhibit defining characteristics found in heritage language speakers. Also, the participants' responses witness diversity, probably caused by various factors influencing their bi/multilingual development, such as the quantity and quality of linguistic input at different period of life as well as the family, the local community and a wider social background.

**Keywords:** Heritage language, heritage speaker, linguistic input, language maintenance.

### INTRODUCTION

An increasing trend in many classrooms around the world is the presence of heritage language speakers. Heritage languages (HL) are spoken by simultaneous or sequential early bilinguals, referred to as Heritage language speakers (HLSs) herein, who are characterized as having a home language which is restricted because of insufficient linguistic input. As a result, HLSs can understand it and probably speak it to some degree but are more proficient in the dominant language of their society (Polinsky 2011). The study of heritage languages is a relatively new field of linguistics. Researchers involved in the field raise two central issues: (a) a definition of characteristics of HLSs in relation to those learning their first (L1), second (SL), or foreign language (FL) and (b) the development of language learning curricula tailored to suit the needs of the particular learners. Even though it draws on research into first language acquisition, bilingualism (as heritage speakers are a subset of bilinguals), and language attrition, there are few research protocols or guidelines for covering the broad range of topics related to heritage language study. As far as Greek heritage language speakers (GHLSs) are concerned, even though there is a considerable number of them in the U.S.A, Australia, Canada, Russia, Germany, this is still uncharted territory and there is an urgent need to develop adequate research tools for collecting data in order to delineate their characteristics and educational requirements. Thus, the purpose of the present paper is to profile GHLSs who live in the USA (Chicago) and Russia (Moscow and Saint Petersburg) and shed light to their specific characteristics.

**LITERATURE REVIEW****Heritage language speakers' characteristics**

The term heritage speaker was first introduced in Canada in mid-1970s (Cummins 2005) but has been gaining ground mainly in the USA since 1990s. According to Montrul (2016), heritage speakers are child and adult members of a linguistic minority who grew up exposed to their home language and the majority language. Also, heritage language learners are speakers of ethnolinguistically minority languages who were exposed to the language in the family since childhood and as adults wish to learn, relearn, or improve their current level of linguistic proficiency in their family language (Montrul 2016).

There appear to be two general HLSs' categories: immigrants' children who were either born in the host country or arrived there in early years, and immigrants' grandchildren who were born in the host country. Thus, the immigrants constitute the first, their children the second and their grandchildren the third generation of heritage speakers (Silva-Corvalan 2003). The second-generation HLSs is characterized by simultaneous or sequential early bilingualism, depending on the time of the initial exposure to both languages. In both groups, however, the heritage language is the weaker one due to the limited exposure and input as well as the shift in the functional needs (the host country language is the formal language of education and the dominant language of the society). This becomes even more evident in the third-generation HSs where language attrition is predominant.

Gavriilidou (to appear) compares the characteristics of HLSs with SL/FL learners' (see table 1) and concludes that they differ both from L1 and SL/FL learners, which leads to their specific educational demands.

Linguistic input	HL	SL/FL
Acquisition age	Early age	Older age
Context	Natural (home environment)	Formal education
Exposure	Oral, natural	Written/oral (literacy)
Linguistic community	Within a linguistic community	Limited linguistic community
Quantity and frequency	Variable	Variable
Quality	Dependent on the context and degree of parental involvement	Dependent on the context

Table 1 Comparison between HL and SL/FL learners' characteristics

On the whole, a common feature of HLSs is the shift from the HL to the official host country functional linguistic dominance. This leads to HL attrition in the areas like phonetics/phonology, morphology, syntax (Au et al. 2002; Keating et al 2011; Laleko 2010; Montrul & Bowles 2009; Polinsky 2008; Rothman 2007), vocabulary (Montrul & Foote 2014), semantics and pragmatics (Montrul & Ionin 2012). To sum up, heritage speakers diverge from native speakers in phonology, lexical knowledge, morphology, syntax, case marking, and code-switching (Benmamoun et al. 2012).

**Heritage language studies**

Recent interest in the HL research is evident particularly in the USA. The studies mainly focus on heritage languages such as Spanish, Russian, Chinese, Polish, Lithuanian (Golebiowski 2004; Li 2006; Macevičiūtė 2000; Mah 2005; Norvilas 1990; Potowsky 2002, 2003; Tomaszczyk 1980; Tamošiūnaitė 2008). Other studies investigate heritage language speaker characteristics and needs (Campbell & Rosenthal 2000; Polinsky & Kagan 2007) as well as characteristics of particular linguistic varieties.

Being a new field of study, it is concerned with collecting empirical data on HLs as well as identifying general theoretical questions relevant to the learning and maintenance of HLs. Thus, a need to do more experimental work with various HLs becomes even more urgent. In order to facilitate research in this area, a collection of data on HLs should include language background questionnaires, proficiency assessment tools, and experimental research tools (NHLRC <http://nhlrc.ucla.edu/nhlrc/research#researchproficiency>).

### **Greek heritage language studies**

So far, research on GHL is fragmented and limited. There are few studies of Greek communities in diaspora (in Australia, see Tamis 1986, 1992, 2009; in Brussels, see Hadzidaki 1994; in Ontario, Canada, see Aravossitas 2010). Symeonidis and Tobaidis (1999) investigated the Greek language varieties spoken in Ukraine by descendants of Greek origin. However, the aforementioned studies do not generally approach their linguistic data from the point of view of heritage language speaker characteristics, with the exception of Aravossitas (2016) who aimed to locate, map, assess, and develop the GHL resources in Canada and to offer an educational program suited to heritage language learners. Only recent research (Karatsareas 2018, to appear a, to appear b) documents the linguistic competence of Greek or Cypriot-Greek heritage speakers, the structural characteristics of different varieties of Heritage Greek and its sociolinguistic status or stance of speakers towards it. Also, Gavriilidou (to appear) discusses how input and language learning experience affect linguistic competence of heritage speakers and argues the necessity for the design and implementation of language learning programs that are attractive to GHLSs.

### **Greek diaspora in the USA and Russia**

By 1990 the U.S. census counted more than 70.000 people in metropolitan Chicago claiming Greek ancestry, approximately one-third in the city and two-thirds in the suburbs. The 2000 census counted 93.140 people of Greek ancestry in the metropolitan region. Community estimates, however, ranged from 90.000 to 125.000 (<http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/548.html>). Greek Orthodox churches started establishing parochial schools in 1908, some of which are full day schools with a bilingual English and Greek curriculum, while others are afternoon and Saturday schools with only a Greek-language curriculum. While the vast majority of Greek children attend the Chicago Public Schools (except for those enrolled in Greek day schools), practically all Greek children attend afternoon (following public school attendance) and Saturday schools, where they learn the rudiments of the Greek Orthodox faith along with Greek language and culture (Kunkelman 1990). There are also numerous cultural organizations and unions promoting Greek cultural heritage and traditions.

On the other hand, according to the 2002 census in Russia, there are 98.000 citizens of Greek descent, most of whom live in southern Russia, while there are 25.000 people in the Moscow prefecture and about 2.000 GHLSs under the jurisdiction of the Greek Consulate in Saint Petersburg (<https://www.elru2016.gr/el/content/istoria-omogeneia>). Greeks have lived in southern Russia from the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC. They are assimilated into the indigenous populations, are descendants of Medieval Greek refugees, traders, and immigrants from the Byzantine Empire, the Ottoman Balkans, and Pontic Greeks from the Empire of Trebizond and Eastern Anatolia who settled mainly in southern Russia and the South Caucasus in several waves between the mid-15th century and the second Russo-Turkish War of 1828-29 (Papoulidis 2011). In former Soviet republics, about 70% are Greek-speakers mainly descendants of Pontic Greeks from the Pontic Alps region of northeast Anatolia, 29% are Turkish-speaking Greeks (Urums) from Tsalka in Georgia and 1% are Greek-speakers from Mariupol in Ukraine

(Khanam 2005). In Moscow and Saint Petersburg, there are a number of organizations which are mainly concerned with promoting Greek traditions and customs for its members by organizing cultural events and meetings.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Instrumentation**

The present study is part of the project which aimed to profile GHLSs, investigate structural and functional differences between GHL varieties, and collect data for the compilation of an online Greek Heritage Language Corpus. The goal of the online survey was to collect information from different generations of Greek heritage language speakers currently living in the USA and Russia, in order to understand their backgrounds, attitudes, and goals in maintaining/studying Greek. More precisely, we sought to record the respondents' demographic data, language learning history, self-rated proficiency, language use, and language learning motivational profile.

To administer the survey, we developed an online tool which allowed us to collect and store responses, and analyze the results. It is based on a survey that investigated the reading skills of HLSs (Jensen & Llosa 2007) and surveys from the National Heritage Language Resource Center (Carreira 2009; Gignoux 2009; Lyutykh 2012; Montrul 2012; Torres 2012), which have a broader scope and include questions about all 4 language learning skills as well as questions on motivation, attitudes, and interaction with the community. Versions in Greek, Russian and English were provided.

The survey contains 29 questions in total. More specifically: (a) 3 questions on demographic information about the participants (age, gender, and the level of education), (b) 6 questions on biographical information related to the contact with the languages they use, (c) 5 questions on language use and preference, (d) 1 question on heritage language instruction, (e) 7 questions on previous exposure to written/spoken heritage and dominant languages, (f) 4 questions on self-rated language proficiency, and (g) 3 questions on their attitude towards the languages they spoke.

Our survey design procedure followed the adaptation protocol of Gavriilidou & Mitits (2016) and included: (a) the translation process – initial translation, translation synthesis and back translation, (b) cross-cultural verification and adaptation – key informants' feedback, focus group remarks and expert committee report and (c) piloting. The SPSS statistical package v.25 was used in order to compute the frequencies of the multiple responses and run multiple dichotomy analyses, and to conduct a reliability analysis. The Cronbach alpha for the 46 five-point Likert scale format items (questions 23-26) was high (Alpha=0.969).

### **Participants**

The study investigated 40 GHLSs from the USA, with English as their dominant language, and 49 Greek heritage language speakers living in Russia and having mainly Russian as their dominant language (N=89). The respondents were found after contacting the Greek communities in the USA (Chicago) and Russia (Moscow and Saint Petersburg). The intent was to collect data from 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> generation heritage speakers and the widest age range and education level feasible in order to investigate the possible effect of this demographics on the Greek language proficiency and other aspects of language maintenance. The participants were informed about the aims of the study and full confidentiality was ensured.

There were 17 male and 23 female participants from the USA and 21 males and 28 females from Russia, whose age ranged from <12 to 55+ (see table 2), with all education levels from primary education to postgraduate degree holders being represented (see table 3).

<12	12-17	18-22	23-28	29-40	41-55	55+	Total
USA							
1	4	1	2	9	20	3	40
2.5%	10%	2.5%	5%	22.5%	50%	7.5%	100%
Russia							
2	0	4	11	17	12	3	49
4.1%	0%	8.2%	22.4%	34.7%	24.5%	6.1%	100%

Table 2 Age range of the participants

Primary	secondary	university	post-graduate	Total
USA				
1	9	16	14	40
2.5%	22.5%	40%	35%	100%
Russia				
2	5	37	5	49
4.1%	10.2%	75.5%	10.2%	100%

Table 3 Education level of the participants

## RESULTS

### Biographical background

Questions on biographical background of the participants revealed that, in the case of the USA, the majority of them were born in the host country while in Russia a larger number came from other countries such as Georgia, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and other former Soviet republics (see table 4).

USA	Greece/other	Total
31	9	40
77.5%	22.5%	100%
Russia	Greece/other	Total
19	30	49
38.8%	61.2%	100%

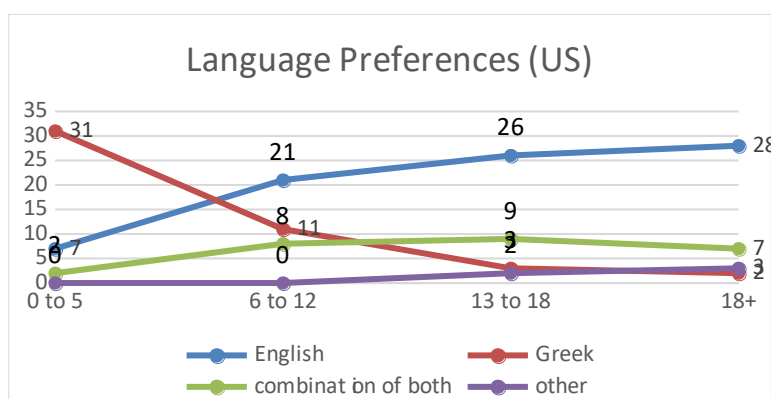
Table 4 Place of birth

Those participants who were not born in the host country had arrived there either at a very early age <14 in the case of the USA or 14+ in the case of Russia. When asked if they had attended school in Greece before immigrating, 25% of those living in the USA had while only 10.5% of those living in Russia responded affirmatively. On the other hand, the participants living in Russia travel to Greece more often (63.3% every year) while half of those from the USA have visited Greece 3-5 times (57.5%). The most evident language biography difference between the two language communities is the language they learned to read in first. The USA participants report an even distribution between English, Greek and both (30%, 37.5% and 32.5% respectively) while the Russian participants overwhelmingly report Russian only (91.8%).

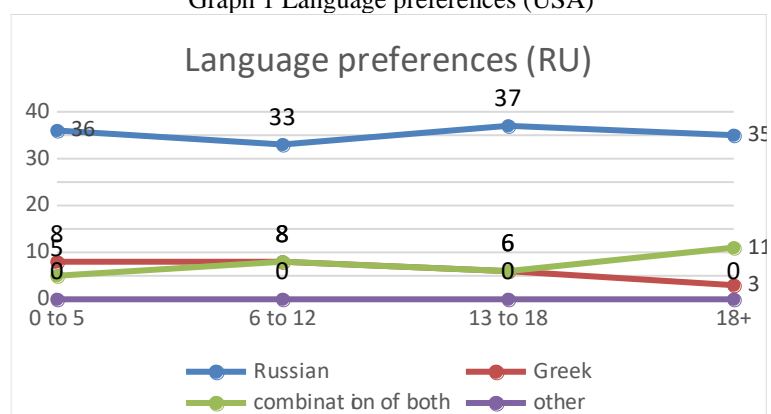
## Language use

The particular questions focus on determining which language(s) they prefer to use and with whom as well as whether those preferences change in different periods of life. The majority of respondents from Russia (81.6%) use Russian most of the time while 18.4% speak the combination of Russian and Greek. In the USA, however, the use of English (60%) and Greek (37.5%) is more balanced. The most striking difference between the two heritage Greek groups is the language they use at home. In the USA 70% of the participants report using both English and Greek and 22.5% just Greek at home whereas in Russia the dominant home language is Russian (59.2%), followed by a combination of Russian and Greek (28.6%). However, when asked which language(s) they spoke with their friends, the answers were similar in both countries, with the host country language coming first and the combination of dominant and heritage language second.

The study produced some very interesting findings with respect to language use preferences (see graphs 1, 2). There is a dramatic decline in the USA speakers' use of Greek as they age. While 77.5% respondents say they used Greek predominantly before the age of 5, only 5% aged 18+ report the same. In Russia, however, only 16.3% used Greek before the age of 5 with the number dropping to 6.1% when aged over 18. At the same time, the number of those who use both languages on a daily basis seems to increase by age before it drops after the age of 18 in the case of the USA, whereas there are more fluctuations in Russia. Also, a number of other languages are reported by Greek heritage speakers living in Russia, such as Pontic Greek, Turkish, German, etc.



Graph 1 Language preferences (USA)



Graph 2 Language preferences (RU)

## Greek heritage language study

The question of whether the participants have studied Greek at a community/church school aimed at examining their possible exposure to formal instruction in the Greek language. It



revealed apparent differences between the two contexts, namely 71% of the participants who live in Russia have never attended such schools while 67.5% of those living in the USA have had more than 4 years of formal instruction into Greek (see table 5).

Have you studied Greek at a community/church school?						
never	1 year or less	2-3 years	3-4 years	more than 4 years	other	Total
USA						
6	3	1	3	27	0	40
15%	7.5%	2.5%	7.5%	67.5%	0%	100%
Russia						
35	6	1	1	1	5	49
71%	12.2%	2%	2%	2%	10.2%	100%

Table 5 Formal instruction in Greek

### Previous exposure to written/spoken language

The next set of questions investigates the exposure to Greek that the participants have had in their lives, mainly to written language which is generally underrepresented in the upbringing of heritage speakers but also to certain tasks and activities which require comprehension and use of spoken Greek.

The question What type of Greek print did you have as you were growing up revealed a most important difference between the two groups of heritage speakers, with 40.8% of those living in Russia reporting that they did not have any compared to the USA speakers who grew up with a variety of Greek print at home, where books, children's books, calendars, dictionaries and religious literature were most widely represented. In the case of Russia, it was books, dictionaries, children's books and magazines that ranked high. The situation with English and Russian print respectively is far more balanced between the two groups. Surprisingly, Greek heritage speakers from Russia seem to have more Greek print at present compared to the USA participants except for children's books, calendars and religious literature.

The most striking differences are found with respect to whether their parents read to them when they were children, with 55.1% of Russian participants reporting that they have never been read to. Among those respondents whose parents did read to them, most were read children's books (22.4%) and books (18.4%). The numbers are very different in the case of the USA with the participants being primarily read children's books (80%), books (52.5%), religious literature (32.5%) and newspapers (17.5%). Both groups provided similar responses to how often they accessed the Internet in Greek, with 25% in the USA and 22.4% in Russia answering frequently, 55.5% and 55.1% respectively responding rarely while 22.5% and 22.4% never do. The number of participants who read in Greek, as the time frame passes, gradually decreases with the exception of Russia where 24.5% of respondents read more than 2 hours a week. With respect to English and Russian respectively, the situation is reverse as 90% in the USA and 63.3% in Russia read more than 2 hours in their dominant languages.

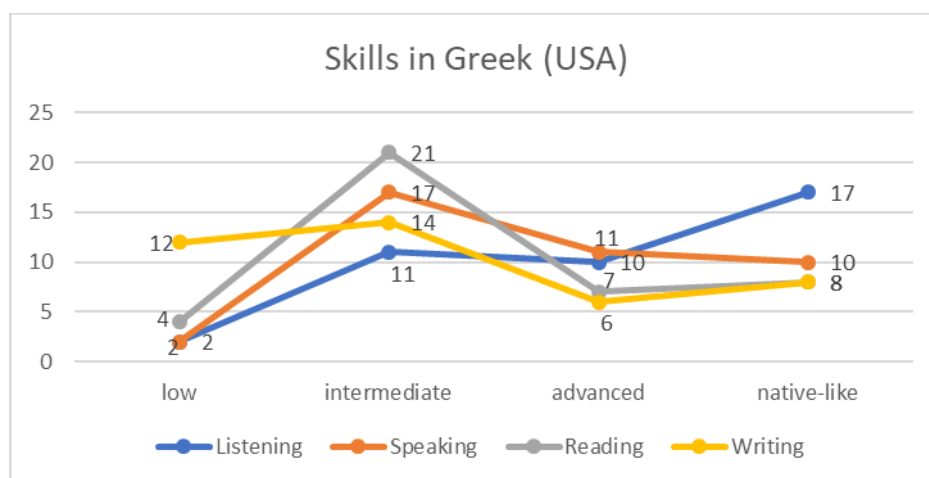
Table 6 shows which activities -involving contact with Greek the participants- have been engaged in in the last 6 months. Listening to Greek music was highest on the list in both countries. While Greek Heritage speakers from Russia spoke more on the phone, their counterparts in the USA attended Greek community related event and watched Greek TV.

Activities done in Greek recently	USA			RUSSIA		
	N	percent	percent of cases	N	percent	percent of cases
Spoken on the phone	39	15.4%	100%	30	12.9%	63.8%
Watched a movie	10	3.9%	25.6%	18	7.7%	38.3%
Written an email/letter	20	7.9%	51.3%	15	6.4%	31.9%
Attended an event	33	13%	84.6%	15	6.4%	31.9%
Listened to music	36	14.2%	92.3%	42	18%	89.4%
Listened to radio	20	7.9%	51.3%	18	7.7%	38.3%
Tweeted/chatted/used Instagram	8	3.1%	20.5%	13	5.6%	27.7%
Read a newspaper	8	3.1%	20.5%	9	3.9%	19.1%
Watched TV	27	10.6%	69.2%	14	6%	29.8%
Visited a website	22	8.7%	56.4%	26	11.2%	55.3%
Used Facebook	18	7.1%	46.2%	15	6.4%	31.9%
Read a book/short story	13	5.1%	33.3%	18	7.7%	38.3%
Total	254	100%	651.3%	233	100%	495.7%

Table 6 Activities done in Greek

**Self-assessment of language skills**

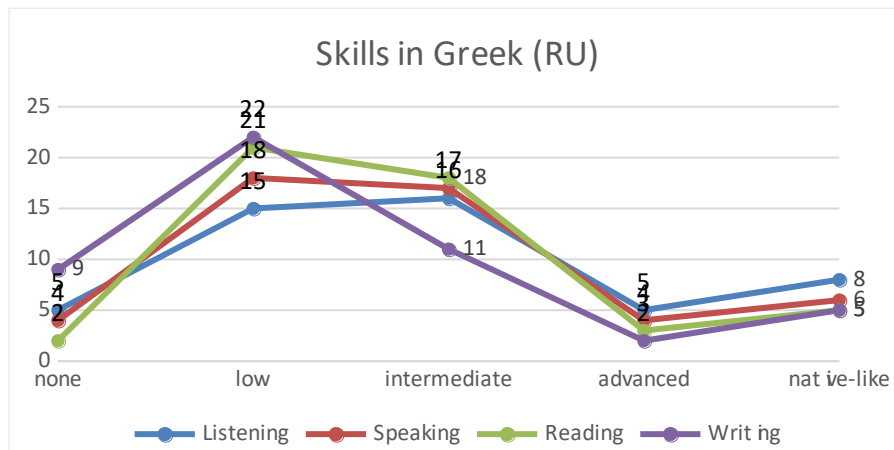
When the respondents were asked to rate their Greek heritage language abilities, a clear trend emerged in both the USA and Russian contexts (see graphs 3,4).



Graph 3 Self-assessed Greek language skills (USA)

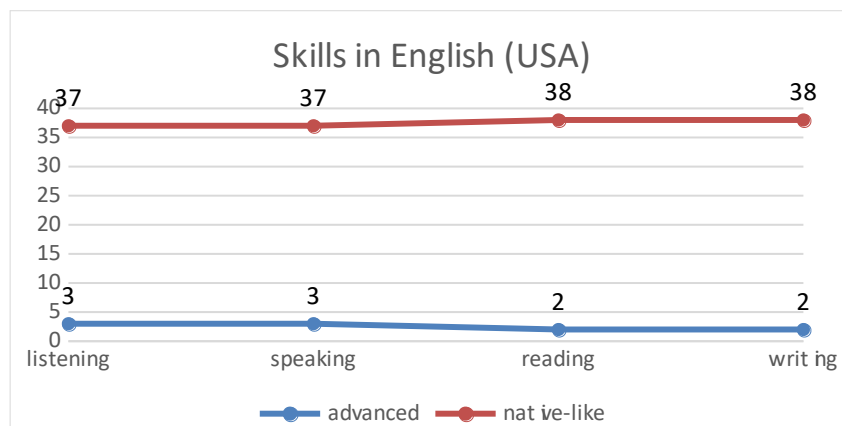
Most respondents rated their writing as the least developed of their skills (low and intermediate 65% in the case of the USA and none, low and intermediate 85.7% in Russia). It was followed by reading (low and intermediate 62.5% the USA and none, low and intermediate 83.7% Russia), speaking (low and intermediate 47.5% the USA and none, low and intermediate 79.6% Russia), and listening (low and intermediate 32.5% the USA and none, low and intermediate 71.5% Russia). An evident difference between the two countries, though, is the very low self-judgment of all the four skills by the participants from Russia compared to their USA counterparts.



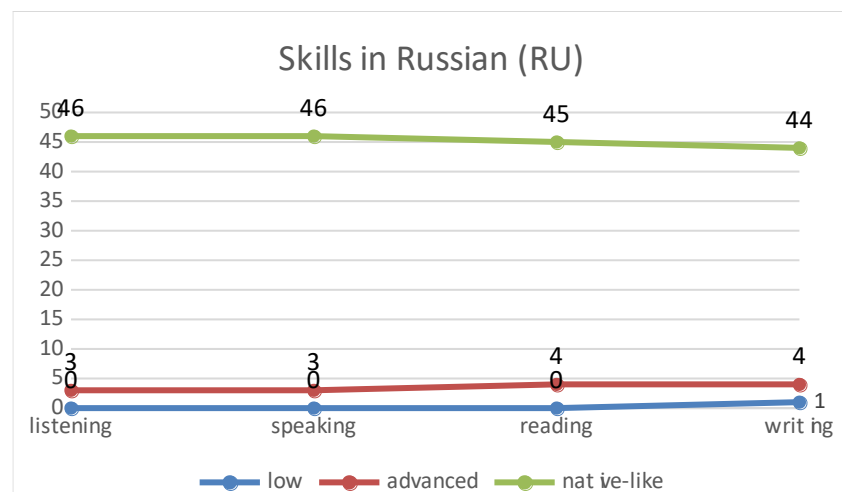


Graph 4 Self-assessed Greek language skills (RU)

When asked to self-rate their English/Russian language skills, the respondents provided very similar answers depicting equal distribution of responses. They do not differentiate much between the four skills in English/Russian, and the vast majority feels they have mastered them (see graphs 5, 6).



Graph 5 Self-assessed English language skills



Graph 6 Self-assessed Russian language skills

The genres that most respondents from the USA find most difficult to read are academic/technical papers, poetry, novels, theatrical plays, non-fiction and textbooks while flyers, dictionaries, letters and emails were rated as being easy to understand by most

respondents. The Russian participants' responses appear to differ to a certain degree in that they report as the most demanding: religious literature, theatrical plays, followed by academic/technical papers, novels and poetry. On the other hand, there is an overlap as far as the easiest reading is concerned.

When speaking in Greek the respondents from the USA find it relatively easy to very easy to accomplish most of the tasks, such as telling a joke, a fairy tale, a story, using polite language or being rude. Talking about current events or debating an idea show a moderate level of difficulty while only giving a formal presentation is rated as challenging. The spread of responses across the difficulty continuum shows a completely different trend in the case of Russian GHLSs who report finding all of the above tasks impossible or very difficult to accomplish (with the exception of using polite language). Overall, most respondents agreed that all tasks on the list were extremely easy for them to accomplish in English/Russian. Finally, the USA GHLSs were more confident in their listening skills, and judged most of the tasks listed (see table 7) relatively easy to extremely easy to accomplish, except for news reports. On the other hand, for most tasks there was an even distribution of responses in the case of Russia.

country	Humor		News reports		TV shows		A formal talk		Conversation if eavesdrop		Movies		Song lyrics		
	1	0	0%	3	7,5%	1	2,5%	2	5%	1	2,5%	2	5%	1	2,5%
USA	2	3	7,5%	3	7,5%	2	5%	3	7,5%	1	2,5%	0	0%	3	7,5%
	3	8	20%	17	42,5%	10	25%	12	30%	3	7,5%	9	22,5%	11	27,5%
	4	13	32,5%	6	15%	14	35%	11	27,5%	13	32,5%	14	35%	13	32,5%
	5	16	40%	11	27,5%	13	32,5%	12	30%	22	55%	15	37,5%	12	30%
	Total	40	100%	40	100%	40	100%	40	100%	40	100%	40	100%	40	100%
	Russia	1	7	14,3%	8	16,3%	9	18,4%	14	28,6%	6	12,2%	7	14,3%	6
2		11	22,4%	14	28,6%	12	24,5%	13	26,5%	12	24,5%	15	30,6%	6	12,2%
3		10	20,4%	10	20,4%	5	10,2%	8	16,3%	8	16,3%	5	10,2%	16	32,7%
4		10	20,4%	10	20,4%	11	22,4%	7	14,3%	11	22,4%	10	20,4%	8	16,3%
5		11	22,4%	7	14,3%	11	22,4%	7	14,3%	12	24,5%	12	24,5%	13	26,5%
9		0	0%	0	0%	1	2%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Total		49	100%	49	100%	49	100%	49	100%	49	100%	49	100%	49	100%

Table 7 Understanding Greek

### Attitudes towards Greek

This last set of questions investigates the attitude that GHLSs have towards their heritage language. When asked what language(s) they preferred to speak, both groups offered similar responses with the majority preferring their dominant language (English/Russian) whereas about 1/3 of the respondents from both countries favored speaking the mixture of both (see table 8).

What do you prefer to speak?				
Greek	English	a mix of both	no preference	Total
2	22	13	3	40
5%	55%	32.5%	7.5%	100%
Greek	Russian	a mix of both	no preference	Total
4	30	13	2	49
8.2%	61.2%	26.5%	4.1%	100%

Table 8 Language preference

The overwhelming majority of participants from both countries have their family's support in maintaining Greek (97.5% in the USA and 95.9% in Russia). Similarly, almost all of them want to teach their children Greek (100% in the USA and 95.9% in Russia).

## DISCUSSION

The most obvious difference between the two groups of GHLSs can be put down to the different linguistic and cultural contexts. The participants from the USA, especially second generation, are mainly simultaneous bilinguals who have been exposed to both languages since birth and have been given opportunities to stay in contact with their heritage language continuously and more systematically. Actually, data from the Greek heritage speakers of Chicago in this study and Karatsareas' study (to appear b) on Cypriot-Greek confirm previous research (Cho et al. 2004, Montrul 2008, 2016 Schwartz 2004, Unsworth 2005) showing that there is a shift in dominance from the heritage language to the majority language in the transition from the first to the second generation of speakers and a possible loss of the heritage language by the third generation. Actually, a characteristic of heritage speakers reported in the literature is that heritage language use diminishes with age depending on whether or not the HLSs are offered formal education in the language. In the case of the USA, it occurs particularly after the age of 18 as a result of interrupted formal schooling in Greek but also because of language preference in various contexts (family meetings, conversations with friends, socializing, etc.).

On the other hand, GHLSs living in Russia have more complex language biographies as there are cases of Pontic Greek, other Greek language varieties, Ukrainian, Turkish, etc. as L1, with Russian as L2 and Greek L3, either in the order of acquisition or prevalence. As a result, they can be described as sequential bi/multilinguals who have not always been given sufficient linguistic input and formal instruction opportunities to help them retain a certain level of proficiency in Greek as heritage language.

Another observable variation between the two groups has to do with the quantity and the variety of written Greek they have been exposed to since early years. Here, the amount and type of linguistic input can be attributed to parental involvement, whose importance has been documented in the relevant studies (see for example Li 2006). In other words, it is the close family that provides both spoken and written contact with the heritage language and the quality of linguistic input is a determinant of how proficient a heritage speaker may become (see Gavriilidou, to appear). Also, current contact with Greek is reflected in different interests and opportunities that our participants have.

Self-rated proficiency as an approach to measuring the level of language acquisition has met with criticism, in that it requires linguistic and metalinguistic awareness. Also, there is the case of what Polinsky (2011) calls "misjudgment": speakers tend to assess their knowledge as lower

or higher showing an inverse correlation between a person's self-assessment and their actual proficiency. However, studies have shown that heritage speakers' self-assessment correlates very well with independent measures of proficiency (Montrul et al. 2010). The language skills recorded in our study follow the order of an L1 acquisition process of a child naturally learning the language of the home. Namely, the participants rate their linguistic abilities regressively starting from listening, speaking, reading and writing in both the USA and Russia. The USA GHLSs rate their proficiency higher than their counterparts in Russia, which is consistent with their responses reflecting more frequent language use, formal instruction, and exposure to both written and spoken language. Moreover, the phenomenon of SL taking over HL (Campbell & Rosenthal 2000; Polinsky & Kagan 2007) is documented by very high self-rating skills in English and Russian respectively by both groups of GHLSs. Similarly, oral production in particular tasks in their dominant languages poses no problem for both groups, still there seem to be further evidence that more limited contact with spoken language in the Russian context leads to lower self-rated speaking ability.

The next difference related to the type of printed language exposure and reading skills can probably be attributed to the role of the church and formal instruction in Greek, which is more evident in the USA than in Russia.

Lastly, the most striking similarities are found in the positive attitude towards Greek as heritage language by both the USA and Russian heritage Greek speakers and their strong desire to maintain it, although there is a clear preference for the everyday use of dominant language which is yet another common dominator shared by many heritage language speakers reported in the literature (Polinsky 2011). The positive attitude towards heritage language, which is viewed as a symbol of heritage speaker's ethnolinguistic identity, culture and history that has to be maintained is also found in the study by Karatsareas (2018) who investigated attitudes towards Cypriot-Greek and Modern Greek.

## CONCLUSIONS

Heritage language research is still in its early stages. The study of Greek as a heritage language is even more limited. The present study is an attempt to offer an initial profiling of GHLSs with varied linguistic biographies living in two very different contexts (the USA and Russia). The results show that they exhibit defining characteristics found in heritage language speakers. Also, the participants' responses witness diversity, probably caused by various factors influencing their bi/multilingual development. The next steps will be profiling GHLSs worldwide with the use of the e-questionnaire in countries such as Germany, Belgium, The UK, Australia, etc. Coupled with a Parental Involvement Questionnaire, it should shed more light on the possibility of GHLS maintenance.

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