

# **High School Students Registered in Ukrainian Language Arts – What Practitioners and Learning Resource Developers Should Know**

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**Foreign Language Reading Anxiety: Korean as a Foreign Language in the United States**

## **Abstract**

This study examined various characteristics of high school students, including students' interests and motivations, cultural background knowledge, academic ability, Ukrainian language ability, program entry characteristics, challenges and needs for support, and social or cultural issues that need to be considered for the Ukrainian Language Arts program to be delivered effectively. Triangulation of student survey responses, interview responses, and teacher focus group findings yielded generalized findings as well as trends and recommendations for educators. Implications for development of instructional materials for the Ukrainian Language Arts program are discussed and may apply to other lesser-used language learning contexts.

## **High School Students Registered in Ukrainian Language Arts – What Practitioners and Learning Resource Developers Should Know**

### **Introduction**

With global trends of immigration and transnational employment, lesser used languages are found around the world, sometimes reviving a pre-existing diaspora and sometimes initiating one. The Ukrainian community was established in the 1890s when Canada offered cheap land to farmers in what is now the prairie provinces. After decades of community school programs in rural and

urban areas, renewed by two additional waves of immigration in the 1920s and after World War II, a Ukrainian Bilingual Program (UBP) was established in 1974.

Following the immersion model initiated in Québec by Wallace Lambert in 1965, the UBP offers 50% instruction in grades K-6, 30% – at the junior high level through Ukrainian language arts and a variety of optional subjects such as drama or home economics, while in high school, a series of Ukrainian Language Arts (ULA) courses is offered in grades 10-12. With 85% of the annual registration of 3,000 students in the program not coming from Ukrainian speaking homes, the UBP has long struggled to create appropriate learning resources for teaching the language and content areas (Bilash, 2002).

Enrollment was also supplied by two additional small waves of immigration – in the early 1980s from southern Poland (from areas formerly belonging to Ukraine) and, more recently, from Ukraine (since independence in 1991). Although the independence of Ukraine opened new possibilities for creative collaboration and a resurgence of language skill, contemporary Ukrainian was different from the somewhat anglicized and dated Ukrainian spoken in Canada. Determining which language to code in texts was one issue facing the program, but was somewhat manageable through editors. The language of the classroom was an additional challenge, and even with the offer of summer bursaries to study in Ukraine, most of the teachers in the program were children of the post-WWII immigration and at the stage of life when they could not leave their young families for intensive study abroad.

By the time of the silver anniversary of the UBP, 21<sup>st</sup>-century technology had opened new possibilities for more learning resource development, as had the promise of a new second languages initiative in Alberta; however, before creating such costly items, funders insisted on a study of characteristics of current students. The study discussed in this article served that purpose.

## Literature review

While educators recognize the need to structure instructional programs in accordance with various characteristics of their students, the review of research literature points to the dearth of studies on student characteristics, findings from which could ensure that language programs respond to students' needs, interests, strengths, and weaknesses and do not waste scarce funds. A review of the few studies that seemed applicable revealed four clear facts: students placed high value on grades; student attitudes and motivation influenced purposeful and practical content and instruction; the strategies students use affect the way they experience learning a second language as well as their perceived success rate; and students crave understanding content and recognize teachers who can help them do so, rather than just cover the content for the sake of the exam.

Some researchers examined student characteristics in the context of online learning, often at the higher education level (Sundal, 2003; Wojcechowski & Bierlein Palmer, 2005). The 2003 Sundal study brings forward educational concerns about generically designed online programs that leave little room for individualized curricula tailored toward personalized learning needs. Wojcechowski and Bierlein Palmer (2005) found significant relationships between students' course grades and their grade point average (GPA), attendance at a class orientation session, the number of previous course withdrawals, and other performance scores, all of which suggested that *students placed high value on grades*.

Several research studies point to the need for educators to consider student characteristics, including ethnic/heritage identity (Berardi-Wiltshire, 2012; Henkel, 2009; Magnan et al., 2012), when designing highly *motivating* instructional curricula (Banciu & Jireghie, 2010). Hoyt-Oukada's survey (2003) of attitudes, perceived needs and interests of high school students in studying French at the secondary level concluded that a curriculum should provide students with motivating, purposeful, and practical content and instruction. In an investigation into the *motivation* of secondary school students in the south west of England to learn a foreign language, Williams, Burden, and Lanvers (2002) discovered a decrease in motivation with age, and

higher level of motivation among girls than boys. Hänze and Berger (2007) examined cooperative learning, motivational effects, and student characteristics in an experimental study, in which the comparison between cooperative instruction and traditional direct instruction of physics revealed differences in students' experience of autonomy, competence, social relatedness, and degree of intrinsic *motivation*.

When considering individual student characteristics in the language classroom, some studies focused on the use of instructional strategies to optimize the instructional process. The National Capital Language Research Centre (1996) carried out a three-year investigation of the *learning strategies* high school students reported using for learning a second language. Since students of all languages need to be consciously aware of the strategies they use to learn a language, teachers are recommended to build on students' existing knowledge of strategies, as increased metacognition of how strategies work across skill areas may help students make appropriate strategy choices. In another study (2000), this group concluded that learning strategies should be incorporated into lesson design and instruction. Netten and Germaine (2005) emphasize the importance of instructional strategies that focus on language use. The National Capital Language Research Centre (2000), Butler and Jiyoung (2010), and Castaneda and Rodriguez-Gonzalez (2011) all recommend that students should be involved in the process of assessment.

Smits, Field, and Mayers (2004) asked students in Alberta what and how they experience learning and classroom conditions. Students' words signal that *rushing through curriculum and preparing for exams are not the same as achieving understanding*, which requires time and opportunity to engage in inquiry and to question and have conversations with teachers and peers. Although the study was not able to uncover the entire story of students' lives, for example, how home life, part-time work, and culture and gender issues affect students' learning experiences, it did confirm that teachers must be seen by their students as being not only informed in their subject area, but also sensitive to students' needs. Mostly, it suggests that teachers must be people who have time to listen to their students. The paucity of research on student characteristics in Ukrainian

bilingual programs necessitated the given study that also informs the field of bilingual education comparatively.

The study discussed in this article used the research findings discussed above and the contextual specifics of the UBP as a conceptual platform for the mixed methods project research design. The overall purpose of the study was to investigate individual characteristics of high school students in the ULA program in order to determine if commonalities could be identified for the purposes of developing appropriate learning resources for this population.

### **Methodology**

Three research tools were employed for this study and all procedures passed and followed guidelines of the University ethics review board.

*Student Surveys (Grades 9-12):* A survey was developed in English, administered by a trained research assistant to classes with certain questions being read aloud while students checked off appropriate areas, and took less than one class period to complete. It was completed by 86 students in ULA.

*Interviews with Selected Students (Grades 9-12):* in-depth face-to-face one-on-one interviews were held with four to six students in each grade of each school offering ULA (students were selected by the teacher; the student sample was to represent both genders equally and include a distribution of academic ability – approximately two students each with high, medium, and low grades in the course, and approximately equal numbers of students who do or may use Ukrainian in their homes and those who do not). The researchers conducted the interviews according to times and locations determined by the schools. Each 20-25 minute interview took place during Ukrainian class in another part of the school over a one-week period. Written parental consent was obtained before interviews were conducted. Interviews were tape-recorded so that the interviewer could concentrate on comments made by the student and on probing for details about the student's needs, strengths, weaknesses, and interests. The content of the individual tape was summarized in writing and presented for analysis. The researchers' field notes also included a paragraph of 'impressions' about each student and

interview following the guidelines of Chiseri-Strater & Stone Sunstein (1997). Due to limited access to the schools, no member checks were conducted.

*Focus Group Interviews:* Nine teachers in three school districts participated in two focus group interview sessions. The first lasted approximately three and a half hours, the other approximately two hours. The researcher explained the research project and provided teachers with questions before each session. The sessions were tape-recorded, and a summary of the discussion was sent to participants by e-mail within two weeks of each meeting (member check). Teacher participants were then asked to make changes, corrections, or additions via e-mail (Miles & Huberman, 1994). A follow-up phone call to each participant ensured that their concerns or observations were included.

**Study Participants.** All secondary schools offering Ukrainian Language Arts in three school jurisdictions were invited to participate in the research study. All accepted and were guaranteed anonymity and confidentiality for their students, teachers, schools, and jurisdictions. In total, 86 students and nine teachers participated. In order to solicit ideas from incoming high school students, it was also decided to include Grade 9 students and their teachers in this study.

Thirty-seven males and 49 females participated in the study (27 students from Grade 9, 15 from Grade 10, 24 from Grade 11, and 20 from Grade 12). Their average age was 15.6 years. Students reported that they had been studying Ukrainian for 9 years (5 students), 10 (22 students), 11 (17 students), 12 (14 students), or more years (27 students). The average number of years that the 86 participants have studied Ukrainian was 11.3 years. Given the small number of teachers in the UBP in Alberta, demographic data about the teacher participants would deny them and their schools anonymity, thus no detailed data about the teachers are included in this article.

**Data Analysis Procedures.** Student survey and interview data were coded for analysis. Feedback from focus group interviews was summarized, sent to teachers for member checks, and revised

accordingly. All of the data were triangulated, analyzed, and interpreted to generate a profile of characteristics of high school students registered in ULA – their interests, background knowledge, and language strengths and weaknesses (Bilash, 2005).

## Findings

The study results are presented in this section as synthesized responses for seven themes that need to be considered for ULA to be delivered effectively: overall perspectives, motivations, students' interests, cultural background knowledge, academic ability, Ukrainian language ability, and challenges and supports.

**Overall Perspectives:** The overriding and most consistent observation made by the students, teachers, and researchers was the great range of abilities and interests of this relatively small population. As one of the ULA teachers put it, the students' abilities “*are across the board*” in all areas. The extreme range of student ability in a class was also captured by students and suggests the need for a great variety of differentiated resources. One Grade 12 student states:

*In high school the teacher(s) teach to the students who have a great understanding of the language and look to them for understanding before moving on; leaving the students who don't understand even more so in the dark. I feel that students who come into the program and are fluent should challenge the final and call it a day; letting the students who need to learn have a better chance.* (Original emphases are underlined.)

and a student participant in Grade 11 reiterates:

*We spend a lot of time covering material that those who know Ukrainian already know it . . . and the kids who don't know Ukrainian won't get it anyway! I mean, if they haven't got it yet – after all of these years . . .*

**Motivations.** Drawing upon responses to various parts of the student survey, the student interview protocol and focus group teacher interview questions, students reported that they are taking ULA for five major reasons: social-friendship network, integration, academic assets, marketplace advantages, and heritage and identity.

*Social-friendship network:* The majority of students have been in the UBP since kindergarten and have a strong network within the

program (The program is also old enough now that it has established its own traditions, e.g., *matura* [graduation ceremony]). While students state that it was their “*parents who made the decision to register*” them in the UBP initially, many note that they are now personally responsible for choosing to be in it. Teachers’ responses were reflective of those given by the students.

*Integration:* Some students have come from Ukraine (or a country in the former Eastern Bloc) and use ULA to help them integrate into public education. “*I learn about English through Ukrainian in this program.*”

*Academic assets:* Both teachers and students see ULA as an asset in terms of boosting their grades/average or as a prerequisite for university or both. “*I use Ukrainian at home so I do quite well in ULA. This’ll boost my grades and make up for one subject that is a little weaker. (laughs)*”

*Marketplace advantages:* When asked how they thought that Ukrainian would help them in their future, a large number of the students indicated that being able to speak Ukrainian “looks good on a resume” and they believe that it will help them get a job. “*Another language makes a good impression on an employer,*” said one student, typical of most responses, even though most of these same students were not able to explain concretely how they might make use of the language in the workplace. Other students hoped to tie Ukrainian in with their career, even though they did not yet know what they want to do. Some cited the fact that there are Ukrainians all over the world, thus the language would facilitate communication internationally, and especially with people from Ukraine. Others felt it would help them learn other languages, or at least understand peoples from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

A few students were highly skeptical about how Ukrainian could possibly help them in the future, and were unable to generate any ideas in this regard. This is, perhaps, another indication that the ‘mythos’ regarding the advantages of learning another language helps justify them staying in ULA by claiming that it will help with their careers, but with little real perception or awareness of how. Or, perhaps, there is a need for explicit instruction on the value of Ukrainian in the marketplace and one’s personal life.



*Heritage and identity:* Students expressed a very strong connection between studying Ukrainian and associating with people and events of personal relevance – the desire to speak Ukrainian with one’s family and the maintenance of cultural traditions were very important. Others wanted to travel, and saw Ukrainian “*coming in handy*.” Many were excited about the prospect of working in or with Ukraine. A few even expressed a real fear of forgetting the language they have spent so much time learning. These varied responses confirm a personal investment in students’ Ukrainian language identity.

Underpinning all of the reasons is a desire to learn to speak Ukrainian, a strong identity with their Ukrainian (Canadian) cultural heritage, and a pride in it. In the written surveys, 35% of students reported that they planned to study Ukrainian at university, a sure sign of a commitment to improving their language skills and increasing their knowledge of Ukrainian-related topics. The vast majority of students (92%) indicated that they would like to visit Ukraine. At the same time, a slight majority of students indicated that they would *not* like to go to Ukraine on an exchange (51%), while nearly the same number (47%) would consider participating in an exchange program in Ukraine.

**Students’ Interests.** Study participants were also asked to identify topics they considered interesting in their ULA classes. According to an open-ended question on the survey and student interviews, students reported the following topics or themes as being the most interesting to them: history and famous people, culture, current events (especially during the Orange Revolution in November-December, 2004), reading stories, music videos, posters-projects/group plays, hands-on activities, sports, grammar, pen pals, handwriting, practical/functional, personal relevance, variety, and field trips. According to teachers, additional topics that learners like were: clothes-fashion, family dynamics, media and Internet, and relationships. Learners at all grade levels reported that any topic that is overdone or repeated every year or every second year loses its appeal, even if it was interesting the first time they encountered it. “*We keep repeating the same stuff every two OR three years. We need more topics.*” Such information would be invaluable to resource developers

who need to be aware not to overrepeat topics, and when some topics do reemerge, to ensure that different types of activities are associated with each. For example, honouring the *Holodomor* (famine-genocide of the 1930s) is acknowledged as an annual event in ULA; how it is revisited could vary.

A few students noted that they thought that their/the teachers should all have been to Ukraine and be more familiar with language used in Canada and Ukraine. “*Teachers should know both kinds of Ukrainian. Sometimes they ask the kids from Ukraine how to say certain words.*” A contrastive linguistic activity such as addressing language variations with reference to English (e.g., reminding them how words and accents vary between British, Australians, New Yorkers, Atlantic Canadians) might alleviate this critique (Bilash & Tulasiewicz, 1995).

**Students’ Cultural Background Knowledge.** Information about students’ cultural background knowledge came from students’ responses to questions about first, second, and third language abilities, their involvement in activities that relate to other cultural groups, as well as comments made by students or teachers during interviews.

When addressing the question of the languages spoken, the majority of participants (77%) claim English as their mother tongue; however, almost all students in the survey and interviews made reference to some Ukrainian heritage. One student identified French as a mother tongue, while all others indicated that a Slavic language was their first language.

Students also indicated that they are involved in the following ‘cultural’ activities outside of the classroom: sports (hockey, boxing, karate, volleyball, soccer, track), dancing (Ukrainian, ballet, jazz, hip-hop, Latin), choirs, Ukrainian community youth groups, on-line poker, drinking. The activities appear to be either those of mainstream middle class Canadian youth or those offered in the Ukrainian Canadian community.

**Students’ Academic Ability.** Academic ability is a difficult construct to measure. In this study, it was inferred from surveys and interviews.

Almost all of the students interviewed reported that they are satisfied with their grades in ULA. However, a few students indicated on the survey that their ULA grade was decreasing their GPA and thus would not be continuing in ULA the following year.

Based on the number of students aspiring to go to university or another post-secondary institution and the teacher feedback, the students taking ULA appear to range in academic ability from very able scholarship winners to students whose GPAs will enable them to pursue post-secondary studies at colleges or institutes in Alberta, to those who may require upgrading to continue studying in post-secondary institutions. These results might align with those of Smits et al. (2004) wherein they note that students feel they are rushed through material and pressured to study for exams without really understanding the content.

**Students' Ukrainian Language Ability.** The findings in this category were generated from self-reporting on the survey as well as responses from interviews with select students and teachers.

In order to discern their communicative comfort with some language learning tasks, the students were asked to rate their enjoyment of a list of activities typically carried out in the Ukrainian classroom or in the community according to a four-point scale of 'always like,' 'almost always like,' 'sometimes like,' and 'never.' When combining students' responses 'always' and 'almost always' a distinct pattern emerges of the type of activities that they not only like and feel comfortable doing, but perhaps also are able (and less able) to do (Table 1).

**Table 1: What tasks students like**

<b>I like:</b>	<b>Always</b>	<b>Almost always</b>	<b>Total</b>
to play games in class	56%	27%	83%
that my teacher knows me in this course	55%	23%	78%
pair work	36%	38%	78%
group projects	38%	37%	75%
learning Ukrainian songs and listening to Ukrainian music	41%	22%	73%
to get personal feedback from my teacher about my work	40%	33%	73%
to attend Ukrainian events outside of school	45%	24%	69%
to learn about important people and events in Ukrainian history	33%	34%	67%
to hear explanations	38%	28%	66%

to have some direction from the teacher	28%	38%	66%
to listen to presentations by guest speakers	34%	31%	65%
to see words and pictures of what I am learning	22%	41%	63%
to learn using a computer	34%	27%	61%
to have a textbook or workbook with clear instructions	26%	20%	56%
to be directed by the teacher	17%	37%	51%
to be able to create my own assignments	16%	26%	42%
to read	14%	27%	41%
to work on individual projects	12%	27%	39%
to learn grammar	12%	17%	29%
to interview people and learn about them	5%	23%	28%
to memorize	6%	21%	27%

When looking at the activities in rank order, one notes that the activities liked most are those that provide the most social support and the ones liked least are the most cognitively demanding or require the most independent and unpredictable language use. A second group of tasks, the ones that students liked in the midrange, are all comprehension-based. The activities that students liked least are largely meant to be done independently.

Without teacher assistance only about one-third of the students thought that they could create or produce language on their own (orally or in writing) or understand written prose. Only a quarter thought that they could understand oral or written information and fewer than a sixth thought that they could engage in any oral language activity at ‘normal’ speed.

Answers to two survey questions helped reveal how much time students hear and use Ukrainian in and out of school on a daily and weekly basis and may relate to perceptions of language ability. Findings indicate that 47% of students only hear Ukrainian within and outside the classroom 5-10 hours per week, and 42% of students use Ukrainian within and outside the classroom under 5 hours per week. Thus, resource developers and instructors must consider that most students in the Ukrainian Bilingual Program are learning in a foreign language environment or in a context with minimal environmental support (Stern, 1983, p. 16).

Students were also asked to describe the kinds of activities in which they engage both in and outside of school. Study findings reveal that for most students Ukrainian is used primarily in school (97% in the last week and 99% in the last month), although some students use some Ukrainian with friends (67% in the last week and 80% in the last month), when listening to music (55% in the last week and 80% in the last month), within their families (56% in the last week and 70% in the last month), and at church (45% in the last week and 58% in the last month).

The combination of responses to these questions allows for extrapolation to recommendations for improvement of the ULA program and gives a picture of the abilities of students in high school ULA, most notable that the majority of them have very limited contexts in which to “use” Ukrainian, even within the classroom. The activities that fall within their comfort zone are largely teacher- or

peer-supported or comprehension-based (as opposed to production-oriented). They crave opportunities to talk, intuiting that this will be a slow process of finding what they have been taught in their memory and figuring out how to apply it within reasonable timelines so as not to impede an ongoing conversation (Chandler & Sweller, 1991; Kahneman, 1973). Whereas print or media material might spark ideas for oral discussion, it is the oral discussion itself that the students seem most to need and desire and how to structure and support this development must also be developed. Thus, new learning resources should offer students access to more authentic oral and written texts, a greater variety of real and imagined contexts in which to use and create in Ukrainian, and more scaffolded learning tasks to support the learning of concepts alongside opportunities to use them (Bilash, 2005).

**What Students Can Be Expected to Know and Able to Do.** At all grade levels, the tasks that most students ranked the highest were the same: learning a role in a play, learning to play a game in Ukrainian, understanding a *kazka* [Ukrainian fable], and writing a self-introduction in an e-mail. Similarly, the tasks which students had the least confidence completing were the same at all grade levels: writing an essay in Ukrainian and conducting an interview in Ukrainian. More students were more confident completing more tasks in Grade 11 and then again more so in Grade 12. For example, many Grade 11 students had high confidence in their ability to understand a news article on Canada and understand a phone conversation while many Grade 12 students also had high confidence in their ability to give directions to the bus stop to a stranger in Ukrainian and make up a dialogue-conversation in Ukrainian.

When asked about what helps them learn, students reported that the teacher's role in the learning process is very important and positively seen, especially when the teacher gave personal feedback (73%), explanations (66%), direction (66%), arranged for guest speakers (65%), and presented visuals along with oral input (43%). In the open-ended questions and interviews, a few students noted that occasionally teachers were not well-prepared and sometimes lacked sufficient contemporary vocabulary or comfort in the language.

Teachers added that when students were learning content about current events, history, traditions, or literature, their thinking was really stretched. *“Explanation must be meaningful, not merely taught with no context. Students usually can remember short explanations that are applicable to a certain context.”* Known as cognitive load or how much information can be processed at one time and remain in short- and long-term memory, this “stretching” of student memory or demand on their learning attention needs to figure prominently in the amount of content selected, structuring, sequencing, and pacing of lesson plans as well as the structuring and scaffolding of learning activities and the selection of resources for them (Chandler & Sweller, 1991). This is likely to mean covering less content in any one lesson. As one teacher put it, it is *“better to cover less but have them remember something than cover everything but have them remember nothing.”*

**Students’ Challenges and Needs for Support.** Students indicated that many aspects of Ukrainian were difficult for them and some students expressed that, despite their successful grades, they were disillusioned with how little they can do in Ukrainian, especially in oral communication, after over a decade of studying the language. This lack of confidence and inability to assess their own abilities needs to be considered by resource developers. It might also be offset by the Ukrainian Language Entrance Examination for International Students administered by the Ukrainian Language Education Centre of the University of Alberta, Canada, and Ivan Franko Lviv University, Ukraine. This measurement of Ukrainian language proficiency can provide Grade 11 and 12 bilingual students with attestation of sufficient language proficiency to qualify them for acceptance to study at a university in Ukraine. Additionally, this assessment tool is intended to empower students with an international credential for their educational portfolio, akin to those of France’s *Delf* and Germany’s *Zertifikat Deutsch*, encourage them to take ownership and pride in the growth of their language development, and increase the attractiveness and enrollment in Alberta’s UBP (Shyyan, 2011).

According to student surveys, grammar proves to be the most difficult aspect of learning Ukrainian at all grade levels and includes everything from tenses to declensions and adjectival agreement.



Teachers confirmed this, adding that it is the application of grammar to speaking that is the biggest problem for their students. *“While some students pick up grammar indirectly, others need direct teaching.”* Although students have been exposed to Ukrainian since kindergarten and had direct grammar instruction, their grammatical acquisition” (or “use” when expressing themselves in speaking and writing) seems *“not to have advanced beyond what they had when they were in Grade 2”* (Sokolowski, 1982). Given contemporary research on teaching form (Berns, 1990; Ellis, 2006; Savignon, 1991; van Patten, 2003), it may be that there has been too much emphasis on form instruction and not sufficient on developing communicative competency.

In addition to observations made about grammar, teachers expressed a great concern over the limitations of their students’ vocabulary. *“They cannot express themselves, even if they are able to understand something they read or are read to. They do not use the language. They are not exposed to the same phrases/vocabulary on a repeated basis in any of the materials.”* Teachers also noted that students had trouble if content was not highly contextually supported: *“Any explanations that are given must be given in a context to help them understand.”* *“They usually remember short explanations that are applicable to a certain context.”* These comments and similar ones from students suggest a need to revisit the provincial Program of Study and emphasize scaffolding in instruction. The fact that a generic approach to curricula in all second languages has been adopted in the province ignores Liskin-Gasparro’s research (1982) that Germanic and Slavic languages take longer for English speakers to learn than Romance languages (Bilash, 2005).

For the most part, teachers feel that their secondary students’ Ukrainian language ability would improve if they had contact with the language outside of school. *“A trip to Ukraine would be ideal, but so would involvement in Ukrainian youth organizations.”* Developing a system whereby students could exchange e-mails in Ukrainian would also be advantageous.

Finally, teachers also felt that *“students who come from Ukraine need to learn that there is more to learning than just language and that even if the teacher speaks Canadian Ukrainian s/he still has something to teach them!”*

**Limitations of the Study.** The following limitations should be taken into consideration when interpreting the study findings. It is

hoped that teachers selected students from the three categories of strong, medium, and weak for the interviews so that the voices of a representative sample of all students in ULA can be heard in the interviews and thus be reflected in the recommendations. Also, due to the guidelines of Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy and the participating school jurisdictions, it was not possible to obtain any course grades for participating students. Finally, when the occasional contradictions occurred between answers in the student survey and those in the interview, the interpretation favoured the interview data and considered them more accurate because there were opportunities to probe for more precise understanding.

### **Trends and Recommendations**

This section of the article presents both a series of trends noted in the changing population of students taking ULA and a set of recommendations about enhancing instruction through developing appropriate learning resources.

Fifteen years ago, students in ULA would have had only basic knowledge of computers, the Internet was in its infancy, access to Ukraine was restricted, Canadian television and pop-culture were slowly becoming more globalized, and reality TV was being born. The break-up of the Soviet bloc, the streamlining of technology, the blossoming of the information age and the trends in globalization have had a tremendous influence on Canadian high school students today, no less those in ULA. Overarching study findings point to several trends or changes that may be of use to administrators, resource developers, and teachers:

- Extreme range of student ability within any one class
- Disillusionment of native-speaking learners
- Disillusionment of many learners, despite their good grades
- Students' perception of poor organization or lack of continuity when there is no 'textbook'
- Students' perception that there is too much content repeated every year and, hence, no sufficient variety
- Students are media-savvy and technologically literate, often much more so than their teachers

- Strong desire to learn about contemporary Ukraine, in particular youth culture and popular media
- If students do not get good grades they may well choose not to continue their studies throughout high school or thereafter
- Potential rift between students and teachers if the teachers do not seem attuned to the language and terminology used in contemporary Ukraine.

With the opening of Ukraine, students in ULA are aware of having opportunities to travel freely to Ukraine and to be able to use the language in ways previously not conceived of – for study, employment, tourism, etc. They are very eager for more information about such opportunities. Since the time that the research for this paper was conducted, several student exchanges have been initiated with high school students in Ukraine and research is underway as to the intercultural competency needed and being developed (Hayduk, 2012; Shyyan, Dunn, & Cammarata, 2013). These topics offer refreshing directions for resource developers.

The positive attention that Ukraine received during the international coverage of the Orange Revolution has increased general public background knowledge and interest about Ukraine. Thus, many students requested more information about current events in Ukraine, as well as continued, but not redundant, coverage of key historical events. To do so may also require revisiting Alberta's Program of Study and explicitly creating outcome links in this area.

Students are all media-savvy and, with globalization, young people have opportunities to learn about trends in pop-culture throughout the world. This generation of digital natives is drawn to music from around the world. Watching and listening to music videos was a positive activity and resource seen by students in all grades. Access to them and more of them along with activities for vocabulary development and culture learning would be positively received.

Technology has evolved to make communication throughout the world not only possible and quick, but also simple. Today's teens have the skills to use this technology – MSN Messenger, Skype, and email can enable synchronous and asynchronous interaction. The Internet as a source of information on all topics imaginable should be

better utilized in classes as should movies and audio creations. Students need but a few minutes to learn how to use the technology, and then time and structured activities to be able to benefit from it. Schools need to provide support in terms of fonts and firewall examination to enable this type of learning, and teachers need to explore blending online learning and face-to-face communication (Blake et al., 2008; Pellerin & Montes, 2012; Tochon, 2013). Perhaps, teachers also need to become more aware of what to watch for in terms of misuse or abuse of Internet sites. Furthermore, teachers may be required to preview sites linked to potential assignments to ensure language and literacy appropriateness as well as content.

Based on all of the data gathered in this research project – from students and teachers – a profile of the overall range of student ability in ULA in each grade is proposed in Table 2 for each skill area according to the ACTFL Proficiency guidelines (ACTFL, 2012). The majority of students in ULA appear to be at novice to intermediate levels in listening, speaking, reading, and writing, with some native speakers<sup>1</sup> being in the advanced to advanced-plus range. Considering the broad range of students' ability levels and the native speakers who are found in each class, one can understand the teachers' frustration in teaching ULA and the disillusionment of many students with their own ability and progress.

**Table 2: ULA students ability levels**

Skill area	Proficiency descriptor of lowest ability level students in ULA	Proficiency descriptor of mid-range ability level students in ULA	Proficiency descriptor of highest ability level students in ULA	Native speakers
Listening	Novice-	Intermediate-	Intermediate-	Advanced

<sup>1</sup> We note that the term 'native speaker' is somewhat tenuous in diaspora communities. The longer a child was educated formally in one's mother tongue, the greater is the expectation of native-like fluency over time. Due to the social and media influences in minority language settings, Valdés (2000) has described individuals raised in homes where the dominant language of the region is not spoken or not exclusively spoken as 'heritage language speakers.'

	High	Low Intermediate- Mid	High	
Speaking	Novice- Mid	Novice-High	Intermediate- Low	Advanced- Plus to Superior
Reading	Novice High	Intermediate- Low	Intermediate- Mid	Advanced to Advanced- Plus
Writing	Novice High	Intermediate- Low	Intermediate- Mid	Advanced to Advanced- Plus

On this note, it may be worth referring to the ideas put forward by Kagan and Dillon (2001), who describe some differences between native speakers and heritage language speakers according to three communicative modes: interpersonal, interpretive, and presentational. The interpersonal mode focuses on face-to-face oral and written communication, primarily with individuals who have personal contact. The interpretive mode focuses more on the receptive communication of oral and written messages such as taking notes from a written text or lecture. The presentational mode expands the range of possible audiences for spoken and written communication – from the familiar to the formal. Due to political conditions in Ukraine, many of the present-day ULA teachers did not have access to ‘contemporary’ Ukrainian society and language in their formative years or until recently. As a result, it may be that some teachers of ULA who are themselves heritage language communicators have not developed sufficient experiences in all of these modes. In order to maintain the interest and contribute to the education of heritage and native speakers, the teachers’ comfort in all of these modes and knowledge of contemporary Ukraine will be imperative.

Education has become increasingly more directed by standards and thus, competitive. Students are more strategic about the courses that they take, knowing that they do not want to

jeopardize their GPAs. As has already been stated, reports from students and teachers suggest that the new Program of Study may have to be revisited in some areas so that all of the expectations are not only realistic but satisfying to students. Otherwise, the future of ULA may be at risk; sufficient students will not register in it.

At the same time, high school students crave more and more personal human contact and attention. With possibilities of creating new personas in the anonymity of on-line interaction (Sundal, 2003), a recent Alberta study reported that young people *need* to have human contact (Smits, Field, & Mayers, 2004). ULA high school students appear to be reasonably well-grounded in this regard.

The ULA program would significantly benefit from development of resources that integrate the aforementioned findings and advice as well as like studies that would examine the contemporary conditions and future prospects of Ukrainian language instruction in Canada and abroad.

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