

# NARRATIVES OF NOT BELONGING: THE SYMBOLIC AND FUNCTIONAL MEANING OF LANGUAGE USE IN THE RELATION OF RUSSIAN AU PAIR MIGRANTS TO THE RUSSIAN- SPEAKING COMMUNITY IN GERMANY

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**On the basis of theoretical approaches to ethnic group formation and belonging, this article examines how Russian au pairs in Germany relate to the Russian-speaking migrant community in the context of their migration processes. It shows how au pairs use their bilingual skills as an emblem of identity but also as a tool to establish social relationships. At the beginning of their stay au pairs use their native language to draw on the Russian-speaking community, explore their host city, and get social support during their au pair year. In later stages of settlement au pairs, who may enroll in university or enter highly skilled work, emphasize social relationships with German citizens and migrants of the same socioeconomic background. In biographical narratives they seek to distance themselves from the Russian-speaking community by creating intragroup boundaries and rejecting interest in speaking Russian or socializing with Russian speakers. They use their German-language skills as markers of education and upward mobility in order to position themselves as members of society without any of the negative attributes commonly ascribed to members of the Russian-speaking community.**

**Keywords:** Migrant community; Bilingualism; Au Pairs; Russian Migrants in Germany; Belonging; Boundary Making

Ethnic neighborhoods, such as Chinatown and Little Italy, are understood to serve migrants' need for spatial closeness with members of their own ethnic group, culture, and language. One of the largest minority language groups in Germany, Russian-

speaking migrants<sup>1</sup> have created their own communities, such as Berlin's "Charlottengrad" and many other unnamed neighborhoods. Russian-speaking migrants in Germany have developed a visible ethnic infrastructure, which includes cultural and religious groups, print and online media, television channels, shops, travel agencies, restaurants, clubs, and discos (Dietz 2000:646; Savoskul 2005:75).

Although the immigration of ethnic Germans from Russia to Germany is a well-known phenomenon in Russia, many newly arrived Russian au pairs<sup>2</sup> in Germany are quite surprised to learn how many other Russian speakers are living in (even smaller) German cities. Alina, one of the au pairs I met during their first week of au pairing, told me how astonished she was when she walked through the city for the first time, saying: "Everywhere you hear Russian." Another interviewee, Dar'ia, stated that "you meet Russians through Russians," meaning that the Russian speakers the au pairs first met in public spaces introduced them to their friends and relatives, many of whom also speak Russian and are of similar age. While Russian speakers of the same age are important contacts in the early phases of migration, au pairs gradually detach from these peer groups over the course of their settlement in Germany (compare also [Tkach] 2014 about Russian-speaking au pairs in Norway). Taking this observation as the point of departure, this article focuses not on the experience of working as an au pair in a German family but rather on the relationship of these young women to the local population over the course of their migration process.

Critiquing views of migrants as homogeneous, many authors argue that migrant networks and their consequent making of boundaries with other social groups cannot be explained by ethnicity alone without acknowledging the impact of other social categories, especially education (Dahinden 2013; also Epstein and Kheimets 2000; Zhou and Kim 2001; Cardu 2007). Russian au pair migrants' relationships with the Russian-speaking community are significant to the path of upward social mobility—from being an au pair to studying and then entering highly skilled work—that au pair migrants follow over the course of their migration process. Expanding on the finding that au pair migrants who have lived in the country for some time tend to distance themselves from other Russian speakers, I investigate how their biographical narratives incorporate their cultural and educational backgrounds in belonging—or not—to Russian-speaking communities. Based on theoretical frameworks that examine the formation of ethnic groups through boundary-making processes

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<sup>1</sup> The term "Russian-speaking migrants" is chosen instead of "Russian migrants" to signify that many members of the community originate not in the Russian Federation but in other states of the former USSR and are not officially considered ethnically or nationally "Russian."

<sup>2</sup> My sample of Russian au pairs consists of university graduates, who mainly use the au pair stay as a substitute for student exchange mobility, which is not accessible to them either because their home universities did not participate in exchange programs or they could not afford to study abroad. Au pair migration, although officially defined as a form of cultural-exchange mobility, eventually leads to other forms of immigration, such as when au pair workers decide to settle in the receiving country to go to university, find regular skilled work, or get married. Au pair programs allow young foreigners between the ages of 18 and 25 to live with a German "host family" for up to 12 months, babysitting and doing housework. Interviewees of my sample did their au pair stays in several different cities and villages dispersed all over Germany.

(see Wimmer 2008) and the individual identification as belonging to (ethnic) groups (see Pfaff-Czarnecka 2013), this article will discuss the heterogeneity and internal differentiation among Russian-speaking migrants in Germany. I will show how the native language (Russian) and the second language (German) are narratively defined by au pair migrants as markers of shared or divergent social positions in relation to co-migrants and the wider receiving society.

The article begins with a discussion of the question of individuals' belonging to migrant communities from a theoretical perspective. After a short methodological introduction, I provide a brief overview of the different groups of Russian speakers in Germany, with a special focus on their immigration status. Finally, I examine how au pair migrants position themselves in relation to Russian-speaking communities. In the first part of my analysis of au pairs' encounters with Russian-speaking communities, I analyze data from interviews with several au pairs in the first stage of their migration process—namely, the beginning of their au pair stay—as well as data from participant observation at au pair meetings. The second part of my analysis focuses on the narratives of three interviewees who had entered Germany several years before as au pairs and stayed on for education and work, reflecting on the relation to co-language communities over the course of their migration.

## **THE MEANING OF ETHNIC COMMUNITIES IN THE PROCESS OF MIGRATION**

Migrant communities are voluntarily formed ethnic groups that typically consist of social networks of individuals who live in the same residential area. These ethnic networks satisfy specific needs of migrants. Friedrich Heckmann (1992) notes that social, cultural, religious, and political self-organization provides newly arriving migrants with much-needed support during the first stage of settlement in the form of information, accommodation, employment, and products and services catering to migrants' needs. Because the shared language, culture, and religion provide psychological support for migrants who feel alienated in their host society, they form social groups that serve as an important source of identity.

According to Andreas Wimmer, the formation of social groups along the lines of ethnicity inevitably involves ethnic boundary making. Ethnicity—which is defined as “a subjectively felt sense of belonging based on the belief in shared culture and common ancestry” (Wimmer 2008:973)—is constructed with reference to cultural practices that are considered distinctive for an ethnic group, such as language, rites, social norms, values, and common descent. The process of ethnic boundary making involves “acts of social classification and collective representation” and “scripts of action,” the latter of which allow individuals to determine how to relate to individuals identified as in- or out-group members and thus to build specific everyday networks and relations (975).

A common mother tongue is often the foundation of a community; language is both a requirement for membership in a group (Mamadouh, Beck, and Schrijver 2011) and a social marker of group membership. Language, therefore, is a source as well as

an “emblem” (Bailey 2001:192) of social identity, which signifies boundaries to other groups: “One’s language of choice or accent inform others of one’s affiliation with a specific speech community and/or one’s ethnic origin; they also signify interest in forming and maintaining social relationships” (Remennick 2005:7).

Alejandro Portes and Richard Schauffler in their study of immigrants in the United States argue that there is a strong trend toward language assimilation from the first to the third generation of immigrants, often leading to the extinction of the language of the sending country by the third generation (1994:643). The authors conclude that only in places with a high concentration of immigrants will the language of origin survive past the first generation (659). Learning the language of the receiving country is relevant not only in terms of economic participation; in the American context learning the use of English is interpreted as a marker of citizenship, representing national unity and allegiance to the country (642).

Benjamin Bailey’s study of second-generation Dominican Americans shows that language can function as an emblem of cultural or ethnic identity but also as “a tool used to instantiate multiple, shifting alignments and oppositions that are situationally activated or backgrounded vis-à-vis other individuals or groups” (2001:192). This study shows that black Dominican migrants use the Spanish language in order not to be identified as black Americans. The language of their parents’ country of origin is their resource and “primary means to display an ethnolinguistic identity that can counter phenotype-based ascriptions” (204). Therefore, the language of the country of origin becomes a marker of ethnic origin and a tool to draw a boundary with others. Above that, the Spanish language can also be used to draw intragroup boundaries among Spanish speakers, as second generation migrants mock the language use of more recent immigrants to differentiate themselves from newcomers (204). Ethnolinguistic identity is a “discursive, interactional negotiation of identity” (206), because identity has to be established through communication in a specific language.

For migrants of the first generation, like the au pair migrants researched in this article, the individual’s command of language often changes during the process of migration and provides opportunities to become a member of other social groups and construct one’s identity in terms of group membership. Heckmann has noted that, ideally, migrants detach from their ethnic group and develop social relations with members of the receiving society over time, by entering the educational and employment systems and by moving to other neighborhoods in the course of social upward mobility (1992:116). However, H el ene Cardu (2007:436) argues that in order to enter the skilled employment market migrants have to become members of networks that facilitate access to work organizations. This requires the continuous learning of cultural codes linked to work and the reevaluation of other group memberships, especially that with their ethnic group. In this process the individual’s sense of belonging to specific social groups as an important element of their own identity may change. According to Joanna Pfaff-Czarnecka, “[b]elonging is an emotionally charged, ever dynamic social location—that is: a position in social structure, experienced through identification, embeddedness, connectedness and attachments” (2013:13). Individ-

uals identify themselves as belonging to a specific social group by using biographical narratives that emphasize a certain commonality with that group, that is, a “perception of sharing ... a common lot as well as cultural forms (language, religion, and life-style), values, experience, and memory constructions” (14). Thus, a sense of belonging develops when individuals identify as members of one group because they assume that they share commonalities with that group, which are expressed in the collective performance of practices that are distinctive for this group, such as language use.

## METHODOLOGY AND SAMPLE

The empirical data presented in this article are based on 16 biographical interviews with young women from Russia born between 1978 and 1988. Interviewees were recruited through networks of Russian-speaking migrants in Germany, through contacts with au pair agencies, and through snowball sampling. Interviews were conducted in both Germany and Russia, mainly in the German language, sometimes in English, and in one case in Russian through an interpreter.

At the time I interviewed them two women were still living in Russia preparing for their au pair stay. They were interviewed in Russia and subsequently moved to Germany as au pairs. Four women were interviewed in Russia who had returned to Russia right after their au pair stays or after having studied and worked in Germany some time after their au pair phase. In Germany three women were interviewed who were working as au pairs at the time of the interview, and seven women were interviewed who had remained in Germany after their au pair stay.

For simplicity's sake, the current and former au pairs who are the subject of this article are referred to as “au pair migrants” (including re-migrants to Russia) to reflect the fact that they originally came to Germany as au pair workers, although later they attained the visa status of educational, labor, or marriage migrants.

The primary data were collected using narrative biographical interviewing, which aims at generating biographical accounts that cover entire lives or particular life phases by stimulating narrations instead of asking closed questions. This means that interviewees were not asked about their relationships with co-language migrants, but accounts about co-language migrants appear as part of their larger biographical narrative of the migration process.

In addition to conducting these interviews, I collected data through participant observation at monthly “au pair meetings” of ten au pair workers, most of whom were Russian. The meetings were hosted by a local au pair agency. After the meetings, the au pairs and I went to a restaurant or nightclub together. I also met four other Russian au pairs regularly during their leisure time. Participant observation allowed me to watch how au pair migrants communicated and interacted with each other and with other individuals.

The interviews were analyzed using a mixed methodology consisting of hermeneutic sequential analysis conducted within a transnational researcher group (Ameilina 2010). The analysis aims at revealing collective biographical interpretation pat-

terns applied by interviewees to explain, legitimize, and orient biographical decisions. Thus, biographical interpretation patterns give an insight into the perception of biographical problems and their corresponding orientations. More precisely, based on the biographical narrations we can interpret how interviewees discuss their relation to other Russian-speaking migrants in Germany in order to define their own position in the receiving context by constructing commonality and difference.

## RUSSIAN-SPEAKING IMMIGRANTS IN GERMANY

Russian speakers represent a group within the migrant population in Germany that is highly diverse in terms of immigration pathways, ethnic composition, professional and educational background, life stage, and regional origin. However, what they all have in common is their mother tongue and the fact that they originate from one of the now-independent countries of the former Soviet Union.

The number of individuals currently residing in Germany who speak Russian as a mother tongue has been estimated at 4.5 million (Dück 2013). According to political definitions which ascribe different ethnicities to these immigrants, three major groups can be distinguished: 1) ethnic Germans and their relatives; 2) Russian Jews; and 3) ethnic Russians.

The largest number of Russian-speaking immigrants in Germany are the descendants of ethnic Germans, who are often termed "Russian Germans" (*Russland-deutsche*). After the dissolution of the Soviet Union between 200,000 and 400,000 ethnic Germans, now officially referred to as "resettlers" (*Aussiedler*), returned to Germany every year (Bade and Oltmer 1999). In response to the decreasing absorptive capacity of the German labor market (Dietz 2000:644), new immigration policies were adopted in 1993 to limit resettler migration to 220,000 individuals per year. These new policies also introduced the new category of "late resettlers" (*Spätaussiedler*). While Russian-speaking resettlers immigrated to Germany from all former states of the Soviet Union—that is, the Russian Federation and the members of the Commonwealth of Independent States—most of the late resettlers since the late 1990s have come from Kazakhstan (Fischer 2009). Resettlers and their relatives were granted German citizenship, and at first they received social support in the form of unemployment pay, language courses, and housing to promote their integration, but such benefits were reduced during the 1990s (Bade and Oltmer 1999:33).

The late resettlers among the Russian-speaking immigrants have come to the forefront of public discourse and relevant research in the area of migration studies, with a particular focus on how these immigrants integrate into the receiving society. It has frequently been observed that although young Russian-speaking immigrants meet native Germans in school or at work, they tend to socialize with each other in their spare time and are segregated from cohort members of the host society (Dietz 1999; Eckert, Reis, and Wetzstein 1999; Walter and Grübl 1999). It has also been noted that deskilling and poor language skills impede educational achievement and labor market integration, which is exacerbated when Russian speakers are concentrated in residential enclaves (Dietz 1999; Mammey 1999; Vogelsang 2013). In addi-

tion, the German media portray young male Russian resettlers as prone to alcoholism, drug abuse, unemployment, and delinquency. By the end of the 1990s many of these young resettlers had experienced discrimination and negative stereotyping in public discourse and the media (Wehmann 1999) and felt unwelcome in Germany (Dietz 1999:173). Because of their poor German-language skills, their German ethnicity was called into question, meaning that language was taken as the primary marker of ethnicity (Eckert et al. 1999:197). Migrants who speak Russian as their main language often refer to themselves as "Russians" (Walter and Grübl 1999) and are referred to as such by society, although they have immigrated from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Ukraine, and other countries of the former Soviet Union and belong to different ethnicities. The general public perceives resettlers as "Russians" rather than as Germans. This indicates that the "mastery of the German language is the most important requirement for social acceptance and the 'official criterion of integration into German society'" (Darieva 2005:160–161). Thus, in the German context the use of the Russian language is interpreted as an indicator of failed integration.

Jewish Russian speakers from the states of the former Soviet Union started to immigrate to Germany in the early 1990s as "quota refugees" (*Kontingentflüchtlinge*), with 205,674 Jewish immigrants coming to Germany between 1993 and 2012 (Bundesministerium des Innern 2014:80).

The third group of Russian speakers includes those who have come to Germany for education, work, or family reunification since the early 1990s (but not those accompanying an ethnic German migrant). Because there are no statistical data on this group, their number is difficult to specify, but it has been estimated that there are about 350,000 ethnic Russian immigrants living in Germany (Dück 2013:79), among them au pairs, who have an annual influx of approximately 1,000 individuals (Bundesministerium des Innern 2014:55).

Although there are no statistical data available, previous research shows that au pairs from postsocialist states are very often young women with university degrees who mostly come from villages or cities other than capitals or metropolises (Hess 2009; Burikova and Miller 2010; Rohde 2014; Tkach 2014). All of the women interviewed in this study had been enrolled in university prior to their au pair work and more than half of them graduated before the au pair stay. These women mostly come from educated but not wealthy families and were often raised by single mothers. Many of the former au pair workers interviewed for this study became (temporary) migrants, as they stayed on in Germany to enroll in university and/or enter the skilled-labor market. Other au pair workers returned after the au pair phase or later on to Russia, where they also took up highly skilled jobs.

## AU PAIRS' ENCOUNTERS WITH RUSSIAN-SPEAKING COMMUNITIES

Most of the au pairs in this study learned German prior to their au pair stay, in school and/or at university, and therefore did not need to depend on Russian speakers to communicate. However, the shared mother tongue for many au pairs seems to be a

“tool” to easily make peer contacts at the beginning of the au pair stay. In the case of au pairs the functional support of the ethnic community in terms of communication, information, accommodation, and so on, as suggested by Heckmann (1992), may not be relevant. Contacts to co-language migrants for au pairs in the first stage of their migration process are important, rather, in building a local peer group.

Spoken language is the primary marker with which newly arriving au pairs use to identify migrants who speak their language. There are three ways in which Russian-speaking au pairs normally make contact with members of the Russian-speaking community in their area. The first and most common way is for au pairs to go to the city center in small groups during their spare time. Talking to each other in Russian, they accidentally attract the attention of other Russian speakers, who then approach them or vice versa. A second (and rarely used) way is for individual au pairs to use social network services (such as Odnoklassniki and VK) to find other Russian speakers in their area. The third way is by going to places that are known to be frequented by Russian speakers. Most au pairs are not familiar with the institutions of the Russian-speaking community at the beginning of their stay. The first time they accidentally meet other Russian speakers is when they attend language courses, take sports classes (especially dance and fitness classes), or join religious groups.

Only in rare cases do au pairs, who are usually in their early twenties, develop intergenerational relations, such as to older Russian-speaking women. Mostly, au pairs engage with Russian-speaking migrants of their own age. Peer contacts are often the result of male Russian speakers’ courtship behavior. Au pairs perceive dating and marrying within the language community as a common practice among young Russian speakers in Germany, but they usually avoid choosing a co-language partner. To au pairs, dating Russian speakers is an ambiguous biographical decision in the context of their migration process. On the one hand, they particularly appreciate Russian-speaking men’s intensive courtship—being taken out to dinner, being taken out for a ride in the man’s car, being shown the city and the region, being given presents, and so on—if they have no other people with whom to spend their leisure time. This also shows that peer relations between au pairs and Russian-speaking men in Germany are regulated by heteronormative gender roles. On the other hand, being with Russian speakers all the time is regarded as a hindrance to practicing German, when speaking the language was their main reason for becoming an au pair in the first place, as all interviewees made quite clear. At several of the au pair meetings I attended, some women gossiped about a Russian-speaking au pair from Ukraine who not only had been placed with a family where the mother was a native speaker of Russian, but who also had a Russian-speaking boyfriend whom she had met through this family at the beginning of her stay. She was presented as an example of a “failed” language learner because she did not dare speak German, whereas the other au pairs proudly began showing off their newly acquired language skills, including many colloquial terms, not long after arriving. This shows that the choice of language is used as an emblem (cf. Bailey 2001) of educational identity. While the use of Russian signifies the cultural or ethnic belonging, the use of German is interpreted by au pairs as a marker of educational success during the au pair stay.



Many of the au pairs I interviewed emphasized that they wanted to meet German-speaking peers during their stay but that this was very difficult to achieve because they never had the opportunity to meet German natives of their own age, as friends and family members of their au pair family were mostly older, and the only German natives they talked to at the beginning of their au pair stay were the members of their au pair family. The Russian-speaking community thus serves the dual purpose of providing space for au pairs to spend time away from the family and of being a source of social support in times of conflict with the family. Some au pairs also benefit from the social support of the Russian-speaking community by turning to their Russian-speaking acquaintances to get advice, borrow money, or find accommodation if they want to leave their au pair family.

I found that former au pairs start to break away from their first peer group in Germany after the au pair stay as soon as they enter the educational system or the regular employment market in Germany, a finding that is supported by Heckmann's (1992) model of migrants' successful integration process. Denoting the impact of shared educational background on the formation of peer groups, former au pairs soon start to establish social relationships with individuals they meet at university or at work who have the same educational background, be they native Germans, Russians, or migrants of other cultural backgrounds. It is through these individuals that they build new, mostly German-speaking or bilingual peer groups with whom they spend leisure time and from whom they receive social support.

During interviews with those au pair migrants who had resided in Germany for some time, it became clear that rejecting their belonging to a purely Russian-speaking migrant group and the infrastructure provided by the Russian-speaking community was the narrative core strategy to position themselves within the receiving society and thus construct intragroup boundaries (cf. Bailey 2001; Wimmer 2008). It is important to note that the interviewees classified Russian speakers as a single homogenous group with distinctive practices and attitudes. This narrative construction of Russian enclaves allows au pair migrants to position themselves in relation to this group of Russian speakers. When the au pair migrants referred to Russian speakers, the usually used the term "Russians," with an emphasis on the plural: "There are many Russian men here" (Alisa); "I also have some Russians among my friends" (Anastasiia); "...to get into contact with Russians" (Nina). The term "Russian" is used to produce commonality, with language serving as the central medium through which the ethnic group of "the Russians" is constructed, a strategy that runs counter to the ways in which ethnicity is ascribed politically. Thus, "Russian" is constructed as an ethnolinguistic identity denoting a social group whose ethnic identity is signified by the common language of its members (Bailey 2001:205) and by the fact that they all originated from a (former) republic of the Soviet Union.

The au pairs I interviewed for this study constructed "Russian Germans" as a subgroup of the larger group of "Russians." For example, Mariia told me that she had met a man who was "Russian—Russian German"; Dar'ia stated that she had met men who were "Russian German"; and Elena, who is married to a resettler, said, "My husband is ... a late resettler, a Russian, so to speak, a Russian German." Au pair migrants

distance themselves from “the Russians” in Germany by constructing a subgroup of “Russian Germans,” who are characterized by a special immigration status, special rights that come with it, and, more importantly, a distinctive social position in the receiving society. Evidence of this strategy is for example found in the narrative of my interviewee Alisa, who stated, “There are many Russian men here, but they don’t have proper training, and they’re not educated enough for me, and same as in Russia they take things too lightly. They drink lots of alcohol, and that doesn’t work for me either.” By referring to “Russian men” in Germany, Alisa negates the differences implied in the politically ascribed ethnic distinction between ethnic Russians and ethnic German resettlers but explains that “Russian men” in Germany have no training or academic qualifications. With reference to their common cultural background and gender, Alisa states that Russian men in Germany are prone to alcohol abuse—same as Russian men in Russia. Herewith, she implies that the lifestyle of Russian-speaking men in Germany is rooted in their belonging to the gender-specific Russian culture and therefore this lifestyle can also be found in Russia, while the aspect of poor education is specifically ascribed to Russian speakers in Germany, whom she regards as a subgroup of “the Russians” with a distinctively low social position both in the receiving and the sending society. This form of intragroup boundary making allows au pair migrants to distance themselves from the social position of resettlers, whom they perceive as being marginalized in the receiving society due to their poor education and unskilled employment and thus to maintain their own status as highly educated migrants, although they temporarily worked in the low-skilled job of au pair.

### **LANGUAGE USE AS A NARRATIVE STRATEGY FOR AU PAIR MIGRANTS TO POSITION THEMSELVES TOWARD THE RUSSIAN-SPEAKING COMMUNITY**

The three women whose narratives are presented in this section differ in terms of their structural embeddedness in the Russian-speaking community. At the time of the interviews, Elena was married to a late resettler and had been well integrated into his peer group; Dar’ia had left Germany after living there for two and a half years, during which time she was integrated into a group of resettler students; and Nina rarely met other Russian speakers during her au pair stay.

The three cases presented below were selected, first, because they represent three different ways of getting into contact and distancing oneself from co-language communities. Also, the narratives of these three former au pairs most coherently exemplify how language use is connected to perceptions about social positions in the receiving society. Although these three interviewees were prominent in the intensive descriptions of their experiences, they use meaning structures that are collectively shared in narratives of the sample.

#### **“WE DIDN’T HAVE MUCH TO TALK ABOUT”: DAR’IA’S CASE**

Dar’ia became an au pair at the age of 25 after finishing her second university degree because she had studied the German language and wanted to gain practical language skills to be able to work as an interpreter. Dar’ia comes from a city of 300,000 inhab-

itants in European Russia. Her mother worked as a librarian before retiring, while her father was a military officer.

Dar'ia lived as an au pair in Germany for one year and as a voluntary hospital worker for another year and a half. At the time of the interview she was back in Russia, working as a project manager for an international company in Moscow. Dar'ia told me that she had avoided meeting other Russian-speaking migrants during her time in Germany. In the following passage she describes how she was courted by male resettlers to whom she had been introduced by her au pair friends:

Well, they were Russian Germans—boys—who didn't do anything with their lives. They always came in their daddy's car, and we didn't have much to talk about because I didn't have a lot in common with these people.

Dar'ia's narrative reveals aspects that are typical of Russian au pairs' encounters with the Russian-speaking community at the first stage of migration: namely, activities aimed to expand the networks of Russian speakers by meeting friends of friends and being courted by male resettlers. Dar'ia says that she was not impressed by these men, who she thought had no desire for social mobility, to make it clear that she did not consider them as potential partners. The image of resettlers that is given in Dar'ia's narrative is gendered, because these negative characteristics are ascribed solely to men.

The crucial element in Dar'ia's narrative is her claim that she and the young men who courted her "didn't have much to talk about," which means that, while speaking the same language allowed them to communicate, because of their different lifestyles they had very little to communicate. The definition of a commonality, which is essential for belonging to the same group, in Dar'ia's narrative is found in sharing not one native language but one lifestyle. Later in the interview Dar'ia described her encounters with resettlers, stating that she met "Russian Germans" with whom she had things in common because they were different from most of the other resettlers:

So we were friends with a bunch of Russian Germans, but they were really nice, and they worked and studied at the same time, and they didn't just party and go out all the time, because there are so many Russian Germans—this is how I experienced it, right?—they just come here and they get the money from the state, like unemployment pay, and their rent is paid for, and they're not motivated to study or to look for work, right? And they're happy because in Russia if you don't work, you get so little money you can't even pay your utility bills.

By describing her friends and by stating that she and they are in a similar position, Dar'ia stresses that she made great efforts to get an education and to make her own money. Aspirations of social mobility are understood to create commonality between Dar'ia and her friends, which seems to be more important than their native language. Thus, an intragroup boundary within the large group of Russian speakers in Germany is constructed on the basis of education and lifestyle.

In Dar'ia's narrative resettlers (others than her friends) are presented as a homogeneous group of individuals who depend on social welfare. In this, she takes up

negative stereotypes that have often been used in German media and public discourse, especially during the 1990s and early 2000s. The implication is that there are differences between her and this constructed group in terms of immigration status and citizenship rights (resettlers in Germany are eligible for social welfare) and that these differences are due to the resettlers' lack of desire for social mobility. Dar'ia's conclusion is that resettlers migrate because they want to claim social benefits in Germany, which are greater than in Russia. Thus, contemporary Russia (although many resettlers originate from other states) is used as a common nation of reference where resettlers would have a lower social position than Dar'ia and her peers. Hence, in Dar'ia's narrative the difference between herself and her friends, on the one hand, and other resettlers, on the other, is the position in society based on success in education and the employment market, which, according to her, is rooted in different attitudes toward life.

Dar'ia's perspective as a native Russian speaker and fluent German speaker became apparent as she talked in more detail about her friends. With reference to internal distinctions among Russian speakers in Germany, she portrayed her friends as a group of resettlers who spoke Russian and German equally well, allowing them to enroll in a German university. This is how Dar'ia described their language skills and the way they used language: "I can't say that they made many mistakes when they spoke Russian, or that they spoke with an accent. Actually, they didn't do that in either language." Having learned to speak German without an accent, Dar'ia's friends could not be identified as migrants by native Germans and were also able to practice their cultural belonging to the Russian group. Dar'ia was in the position of an outside observer: drawing on her language skills and her experience with other Russian-speaking migrants in Germany, Dar'ia inferred that her friends' bilingualism allowed them to study at German universities, which to her was an exceptional development compared to that of the typical social positioning of most resettlers she knew, and in doing so, she implicitly identified with this group. Dar'ia's peers formed a group not because of their language (although they did share a native language) but as a result of educational participation, which manifests itself in the active use of bilingualism. The narrative pattern of Dar'ia's interview is to establish difference between her group of friends as an "exception from the norm" and other resettlers. Bilingualism in this regard is an emblem for the maintenance of the culture of origin by speaking Russian and for the achieved social mobility in the receiving context by speaking German.

#### **"IF YOU SPEAK RUSSIAN ALL THE TIME, YOUR GERMAN SUFFERS": NINA'S CASE**

Nina was born and raised in a city of about one million inhabitants located in the Volga region. She is the only child of a clerk and a chauffeur. Her parents divorced early in Nina's childhood, and Nina was raised by her single mother.

At the time of the interview Nina had been living in Germany for eight years. She was pursuing a PhD in German linguistics and was married to a German man. Nina had started to work as an au pair after graduating from a Russian university at the age of 22. She stated that her main reason for becoming an au pair was that she had studied

German but had not acquired practical German skills during her studies. In her narrative Nina presented learning German perfectly as both a professional requirement and a personal desire.

Well, I studied German ... but we hardly ever spoke German. We did many things, such as translation, grammar, all the linguistics stuff, but we hardly ever spoke German, and that was a problem ... and that's how I knew that I had to improve my practical language skills as well.

Even when she was an au pair, Nina did grammar exercises at home and took notes while she listened to conversations on television to work on her German skills. She often spent her spare time alone and rarely met other Russian speakers. One reason was that her au pair family lived in a rural place that did not have a large migrant population. When asked how she spent her leisure time, Nina stated that she usually went to the library to borrow books by the German classicists, that she rarely went to the next largest city, and that when she did, she only went shopping and never experienced the nightlife. Due to Nina's placement in a rural area, she had no opportunity to get into contact with other Russian speakers during the first stage of migration and, therefore, had to cope with the uncertainties of that period on her own. When Nina moved to another German city after her au pair stay to enroll in university, she became friends with some Russian speakers whom she had met at the university. According to her narrative, keeping in touch with Russian speakers posed the risk of losing her German skills:

I've never tried to keep in touch with Russians or to speak Russian just for the sake of it. Actually, I don't like that very much. Hmm, I also try to speak German with my Russian friends now [*laughs*], because if you speak Russian all the time, your German suffers.

Nina emphasized the importance of speaking German by saying that she tried to speak German with her Russian friends. She also told me that she felt guilty when her mother came to visit her for a couple of weeks and she had little opportunity to speak German. Nina did not regard bilingualism as the ability to speak both languages equally well. She did not have to practice her own native language, but she thought that she would lose her command of German, her second language, if she spoke Russian all the time. She also stated that she tried to get her Russian friends to change their practices of language use so that she would not lose her German skills. What is important to note about Nina's highly individualized strategy for positioning herself is that she does not regard language use as a means of forming a peer group; rather, she uses her peer contacts as a means of practicing language, even if this means that she has to pressure her Russian-speaking friends into speaking German. When she told me that she avoided speaking Russian, Nina also stated that she did not often use the Russian media:

I have a few Russian films at home; actually, they're Soviet films from my childhood, Soviet comedy films and stuff like that. I still have them, but I don't really

watch them very often. I don't have Russian TV either, and I don't buy books in Russian.

Nina explains that she does not use any of the products and services provided by the Russian infrastructure other than Soviet movies, which remind her of her childhood but which she no longer watches regularly. To Nina, Russian is the language of childhood nostalgia and communication with her family of origin, while in her current life in the receiving context she only speaks German.

Sometimes people don't even notice that I'm Russian. They often think that I'm from Poland or from Scandinavia or whatever, that happens to me a lot, sometimes people also think that I'm from Germany but never that I'm from Russia. Even Russians don't notice that I'm Russian. In a way I find that fascinating—I don't know, I don't seem to have much of a connection to them.

By stating that other people—and “even Russians”—do not see her as a Russian but as a migrant with a different background, Nina denies that she has anything in common with the constructed group of “Russians” in Germany. Not belonging to the group of Russian speakers (not being recognized by Russian speakers due to their lack of commonality) in this narrative allows Nina to distinguish herself from other Russian speakers. Nina's integration process and her social mobility, according to her narrative, were achieved entirely independent of the Russian-speaking community. Accordingly, belonging to a social group in Nina's narrative is not the basis for positioning herself. Rather she portrays herself as an independent individual.

#### **“WHY ARE YOU TALKING TO ME IN GERMAN?”—“BECAUSE YOU CAN'T”: ELENA'S CASE**

At the time of the interview Elena was 25 years old, working as a research fellow and doing her PhD at a German university. Elena came to Germany about seven years ago as an au pair and stayed on. She was born in the North Caucasus and has one brother five years her senior. Her parents are entrepreneurs with university education. At the age of 17 Elena left her home and moved 300 kilometers away to attend one of Russia's most prestigious universities. She was unhappy with this situation as she felt bored by her studies in economics. Elena contacted her mother's best friend Liudmila, who lives in Germany and whom Elena had visited before, to ask her to help Elena come to Germany and take a “holiday year” from her studies and learn German. Liudmila organized an au pair family for Elena.

A few weeks after arriving in Germany, she met the man who later would become her husband, a late resettler from her own city of origin in Russia. By spending time with him, she was integrated into a group of Russian-speaking peers who had immigrated to Germany as late resettlers. Elena was the only interviewee in my sample who had had a long-lasting relationship with and even married a male late resettler; however, she was filing for divorce at the time of our interview.

You would think that we had so much in common, but actually the only thing we did have in common was that we came from the same city, and of course, since

my parents couldn't be here, at least there was someone who understood me. Yes, well, and then we got married.

A crucial aspect of Elena's narrative is that her boyfriend "understood" her when her parents were not around. "Understanding" can be interpreted in two ways. The first interpretation is that at the beginning of her au pair stay Elena, unlike most au pairs from Russia, did not speak any German at all and therefore had to rely on Russian-speaking acquaintances to be able to communicate, which demarcates the functional aspect of the ethnic community in her case (cf. Heckmann 1992). The second interpretation is that Elena had regarded the fact that she came from the same city as her boyfriend as an emotionally charged commonality (cf. Pfaff-Czarnecka 2013) that, she believed, would allow them to perceive life in the same way. Later in the interview she stated that their marriage broke up because of their different educational backgrounds and career plans and because her husband had not supported her decision to pursue a PhD: "He's a blue-collar worker, and I'm in research—that doesn't work out at all; he can't understand why I sit down and read books." This indicates that in the process of migration, the shared mother tongue and place of origin lost their power to create commonality even on the micro level of a love relationship, while difference is established along the lines of class in terms of education and occupation.

Elena's case shows the reevaluation of group membership with regard to partnership and peers in the process of migration (cf. Cardu 2007). During her first years in Germany Elena spent much of her time with her husband and his friends. In the interview she emphasized that she did not want to socialize with Russian speakers at her college (which she attended after the au pair stay) because doing so would have interfered with the process of learning German. Instead, she socialized with Germans and other students who had a different migration background, with whom she spoke German. Elena stereotypes the entire group of Russian-speaking migrants as individuals who are not interested in learning the language of the receiving society and thus not willing to integrate into it. Therefore, the commonality among group members of the Russian-speaking community as understood by Elena is a specific attitude toward learning German as a marker of integration into the receiving society.

I didn't want to learn Russian in Germany—I wanted to learn something new. The Russians here can't show me anything new.... There really are some strange people here who don't speak German, and I can't understand how someone can live in Germany for five years and not speak a word of German and not even understand German, and they don't want to integrate.

Elena justifies her distancing herself from the Russian-speaking community by referring to "being interested in learning new things"—that is, to individual preferences and lifestyle choices. This strategy allows her to reject her belonging with the Russian speakers, whom she presents as a group that prefers maintaining a culturally homogenous social environment. She also refers to length of residence as a marker of difference, stressing that she, unlike other Russian speakers, had learned to speak

German very quickly and that she had avoided meeting other Russian speakers because she had been so eager to learn German. Hence, avoiding the co-language group, in Elena's narrative, is interpreted as a necessity for social mobility in the receiving context. Elena's case shows that skills of the majority language are not only officially used in the German public space (cf. Darieva 2005) but also informally used by other migrants as a marker of successful integration into the receiving society.

In her narrative, the conscious decision not to socialize with Russian-speaking migrants other than her husband and his peers is at the core of her biographically constructed denial of ethnic belonging. At one point in the interview Elena talked about meeting another Russian-speaking migrant during a special preparatory course at a local college she had to attend after her au pair stay to be admitted to a German university because the degree she had earned in Russia was not fully recognized.

A resettler came up to me one day, saying, "Why are you sitting here? We can see that you're Russian." And I had almost no contact with any Russians at the time because I had had enough of them. I wanted to learn German, I didn't want to hang out with Russians, and I just thought, what does she want from me? ... And she said, "Why are you sitting here?" blah, blah, blah. I just said, in German, "That's none of your business, good bye!" And then she said, "Why are you talking to me in German?" And I said, in German, "Because you can't!"

In this part of her narrative, Elena tells how she rejected the shared practice of speaking Russian with other Russian speakers, which is the collective representation of this group (Wimmer 2008), in order to distance herself from this group. By answering in German she disrupted the practice of communicating in their shared mother tongue, thus rejecting the assumption of commonality. This narrative is an intriguing example of Bailey's (2001) argument about the discursive, interactional establishment of identity through communication in a specific language. Distancing herself from young Russian speakers who prefer socializing with speakers of their own language, Elena can present her social mobility from being an au pair to being a PhD candidate as the result of her personal attitudes and her own decisions to make learning German her priority—qualities that differentiate her from other Russian-speaking migrants.

## CONCLUSION

One of the problems of the au pair stay being defined as a form of cultural exchange mobility is that au pairs are integrated only into their au pair families and not into native peer groups. The Russian au pairs investigated in this study, who were placed in urban areas, often used their own native language to get in touch with Russian-speaking peers in Germany, to spend their leisure time together, and get social support. For them, the use of the Russian language in public was a means of identifying and classifying other Russian speakers as potential peers and was the primary medium of group formation at the first stage of migration. When my interviewees enrolled in university and entered the regular employment market, they used German or their



German-Russian bilingualism to discover new social contexts that facilitated the development of friendships with native Germans and migrant peers from the same socioeconomic background as these au pairs. In this process, they detached themselves from their former peer groups of Russian speakers and started using specific narratives to distance themselves from them, position themselves outside these groups, and emphasize that they do not belong to them. Thus, interviewees created intra-group boundaries within the ethnolinguistic group of "the Russians" by constructing the subgroup of "Russian Germans," with whom they may share an ethnic background but who have a different educational background. In their narratives interviewees use a similar discourse about resettlers' unwillingness to learn German as is found in the German media and public discourse. Ascribing negative attributes to resettlers, such as proneness to ethnic segregation and unemployment, low level of education, and lack of German-language skills as well as dependence on services provided by the Russian infrastructure, the monolingual use of Russian is interpreted as an emblem of these migrants' marginalized social position in the society. Hence, this article shows how the use of the native language or the second language is interpreted as a marker of both ethnic belonging and educational background.

Constructing differences in attitudes about language learning allows former au pairs to position themselves in the receiving society as highly educated migrants whose individual agency enables them to achieve social upward mobility, the primary signifier of which is the command and public use of German. Thus, these individuals use their bilingualism as a marker of personal achievement by actively distancing themselves from other Russian speakers, which they regard as a prerequisite for successfully learning German, gaining an education, and finding employment in Germany. Therefore, not belonging to the stigmatized group of "Russian Germans" is interpreted as a consequence of personal attitudes (such as ambition, curiosity, and perseverance) that guide the migration process in the receiving context and facilitate upward social mobility. Contrary to the theoretical assumption that belonging to social groups is formative of an individual's identity, the cases presented in this article have shown that identity in highly individualized ways can also be constructed with regard to "not-belonging" to groups of reference.

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## НАРРАТИВЫ НЕПРИНАДЛЕЖНОСТИ: СИМВОЛИЧЕСКОЕ И ФУНКЦИОНАЛЬНОЕ ЗНАЧЕНИЕ ВЫБОРА ЯЗЫКА РОССИЙСКИМИ УЧАСТНИКАМИ ПРОГРАММЫ «AU PAIR» В ИХ ВЗАИМОДЕЙСТВИЯХ С РУССКОЯЗЫЧНЫМ СООБЩЕСТВОМ В ГЕРМАНИИ

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В представленной статье, опирающейся на теоретические подходы к формированию этнических групп и принадлежности, идет речь о том, как русские мигранты, уехавшие по программе «Au pair», относятся к русскоязычному мигрантскому сообществу в контексте процесса собственной эмиграции в Германию. Автор показывает, что эти мигранты используют свои языковые навыки (как родной язык, так и иностранный) как «эмблему» своей идентичности и средство для установления социальных связей. В начале своего пребывания в Германии они используют родной язык для того, чтобы заручиться поддержкой русскоязычного сообщества, изучить город, в котором они оказались, и установить контакты на время своего пребывания в стране. На более поздних стадиях переселения те участники программы, которым удается поступить в университет или найти работу по профессии, подчеркивают свои социальные отношения с немецкими гражданами и с другими мигрантами, и теперь подбор знакомых соотносится с их собственным социально-экономическим бэкграундом. В биографических нарративах они стараются дистанцироваться от русскоязычного сообщества, создавая внутригрупповые границы и демонстрируя полную незаинтересованность в разговорах на русском языке и в общении с носителями русского языка. Они используют свое знание немецкого как маркер образованности и восходящей мобильности, для того чтобы позиционировать себя в качестве полноценных членов общества и избежать каких бы то ни было негативных коннотаций, обычно ассоциирующихся с представителями русскоязычного сообщества.

**Ключевые слова:** сообщества мигрантов; двуязычность; au pairs; русские мигранты в Германии; принадлежность; проведение границ