'What Russia stands for me’: Exploring versions of heritage

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This paper considers the myriad versions of Russianness converging in one multilingual household in Melbourne, and the theoretical implications thereof. This household embodies what is increasingly described as a ‘superdiverse’ environment (Vertovec, 2007; Creese & Blackledge, 2010; Blommaert & Rampton, 2011), with ongoing negotiations between Eva’s German-Russian-Orthodox heritage and her husband Dmitri’s Odessan-Australian-Jewish background. Furthermore, while Dmitri’s family followed a more traditional migrant trajectory, Eva arrived just six years ago.

The couple’s metadiscursive characterizations of linguistic and cultural practices, as evident through self-recordings and interviews, reveal highly nuanced perspectives of, in their words, ‘what Russia stands for me’. Indeed, Eva and Dmitri position themselves at ‘opposite ends of the Russian spectrum’, thereby challenging perceptions of homogeneous migrant groups.

These dynamics are also influenced by my history as a 2nd generation Russian speaker from America. Throughout the representation process, a reflexive approach has proven vital to understanding the multiple indexicalities at play across the overlapping times and spaces inherent in synchronic speech.

While the heteroglossia of such interactions merits attention in its own right, I also consider how it leads to a blurring of distinctions such as ‘heritage’ vs. ‘second’ language, or ‘minority’ vs. ‘majority’ ways. Indeed, such dichotomies emerge as relative to one’s temporal and spatial orientation. The transfer of ‘authentic’ practices to future generations also becomes a point of tension as ‘regimes of meaning’ (Weedon, 1987: 34) coincide: in the field, in the home, and in the transcripts guiding the research.

References


Keywords: heritage, Russianness, reflexivity.