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“I WANT A BEAUTIFUL LIFE”: DIVERGENT CHRONOTOPES IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHER EDUCATION

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Research on second language teacher education (SLTE) has focused on the processes, practices, and contexts of teachers’ learning to teach. The interaction between SLTE and the broader sociopolitical processes has received less attention. To address this gap, the author explores how SLTE programs in Russia have become positioned at the intersections of transnational educational reforms, such as the Bologna Process, and global cultural flows of migration. Drawing on a multisited critical ethnography, the author analyzes how faculty members and students appropriate SLTE spaces based on their divergent chronotopes (Bakhtin, 1981) and orientations toward English. Although faculty adhere to an aesthetic orientation of taking trips to the imaginary West, many SLTE students follow an instrumental approach of using SLTE spaces to gain linguistic capital for professional and geographic mobility. These contradictory orientations and divergent chronotopes create frictions within programs. As a result of students’ pursuit of a better life elsewhere, SLTE programs fail to fulfill their primary mission of preparing English teachers for schools. The significance of this study lies in expanding the focus of inquiry on SLTE and introducing new lens through which to examine the contradictions that emerge in language learning spaces.

Introduction

Processes associated with globalization have decreased barriers and increased opportunities for greater mobility of people across national borders (Appadurai, 1996). Although quantitatively this mobility may demonstrate little deviation from previous eras of migration, qualitatively it represents a significant departure (Guhathakurta, Jacobson, & DelSordi, 2007). The growing diversity
among mobile populations due to differences in professional preparation, social class, religious outlook, or even diasporic orientations has led to the coining of the term superdiversity (Vertovec, 2007). Whether those are voluntary or involuntary migrants driven by economic, political, or social forces, many desire better opportunities elsewhere as they flee the challenges of local contexts. Despite presumed national or local culture orientations of the teaching profession, teachers have not been exempt from this process. Growing numbers of teaching professionals—preservice or inservice—who embark on a transnational pursuit of opportunities have drawn the attention of researchers, policymakers, and teachers’ unions (Caravatti, Lederer, Lupico, & Van Meter, 2014; Dunn, 2013; Ochs & Yonemura, 2013). Most of this attention, however, focuses on what happens to these professionals once they arrive in the countries where they undergo preservice training or are hired to teach in schools (Chowdhury & Le Ha, 2014), leaving the stages before the departure largely unexplored.

In the context of these global flows and disjunctures, research on second language teacher education (SLTE) has for the most part focused on practices, processes, and approaches within teacher education programs themselves (see Crandall, 2000; Freeman & Johnson, 1998; Johnson, 2009; Johnson & Golombek, 2011; Wright, 2010). Studies on SLTE have explored how second language teachers learn to teach and how the contexts of second language teachers’ professional learning affect their teaching practices (Johnson & Golombek, 2011). In reconceptualizing the knowledge base of SLTE, Freeman and Johnson (1998) argued that SLTE programs have to consider how to better prepare teachers for specific contexts of their practice, with schools being teachers’ ultimate destination. Extending the notion of context, Johnson called for research that would consider how SLTE programs are affected by the “ever changing sociopolitical and socioeconomic contexts around the world” (p. 114). Taking cue from this charge, researchers have explored the impact of such forces as new educational policies, curricular reforms, and the rise of testing regimes (see Johnson & Golombek, 2011; Shohamy, 2005). Rarely, however, have studies examined how SLTE programs have been affected by social transformations at large, such as neoliberal globalization. This omission is unfortunate because as Gray and Block (2012) argued, “discussions
about the knowledge base of the field that fail to consider the ideological, economic and political forces [such as neoliberal globalization] … are limited by their narrowness of focus” (p. 115).

The examination of intersections between neoliberal globalization and language education highlighted the ways in which English as a lingua franca is implicated in the reconfiguring of social, political and economic relations around the world (Block & Cameron, 2002). Shin and Kubota (2008) described how the global spread of English brings self into a contact with the other through a set of neocolonial relationships, which produce “perpetuating effects of the colonial constructions of the cultural images of superior Self and inferior Other on theories, beliefs, and practices in language education” (p. 210). With the rise of global competitiveness discourses, English has become entrenched as a language of modernization, knowledge economy, and global markets (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010). As a result of this transformation, English has become a tool, the primary value of which lies in its exchange value, making it “a marketable commodity on its own” (Heller, 2003, p. 474). This commodification of English plays an important role in positioning teaching English as a second language programs in Western contexts at the center of marketization discourses as objects of desire and points of access to the promised land (Chowdhury & Le Ha, 2014).

The question then is how these shifting conceptions of language and newly reconstituted relationships with the Other affect SLTE in other international contexts. To put it slightly differently, what might we learn if we examine the processes in SLTE by shifting our gaze to non-Western contexts and by contextualizing processes occurring there in global flows of policies, people, and ideas (Appadurai, 1996)? Here I engage with this question through a critical ethnographic study of English as a foreign language teacher education programs in the Russian Federation. I analyze contradictions and conflicts occurring in English language teacher education under the influence of transnational neoliberal policies, such as the Bologna Process, and global cultural flows of migration. In my analysis, I move across transnational, national, and institutional scales and attend to global connections in which cultural and ideological flows create frictions (Tsing, 2005) in local SLTE programs. By positioning English language teacher education in the global
networks of power and desire (Chowdhury & Le Ha, 2014; Motha & Lin, 2014), I capture the conflicts that emerge in SLTE when various actors appropriate its spaces based on their divergent chronotopes (Bakhtin, 1981) and orientations.

**Theoretical Framework**

Bakhtin’s (1981) writing on heteroglossia and the multivoicedness of sociocultural life is helpful for examining how various actors interpret the processes and practices of English language teacher education. His work pushes us to re-examine the areas of alleged consensus, such as the assumption that second language teacher education exists to prepare second language teachers. It also reminds us that each word is an alien word: to own it, each individual and social group has to appropriate it and populate it with their own intentions (Blackledge & Creese, 2013; Holquist, 2002). Attending to this process of appropriation allows a tentative glimpse into the nature of contradictions and conflicts that emerge among participants who despite alleged affiliation with teacher preparation, use SLTE spaces to pursue activities that contradict programs’ missions.

To disentangle the complexity of participants’ orientations, I draw on Bakhtin’s (1981) conceptual framework of the chronotope or “the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships” (p. 84). A chronotope is “a special connection between a man and all his actions, between every event of his life and the spatial-temporal world” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 167). It is a particularly useful construct for understanding processes related to globalization as “chronotopes invoke and enable a plot structure, characters or identities, and social and political worlds in which actions become dialogically meaningful, evaluated, and understandable in specific ways” (Blommaert, 2015, p. 109). In other words, participants’ chronotopes shape how they evaluate different processes and practices through their divergent orientations toward time, space, and the other, as a result capturing “the interplay between individual and social changes” (Wang, 2009, p. 2).

Among several types of chronotopes identified by Bakhtin, three are relevant for the analysis of participants’ experiences in education: (a) no change is happening in either participants or the world around them; (b) change is happening in participants only; and
(c) change is happening in participants and they in turn attempt to change the world around them (Bloome, Beierle, Grigorenko, & Goldman, 2009). I refer to the first two as the chronotope of ordeal (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 87) and the chronotope of adventure respectively. The chronotope of ordeal captures participants’ lives as adjacent biographical moments, in which they struggle to overcome challenges they face. In their encounters with the Other, participants do not undergo change and maintain their homeland as the orienting center for their adventures. This type of chronotope is connected to aesthetic orientation (Bakhtin, 1990) toward language, where the “aesthetic value [of a foreign language] is actualized at the moment when the contemplator abides within the contemplated object” (p. 63). The chronotope of adventure, on the other hand, captures participants’ metamorphosis and documents their life as “a line with knots” where different crises and turning points affect characters’ transformations. In this chronotope, time “leaves a deep mark on the man himself” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 116) and space acquires “real meaning” (p. 120) as a resource for participants’ transformations. Also called the chronotope of the road, this chronotope is connected to instrumental orientation1 (Bakhtin, 1986) toward language in which the value of a foreign language lies in its potential to serve as a tool of social or geographic mobility for the participant. The third chronotope—chronotope of dynamic historic action—captures changes in individuals as historical beings who collectively engage in changing the world around them (Bakhtin, 1981). Although this chronotope did not emerge in my participants’ responses, I return to it in the conclusion of this article to propose alternative conceptions of how relationships in SLTE programs could be structured.

These distinctions in chronotopes provide useful tools for understanding how participants interpret linguistic resources that SLTE programs provide and use those resources to claim divergent roles in political, social, or historical processes around them (Woolard, 2013). In the context of SLTE, this framework affords conceptual bridges between individuals’ agency, national-level policies, and global processes of migration. In this study, I attend to how participants draw on chronotopes of ordeal and adventure to read spaces, to orient themselves in time, and to interpret their positions in respect to diverse others,2 as they navigate and appropriate the spaces of second language teacher education.
Methodology

This paper emerged out of a study in which I examined the transformations created by the introduction of the Bologna Process into Russian pedagogical universities (Aydarova, 2015a, 2015b). During my fieldwork, however, an additional strand of tensions emerged—a strand that may not have surfaced were it not for a duality of the situational identities ascribed to me (and occasionally actively claimed by me) in the field: I was a Russian émigré and a former English major. The fact that I was born in Russia but was currently living abroad had conspicuously different effects on my participants: many of the faculty became very self-conscious and asked me for the correct way to say this or that in English; students, on the other hand, were very eager to talk to me about my life in the United States or about ways to travel abroad. The differences in reception that I encountered as well as the conversations that I had with students and with faculty prompted me to explore how different participants positioned themselves in relation to the West in the context of SLTE programs.

I conceptualized this study as a critical ethnography because among qualitative research methodologies, critical ethnography presents most points of alignment with Bakhtin’s theories of dialogism, multivocality, and heterogeneity of chronotopes (Quantz & O’Connor, 1988). As Madison (2012) contended, “critical ethnography is always a meeting of multiple sides in an encounter with and among others, one in which there is negotiation and dialogue toward substantial and viable meanings that make a difference in others’ worlds” (p. 10). The data for this article were collected primarily at two pedagogical universities in the Russian Federation over the span of three years (May–June 2011, May–June 2012, and September 2013 to June 2014). I selected the pedagogical universities based on the differences in their geographic locations: the city of Dobrolyubov is in Russia’s heartland and the centrally located city of Ognensk lies in closer proximity to Europe. Geographic location had a bearing on the amount of contact with other countries and on the ease of travel: Ognensk State Pedagogical University (OSPU) had multiple collaborations with higher education institutions abroad, whereas Dobrolyubov State Pedagogical University (DSPU) had fewer extensive contacts with international institutions.
During my time at the programs, I conducted over 50 participant observations of classes and department activities, 30 interviews with faculty, and 15 focus groups with students. Throughout my fieldwork, I kept detailed narrative field notes (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011) that captured my interactions with participants, observations of various activities, and reflections on what I was learning in the field. In selecting faculty participants for interviews, I sought to establish maximum variation in age, gender, status, and disciplinary affiliation to collect a variety of perspectives on the changes faculty were observing in the programs. Faculty I interviewed were between the ages of 25 and 75 years old, predominantly women and ethnically Russian, and occupied different positions in the programs (from regular teaching faculty to department heads and assistant deans). Interviews with faculty were open ended and lasted between 1 and 2 hr.

With students, I focused on those who majored in English and followed the teacher preparation track. To ensure maximum variation in data, I interviewed students from all four years of the program. Students varied in age (between 18 and 24 years old), socioeconomic status, and ethnic background (even though most were ethnically Russian). Focus groups with students comprised between three and 12 participants and lasted on average about an hour and a half. All interviews and focus groups were conducted, transcribed, and analyzed in Russian. Because chronotopes are mediated by various scales (Blommaert, 2015), I contextualized teacher education programs within flows of transnational policies, such as the Bologna Process, and global cultural flows of migration. Themes that emerged from the preliminary analysis of the data revealed connections with transnational policies and national trends of rising interest in migration among the college-age population. Relevant policy texts and newspaper articles covering those migration trends were subsequently added to my dataset.

Analysis of the dataset that included interview and focus group transcripts, field notes, program artifacts, policy documents, and newspaper articles proceeded in several steps. Throughout data collection and data analysis, I wrote analytic memos and descriptive summaries that were used as a springboard for identifying salient themes. Subsequently, I applied open-ended thematic coding (Ryan & Bernard, 2003) and disaggregated items that focused on
the dimensions of time, space, and other among the documents in the dataset. Next, I employed Fairclough’s (2003) critical discourse analysis to focus on representations of time and space in participants’ utterances.

I present my findings in a form of bricolage (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005) that connects participants’ voices with social change across different scales: a transnational scale that encompasses the European Union and Eurasia, a national scale of Russia, as well as an institutional scale of the particular programs where I conducted fieldwork. First, I show how educational reforms across the transnational and national scales introduced mobility as a desirable activity. Then I explore how transformations across these scales were mediated by the divergent chronotopes present within the teacher education programs: faculty’s pursuit of mobility to the imaginary West via the aesthetic orientation toward language and students’ pursuit of professional and geographic mobility via instrumental use of English. Finally, I show how these divergent chronotopes created frictions (Tsing, 2005) within SLTE programs.

**Context**

The majority of the teaching force in Russia are graduates of pedagogical universities, or stand-alone teacher preparation programs that grant degrees predominantly in teaching (Gasparishvili, Ionov, Ryazantsev, & Smolentseva, 2006). For this reason, I chose SLTE at pedagogical universities as the focus of my exploration. After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Russian society has gone through some major transformations, which among other things included a reorientation from the socialist to capitalist ideology and the introduction of neoliberal reforms across the social sphere. During the economic turmoil of the 90s, public sector jobs lost funding and, subsequently, status, prestige, and support. Teachers who enjoyed a relative degree of privilege as cultural icons during the Soviet times within a decade lost their status, pay, and prestige (Gasparishvili et al., 2006). In the context of these transformations, foreign language teaching currently has the highest shortage of school teachers (Obrazovanie v Rossiiyskoy Federatsii, 2010).
Findings

Transnational Scale: Reification of Mobility

The discourses that circulate at the transnational scale cast mobility as a crucial component for increasing innovation and competitiveness of nation-states in the context of intensifying globalization. For example, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development’s (1996) report on knowledge-based economy valorized individuals’ abilities to form networks and move across spaces to create new knowledge that can be turned into profit and into greater national competitiveness. In Europe and Eurasia, these discourses became the foundation for the Bologna Process, or the harmonization of higher education policies that standardize higher education systems of participating countries to produce integration in which equivalent degrees facilitate greater mobility across national borders (Voegtle, Knill, & Dobbins, 2011). More specifically, national forms of higher education degrees have been transformed into a two-tiered Anglo-Saxon model of bachelor’s and master’s degrees; all universities are required to issue for students European diploma supplements, in which students’ education is captured in easily readable and comparable credit units. Apart from facilitating integration and promoting mobility, the Bologna Process became the vehicle for restructuring European higher education based on the principles of neoliberal ideology (Fairclough, 2007). The Bologna Process has had a profound impact on teacher education: it contributed to curriculum standardization (Aydarova, 2012) and eliminated many aspects of distinct national approaches to teacher preparation (Aydarova, 2014, 2016).

National Scale: The Bologna Process and Modernization Reforms

Despite protests and heated debates, Russia joined the Bologna Process in 2003. Some supporters argued that the Bologna Process would create opportunities for attracting international students that could increase university revenues (Melville et al., 2005). Others suggested that restructuring of higher education based on Western principles undermined the national higher education traditions established in the Russian Federation
during the Soviet period (Zapesotskii, 2006). For some who saw mobility as equating migration, it presented a threat: high levels of brain drain experienced in the 1990s significantly decreased national intellectual resources (Zapesotskii, 2006).

Russia’s signing of the Bologna Accord occurred at the time when Putin’s administration embarked on modernizing Russian education. In 2001 and 2003, the Ministry of Education issued policy documents that echoed the international agencies’ recommendations for reforming Russian education based on neoliberal market principles in order to develop national human capital and increase the nation’s economic competitiveness (Government of the Russian Federation, 2005). Standards for teacher preparation based on the Bologna principles were issued in 2009. In subsequent years, the Ministry of Education identified foreign language teaching as one of the priority areas in national schools and higher education institutions.

**Institutional Scale: Chronotopes of Ordeal and Aesthetics of English**

Within SLTE programs, faculty held different views on the Bologna Process and mobility. Faculty who were in charge of introducing Bologna-related procedures acknowledged that the new system emerged out of “gazing at the West” and “adopting an alien model” but argued that “there is nothing wrong with that” (Interview 22, personal communication, 2013). They were a significant minority. Most faculty referred to new approaches and new standards as a form of Europenization, Americanization, and Westernization that greatly decreased the quality of education (Aydarova, 2015a, 2015b). They argued that the new requirements were incongruent with the cultural context. As one middle-aged faculty explained, “alien models don’t work here because they don’t fit our mentality and our traditions” (Interview 19, personal communication, 2013). Others were exasperated at the amount of paperwork that the new approaches required—they felt their workload doubled as they were now required to create new curriculum plans and new courses for the same miserly pay. Apart from describing the changes as intrusive and inappropriate for the context, most faculty complained that their newly reconstituted relationships with administrators as their constant surveyors and students
as their clients “brought them on their knees” (field notes, 2013). In the context of low pay and declining social status, Bologna-related reforms turned faculty work life into an ongoing struggle (Aydarova, 2015a, 2015b).

Discussions about the introduction of Bologna-related changes revealed how faculty members’ perspectives were shaped by the chronotopes of ordeal—they recounted their lives as struggles, drawing strict boundaries between the West and Russia. For example, a conversation I had with a department chair in Ognensk who spoke about the changes associated with the Bologna Process captured the structure of a chronotope common among faculty members, regardless of their age:

This change toward the Western approaches, this is bad... Here in Russia we have always had strong teaching of foreign languages. Why? Because we lived behind the Iron Curtain. When we went there, everyone was surprised at us, that we speak without an accent because our phonetics is well developed. (Interview 7, personal communication, 2012)

In this quote, the Iron Curtain—a symbol of separation and isolation—is reinterpreted in a positive light as that which served as a form of protection and created conditions for better language learning. The encounter with the other is marked with clear spatial boundaries (“there”) that occurred as a result of a short visit. This movement through space allows the self to demonstrate accomplishment and achievement (“they were surprised at us”). It also overlaps with movement through time, which is demonstrated by the shift between the past (“when we went there”) and the present (“we speak without an accent”). Important here is the clear reference to the Soviet past evoked through the reference to the Iron Curtain—faculty members’ chronotopes often shift between past and present, positioning the past in more favorable light (Aydarova, 2015b). It also reveals faculty members’ perspectives on mobility, which imply a point of return—a visit to a foreign country is temporally circumscribed and is followed by the stay in their home country. As is common in the chronotopes of ordeal (Bakhtin, 1981), the homeland remained the center around which participants’ narratives were constructed. Even though faculty often expressed dissatisfaction with how life was unfolding in Russia—for example, by quoting the line “I feel pain for/I am disappointed with
the Motherland” (Rus. za derzhavu obidno) from a famous Russian movie—Russia remained the (implicit) center of their narratives with all their journeys bringing them back to it.

At foreign language departments, particularly at OSPU, a few faculty had an opportunity to travel abroad at least once. Yet when faculty described their experiences, similarly to the quote above, their narratives captured the dichotomy between them and us and revealed participants’ unchanged nature through their journeys. In other words, the moment of encounter with the other did not trigger transformation in their outlooks or perspectives. Rather, that encounter was narrated as an opportunity to demonstrate the superiority of Russian approaches to language teaching. At DSPU, Olga Alekseyevna, a 35-year-old faculty member, often shared with her students a story of her first visit to the United Kingdom:

When I was in England what surprised the director of the school was that I had never been to England before. “There is no way! You must have been here at least ten times! What are you telling us? It is impossible to learn a language like this just by sitting at home.” To which I responded, “What do you mean, it is impossible to learn a language like this? ...Why impossible? How about books? Movies? Tapes? TV? Grammar textbooks.” He grabbed his head in horror and exclaimed, “Oh, my gosh! You Russians!” (Class Observation, June 2011)

Similarly to other accounts of trips abroad, this story follows the chronotope structure that demarcates boundaries between here and there and allows participants to traverse these spaces unchanged. What Olga Alekseyevna tells her students when she teaches a methods class is not how trips abroad changed her perspective on the world or on how languages can be taught differently, but rather how well methods of teaching English at DSPU work for those who study and work there. Important in her story is the punchline, in which the director of the language program is impressed with the ingenuity and high levels of proficiency that Russian speakers of English allegedly demonstrate.

Although only a few faculty could afford to partake of opportunities for mobility created by the Bologna Process, many used language analysis, literature, works of art, and politics to take trips to the imaginary West. Trips to the so-called imaginary West were first noted by Yurchak (2005) in his study of
late socialist period when many of the Soviet youth pursued foreign language study, enjoyed Western music or art, or purchased Western goods as a way of locally consuming the inaccessible West. In foreign language departments, these figurative trips represented an aesthetic orientation (Bakhtin, 1990)—or the movement along space and time scales to derive pleasure from intellectual or cultural contact with the imagined other. Aesthetic orientation afforded faculty opportunities to be there and here simultaneously. This simultaneous positioning allowed some faculty to elevate their otherwise crumbling social status. It also afforded them an opportunity to escape the grim realities of dilapidated physical or social conditions of their work where most classrooms had only an old blackboard, chalk, a piece of cloth, as well as falling apart desks and chairs (Figure 1). Amidst society’s pursuit of material goods that appeared inaccessible because of meager university salaries, corruption, or siphoning of funding directed at building repairs, trips to the imaginary West provided escape from the ordeal of daily realities.

One manifestation of aesthetic orientation was emphasis placed on the analysis of linguistic form, in which English pronunciation patterns or grammatical structures were captured in formulas, diagrams, and charts. Multiple classroom activities I observed focused on the analysis of language form as an end in itself. It was not students’ communicative competence that mattered, but their ability to faultlessly and effortlessly analyze or approximate native speakers’ speech. An elderly department head shared during an interview that this focus on form became translated into second language teacher education as “jeweler’s work” (Interview 30, personal communication, 2013)—the imperative to create beauty through immaculate linguistic performance for their own consumption “as contemplator[s] abid[ing] within the contemplated object” (Bakhtin, 1990, p. 63). Linguistic analysis and focus on form revealed the aesthetic orientation on which much of teacher educators’ approach was based: a foreign language becomes a system of rules that is savored through the process of learning to unlock its secrets and idiosyncrasies.

Imaginary trips that occurred through the discussion of literature, art, and politics were another dimension of this aesthetic orientation common among faculty. English language paperbacks
were often exchanged in the department offices; books were discussed through their association with the other’s space. For example, one faculty at OSPU used *About a Boy* in one of her classes. During chats over tea with her colleagues, she spoke enthusiastically about the book as an opportunity to experience what life is like in the United Kingdom. Over the span of two years of my research at that department, nearly half of the faculty in that department read that book. Reproductions of Western classic or modern art that adorned walls of classrooms or department offices, printouts of BBC newsbytes that were shared with students or colleagues, or DVDs of original British TV series that were passed around served a similar purpose—imagining a life elsewhere and experiencing it vicariously.

As I mentioned before, the trips were not always figurative—some faculty traveled to the United Kingdom, Germany, or France for professional development or for conferences. In some cases it was one-off trips to a summer school; in others, those were regular trips organized as study-abroad opportunities for students that faculty members supervised. Overall, however, of about 35 or 40 faculty who I came to know well at the two universities, only three expressed interest in mobility. All three were younger than 30 years old. Out of those three, only one actively pursued opportunities to move abroad and ended up going to the United States on a two-year exchange
program; the other two after some thought, entered graduate programs in Russia and decided to stay.

There might have been several reasons why faculty preferred imaginary trips. During the emigration waves of the 90s many faculty members from foreign language departments left for other countries. Thus, those who stayed heard stories about the challenges their colleagues faced as immigrants in the West, which deterred them from leaving. Others had unpleasant experiences abroad and returned to Russia having made their minds that the imaginary West (Yurchak, 2005) is better enjoyed from “one’s own home” (Interview 19, personal communication, 2013). Several stayed because of family obligations that required their proximity and constant attention, whereas others feared even further loss of status and stability that a move would create. “Who needs us there?” they would ask me during our conversations. Although their cases differed, the outcome was relatively similar—very few faculty members sympathized with students’ desire to leave. This is the desire that I will describe next.

_Institutional Scale: Chronotopes of Adventure and Instrumental Use of English_

When asked why students chose the foreign language department, most said that they loved English or foreign languages. Even though these responses seemed to suggest that they shared faculty members’ aesthetic orientation, I had to eventually rule out this possibility for two reasons. First, very few students derived similar pleasure from the analysis of linguistic forms. Students often described their studies as “too much theory,” too many “useless subjects,” or “all sorts of nonsense” (Focus Group 4, 2011) and critiqued their classes for a lack of opportunities to learn to communicate or to do practical language tasks. They also wanted SLTE curriculum to include such courses as business English or English for tourism—courses that most faculty considered inappropriate for teacher preparation.

Students also rarely expressed enthusiasm for the imaginary trips to the West. During one focus group, for instance, some students questioned the benefits of the country studies—a course dedicated to the United States and the United Kingdom as the countries
of the target language. Faculty members justified this course by saying that knowledge obtained in this course can be used to motivate school students. One of the students challenged that claim, “I know from experience, I can motivate students by saying, ‘I have been to London. Do you want to see my pictures?’ Not by saying, ‘I learned it in the Country Studies class’” (Focus Group 5, 2012). Students perceived an actual trip as of a greater use than its imaginary counterpart. Because of students’ focus on use and usefulness, I refer to it as an instrumental orientation (Bakhtin, 1986) toward a foreign language—as the process of approaching language study for the material or social returns it can bring.

When asked about the Bologna Process, some students echoed faculty members’ perspectives that those were foreign forms that could not take root in Russia. Yet such responses were rare. More often, however, students shared that the Bologna reforms were beneficial because “in the context of globalization, it is good that Russia is finally joining the world, becoming more like other countries” (Focus Group 10, 2013). Common in students’ responses was a preference for the erasure of boundaries between here and there that could afford them greater mobility to other countries. In constructing narratives of their aspirations and goals, students often followed the narrative of adventure in which they embarked on journeys to other countries to study, work, or live. The excerpt from a focus group below shows how this erasure occurs:

Researcher: What do you think about teaching?
Boris: I am not very interested in teaching. I would rather work as an interpreter. Maybe work somewhere abroad.
Alexander: Actually, yes, abroad. That would be great.
Researcher: Tell me more about that.
Alexander: I would love to move anywhere. Maybe they don’t need interpreters abroad.
Marina: But maybe as a teacher.
Alexander: Any job that would require someone who knows English.
Anton:
Ideally, I would want to be teaching English in higher education in America.

Researcher: Do all of you want to go abroad?
Participants together: Yes... Many of us do...
Boris: I don’t want to necessarily move there permanently. Maybe work there, but have a home in Russia. (Focus Group 11, 2013)

This exchange reveals students’ chronotope of adventure: in describing their aspirations for future careers, they gradually shift to describing a life on the road. Unlike faculty members’ common time scale of present to past, students’ instrumental orientation moved from the present to the future. In constructing their futures, few saw themselves as language teachers in Russian schools. As one student commented during another focus group, “I want a beautiful life. Who would want to slave away at a school for a meager salary?” (Focus Group 10, 2013). As a result of this orientation, students saw classes that entailed linguistic analysis or focus on form as useless because in most cases they wanted to learn English not for the sake of an aesthetic experience, but rather as an instrument of mobility.

Students’ responses indicated that they saw two ways one could pursue mobility with the help of language. One was professional mobility. When asked why they chose a pedagogical university, two or three in each focus group mentioned that they were considering teaching but rarely did they mean teaching in schools—most thought of teaching at language schools, universities, or private companies. Others explained that they chose the SLTE program because it offered preparation for a variety of professional tracks other than teaching: a graduate could become a translator, an interpreter, a tour guide, or a secretary at an international company. Most students felt that knowing English and another foreign language was a good stepping stone toward another career.

Most often, however, students spoke about pursuing geographic mobility. A pedagogical university’s comprehensive training in a foreign language was cherished for the opportunity it provided to move abroad. As one student said during a focus
group, “I think among the pedagogical education students most want to leave and go abroad” (Focus Group 11, 2013). Students had different orientations toward the West: most wanted to leave for good; some wanted to study abroad so they could return and get a better job at a multinational corporation. When I once asked students how the desire to move abroad affected their studies, one of them explained, “There is a greater desire to learn the language, so that you can leave.” Others added, “You try harder to learn English to leave” (Focus Group 11, 2013). The desire for geographic mobility became manifest in students’ pursuit of study abroad or other opportunities to travel. In Dobrolyubov, at least one or two students in each group of 10 or 12 had traveled to the United States through the work-and-travel program. In Ognensk, at least two or three students per group of 12–15 among juniors and seniors had been on study abroad trips. Occasionally, there were students who went to the United States for year-long undergraduate exchange programs.

Students explained this search for opportunities to migrate as a pursuit of a better life. As one student shared during a focus group in Dobrolyubov, “Our people are still striving for a better life. A better life is somewhere there. We have everyone striving toward this beautiful life. There you have the American Dream, here we have the Russian American Dream” (Focus Group 1, 2011). Desire for a beautiful life stoked the desire to migrate and English or other foreign languages provided the means for movement. Yet this desire was more complex than just an attraction to a superior other.

The “chronotope of the road” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 120) emerged in students’ narratives alongside their descriptions of crises they experienced in dealing with Russian social institutions. These crises became the “critical turning points” (p. 114) reorienting students toward pursuit of migration. In Ognensk, I was invited to teach a class of first-year students. After we completed the activities assigned for the day, we sat down in a circle for a casual chat about their experiences. A few of them shared that they wanted to go abroad. I asked why. One of the students responded, “See, you did not have to deal with all the problems of setting up internet, or not getting treatment you need at the hospital, or having problems with your cell phone because the cell phone company was stealing money from you. If you had to go through this, you would know why we want to get out” (field
notes, 2013). Although this student was speaking, others were nodding their heads in agreement. By that time, I had spent several months in Russia and had myself struggled with the problems students were describing. Not all students had experienced such crises, but when during focus groups some students attempted to share that life in Russia was not that bad, they were corrected by others. “You are only saying that things are manageable and that we have rights because you yourself had not gone through the nightmare of what it means to deal with our medical or legal system,” said one fourth-year student to her friend. After this, she embarked on a story of how her grandma witnessed a death of a patient who was brought to a hospital on an ambulance but did not receive any help because he did not have money to pay for those services out of pocket (Focus Group 10, 2013).

These moments of crisis provided students with insights into the low quality of life in Russia and a lack of opportunities they had, if they stayed. Those moments of crisis shaped how students read, interpreted, and evaluated the national space of Russia. During focus groups and casual conversations, students described the challenges they saw in that space and explained how those challenges motivated them to learn English so that they could look for opportunities elsewhere. This extended quote from a focus group below represents the themes that other groups brought up and connects students’ descriptions with a wider social trend.

Researcher: Do a lot of people want to go abroad?

Several participants at the same time: Everyone does... A lot of people do... That is so common...

Maria: Among the people I know, there are many of those who really want to leave to never come back.

Angelina: And sometimes they don’t even know the language. [...] 

Anna: Yeah, it is natural to forget the language while you are sitting in *Rushka.

Angelina: I think among the youth it is very common to desire to “leave” (Rus. svalit’).
Maria: I personally get really hurt when people say “to leave *Rushka” (Rus. svalit’ iz Rushki).

Researcher: Tell me about it. I have heard this expression before.

Angelina: It comes from mass media, from comedies.

Maria: Why? It is common among the youth to say this.

Svetlana: I think youth gets this impression from mass media that Russia is nothing, that we have a great history and a few great people but...

Anna: ...which we wasted...

Svetlana: But either way, education is not great now, corruption is high, there a lot of social problems...

Maria: You cannot get ahead on your own...

All participants together: ...without money, without connections...

Svetlana: The economy is not developing as fast as one would like it to. You travel and you see how other people live. And you get this really negative impression. And that is why it is no longer Russia but *Rushka. And you want to leave because you want to run away from all these problems. That’s why. My brother studied hard, went to all these job interviews. And then he said to me, “You can’t even imagine what it feels like to be not needed.”

Several participants at the same time: Yes, unemployment is bad. People also leave because there are no jobs. (Focus Group 7, personal communication, 2013)
During this focus group, students acknowledged their desire to leave through their critical assessment of peers who have the same desire but do nothing to fulfill it. In discussing their friends’ (lack of) language proficiency, these students implicitly revealed how pursuing English majors put them at an advantage to gain necessary linguistic capital and to move abroad when it became possible. The English language, however, as one of them stated, was “not the most important reason for leaving”; it was only a mechanism of mobility.

For students, the driving force for leaving was the assessment of the social situation in Russia. As they critically assessed opportunities for social mobility (“you cannot get ahead on your own”) and the overall malfunctioning of social institutions, students began to consider how they could move elsewhere. One important outcome of this critical analysis was a lack of collective responsibility for improving the social conditions in their home country. Instead, consistent with the chronotope of adventure, improving one’s conditions became “the personal business of a discrete, particular individual” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 119) who could only achieve a better lot in life by hitting the road and moving elsewhere.

In the context of this critical analysis, students brought up the term *Rushka. Instead of using the Russian word for Russia (Rus. Rossiya), they referred to their country by its English name Russia and added the Russian suffix –ka to turn it into a derogatory term. In the quote above, students argued that the shortcomings of life in Russia became most visible while traveling abroad. Unlike faculty, students experienced their trips abroad as a “metamorphosis” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 111) that opened their eyes to the corruption, injustice, and other social problems in Russia. As a result of this transformation, more students accepted the mutation of their country’s name into *Rushka because for them it captured the experience of seeing Russia through the other’s eyes and finding it lacking. Even though Maria said that she was hurt when people used that phrase, she joined others in explaining how ultimately that phrase matched her lived experiences. As students suggested, this is a common expression among Russia’s younger generations. This is an area that I explore next as I move back toward the national scale.
A widespread desire to leave became a visible national trend subject to much debate in the 2010s. On September 21, 2012 one of the Russian news agencies reported alarming findings of a research study: a third of Russian urban dwellers want to move abroad, with the highest preferences given to Europe, North America, Australia, and New Zealand. The expressions used to describe this “emigrant mood” were highly marked. All articles used the same phrase “svalit’ iz Rushki,” in which “svalit’” is a slang word for “leaving in droves, or without return” and *Rushka the Anglicized derogatory term for Russia. The use of slang reflected the language use of the population most affected by the trends: “According to research data, most active in their desire to emigrate are young Russians at the age of 18–24” (NEWSru, 2011). Emigration moods among this group were described as alarming and offensive.

In the fall of 2012, several articles sought to establish reasons for the alarming numbers. Some argued that these high numbers suggest that not everything was stable in the country, that people leave to improve their quality of life, or that political dissatisfaction with Putin’s regime ignited the desire to leave. One of the articles argued that the middle class is humiliated and scared. In the spring of 2013, the debate was settled by sociologists’ new findings:

Russian sociologists have arrived at an interesting conclusion: it turns out that the currently popular either phrase or trend “to leave Rushka in droves” (Rus. svalit’ iz Rushki) is not evidence of a sad state of affairs in the country. The results of sociological surveys show the opposite. Those who are satisfied with everything and only want things to get even better are subject to suitcase moods. (NEWSru, 2013)

The article reconstructed many of the tropes that were in circulation before: desire for a beautiful life is intricately interwoven with desire to migrate. But it dismissed the chronotopes of those who engage in a critical analysis of poor social conditions in Russia, by suggesting that migration is only an attempt to improve that which is already good. This dismissal recasts a common desire for a beautiful life to obscure and disguise
structural inequalities that push people to seek a better life elsewhere.

Whether there is an increase in numbers of emigrants or not, according to the World Bank migration data, Russia occupies third place among top emigration countries after India and Mexico, with 10.9 million of its citizens living abroad (World Bank, 2016). This data provides a background for understanding foreign language department students’ search for opportunities to move abroad. Not everyone has the desire to leave and those who do are not always successful, but language skills become an asset—a form of linguistic, cultural, and social capital (Bourdieu, 1991) that serves as an entry point to networks of employment and educational mobility. It does not produce knowledge or improves a nation’s competitiveness, but it can potentially improve one’s lot in life. The Bologna Process, with the promise of equivalent degrees and provision of greater opportunities for mobility, fed into the local desires for a better life and intensified conflicts within institutions. These conflicts emerged because of the different orientations that students and faculty bring to SLTE programs, which will be explored next.

**Institutional Scale: Frictions within Programs**

Students’ striving for something other than what the programs were traditionally set up for did not go unnoticed by the faculty. When students asked to take exams early to travel to the United States on a work-and-ravel program or on other exchange programs, some faculty members created additional obstacles for such students or gave them lower grades regardless of their performance. Reflecting on students’ career choices, an assistant dean at Ognensk with disappointment in her voice said that students regarded schools as “a stepping stone” toward other paths. She shared that the department carried out a study that showed that only 20% of the departments’ graduates went to work in schools, but even those who did ended up leaving soon. One faculty shared a different perspective with a degree of frustration during an interview: “You think our students go to school to work? We are a department that prepares brides for
foreigners. They get married and leave for England, for France…” (Interview 8, personal communication, 2012).

One of the instructors in Dobrolyubov shared her perspective on the changes that occurred in foreign language teacher education since the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Valentina Mikhaylovna: Technologically, this place is not well equipped. The financial and technological base is absent. I lived there, worked there. But, nevertheless, I am here. Students leave, get master’s degrees.

Researcher: What happens when they get back?

Valentina Mikhaylovna: They don’t come back. Many stay there. Unfortunately, our employers do not value foreign diplomas. And now... We teach them here, language as a goal. But now, language is a means. Employers want a language in addition to a different profession. Those who are smart go abroad and get a different specialization. (Field notes, 2011)

This excerpt returns back to the issue of divergent chronotopes. It presents a contrast between the faculty’s chronotope of ordeal that maintains Russia as its center despite the problems inherent in that space and students’ chronotope of adventure that “fuses the course of [their] life (at its major turning points) with … actual spatial course or road—that is, with [their] wanderings” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 120). It also reveals a re-orientation in how language learning is perceived in the society and in the value that students in the foreign language programs ascribe to their time at SLTE programs—a foreign language is no longer the end in itself, it is a means. Even though language is sometimes referred to as a means to supplement a skill set for a job, it more often becomes an instrument for migration. English language teacher education becomes a medium for moving into the other’s space.

The theme of mobility has a strong connection with the reforms associated with the Bologna Process. Under new rules, mobility is encouraged and equivalent degrees are issued to facilitate easier movement across borders. The process of change is controversial for many reasons but students’ pursuit of mobility becomes a particularly sore point. As Alexander Arkadyevich—a department head in Dobrolyubov—explained:

How important is [mobility]? Maybe someone wants to go and study abroad. But those are few. Most people want jobs. If they go abroad, they stay there. Are there job openings there? For the most part, they
have enough of their own people to fill those job openings. If they take a foreigner, it means that is an extremely bright person. So then it seems like, this whole integration is so that they could find the best, it gives them a huge pool. Certain stars have an opportunity to receive knowledge and [...] when they receive an offer from abroad, they will leave in droves. It is beneficial for them and for the country that will receive them. Only the most patriotic would stay here to create and to do something for a miserly pay. (Interview 4, personal communication, 2011)

Similarly to Valentina Mikhaylovna, Alexander Arkadyevich described mobility as final: “if they go abroad, they stay there.” He also noted that reforms that standardize degrees (“integration”) benefit the West—more affluent countries have the resources to attract more workers and have a wider selection of talent to choose from. The connection between the conditions in Russia (“miserly pay”) and the desire to move shifted some responsibility for migration from individuals to structural inequalities, but despite this shift, those who did not succumb to these pressures were described as “the most patriotic.” Ironically, we were interrupted in the middle of the interview when a former student came to visit. After she left, Alexander Arkadyevich turned to me and added with a sigh, “Their entire group emigrated. Not one of them stayed.” This incident once again underscored how the desire for a beautiful life shifted students’ chronotopes and linguistic capital enabled their mobility across spaces.

Conflicts also emerged because Russian state officials and educational reformers blamed pedagogical universities for teacher shortages in key subject areas (e.g., foreign languages), and for the low numbers of recent graduates teaching in schools (Bolotov, 2014). Policy-makers argued that graduates of pedagogical universities do not go to work in schools because they are poorly prepared for the practical tasks of school environments. Moving into abstract time and national space, policymakers erased group orientations or individual aspirations and reduced students’ activity to input-output formulas in their narratives. Structural inequalities, in response to which students chose paths different from teaching, became once again obscured and disguised. Trumping faculty members’ aesthetic and students’ instrumental orientations, reformers pushed to close pedagogical universities because they no longer fulfilled the function of preparing teachers for work in schools.
Conclusion

This study highlighted the importance of positioning research on second language teacher education in the transnational flows of ideologies, people, and ideas—extending the scope of inquiry beyond the immediate contexts of schools, universities, or educational policies. Moving across different scales, I captured different forms of chronotopes that shape the processes inside SLTE programs and affect various actors’ interpretations of changes. Faculty members’ chronotopes of ordeal reflected their struggles amidst the reforms, with their aesthetic orientation toward language providing them with an escape to the imaginary West. Students’ chronotopes of adventure, on the other hand, positioned them as seekers of a beautiful life elsewhere who drew on their instrumental orientation toward English to attain professional and geographic mobility.

These different orientations within programs contributed to frictions, conflicts, and contestations both between faculty and students and partly between institutions and the state. Students’ appropriation of SLTE spaces for professional or geographic mobility—appropriation divergent from SLTE’s intended purposes of preparing teachers for national schools—contributed heavily to these conflicts. Yet the transnationally circulated educational reforms based on the Bologna Process and discourses of leaving *Rushka in droves flowing across the national scale aligned with students’ adventure chronotopes and served as a justification for their departures. Central in these struggles was the desire for English not because of a particular attraction to cosmopolitan identities or students’ identification with particular countries; but rather because of a critical analysis of deteriorating social conditions in Russia itself. It was not a desire for a particular space, but rather it was a desire away from one.

I also point to the irony of national investment in transnational processes, such as the Bologna Process, that facilitate mobility but ultimately may not result in greater competitiveness of the nation but in students’ individual advancement. Neoliberal ideology, in either its top-down manifestations of scaling down the social safety nets or in horizontally circulated narratives of individual responsibility, prioritizes the pursuit of
private goods and tasks individuals with improving their lot themselves. This positions individuals in search of maximizing their opportunities, sometimes in contradiction to the officially stated missions of the institutions with which they are affiliated. Even though SLTE programs may be officially tasked with preparing teachers, students respond to the ideological transformations around them and appropriate those spaces for gaining linguistic capital and pursuing mobility so that they can better their own individual lives. These processes not only leave schools with a shortage of foreign language teachers, they also undermine a sense of collective belonging to a national space and a commitment to collective efforts to improve social conditions either in home or in receiving countries.

Ultimately, neither the chronotopes of ordeal nor the chronotopes of adventure represent a generative or creative force that can pave the way for a better future. Focused on one’s individual pursuit of escape, both forms of chronotope restrict participants’ involvement in social action that could challenge systemic inequalities or harsh social conditions. Bakhtin (1981) provides insight into the need for a new chronotope—chronotope of dynamic historic action—“that would permit one to link real life (history) to the real earth … [with] a creative and generative time, a time measured by creative acts, by growth and not by destruction” (p. 206). This chronotope could allow participants to perceive themselves as actors actively engaged in the production of history, not as individuals but rather as members of a collective force, engaged in labor that matters for the future. This form of chronotope would afford faculty members and students an opportunity to engage in a transformation of the world around them together, rather than perceiving each other as opposing sides in a conflict not of their own making. This insight leaves questions both for future research and practice about how to construct possibilities of new chronotopes and new orientations for those who are affiliated with SLTE programs.

Notes

1. Many second language research studies on motivation examine instrumental orientation through the lens of individual and social psychology (e.g., Gardner, 2007). Bakhtin’s work in
sociocultural theory provides an alternative lens for exploring instrumental orientation by focusing on its social dimensions, sociohistorical connections, and sociopolitical contexts.

2. Although Bakhtin emphasized multiplicity of others, I focus on conception of the West as the other because of its dominance in participants’ narratives, aspirations, and struggles.
3. It is important to note that fieldwork research for this article was completed before economic sanctions against Russia took their full effect.
4. All geographic and personal names used in this article are pseudonyms.

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