

**CROATIAN LANGUAGE AND CULTURAL MAINTENANCE IN THE SLAVIC-AMERICAN
COMMUNITY OF STRAWBERRY HILL,
KANSAS CITY, KANSAS**

By

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ABSTRACT

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2012

The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate levels of immigrant language retention among Croatian-Americans in the Slavic diaspora community of Strawberry Hill in Kansas City, Kansas. There have been three major waves of Croatian immigration to Kansas City over the last 100 years, and members of the Strawberry Hill community represent the following generations: child, parent, grandparent and great-grandparent. This thesis examined language shift among two groups of consultants based on the Expanded Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (EGIDS, Lewis and Simons 2010). I explore (1) Croatian-American English bilingualism and (2) the maintenance of cultural practices that are associated with the homeland, Croatia, through structured interviews with 20 Croatian-Americans. Results indicated that first-wave immigrants typically possess passive knowledge or symbolic proficiency of Croatian, whereas second- and third-wave immigrants retain high levels of bilingualism. This current analysis also reevaluates previous studies of the community and suggests that attitudes toward bilingualism have changed over the last few decades due to two major socio-economic transformations. I argue that it is not imperative for Croatian-Americans in Strawberry Hill to speak their ancestral language because ethnic heritage can be maintained through cultural practices even after Croatian has shifted to American English.

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Hvala na sve.

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1. INTRODUCTION

For most of us the ancestral language has already yielded its place of priority to English, but the humanistic values of our forebears—their spiritual values, love of family and fellowman, even the delights of cuisine and play—transcend the limits of a particular language and have meaning for ethnic Americans and indeed all Americans.

Thomas F. Magner (1976:67)

“Did you know there is a Croatian neighborhood in Kansas City? It’s called ‘Strawberry Hill.’ There’s a Croatian church and a museum.” I was shocked by the news my husband had just shared with me over the phone. It made me think back to a geography course I took as an undergraduate. The professor had mentioned a world region called former Yugoslavia once during the entire semester. Even then, he only spoke about parts of it for five or ten minutes in passing, explaining that Slovenia had recently joined the European Union and that Croatia was also vying for membership. And that was it. I knew practically nothing about these places but could not get them out of my head.

How was it that I had lived nearly two decades without having learned about Yugoslavia? The country no longer existed, but the place itself had a unique history. Who were the people who lived there—how did they identify themselves, and which languages did they speak? It was these questions that led me to pursue a master’s degree in linguistic anthropology from the University of Kansas. I had no idea at the time, but the geography course about developed nations literally changed my life by introducing me to the countries that I now study as a graduate student. I eventually realized that it was the people of Strawberry Hill who could answer my questions about identity and language.

I visited the Strawberry Hill Museum and Cultural Center with my husband not long after the phone conversation, and I began volunteering there in October 2010 to establish contacts and

to learn more about the neighborhood.¹ I discovered two things right away by spending time in Strawberry Hill. First, besides Croats, there were other immigrant groups who had moved to that same area of Kansas City over the years including people from other parts of Yugoslavia, Germany, Ireland, Russia, Poland, Ukraine and other countries. Second, Croats and these other groups were very proud of their ethnic heritage—so proud, in fact, that a few concerned citizens established the museum in 1988 to “sponsor and preserve” the heritage of their forebears (SHMCC 2011). The museum is run entirely by volunteers who see this as their duty and privilege.

I began introducing myself to as many people as possible once I became familiar with the area. At first, I assumed most of the museum volunteers were residents of the neighborhood, but it became clear that many of the people I met did not live in Strawberry Hill. They had either grown up in the community or had family members who had once lived there. These people currently reside in other parts of Kansas City or surrounding areas. Some of them had not lived in Strawberry Hill for years or even at all, but they were drawn to the community. One cultural geographer has argued that, over time, individuals “yearn more for home and thus tend to become more intensely attached to it,” valuing more what they “seem to be losing” (Terkenli 1995:331). A lot of people still consider Strawberry Hill to be their home, a place more familiar than any other, and they are obviously devoted to its preservation.

The people I met at the museum were pleased to hear about my interest in former Yugoslavia. When I told them I was studying Croatian, they beamed. Almost everyone asked about my own background. “What’s your last name? Who are your parents?” Surely I had Croatian heritage, they thought. Why else would I be studying the language? There were mixed

¹ I also attended meetings of the Strawberry Hill Neighborhood Association during the same time to obtain information about the community organization for a research poster I presented at the Society for Applied Anthropology’s annual conference in April 2011.

reactions when I told them I was from Arkansas and that I did not have any sort of Slavic heritage. Some were puzzled and wanted to know more about my reasons for choosing the field of study. Others simply accepted my decision, and a few people said they were proud of me for learning about their culture. Really, they were proud of someone they had just met? I did not doubt their sincerity, but it struck me that multiple people expressed this attitude to a stranger.

Throughout this thesis, I explore the social identity of Croatian-Americans and their attitudes toward their ancestral language and culture in the Slavic-American community of Strawberry Hill in Kansas City, Kansas. Strawberry Hill has been known for its ethnic parishes and Slavic beginnings for several decades (Manzo 1975; Greenbaum 1978; Filipović 1983). This is why I refer to the neighborhood as Slavic-American even though most Croatian-Americans and other Slavs no longer live there. Dozens of these individuals and their families still participate in the social organizations of Strawberry Hill and are considered members of the community regardless of their residence. *Community* can be defined as “people who interact and communicate frequently with one another, share common interests, common values, and common goals” (Tepperman 2010:7). Thus, a community consists of individuals and is not necessarily a bounded geographic location.

There have been three major waves of Croatian immigration to Kansas City. The initial movement took place during the late 19th and early 20th centuries when hundreds of Eastern Europeans immigrated to work in factories, hoping to establish new, meaningful lives in the United States (KSHS 2010). This period of resettlement coincides with the peak of immigration to the United States in 1907 when 70 percent of all immigrants were Slavs (Prpic 1971:103). Many of these original immigrant workers built homes in Wyandotte County next to the Kansas River in western Kansas City. This area eventually became known as Strawberry Hill because of

the wild strawberries that grew there (Chin 1985:xi). The first South Slavic immigrants from the Austro-Hungarian Empire moved to Strawberry Hill during the early 1890s (Manzo 1975:14). Most of these earliest Slavs were born in the mountainous region of Gorski Kotar (lit., mountain district), which is part of modern-day Croatia near the southern Slovene border (Greenbaum 1978; Filipović 1983, 1997, 2001). The second wave of immigration occurred a few decades after World War II, and the third took place during the 1990s and early 2000s because of the Yugoslav wars of secession.

I attempt to answer the following questions in this research: Do Croatian-Americans in Kansas City currently speak their ancestral language? In which situations is Croatian used? Is there a significant difference in (1) degree of bilingualism and (2) the maintenance of Croatian cultural practices between descendents of the first wave of immigration and the newer immigrants who settled in the United States after World War II? Is it likely that use of the Croatian language will completely disappear in Kansas City? These questions are addressed through analyses of data obtained from linguistic fieldwork in Strawberry Hill and other places around Kansas City where Croatian-Americans live. The fieldwork consisted of participant-observation at community events and structured interviews about Croatian language and culture with 20 Croatian-Americans.

I begin the next chapter with a review of pertinent scholarly literature about topics directly related to language, cultural maintenance and Slavic diaspora groups. The notion of “diaspora” and other key concepts are defined. Research and theories about language maintenance, acculturation and cultural preservation are also introduced and critiqued. The research of Joshua A. Fishman is given special attention because of his innovative work on language maintenance and language shift, which began in the 1960s. I provide further

background by discussing relevant sociolinguistic case studies of immigrant language retention in the United States and by comparing the Strawberry Hill community to other diaspora settlements across the nation.

In Chapter 3, I provide an overview of my project and present two hypotheses about Croatian language use I formulated prior to fieldwork. Next, I discuss the methods I used to obtain information from Croatian-American consultants in detail, highlighting the language shift paradigm that is used to distinguish current levels of Croatian language use in the community. I end the section with a discussion of similarities and differences between consultants who participated in this study. Analyses of the data are provided in Chapter 4, which is dedicated to the linguistic and cultural activities of two groups of Croatian-Americans in Kansas City. I conclude the thesis with Chapter 5 by reviewing the results and implications of this research.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This examination of language and cultural maintenance in one Croatian diaspora community in Kansas City is informed by historical studies, theory, and methods from several disciplines including linguistics, anthropology, sociology and Slavic studies. In this chapter, I define key terms and discuss the areas of research that are most relevant to these topics.

Diaspora is a social, transnational phenomenon. A diaspora community consists of members of an immigrant minority group who can be defined by their “consciousness of a common belonging to a nation and a distant homeland, and usually also acting upon this consciousness” (Colic-Peisker 2008:157).

Language Shift and Acculturation

In Strawberry Hill, the Croatian language has almost entirely shifted to American English. I use the term *language shift* here to refer to instances when individuals or groups of people “adopt a new language or variety into their repertoires, whether or not at the same time they also give up a language or variety that they had previously used” (Fishman 1972:107).

Language shift determines how speakers think about and relate to their first language. *Language maintenance* occurs when a person or group attempts to maintain and develop its ancestral language (Fishman 1966a:21). The process of language shift in Strawberry Hill has influenced Croatian language maintenance as bilingual Croatian-Americans have been faced with the decision of whether or not to speak Croatian with their children—individuals who will grow up in a society dominated by the English language.

Members of the Strawberry Hill community have been naturalized as American citizens for more than a century in a manner that is most accurately described as *de-ethnization*, or the process of forming the “national identity and the national self-concept of most Americans”

(Fishman 1966a:29). This is an expected outcome in the United States that has destabilized Croatian language maintenance in Kansas City as immigrants react to social pressures and negotiate their status in society.

Rudolf Filipović conducted linguistic fieldwork in a number of Croatian-American communities including Strawberry Hill. In doing so, he developed a three-part linguistic formula to represent the maintenance-shift process (Table 1).

Table 1: Stages of Croatian Language Maintenance to American English Language Shift²
(Filipović 1983, 1997, 2001)

Stage	Language Situation	Speaker Generation
A	monolingual	The first-generation Croatian immigrant speaks Croatian only.
B	bilingual	The first-generation Croatian immigrant learns to speak English or the second-generation Croatian-American becomes bilingual.
C	monolingual	The third-generation Croatian-American speaks English only.

Filipović warned that the three stages of immigrant language retention are not always compatible with the three generations of all Croatian-American communities. His studies showed that “some immigrant groups preserve their dialect even in the third generation” (2001:54–55). Strawberry Hill was portrayed as one of these exceptions, and the researcher cited six institutions in the community that kept the ancestral language alive in Kansas City: family life, work environments, ethnic organizations, immigrant-owned businesses, and St. John the Baptist Catholic Church and School (Filipović 1983:285–286; 1997:30–31; 2001:57, 61).

Filipović published three articles (1983, 1997, 2001) that discuss Croatian-American English bilingualism in Strawberry Hill. Each of these articles represents the same line of investigation, but the actual fieldwork research cited in the articles was conducted during the mid- to late-1970s (Parker 1978:2). The researcher does not mention the number of participants

² Filipović created this scheme by adapting Robert Di Pietro’s linguistic formula to examine “the general phenomena of immigrant language retention” (Filipović 2001:54).

recorded in the community or the age, sex, or any other related marker of identity for the Croatian-Americans he interviewed. Hard data that would illustrate how the researcher chose which stage of dialect retention the speakers displayed is also missing. Although I agree that the six institutions cited by Filipović must have contributed to ancestral language maintenance in the past, my current research shows that the Croatian language is not maintained by third-generation Croatian-Americans in Strawberry Hill. Despite Filipović's previous work, I argue that Croatian language maintenance in Strawberry Hill *is* best described by the three stages of language shift presented in Table 1 because the Croatian language has shifted to American English for most third-generation members of the community.

Successful transmission of a heritage language does not always ensure maintenance among the next generation. Members of the Strawberry Hill community who speak both Croatian and American English have expressed disappointment and uncertainty about the continued use of Croatian in Kansas City—especially among younger Croatian-Americans. Some Eastern European immigrants who settled in the United States have reported that a major barrier to ancestral language retention is that their children become exposed to more English-dominated environments through school and friendships as they reach adolescence. These parents said their children spoke English instead of their first language once the children became proficient speakers of English (Nesteruk 2010:281). The trend of responding in English to questions or comments spoken in the ancestral language is also characteristic of young members of the Strawberry Hill community. Therefore, while it is feasible to transmit a heritage language to children, “it is exceptionally difficult to maintain it during the adolescent years due to the developmental pressures of this age” (Nesteruk 2010:284).

Here I evaluate the current status of the Croatian language in Strawberry Hill using a sociolinguistic measure known as the Expanded Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (EGIDS, Lewis and Simons 2010). This scale is based on Joshua A. Fishman's Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (GIDS, 1991) and has been extended by several levels. More details about the extended scale are provided in Section 3.2. Fishman developed the original measure to determine the threatened status of a language due to language shift. A high rating on the scale indicates a severely threatened language that is used in few or no circumstances. A low rating represents a language that is used in multiple social arenas and is therefore less threatened, although it does not ensure the future vitality of the language (Fishman 1991:107). These graded scales of intergenerational language use are valuable research tools for two main reasons. First, they enable the field researcher to add a quantitative edge to linguistic work that is largely based on qualitative analyses of language use. Second, the scales make it possible to compare different sociolinguistic situations in speech communities.

In Strawberry Hill, Croatian language use is affected by *acculturation*, the process by which an outsider acquires the culture of the dominant group (Nahirny and Fishman 1966a:188). Over the past 100 years, Slavic immigrants went to great lengths to “make Americans of themselves” (Prpic 1971:227). One extreme method of Anglicization was to change, shorten or respell family names, which was done for “practical or opportunistic reasons” because many Slavs were confronted with discrimination due to their accents; also, most Americans viewed the immigrants as outsiders and did not bother to pronounce Slavic names correctly (Prpic 1971:227).

Croatian immigrants also faced this sort of discrimination in Kansas City. Today, most Croatian members of the Strawberry Hill community spell their surnames without Croatian

diacritic marks, and these names are generally pronounced according to English language rules. Some individuals have applied this trend to first names as well. For example, one second-wave consultant dropped the 'j' in her first name, spelling it 'Maria' instead of 'Marija' because the former spelling is more familiar to English speakers.

Acculturation also influences Croatian immigrants in Kansas City to develop new cultural attitudes. This social process is dependent on two factors (Colic-Peisker 2008:195), which are born out in Strawberry Hill. First, Croatian immigrants must be willing to adopt the practices of the majority by learning the dominant language and stressing traditional American values such as hard work and education. Second, the host society must be willing to accept Croatian immigrants as contributors to American economic prosperity through their work in stockyards, factories and other jobs.

First-generation immigrants who voluntarily leave their homeland are likely to accept the dominant culture on an individual level. Val Colic-Peisker found that Croats in Australia accepted Australian good manners, greater tolerance of difference, and a strong work ethic because they found these aspects of the culture to be "beneficial to themselves and others" (2008:195). Still, some first-generation immigrants resisted acculturation because they considered it disloyal and thought Australian culture was causing divides within the Croatian community (Colic-Peisker 2008:200). Although second and later immigrant generations experience adolescence at different time periods, they are almost entirely acculturated according to the dominant culture of their society because of prolonged immersion (Fishman 1966b:395, 405). This trend of immersion aids in the explanation of why some immigrant children in Kansas City use American English at home even if they speak Croatian.

Cultural maintenance refers to (1) the efforts taken to preserve one's culture and (2) the efforts taken to resist acculturation. Maintenance may be enforced on an individual level or at the group level. In diaspora communities in the United States, immigrant groups developed institutions that would allow them to maintain their culture at the group level. It has been reported that heritage language schools, churches, lodges, and other organizations largely contributed to ethnic cultural maintenance among these groups (Fishman 1966a; Jutronic 1976; Ward 1976). Strawberry Hill is no exception. Croatian-Americans in the community began construction on their own parish, St. John the Baptist Catholic Church, in 1900, and the Croatian language was taught at the parish school until World War II in some capacity. Lodges were established to help workers finance funerals, and clubs were formed to promote social support and recreation.

Both ethnic communal life and ethnic heritage came largely to depend upon and be sustained by such purposively devised organizational bonds. Only through participation in ethnic organizational life could the immigrants, and even more so their native-born children, reassert their ethnic solidarity as well as express their attachment to ethnic values and traditions. (Nahirny and Fishman 1966b:352)

Just as heritage language use fades according to generation, immigrant culture is also susceptible to pressures from the dominant society. If the younger immigrant generation is uninterested in participating in these institutions as adults, maintenance of the heritage culture will break down at the community level along with the organizations.

Croatian-Americans in Strawberry Hill who want their children to learn and speak Croatian cite two main reasons for transmitting the language. First, knowledge of Croatian is necessary for younger Croatian-Americans to communicate with their family members who still live overseas. In many cases, this includes extended family members such as grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins. Second, use of Croatian is encouraged because it is perceived as a way to

maintain and promote Croatian heritage. Family communication and cultural preservation are also reported in other immigrant communities as reasons for ancestral language maintenance (Kouzmin 1988; Nesteruk 2010).

Nevertheless, all attempts at language maintenance are not successful. Attitudes toward foreign languages are complex, but minority languages are typically considered by most members of a society to be inferior to the dominant language (Hidalgo 1986:197). This sentiment was expressed by a few older consultants who remembered times during their childhood when some people from Strawberry Hill faced discrimination because of their limited use of English. Language is an extremely significant part of culture, but it is just one aspect. Language is, after all, a “criterion for the identification of a people though it is not an essential one” (Magner 1976:61). Negative attitudes toward foreign language use influence immigrant groups to emphasize other forms of ethnic identity in the diaspora (Jutronic 1986).

Shifting Language Perspectives

This thesis concerns speakers of Croatian, a South Slavic language of the Indo-European language family. The other South Slavic languages are Bosnian, Bulgarian, Macedonian, Montenegrin, Serbian and Slovene. These languages are predominantly spoken in East-Central Europe, although thousands of South Slavic speakers can be found in diaspora communities all over the world. Bosnian, Croatian, Montenegrin and Serbian share a complicated past as mutually intelligible languages and have been referred to by various names over the years. The name of a language is not a neutral identifier. Language names and how they are used by various people “reveal attitudes, biases, and conscious or unconscious views toward the speakers of these varieties, the worthiness of their varieties in polite society, and their conceivable ephemerality or permanence” (Fishman 2010:6).

Historically, sections of the region where Bosnian, Croatian, Montenegrin and Serbian are currently spoken belonged to the Austro-Hungarian, Byzantine, and Ottoman Empires. Once the Austro-Hungarian Empire dissolved in 1918, most South Slavs formed their own successor state called the Kingdom of Yugoslavia.³ This state began to disintegrate in 1991, and the independent nations of Bosnia and Herzegovina⁴, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia⁵ and Slovenia were eventually formed. Ethnic and linguistic sensibilities have changed in this region based on these new states. The Bosnian, Croatian, Serbian and Montenegrin languages of today surfaced along with the independence of the former Yugoslav countries with which they are associated. *Language group* is often synonymous with *ethnic group*, but an individual's *use* of language and his or her symbolic capabilities can redefine or reshape ethnicity (Blench 1996:3). The relationship between language and ethnicity is a convoluted one and is reflected in the multiple names that are used to refer to these mutually intelligible languages.

During the reign of the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman Empires, a literary enterprise was initiated by Croatian linguist Ljudevit Gaj called the Illyrian Movement (1835–1848). Proponents of the movement called for a standard language that could be used by South Slavs who were separated by these two empires (Greenberg 2010b:364). Eventually, the Illyrian Movement became more Croatian-focused, but it set the stage for the Vienna Literary Agreement of 1850 in which Croats and Serbs agreed on a Štokavian standard that would unite their languages, which was to be referred to as Serbo-Croatian or Croato-Serbian (Greenberg

³ The Kingdom of Yugoslavia was referred to as the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes from 1918 until 1929. At the conclusion of World War II it became known as the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY).

⁴ Bosnia and Herzegovina consists of ethnic territories that are not entirely recognized by the international community.

⁵ Kosovo is an Albanian majority region that declared its independence from Serbia in 2008. The Serbian government has not recognized the secession. Kosovo is now an emergent state and United Nations protectorate.

2010b:365, 377). Authors of literature published between the years 1850 and 1991 typically refer to the language spoken by South Slavs (except Bulgarians and Macedonians) as Serbo-Croatian.

Variations exist between the Bosnian, Croatian, Montenegrin and Serbian standard languages even though they share most lexical items (Lewis 2009). There are three dialects: Kajkavian, Čakavian and Štokavian. The designation of each is primarily determined, both by scholars and speakers themselves, by the word for ‘what’ in each variant: *kaj*, *ča* and *što*, respectively. The Štokavian and Čakavian dialects are additionally classified as Ikavian, Ekavian or Ijekavian based on the pronunciation of the Common Slavic vowel ‘jat’ (Greenberg 1996:4). Bosnian is based on the Štokavian standard but includes a high number of borrowings from Turkish, and, through Turkish, also Arabic and Persian (Greenberg 2010a:23). Standard Serbian and Croatian are also Štokavian-based, but all three dialects are spoken throughout Croatia. Montenegrin is the official language of Montenegro, but it is still (as of 2011) classified by standardizing bodies such as the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) and Ethnologue as a variant of the Serbian language, perhaps because definitive reference works delimiting the features of Montenegrin have only recently been in development. Croats use the Latin alphabet; Montenegrins and Bosnian Serbs use Cyrillic. The Latin and Cyrillic alphabets are both used in Serbia and parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Scholars who published literature after the break-up of Yugoslavia typically use the designations Bosnian, Croatian, Montenegrin or Serbian to refer to the languages spoken in this region because these distinctions are preferred by the inhabitants of these countries.

Ethnicity and Culture Contact in Former Yugoslavia

Ethnicity is typically understood as the qualities or characteristics of a culture group (Niculescu 1997–1998:217). This thesis is grounded in a constructivist view of identity, which

regards ethnicity as a social process that is “made and remade rather than taken for granted” and “chosen depending on circumstances rather than ascribed through birth” (Wimmer 2008:971).

Therefore, an individual’s sense of ethnicity may be in a continuous state of flux.

Ethnicity is complex and variable. It can change from generation to generation, and even within the lifetime of the individual. Ethnic self-identification can vary with context and levels of interaction, from interpersonal relationships to national entities. (Lindstrom 2001:73)

A person’s ethnic identity in the region of former Yugoslavia is a common designator of religion, which is also true for diaspora groups including the Strawberry Hill community.

The Schism of 1054 separated South Slavs into two cultural regions defined by separate branches of Catholicism. Roman Catholicism prevailed among Slovenes and the majority of Croats because they were under the influence of the German state, Hungary, and the Venetian Republic. The Orthodox Church prevailed among Serbs, Montenegrins and Macedonians because of pressures from the Byzantine Empire, which also influenced architecture and literature in the region (Klemenčič and Žagar 2004:29). During the mid-15th century, Turks under the leadership of Mehmed II occupied Bosnia, making it part of the Ottoman Empire. Most locals converted to Islam during this time (Klemenčič and Žagar 2004:20).

These religious distinctions based on geography still exist today. Slovenes and Croats largely identify with the Roman Catholic Church, and the Orthodox Church thrives in Serbia, Montenegro and Macedonia. Religious differences in Bosnia and Herzegovina are more complex because of the ethnic sensibilities of its three major culture groups: Croats (Roman Catholic), Serbs (Orthodox Catholic), and Bosnian Muslims who refer to themselves as *Bosniacs*. Bosnia declared its independence from Yugoslavia in 1992, and devastating ethnic violence erupted in the region due to territorial disputes and the religious and cultural differences of Croats, Serbs and *Bosniacs* (Silber and Little 1995:201).

The emphasis of this thesis is a Croatian diaspora group in Kansas City, and I focus on two aspects of Croatian culture, music and cuisine, to provide insight on the relationship between linguistic and cultural maintenance in Strawberry Hill. Folk music is popular in Croatia and the diaspora. It is often sung in celebration of plowing, sowing, harvesting, weaving, housework, love and religion. Dance, play and songs are “inseparable” from various social occasions including weddings, baptisms, feast-days and religious holidays (Eterovich 1964:211). One of the most beloved instruments used to play this music is the *tamburica*, a wooden, stringed instrument with a pear-shaped body that dates back to the 6th century (Prpic 1971:371). Another way to celebrate folk music is to create a circle by joining hands and dancing the *kolo* (lit., circle), a Croatian national dance. Folk songs and *kolo* dances are still maintained in Strawberry Hill and other diaspora communities because Croats who left their homeland continued to cherish these customs abroad.

Preparation of foods associated with Croatia is commonly cited as a marker of ethnic identity in Strawberry Hill. Croats in the homeland and diaspora often raise small vineyards to make their own wine and use smokehouses to prepare meat. Common Croatian foods include *povitica*, *sarma*, *krvavica*, *čevapčići* and *nadjevena*. Members of the Strawberry Hill community continue to prepare these foods either on a daily basis for their families or on special occasions like weddings or holidays (Chinn 1985:46–47). Maintaining customary food habits has been a way to sustain *Hrvatstvo* (lit., Croatness) because “preparing and consuming the same foods in a new context is as much an act of innovation, assertion, and transformation as it is an act of reproducing tradition” (Oyangen 2009:324), a concept that is further explored in Section 4.3.

Croatian Diaspora in North America

The Croatian diaspora consists of 4.5 million people or “about half the number of all Croats worldwide” (Winland 2007:109). Most immigrants left their homeland for political or economic reasons or both (Prpic 1971:89). Thousands of Croats settled in North America. Strawberry Hill is typical of a North American Croatian diaspora group for three main reasons. First, members of the community built their own Catholic parish. Second, individuals continue to participate in organizations that promote *Hrvatstvo* such as the Croatian Fraternal Union (CFU) and various Croatian-American social clubs. Third, most community members maintain Croatian practices at the individual or family level.

Daphne Winland (2007) presented 12 years of fieldwork and analyses dedicated to uncovering the complex social phenomenon of diaspora, using Croats in Canada as a case study. Croatian language use was a key approach for establishing personal identity among Toronto Croats, and it gave them the opportunity to distance themselves from Toronto Serbs (Winland 2007:56). The issue of language and how to refer to it became “a central barometer of interethnic relations in Toronto,” and in 1993, the local Croatian population urged professors at the University of Toronto to stop referring to their language courses as Serbo-Croatian (Winland 2007:65). Students were thereafter given the option to take either Serbian or Croatian courses. Because of the homeland war of secession from Yugoslavia during the early- to mid-1990s and their need to assert *Hrvatstvo*, members of the Croatian community provided financial support for the separate Croatian language course only (Winland 2007:68). The Croatian response to language in Toronto mirrored the response in the homeland as Croatian authorities attempted to make their language more different from Serbian (Winland 2007:66). Nevertheless, language

was a “symbol of unity” and a “marker of difference” because the use of regional dialects persisted in Croatia and the diaspora (Winland 2007:68).

Mass immigration to the United States occurred during a 40-year period beginning in 1880 and included thousands of South Slavs from the Austro-Hungarian Empire (Fishman 1966a:25). Family-sponsored immigration was permitted during this time, which allowed individuals who had already settled in the United States to bring over members of their family (Colic-Peisker 2008:55). Sizeable Yugoslav immigrant communities were formed in Ohio, Illinois, New York, California, Wisconsin, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Kansas and other states (Prpic 1971; Albin 1976; Ward 1976; Jutronic 1976; Filipović 1983).

Ivana Djuric (2003) provided a study of ethnic solidarity and Croatian identity between home (Canada and the United States) and homeland (Croatia) by using discourse analysis to examine the *Zajedničar* (lit., Fraternalist), the official newsletter of the CFU, which was first published in 1904. All Croatian-Americans from Strawberry Hill are familiar with the publication, and some of them contribute news or editorials to the newsletter. The CFU is the oldest and largest Croatian organization in North America and has around 100,000 members, making it “the most influential of the Croatian diasporic organizations” (Djuric 2003:115). There are about 40,000 readers of the *Zajedničar* who live in Canada and the United States (Djuric 2003:115). Djuric analyzed newsletter articles about the activities and attitudes of CFU members that were published between 1980 and 1995 to explore “the main trends in different stages of ethnic homogenization and mobilization of Croatian diaspora in North America” (Djuric 2003:113–114).

At a 1982 meeting of the CFU, English was declared the official language of the organization because few members were able to read Croatian, and there was speculation that the

Croatian language would disappear within 15 years in the North American diaspora (Djuric 2003:116–117). Croatian language loss was also apparent in Strawberry Hill during this time because many descendants of the first wave of immigration had already shifted to English. In spite of the official change from Croatian to English, members of the CFU began to promote Croatian in two major ways during the mid- to late-1980s. Funds were raised to establish the Department of Croatian Language and Culture at York University in Toronto—the first of its kind outside of Croatia. Members also petitioned the Voice of America radio service to include a Croatian segment that was to be separate from Serbo-Croatian broadcasts. The newer broadcasts were created to highlight “the distinctiveness of the Croatian language” (Djuric 2003:117).

The CFU avoided religious affiliation until December 1986 when an annual section called “Encyclical to the Diaspora” was added to the *Zajedničar* (Djuric 2003:118). At this time, members began to stress the importance of Catholicism because of the central role the Catholic Church played in maintaining ethnic identity within diaspora communities (Djuric 2003:118). The Catholic Church was seminal in perpetuating Croatian identity in Strawberry Hill and among other diaspora groups, but this does not explain why there was an upsurge in articles about religion during the mid-1980s. Readers of the *Zajedničar* were aware that the Croatian language faced extinction in North America. It is most likely that Catholicism became an easier marker of Croatian identity to maintain in the diaspora once the language was lost. Dunja Jutronić (1986) argued that retention of Catholicism was stressed over retention of the ancestral language in the Yugoslav diaspora community of Steelton, Pennsylvania. If typical, this explains why more articles about religion were introduced after English was declared the official language of the CFU.

Immigrant language maintenance in Croatian or Yugoslav diaspora communities in the United States has been fairly well documented (Albin 1976; Ward 1976; Jutronic 1976; Filipović 1983, 1997, 2001). Most findings correspond with the three stages of Croatian to American English language shift described by Filipović (Table 1). There was “no appreciable language loss” among second-generation speakers of Serbo-Croatian in San Pedro, California because members of the speech community were “very conscious of language as well as cultural maintenance” (Albin 1976:89).

Deterioration of Serbo-Croatian among second-generation speakers of multiple Yugoslav diaspora groups in Milwaukee County, Wisconsin was marked in two major ways: (1) loss of case endings and (2) apprehension about responding to questions in the language that required vocabulary beyond typical daily interactions (Ward 1976:162). Still, the researcher departed from Filipović’s three-part schema by arguing that, despite current speakers’ shortcomings, Serbs would continue to speak their ancestral language into the 21st century because of social institutions like the Catholic Church and newer waves of immigration (Ward 1976:164–165). Recent immigration to Kansas City (post-World War II) has impacted Croatian language use in Strawberry Hill because the number of Croatian speakers has been renewed since the initial wave of immigration during the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Each successive generation in Steelton, Pennsylvania spoke or understood Serbo-Croatian with less precision than the previous generation (Jutronic 1976). Most third-generation immigrants were not fluent speakers of Serbo-Croatian because of the following: Croatian-Americans were marrying outside of their ethnolinguistic group; Serbo-Croatian was no longer used in church services; Serbo-Croatian was mostly used in the home or with friends; children who learned Serbo-Croatian lost interest in the language once they entered elementary school

(Jutronic 1976:185). These four explanations for language loss can also be applied to Strawberry Hill and are further discussed in Section 4.1. Jutronic reached two conclusions about the use of Serbo-Croatian in Steelton. As previously mentioned, it became more important for members of the community to maintain Catholicism than their heritage language. Second, the language would eventually vanish from the community because there was “very little need to communicate in Serbo-Croatian in an open and receptive society where English is the dominant language” (Jutronic 1976:185).

Croatian-Americans in Strawberry Hill

Defining the social structure of the Slavic-American community of Strawberry Hill is a complicated task because regional and national identities have changed in Eastern Europe since the first wave of South Slavic immigration. Yet individuals from each of the three waves brought their ancestral language and cultural practices with them to Strawberry Hill, enriching the cultural landscape of Kansas City. Some of the original immigrants intended to stay in the United States for a short time, just long enough to earn the money needed to finance farmland back in the homeland. Twenty to sixty percent of the workers returned home; those who stayed became permanent U.S. residents (Magnuson 1990:5). Individuals from the third wave of immigration were classified as refugees by the U.S. government due to the ethnic violence that persisted in regions of former Yugoslavia. Most of these immigrants were born in what is now Croatia or Bosnia and Herzegovina. Some of the refugees are Bosnian Croats (Christian) and others are *Bosniacs* (Muslim).

A growing number of Strawberry Hill residents are completely unrelated to the original population, but some descendants of the first Croatian immigrants have remained in Strawberry Hill for more than 12 decades. After World War II, young couples were not able to find suitable

housing in the neighborhood. Homes were simply not available due to overcrowding, or they were too small or not equipped with modern conveniences. This caused dozens of Croatian-Americans to move west of Strawberry Hill to other parts of Kansas City (Greenbaum 1978:14). The most devastating transformation of the neighborhood occurred in 1957 with the construction of an inter-city viaduct. This project led to the destruction of more than 200 homes in Strawberry Hill, forcing even more Croatian-Americans from their historic neighborhood (Greenbaum 1978:1, 15). Although the physical size of the community changed drastically, some second- and third-wave immigrants were able to settle in Strawberry Hill when housing was available. Some families moved out of the neighborhood once they were able to afford larger properties.

The Croatian-American population of Kansas City from all three waves of immigration is uncertain, but most consultants estimated that there are currently 300 to 400 Croatian-Americans living in the Kansas City area. Many individuals from all generations remain in contact through social functions and church membership at St. John the Baptist Catholic Church. This parish represents “the history of the Croatian people, their religious faith, and their struggle to keep that faith alive while adapting to the culture and customs of their adopted country” (Diamond Jubilee 1975:20). The church was completed in 1905 (Greenbaum 1975:8). At the time of its formation, the church was located at the center of the neighborhood. It now stands at the edge of the community, overlooking Interstate-70 because of the viaduct construction of 1957.

The first pastor of St. John the Baptist, Msgr. Martin Krmpotic, was born in the Croatian region of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and moved to Kansas City in 1902 (Diamond Jubilee 1975:8). Each pastor since has been of Croatian descent except for the current priest who assumed leadership of the church after Fr. Frank Horvat retired in 2011 due to health reasons. Before 1926, all three masses were delivered in Croatian at St. John the Baptist. By 1938, there

were four masses—three in English and only one in Croatian (Manzo 1975:51). Today, all masses are delivered in English except on special holidays or when a visiting priest is in town who speaks Croatian.

A Catholic school was required for churches with at least 25 children, according to the statutes of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Leavenworth, Kansas. Classes were held in the basement of the St. John the Baptist until 1907, when a separate school building was constructed (Diamond Jubilee 1975:48). The school provided education until the eighth grade. Croatian was used for teaching “in the early days” because the teachers from Europe did not speak English well, but Croatian became a “secondary language” after the teachers learned to speak English (Diamond Jubilee 1975:52).

Former students do not recall the precise year Croatian was no longer used, but three consultants who attended the school during the 1930s suggested that Croatian was taught in some capacity up until World War II. These former students said they remembered having Croatian lessons and a Croatian primer book until the third grade. One consultant who graduated from the eighth grade in 1940 said she enjoyed the Croatian classes “very much” and was given a rosary as a prize for speaking Croatian well.

Croatian heritage has been maintained in other ways than speaking the heritage language in Strawberry Hill. A *tamburica* orchestra was formed at the school in 1966 to preserve the musical heritage of the parish. Over the years, dozens of students were taught how to play folk music on the traditional instrument, and members of the student group traveled to Yugoslavia in 1973 to perform at the International Folk Festival (Diamond Jubilee 1975:98). In 2007, the same year the school was closed, an adult *tamburica* group was formed called *Hrvatski Običaj*⁶ (lit.,

⁶ There is another *tambura* orchestra based out of Sugar Creek, Missouri. Some members of the Strawberry Hill community are part of this music group.

Croatian tradition). There are about 25 members of the group who sing and play traditional folk music from Croatia, performing locally and at national festivals (Hrvatski Običaj 2011).

Croatian-Americans in Kansas City also maintain awareness of Croatian culture through CFU membership. There are two active lodges of the organization in Kansas City (CFU 2011). A number of social clubs also promote *Hrvatstvo* by sponsoring Croatian dances, concerts, dinners and picnics for the community.

Joseph Manzo (1975) argued that it was difficult to avoid contact with the Croatian language in Strawberry Hill even after instruction of the language was abandoned at school. Formal Croatian language classes were offered to children and adults at St. John the Baptist at the time of his inquiry, though. The Croatian alphabet and a dictionary column were also printed in a newsletter published by the church (Manzo 1975:52). Manzo's main research topic was geographical modifications in the community, but he stated that older residents spoke their ancestral language fluently and that their middle-aged children used Croatian words to emphasize communication in English (Manzo 1975:51).

Susan Greenbaum (1978) reconstructed the history of Strawberry Hill to identify and describe the people of the neighborhood. A systematic analysis of the Croatian language was not presented, but certain aspects of the language were characterized from a household survey. Of the Croatian-Americans interviewed, 43 out of 46 participants stated that they were bilingual, speaking both Croatian and American English. In many cases, Croatian was spoken as a household language during childhood and was maintained in later years because of the need to communicate with older family members (Greenbaum 1978:22). Unfortunately, this research lacks the perspective of younger Croatian-Americans as the average age of participants was 62

years. Readers are not given any sense of how younger adults felt about their ancestral language or whether they planned to speak it in the future with their own children.

The most striking difference between Manzo (1975) and Greenbaum (1978) is the portrayal of the strength of the neighborhood. Greenbaum argued that Strawberry Hill was still viable while Manzo articulated the neighborhood's imminent demise because of the geographical changes that reshaped the physical landscape of the community. Greenbaum was more optimistic and emphasized the vitality of Strawberry Hill, saying that the neighborhood represented "a living system" of ethnic heritage (1978:19).

2.1 SUMMARY

In this chapter, I have discussed and, in some cases, critiqued a collection of scholarly literature about language shift, cultural maintenance and Slavic diaspora groups. This account has culminated with an emphasis on the Strawberry Hill community in Kansas City. If possible, speech communities should be investigated "every few decades" (Dwyer 2011:10). The state of bilingualism in Strawberry Hill among Croatian-Americans is in need of an update because the last studies were conducted more than 25 years ago (Manzo 1975, Greenbaum 1978; Filipović 1983). In Chapter 3, I outline the methods used for linguistic fieldwork among Croatian-Americans from Strawberry Hill, highlighting the language shift paradigm known as the Expanded Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (EGIDS, Lewis and Simons 2010). I also discuss two hypotheses I developed about Croatian language use before interviews were conducted.

3. OVERVIEW

This chapter explores the general techniques implemented during short-term linguistic fieldwork in Strawberry Hill. In October 2010, I began establishing contacts in the community through volunteer work at the Strawberry Hill Museum and Cultural Center, and, in January 2011, I began researching Croatian diaspora groups and immigrant language retention. I conducted structured interviews with 20 Croatian-Americans between July and November 2011, exploring consultants' perceptions of *Hrvatstvo* (lit., Croatness) via Croatian language and cultural maintenance. I also used participant-observation to interact with Croatian-Americans at community events such as festivals and *tamburica* performances.

This qualitative study identifies factors that lead to language maintenance and loss over a series of generations by evaluating two hypotheses about the relationship between Croatian language and cultural practices throughout a century of Croatian immigration to Kansas City. The first wave of immigration occurred during the late 19th and early 20th centuries; the second took place after World War II; and the third wave occurred during the 1990s and early 2000s as a result of the Yugoslav wars of secession. Croatian to American English language shift is investigated among two groups of consultants through application of the Expanded Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (EGIDS, Lewis and Simons 2010). Prior to interviews, my conversations with members of the community and background reading presented conflicting evidence of Croatian language maintenance in Strawberry Hill.

3.1 HYPOTHESES

I developed hypotheses about Croatian language use in Strawberry Hill because previous fieldwork in the community (Manzo 1975; Greenbaum 1978; Filipović 1983, 1997, 2001) did not correspond with the current linguistic knowledge of descendants of the first wave of

immigration from the early 20th century. I spent time with third-generation Croatian-Americans from the first wave at the museum, but I did not find evidence to substantiate Filipović's claim (1983:278; 2001:52) that these individuals continued to speak "perfect" Croatian. They were able to tell me about Croatian customs, but they hardly spoke any Croatian. These conversations led me to the realization that *Hrvatstvo* can exist independently from the Croatian language. I did not meet any second- or third-wave Croatian-Americans until early 2011, but volunteers at the museum assured me that those from the latter two waves of immigration spoke Croatian before and after church and during other social functions. First-hand experience in the community and different assessments of language maintenance gave me the opportunity to consider the relationship between Croatian language and culture among two immigrant groups in Strawberry Hill.

First, Croatian language use has become obsolete among descendents of the first wave of immigration (Group 1) due to negative attitudes toward bilingualism that developed a few years after the original immigrants settled in Kansas City. I suggest that members of the Croatian community as well as cultural outsiders are responsible for the shift. For example, the parent of one Croatian-American resident of Strawberry Hill was not allowed to speak Croatian as a child because her grandfather wanted "American babies." This great-grandfather of the current resident was born in the Croatian region of the Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1888 and immigrated to Kansas during the early 20th century. Furthermore, the coming of television and easier access to cars by younger people gave them a way to interact with people and places beyond Strawberry Hill (Welch 1985:41), exposing them to outside influences and monolingual English speakers. Nevertheless, first-wave descendents still feel a sense of ethnic pride, which is

manifest in the survival of multiple Croatian cultural practices. I explain old and new attitudes toward bilingualism in Section 4.1.

Second, solidarity with the *homeland*, or region of family origin, is the primary motivator for the maintenance of Croatian language and cultural practices among second- and third-wave Croatian-Americans (Group 2). I define *social solidarity* as the continuation of a group through the stable membership of individuals who act to sustain their group identity (Redekop 1967:152–153). For instance, three individuals in Group 2 (30 percent) consistently interact with the homeland by traveling to Croatia almost every year, and others (60 percent) communicate with friends or family who live there on a daily or weekly basis. Fellowship between diaspora and Croatia promotes solidarity among immigrants in Kansas City, fostering *Hrvatstvo* through a shared nostalgia for homeland, a point I explore further among both groups of consultants in Section 4.3. Croatian language and culture are retained to a higher degree among second- and third-wave Croatian-Americans because they have more family members and acquaintances in former Yugoslavia than their first-wave predecessors.

Individuals in Group 2 have maintained bilingualism because Croatian is their first language, and it is necessary for communication with relatives and friends who reside in the homeland. Knowledge of English is also required if an individual wants to find a job and maintain a steady income in American society. Once these immigrants have lived in the United States for multiple generations, the same process of language loss will most likely affect their progeny due to the same outside pressures that led to monolingualism among descendents of the first wave of immigration. A complete shift from Croatian to American English will presumably occur within three generations, which is typical for European diaspora groups in the United States (Fishman 1978).

Croatian cultural maintenance is also at stake in Strawberry Hill. Personal observations and conversations with members of the community confirmed that some practices were common, such as preparing foods associated with Croatia and observing holidays connected to the Catholic Church. Culture is emergent, and “each new performance or expression of cultural heritage is a copy in that it always looks back to a prior performance, but each is also an original in that it adapts to new circumstances and conditions” (Bruner 1994:407). I argue that some practices have persisted precisely because of this notion—because they have been modified or are still perceived as contemporary and relevant to family life. The Croatian language has been lost by some Croatian-Americans because it was not adapted to new circumstances and conditions, making it redundant in a nation where approximately 80 percent of the population 5 years and older speaks only English at home (United States Census Bureau 2007). Ethnic pride and specific examples of cultural practices are covered in Section 4.3.

3.2 METHODS

I initiated a one-year period of qualitative fieldwork consisting of participant observation and structured interviews with 20 Croatian-Americans to evaluate the current status of Croatian language and culture in Strawberry Hill. In order to accomplish this goal, I began ongoing volunteer work at the Strawberry Hill Museum and Cultural Center in October 2010 to establish contacts. I also attended several community events between January and October 2011 including a *kolo* night, *tamburica* performances, and two festivals. I selected consultants based on referrals from volunteers at the museum and through personal encounters in the community, and I categorized consultants by wave of immigration. I scheduled ten interviews with Croatian-American descendents of the first wave (Group 1) and ten interviews with second- and third-wave Croatian-Americans (Group 2).

I divided consultants into these two groups because individuals with family members who settled in Kansas City during the late 19th and early 20th centuries were born in the United States and have not spent substantial portions of their lives in Croatia. Nearly all of them (70 percent) have traveled there, but consultants mostly visit as tourists and rely on English to function in the homeland of their parents and grandparents. First-generation immigrants from the second and third waves were born in Yugoslavia and lived there throughout childhood and early adulthood. Recent immigrants are able to activate specific memories of day-to-day life in their homeland. Therefore, different life experiences and levels of exposure to Croatia set the two groups apart.

All of the interviews were carried out during a three and a half month period between July and November 2011. Prior to the interview, each of the 20 consultants signed a participant consent form.⁷ Three interviews were conducted over the phone, and 17 were conducted in person. Interviews typically lasted 60 to 90 minutes. I took extensive notes during these sessions, and I typed and saved hand-written notes in electronic form within two days of the interview. All interviews were conducted in English, and sessions were recorded when permission was granted by the consultant.

First, I evaluate the current status of Croatian language use in Strawberry Hill among both groups of consultants based on the Expanded Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (EGIDS, Table 2). This scale, developed by M. Paul Lewis and Gary F. Simons (2010), is derived from Joshua A. Fishman's (1991) Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (GIDS) and has been extended from 8 to 13 levels by incorporating elements from other language assessment tools designed by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

⁷ Permission was obtained from the Lawrence Human Subjects Committee in November 2010 to conduct fieldwork for a one-year period: HSCL #19039.

(UNESCO) and Ethnologue. New levels were added because the original scale does not sufficiently describe all potential language situations (Lewis and Simons 2010:106). For example, Level 9 accounts for *symbolic proficiency* and is concerned with “the relationship of ethnic identity to high-prestige linguistic remnants such as greetings” (Dwyer 2011:9).

Table 2: Expanded Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (Lewis and Simmons 2010)

EGIDS Level	EGIDS Label	EGIDS Description
0	International	Language is used internationally for a broad range of functions.
1	National	Language is used in education, work, mass media, and government at the nationwide level.
2	Regional	Language is used for local and regional mass media and governmental services.
3	Trade	Language is used for local and regional work by both insiders and outsiders.
4	Educational	Literacy in the language is being transmitted through a system of public education.
5	Written	Language is used orally by all generations and is effectively used in written form in parts of the community.
6a	Vigorous	Language is used orally by all generations and is being learned by children as their first language.
6b	Threatened	Language is used orally by all generations but only some of the child-bearing generation are transmitting it to their children.
7	Shifting	Child-bearing generation knows the language well enough to use it among themselves but none are transmitting it to their children.
8a	Moribund	The only remaining active speakers of the language are members of the grandparent generation.
8b	Nearly Extinct	The only remaining active speakers of the language are members of the grandparent generation or older who have little opportunity to use the language.
9	Dormant	Language serves as a reminder of heritage identity for an ethnic community. No one has more than symbolic proficiency.
10	Extinct	No one retains a sense of ethnic identity associated with the language, even for symbolic purposes.

To identify which level of intergenerational language use best correlated with speakers, I asked each consultant approximately 50 questions about linguistic and cultural activities and attitudes. I assessed EGIDS levels by analyzing a few key questions developed by Lewis and Simons (2010:113–117), which are listed in Table 3. These questions cover identity function,

vehicularity, state of intergenerational language transmission, literacy acquisition status, and societal profile of generational language use. By summarizing and supplementing consultant responses, I addressed three questions to identify the current state of Croatian language use among 20 Croatian-Americans in Kansas City. Question 2 was not applicable to this study because Croatian is not used as an official language at the national or regional level for government, business or education, and it is not used for trade or other related purposes in Kansas City. I also omitted Question 4 because it corresponds with specific upper levels of the scale that do not represent current stages of Croatian language use in Strawberry Hill.

Table 3: Five Key Questions for Evaluating Language Use via EGIDS
(Lewis and Simons 2010)

Question 1	What is the current identity function of the language?
Question 2	What is the level of official use?
Question 3	Are all parents transmitting the language to their children?
Question 4	What is the literacy status?
Question 5	What is the youngest generation of proficient speakers?

After using the EGIDS to verify the current status of Croatian in the community among both groups of consultants, I utilized the same interviews to reconsider Filipović’s (1983, 1997, 2001) conclusions about Croatian language retention in Strawberry Hill. At the end of his investigation, Filipović wrote that “in order to maintain Croatian customs and ethnic heritage, it is vital to maintain the original dialect” (2001:61). Language is closely related to ethnicity, but Filipović overstates the relationship between language and cultural heritage, a point I will expand on in Chapter 5. Through this analysis, I show that expressions of culture remain even after the ancestral language has been lost. Croatian cultural practices are maintained by those who speak Croatian and by those who do not.

In summary, the EGIDS is most appropriate for this project because it incorporates stages that account for language use in ethnic communities and because it facilitates an accurate

comparison of Croatian to American English language shift among Groups 1 and 2. I also reexamine Filipović’s (1983, 1997, 2001) work in Strawberry Hill by highlighting two socio-economic conditions that have changed in the community since his investigation. A limitation of practically any social assessment tool is that communities rarely fit perfectly within prescribed categories. For instance, neither group of consultants in Strawberry Hill can be categorized by only one level of the EGIDS.

3.3 CONSULTANT DEMOGRAPHICS

Group 1 consists of ten Croatian-American descendents of the first wave of immigration (Table 4). The parents or grandparents of these consultants settled in Kansas City between 1900 and 1923. Each consultant attended St. John the Baptist Catholic School through the eighth grade and is a current member of St. John the Baptist Catholic Church or was at one time—except for one.⁸ Four males and six females between the ages 38 and 88 were interviewed. Four consultants have family from Ribnik or nearby villages on the Croatian side of the southeastern Slovene border, and six have family from the Croatian region of Gorski Kotar. Consultants are second- or third-generation Croatian-American.

Table 4: Croatian-Americans in Group 1

Consultant Number	Sex	Age in 2011	Generation	Straw-Hill Residence	Croatian Spouse
1*	F	88	second	53 years ^Δ	no
2*	F	86	second	25 years	yes
3*	M	81	second	71 years ^Δ	no
4*	F	75	third	19 years	yes
5*	M	75	third	25 years	no
6*	F	72	second	72 years ^Δ	yes
7*	F	71	second	71 years ^Δ	no
8	F	56	second	21 years ^Δ	n/a
9	M	52	third	10 years	n/a
10*	M	38	third	11 years ^Δ	no

*Consultant has at least one child.

^Δ Consultant currently lives in Strawberry Hill.

⁸ This consultant attends Holy Family Catholic Church, the nearby Slovene parish, because she also has Slovene heritage.

Group 2 consists of nine Croatian-Americans from the second wave of immigration and one from the third wave (Table 5). The former are women aged 20 to 91; they or their parents moved to Kansas City between 1959 and 1976. Five of these consultants attended St. John the Baptist Catholic School through the eighth grade or sent their children to the school. The second-wave immigrants came from Gorski Kotar, or from villages near Ribnik, Karlovac and Zagreb. Five of them were born abroad, and the other four were born in the United States. The single third-wave consultant is a 40-year-old male. He was born in what is now a central region of Bosnia and Herzegovina and immigrated to Kansas City in 2000 as a refugee. All consultants are current or former members of St. John the Baptist Catholic Church.

Table 5: Croatian-Americans in Group 2

Consultant Number	Sex	Age in 2011	Generation	Wave of Immigration	Straw-Hill Residence	Croatian Spouse
1*	F	91	first	second	0 years	no
2*	F	76	first	second	2 years	yes
3*	F	75	first	second	1.5 years	yes
4*	F	64	first	second	14 years	yes
5	F	44	second	second	0 years	n/a
6*	F	42	second	second	6 years	yes
7	F	41	first	second	9.5 years	n/a
8*	M	40	first	third	8 months	yes
9	F	22	second	second	0 years	n/a
10	F	20	second	second	0 years	no

*Consultant has at least one child.

Tables 4 and 5 present several differences between the two groups of consultants. First, most consultants in Group 1 are senior citizens, yet there are only three consultants in Group 2 who meet this distinction. Age is a significant factor because older individuals typically have more opportunities for intergenerational transmission of a language. Second, consultants in Group 1 represent second- and third-generation immigrants, while Group 2 includes first- and second-generation immigrants. This information is essential because specific levels of language retention are generally linked with immigrant generation (Fishman 1978; Filipović 1983, 1997,

2001; Alba et al. 2002). Third, consultants in Group 1 have much longer residency patterns in Strawberry Hill than consultants in Group 2. Almost everyone in Group 1 spent their childhood in the neighborhood, and six consultants still live there. No one in Group 2 currently lives in Strawberry Hill, and four consultants never lived there. Therefore, second- and third-wave immigrants have to drive farther to attend church and other community events. Fourth, more consultants in Group 2 have a Croatian spouse. Households with two bilingual parents demonstrate higher levels of ancestral language transmission than households with only one bilingual parent (Jutronic 1976; Alba et al. 2002; Nesteruk 2010).

3.4 SUMMARY

In this chapter, I have provided an overview of the sociolinguistic fieldwork that informs this thesis. I described my entrance into the Strawberry Hill community and how I came to realize that the Croatian language can be detached from Croatian-Americans' personal perceptions of *Hrvatstvo*. I also outlined two hypotheses about Croatian language and cultural maintenance among two groups of consultants from the community and detailed the fieldwork methods and classification scheme I use to evaluate these hypotheses. Finally, I presented the demographics of both consultant groups, discussing the significance of factors such as age and immigrant generation. In Chapter 4, I analyze current levels of language and cultural maintenance among Groups 1 and 2, underscoring (1) differences in American English to Croatian language shift and (2) similarities in Croatian cultural practices in the Strawberry Hill community.

4. ANALYSIS: CROATIAN LANGUAGE AND CULTURAL MAINTENANCE AMONG CROATIAN-AMERICANS IN STRAWBERRY HILL

This chapter presents a qualitative analysis of Croatian language and cultural practices in the diaspora community of Strawberry Hill. I selected 20 consultants and divided them into two groups to evaluate Croatian to American English language shift across a century of Croatian immigration to Kansas City. This is accomplished by using the Expanded Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (EGIDS, Lewis and Simons 2010) to categorize current levels of Croatian language use among the two groups. The EGIDS is a beneficial evaluation tool because it considers the relationship between language use and ethnic heritage, and it provides a framework for comparing language shift among immigrant groups. As shown in Tables 4 and 5 in Section 3.3, Group 1 consists of ten descendents of the first wave of immigration to Kansas City, which occurred during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, whereas Group 2 consists of ten second- and third-wave Croatian speakers who immigrated after World War II.

In the following section, I begin evaluating language shift with the EGIDS by addressing three key questions that concern the function of Croatian in the community, intergenerational transmission, and the youngest generation of Croatian speakers (Table 3 in Section 3.2). I discuss these topics in chronological order, first considering Group 1 and then Group 2. I conclude linguistic analysis by contextualizing current levels of Croatian use among each group of consultants. In Section 4.2, I discuss how two recent socio-economic factors have affected language use in the community since the initial wave of immigration. Finally, I compare cultural practices that consultants associate with *Hrvatstvo* (lit., Croatness) in Section 4.3, highlighting similarities and differences among the two groups.

4.1 CURRENT CROATIAN LANGUAGE USE IN STRAWBERRY HILL

Identity Function in Group 1

For most descendants of the first wave of immigration, Croatian is utilized to express heritage. A *heritage language* refers to immigrant, refugee or indigenous languages (Wiley 2005:595). Consultants in Group 1 hardly speak their heritage language, but they sometimes employ words or phrases to affirm their unique identity as Americans of Croatian descent—examples of which will be discussed below. On the EGID scale (Table 2 in Section 3.3), a language used to convey one’s ethnic background represents Level 9 – Dormant because (1) few people speak the heritage language as their second language and (2) the heritage language is used only for symbolic or ceremonial reasons (Lewis and Simons 2010:113).

The level of Croatian-American English bilingualism is very low among Group 1. Only one person (age 86, second-generation) out of ten speaks Croatian fluently, and two individuals (ages 52 and 75, third-generation) are intermediate speakers who are able to engage in basic conversation. The other consultants cannot speak Croatian, or they characterize their knowledge as *passive*: having some comprehension of the language but little or no speaking ability. The two eldest consultants were taught Croatian up until the third grade at St. John the Baptist Catholic School during the 1930s and 1940s.

Two other consultants took formal Croatian language courses as adults through the University of Kansas. One is currently enrolled in an intermediate-level course and engages with the language through films, language tables,⁹ and personal correspondence with relatives who live in Croatia. The other took an introductory, six-week study abroad course in Croatia during the 1980s and continues to interact with the language by singing songs in Croatian and

⁹ Students can gather at a language table event to practice conversational skills in a relaxed atmosphere at the University of Kansas.

performing with a *tamburica* orchestra. Neither person has achieved fluency, but both have studied the language to better understand their heritage.

In diaspora communities, second- and third-generation immigrants often speak the dominant social language with their parents (Jutronic 1976; Portes and Schaufli 1994; Alba et al. 2002; Nesteruk 2010), which leads to significant language shift over time. Children of Croatian heritage in Strawberry Hill are no exception. The consultants with passive knowledge of Croatian learned the language through older family members. Some members of the grandparent generation from the first wave of immigration spoke only Croatian because they worked in factories or other industries where knowledge of English was not necessary. Therefore, many children spoke Croatian with their grandparents and English with their parents (Greenbaum 1978:22).

This gradual shift to English was detected by some members of the community. Consider Marta (age 75, third-generation, name changed). She said, “The [Croatian] language has faded. Older people who spoke it died a long time ago.” Don (age 75, third-generation) expressed a similar attitude, saying, “I realized the [Croatian] language was dying with the people.” These statements suggest that the process of Croatian to American English language shift became noticeable during the 1960s and 1970s when members of the grandparent generation began to pass away.

Most consultants have lost the ability to communicate effectively in Croatian. If they speak Croatian at all, it is basically used in four situations: (1) to teach younger family members a few words (2) to say something in secret (3) to greet people at social gatherings by saying *dobar dan* (lit., good day) or *bog* (lit., hello) or (4) to refer to Croatian practices or cultural items such as food. For instance, Mary Ann (age 71, second-generation) said she enjoys teaching

Croatian words to her grandchildren. “They like to hear it. They’ll point to something and ask, ‘What’s this, grandma?’” Francie (age 72, second-generation) said she occasionally uses Croatian if she does not want strangers to understand her. She explained, “If I’m at the store with friends, sometimes I’ll speak it if I want to say something in private.”

A dormant language classification is appropriate for most consultants in Group 1 based on minimal daily communication in Croatian. However, three individuals in this group (30 percent) use their heritage language consistently during one or more of the following: (1) phone conversations with friends or family (2) personal travel in Croatia (3) Croatian language classes and language tables at the University of Kansas. These consultants have more than passive knowledge of their heritage language and cannot be classified as inactive. Therefore, after I discuss the identity function of Croatian in Group 2, I address other issues that will characterize the most accurate level of Croatian language use among all members of Group 1.

Identity Function in Group 2

All ten second- and third-wave immigrants are fluent speakers of Croatian and American English. For them, Croatian serves primarily as a *home language*: one that is used every day in the home by at least some members of the speech community (Lewis and Simons 2010:113). Five individuals speak Croatian consistently at home with other family members, and four of them speak Croatian in their parents’ home. Mario (age 40, first-generation) explained, “At home we speak Croatian. When the kids don’t really understand something, I say it in English then repeat in Croatian. [My wife and I] make a major effort because the kids need to know their heritage.” A younger consultant, Kristy (age 20, second-generation), said she speaks English at home with her fiancé but switches to Croatian when she visits her parents “because it’s easier for

them.” Whether at home or in the home of a parent, most consultants (80 percent) speak Croatian every day, and two speak it “almost every day.”

Everyone in Group 2 learned Croatian at home as his or her first language, but circumstances of acquisition differed depending on immigrant generation. First-generation consultants were taught to speak Croatian in their homeland, whereas members of the second-generation learned Croatian during their childhood in the United States. I note the difference here because individuals born in the homeland are completely surrounded by native Croatian speakers in all areas of life outside of the home—at school, church, work, the marketplace and other social spaces. Conversely, individuals born in the United States do not have the same level of exposure to Croatian. Outside of the home, children spend most of their time at school. Thus, aside from their parents, second-generation immigrants are surrounded mostly by native English speakers. This causes the children of immigrants to “lose their [heritage] language as they grow up” because “the most effective and important institutions to which they have access as Americans are conducted in English” (Glazer 1956:367).

Although consultants in Group 2 mainly use Croatian as a home language, they sometimes speak it elsewhere. For example, consultants reported using Croatian to communicate with other Croatian-Americans at church, Croatian Fraternal Union (CFU) lodge meetings, weddings, the grocery store, the gym, and social club gatherings like picnics and dinners.

Intergenerational Transmission in Group 1

Five out of ten consultants were discouraged from speaking Croatian after they entered elementary school during the 1930s and 1940s. Their parents or grandparents wanted younger members of the family to speak English only due to the following perceived benefits: (1) to distance themselves from Communism by becoming “American as fast as possible” and (2) to

“find work” more easily. No one in this group transmitted Croatian to the next generation since the majority of consultants (70 percent) possess symbolic or passive knowledge of the language (Table 6). Agnes, the single fully bilingual consultant, (age 86, second-generation) said she is proud to speak her parents’ native language but did not teach her children to speak it because they were not interested. Then she added, “But my kids enjoy it when I say *laku noć* (lit., goodnight) and *hvala* (lit., thanks). They get a kick out of it.” Therefore, a positive attitude toward one’s heritage language is no guarantee of transmission to the next generation.

Table 6: Intergenerational Transmission in Group 1

Consultant Number	Sex	Age in 2011	Fluency	Generation	Generation Croatian Language Ceased
1	F	88	passive knowledge*	second	second
2	F	86	fluent, bilingual	second	second
3	M	81	passive knowledge*	second	second
4	F	75	symbolic proficiency	third	second
5	M	75	intermediate*	third	third
6	F	72	passive knowledge*	second	second
7	F	71	passive knowledge*	second	second
8	F	56	passive knowledge	second	second
9	M	52	intermediate	third	third
10	M	38	symbolic proficiency	third	second

*Consultant spoke Croatian to grandparents as a child but can no longer speak the language with proficiency.

Since the 1980s, formal language courses have taken the place of intergenerational transmission to some extent in two cases. The son of one third-generation consultant attended Croatian language classes for a few months in 1991 when they were available to the community,¹⁰ though the student only gained a very basic understanding of the language. The grandson of another third-generation consultant is currently enrolled in a beginning-level Croatian language course at the University of Kansas. Instances of informal diffusion by word of mouth and structured classes do not ensure Croatian language proficiency among successive

¹⁰ Introductory Croatian language courses were taught in Strawberry Hill by a professor from the University of Kansas during the 1980s and by a Croatian-American from St. Joseph, Missouri during the early 1990s.

generations, but they serve as reminders of Croatian heritage and may encourage young members of the community to embrace the language in later years. This sort of individual learning is clearly encouraged as 90 percent of consultants said they would like younger family members to study Croatian.¹¹

Intergenerational Transmission in Group 2

Intergenerational transmission is disrupted if all parents are not teaching the language to their children. Most parents (83 percent) are transmitting the language (Table 7). Six consultants in this group have children, and four have grandchildren. All five first-generation consultants transmitted the Croatian language to their children, but not all of the children are able to read and write their heritage language. The only second-generation parent did not teach her children Croatian, but she said she would be willing to relocate to Croatia for six to twelve months so that her family could learn the language through immersion. She did not transmit Croatian to her children because she thought her husband,¹² a monolingual English speaker, would feel “left out.” In general, the high level of transmission in Group 2 is a positive indicator of bilingualism in the next generation, but we must also take into account younger Croatian-Americans and whether they plan to speak Croatian with their own children in the future.

Table 7: Intergenerational Transmission in Group 2

Consultant Number	Sex	Age in 2011	Generation	Wave of Migration	Children Speak Croatian	Grandchildren Speak Croatian
1	F ^Δ	91	first	second	yes	no
2	F ^Δ	76	first	second	yes	1-yes / 1-no
3	F ^Δ	75	first	second	yes	no
4	F ^Δ	64	first	second	yes	n/a*
6	F	42	second	second	no	n/a
8	M	40	first	third	yes	n/a

^Δ Consultant has at least one grandchild.

*Consultant has grandchildren under the age of 1 year.

¹¹ Of these nine consultants, two said that learning a language other than Croatian would be equally desirable.

¹² This consultant’s husband is a third-generation Croatian-American who speaks very little Croatian.

Four consultants are not mothers, but most would like to have children. Kristy (age 20, second-generation) said she wants her children to speak Croatian but that it would be difficult to pass on because her fiancé does not speak the language. Diana (age 22, second-generation) explained that it would be nice if her future children could speak Croatian, but that it might not be possible and also depends on who she will marry. The other two consultants said that, if they had children, they would “definitely” want them to speak Croatian. Although the desire for the language to be passed on to the next generation is strong for these two individuals, they said they had little influence over whether their nieces and nephews would be taught Croatian. Consequently, the likelihood of Croatian being transmitted to the third generation is low among these four consultants.

Youngest Generation of Proficient Croatian Speakers in Group 1

According to Lewis and Simons, identification of the youngest generation of proficient speakers in a community “provides an index to the progress of language shift” (2010:116). The only proficient speaker of Croatian in this group is Agnes (age 86, second-generation). Therefore, the great-grandparent generation is the youngest age group to demonstrate proficiency. Based on this generational information, individuals in Group 1 have almost completely shifted to American English, and their level of Croatian language use can also be characterized as Nearly Extinct (EGIDS Level 8b).

Youngest Generation of Proficient Croatian Speakers in Group 2

The youngest proficient speakers of Croatian in this group are Mario’s children (ages 3, 11 and 15). Mario (age 40, first-generation) explained that other parents of his generation have children who do not want to speak Croatian. “When the kids get together, they speak English. They answer their parents in English, but they understand Croatian. Now there are just a few kids

who speak Croatian well.” There are more adults of child-bearing potential (ages 18 to 45) who speak the heritage language than there are children who speak it. Four consultants in Group 2 are of the child-bearing generation, and the bilingual children of a first-generation consultant also fit within this age category. Accordingly, Croatian language use in Group 2 is best characterized as Threatened (EGIDS Level 6b) because there are few proficient speakers of the child generation, but Croatian is also in the process of Shifting (EGIDS Level 7) to American English because the heritage language is not being transmitted to all children.

Summary of EGIDS Levels for Groups 1 and 2

Now that I have evaluated three key questions of EGIDS based on consultant responses, I will review the levels of Croatian language maintenance that were distinguished for each group. Croatian is latent among most descendents of the first wave of immigration (Group 1) because the language serves primarily a reminder of ethnic heritage (Table 8a). The majority of consultants (70 percent) possess passive or symbolic proficiency of Croatian; they generally employ their limited knowledge to greet people at social events or to index practices or cultural items they associate with Croatia. Since there are three (one fluent and two intermediate) active Croatian speakers in this group, I proceeded to address the other key questions to provide the most accurate description of Croatian language use. None of the three active speakers transmitted the language to the next generation, and the youngest proficient speaker is a great-grandparent. Therefore, Croatian is mostly dormant and nearly extinct among Group 1 (Tables 8b and 8c).

The current level of Croatian language use among Croats who immigrated to the United States after World War II (Group 2) is also best characterized by two levels of the EGIDS. Consultants in this group mainly speak Croatian at home (Table 8a). Most parents (83 percent) transmitted the language to the next generation, but there are more adults of the child-bearing

generation who speak Croatian than there are children who speak it (Tables 8b and 8c). Croatian is both threatened and shifting to American English in Group 2 because few children use the language and because adults are unsure whether they can successfully transmit it to their own children in the future.

Table 8a: EGIDS Question 1—Identity Function of Croatian

Group Number	Identity Function	Corresponding EGIDS Level
1	reminder of heritage	Level 9: Dormant
2	home language	continue to Question 3

Table 8b: EGIDS Question 3—Intergenerational Transmission of Croatian

Group Number	Are All Parents Transmitting Language?	Corresponding EGIDS Level
1	no	continue to Question 5
2	no	continue to Question 5

Table 8c: EGIDS Question 5—Youngest Proficient Speakers of Croatian

Group Number	Youngest Speakers	Corresponding EGIDS Level
1	great-grandparent generation	Level 8b: Nearly Extinct
2	child-bearing generation child generation	Level 7: Shifting Level 6b: Threatened

4.2 REASSESSING LANGUAGE USE IN THE COMMUNITY BASED ON NEW SOCIO-ECONOMIC FACTORS

Most fieldwork in Strawberry Hill during the 1970s was focused solely on descendents of the first wave of immigration and indicated that Croatian-American English bilingualism was widespread in the community (Manzo 1975; Greenbaum 1978; Filipović 1983). Assertions about language use derived from these studies must be reassessed because socio-economic conditions have evolved considerably within the last few decades. Significant changes such as these require new methods of evaluation that clarify contemporary attitudes toward bilingualism and heritage language maintenance. Two major transformations have affected the use of Croatian in Kansas City in recent decades.

First, the Croatian community in Strawberry Hill was considered fairly “isolated” up until the 1970s (Filipović 1983:279). Croats who immigrated to Kansas City during the late 19th and early 20th centuries built their small settlement of homes, businesses, church and school within just a few city blocks. These first immigrants mostly performed manual labor, working long hours in factories and stockyards where knowledge of English was not required. Some of them never learned the language, though they stressed the importance of an American education for their children (Manzo 1975; Welch 1985). According to consultants, these older Croatian-Americans did not bother to speak English because Croatian-run businesses in the neighborhood allowed them to function without it. Maria (age 64, first-generation) explained:

When people came here in the early 1900s, they all spoke Croatian and didn’t understand English very well. There was a Croatian furniture salesman, and all the people bought furniture from him because they didn’t have to use English.

Maria said she began to learn English right away when she and her husband moved to Strawberry Hill in 1968 because she wanted to understand the people in her new country. She also needed a driver’s license. Most first-wave immigrants did not need to study English for this reason because they did not have to drive. Instead, they walked to work, church and other establishments in the neighborhood. For second- and third-wave immigrants, life in Kansas City is different: most jobs require knowledge of English, owning and driving a car is a necessity, and there are fewer Croatian-run businesses in Strawberry Hill. These new socio-economic circumstances influenced individuals who immigrated after World War II to learn English faster than their pre-war counterparts.

Second, Croats declared their sovereignty from Yugoslavia in 1991, igniting a war of independence that lasted until 1995. This event triggered the most recent wave of immigration, which continued into the early 2000s. First-wave immigrants transmitted Croatian to their

children during the first couple of decades of the 20th century, but many did not want their grandchildren to speak it for fear that the family would be associated with Communism (Section 4.1). Third-wave immigrants have also transmitted Croatian to their children, but there is no longer a concern that other family members will face discrimination now that Croatia is a democratic republic. In fact, the Croatian flag and coat of arms are displayed on the interior and exterior of several Croatian-American homes in Strawberry Hill and elsewhere in Kansas City. Third-wave parents who immigrated during the 1990s and 2000s are proud of their heritage and want their children and grandchildren to speak Croatian and American English. These current attitudes toward bilingualism do not guarantee heritage language proficiency in third and later generations, but they have impacted the current language situation by renewing the number of Croatian-speakers in Strawberry Hill.

This thesis provides an updated, improved assessment of Croatian language maintenance in the community because (1) it employs a new evaluation tool (EGIDS, 2010) and (2) its scope is *diachronic*, encapsulating linguistic changes over time (Greenberg 2010a:70). The most detailed accounts of Croatian in Strawberry Hill characterized the language based on whether immigrants were first-, second- or third-generation speakers (Filipović 1983, 1997, 2001). Each article published by Filipović represents the same line of investigation from the late 1970s, but the researcher does not provide background information for consultants except immigrant generation. Furthermore, the research does not include any data to explain which stage of retention the speakers reflected. Immigrant generation is an important component for understanding levels of attrition, but current studies of language maintenance must transcend this three-level classification scheme.

The EGIDS is a superior evaluation tool because it can be applied to any speech community by addressing one or more of five key questions about language use (Table 3, Section 3.3). The scale also provides a broader spectrum of analysis (13 levels) that goes beyond immigrant generation, considering speaker agency and how the language is used. Other community assessments ought to incorporate the EGIDS and a diachronic perspective because, utilized together, these approaches render the most accurate descriptions of language maintenance.

During some interviews, I observed a disconnection between what consultants said about their heritage language and how they perceived its vitality over time. For instance, 14 out of 20 consultants (70 percent) said use of Croatian was fading in the community, but only 5 consultants (25 percent) said their heritage language was likely to disappear in Strawberry Hill. Most individuals agreed that fewer people are speaking Croatian, but hardly anyone associated this decline with the long-term possibility of complete language loss. Therefore, researchers should make their final evaluations of language use available to the community under investigation so that, if desirable, members can make arrangements for transmitting the language to future generations.

4.3 CURRENT CULTURAL PRACTICES ASSOCIATED WITH CROATIA

Culture is a dynamic, social process as people continually reinvent themselves (Bruner 1994; Hanson 1989; Lavie et al. 1993, etc). Regardless of language, residence, age, income, sex, gender, or any other marker of identity, individuals are often confronted with new experiences because the world is in a constant state of flux. These new experiences can cause individuals to act or think in different ways, which alters the qualities or practices that people associated with themselves and other groups over time.

Culture is not a closed, once-and-forever defined list of elements characteristic to a particular group of people and possessed by an individual, but rather an open system of meanings that people constantly reinterpret, utilizing its resources for defining their own position in society. (Žmegač 2007:7)

Therefore, the essence of being Croatian or identifying with Croatian culture cannot be characterized by one set of attributes at any given time or place. *Hrvatstvo*, like all conceptions of nationality or group membership, is highly variable and changes with context. A person who resides in Croatia may define him or herself in terms that differ from Croats who live elsewhere in the country; even family members who share a home sometimes disagree about these complex issues. Definitions of Croatness fluctuate and depend on various circumstances such as proximity to Croatia and degree of descent (i.e. generation). The following section analyzes perceptions of (1) *Hrvatstvo* in the diaspora community of Strawberry Hill and (2) the maintenance of cultural practices these Croatian-Americans connect to their homeland.

Descendents of the first wave of immigration from late 19th and early 20th centuries (Group 1) and second- and third-wave immigrants who moved to Kansas City after World War II (Group 2) *aver Hrvatstvo* in numerous ways (Table 9). Veneration of music and foods associated with Croatia is arguably the most significant because most practices listed by consultants highlight these components of culture. I attended four social events during 2011 in which Croatian-Americans from the community participated: a *kolo* night, the Wyandotte County Ethnic Festival, the Strawberry Hill Festival, and a Croatian dinner/dance event. Live Croatian folk music¹³ and Croatian cuisine were featured prominently at each gathering.

¹³ The live music was mostly performed by a *tamburica* orchestra. Members of the orchestra played their instruments and sang about love of man, country and sea in Croatian at these events.

Table 9: Maintained Cultural Practices Related to *Hrvatstvo*, Groups 1 and 2

- 1) Preparing foods associated with Croatia
- 2) Attending Catholic Church and sponsored events
- 3) Listening to or singing Croatian music
- 4) Attending *kolo* dancing events
- 5) Supporting or participating in a *tamburica* (East European stringed instrument) group
- 6) Incorporating Croatian traditions in modern weddings (music, food, etc)
- 7) Attending cultural festivals—especially the Strawberry Hill Festival at St. John the Baptist Catholic Church
- 8) Taking a basket of food to church on Easter for blessings
- 9) Celebrating St. Nicholas Day on Dec. 6
- 10) Watering wheat for St. Lucy’s Day on Dec. 13 for good luck in the New Year
- 11) Attending Croatian Fraternal Union (CFU) lodge meetings and sponsored events
- 12) Attending Croatian social club events like picnics and concerts
- 13) Reading about Croatia and Croatian-Americans in the *Zajedničar* (CFU newsletter)

Folk music from the homeland has been part of the Strawberry Hill community for generations. Nearly all consultants in Group 1 (80 percent) cited music as a major part of their Croatian identity, emphasizing the *tamburica* orchestra (a group of musicians who sing and play East European stringed instruments), church songs, and the Ethnic Choir of Kansas City. Some of the first immigrants who settled in Kansas City during the late 1800s and early 1900s brought the *tamburica* with them to their new home (Magnuson 1990:12). In 1966, a *tamburica* orchestra was formed at St. John the Baptist Catholic School “to preserve and maintain” the musical heritage of the community (Diamond Jubilee 1975:98). Lessons were offered at the school through the 1990s, though they were not part of the official curriculum. *Hrvatski Običaj* (lit., Croatian tradition), the Strawberry Hill-based orchestra, was founded in 2007. Kristina (age 42, second-generation) said the group has been praised locally and internationally for its authentic Croatian sound. Croatian-Americans from all three waves of immigration participate in the group.

Hymns are still routinely sung in Croatian during church services at St. John the Baptist, which is a source of pride among parishioners. Don (age 75, third-generation) began to tear up

while reminiscing about the Croatian songs. “I used to sing those songs with my mom, and I still sing them with my *teta* (lit., aunt).” Then he jovially sang a few lines in Croatian from a couple of songs—including the Croatian national anthem. Don’s *teta*, Agnes (age 86, second-generation), also had “wonderful memories” of the music from her childhood in Strawberry Hill. “I would sit on the front porch and swing while singing Croatian songs. I just had a ball.”

Consultants in Group 1 also mentioned their involvement or support of the Ethnic Choir of Kansas City, which was formed in 1978. Members of the choir represent several ethnic backgrounds across Europe, though the songs they sing are mostly Croatian, Slovene and German.

Everyone in Group 2 attends the same religious and community events as the individuals in Group 1 because of their mutual associations with St. John the Baptist, Croatian Fraternal Union (CFU) lodges, and social clubs. Consequently, consultants from the second and third waves of immigration sing the same Croatian hymns at church, attend the same festivals and other social functions, and celebrate the same Catholic holidays as other Croatian-Americans in Kansas City. However, consultants in Group 2 did not mention any involvement in the Ethnic Choir. Instead, these individuals listen to and sing along with contemporary music from Croatia online, in their cars, and on their mp3 players. *Tamburica* music is still popular, though, as three consultants are current members of *Hrvatski Običaj*, and one is a former member. Kristina (age 42, second-generation) learned to play the *tamburica* at school and never stopped practicing, explaining, “The music has always been part of my life.”

As discussed in Section 4.2, Croatian-Americans in Group 2 also assert *Hrvatstvo* by maintaining their heritage language in the second and, in some cases, the third generation.

Otherwise, consultants in Group 2 listed only two practices that differ from Group 1: (1) watching Croatian television and films and (2) celebrating *imendan* (lit., name day).

Most consultants in Group 2 (60 percent) said they watch at least some television or films in their native language. Three individuals have access to Croatian television through satellite service and watch newscasts and other programs for entertainment. For instance, the husband of one consultant was watching a Croatian cooking show in the adjacent room during an interview session. Another consultant explained that some members of the Strawberry Hill community now watch Croatian language newscasts online, and two others said they watch Croatian films online or when they are shown at the University of Kansas.

Another cultural practice maintained by some consultants is celebrating *imendan* (lit., name day). Saints are commemorated on the anniversary of their death according to the Roman Catholic calendar. Each day of the year is associated with one or more saints. A person is linked with a saint of the same name or derivation thereof, and the person's name day is observed on the day of that saint. Croatian-Americans who maintain the *imendan* practice acknowledge the name days of close relatives in multiple ways. Ann (age 44, second-generation) said, "My immediate family celebrates name days with a dinner, a card, or sometimes a monetary gift. The gifts themselves aren't necessarily Croatian, although the ritual of celebrating on your named saint day is traditional."

Recipes of popular foods like *povitica* and *sarma* have been handed down for generations since the first Croatian immigrants settled in Strawberry Hill and are still highly emblematic of *Hrvatstvo* in the community. During interviews, I asked everyone in Group 1 to name the first few Croatian words that came to mind. Each consultant listed at least nine words. The top three categories of words were food items (27 percent), greetings/terms of endearment (19 percent),

and traditions/holidays (17 percent). Everyone mentioned *povitica*, a South Slavic bread made from yeast dough that is rolled around nut paste, cream cheese or sweet fillings. Six consultants (60 percent) also listed *sarma*, a mixture of ground meat rolled into leaves of cabbage, then topped with tomato sauce and baked. *Povitica* was served at all four cultural events I attended in 2011, and *sarma* was available at two of them. Indeed, the most sought after meal at the Strawberry Hill Festival was a *sarma* dinner that included mashed potatoes, green beans, and a roll.

Foods associated with the homeland are essential markers of *Hrvatstvo* among Group 2 as well. All ten consultants listed preparation of these foods as a present-day cultural practice. *Povitica* and *sarma* were also the most common foods cited by consultants, although several people also mentioned *čevapčići*, a grilled minced meat, and *janjetina* (lit., lamb meat). The ways in which people in immigrant communities consume and relate to food are indicators of cultural continuity, difference, hybridity or assimilation (Mankekar 2005:203). For Croatian-Americans in Strawberry Hill, food preparation is primarily a means of cultural continuity. Almost everyone in both groups said they enjoy traditional foods because these dishes remind them of family. Tom (age 81, second-generation, Group 1) could simply not separate his family from these practices, explaining, “It’s just who we are.” Kristy (age 20, second-generation, Group 2) said customs like preparing foods from the homeland are deeply meaningful. “It’s about keeping the culture alive, and it brings the family together.”

Although not made explicit by consultants, I argue that *Hrvatstvo* in Strawberry Hill is also bolstered in both groups through direct contact with Croatia. Nearly all consultants in Group 1 (70 percent) have visited Croatia at least one time (Table 10a). Several of them expressed reverence about walking through their parents’ or grandparents’ villages. For example, Francie

(age 72, second-generation) said visiting her father’s former residence was very emotional. “I loved it. When I walked into the family home, the first thing that hit me was my dad’s family photo on the wall. I couldn’t believe it.”

Since immigrating, everyone in Group 2 has traveled back to the homeland. Most of these consultants have a more intimate connection with Croatia because they visit the country more often than Group 1 (Table 10b). Consequently, second- and third-wave immigrants were also nostalgic as they spoke about their experiences. Diana (age 22, second-generation) has been to Croatia four times with her parents and is struck when she sees the villages where her mother, father and grandmother spent their childhood. She explained, “Seeing my parents laugh, retell stories, and cry with the people they grew up with is something I won’t forget.”

A few consultants from both groups also mentioned that younger family members who visited Croatia had been inspired to study Croatian language or history because of their travels. Thus, encounters with people and places in Croatia comprise powerful memories that strengthen personal awareness of *Hrvatstvo*.

Table 10a: Visits to Croatia, Group 1

Consultant Number	Number of Visits
1	0
2	2
3	4
4	8
5	18
6	1
7	0
8	4
9	3
10	0

Table 10b: Visits to Croatia, Group 2

Consultant Number	Number of Visits
1	20+
2	3
3	20+
4	2
5	20+
6	3
7	5
8*	1
9	4
10	2

*Consultant 8 has visited his homeland, Bosnia and Herzegovina, one time since immigrating.

4.4 SUMMARY

I interviewed 20 Croatian-Americans from the Strawberry Hill community and divided consultants into two groups based on wave of immigration because different life experiences and levels of exposure to Croatia set the two groups apart. Next, I used consultant responses to classify current levels of Croatian language use among both groups according to the EGIDS because the scale accounts for the complex relationship between language use and ethnic identity. Finally, I discussed cultural practices maintained by both groups of consultants to highlight contemporary perceptions of *Hrvatstvo* in the community.

The current level of Croatian language use in Strawberry Hill among descendants of the first wave of immigration (Group 1) is best characterized as Nearly Extinct (EGIDS Level 8b) and mostly Dormant (EGIDS Level 9). Only one consultant is fully bilingual, speaking both Croatian and American English; two others are intermediate speakers of Croatian and are able to engage in basic conversation. Limited proficiency has interfered with transmission, and now Croatian primarily serves as a reminder of ethnic heritage. Most consultants (70 percent) have maintained symbolic proficiency or passive knowledge, losing the ability to communicate effectively in their ancestral language. Croatian has almost entirely shifted to American English by the third generation in Group 1. Monolingualism is typical for most diaspora groups at this juncture because immigrant children mostly use the dominant social language by the time they reach adolescence (Glazer 1956; Portes and Rumbaut 2001; Alba et al. 2002; Nesteruk 2010), which leads to lower levels of heritage language proficiency or complete language loss during adulthood.

Croatian is better maintained by immigrants who moved to Kansas City after World War II (Group 2) because it is reinforced through daily use in the home. Everyone in Group 2 is

bilingual because all first-generation parents taught their children to speak Croatian. Nevertheless, use of Croatian in this group is best characterized as Threatened (EGIDS Level 6b) and Shifting (EGIDS Level 7) to American English. Future use of the heritage language is not assured for two reasons. First, preadolescent bilingual children in the Strawberry Hill community speak English more often than Croatian, which, as mentioned above, typically leads to monolingualism in later years. Second, bilingual adults of child-bearing potential are uncertain whether they will be able to transmit Croatian to their own children because of intermarriage with non-Croats. Intermarriage has been shown to reduce heritage language maintenance in Croatian and other diaspora communities in the United States (Jutronic 1976; Alba et al. 2002; George and Yancey 2004; Nesteruk 2010).

Cultural practices associated with the homeland are almost equally maintained by Groups 1 and 2 because many Croatian-Americans in the Strawberry Hill community are members of the same church and social organizations. *Hrvatstvo* is sustained through several cultural practices but mostly ones that include folk and contemporary music from Croatia and preparation of foods like *sarma* and *povitica* that remind people of their homeland. *Hrvatstvo* is also strengthened in both groups through travel to Croatia, which tends to reinforce personal emotions toward the homeland for members of the diaspora.

There are only a few differences in cultural practices between the two groups. Some members of Group 1 support or participate in the Ethnic Choir of Kansas City, whereas others in Group 2 watch Croatian television or movies and celebrate *imendan*. It seems that the major difference between the two groups is point of immigration and its long-term effects. Descendants of the first wave of immigration are proud of their family background but do not speak Croatian; they are most interested in sustaining their ethnic heritage through institutions like the

Strawberry Hill Museum and Cultural Center and St. John the Baptist Catholic Church. This emphasis on religion and cultural components other than language has been documented in other diaspora communities as well (Jutronic 1976; Rouchdy 1989; Khemlani-David 1998).

Second- and third-wave immigrants still speak their heritage language. They are also members of St. John the Baptist, but they are not as involved with the museum. I argue that the heritage language provides a stronger awareness of *Hrvatstvo* for members of Group 2 because they communicate in Croatian on a daily basis. Museums are typically associated with cultural items or customs that are fading or gone, but individuals who immigrated after World War II continue to express their heritage through language *and* cultural practices. Once Croatian completely shifts to American English for members of Group 2, they will most likely emphasize other aspects of *Hrvatstvo* like church membership and involvement with the museum over the heritage language—just as members of Group 1 have done.

5. CONCLUSION

“Today some people don’t speak the language, but they think of themselves as Croatian.
You can be Croatian in your heart.”

—First-generation Croatian-American from Strawberry Hill

I am lucky my husband happened to come across the Strawberry Hill community while driving around Kansas City. I remember the excitement in his voice as he told me about St. John the Baptist Catholic Church and the Strawberry Hill Museum and Cultural Center. Before I began my thesis research, I thought members of the community would teach me about their homeland, about language and identity in Croatia. But as they shared their own experiences of Croatian language and culture, I realized they had more to say about their home—about *Hrvatstvo* (lit., Croatness) in Kansas City.

I have presented a portrait of Croatian language and cultural maintenance among Croatian-Americans in the diaspora community of Strawberry Hill. This case study highlights linguistic and cultural attitudes of Croatian immigrants from three surges of immigration: first wave (late 19th and early 20th centuries), second wave (post World War II), and third wave (late 20th and early 21st centuries). Therefore, this analysis spans 100 years of immigration, emphasizing different levels of (1) Croatian to American English language shift and (2) the continuation of cultural practices across three generations.

The fieldwork that informs this thesis consisted of participant observation at community events in Kansas City, in-depth interviews with 20 Croatian-Americans, and library research over a one-year period. I categorized consultants by wave of immigration. Individuals in Group 1 are descendents of the first wave of immigration; their parents or grandparents immigrated between 1900 and 1923. Individuals in Group 2 are second- and third-wave Croatian-Americans who immigrated between 1959 and 1976 and during 2000, respectively. I divided individuals

into two groups because different life experiences and levels of exposure to Croatia distinguish the consultants.

The descendants of the first wave contradicted the findings of previous research by Filipović. I wanted to explain these inconsistencies so I developed two hypotheses about Croatian language use in Strawberry Hill before conducting interviews. I did not find evidence to substantiate Filipović's (1983, 1997, 2001) claim that third-generation descendants of the initial wave of immigration continued to speak Croatian perfectly. Instead, I posited that Croatian language use had become obsolete for these individuals (Group 1) because of the negative attitudes toward bilingualism that proliferated in the community during the early 20th century once the first immigrants considered the potential hardships of younger family members. I also argued that individuals who immigrated to the United States after World War II (Group 2) maintain higher levels of bilingualism because of two apparently equal strong pressures: (1) the need to learn English for gainful employment and (2) the need to use Croatian for communicating with family and friends overseas.

The Expanded Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (EGIDS, Lewis and Simons 2010) facilitated a comparison of language shift between the two groups. The current level of Croatian language use among Group 1 is best characterized as Nearly Extinct (EGIDS Level 8b) and mostly Dormant (EGIDS Level 9). Most first-wave immigrants (70 percent) no longer speak Croatian with proficiency. Only one out of ten consultants in this group is fully bilingual, and two others are able to engage in basic conversation due to their immediate knowledge of Croatian.

Though others as children spoke Croatian with their grandparents, they have entirely shifted to using American English and possess only passive knowledge of Croatian. These

consultants reported that bilingualism was not encouraged as they entered elementary school in the 1930s and 1940s. Older family members wanted them to assimilate to American culture; they associated Croatian with Communism and felt that their children would have greater success at obtaining employment without it. Thus, American English was favored over Croatian, and Croatian-Americans eventually became monolingual.

Most consultants in Group 1 use their limited knowledge of Croatian to assert *Hrvatstvo* while associating with other Croatian-Americans. For example, passive knowledge of the heritage language is employed to teach younger family members a few Croatian words or to say something in secret. Symbolic proficiency is employed to greet people at social gatherings or to refer to elements of Croatian culture such as music or food. Both passive and symbolic uses of Croatian foster a sense of group identity in the diaspora. Although descendants of the first wave no longer speak their ancestral language, they commemorate their heritage through various cultural practices associated with Croatia such as attending Croatian Fraternal Union (CFU) meetings and observing customs connected to the Catholic Church (e.g. planting wheat on St. Lucy's Day for good luck in the New Year). Consultants consider these practices "Croatian" because they associate *Hrvatstvo* with the social activities of their parents and grandparents and with Catholicism.

Every second- and third-wave consultant speaks Croatian and American English with proficiency, demonstrating a much higher level of bilingualism than Group 1. Croatian is mostly used at home, but it is also spoken at church and community events such as picnics and CFU lodge meetings. All first-generation Croatian-Americans¹⁴ taught themselves to speak American English between the ages 21 and 33 by (1) listening closely to native speakers (2) attempting to

¹⁴ There are six first-generation consultants in Group 2. Five were adults when they immigrated. One was preschool-aged at the time of immigration and learned American English around age 5 while attending elementary school.

speaking English in spite of numerous errors (3) watching American television (4) using an English dictionary and (5) asking for help from their children. The primary reason for learning American English was to find a job to support one's family.

First-generation consultants in Group 2 said they taught their children to speak Croatian because they wanted them to connect with their heritage and to communicate with family members who still reside in the homeland. All parents transmitted Croatian to their children except for one second-generation consultant. The youngest generation of Croatian speakers is children, but there are more adults of the child-bearing age (second generation) who speak their ancestral language than there are children who speak it. Most of these second-generation consultants expressed uncertainty about teaching their future children to speak Croatian because their spouses would most likely not have links with Croatian culture. Thus, Croatian language use in Group 2 is best characterized as Threatened and is moving toward total language Shift from Croatian to American English (EGIDS Levels 6b and 7).

Consultants in Group 2 also commemorate their heritage by involving themselves in activities they consider Croatian, with a major emphasis on Croatian foods and music. Members of both groups typically maintain the same practices through (1) their membership at St. John the Baptist Catholic Church and (2) social events organized by Croatian-Americans in the Strawberry Hill community.

If the consultants I interviewed are typical for all members of the community across the three waves of immigration as I believe they are, Croatian language proficiency is liable to cease in Kansas City by the third generation unless some members of the community undertake a revitalization project. There are fewer speakers in successive generations for two main reasons. First, bilingual children speak English most often. They use the dominant social language at

school and when they communicate with parents and friends of Croatian descent. The children lose their heritage language over time because English is reinforced through exposure to mass media, education, and other facets of American culture. Second, intermarriage with non-Croats typically causes a breakdown in transmission because Croatian is spoken by only one parent.

Regardless of these trends, I argue that Croatian will *not* reach Extinction (EGIDS Level 10) because some families already have retained a sense of ethnic identity associated with the language for more than a century. Descendants of the first wave of immigration commemorate *Hrvatstvo* through membership at St. John the Baptist Catholic Church and involvement with the Strawberry Hill Museum and Cultural Center. Croatian-Americans in Strawberry Hill will maintain at least symbolic proficiency of their heritage language as long as these institutions are supported by the community.

During interviews with both groups of consultants, many people steered the conversation back to St. John the Baptist Catholic Church. After all, this was the place they attended mass. This was where many of them went to school. This was where they sang Croatian songs and congregated with other Croatian-Americans. It was built by their forebears, by Croats. For many people in Strawberry Hill, church is the center of *Hrvatstvo*. Alex (age 88, second-generation, name changed) summed up her thoughts about St. John the Baptist: “Strawberry Hill is one big family. It’s my heritage and my faith. It’s just home. The church has always been the foundation of the community. You can’t separate the church from Croatia.”

In tracing linguistic and cultural attitudes of Croatian-Americans, this study contributes in the following ways to the body of linguistic anthropological scholarship on language attrition and cultural maintenance. Results of this research project may inform Croatian-Americans in Kansas City and members of other diaspora communities in the United States about the typical

trends of immigrant language shift. If individuals want to maintain their ancestral language, this thesis may serve as a cautionary narrative and encourage them to make arrangements for successive generations. These arrangements might include transmitting the language to children at an early age, speaking the heritage language consistently at home, and teaching children the benefits of speaking more than one language such as better preparedness for learning other languages, the ability to view the world through multiple linguistic perspectives, a broader understanding of other cultures, and general intellectual development (Nesteruk 2010:78–79).

Further research on Strawberry Hill would best entail interviewing more individuals from the community. I was only able to interview one consultant from the third wave of immigration, a Bosnian Croat. A valuable follow-up study would consist of interviewing 10 to 20 individuals of all generations from each of the three waves of immigration and would also include Bosnian Muslims because this additional linguistic information will provide more insight on language retention in the diaspora. Future research on the topic of language and cultural maintenance in diaspora groups might evaluate how individuals from multiple waves of immigration interact with each other and how their dialects have been affected by American English. For example, all consultants in Group 2 said they sometimes speak Croatian and American English simultaneously, adding Croatian case-endings to English words while speaking Croatian or using Croatian and English phrases in the same sentence. Some individuals have names for these speech patterns including “*Crenglish*” and “*half i pol*” (lit., ‘half and half’). A potential investigation could document instances of code-switching, examining how this phenomenon affects (1) communication among Croatian-Americans in the diaspora and (2) communication between diaspora and homeland.

Maintenance of any variety of Croatian is no longer the best marker of Croatian ethnicity in the United States because third and later generations often think of themselves as Croatian even after losing proficiency in the ancestral language (contra Filipović 1983:289, 2001:61). These individuals can be “Croatian in their hearts” by maintaining customs they associate with *Hrvatstvo* such as preparing foods from their homeland and performing or supporting folk music from the Balkan region. This research has shown that the best marker of Croatian ethnicity in the diaspora is the expression of a Croatian identity through the maintenance of cultural practices.

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