Russian: The Easy Way

Product Description

Program Title: Russian: The Easy Way, 4.33

System Requirements: Macintosh

Publisher: Gessler Publishing CO., Inc., 55 West 13th Street, New York, NY 10011-79958

Tel: (800) FAX (603) 465-2779

Price: $49.95

Content: Three 800k disks, Instruction pamphlet.

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Summary

Russian: The Easy Way is a basic review package of the Russian case system and a few other grammatical categories that emphasizes mastery of case endings for nouns and modifiers. The program is straightforward, simple to use, but limited in depth and breadth of material covered. The program assumes that a student is familiar with basics of the Russian writing system and spelling rules and has been presented with the necessary vocabulary and grammatical categories to be reviewed.

Content

Russian: The Easy Way comes on three 800k disks with a three page manual explaining the installation and use of the program, and a graphic representation of the Russian keyboard. Each disk has a system, finder, and program, in addition to the files. When installed on a hard drive without the separate systems and finders, the entire program and files use only 500k. The manual recommends installation of the program on a hard disk when available, but this approach resulted in a font conflict rendering the program difficult to use.

When run from the floppy disks, or copies thereof, the program opens to a menu of drill and practice categories. The majority of these categories (twenty of twenty six)

refer to case endings in the singular and plural. When the category is opened, the student reads a brief overview of the function of the case and sometimes a description of the appropriate endings. This is followed by a sentence with a blank space to be filled in with the correct form for the word(s) given in the nominative case singular in parentheses. The student must type in the correct forms with accents. (Some will appreciate this feature, others will disapprove). A correct answer calls forth the response in Russian "Nice guy/gal" and moves on to the next question. An incorrect answer is registered as such and then the student is referred back to the original. The user is permitted three tries, after which the correct answer is displayed, and the program automatically moves on. At any time the student may choose to leave the program; as such time a summary of the number of tries, items correct, and items incorrect is given. For each grammatical category there are ten to twenty questions, the order of which is randomized when the student re-enters the program.

A few additional drills are devoted to calling/naming verbs, comparatives [of adverbs], a counting exercise, time expressions, and verbal aspect. These exercises are of two types, a simple multiple choice 1,2, or 3 option, or a fill in the blank activity without sentences or context. The coverage is minimal, with ten to twenty items offered to the student.

All typing of answers is done on a phonetic or transcription keyboard, where English "a' corresponds to the Russian letter "a", etc. This keyboard layout is provided on the last page of the three page instruction sheet.

Evaluation

This program has limited appeal.It is not as the back cover of the package states "instructional materials [that] teach case endings, singular and plural, comparisons, time expressions and most grammatical concepts included in a first-year course." Rather, this is a basic set of drills written in MacLang for a student who has been taught the function of cases and proper endings for most modifiers and nouns. It can serve as a speedy, brief (sometimes only ten questions for all possible variations of a given

case) review of what has been learned. The program offers no translation of the words used and assumes that these forms are already known to me students from their general texts. The helpful explanations are brief and refer students to a more complete explanation in one's own textbook, but oversimplification of complex issues such as verbal aspect, for example can be misleading. The keyboard graphic is offered only in hard copy and is not accessible under Key Caps in the Apple menu. No grammatical charts or other reference materials are on line, and the program did not permit Multifinder operation and access to other programs.

When used according to my instructions on my hard disk running System 7.0.1, a font conflict arose, providing not the phonetic keyboard, but a Soviet style keyboard.

When run directly from program disks, a few curious keystrokes appeared, one help or information screen made no sense because of the wrong font, and in multiple choice questions the number "2" was not recognized.

This program makes certain demands on the learner and the instructor. The learner must already know the case endings, not only for the nouns, but for the adjectives and special modifiers. For someone who has been exposed to the entire case system, this series offers a quick review of knowledge of correct forms. An experienced teacher familiar and comfortable with Russian fonts and Macintosh programs will find a way to make use of this modest contribution to the little software available for Russian.

Russian: The East Way will work on even some of the earliest Macintosh machines, but it is showing its age. Its most important contribution may be to urge others to go beyond this admittedly first step.

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Publisher's Response

We wish to add the following comments to your review of *Russian: The Easy Way*. The program's vocabulary is consistent with expectation levels for First Year stu-