

Given the students' relatively strong (ACTFL Advanced, Advanced Plus/ILR 2, 2+) starting point, my aim was to enhance their proficiency to the ACTFL Superior Level (ILR 3) and simultaneously to provide them with a strategy and the tools to work independently on continuous improvement of their speaking, as well as reading and writing skills, on the way to Level 4 proficiency. The means to this goal were developed primarily on the principal "learn to do by practicing doing it" and use of projects. Students were required to read high-level content-specific language, translate it into English, make short oral presentations and write supporting papers. The major topic chosen was Ecology—for its growing popularity, its scope encompassing issues of the natural sciences, as well as the social sciences, in particular political science and economics, and the topic's general interest. The course and its design were also intended to serve as a template for acquiring higher level language skills either with an instructor or as an independent learner that could be applied to other areas in the natural sciences, social sciences, and humanities.

This senior seminar had two parallel tracks—(1) a speechmaking component developed along with the text by Emily Tall, *Let's Talk about Life*, and (2) a separate set of modules on Russian ecology, culminating in the development of student designed mini-courses in their own fields of interest. One essential element of the course was the inclusion of Russian materials via the WWW, an increasingly useful source of timely and high-level language for students.¹

The speechmaking track was modeled loosely on the Toastmasters program (<http://www.toastmasters.org>), in which adults acquire and develop the skills to make public presentations in English. Participants are encouraged to know their material well, practice before delivering the speech and then actually present to fellow participants their "speeches" ranging from a minute or two to longer oral reports. I transported that model into Russian where student assignments for

each Tuesday ranged from a weekly brief two or three minute up to ten minute oral presentations on such topics as academic life, rock music, the role of religion in Russian life, social issues etc. (For a full list see the syllabus Appendix A). These reports were to be written beforehand and then reviewed or rehearsed (not memorized) for oral presentation in class. Students were encouraged to indicate their seriousness of purpose and respect for audience, using a podium, correct forms of formal address, and even to dress appropriately for a formal audience. The technique of gradually advancing through timed and increasingly longer speeches is an integral element of the Toastmasters program, and was easily adapted to the classroom setting. Students were formally introduced by the instructor or another student and then stepped to the podium to deliver her or his "speech." No interruptions were made during the course of the presentations themselves. At the conclusion of each speech, students and the instructor could direct questions of content to the presenter. Some minor feedback was provided on the spot when it was deemed useful to all students. Individual comments and corrections of language mechanics, style and content were reserved for the printed version of the text which was turned in at the end of each class.

At the same time, students completed for each Thursday one half lesson per week of a mini-course Russian ecology, the purpose of which was to provide students with research tools and skills for identifying key issues in their fields, developing a methodology for information gathering, collection and analysis of data and presentation to a non-specialized audience in oral and written form. The broad objectives and activities for each lesson were as follows:

Lesson 1 was intended to equip students with the technological skills to do web based research in Russian (as well as English). The lesson called for students to install Cyrillic fonts, configure the web browser to read and input Russian. They printed out a Russian text from the internet and typed Rus-

sian text. They translated from Russian to English an article of between 100-200 words and used Russian search engines, such as www.rambler.ru. They were also to familiarize themselves and work with electronic research tools including online Russian-English dictionaries.

Lesson 2 required students to utilize these research skills in practice. They had to read and translate a Russian text on the connection of ecology with political and economic considerations. They were then to identify a specific environmental issue for further research using Russian and English online sources, and develop a bibliography or personal set of web links to Russian and English sources. Finally, they were to read and summarize in Russian an article on contemporary problems in the Lake Baikal region.

Lesson 3 moved more in the direction of independent research, where students worked to determine their own research topic, locate and use original Russian sources to gather data, including translation of key elements from Russian to English, and then outline the issue.

Lesson 4 required completion of a project including a five-page paper in English, a one-two page typed summary in Russian for the oral presentation of the paper, supported by an electronic outline (Power Point) in English and Russian of the presentation and paper.

The resulting projects ranged from an examination of desalinization of the Aral Sea to Russia's decision to become for a price a dumping ground for Western Europe's nuclear wastes. These environmental issues were, however, not necessarily linked to the students' future professional issues. In an attempt to meet individual needs, we then returned to the Ecology modules with an eye to adapting them to any number of other topics. Students were provided the shell or set of web pages constituting the Ecology course and encouraged to identify their own specific area of interest. Students identified four topics: Computer Piracy, Vladimir Putin, Disarmament, and the continuing conflict in Chechnya. They then modified the Ecology course

with assignments, links and topic-specific articles and research tools, effectively creating four brand new individualized instructional courses based on the above areas of interest.

The "template" model was, I believe, successful, because it is primarily focused on skills that anyone needs to acquire to develop language expertise at higher levels in serious content areas. The program was both intensive and extensive. It was intensive in that it required substantial work in gathering data, reading and organizing materials and a substantive amount of writing and speaking (delivering short oral reports). All of these skills required one to use appropriate high-level language. The exercise was extensive in its range of activities and topics, applicable to almost any subject matter.

One other key element of the module system was an adaptation of the tasks for those who struggled with the language. This approach permitted returning to a more comfortable and comprehensible level before resuming work on higher level skills. Thus, for example, in the first two lessons there were sections labeled "That's Too Hard," setting forth a new set of required tasks but still utilizing the identical original content/texts.

It would be naïve to assume that a four-week module and even a thirteen-week (39-hour course) could result in dramatically increased language proficiency. Yet, several results were achieved. Students became familiar and, thus, more capable with gathering data and acquiring the vocabulary necessary to talk and write about serious content matter. They moved from a purely conversational and fairly colloquial mode to one utilizing higher level thinking skills with the appropriate discourse, which is in Russian and English more complex in structure, more demanding in vocabulary, and more "mature" from the standpoint of interlocutors. Perhaps equally important was internalizing the basis for continued work in improving language skills. Language learning is, as we know, a continuum, in one's language as well as a second or third language. That realization matched with

a strategy and the tools to be a life-long learner offer for those individuals in times when they are without formal training and instructors a way to constantly improve their skills and keep themselves on the path to Level 4 proficiency.

A note on the appendices and hyperlinks:

Appendix A contains the syllabus- also available at: <http://community.middlebury.edu/~beyer/courses/RU704f01/index.html>

Appendix B contains the text elements contained in the ecology web course. The course itself with graphics can be accessed at: <http://community.middlebury.edu/~beyer/courses/ru700es/index.html>

The student-designed courses referred to above can be found at <http://community.middlebury.edu/~beyer/courses/ru700es/students/studprojects.html>

Instructors may feel free to use any of the materials offered on line. Those wishing to modify my materials or design their own may do so by contacting me electronically at tom.beyer@middlebury.edu.

APPENDIX A

Class Assignments for RU704

for Thursday, Sept. 13

Go the Russian Ecology Course. Read the Introduction and complete assignments 1a, 1b, 1c. This will prepare you to use your computer for reading, typing and printing Russian on the web, and introduce you to the issues of translating a text.

for Tuesday, Sept. 18

Read the Introduction and "To the Student" in *Let's Talk about Life*. Type a short (two-three minutes) description of your activities this past academic year. (Bring the typed copy to class, it will be collected. You must, however, speak, not read, with notes on cards permitted.)

for Thursday, Sept. 20

Lesson one: Ecology complete assignment. This will equip you with the skills to use search engines and other on-line tools to locate and work professionally with Russian language resources.

for Tuesday, Sept. 25

Lesson one: Private life.

Prepare entire lesson. Using the topic of "First..." (p.34, B 1) prepare a short (three to five minute) oral presentation. You must also type and print out a copy of the text to be handed in, but you may not read from it. You can read from notes or note cards.

for Thursday, Sept. 27

Ecology Lesson two: Do Assignments 1 and 2.

for Tuesday, Oct. 2

Lesson two: Student life.

Prepare entire lesson. Write p. 53, Composition 2. With your classmates each prepare a five minute presentation on life at Middlebury College, covering at the least academic life, social life, the residential system, the role of athletics and financial aid in higher education.

for Thursday, Oct. 4

Ecology Lesson two: Do Assignments 3 and 4.

for Tuesday, Oct. 9

Lesson three: Rock Music.

Prepare entire lesson. Find a Russian rock group on the Internet-with words and music. Bring the URLs to class. Write a composition on what's new in Russian rock. Your classroom presentation today should incorporate examples as you address the topic of Russian contemporary music.

for Thursday, Oct. 11

Ecology Lesson 3. Begin work on assembling materials. Do everything except the Outline. Be prepared for individual consultations.

for Tuesday, Oct. 16

Lesson four: Alcohol and drugs.

Prepare entire lesson. Write p. 114, composition B or V. Your oral presentation should aim at presenting an issue and offering a solution to the use/abuse of alcohol or drugs at Middlebury College

for Tuesday, Oct. 23

Lesson five: Sexuality.

Prepare entire lesson. Write p. 138, composition B1. Your oral report (5 minutes) should explore some of your own experiences in Russia and how Russians and Americans concur and differ in their approaches to issues of sexuality.

for Thursday, Oct. 25

Ecology Lesson 3: Present a complete outline of your topic as an HTML document.

for Tuesday, Oct. 30

Lesson six: Religion.

Prepare entire lesson. Write p. 163, composition 1. Your oral report (a six minute lecture) should be a look at some aspect of the historical role of religion in Russia.

for Thursday, Nov. 1

Ecology Lesson 4: Prepare a five-page paper in English on your environmental issue, with translations along with citation and quotation of the original Russian sources. Submit a two page typed summary in Russian that will serve as the basis for your oral presentation of your paper.

for Tuesday, Nov. 6

Lesson seven: Men and Women.

Prepare entire lesson. Write p. 186, composition A. Provide a light entertaining overview (six minutes) of the changing roles of men and women in American or Russian society.

for Thursday, Nov. 8

Ecology Lesson 4. Using an electronic outline (Power Point or web page) of your presentation

and paper with live links to resources you have used on this project, provide a ten minute oral report on your ecological topic.

for Tuesday, Nov. 13

Lesson eight: Social Issues.

Prepare entire lesson. Write p. 219, composition V. Speak on contemporary problems in Russian society related to crime, the economy or the environment

for Thursday, Nov. 15

Classroom discussion in Russian of areas of interest and specialization with guidelines for preparing a mini-course of one's own for individualized instruction.

for Tuesday, Nov. 20

Consultations on chosen area and presentation for critique of materials assembled and work in progress.

for Tuesday, Nov. 27

Lesson nine: Russia and the West.

Prepare entire lesson. Write p. 250, composition B. Be prepared to give a ten minute lecture on a topic related to Russia and the West.

for Thursday, Nov. 29

Present completed course template for specialized Russian course.

for Tuesday, Dec. 4

Prepare a five-seven minute presentation on what you have learned in our course and remaining linguistic challenges.

for Thursday, Dec. 6

Final projects to be presented using computer projection.

APPENDIX B

Note: The lessons were designed for two class sessions per week, or four to six hours of individual time spent each week on the following tasks.

Environmental Studies in Russian

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What follows is an experiment in Internet based learning, a mini-course that combines Russian language content from the field of Environmental Studies, with guides to using the Internet to search, access and read Russian sources. The course is intended for approximately four weeks of instruction, meeting with an instructor once or twice weekly, but may be utilized for individualized instruction. The course has primarily been designed for advanced students of the language, i.e. those at or beyond the Intermediate High level on the ACTFL scale (1+ on the ILR scale). This normally requires several years of study including some significant time spent in a Russian speaking country. Students who are less proficient may still use the course performing the tasks indicated by *That's too hard!!!*

The material is broken down into the following major areas:

Lesson 1. Configuring your computer and browser to read and type Russian. Using Russian search engines. Consulting Russian language aides, general and specific dictionaries.

Lesson 2. The major environmental issues in Russia. What are Russia's key concerns?

Lesson 3. Specialization picking your own research topic and area.

Lesson 4. The research report—and you are on your own. What follows is the outline in text form of the Lesson plan:

Lesson 1

Read and Write Russian

1) Assignment

- a. Download and install Russian fonts (1/2 hour)

You may already be able to read and write Russian on your computer and to understand web pages from Russia. The topic is, however, a bit complicated by the different types of computers (Windows or Mac based) and the different browsers (Internet Explorer or Netscape Communicator) and their own different versions and latest updates. Briefly stated, you need to acquire and install Russian fonts and then configure or set your browser to recognize those fonts. The links below should get you started. Your first assignment is to follow the directions, set up your computer. Note: If this is a bit too complicated for you, seek some assistance from your computer support people!

To configure your computer to read and write Russian, press here for Windows or here for Macintosh or Russian typing and keyboards.

b. Locate and print a web page in Russian. You might choose something simple like www.msnbc.ru. Check out the sections on technology, business and health. (1/2 hour)

c. Identify one brief article (100-200 words) of relevance and translate it from Russian into English. (1 hr)

That's too hard!!! If you find the above assignment (c) too linguistically challenging try the following step-by step approach:

Look at the headings for the different categories.

Find twenty words that are similar in Russian and English.

Find another ten words in Russian you do not understand and look them up in a Russian-English dictionary.

Hint: You can copy Russian or English words from any text and paste them into a Russian-English web dictionary

Using Search Engines

There are a number of search engines in English, www.yahoo.com, www.altavista.com, www.snap.com, www.go.com and those located at the home page of your browser. You can and