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LANGUAGE FOR A SPECIFIC PURPOSE: BUSINESS RUSSIAN

ABSTRACT

This essay examines methods for integrating Business Russian into the classroom for the specific purpose of real-world research application. Included are both the Language for Specific Purposes (LSP) methodology used within the classroom (Crouse, 2013) to engage in this type of research in Russian, as well as the results of student-centered inquiry (McCarthy, 2015). The practical results of the research are then presented in a brief history of why five select companies came to conduct business in Russia and the results of inquiries to these companies as a specific study with repercussions for the pedagogy. A list of best practices for conducting business in Russia, gained from the branches of the US companies that continue to successfully operate in Russia despite sanctions, expulsions, and diplomatic difficulties follows. The conclusions drawn from the teaching of language for a specific purpose and its practical results demonstrate the need for such high-impact (community-based learning, oral history interviews, and integrated study abroad) practices in education today.

KEYWORDS: business, Language for Specific Purposes, methodology, pedagogy, Russian, second language acquisition, technical translation

The teaching of language for the specific purpose of integrating business terminology into classes is a difficult prospect, but a rewarding proposition nonetheless. Business terminology covers not only the overt areas of business, company formation, economics, trade, and sanctions, but also applies to the inherently related themes of art, culture, government, immigration, and politics.

Within the Goucher College-Johns Hopkins Russian Cooperative Program, Annalisa Czczulin introduces the lexicon and grammar of Business Russian in a two-course sequence of the Russian Program: Russian Press and Russian Technical Translation (the former being the prerequisite for the latter course). Both courses teach analytical skills with international content. Given current US-Russia relations, student interest in commerce, and changing attitudes toward Russia, the ability to communicate competently in business Russian is imperative. Czczulin developed a unique approach of integrating a real-world application into theoretical instruction. Each student now produces a capstone research paper, which is entered in a competition on conducting business in Russia. The student who writes the best research paper then works collaboratively with Czczulin to write and submit a research paper to a Language for Specific Purposes (LSP) conference. The winning student, Caroline Greydak, was selected to participate with Czczulin in the International Symposium on Languages for Specific Purposes (ISLSP)/CIBER Business Language Conference IV, in conjunction with a Center for International Business Education Research (CIBER) grant received by Czczulin.

With the integration into the pedagogy of real-world applications in mind, Czczulin and her colleague, Olya Samilenko, have rewritten the university's Russian program curriculum so

that it is student-centered and incorporates high-impact practices (e.g., community-based learning, oral history interviews, and integrated study abroad). Although the entire new curriculum now requires real-world applications, this need is especially obvious in advanced-level courses, which are (for the most part) conducted in Russian. The Program currently serves the Baltimore region's academic consortium.¹

The revised curriculum devotes a significant portion of classes to teaching business Russian in the Russian Press and Russian Technical Translation classes. The first half of the courses focuses on Russian politics and economics across different regions, as well as current US-Russia relations. The second half focuses on business Russian using textbooks and authentic Russian materials to incorporate business vocabulary, idioms, and technical jargon, as well as an understanding of Russian economics, trade, and business practices. In addition, students network with business professionals at CIBER, Baltimore Council on Foreign Affairs and language conference events.

The course on the Russian press (RUS 260) is a first look at applying strategies that students have learned in the four-semester grammar course series in order to read and discuss authentic journalistic materials (newspapers, magazines, and online texts). The American Council for the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL)² and STARTALK³ principles of age- and proficiency-level appropriateness are applied in the selection of the materials. The course emphasizes strategies for deciphering texts, skimming, scanning, and obtaining specific information quickly, as well as pre- and post-textual analysis. The course, as a precursor to Russian Technical Translation, is offered in the target language, but welcomes students who are first language (L1) English speakers, as well as second language (L2) speakers of world languages other than Russian. This combination of students incorporates a global world view and aids in identifying reliable sources.

In essence, the course is taught as a syllabus within a syllabus. It allows for disparate groups of learners to be synchronically incorporated into the same class. The class follows a format of pre-textual analysis, reading, and post-textual analysis. L2 speakers of Russian are presented with an article written in Russian on a particular topic (for example, trade in Russia) from an authentic Russian news source. L1 English speakers and L2 speakers of other languages are presented with a similar article written in English, often from an English-speaking news source.

As a part of this process, the class is partitioned into working segments, during which each group is addressed (the mechanics of which are further explained below). The different learner categories are given a pre-textual packet, which includes distinct, but related, information. L2 Russian learners receive a short list of Russian roots, prefixes, and suffixes that are specific to the article and focus on business terminology. In addition, a list of new vocabulary is bolded within the text and defined in a concise word list. Structures of particular interest (idioms, nested case, jargon) are underlined and require student attempts at translation in a

¹ One course per semester is available to students from the Community College of Baltimore County, Coppin State University, Goucher College, Johns Hopkins University, Loyola University Maryland, Maryland Institute College of Art, Morgan State University, Notre Dame of Maryland University, Stevenson University, Towson University, University of Baltimore, and University of Maryland, Baltimore County students without additional tuition cost.

² See American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (2015), especially "Standards Summary" for an explanation of these principles.

³ See STARTALK (2018, February 4), especially "STARTALK-Endorsed Principles for Effective Teaching & Learning" for an explanation of these principles.

flipped classroom⁴ situation, followed by explanation during the class itself. Students of L2 Russian are expected to be familiar enough with the language, vocabulary, and grammar to function with minimal dictionary and textbook assistance.⁵

L1 English speakers and L2 speakers of other world languages are given the same packet, delivered in English, as it applies to the content of their article. Both groups of students can expect pertinent Greek and Latin root, prefix, and suffix lists that will allow them to function more efficiently within their specific articles. As most L2 world language speakers learn French or Spanish, this methodology is extremely helpful. Even with other L2 speakers, the fact that their L1 is English renders this practice relevant. In fact, it has been documented in the research that “teaching roots and affixes is beneficial for students . . . in that it gives students a strategy for decoding the meanings of unknown words. Roots and affixes are often cognates with other words in the ‘Romance Languages,’ so it is important for English Learners to learn roots and affixes” (Yurtbasi, 2015, p. 50).

In order to fully bring the skills to bear on the topic, students are then asked to select a related article in their particular language (L2 Russian or L2 other language) or several articles (L1 English speakers). Students then take a common approach of analyzing the article(s) by selecting and defining words that they do not know, attempting to find the same prefixes, roots, and suffixes from the initial article, and then highlighting and defining phrases of interest. The mechanics of the class dedicate one third of the class time to working in Russian (while English/L2 other speakers work through their packets), and one third to working in English (while L2 Russian speakers work through their packets). The students come together for the last third, discussing the topic from several global viewpoints. Students are typically astonished that, although the topic is the same, the opinions and biases expressed vary widely with the country and news source of origin. In this manner, several languages are accommodated in the acquisition of business language for the specific purpose of reading the press, articles are selected with student-centered interests in mind, and a general idea of the global situation, often from diametrically opposed viewpoints, is established as pertains to the topic.

By the end of the semester, students explore a topic of their choosing, applying the strategies of the class to produce an authoritative article, which is then incorporated in a cooperative “student newspaper” (based on a rubric). The article is written in English for mutual understanding and contains proper citations from the researched articles used to support the topic of interest in the press. L2 Russian students are expected to detail the current state of some aspect of business in Russia, as well as its political and socioeconomic bases.

The course on Russian technical translation (RUS 335) is designed for advanced Russian students who speak advanced L2, heritage, or native Russian. Its main goal is to methodically teach the student how to tackle translation on aural, oral, and written levels, in accordance with ACTFL standards and time constraints. Class discussions are, for the most part, in the target language, with some explanation of finer points in English if absolutely necessary.

The students in the course titled Russian Technical Translation refine the skills learned in Russian Press, adding more difficult lexical and grammatical items. They use the textbook *Political Russian: An Intermediate Course in Russian Language for International Relations*,

⁴ See Edudemic (2017) for the history and current practices of the flipped classroom.

⁵ Students have finished two pertinent semester-final projects by this point. In their third semester, students are required to write their own grammar, including sections on gender, number, case, adjectives, nouns, verbs, and their endings and functions. In the fourth semester, students are required to write a summary of participle and gerund formation, as well as to document formation and use with exceptions noted.

National Security and Socio-Economics (Simes & Robin, 2013). Students are presented with a full list of all Russian prefixes, roots, infixes, and suffixes, as well as verb and grammar classification schemes. Materials in the first half of the semester are student-selected by area of interest. In addition, students are responsible by the end of the semester for teaching a class on an article of their choice, using the same approach of providing a list of prefixes, roots, infixes, and suffixes, and selecting and defining vocabulary, phrases, and grammatical structures of interest. Pedagogical methodology asserts that this is an effective way to enhance comprehension (Paul, 2015).

The main learning outcome for the second half of the semester is Russian business methods and their relation to politics and socioeconomics, with a focus on how to think strategically about competitive business practices in Russia. Students focus on terminology and jargon of Russian business language through guided exercises and timed translation efforts. The majority of translation efforts are L2 Russian to L1 English, but eventually, students also gain some experience in the difficulties of translating L1 English to L2 Russian (as well as the reasons for not recommending L1 to L2 translation as professional employment). Each student attempts to contact two U.S. companies with businesses in Russia to establish best practices, and then writes a research paper on findings. Faculty from two different institutions then evaluate the papers, with the winner, as aforementioned, participating with the professor in a conference presentation, based on a CIBER or community-based learning project.

The business content of both courses links information across the curriculum, encouraging strategic international business thinking. Students are offered opportunities to visit and participate in business competitions⁶ and conferences. Baltimore County Community College students may now access the curriculum upon transfer. This entire curriculum will soon be shared with Maryland high school, middle school, and Saturday school teachers and students in a proposed Russian teacher certification and student credit-bearing summer program, which is now an intrinsic part of the Bridge to Russian initiative.⁷ In an effort to explain the potential impact of this pedagogy, a brief description of the evolution of one of these papers and its pedagogical insights follows.

Caroline Greydak, a senior undergraduate at Johns Hopkins University in the Goucher College- Johns Hopkins Russian Cooperative Program, won this year's paper competition. As an International Studies major, Greydak concentrated her efforts on Russia. She took upper level grammar, literature, and political science courses, working across the curriculum toward her goal

⁶ See "Pitch George", where students attempt to obtain funding at George Washington University in Washington, DC for their business start-ups.

⁷ The original Teach to Lead–Bridge to Russian initiative began as a proposal for a leadership summit sponsored by Teach to Lead–Maryland, which was organized by The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) in July 2016. The current Bridge to Russian team (consisting of Annalisa Czczulin, Inna Hart, Julie Steimel, James Sweigert), and led by Michelle Quackenbush, is attempting to carry out the original goal of the initial proposal, which "imagined that any child interested in studying Russian could turn to an adult in his school or learning community and ask to begin learning the language. Rather than turn that child away, the adult would be able to help him connect to a network of qualified Russian teachers, one that would be in proximity to the child's school or available through broadcast or online learning. Even if Russian were not offered at his school, the student would have access to and be able to experiment with Russian for a few years or even earn high school credit and/or prepare for the National Examination in World Languages–Russian (NEWL)" (ACTR Newsletter, 2016). The current team seeks to expand the program to other less commonly taught languages as well.

of becoming employed in Russian. She developed an interest in international business outside of the classroom due to the interaction of the different courses' subjects that revolved around Russian business and politics. Greydak worked at a bank in the office of banking compliance over the summer, gaining a greater perspective from a legal standpoint. In the following passage, Greydak describes her journey through the Russian program:

A major theme of the Russian Cooperative Program is learning real-life applications of Russian in a political and economic context. In the elementary levels, one memorizes a list of vocabulary and grammar concepts. At the intermediate levels, one begins to translate, seeing how words relay alternate meanings in new contexts. By the advanced level, one translates entire pieces and is exposed to the tone of the author, as well as how each piece reveals the underlying motive of how and why the information was conveyed. In Russian Press, one enjoys the time to translate independently and then to come back to the group to discuss, picking up details that were misunderstood and hearing different perspectives. On the other hand, Russian Technical Translation becomes a more difficult and detailed extension of Russian Press: vocabulary and technical jargon that pertain to business, for example, are more difficult to assimilate, as they occur less frequently. However, with the root and grammatical system knowledge, these new lexical items soon become familiar, allowing much better access to texts. The paper links the classes together, allowing students to apply what they have learned through the vehicle of a topic of interest. (Greydak)

Greydak took part in the research paper competition, contacting two companies in the United States. She established best practices for conducting business in Russia. Greydak's paper won the competition, after which she corroborated with Czeczulin on the research paper. The CIBER grant allowed for research on this joint paper, "Doing Business in Russia: Best Practices" over the summer of 2017, presented at the 2018 *Language for Specific Purposes CIBER/ISLSP Business Language Conference*. This paper also eventually led to Greydak's senior thesis and to employment.

Greydak combined her interests with Czeczulin's classroom vision. The authors selected five companies for the investigation: PepsiCo, Boeing, Pfizer, Morgan Stanley, and Ford. Stories of why they were successful, where they struggled, and why they were important in Russian business were collected. While Czeczulin researched the background histories and completed the detailing of the Russian program pedagogy, Greydak researched the particular business models, contacted companies domestically and abroad, and attempted to establish best practices. Greydak began multiple attempts to survey these companies both directly and indirectly and ascertain the best practices of conducting business in Russia. Her research took an unexpected turn when information on these companies and their relationship to US parent companies was not forthcoming, leading to interesting new perspectives on conducting business in Russia, as well as the need to educate students on Russian culture during the acquisition effort. Below are several insights gained from the research project to detail the import of LSP, but also some of the pitfalls in using LSP.

To begin with, foreign company histories and business philosophies vary considerably concerning investment in Russia; however, most track to a perceived economic advantage. In 1972, PepsiCo invested in Russia because the company was able to establish a monopoly

(WYPR, 2014). Boeing formed a 2006 joint-venture with Russia's VSMPO-Avisma (a titanium company) because the pay rate there is less costly than that of US workers (Tavernese, 2001). Pfizer Pharmaceuticals invested in Russia in 2012, finding production of its Prevnar 13, Lipitor, Xeljanz, and Zyvox production cheaper and more expedient in Russia (The Pharmaletter, 2017). Morgan Stanley invested in 1994 because it was given "most of the highest profile and most successful transactions in equity, mergers, and acquisitions and debt in the Russian market" to manage (Morgan Stanley, 2018). Ford invested in 2002 because it expects to become a significant player (Reuters, 2017) in the "more mature" European market soon (Gibbs, 2018).

In researching these five companies, Greydak found that the problems of global business were not localized to Russia alone. Many of the giants of the industry, including Walmart and Starbucks, failed to successfully "go global" for the same reasons as these select companies in Russia. Greydak found five main reasons that US companies do not tend to thrive in Russia. First, many companies do not develop a strategic plan that includes understanding stability, consumer attraction, organizational and management needs, and financing that harmonizes with the country intended for foreign sales. Second, companies have not completed sufficient research. This research includes the target country's market, industry trends and forecasts, competitors and potential key players, market dynamics, local culture, and industrial regulations. Third, many companies fail to understand the local culture, including consumer preferences, products that consumers have and want, and the means with which to reach consumers, and its effects on business (TextMaster, 2016). Fourth, many companies try to enter foreign markets alone, without the benefit of a local partner who understands the culture and has already established a trusted reputation. Finally, companies expect a quick return and then end the partnership when losses are recorded early on in the expansion, not accounting for hidden costs (Kvint, 1994).

Although it was relatively easy to trace the histories of each company, as well as the paths that each took to success, obtaining recommendations on doing business with Russia from a company spokesperson turned out to be extremely difficult. Company representatives would initially respond to inquiries; however, when Greydak began asking questions about US-Russian relations, business practices, and contacting the Russian counterparts, commentary was sparse. There are two main reasons posited for this outcome by the authors. First, the political situation in the United States, in conjunction with the investigation into Russian interference in the 2017 presidential election and Winter Olympics doping scandals has made spokespersons reluctant to confirm ties with Russia. Second, corruption in Russia is a continual problem in all spheres of life, including business. As a result, Kalinina (2012) states that the instilled culture of corruption in Russian business must be taken into account in order for foreign nations to successfully gain profit (pp. 5–9). Speaking openly of this corruption and its entailed problems may not be a wise move for US. companies currently trying to succeed in Russia despite sanctions and edicts.

Greydak was able to determine a general idea of the corruption that exists in Russia, as well as the etiquette for conducting business in Russia. She found that there are three components to proper business etiquette: essential pre-business meeting knowledge (Heinze, 2014), conversational etiquette (LinkedIn Slideshare, 2012), and behavioral norms during the meeting (Crescente, 2014). Greydak proposed several best practices based on the global challenges presented by conducting business in Russia. Knowledge of the Russian system, cultural understanding, and business etiquette play essential roles. Pre-planning is an essential part of the equation, but relations and reactions during the meeting must be culturally appropriate, or no accord will be reached. Even though it has a risky and unpredictable political

and economic climate, Russia continues to remain an attractive investment compared to other emerging markets “because of its large population, public and private spending capacity, and strong resource base” (McNamee, 2017). The final takeaway is that conducting business with Russia is not a simple process, but may be well worth the outlay in time, finances, and effort. Given Greydak’s findings, the most effective pedagogy for integrating effective business Russian into the classroom is found to rely on the “World-Readiness Standards for Learning Languages” foundations (The National Standards Collaborative Board, 2015): communication, cultures, connections, comparisons, and communities. In communicating, students need to learn to interact effectively with each other and professionals in all forms of interaction on interpersonal, interpretive, and presentational levels. The dominance of cultural understanding of Russia became obvious. The perspective of the companies and the practices with which they either succeeded or failed also became clear in the research. Students need to explore the connections between the information they acquire and diverse cultural perspectives, while at the same time acquiring information to highlight these perspectives with their similarities and differences. Students then need to be able to compare the same business in Russia and in the United States in order to locate the heart of successes and failures of different companies. Students are required to become lifelong learners (The National Standards Collaborative Board, 2015) using their languages in the classroom and beyond, with a positive outcome of possibly finding future career interests.

Also efficacious is the use of STARTALK standards.⁸ These include facilitating a learner-centered classroom; using of the target language 90% of the time and providing comprehensible input for instruction; integrating culture, content, and language into the world language classroom; adapting input using age-appropriate authentic materials; and conducting performance-based assessment (STARTALK, 2018). Wiggins and McTighe’s (2005) principles of backwards design figured prominently in both courses: learning outcomes were established with “Can-Do” statements, methods of direct and indirect assessment were configured, and then materials and appropriate tasks were selected to accomplish the set goals.

Based on current theory, two smaller courses of beginning and advanced translation were hybridized into scaffolded sequential courses. The language-specific purpose of these classes is to advance student confidence and ability in first gleaning information and then actually being able to translate and use the information presented in the authentic materials and interactions. The endgame is a career that requires Russian, where the student can function primarily L2 Russian to L1 English, but also demonstrates some skill in L1 English to L2 Russian translation. The integration of LSP, and, in particular, the integration of Russian business language in order to produce effective translators capable of employment in the global arena, is thus achieved through the deliberate design of a strategy that introduces basic translation skills and specific word and morphological lists in the first course in the series, Russian Press, followed by more specific, timed skills and general word and morphological lists and active performance in the second course, Russian Technical Translation. Adding the authentic, interactive capstone application, as seen in Greydak’s reported experience, provides real-world experience in typical obstacles in dealing with employment in Russia.

To conclude, business in Russia is a complex and dynamic process. This understanding is extremely important to introduce and develop relatively quickly in the classroom setting,

⁸ See STARTALK (2018, February 4), especially “STARTALK-Endorsed Principles for Effective Teaching & Learning” for an explanation of these principles.

followed by a capstone real-world application. In Greydak's case, this conference capstone led to an employment offer in her field. The next objective of the CIBER grant is to continue to achieve these objectives by providing up-to-date instructional materials as a vehicle for the integration of specific business Russian language and knowledge into the classroom setting for future students, resulting in well-prepared global citizens.

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