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ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS BADLY.

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IF STATISTICS WERE AVAILABLE ON THE DROPOUT RATE AND UNSATISFACTORY ACHIEVEMENT OF COLLEGE STUDENTS TAKING RUSSIAN, THEY WOULD PROBABLY SUPPORT THE WIDELY HELD OPINION THAT RUSSIAN IS DIFFICULT. THE DIFFICULTY IS ATTRIBUTABLE LARGELY TO THE FACT THAT RUSSIAN IS NEITHER A GERMANIC NOR A ROMANCE LANGUAGE, AND STUDENTS THUS FIND IT HARD TO RECOGNIZE COGNATES AND TO ACQUIRE AN ACTIVE VOCABULARY. NEW TEXTBOOKS AND METHODS, BOTH AUDIOLINGUAL AND GRAMMAR-TRANSLATION ARE NEEDED THAT WILL FACE THE VOCABULARY PROBLEM. INSTEAD OF REQUIRING AN ACTIVE COMMAND OF GRAMMAR AND VOCABULARY FROM THE OUTSET, TEACHERS SHOULD AIM AT DEVELOPING IN THEIR STUDENTS AN ACCURATE PRONUNCIATION, A THOROUGH BUT PASSIVE COMMAND OF GRAMMAR, AND A LARGE READING VOCABULARY. THESE SKILLS, ADMITTEDLY, ARE GAINED AT THE EXPENSE OF A LIMITED AND DOUBTFUL ORAL FLUENCY. IN THE FIRST TERM OF COLLEGE WORK THE BASIC ELEMENTS OF GRAMMAR AND A 300-WORD VOCABULARY SHOULD BE COVERED. THE OTHER TERMS SHOULD BE DEVOTED TO DEVELOPING A LARGE PASSIVE VOCABULARY BY MEANS OF READERS WITH VISIBLE VOCABULARIES AND STIMULATING MATERIAL ON RUSSIAN CULTURE. AFTER 2 YEARS OF NONINTENSIVE COURSES THE STUDENT WILL HAVE A CORRECT PRONUNCIATION, A RELIABLE COMMAND OF GRAMMAR, UNUSUAL FLUENCY IN READING, INSIGHT INTO RUSSIAN CULTURE, AND THE DESIRE AS WELL AS THE SOLID BASIS FOR GOING ON TO ADVANCED COURSES. THIS ARTICLE IS PUBLISHED IN "THE SLAVIC AND EAST EUROPEAN JOURNAL, "VOLUME 10, NUMBER 1, SPRING 1966. (AUTHOR)

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All's Well That Ends Badly

Nathan Rosen, University of Rochester

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE

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The Russian language proficiency of those applicants for the 1964-65 exchange who were in the social studies and humanities with an interest in the Russian area was shockingly low. Doctoral candidates, who had passed their general exams and who were doing research on their dissertations, were found to be unable to translate relatively simple materials, even in their own fields, let alone speak and understand spoken Russian. The same was, unfortunately, also true of some post-doctoral applicants who had received their degrees within the last few years from leading American universities. It is expected that this year's selection committee will pay greater attention to language proficiency, rejecting those persons in the field of Russian studies who might otherwise have been selected, had it not been for their inability to use Russian. As one former participant recently pointed out, the Soviet Union is no place to learn Russian.¹

Each year we bask in comforting statistics on the growing number of students in grade school, high school, and college who take up the study of Russian. But we have no statistics on the number of dropouts each semester, no statistics on the number who manage to finish the last required course, no statistics on those few hardy souls who forge ahead into the advanced courses. There are no statistics because the figures would most likely be disquieting—they would bear out the widespread suspicion that Russian is more difficult than any other commonly taught modern European language.

We have accepted this cliché of the difficulty of the Russian language with a mixture of pride and despair. No one, for example, has ever found it necessary to call attention to the odd fact that our third-year language students seem to know so much less than third-year students of French, German, or Spanish.² We simply take for granted that the disparity must be due to the difficulty of the Russian language.

The legend of the difficult Russian language takes its toll in other ways as well. We shall never know how many bright and sensitive students of literature are deterred each year from majoring or minoring in Russian literature because Russian is alleged to be so hard while they consider their own aptitude for languages as merely average. And so they major in English literature. And if comparative literature studies which involve Russian are developing at a disappointing pace, one reason must certainly be our failure

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to attract talented students of French and German literature because "you know, Russian is such a *difficult* language!"

I think that we are all responsible for this state of affairs—not only language teachers but also teachers of Russian literature. The latter disdain to concern themselves with mere problems of language teaching; still, while chatting with Puškin, Tolstoj, and Dostoevskij, they occasionally wonder why they have no one else to chat with—why, for example, they have so few good Russian majors. They may even ask themselves occasionally why the general level of our published articles on Russian literature is so disappointingly mediocre. But they do not go beyond private bewilderment to express public concern. I do not say that teachers of literature should become specialists in language teaching, but they should be aware that the Slavic teaching community is one, and the quality and nature of Russian language teaching ultimately affect the quality and nature of the Russian literature majors that they get.

It is highly characteristic of our distorted values that friends of mine warned me against writing this *language article*. Articles on Tolstoj and Dostoevskij, they argued, carry rich dividends in promotion and prestige; they are read and discussed and reverberate down the corridors of time—of our time, at least. Whereas *language articles*—well, they just don't reverberate at all. Good teachers will continue to teach well, bad teachers will continue to teach badly, and the sensible thing to do is to get back to articles on Tolstoj and Dostoevskij. This is a very short-sighted argument. Illuminating studies of great writers depend on the existence of many specialized monographs. On Tolstoj and Dostoevskij—strange as it may seem—there are very few useful monographs. We need many seminars, many students—I should say, many competent students. The problem is to attract the best students into the Russian field. We are not getting the best students except possibly in linguistics. We are not getting them because the Russian language is alleged to be so *difficult*. It has never occurred to anyone either to confirm this legend or to debunk it; we simply live with it as we live with death and taxes, stoically and unthinkingly. I propose in this essay to blaze a trail—to *think* about the "difficult Russian language."

Is it really difficult? If it is, where does the difficulty lie? In trying to answer this question I make no pretense to a scholarly contribution to philology. I simply intend to note down some of my own observations as a language teacher. Other teachers have reported some of the same findings but have not ventured to draw conclusions from them. Others, I hope, on the basis of this article, will report their own findings.

In what respect is the Russian language different from other modern languages? It is an inflected language—but so is German, which is not reputed to be as difficult. Russian does have two unusual features: the

aspect system and verbs of motion. Neither of these presents difficulties in an elementary course. (Aspect becomes difficult only in advanced courses.) The mysteries of pronunciation and the alphabet are soon mastered. Indeed, Russian grammar—in my opinion—is easier to learn than French or German grammar. We need only consider the simplicity of the gender system, the subjunctive, the neat structure of roots, prefixes, and suffixes, the almost phonetic pronunciation and spelling. The only real difficulty in learning Russian is the vocabulary. Unlike French or German, Russian has few obvious cognates with English since Russian belongs neither to the Romance nor to the Germanic languages (Russian has many cognates, but they are difficult to recognize without special training). Russian words are therefore more difficult for a student to memorize than words in French, German, or Spanish. This is the crux of our problem.

This problem of the special difficulty of the Russian vocabulary is not recognized by our writers of Russian textbooks or by advocates of the traditional grammar-translation or audio-lingual approach. That is to say, the difficulty of the Russian language is admitted in theory, but in practice our textbook writers act as if the difficulty did not exist. This makes the writing of textbooks much easier: one need only copy unthinkingly whatever is being done in French and German textbooks. As an example I would like to cite the "theory *versus* practice" of Lila Pargment, author of two widely used Russian readers. In an article published in 1940 she said: "The Russian language enjoys the unenviable position of being extremely difficult to master. To what extent is this true? What are the facts? It is true, of course, that the Russian language, belonging as it does to a group of languages very different in vocabulary and structure from the Romance and Germanic languages, cannot, without some extra effort, be acquired by English-speaking people to the same extent in a given time as any of those other languages." If the Russian language is as difficult as Mrs. Pargment believes it to be, then the only logical solution (here I am anticipating what I shall say later) is a reader with a visible vocabulary. Mrs. Pargment's readers, however, have an old-fashioned glossary at the back and she opposes the use of readers with a visible vocabulary. A paradox: Mrs. Pargment offers a forward-looking analysis of language and then refuses to apply her findings to her own readers, which are backward-looking. The weight of the traditional approach bears too heavily upon her. And I regret to say that most textbook writers in our field are more conservative than she is; they do not even ask themselves why Russian is more difficult than other languages. The unthinking copying of French and German models in textbooks and teaching methods prevents them from recognizing the unique vocabulary problem in Russian. Let us see now how far our textbooks and teaching methods have gone astray in not basing themselves on this vocabulary problem.

Let us begin with the oldest model: the Russian grammar book based on the traditional grammar-translation approach. This type of book is known to all. Each chapter is prefaced by a long list of words to be memorized. Then comes a fairly long reading passage designed partly to illustrate points of grammar and partly to aid in memorizing the long vocabulary list. The reading passage is followed by exercises requiring translation from Russian to English and from English to Russian. This traditional grammar is based on two assumptions: (1) that an active command of grammar and vocabulary is desirable; and (2) that it must build up a student's vocabulary (otherwise there would be no need for such a long vocabulary list).

I do not know why writers of grammars do not stick to the job of expounding grammar; grammar is difficult enough without requiring students to memorize long vocabulary lists as well. Even if an active vocabulary is desirable for first-year students, why must the vocabulary of a grammar book exceed the 300 to 400 words that Professor Vakar has found to be basic in Russian?⁴ The answer is that our textbook writers have unthinkingly imitated the writers of French and German textbooks, whose vocabulary lists are very long indeed.

The second assumption of our grammar writers is that an active command of grammar and vocabulary is desirable. I shall discuss this assumption in detail later. For the present I wish merely to point out that requiring an active knowledge of all elements of grammar and insisting that the student memorize many words slows down his progress and turns study into drudgery. And the exposition of basic elements of grammar too often drags on into the second year of language study.

Our second model is the Russian reader. Designed to supplement the grammar book, it also becomes an exercise in drudgery, with the aim of proving that language study can be as tedious as possible. The function of a reader is to develop the student's vocabulary. In coming upon unfamiliar words he is expected to consult a glossary at the back of the book or a dictionary. The student must turn constantly from the text (in which he is interested) to the glossary (in which he is not). His natural curiosity about what is going on in the story is thwarted at every moment by the need to turn to the glossary or to a dictionary, reminding him constantly that his task is to learn a language rather than enjoy a story. And since the student must spend so much time turning pages back and forth he loses much precious time that could have been better spent in reading more stories. Most of the Russian readers in use nowadays follow this old-fashioned, tedious, and rather sadistic approach: the readers by Pargment, Patrick, Henley, Turkevich and Bill, Lunt, the readers in the otherwise admirable Oxford series, the Bradda books, and the recent Soviet series of simplified readers for English-speaking students.⁵

Not only is this kind of reader old-fashioned, but it is particularly unsuitable for the Russian language. If Russian vocabulary poses unusual difficulties for an American student, why should we use readers which force the student to memorize words actively in the process of carrying them in his mind from the text to the glossary and back again? Why must we add to the difficulty of learning Russian? The answer again is inertia—thoughtless copying of models in other languages as well as from older Russian readers.

The only reader that is sensible has a visible vocabulary—that is, with a running vocabulary on the same page or on the facing page.⁶ Advanced readers should have translations on the facing page, as in Struve's Bantam anthology of the Russian short story. The student then reads more rapidly, covers much more ground, and the important words tend to repeat themselves, becoming part of his passive and later his active vocabulary. The student then reads with a sense of accomplishment and pleasure. Since so much material can be covered, the compiler can use complete stories instead of irrelevant snippets. If we have only snippets, the text dwindles into a pretext for a battery of drills. The student is asked all sorts of mechanical questions about content but is not asked to regard what he has read in a way that would enlist his intelligence and esthetic sensibility. A reader with a visible vocabulary would liberate him from these limitations, would turn language study into a challenge and a pleasure, and kindle interest in Russian literature.

The case against the visible vocabulary has been stated by Lila Pargment:⁷

Visible vocabularies have the advantage of presenting to the student the correct meaning in the briefest time, but, on the other hand, they are injurious to training in recall and they handicap the development of the power of direct comprehension. Because of the great accessibility of such vocabularies, the learner, quite naturally, follows the text with one finger and the vocabulary with another . . . looking up nearly every word—in fact, he cannot help seeing them all—and it is inevitable that he will interpose an English word after each foreign word—a practice that leads to the formation of a disastrous habit.

Since the elementary or intermediate student of Russian looks up many words in any case, it is preferable to have the words close to the text. I encourage the student to check the visible vocabulary lists or the facing translation if he has any doubts. But why should this practice lead to a "disastrous habit"? The student should read and reread the story until he can translate it into English *without* glancing at the vocabulary list or translation; speed and smoothness of translation are emphasized. Words, phrases, sentences sink in unconsciously as part of a living context. The next time the same words and phrases appear, the student will vaguely recall having seen them; he may look them up again in the vocabulary and find them with a sense of recognition. The third time he encounters the word or phrase, he will know it instantly and will not need to look it up.

Notice that he will have covered at least three times as much reading material as in Mrs. Pargment's approach and will have three times as many chances of encountering that word or phrase. Mrs. Pargment seems to think that a student, faced with the temptation of a vocabulary list close by, will invariably yield to the temptation and will thus develop bad habits. Why not respect the student's interest in learning Russian? If he understands that the vocabulary list is a crutch and a danger, he will use it sparingly, in the manner indicated by the teacher; and, in fact, he will try to meet the challenge by working even harder to ascertain the meaning of the word for himself, only later checking it against the vocabulary list. If he sees that he has learned the word, he develops pride in his knowledge and uses the vocabulary crutch less and less.

The use of a traditional grammar book and a traditional reader; the insistence on an active command of grammar and vocabulary; stress on translating from English to Russian—these are the characteristics of the grammar-translation approach. This approach is sound and rewarding—for those who survive it. But most students find it grim and uninspiring. And given the vocabulary problem in Russian, the traditional approach makes for few survivors. To overcome these deficiencies we now have the "audio-lingual," or "oral-aural," approach. This approach makes it possible for students to begin the study of a foreign language in grade school. Supported by lavish government subsidies, professional language organizations, the latest devices of audio-technology, and the findings of structural linguists, the audio-lingual approach has made rapid headway. As Fan Parker reported rather complacently in this *Journal* recently, there is "almost complete unanimity—almost an official policy—on the cardinal principles of Russian language instruction. The aural-oral approach . . . finds on the whole common acceptance."⁸

Having looked through all the issues of the *Modern Language Journal* and *SEJ* from 1960 to the present, I am startled by the overwhelming number of articles that express misgivings and criticism of the oral approach. These misgivings were summed up in a recent issue of the *Modern Language Journal* (January 1965) by D. C. Hawley: "It is now clear that the inevitable reaction is setting in, and that the audio-lingual method is coming under fire both from the traditionalists and from some of its former supporters."⁹ Hawley pleads for a synthesis of the best elements in the old and new methods; otherwise he fears that the oral approach will be completely discarded in the violence of our reaction against it.

Mrs. Parker's report of "almost complete unanimity" regarding the oral approach actually reflects the official position of the Modern Language Association and the US Department of Education; it ignores the reports of humble workers in the field. (I speak now only of the Russian field.) These reports on Russian language teaching have one curious characteristic: they are critical of various aspects of the oral approach in Russian, but

remedies are proposed only within the confines of that approach. The only exception that I have come upon is an intelligent and forceful broad appraisal by Rebecca Domar, and it is significant that it has been ignored by everyone.¹⁰ Except for Miss Domar's, none of the critiques of the oral approach question the basic premises of that approach. I would like to cite the example of Claire Walker, whose articles on Russian language teaching often appear in this *Journal*. An advocate of the oral method, Mrs. Walker is observant, courageous, and articulate. She recognizes that the vocabulary and structure of Russian set it apart from other languages and pose serious problems for the teacher. As she puts it, "Vocabulary is still more the distinctive problem in Russian than in any other commonly studied foreign language."¹¹ She adds that because of the vocabulary problem, "the same learner who in the second or third year of study can walk through French or Spanish literature with a cane cannot cope with Russian literature except in a wheelchair."¹² As I have said, Mrs. Walker is intelligent and observant; the flamboyance of her metaphor shows that she is also young in spirit. Her solution to the very problem that she poses, however, is spiritless and despairing. Since Russian literary texts prove so difficult to students, she proposes (in the same article) that they be replaced by texts in geography, history, or even grammar. I vividly picture to myself the lively discussion going on each day in Mrs. Walker's classes as her students get excited over Russian geography, history, and grammar; how their excitement and insight gained through disputes over geography, history, and grammar spill over into an overwhelming desire to read Dostoevskij, Tolstoj, Gogol', and Puškin; and how well equipped they are to read these writers by their knowledge of the language and style of texts in geography, history, and grammar. I think, in short, that Mrs. Walker has correctly diagnosed the disease, but that her cure would be fatal.

The difficulty and absurdity of her position stem from the fact that she has tried to make intelligent, constructive criticism of the oral approach while remaining firmly committed to that approach. I feel that we should not be committed to any approach—our only commitment is to improve the teaching of Russian. And if Russian vocabulary poses a special problem, then we should be all the more cautious in applying methods that are now the fashion in other languages. (And before long they may well be out of fashion.) The very language of the apostles of the oral approach is suspicious—it is the language of the New Jerusalem, approached by the "Via scientifica." Here is a sample: "America is filled with tongue-tied translators who have no sense of the sound or the syntactical structure of the language they laboriously decode. We want them to learn to speak the language not merely so that they can ask the way to the bathroom, but so that they can *hear* as well as read the beauty of its literature."¹³ We might ask in a nasty, carping, semantic spirit what "syntactical structure" is being "decoded"—

is it the syntactical structure of the spoken language (how to get to the bathroom) or the syntactical structure of Gogol' and Dostoevskij? Is there a difference between the two structures, and how would the oral approachists overcome that difference? The term "decode" is borrowed from the language of cryptograms and science. In the language of science every word has one specific, definite meaning. Is this the language of Gogol' and Dostoevskij—where everything is metaphor, ambiguity, connotation, complexity? And then the charming phrase about the translators' language—"the language they *laboriously* decode"—implying that the oral approach requires no sweat and tears! (What about those interminable dialogues to be memorized?) Assuming that one should "hear" as well as "read" literature (which really depends on how sensitive the author was to the way his language sounded), why is speaking a language essential to hearing it? Speaking requires an active command of the language—it has even been called "spontaneous composition, that is to say, the most difficult of all language skills."¹⁴ Hearing requires only a passive knowledge and is therefore much more easily achieved. And then the phrase "*hear* as well as *read* the beauty of its literature": an inspiring thought!—until one is pulled up short by the realization that there is little point to hearing the beauty of nonsense syllables; one can truly enjoy hearing only that which has meaning—that is, what is *read*.

An example of verbal extravagance closer to us is provided by Fairbanks and Leed in their introduction to *Basic Conversational Russian* (1964). They assure us that the best way to read Russian is to learn how to speak it—"The most efficient method of developing thorough and fluent reading ability is to begin the study of a language by learning to speak it." It is as if one were told that one hears better by wearing spectacles—or, more aptly, that one sees better by wearing a hearing aid. I confess in all frankness that I do not understand this statement. After all, reading requires only a passive knowledge of vocabulary and grammar; speaking requires an active knowledge. It may be that an active command of case endings and conjugation patterns helps one to read better, but this very modest contribution of the oral approach to reading offers little proof for the fantastic claim of Fairbanks and Leed that one learns to read Russian best by speaking it.

I think that their claim is based on a confusion of the characteristics of oral and written Russian. The complex syntax of written Russian has no parallel in spoken Russian. Fairbanks and Leed implicitly admit as much by not bothering to explain participles in their book (indeed, they even forget to mention that they have omitted participles). The omission is understandable: participles are used in written Russian but not in the Russian spoken by an ordinary native. One need merely compare the long complex sentence of written prose with the short, simple, elliptical sentence

of spoken Russian. And the vocabulary as well as the structure of spoken Russian differs markedly from the written language. The small, simple stock of words that are enough to carry on an ordinary conversation prove utterly inadequate when we turn to Tolstoj, Dostoevskij, or a Soviet newspaper. Thus fluency in speaking Russian can be gained only at the expense of a reading knowledge of Russian. Speaking is not a short cut to reading. As one specialist in educational psychology observed: "The available research evidence indicates that audio-lingual and reading skills are separate and independently developed abilities."¹⁵

If we turn from extravagant claims to the theoretical premises of the oral approach, we shall find them quite disheartening. In the jargon of the oral approach, "decoding" is bad or at best a necessary evil. "Bilingualism," however, is good. The argument runs that we should learn to speak Russian as naturally and effortlessly as children learn to speak their native language. (The comparison is a trifle inaccurate since Russian children have a good start on us: they speak and hear Russian from birth, and then eighteen hours a day, seven days a week. Their course is more intensive than ours.)¹⁶ We should learn, it is held, not by analyzing grammatical phenomena, not by memorizing words and rules, not by reading, but by imitating the sounds of native speakers, developing the habit (by pattern drills and memorized dialogues) of thinking spontaneously in Russian. Grammar thus comes effortlessly, easily, inductively. This is the direct, natural method as advocated in the standard book *Language and Language Learning* by Nelson Brooks.¹⁷

If Professor Brooks is a reliable guide to the oral approach, then I suggest that we should make a special effort *not* to read his book because it destroys whatever illusions we may have on the possibility of applying the oral approach to college students. Brooks tells us that a child can accurately imitate sounds until the age of twelve, but that his mimicking ability steadily declines thereafter and is replaced by a new ability to reason and analyze: "As the curve of learning by imitation declines with increasing age, the curve of learning by analysis rises."¹⁸

If Brooks is correct in his biology, then the oral approach can most profitably be applied to children between the ages of eight and twelve. Since college students are generally older than twelve, it follows that the oral approach is unsuited to them. I think it is significant that Brooks devotes his book almost entirely to the development of language skills in children. The little that he does say about teaching a new foreign language in college is pessimistic: "The beginning of a second language in college is 'school work' that must *somehow* be done at college level; it must follow the program outlined for schools [grade schools and high schools] *as best it can*"¹⁹ [my ital.]. In other words, college students—who have biologically outgrown the mimicking ability of children—are expected to regain the mimicking ability that they have lost. Meanwhile, the newly gained ability

(after the age of twelve) to analyze and generalize—which makes it much easier and faster to study grammatical phenomena—is ignored since the use of it would be a violation of the “direct, natural method.”²⁰

The essence of successful language teaching, as Brooks sees it, is “the acquisition of non-thoughtful responses.”²¹ Non-thoughtful responses are acquired by memorizing dialogues and practicing oral drills. Unfortunately, all this memorization and mechanical drilling of set forms is too often tedious and slow-moving; the college student develops not only “non-thoughtful” responses but also a “thoughtful” response: he is bored to death. The title of one article dealing with this problem (by an advocate of the oral method) is eloquent—“Dialogue Memorization: A Nemesis.”²² A gifted teacher will no doubt know how to sustain the interest of his students, but such teachers are in a minority.

Fortunately, most advocates of the oral approach are realistic enough to mix a traditional exposition of grammar with the oral method (for example, the Russian textbook by Fairbanks and Leeds, Dawson's textbook to a lesser extent). At the Army Language School in Monterey, California, where the oral method is emphasized, fifty per cent of class time is devoted to the exposition of grammar!²³ This is an acknowledgment that the oral approach in its pure form is impracticable, and especially impracticable in Russian.

But even if the oral approach were theoretically sound as applied to college teaching (and it is not);—even if the method of memorizing dialogues and pattern drills were not boring (which it is);—even if the oral approach could be profitably applied to Russian (which is doubtful, due to the special vocabulary problem)—even then the oral approach could not cope with two formidable new problems: the huge and ever-growing enrollment in colleges and the shrinking four-year curriculum.

The oral approach requires small classes and native instructors—a costly approach at a time when enrollments are expanding and there are growing financial problems. Under these circumstances the only version of the oral approach which makes sense is programmed learning. This new teaching method requires no teachers at all and is therefore the cheapest of all methods. Depersonalization is at its maximum. Each lesson is broken down into its smallest components, with each step arranged in a logical order, and fed into a machine. The student must answer correctly at each step before he can proceed to the next one. The major difficulty is to program a course in such a way that the student does not get bored. While a first-year language course can be programmed successfully (it has been done in Spanish), it is very doubtful that a second-year course can be programmed. In the second year the student must move into a traditionally developed course.²⁴ Programmed instruction may be the most valuable and lasting contribution of the oral approach.

There is one aspect of the oral approach which no one has touched on:

can the oral approach be applied to an intensive language course? The intensive course in Russian will soon become much more necessary and popular than the traditional course of three to four hours weekly. This shift is of the utmost importance. There are two reasons for it.

In the first place, we must resign ourselves to the unpleasant fact that, for many years to come, most students will begin the study of Russian in college rather than in high school. College students will have neither the time nor the patience to suffer the leisurely three-year language sequence; they will want intensive courses. Secondly, an equally unpleasant fact: the four-year curriculum is shrinking into a three-year curriculum. During the fourth year—in certain colleges and universities—the student is already taking graduate courses which will count toward an advanced degree. The point is not whether this tendency is good or bad but that it is growing; and given a three-year curriculum, students who begin Russian in college will certainly choose an intensive course.

An intensive course is generally defined as one in which two ordinary courses are telescoped into one course; it takes twice the time and covers the ground in one term. If in an ordinary course the student is quickly bored with language laboratories, memorizing dialogues, practice drills, etc., he will resist mentally any attempt to double the time spent on them. We have had a grim picture of the intensive course at the Army Language School in Monterey.²⁵ If the intensive course is the wave of the future, then the oral approach offers a dubious foundation for it.

We seem to have reached an impasse. We began by noting that Russian is considered a difficult language; we have tracked down that difficulty to the problem of vocabulary, the lack of cognates with other modern European languages (other than the few words for kinship); we have seen that both the traditional grammar-translation approach and the oral approach represent a mechanical application to Russian of methods that work with varying success in other languages—but these methods fail when applied to Russian due to the difficulty of Russian vocabulary. Both methods insist on an active command of vocabulary—the most difficult thing to achieve in Russian. The student who learns Russian by either the traditional or the oral approach progresses so slowly that after completing his language requirement of three or four semesters of Russian he generally abandons all further study of the language. He has, in effect, wasted his time as well as the teacher's—and the legend of the "difficult Russian language" has acquired another convert in the world.

The student's aim in beginning Russian in college cannot be questioned; he has taken up the language, knowing that it is difficult, because he wishes to use it—either to speak it or to read it. If he drops the language upon satisfying the language requirement, it is because he is convinced that he has not learned enough after three or four semesters to warrant continuing his studies. Our primary aim must therefore be to give the student a

sense of solid achievement after three to four semesters. This will encourage him to go on. It is clear that neither the grammar-translation approach nor the oral approach can achieve this aim; we must, therefore, be prepared to drop them and to look for a new solution.

A new solution can be found only if we are realistic enough to consider three factors: (1) the nature of the Russian language; (2) what motivates a student to take up the study of Russian; (3) what solid achievement is possible after three to four semesters.

1. The Nature of the Russian Language. In view of the difficulty of the Russian vocabulary, we must devise a teaching method that will not require an active command of Russian words. We should aim at developing a large passive vocabulary as rapidly as possible.

2. Student Motivation. Just as the vocabulary problem separates Russian from other languages, so does the motivation of students who take up Russian. Those who study French, German, or Spanish are stimulated by the thought that they can, at any time, visit the countries in which these languages are spoken. Moreover, there are many native speakers of these languages in the United States. The audio-lingual approach makes sense in these languages. In the Russian field the situation is quite different. Few students expect to visit Russia while they are studying the language—and certainly not as easily as they wander about Western Europe or South America. And if they do visit Russia, their stay is quite short. Nor are there many native Russians in the United States with whom one can practice speaking. Hence, even if a student has gained a limited fluency in speaking in the classroom, he will soon lose it due to the lack of opportunity to speak it often. And if his limited fluency vanishes—what else can he show for his efforts? Oral fluency can be gained in two years only at the expense of grammar and vocabulary. Deprived of the opportunity to speak Russian, unable to read it fast and with pleasure, the student loses control of the language entirely. Given these considerations, a student must admit that in the two years in which he will study Russian he hopes to gain a fluent reading knowledge. Reading is primary, speaking is secondary. This order of priority seems unquestionable in Russian.

3. What Can Be Achieved in Two Years? We have, then, some fortunate coincidences. The easiest and most efficient way to learn Russian is to build a large passive reading vocabulary. And the ability to read Russian is what a college student wants most. Our problem now is much clearer: given three to four semesters (which is all that a college student is prepared to give to the study of Russian, unless he majors in it)—what can be achieved? The student can learn neither to speak fluently nor to write with ease, but he can learn to read fluently Russian texts of average difficulty, both fiction

and non-fiction. He can also gain a sound basis for speaking the language which he can work up later on. I maintain that the student will be so proud of the reading ability he has gained in two years of study that he will willingly go on to advanced courses in the language or the literature; and the legend of the "difficult Russian language" will itself become legendary. With three to four semesters of the student's time at our disposal (three to four hours weekly), we should set specific levels of achievement for each semester.

FIRST TERM

The student's motivation is very high at the beginning of the course. He is willing to work unusually hard. Let us take advantage of his enthusiasm and throw the hardest material at him. In the first term he will be asked to master not only the Cyrillic alphabet and a correct pronunciation but also the basic structure of the Russian language (including participles). This concentrated dose of grammar in one semester may seem at first glance fatal, but it is quite feasible if done in the following way.

A. Only a passive knowledge of grammar will be required. This knowledge can be tested by multiple-choice questions, fill-ins, translation exercises from English to Russian—very simple ones, designed only to establish control of specific points of grammar. If we concentrate wholly on a *passive* mastery of grammar the student's progress can be very rapid. The most painful aspect of grammar—the memorization of set forms and rules—will be done away with.

I have found that the study of grammar can be turned into an exciting intellectual experience. There are bold philologists who speculate on the ways in which a people's language reveals its traits. "Whorf . . . tried to show from his study of the language of the Hopi Indians how their world-view was closely related to the grammatical categories of their language."²⁶ And Entwistle points out that Russian goes further than any other European language in its use of the impersonal construction; in connection with this he notes: "Life is for us a thing we shape; for the Russian mind it is a series of occurrences that shape us. This also is an attitude of mind in a medium of grammar."²⁷ One might likewise speculate on the meaning of aspects, the weak use of personal possession (*u menja kniga*), the richness of diminutive formations. These are all characteristic of a people's world-view. There is rich material in N. Jarintzov's *The Russians and Their Language* (Oxford, 1916), which has a commendatory preface by Nevill Forbes, the British grammarian. Such material, when presented to a first-year Russian class, proves fascinating and is an excellent memory device as

well, fixing attention on precisely those elements in Russian grammar which differ most from English. One must, of course, qualify every such social-cultural excursus by the terms "speculative, hypothetical, unproved." But that does not mean one dare not use such material in class. I offer this device as one which I have invariably found to be successful in first-year language courses.²⁸

B. It is impossible to cover the basic structure of the Russian language in one term if vocabulary-building is stressed. Vocabulary must therefore be limited to the very minimum needed to illustrate points of grammar (part of this vocabulary could be passive as well) and to carry on a primitive conversation in class. Conversation creates some variety. A working basis for a first-term vocabulary is the 300-word list proposed by Vakar.²⁹ But generally speaking, vocabulary-building should be left for the following terms.

C. From the very outset we emphasize the writing of the Cyrillic alphabet and establishing correct pronunciation. It is at this stage of the course that audio-lingual equipment is most useful. Students should learn to pronounce correctly and to read aloud, but no time should be devoted to pattern drills or memorized dialogues; the basic stress should be on the mastery of grammar, and if we wish to accomplish this in one term, then we must strive only for a passive knowledge. (This means that classroom conversation has to be pretty rudimentary.)

By the end of the first term the following aims will have been achieved: (1) The student will have a solid if passive knowledge of the main facts of Russian grammar. (2) He will have a correct pronunciation and the ability to write Cyrillic script. (3) He will have a minimal vocabulary, partly passive. (4) Note that he will be just as highly motivated at the end of the first term as at the beginning. He will feel justly proud that after merely one semester he has conquered the basic structure of the "difficult Russian language." He knows that the worst is now over. He can look forward eagerly to the following terms which will be devoted to the much more pleasurable activity of developing his reading ability.

SECOND TERM

In this term a basic reading vocabulary is developed by means of one or more readers with a visible vocabulary. Students are asked to translate smoothly and rapidly from Russian to English—just as smoothly and rapidly as they would read an English text. In insisting on a smooth rapid translation the teacher makes it impossible for the student to glance at word lists; he will have to read and reread the text in advance so often that

he will have a smooth rapid delivery. There is no translation from English to Russian. There is no attempt to develop oral fluency. After a student translates a passage from Russian to English, I ask him to read a few lines aloud and, if time permits, I ask him a simple question about the text.

The best beginning reader, in my opinion, is one of the oldest readers—the Heath series, Books I to III (Lermontov and Puškin). The print is large, the stories interesting (although abridged and paraphrased), and, most important of all, the student is introduced to major Russian writers of the nineteenth century.

Some teachers shudder at the thought of using the Heath readers, claiming that Puškin and Lermontov are shamefully mutilated and desecrated. Obviously we cannot read these writers unabridged at such an early stage. The alternative is silly dialogues in baby talk about the weather, school, etc. The less said about them the better. As a matter of fact, the mutilated classic in the Heath series can be used by the most scrupulous teachers quite effectively: I make a point of reading aloud occasionally from a good English translation—say, Nabokov's translation of *The Hero of Our Time*—while asking the students to follow the corresponding Russian passage in the Heath edition. Students are invariably fascinated by the English version, indignant at the mutilation perpetrated in the Heath reader, stirred and prompted to go out and read the whole book in English, while vowing inwardly to learn Russian well enough to be able to read the *real* Puškin and the *real* Lermontov.

The teacher may protest that there is little point in prompting students in a Russian language course to read authors in *English*. Such an objection can arise only from a narrow view of what a language course should do. Language courses not only impart skills (a purely mechanical aim), but also develop esthetic appreciation and incentive. Not only do I encourage students to do outside reading in English, but I seize upon the opportunity of using the texts of classical Russian authors to say something about the lives and times of these writers—in English. To speak about them in Russian in an elementary language course would require such oversimplification that students would learn little; my talk would simply be an exercise in spoken Russian for them. In English, however, I can speak on a sophisticated level and know that students will understand me. Their interest in Russian literature and history will be aroused. Once aroused, this interest may develop into a lifelong passion. The student may be impelled to take advanced courses not only to improve his Russian but to satisfy his passion for knowledge and insight. I cannot emphasize too strongly that the current practice of reducing language learning to a *skill* reduces the college student's motivation to near zero. We must enlist his intelligence and arouse his curiosity. And we are fortunate in having at our disposal the best teaching material in the world: the works of the major nineteenth-century Russian authors. We should introduce students to

these authors as early as possible, and the Heath readers offer a good starting-point.

Since the vocabulary and syntax of fiction and non-fiction are quite different, I follow the Heath readers with a non-fiction reader along similar lines. Stilman's *Readings in Russian History* is quite serviceable, although it unfortunately bogged down in the Time of Troubles and never gets out of them.

By the end of the second term the following aims will have been achieved: (1) a sizeable passive vocabulary, both in fiction and non-fiction; (2) a thorough knowledge of basic grammar, strengthened by constant application to the texts that have been read; (3) a good pronunciation; (4) a growing interest in Russian literature and history and a knowledge of some of the main facts about them.

SECOND YEAR

Readers of increasing difficulty are used—either with a visible vocabulary or with a facing translation. Again, only the major writers of the nineteenth century are studied. The choice of readers is, alas, terribly limited. Most intermediate readers contain only a few classical authors with the emphasis falling on the Soviet period. Such readers are objectionable on two grounds. First, no Soviet author is as good as any of the major classical authors. Second, Soviet prose—the prose of the best Soviet writers—is much more difficult than nineteenth-century prose. Compilers of intermediate readers are therefore forced to omit Zamiatin, Šoloxov, Leonov, and Babel' in favor of obscure mediocrities. Thus, the weighty reader entitled *From Pushkin to Pasternak* by Josselson and Parker omits Gogol', Gončarov, Čexov, and Saltykov-Ščedrin in order to make room for Inber, Laskin, Gorelov, and Fadeev. As the Foreword says, "The motives [for the selection] are not always literary. They are sometimes pedagogical." Iwanik's intermediate Heath reader *Russian Short Stories* is evenly distributed between Russian and Soviet writers (including Kassil', Fraerman, and Averčenko). I am frankly puzzled by this need to include mediocre as well as good Soviet writers in intermediate readers. Why not leave all Soviet writers for the third-year language course?

We are left with a choice of only three readers at present, and two of them are unsatisfactory. The worst one is Henley's *Russian Prose Reader*, which lacks even a glossary and consists for the most part of fragments from novels. It is difficult to discuss fragments in any way except as a basis for language exercises. *The Golden Age of Russian Literature* by Bobrinskoy and Gsovskaya abridges the texts too severely for an intermediate reader and is poorly edited. The only satisfactory reader is Struve's paperback

anthology *Russian Stories* (although the Tolstoj and Dostoevskij selections are poor). The stories by Čexov and Bunin are good for students at the intermediate stage, and there is a facing translation.

Anthologies invariably leave us unhappy since each teacher has his own favorite works which he would like to see included. My own feeling is that a second-year course should introduce the student to the major Russian writers of the nineteenth century. The works chosen should be complete and should show each writer at his best. My students read Puškin's "Queen of Spades" and Gogol's "The Overcoat." Since it is impossible to read in Russian in one year the major stories of all the major writers, I make a compromise: students read a substantial amount of each story in Russian, and then we discuss the whole story on the basis of the facing translation!¹⁰

For a grammar review I use Pul'kina's *A Short Russian Reference Grammar* (2nd ed.) and Vilgelminina's *The Russian Verb*. Pul'kina's grammar has two virtues: it is cheap, and it lacks grammatical exercises. Thus the teacher is spared the temptation of assigning endless grammatical exercises for review. I simply coordinate sections in Pul'kina with whatever text is being read.

For a non-fiction reader at this point I generally use Karpovich's *Lecture on Russian History* (Mouton). The content is intellectually satisfying, the vocabulary and syntax are challenging, and the notes by Lunt are excellent. If time permits, I follow this by the reading of a play by Čexov; students are also asked to hear the play as recorded by the Moscow Art Theater.

During the second year a number of tests are given. Each test is in three parts: (1) Translation of a passage from the reader (which the students had previously translated). I often take key phrases and words from a story and weave them into a new story in Russian. Or I simply take phrases in Russian, scramble them, and ask for an English translation. (2) Grammar questions (based on Pul'kina). (3) Passage for sight translation. This passage increases in difficulty with each test. Two grades are given: one for mastering vocabulary, a second grade (doubly weighted) for understanding the complex syntactical structure. Of course, no dictionary is allowed. Throughout the year prefixes, roots, and suffixes are carefully studied, so that the student has practice in analyzing words.

By the end of the second year the following aims will have been achieved: (1) The student will have an excellent knowledge of grammar, mostly passive, but studied often and made firm by constant application to difficult reading matter. (2) He has a large passive vocabulary in fiction and non-fiction. With his excellent command of grammar and his large vocabulary he can read any text of average difficulty rapidly, accurately, and with pleasure. (3) He has developed a deep feeling for Russian literature and a knowledge of the main facts of Russian history as well. (4) He has an

excellent pronunciation and can understand simple Russian, but he cannot understand spoken Russian of average difficulty, and he certainly cannot speak with any fluency. This is the price he has paid for his ability to read fluently. At this point—at the end of the third or fourth semester—I encourage each student to attend a summer language institute such as the one conducted at Indiana or Michigan. I feel that the student is now able to take maximum advantage of an intensive summer program. One such program, in which Russian is spoken all the time, is more effective than the one-hour or two-hours per week of conversation common in most language courses.

A student prepared under the reading program that I have set forth here is *better* prepared to take advantage of a summer institute than a student taught by the traditional grammar-translation or audio-lingual approach. Since his grammar and reading vocabulary are excellent, and his pronunciation is correct, he can concentrate all his energy on just one object: to transfer his passive vocabulary into an active, spoken vocabulary.

In this connection I would like to relate a striking experience. After three years of high-school French and two years of college French (taught by the grammar-translation method) I could read *Madame Bovary* fairly well, but I spoke haltingly. For a few years I had no opportunity either to read or speak French. Then I found myself in Paris during World War II as a soldier on leave. I could read French newspapers and signs without difficulty, but was chagrined to find that I could not speak to natives or even understand their rapid speech. How I cursed the five years of grammar-translation French! Then a miracle occurred: after one month in Paris I could understand spoken French quite well and could even speak the language with some assurance. What had happened? During that month my large passive reading vocabulary had been transformed into an active vocabulary. This had happened simply because I was in Paris and had to hear and speak French constantly. But it was, of course, not so simple. If my passive vocabulary had been smaller and if my command of grammar had been less thorough, then I could not have made such rapid progress in one month and could not have taken maximum advantage of the opportunity of speaking French in a native environment. And I contend that the same "miracle" can occur in Russian.

We have arrived then at some striking conclusions:

1. In two years of a carefully worked out reading approach (non-intensive), the student can learn to read Russian fluently and accurately, and he has laid a firm basis for independent and pleasurable reading the rest of his life. His ability to read does not depend on having native speakers to talk to or even on going to the Soviet Union. And he has learned in two years that Russian is not such a difficult language after all.

2. If he wishes to develop a fluent speaking knowledge of Russian, he has a sound foundation for it: a correct pronunciation, a large passive vo-

cabulary, and a thorough command of grammar. He need only live for a while in an area in which Russian is spoken constantly, and he will soon transform his passive vocabulary into an active vocabulary. It may well be that the best way to learn to *spea*k Russian fluently is to learn to *read* it fluently first!

I wish to repeat here that if Russian is considered by many to be a difficult language; if the drop-out rate is dismaying; if talented students of literature hesitate to take up the study of Russian—the reason is that we cannot deliver any kind of mastery of the language in the three to four semesters that the average student is prepared to give us. We cannot succeed because the methods that we use—the grammar-translation and audio-lingual approaches—require an active command of Russian—and an active command of Russian, due to the unique vocabulary problem, cannot be achieved in two years of a non-intensive course. The only approach that makes sense under these circumstances is the one that I have proposed here. If it is widely adopted in colleges we may yet see an unparalleled blossoming of Russian studies in the United States. And if it is not adopted. . . !

NOTES

- 1 Report of the Inter-University Committee on Travel Grants, quoted in *PMLA*, LXXX, No. 1 (March 1965), p. A-12.
- 2 The only exception I know is Claire Walker, "Do Our Students Speak Russian?", *SEEJ*, VII (1963), 178.
- 3 Lila Pargment, "A New Approach to the Teaching of the Russian Language," *MLJ*, XXIV (1940), 362.
- 4 Nicholas P. Vakar, "The Problem of Vocabulary in Russian Texts for Beginners," *SEEJ*, V (1961), 28.
- 5 The publisher of the Soviet series has departed somewhat from this practice in a recent reader—*Echo*. The glossary is published in a separate pamphlet, arranged by story. A recent Soviet paperback anthology entitled *Short Stories by Soviet Writers* (Moscow, n.d.) states in the Foreword that it represents the "first attempt at parallel Russian-English texts." Penguin Books has also released a parallel-text reader entitled *Soviet Short Stories* (1963).
- 6 Oddly enough, the old Bondar readers of World War II vintage had a visible vocabulary. I have often used Puškin's "Queen of Spades" in this edition. Unfortunately, the text is abridged (a fact nowhere mentioned), the editing is primitive, and there is no background information. There are two excellent recent editions of this story in the Bradda series and in *Russian Short Stories, XIXth Century* (Oxford, 1953)—but neither has a visible vocabulary.
- 7 Lila Pargment, review of *Six Short Stories* by Rebecca Domar, *MLJ*, XXXV (1951), 585.
- 8 Fan Parker, "Student-Teacher in Russian: A Methods Course," *SEEJ*, VIII (1964), 195.

- 9 D. C. Hawley, "In Search of a Synthesis," *MLJ*, XLIX (1965), 19.
- 10 Rebecca Domar, "Can Russian Courses Be Saved?," *MLJ*, XLII (1958), 11-17.
- 11 Claire Walker, "Toward More Facility in Russian," *SEEJ*, VI (1962), 348.
- 12 Walker, "Do Our Students Speak Russian?," 178.
- 13 Donald D. Walsh, "A Clearer Look at the New Look," *MLJ*, XLIV (1960), 168.
- 14 Ned. J. Davison, "Will the 'New Key' Prove Flat?," *MLJ*, XLIV (1960), 322.
- 15 David P. Ausubel, "Adults Versus Children in Second-Language Learning: Psychological Considerations," *MLJ*, XLVIII (1964), 423. Ausubel refers for evidence to F. B. Agard and H. B. Dunkel, *An Investigation of Second-Language Learning* (Boston, 1948).
- 16 Ausubel, *ibid.* On the general theme of child-learning versus adult-learning, see also Wilga M. Rivers, *The Psychologist and the Foreign-Language Teacher* (Chicago, 1964), 100-103.
- 17 Nelson Brooks, *Language and Language Learning* (N. Y., 1960). It has been questioned, however, whether the perfect bilingualism sought by adherents of the oral approach can be achieved at all. Even in bilingual communities each spoken language loses its purity, developing similarities of structure with the other spoken language. See William R. Schmalstieg, "Language Teaching and Semantic Structure," *SEEJ*, VII (1963), 408-409.
- 18 Brooks, 113. Prof. Stanley Sapon of the University of Rochester, who has developed a successful programmed course in first-year Spanish, tells me that Brooks is misinformed; the ability to imitate sounds is retained *after* the age of twelve, while the ability to reason develops at the same time. Sapon cites as proof his own experience in programming language courses. This is a question which only psychologists can settle. At present Sapon seems to be in a courageous minority of one.
- 19 Brooks, 116.
- 20 See the critique of the oral approach in Domar's article (cited in note 10), p. 14.
- 21 Brooks, 60.
- 22 Frank P. Benwell, "Dialogue Memorization: A Nemesis," *MLJ*, XLV (1961), 303. See, too, Theodore Huebener, "The New Key Is Now Off-Key!," *MLJ*, XLVII (1963), 376.
- 23 Max Oppenheimer, Jr., "The One-Year Russian Course at the Army Language School," *MLJ*, XLIII (1959), 67.
- 24 On programmed language courses see: F. Rand Morton, "The Teaching Machine and the Teaching of Languages: A Report on Tomorrow," *PMLA*, LXXV (1960), Part 2, pp. 1-6; Albert Valdman, "Toward a Redefinition of Teacher Role and Teaching Context in Foreign Language Instruction," *MLJ*, XLVIII (1964), 279-284. This article contains a bibliography on pp. 279-280, fn. 7.
- 25 Oppenheimer, "The One-Year Russian Course at the Army Language School."
- 26 Rivers, 133.
- 27 W. J. Entwistle, "Russian as an Art of Expression," *Oxford Slavonic Papers*, I (1950), 25.
- 28 I hope that someone may assemble material of this kind and publish it for the benefit of language teachers. Linguists and cultural historians might also find it of interest.
- 29 See note 4.
- 30 Since stories vary in difficulty of language—"The Overcoat" being more difficult than "The Queen of Spades"—I cannot follow a chronological order. In the third term I begin with Čexov and Bunin (in Struve's anthology), then turn to Puškin and Karpovich's reader. This is followed by "The Overcoat."