

## To the Teacher

### Methodological Considerations

Since the year 2000 researchers in the more commonly taught languages have paid increased attention to reading and how to teach learners the active skills needed to read texts in the foreign language. This renewed focus on reading grows out of very different methodological considerations and pedagogical practices than the treatment of reading in previous language teaching methods (especially, the “Grammar-Translation” method). Much of the new work on reading (Swaffar, Arens, Byrnes 1991; Kern 2000; Maxim 2002; Keefe 2004; Bamford and Day 2004) centers on teaching students to read by having them learn “content” *and* language through reading. Written texts become the locus for having students integrate skills (reading, speaking, writing, mapping target language forms to meaning) and cultural knowledge. This integrated approach is task-based, and it privileges reading in a way fundamentally different than previous approaches that, while giving prominence to written texts, simultaneously isolated reading from other foreign language (FL) activities and frequently subverted reading since students were made to translate texts rather than read and discuss them.

The majority of elementary- and intermediate-level Russian language textbooks published in the U.S. since the 1990s include reading activities based on authentic and semi-authentic texts (e.g., notices, advertisements, newspaper stories, biographical sketches, personal letters and messages). Thus, by the middle or end of the intermediate level, students of Russian have usually encountered a variety of texts and have learned how to read such texts for their informational content. Better textbooks actively teach reading strategies for finding and extracting factual information from texts. Yet even students who succeed in reading these kinds of texts for informational purposes can be frustrated by their first encounter with a longer literary text in Russian.

Reasons for this frustration are many: some can be traced to the complex features that mark Russian literary writing (e.g., participial constructions, complex subordinating conjunctions, etc.); others stem from the broader nature of connections that the reader needs to make to “understand” a literary text. Furthermore, in literary texts the intermediate-level learner encounters a flood

of unfamiliar words all of which, depending on the author and text, can be essential to a nuanced understanding of a text's meaning(s), imagery, implications and intertextual references.

To compensate for the difficulties that authentic texts present to intermediate-level learners, editors of previous textbooks and readers have often restricted the post-reading tasks to having students find answers to the most basic questions: *who? what? when? where? why?* While these questions can capture the basic "facts" of a text, they effectively limit the student's reading of the literary text, and often distract attention from those features of the text that make it literary, and therefore worthy of study, interpretation and reflection.

All of these considerations motivated me to look for a literary text that would be engaging and open to interpretation, yet be accessible to students at this level and have manageable linguistic features. These considerations also guided me in determining how vocabulary is glossed in the text, where notes are given, and how tasks are sequenced to ascertain the students' comprehension of the story, to encourage them to notice cultural and literary aspects of the text, and to push them to notice how certain kinds of linguistic forms are used to express meaning.

### **Why This Story?**

First of all, the main conceit of Tokareva's story (living a day without lying) is one easily accessible to students. They already have schemata for reading a story with this plot device (i.e., they know or can easily imagine what kinds of difficulties befall someone who fails to follow certain accepted social practices involving "little white lies"). Furthermore, the other dilemma facing the story's hero (what to do with his life now that he has completed his higher education) is one that looms before many college and university students.

Second, Tokareva's story introduces the reader to Russian urban life in the mid-1960s, at the very start of the Brezhnev era. Many aspects of everyday life found in the story figure in other literary texts and films from the period of "Stagnation."

Third, Tokareva's prose is linguistically very accessible to students at the intermediate level. Since most of the story is told in the form of dialog or internal monolog, the language of the text reflects the contemporary conversational Russian that is featured in virtually all elementary-level textbooks of Russian. Since the author eschews lengthy description, the story contains few bookish linguistic forms—there are virtually no participles and few verbal adverbs. The sentence structure and word order are not overly complex.

### **Intended Outcomes**

In selecting this story for a glossed and annotated edition, I have been motivated by the desire to guide students who have completed approximately 150–200 hours of college-level language instruction through their first encounter with a longer connected piece of Russian fiction. The length of the text (approximately 6,700 words) gives students the opportunity to develop strategies for extensive reading. It gives them increased exposure to repeated incidental vocabulary that is typical of narrative writing; this exposure should help them in subsequent reading and in their language learning in general. This reading introduces them to the ways that longer texts are organized, how authors mark sections or episodes in a text, and how authors rely on readers to make connections between episodes. A longer text also makes readers enter into the world of the character, since they see how the character develops and unfolds over the course of the story.

Successfully completing an unadapted story of twenty-five pages at this stage of language learning can be a great confidence builder for students, showing them that they actually **can** read Russian. I have no expectation that students will “get every word,” but those who read a story of this length in their second, third or fourth semester of language study—even if they comprehend only sixty percent of the text—should rightfully feel a great sense of accomplishment. Studies of extensive reading suggest that the only way people become better readers in their first or second language is through more reading.

### **Reading Aids in This Edition**

Students face two related difficulties when reading unadapted texts at this level. First, they often fail to recognize a well-known word when it appears in an unfamiliar form. How many intermediate level students who know the expression “Как тебя зовут?” can immediately see the related form in the sentence “Он *позвал* нас на обед”? Second, students at this level have limited vocabularies, and any literary text will contain a large amount of completely unknown vocabulary. I have addressed these difficulties by extensively glossing words and phrases in the text on the facing pages. Facing-page glosses allow the students quick reference to a word or phrase without distracting them excessively from the text. Students who want to try a first reading of the text without any “crutches” can always fold back the facing pages to view the Russian text alone. Similarly, when students want to review a section that has been thoroughly discussed in class, they can turn back the facing-page glosses

and read to see if they can remember the meanings of words and phrases in the text.

For most intermediate-level students, these facing-page glosses should keep this first encounter with Russian prose from turning into a tedious and unending encounter with a Russian-English dictionary. The facing-page glosses should give students enough help that they can actually read the text with some speed and pleasure.

In the glosses I have given contextual meanings of words and phrases, although I sometimes also list the word's literal meaning, if the form in the text represents a more specialized usage. I have noted dictionary forms when the word is very common, but is nevertheless likely to be on the periphery of the student's vocabulary at this level. Dictionary forms are also given when they may reveal other related forms of the word (e.g., students often need help in linking forms like *иска́ли* – *и́щут* – *ищи́* to the same infinitive *иска́ть*).

In addition to those immediate contextual glosses, all the words used in the story are listed, parsed, and translated in the glossary provided at the end of this volume. With the facing-page glosses and this glossary, students should be able to find the meaning of any word and be able to use and modify words from the story in discussing the text and thereby add them to their active vocabulary.

To ease the transition from reading the story to saying words and phrases from the story when discussing the text in Russian, I have placed stress marks on all of the Russian words in the text and exercises. The complete text of the story is also available in digital audio format recorded by a Russian native speaker on the book's website (<http://www2.ku.edu/~russian/dbv/>). Listening to the recording while reading a section of the text for a second or third time may help students notice word and phrase clusters, nuances, and ironic twists to the character's comments.

### **Using this Story in the Classroom**

As teachers, we often think of reading (including L2 reading) as a solitary activity that should take place outside of class. Yet, there are distinct disadvantages to this practice, especially for students with the lowest levels of language proficiency. Assigning all reading as homework keeps the teacher from realizing how the students read, when they reach for a dictionary, where they encounter problems with comprehension and how fast they read. Tokareva's story breaks easily into 6 or 7 episodes so that the students can read a chunk at a time, confirming their understanding of the story along the way. The teacher may want to take a few sections of the text and have students read them silently in class. During an in-class reading, the teacher can decide whether to allow

students access to the facing page glosses or to the text's glossary. The teacher might also ask the students to read a specific part of the text in a set time with the goal of making the students aware of their reading speed.

For establishing the basic frame of the story, I strongly recommend that teachers have the students read the first page of the text in class. For the first encounter with the opening page of the story, the teacher might give students a five-minute time limit to read the first pages. Following a discussion of its basic propositional content, the students can do a more detailed second reading at home, completing the related exercises so that there can be a fuller discussion during the following class session.

The exercises accompanying each section of the story are located in the second half of this volume, and they follow the same general structure.

***Вопросы к тексту*** – The questions and exercises in this section serve as an initial comprehension check of the story line covered in the section. Since these questions can help students activate background schemata, they can also serve as a pre-reading activity. Thus students should be encouraged to read these questions before reading the related episode of the story. For some parts of the text, the questions and exercises in this section ask readers to skim and scan for information as they work through the text for the first time.

***Слова, слова, слова*** – These exercises expand students' vocabulary by having them attend to basic principles of Russian word formation and the recognition of cognates.

***Понимаем и обсуждаем текст*** – This section includes questions and tasks that lead students to a more detailed level of text comprehension; they also ask the students to think through the text for clues about the characters, their relations and situations.

***О языке и культуре*** – This section contains notes and tasks relating to some of the many cultural references in the story.

***О грамматике в тексте*** – This optional section is included for several parts of the story. The goal of this material is to focus the readers' attention on the connections between a certain grammatical form and the meaning it expresses, particularly where the form-meaning connection can add to the readers' understanding of the characters and the story.

***Повторяем*** – As the capstone activity for each section of the text, these cloze passages allow the students to review the text once more by

filling in blanks in a summary paraphrase. Approximately every tenth word has been blanked out. Although these cloze passages have a complete word bank for students, teachers may want to encourage students to use ANY logical word that fits the context and not just one that is listed in the bank. Since the cloze passages summarize the main events for each part of the story in conversational language, the completed paraphrases can serve as a model to students of how to retell the story in Russian. Complete answer keys to these cloze activities can be found in the teacher's resource section of the book's companion website. For students, hints to completing these activities will be available on the website as well.

While the questions and instructions for tasks for many parts of the story are given in English, students should be able to answer many of these questions in Russian, especially if they have had the opportunity to prepare the material at home. Before initiating a whole-group discussion, it may make sense to have the students first compare their answers in pairs or small groups. Such comparison activities can often break the icy silence at the start of class. When the homework activities call for summarizing details from the story in a matrix, the teacher might start class by having the students complete the matrix on the blackboard using words and phrases from the text. Alternatively, the students might type out their matrices at home, email them to the teacher, who can then show information from student answers to the whole group and thus motivate discussion or further group work on the question.

To extend classroom discussions or to help the students visualize aspects of the text, the teacher may want to use stills or clips from various Russian movies. The incident with the контролёр in section 2 and the narrator's reference to Smoktunovskii, for example, might be illustrated with a clip from *Берегись автомобиля!* (directed by E. Ryazanov, 1966) or contrasted with the tram scene in the film *Брат* (directed by A. Balabanov, 1997) where a passenger refuses to pay his fine. The episode of Valentin teaching class might be successfully illustrated or contrasted with a short episode from the Russian comic TV series *Ералаш!* that deals with life in a Russian school.

As part of the classroom comprehension activities for each part of the story, the teacher might also ask the students to make a drawing of a particular scene. Since Tokareva's text describes various scenes of daily life in detail, such illustrations of the story might help other students comprehend the text. Variations in the students' illustrations may also alert the teacher to aspects of the story line that have not been understood or noticed. There are also scenes in the text where the teacher might engage the students in imagining how to stage the episode as a play (what props would be needed? what would the set

design look like? what actors would be needed? what emotions do the actors need to project in the scene? what facial expressions will the actors need to make?). Such questions could function as a first step into a reader's theater enactment of the episode.

The story's central questions (how to live without "white lies" and what life paths to follow) are familiar to American students in the 21st century. However, since Tokareva's text explores how they were answered from the perspective of the Soviet Union in the 1960s, teachers should encourage students to compare their 21st-century expectations with Soviet ones from the 1960s. Teachers can build much discussion of the story by having the students make cross-cultural comparisons in this four-way set of outcomes.

Valentin's options in 1964 Moscow	Valentin's options in 21st-century Moscow
American students' options in 1964	American students' options in 21st century

These four-way comparisons are very flexible and can be adjusted by topic or by reframing the parameters. The class might be broken into smaller groups where each is charged with presenting material for a single cell of the chart, and then in a whole-group session students can compare and assess the likelihood of the suggested ideas. When working with students at the intermediate level, the teacher may have to "seed" many language forms or phrases to have the students make the above comparisons in Russian. For example, the teacher might write out a sentence or two in Russian on separate cards expressing a dozen or so possible outcomes, and then distribute them to the students, who must sort them into the four categories presented in the chart above. Students who complete this activity using these seeded forms are more likely to remember the language forms while they gain cultural awareness.

Among the exercises I have included questions and comments regarding cultural comparisons and literary analysis where I thought them justified by the text. Most of these complex issues should probably be discussed in English since the students will lack the vocabulary and language functions to deal with them effectively in Russian. I do not consider the use of English for discussing these intellectually rich questions as a sign of "failure." Quite the contrary: in asking questions that require deeper thinking about the literary work, we are actually inviting students to experience a deeper reading of the L2 text than they would have if the questions and discussion were restricted to the level of their L2 speaking abilities. Rather than skip these issues only because the stud-

ents cannot yet discuss them in Russian, I have chosen to raise them and allow the readers to offer answers that they can express in any appropriate language.

This edition's companion website (<http://www2.ku.edu/~russian/dbv>) offers additional materials for both teachers and students. The teachers' section of the site contains lesson plans for covering the story with an intermediate-level class in twelve 50-minute classes, answer keys for the cloze exercises, suggested essay topics, and a sample test. The site also contains an audio recording of the text in MP3 format, and additional comprehension questions that can be uploaded to a course management program like Blackboard™.

### **Selected Bibliography**

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