Title: From Pushkin to Cheburashka: Teaching Advanced Russian through Popular Culture

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Russian popular culture is a source of countless verbal, visual and musical clichés that fill all types of discourse, demanding from those on the receiving end a higher then ever level of cultural competence. Hence, familiarity with most widely recognizable products of Russian popular culture, as well as ability to understand and appreciate the traits that make these works appealing to a mass audience, is not merely an option for today's advanced language learner, but rather a necessity, a condition that provides for efficient use of literary and media sources and for successful communication with native speakers.

Largely for this reason, and also because of the entertaining properties of most works attributed to this category, the Russian popular culture production is commonly used in language instruction. The examples of such usage range from learning songs in class, to cultural projects leading to student productions, to theme-based courses centered around a certain genre, a particular cultural phenomenon, or a famous personality.

My paper describes a complex, multilateral approach to popular culture as both a subject of study and a material for language learning. It proposes yet another model of advanced Russian language instruction based on a number of selected iconic works that have been recycled over the years and tend to proliferate in various forms in the ever-changing Postmodern Russia. Course materials include traditional and urban folklore, film, animation, literary texts, online articles, and songs. The course structure provides for the most profound student immersion into both language and culture as it encourages and enables student independent research and cultural material presentations. The teaching model described in my paper serves the dual purpose of raising students' overall Russian language proficiency and their cultural competence.