

Title: Coaching into Beyond 3

Authors: Irina Collins, US Department of State

Larissa Ryapolova-Webb, U.S. Department of State

Abstract:

In the Government setting, teaching critical languages to high proficiency scores (3 and above on the ILR scale) has been recently elevated to the levels of heightened significance. While students joining the Beyond 3 (B3) program have already achieved the 3/3 professional proficiency level and are expected to arrive with pronounced levels of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, the expectations placed on a teacher are high and focused around coaching the program mentees to reach higher levels of language mastery in 44 weeks.

To espouse the personal and professional interests of program mentees, a modular curriculum has been designed that allows for the flowing interchange of variant skill-honing activities (discussions at levels ranging from factual to opinion to conceptual, focus on varying conversational styles, diverse formats of language interaction, etc.) and invariant content (cultural references, encoding grammar specificities, etc.).

With focus on the specifics of syntactic organization of speech samples, mentees have been guided through extensive receptive activities in both listening and reading. Subsequent productive exercises have pursued the goal of mirroring the authenticity of nationally specific thought verbalization through rigorous exercises in Russian-specific encoding means. Mentees have also been led through vast swaths of literary, historical and cultural resources that made them better prepared to navigate the intricacies of idiomatic language, cultural references, allusions and otherwise opaque materials.

Although the Russian B3 program has been formally launched only a year ago, the curriculum modules had been pre-run previously on non B3 members. The overall results are indicative of attainability of at least a half point (on the ILR scale) scoring increase. The discussion will center around language parameters other than lexicon that need to be addressed on the priority basis to help program mentees progress within the established timeframe to the B3 destination.