

Title: Teaching Literary-cultural Content and Multiliteracies through an Azbuka Approach in the Collegiate Russian-I Classroom

Author: Ekaterina Ites, University of Massachusetts

The paper presents a project-oriented explorative Azbuka approach implemented within a Russian-I curriculum (Robin et al. 2007) in order to support-enrich communicative language learning with basic literary-cultural content and skills (Byrnes 2006). Developed within an ecological social semiotic perspective on FL-literacy pedagogy (van Lier 2002, Walther 2007) and aligned with an heuristic principle of “understanding by design” and theories of redesigning available designs and multimodal representation of meaning-&-text (Kern 2000), the Azbuka approach is viewed as a mini-immersion solution to the ceiling effect problem (Rifkin 2006). It engages beginner learners in multiliteracy practices with literary mini-texts which inform a cultural context of Russian in use (Boyle & Gerhart 2002). Catchy, playfully-malleable and discourse-adjusted, these texts of diverse genres and origins function as readily-available symbolic resources of communication that foster automaticity of language processing and production (Jackson & Kaplan 2001; Leaver et al. 2004), “useful plagiarism” (Robin 2006), and transfer. To address some problems in mastering the alphabet and basic reading-writing mechanics (e.g., Comer & Murphy-Lee 2004, Bown 2007), this complimentary approach teaches a range of alphabet, language, metacognitive and intercultural skills based on heuristics of the letters’ names, alphabet order, the list-text structure, and mini-texts which feature vocabulary-images of the multimodal Azbuka genre. Syllabic division skills and orthographic reading are emphasized as tools reducing negative transfer from English reading mechanics and promoting orthoepic reading-pronunciation and correct spelling.

The paper outlines Azbuka-related mini-genres employed; introduces some texts used to reinforce/assess learning; presents textual practices-tasks and explorative multiliteracy projects that promote mini-texts’ communicative use in class and beyond; two videoclips included: a mini-text reading-discussion and a reading game-project presentation.

References

Bown, J. (2007). Now I Know My ABB's: A Comparison of inductive and deductive methods of teaching on the acquisition of the Cyrillic alphabet. *RLJ*, 57, 89-107.

Boyle, E. & Gerhart, G. (Eds.). (2002). *The Russian context: The culture behind the language*. Bloomington, IN: Slavica.

Byrnes, H. (Ed.) (2006). Perspectives: Interrogating communicative competence as a framework for collegiate foreign language study. *MLJ*, 90(2), 244-266.

Comer, W. & Murphy-Lee, M. (2004). Letter-sound correspondence acquisition in first semester Russian. *Canadian Slavonic Papers*, 46, 1/2, 23-35.

Jackson, F. & M. Kaplan (2001). Lessons learned from fifty years of theory and practice in government language teaching. In J. Alatis & A-H. Tan (Eds.), *Georgetown University Round Table on Languages and Linguistics 1999: Language in our time* (pp.71-87). Washington, DC: Georgetown UP.

Kern, R. (2000). *Literacy and language teaching*. Oxford, UK: Oxford UP.

Leaver, B., Rifkin, B. & Shekhtman, B. (2004). Apples and oranges are both fruit, but they don't taste the same: A response to Wynne Wong and Bill VanPatten. *FLA*, 37(1), 125-132.

Rifkin, B. (2006). Fifty years of pedagogy: The learning and teaching of Slavic languages: Past, Present and Future. *SEEJ*, 50(1), 29-44.

Robin, R. (2006). Computers and pedagogy in Russian: Where have we been? Where are we going? *SEEJ*, 50(1), 65-81.

Robin, R., Evans, K. et al. (2007). *Golosa: A basic course in Russian*. Book 1, 4th ed., Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Van Lier, L. (2002). An ecological-semiotic perspective on language and linguistics. In C. Kramsch (Ed.), *Language acquisition and language socialization: Ecological perspectives* (pp.140-164). London: Continuum.

Walther, I. (2007). Ecological perspectives on language and literacy: Implications for foreign language instruction at the collegiate level. *ADFL Bulletin*, 38-39(3-1), 6-14.