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How to Facilitate Russian as a Foreign Language for Beginners as a Fresh Way to Peace Promotion Memory Hooks for Letters and “Language Workout”

Abstract

The article presents a model to teaching Russian to beginners which is based on empirical findings on the “Language Workout” method (German *Sprachworkout*) and the “Alphabet Emergency Doctor” (German *Alphabet-Not-Arzt*). The printed letters are introduced with pictures that highlight a letter within a picture for a thing whose name starts with this letter and is an internationalism or typical of Russian culture; training includes names and words that can be expected to be familiar to the average learner. Then, words and phrases are presented (Europeanisms; name, origin and language skills; positions and directions; hotel situations; problems with objects and health; buying things). When presenting an item for a given sense, it is first pronounced naturally, then slowly and clearly repeated and finally naturally again. Slides give morphemic boundaries and literal translations. Memory hooks are also given. Then students are asked to form the Russian rendition of a sentence that combines the new item with an old item. All students first build the sentence in their mind, then the teacher asks one student to try to build the sentence and helps the student as long as necessary. Grammar slides are connected to an explicit explanation of the structure. They aim to give rules of thumb in a learner-friendly way (with plasticity or memory hooks).

Sommaire

L'article [‘Comment faciliter l'apprentissage du russe [comme langue étrangère pour les débutants comme un moyen original de vaincre les images ennemies’] présente un modèle d'enseignement du russe aux débutants qui s'appuie sur les résultats empiriques de la méthode “Language Workout” (all. *Sprachworkout*) et de l’“Alphabet Emergency Doctor” (all. *Alphabet-Not-Arzt*). Les lettres imprimées sont présentées à l'aide d'images qui incluent la lettre à apprendre dans l'image d'une chose dont le nom commence par cette lettre et qui est international ou typique de la culture russe; l'entraînement à la fin comprend des noms et des mots sans doute connus à l'étudiant moyen. Ensuite, des mots et des phrases sont présentés (européanimes; nom, origine et compétences linguistiques; positions et directions; des situations à l'hôtel; problèmes de santé et avec des objets; acheter des choses). Lors de la présentation d'un élément pour un sens donné, il est d'abord prononcé naturellement, puis répété lentement et clairement et enfin à nouveau naturellement. Des diapos donnent les limites morphémiques et les traductions littérales. Des aides mnémotechniques sont aussi donnés. Ensuite, les élèves doivent traduire en russe une phrase qui combine le nouvel élément avec un vieil élément. Tous les élèves construisent d'abord la phrase dans leurs têtes, puis l'enseignant demande à un élève d'essayer de construire la phrase et l'aide aussi longtemps que nécessaire. Les diapos de grammaire sont liées à une explication explicite de la structure. Elles visent à donner des règles de base d'une manière conviviale pour l'apprenant, ce qui signifie qu'elles incluent une certaine forme de plasticité ou de mnémotechniques.

Zusammenfassung

Der Artikel [‘Wie man Russisch als Fremdsprache für Anfänger als neuen Weg zur Überwindung von Feindbildern erleichtern kann’] stellt ein Modell für den Russischunterricht für Anfänger vor, das auf empirischen Erkenntnissen über die Methode “Sprachworkout” und den “Alphabet-Not-Arzt” beruht. Zuerst werden die gedruckten Buchstaben mit Bildern eingeführt, die den zu lernenden Buchstaben in einem Bild für eine Sache hervorheben, deren Name mit diesem Buchstaben beginnt und international oder typisch für die russische Kultur ist; am Ende werden Namen und Wörter trainiert, von denen man erwarten kann, dass sie dem Durchschnittslerner vertraut sind. Sodann werden Wörter und Redewendungen vorgestellt (Europäismen; Namen, Herkunft und Sprachkenntnisse; Positionen und Richtungen; Hotelsituationen; Einkaufen; Probleme mit Objekten und Gesundheit). Bei der Präsentation eines Elements für eine bestimmte Bedeutung wird es zunächst natürlich ausgesprochen, dann langsam und deutlich wiederholt und schließlich wieder natürlich. Die Folien zeigen die Morphemgrenzen und die wörtliche Übersetzung. Es werden auch Gedächtnisstützen gegeben. Dann sollen die Schüler einen Satz ins Russische übersetzen, der das neue Element mit einem alten verbindet. Alle Schüler bilden den Satz zunächst im Kopf, dann bittet der Lehrer eine Person, den Satz zu bilden, und hilft so lange wie nötig. Die Grammatikfolien zielen darauf ab, Faustregeln in einer lernerfreundlichen Art und Weise zu vermitteln, d.h. sie beinhalten bildhafte Erklärungen und Eselsbrücken.

1. Introduction

Multilingualism of people can be shown to be related to different aspects of peace (Grzega 2022). Although it may be unimaginable for many people at the moment of this publication to build bridges with Russia again, the development of the relationship between Germans and French in the past century shows that nations once at enmity can slowly become friends not just by diplomatic relations, but decisively by contacts on the lower levels (for instance, twinned towns and school exchange programs). Moreover, we must not forget that aggressions go back to political and economic powers, not a whole nation. Furthermore, Russian is the mother tongue or one of the mother tongues of many refugees that seek help here. Showing that one is willing to learn their mother tongue may therefore also raise a smile from them. Therefore, the following contribution intends to show how delving into Russian as a beginner may be made more effective and efficient if one takes into account the empirical results of two models. The article first presents the state of the art of these two models and then illustrates how these findings can be implemented into a Russian beginner's class.

2. State of the Art

As already said, the model of teaching Russian presented here feeds on two models: they are called *Sprachworkout* method (translated as *Language Workout* and abbreviated as *LWO*) and *Alphabet-Not-Arzt* (translatable as *Alphabet Emergency Doctor*). They are new with respect to teaching Russian as a Foreign Language and not yet included in corresponding handbooks (e.g. Dengub/Dubinina/Merrill 2020).

2.1. Language Workout Method

The idea of the *Language Workout* method is that learners acquire skills for large aspects of the A1 language level in just a few hours. The model was first tested with French, Italian and Spanish. The original elements encompass (1) a selection of items (words/phrases/structures) based on situational relevance, multi-contextual applicability and frequency, (2) an empathetic teacher guiding learners to the answer and including body-movement elements, (3) learners in a comfortable semi-circle, watching and listening without taking notes, (4) the presentation of new items in the source language and in the target language (with a literal translation), the indication of morpheme boundaries and a memory hook, (5) translation exercises, (6) conversational exercises with elements of *LdL* (*Lernen durch Lehren* 'Learning by Teaching'), (7) revision sections according to *LdL* (cf. Grzega 2013).

After changes due to purely qualitative observations in the first courses, further qualitative and, in addition, quantitative empirical analyses were carried out (Grzega/Hanusch/Sand 2014). They were grouped into two studies. Study 1 analyzed 11 persons of an Italian course, by way of observation, questionnaire and test. It illustrated the principal effectiveness of the Language Workout method. Study 2 analyzed the learning success of 7 persons of a Spanish Language Workout (LWO) course in comparison to the learning success of 7 persons of a Spanish course according to the similar Michel Thomas Method (MTM). This was done by way of two tests which are evaluated in two different ways and whose results are related to the results of a corpus analysis. Fig. 1 shows the test that was used after a Spanish course in two groups, one according to LWO, the other one according to MTM.

You are in a Spanish hotel. At the reception you speak Spanish and a little English. After you have checked in, you go to the hotel reception to clarify several more things. What could you say in Spanish in each case?

1. You want to compliment that you like the construction of the hotel.
.....
2. You don't understand the words "caja fuerte" and want to know what that means in English.
.....
3. Since you want to eat in the hotel restaurant, you ask when dinner is.
.....
4. You ask if you need a reservation for the restaurant.
.....
5. You conclude by thanking them.
.....

Fig. 1: Sample Test

The MTM group scored an average of 14.86 points (median: 16), while the LWO group scored 17.43 points (median: 18). However, the difference is not statically significant ($t=-0.7650$, $df=10$, $p=0.462$). On the second test, the MTM group scored an average of only 10.71 points (median: 13), while the LWO group scored 17.83 points (median: 19.5). This difference is statistically significant ($t=2.3979$, $df=10$, $p=0.037$). As far as the effect size is concerned, according to an omega-square test, 27 percent of the differences can be attributed to the method used ($\omega^2=0.27$).

In order to be able to compare the results of the tests with each other, they were also divided into the areas of lexis and grammar for the evaluation. In this way, the results of the first and second tests of the two groups could be compared according to specific subareas. Then the averages were compared and the differences tested for significance. In other words, do the averages of the groups studied differ systematically, or is the difference in means due to chance? Finally, the effect size was calculated, i.e., what percentage of the differences in the results can be attributed to the method used. Due to the relatively small sample, Welch's t-test was used for the calculation. As the following table shows, the averages of the first subtest (cf. Fig. 2) of the grammatical errors differ only insignificantly from each other, while the difference of the averages of the lexical errors already seems more significant.

	grammatical errors (average — median)	lexical errors (average — median)
MTM – Test 1	2.7 — 3	3.1 — 3
LWO – Test 1	3.1 — 3	1.9 — 1

Fig. 2: Summary of results of Test 1

However, at a significance level of 0.05, neither the averages of grammatical ($t=0.34$, $df=9$, $p=0.75$) nor lexical errors ($t=1.48$, $df=11$, $p=0.17$) of the first tests show a statistically significant difference. Moreover, the low numbers of explained variance of 0-3% testify to a low effect size. Thus, it can

be concluded that the use of neither method had a positive or negative effect on the test results of the first run. The results of the second test were more significant at first glance.

	grammatical errors (average — median)	lexical errors (average — median)
MTM – Test 2	5.4 — 5	6.3 — 6
LWO – Test 2	2.8 — 2,5	3.3 — 3

Fig. 3: Summary of results of Test 2

The calculations show that both the averages of grammatical ($t=2.47$, $df=10$, $p=0.033$) and lexical errors ($t=2.70$, $df=10$, $p=0.022$) of the second test have a significant difference. According to this, the differences are random. Furthermore, with an explained variance of 0.28-0.33, a medium effect of the methods on the test results is shown. Thus, 28-33% of the differences in the test results can be attributed to the different teaching methods, according to an omega-square test.

This showed that after the first phase of forgetting, learners of the Language Workout method have memorized more than learners of the Michel Thomas Method and, thus, that a quantitatively high degree of input and language production alone is no guarantee for the achievement of linguistic competence.

Based on the results from the Italian and Spanish quantitative results, the questionnaires and the informal feedbacks, further adaptations were made to improve the model. While the selection of words in the first experiments was based on personal encounters, for example in the context of town twinning, and therefore also included information on occupation and hobbies, these courses were changed to make them more useful for tourists. In addition, after two half-days (a total of 7.5 to 8 hours) concrete emergency (telephone) situation tasks (role plays) were included, presented in German and additionally in picture form, the interlocutor being played by the teacher. Examples of these situations: reporting health problems, reporting an accident, getting lost, reporting a loss or theft, reporting a robbery, reporting a breakdown. Other dialogue situations were interspersed beforehand (e.g., reporting problems with a hotel room, asking for directions). The use of the native language and the use of mnemonic devices, both of which were found to be profitable by the participants, remained a fixed element. LdL took up too much time in a this context, where many other things are new for the learners, too. Therefore, true LdL was only employed to a very limited extent. In one section of the lesson, the learners have to describe routes using a map of an imaginary city. A first learner asks a second learner to describe a way; but the first learner also has to check if the way description is correct. In addition, in one lesson section, (telephone, hotel room, license plate) numbers have to be said. Again, one student must ask for number information from another and then check the answer as well.

This adapted variant was applied to other languages as well, for example to Dutch in two courses at Bergische VHS Solingen-Wuppertal, which uses an official feedback form. Such forms rarely get longer comments in the field for additions. However, here is respective feedback from two LanguageGyms Dutch (my translation):

- “This kind of course is sensational. A really very good method, absolutely recommendable. This kind of event should be offered more often, more broadly and beyond the language ‘Dutch’. The time corridor, the event weekdays and the number of lessons were and are very

appropriate. I would personally be happy if there was another advanced/extended/ or even repeated course in this form in a timely manner.”

- “The concept is great! I have never learned so much of a new language in such a short time as I did in this course. I would be very happy to have a (comprehensive) beginner course with the same instructor.”
- “Very good event, we are interested in a continuation course.”

2.2. Alphabet Emergency Doctor

The *Alphabet Emergency Doctor* (AED) is originally an idea for migrants who want to learn German and have no or very low knowledge of the Latin alphabet. It was conceived as a model much more efficient to the more conservative textbooks. In order to test the value of this model, a study design was created for German testees, who were the only ones at hand as a homogeneous group. This study design comprehended an experiment on learning Russian-Cyrillic letters (Grzega 2018). All participants were people who wanted to teach German and took part in a two-day advanced training by me. That they themselves were to become part of an experiment, they learned only when the test was written. In a first phase of the experiment four Cyrillic letters were taught (И [i], Ш [ʃ], Я [ja], К [k]), imitating a common German textbook. Fig. 4 shows the first page.

внедрение букв



1. Пишите буквы.

И,

2. Пишите И если И встречается в звуке.
Если не, перечеркните линии.

И



/



—



—



—



—



—



—



Ш

Ш

3. Пишите буквы и слоги.

Ш,

ИШ,

Fig. 4: Teaching Cyrillic Traditional Mode

As in the German model textbook, the page shows four letters (upper and lower case) with a picture that has nothing to do with the letter, but merely depicts the object behind the first example word (which must also be learned in addition to the letter); there are headings and instructions that the student can neither read nor understand; Task 2 can be misunderstood as an assignment to hear if the letter occurs at all, rather than an assignment to hear if the letter occurs at the beginning; Task 2

works with words that are usually unfamiliar to the beginner, and sometimes works with pictures that can be ambiguous (does the third picture in the second row stand for tree or wind?); Tasks 3, 4, and 5 require writing meaningless strings of letters (while some students may wonder what the letter-strings that are written actually mean); Task 6 contains pronunciation variations for a letter. In a second part, I taught the students ten Cyrillic letters according to the AED method:

- (1) Say the sound (the sound with which the auxiliary picture word begins; if a letter presents other sounds, this will be introduced in a later step) and write the letter slowly and in large letters. Have students repeat the sound after the letter.
- (2) Show the auxiliary picture with the auxiliary picture word (supported by gestures if necessary) and have it memorized.
- (3) Have the learners write the individual letters a few times.
- (4a) Write the first example word slowly and in capital letters (upper and lower case). Give everyone time to decipher, then call on one person. If the solution is not correct, reveal step by step (syllable by syllable or even letter by letter). Repeat correct answer in correct pronunciation and clarify meaning if necessary (the word may be international, but still pronounced slightly differently in the learners' language). Likewise with other sample words intended for reading.
- (4b) Have learners copy it down. (Check for correct hand movements, correct if necessary).
- (5) If the letter stands for more than one sound, you name the other sound(s) at this point, introduced with other helping words. Otherwise, the additional words are presented as in 4.
- (6) Recite any other example words (unless they are for reading only) and ask students to write them. Then write them on the board yourself for checking. Also double check with students.
- (7) Write one or two example words in capital letters, have learners decipher them (as in 4) and have learners write them.

The letters and words shown in Figures 5 and 6 were used for the experiment (provided here with transliteration and, if necessary, meaning).

Aa	[a] 'Aah! I present myself!'
М	[m] мама <i>mama</i>
Д	[d] дама <i>dama</i> 'dame', да <i>da</i> 'yes', Адам <i>Adam</i>
Р	[r] радар <i>radar</i> 'radar'
Т	[t] татар <i>tatar</i> , Тамара <i>Tamara</i> , мат <i>mat</i> 'mat; checkmate'
В	[v] ватт <i>watt</i>
Ее	[je] Ева <i>Eva</i> , метр <i>metr</i> 'meter', тема <i>tema</i> 'theme'
Н	[n] нет <i>net</i> 'no', тандем <i>tandem</i> , рента <i>renta</i> 'rent'
К	[k] кантата <i>kantata</i> , такт <i>takt</i> , Канада <i>Kanada</i> , крем <i>krem</i> 'creme', камера <i>kamera</i> , квадрат <i>kwadrat</i> 'square', ракета <i>raketa</i> 'rocket', кран <i>kran</i> 'crane'
Ж	[ʒ] жакет <i>žaket</i> 'jacket', жандарм <i>žandarm</i> 'police officer', менеджер <i>menedžer</i> , драже <i>draže</i> 'dragée'

Fig. 5: Teaching Cyrillic AED Mode: Word Mnemonics

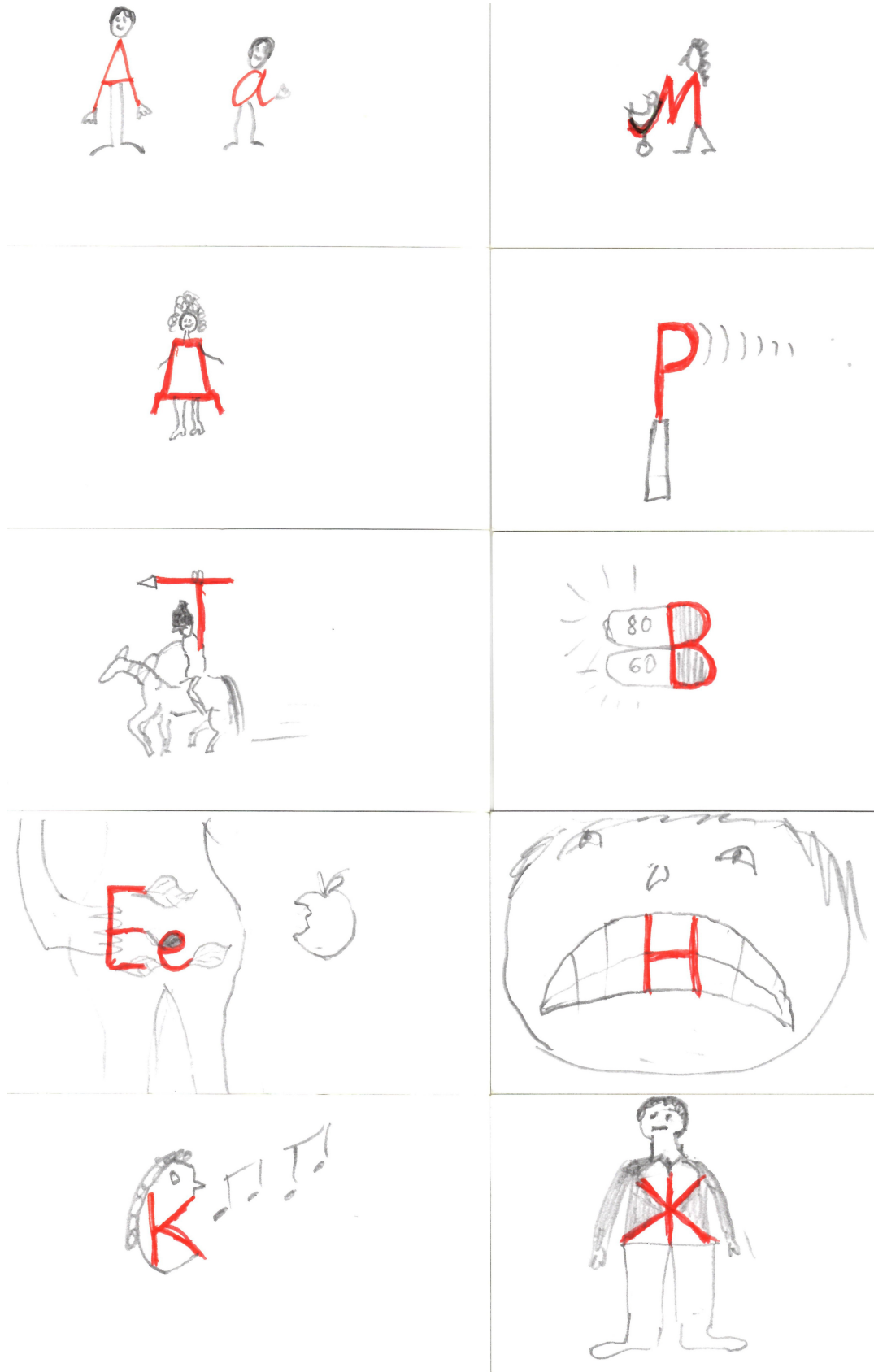


Fig. 6: Teaching Cyrillic AED Mode: Picture Mnemonics

It should be added for both parts of the experiment that the printed letters were used only. For the experiment it was not necessary that Russians de facto write the letters slightly differently in their natural handwriting, e.g. <Д> is normally written in the print letter mode only as a triangle <Δ>. For pronunciation, first an “exaggeratedly clear” pronunciation was applied for reading and writing (spoken slowly) before also presenting how it sounds when spoken normally, taking into account vowel shades (spoken quickly).

The next day, a small unannounced test was then conducted, where three letters from the AED part and three letters from the comparison part were tested by saying the corresponding sound. The results for the 25 subjects were as shown in Figure 7 (correct solutions are indicated by a plus).

test person	points AED	points comparison model	Ж (AED)	И (comparison model)	Л (AED)	ИИ (comparison model)	М (AED)	Я (comparison model)
1	3	0	+		+		+	
2	2	0	+				+	
3	1	0	(half of the symbol okay)	(wrote H)			+	
4	3	0	+		+		+	
5	3	0	+		+		+	
6	3	2	+	(wrote H)	+	+	+	+
7	2	0			+		+	
8	3	1	+		+	+	+	
9	3	0	+		+		+	
10	3	1	+	(wrote H)	+	+	+	
11	3	0	+		+		+	
12	2	1	(wrote ИИ)	+	+	(wrote Ж)	+	
13	2	1	(wrote ИИ)	+	+		+	
14	2	1	+		+	+		
15	3	0	+		+		+	(wrote R)
16	3	2	+	+	+	+	+	
17	3	0	+		+		+	
18	2	1	+	(wrote E)	(wrote A)	+	+	
19	3	3	+	+	+	+	+	+
20	1	2	+	+	(one horizontal stroke too much)	+		
21	3	3	+	+	+	+	+	+
22	3	3	+	+	+	+	+	+
23	3	1	+	e	+	(wrote Ж)	+	+
24	3	0	+		+	(wrote И)	+	
25	3	0	+	N	+		+	(wrote A)
hits			21	7	21	10	23	5

Fig. 7: Test results

The three letters taught with the alphabet emergency physician model were all known significantly more often than the three letters from the comparison model. Participant retention rates were extremely statistically significantly different between the two models ($t=6.96$; $df=30$; $p<0.0001$). Thus, the alphabet emergency physician was found to be more effective.

3. Transfer of Methods to Russian

The ideas were transferred to Russian in four ways, still somehow as work in progress:

- (1) as one part of the one-day concept *Sieben-Sprachen-Schnuppertag* ‘Seven Language Trial Day’ (held twice at VHS Donauwörth and twice at VHS Günzburg)
- (2) as one part of the concept *Sieben-Sprachen-Schnupperwochenende* ‘Seven Language Trial Weekend’ (held twice at Schwabenakademie Irsee)
- (3) as a one-day *SprachFitnessStudio Russisch* ‘Language Gym Russian’ (held twice at VHS Donauwörth and once at VHS Gunzenhausen)
- (4) a half-day sequel *SprachFitnessStudio Russisch II* at VHS Donauwörth).

In all variants, the students sit in a semi-circle, do not write the words down, but look attentively at the slides and try to remember when given a task to read a word or build a sentence.

Ideas 1 to 3 begin with the introduction of the alphabet. I only briefly present the longhand version of the letters and then present the printed characters and, where appropriate, give some information on handwriting. I am well aware that this is in contrast to traditional teaching concepts which start with longhand (Heyer 2014: 184ff.); however, my targeted competence in this introduction is not to write but to provide some basic speaking, listening and reading skills and thus an interest in Russian so that learners want to further delve into the language. Again, I would like to stress that the pictures used are pictures that highlight the letter to be learned drawn in a thing whose name starts with this letter and is, at the same time, similar to a German word or typical of Russian culture. These pictures are thus different to the pictures sometimes used in other textbooks. Also of note, the final training at the end of this section includes only Russian names and words that can be expected to be familiar to the average German person. For humorous effects, I also include the originally German word *buterbrod* ‘open sandwich’. Occasionally, also for humorous effects, the Russian spelling of a German name is presented (similar to what Kositzky [2022: 42] describes). The slides with the printed letters are presented in Fig. 8: they present (1) letters more or less the same as in German/Latin; (2) letters more or less the same in Greek; (3) letters resembling Latin/German letteres, but with a different phonological value; (4) other letters.

Informationen zur kyrillischen Schrift

Аа М О К Т мама кома тоmat

Informationen zur kyrillischen Schrift

Д Р Х В Ее Н У С
[d] [r] [x] [v] [je] [n] [u] [s]
дама радар хор вагг Ева нет Ура! студент

Informationen zur kyrillischen Schrift

Бб П З Г И Й Ы
[b] [p] [z] [g] [i] [j] [i]
банк парк зебра газ идиот музыка

Informationen zur kyrillischen Schrift

Л Ч Э Ю Ь Ъ
[l] [tʃ] [ɛ] [ju] [ʲ]
лампа чай эгоист юбилей мат мать

Informationen zur kyrillischen Schrift

Фф Ш Ц Ж Щ Ёё Я
[f] [ʃ] [ts] [ʒ] [ʃtʃ] [jo] [ja]
фильм шеф царь жакет ши ёрш я

Übungen zur kyrillischen Schrift

Михаил Сергеевич Горбачёв
Анна Юрьевна Нетребко
Владимир Владимирович Путин
Юрий Алексеевич Гагарин
Пётр Ильич Чайковский

водка
матрёшка
дача
самовар
метро
борщ

Fig. 8: Introducing the Cyrillic print letters

The training slide at the end shows internationally known names from different fields and periods plus things related to Russian culture, including *borshch*, which is also presented as typical of Ukrainian culture. Other names and words can be added to show commonalities or dependencies between the US, the EU, Ukraine and Russia: names such as *Rachmaninoff* (*Rakhmaninow*), *Dostoyevsky*; *Pushkin*, *Sakharow* and words such as *glasnost*, *perestroika*, *banya*, *kefir* and words from the learners' language in Russian (e.g. *buterbrod* 'open sandwich' from the German *Butterbrot* 'butter bread').

About 30 minutes are reserved for the teaching of the printed letters. An online version of this section (with German explanations) is available on the YouTube Channel of VHS Donauwörth's InES project (URL01). At the end of the onsite version, the students receive the slides just presented. Then come the slides to form constructions. Fig. 9 presents the first of these slides.

<p>ASBScLJ? vhs Volkshochschule Donauwörth</p> <p>SprachFitnessStudio Russisch</p> <p>приве́т! Sowjet, Priwjet! здравству́йте! <i>Straw</i> (ich heiß' sie herzlich) <i>gt willkommen!</i></p> <p>Алло!</p> <p>© Joachim Grzega</p>	<p>Internationalismen</p> <p>телефо́н</p> <p>кино́</p> <p>маши́на = автомоби́ль</p> <p>оте́ль = гостини́ца</p>										
<p>Das ist ...</p> <p>Э́ТО ... das <i>echt</i></p>	<table> <tbody> <tr> <td>Ja.</td> <td>≠</td> <td>Nein.</td> <td>nicht</td> <td>aber</td> </tr> <tr> <td>да</td> <td>≠</td> <td>нет</td> <td>не</td> <td>но</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Ja.	≠	Nein.	nicht	aber	да	≠	нет	не	но
Ja.	≠	Nein.	nicht	aber							
да	≠	нет	не	но							
<p>Internationalismen</p> <p>студе́нт эгои́ст до́ктор информа́ция автомат автоматизм культу́ра страте́гия телефо́н пробле́ма</p>	<table> <tbody> <tr> <td>was?</td> <td>wer?</td> <td>wo?</td> </tr> <tr> <td>ЧТО?</td> <td>КТО?</td> <td>где?</td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td></td> <td><i>Grade</i></td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	was?	wer?	wo?	ЧТО?	КТО?	где?			<i>Grade</i>	
was?	wer?	wo?									
ЧТО?	КТО?	где?									
		<i>Grade</i>									

Fig. 9: First slides of the Russian LanguageGym

After the greeting and the first phrase when picking up the receiver, some more words that are European and the more common synonym *gostinitsa* for 'hotel' are presented and can serve as a reading and pronunciation exercise. Then the demonstrative pronoun *eto* 'this' is presented and the first translation exercise is given. This could go like this in English:

- Teacher: For “This is a telephone.”, in Russian you literally say “This—telephone.” What would that be? ... [waiting briefly, then picking one student]
- Student1: *éto telefón.*
- Teacher: Yes, *éto telefón.* If you want to formulate the question, you keep the word-order, only put more emphasis on the last word: *éto telefón?* What would then be “Is this a hotel?”? [waiting briefly, then picking one student]
- Student2: *éto otél’?*
- Teacher: Right. Or? Anyone remembers?
- Student3: *éto gostínitsa?*

With the fifth slide, word-formation patterns can be introduced.

- Teacher: If our English *student* is *studént* in Russian, what is probably the Russian for *president*? [waiting for someone to suggest an answer]
- Student4: *prezidént?*
- Teacher: Good. And what would be “Is this a memorial?”
- Students: ?
- Teacher: Can anyone think of an English synonym of *memorial* that ends in *-ent*?
- Student: *monument.*
- Teacher: Good. So: “Is this a monument?”
- Student: *éto monumént?*

With these first slides, students see that they can master dozens of words in Russian. At least, they should get the courage to try even if a specific word may not exist (at least not in everyday Russian language).

Fig. 10 shows the first sentences with which you can practice a question-answer sequence.

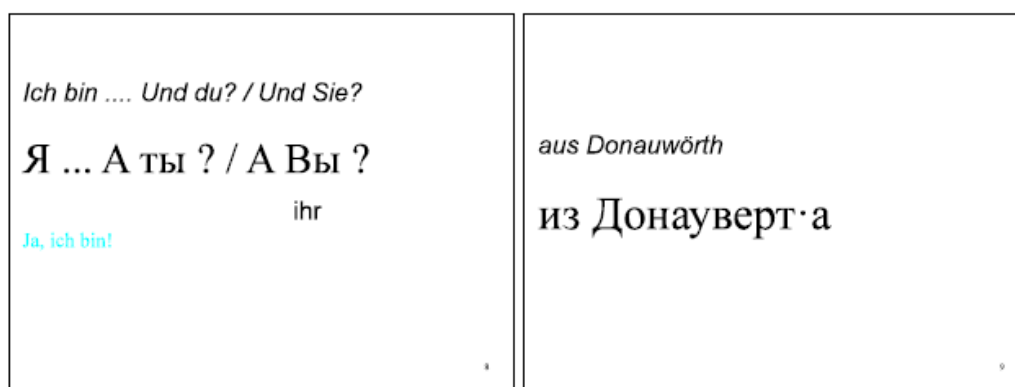


Fig. 10: Phrases for question-answer training

With these two slides, let us sum up the general technique when presenting a word or phrase. When presenting an item for a given sense, it is first pronounced naturally, then it is slowly repeated (if need be, in a unnatural pronunciation close to the spelling, with strong vowels and without akanye) and finally said naturally again. If applicable, the slide gives the morphemic boundaries of a multi-element word (with a dot) and a literal translation. Frequently, a memory hook is given, too. Memory hooks lack in Hartenstein’s (2014: 202f.) techniques to present new vocabulary; however, though not all memory hooks may be felt useful by the majority of course participants, several do

and so their general usefulness should not be underestimated (on the other hand, teachers do not have to spend too much time on finding a memory hook).

Then the students are asked to form the Russian rendition of a German sentence that combines the new item with an old item. Experience shows that such an exercise can fruitfully be done this fast, and that it is thus not necessary that output-based activities only come at the end of a set of comprehension-based activities, as Comer (2020: 176f.) thinks—Comer’s approach is only employed in my method if problems with a certain construction exist. All students first build the sentence in their mind, then the teacher asks one student to try to build the Russian sentence and helps the students as long as necessary until there is a correct sentence at the end. There are three phases where there are question-answer tasks: (1) presenting one’s name, one’s home country and home town, and one’s language skills; (2) asking for the way; (3) revision exercises. The section on asking for the way uses pictures as triggers as does the section for training how to say that an item in one’s hotel room is missing, broken or dirty. These are techniques that we also find among Behr and Wapenhans’s (2014: 140f.) lists of exercises to train speaking skills. We can also say that words and grammar are thus tried to get habitualized through minimal situations, as also included in Hartenstein’s (2014: 205-208) catalog of training measures.

In the feedback on pronunciation, focus is particularly laid on word stress, voiced/voiceless consonants and palatalization and, at least with respect to perceptive skills, weak vowels. This is done in line with Mehlhorn’s suggestions (2014: 172f., 176-178). Beyond Mehlhorn’s (2014: 176) list of examples of how to activate cognitive channels to pronunciation (e.g. [z] as the sound of an insect, [s] as the sound of a snake), it can be added that palatalized consonants are introduced as “smiled/smiling consonants”.

Grammar slides are connected to an explicit explanation of the structure. The value of explicit explanations for structures in Russian has already be determined in earlier works (e.g. Norris/Ortega 2000; Comer/deBenedette 2011; Comer 2020: 178f.). The explanations in the Language Workout Method aim to give rules of thumb in a learner-friendly way, this means that they do not necessarily group phenomena as in traditional grammar books, but they should also include some form of plasticity or memory hooks—an idea that is not mentioned in Hartenstein’s (2014: 203ff.) grammar-teaching techniques either. Fig. 11 shows the first grammar slide, which is the slide after the last slide in Fig. 10.

“Von-Fall / Zugehörigkeitsfall” (Genitiv)

-{я}	: -{и}	Росси·я	>	Росси·и
-{а}	: -{ы}	Москв·а	>	Москв·ы
-{е}	: -{я}	мо́р·е	>	мо́р·я
-{о}	: -{а}	о́зер·о	>	о́зер·а
-{а/я/о/е}	: - +{а}	Киев	>	Киев·а

Fig. 11: First grammar slide

The academic, technical term *Genitiv* is set in brackets, and the explanation is predominantly given in “plastic” terms *Von-Fall* ‘literally: of-case’ and *Zugehörigkeitsfall* ‘literally: belonging case’. The rule can be summarized like this:

“If a word ends in an *a*-like sound, this must unfortunately change into an *i*-like sound! [i:]. But the other words then get an *a*-like sound: [a:]. Examples: This is Russia; Ivan is from Russia, from Moscow: *éto rossíya, iván iz rossíi; iz moskvy*. This is the sea. Arielle is from the sea: *éto móre; ariél’ iz mórya*. This is a lake; Nessie is from the lake: *éto ózero; néssi iz ózera*. This is Kiev; Sergéy is from Kiev: *éto kíev; sergéy iz kíeva*.”

This second part covers the following topics: Europeanisms; presenting one’s name, origin and language skills; asking for positions and directions; dealing with hotel situations; problems with objects; buying things; crime problems; health problems. Normally, the Russian slides need more time to be sufficiently mastered than, for example, Italian or Dutch, so that you normally do not reach the stage where all scenarios used in the final section of a LanguageGym can be done. What can be done, though, is the inclusion of jokes and/or the inclusion of the Russian folk song “Black Eyes”, written by a Russian-Ukrainian lyricist, with a German’s melody.

4. Outlook

Let me also repeat that I would like to stress that the method presented here is still work in progress and that it is thought for the beginning of a language class. The more you advance the more it will be useful to include more Learning by Teaching (LdL) (cf., e.g., Grzega 2006; Grzega/Klüsener 2012) and more Task-Based Learning (cf., e.g., Nuss/Whitehead Martelle 2022). However, the feedback received so far and the fact that institutions re-book these models demonstrates that they are the right track. And again, I hope that these suggestions will contribute to stronger positive, peace-promoting bonds between nations.

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Video

URL01 = <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tCv73G2kj6o>>

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