

Paperno, Slava, Sophia Lubensky, and Irina Odintsova. *Advanced Russian: From Reading to Speaking: An interactive multimedia language course on DVD*. Ithaca, NY: Lexicon Bridge Publishers, 2007. Interactive multimedia disc (\$44.50). DVD-ROM for Windows, ISBN 1-58269-055-3. DVD-ROM for Macintosh, ISBN 1-58269-056
<http://lexiconbridge.com/AdvancedRussian/default.htm>

There's something universally appealing about listening to good stories. Even if the goal of the listening is to improve our language skills in some way, we feel caught up in the story and often do not notice how much effort the improvement is requiring. The authors of *Advanced Russian: From Reading to Speaking: An interactive multimedia language course on DVD* have capitalized on this appeal in their unique resource for proficient students of Russian. The course engages the student's imagination with accounts of love and loss, choosing a life vocation, being a writer in the Soviet Union, living and working as an émigré in the United States, young people struggling through problems in family and friendship, as well as other themes that will capture the interest of any and all members of the DVD's audience. Offering twentieth-century Russian or Soviet short stories and films, Paperno, Lubensky, and Odintsova have created an engaging and contemporary product for a 21st century audience.

Structure of the language material in the course

The DVD offers selections of contemporary writers including Rubina, Mishin, Veller, Ulitskaya, Pelevin, Gelasimov, and Dovlatov. Selections of poetry from Tsvetaeva and Akhmatova are embedded in the works of the modern writers. Twentieth century bards including Vysotsky, Dolina, Galich, Vizbor, and Yarovaya also play prominent role in the instructional material. The work of these talented individuals is presented on the DVD in six chapters covering twelve modern short stories. The Table of Contents organizes the principal texts under the title of "Stories." Associated materials are located in sections called "Stories," "Songs," or "Poems." Each chapter is organized around one or more stories from these twentieth-century Russian or Soviet authors, poets, bards, and thematically-related film episodes. Some chapters contain interviews with the story's author and portraits of the author or bard included in the chapter. In most chapters, the stories are performed by two different professional actors, who declaim each story with their own style and intonation. Each chapter's contents, whether stories, films, or interviews, have been chosen for their adherence to a general theme and include time stamps for ease of use in the classroom. In addition to the dramatic readings of the stories, the authors have included "a Russian TV film based on one of the stories, a concert performance by the author of one of the stories, over thirty video excerpts from interviews

with some of the authors (or their television appearances), fifty scenes from Russian films that are thematically related to the featured stories, video and audio recordings of songs and poems related to the featured stories, and annotated photographs of the authors featured on this disc”

(<http://lexiconbridge.com/AdvancedRussian/default.htm>).

Contemporary and original language

Instructional materials based on classic Russian literature are already available for students, but quality offerings of modern Russian literature are less widely available on the market. The speakers, writers, and bards on the DVD course are mainly young adults in the pre- and post-Perestroika/Glasnost' era between the late 1970s and the late 1990s. Each story is declaimed in its original language in a dramatic style by at least two different professional actors. The interviews expose the learner to unscripted and spontaneous responses to interview questions. The language style of the readings and the films is intelligent, contemporary and conversational, which gives the DVD valuable currency: learners can immediately apply what they learn to conversations with Russian speakers. Large corpora of this kind of conversational language is missing in most text and audio resources. This absence means that learners of Russian encountering native speakers in everyday conversations often report feeling a lack of vocabulary and an inability to follow conversations of speakers talking at a normal rate. The variety of voices with which each story is read presents an additional advantage to the student. Hearing one text presented at different rates of speech and with different accents mirrors the situation the student will encounter in conversations.

Settings for studying Russian using the course

Paperno et al state at <http://lexiconbridge.com/AdvancedRussian/default.htm> that “*Advanced Russian: From Reading to Speaking* was designed for English-speaking learners of Russian with at least two years of college-level study of the language. It may also be used by heritage speakers who need practice and review in reading and speaking grammatically and stylistically correct Russian.” *Advanced Russian* is well-suited to individual or group settings in which advanced students of Russian are working to improve their language proficiency, especially their listening and reading comprehension. If students are working in a group or with an instructor, the course can benefit speaking and writing skills as well. The DVD can be used as a stand-alone resource for independent study or as a part of a varied tutorial context. The authors of *Advanced Russian* have given the field of Russian language teaching a rich gift, solving an expensive and time-consuming problem of acquiring and selecting good language samples. Busy, cash-strapped language instructors, even

experienced ones with vast personal archives, can rarely offer such a wealth of instructional materials at the advanced level.

Instructional tools and materials

Among Russian language courses on the market today, *Advanced Russian* is unique in the imbedded tools and instructional materials available in the course itself. Students and instructors need not consult multiple dictionaries, encyclopedias, and text databases. The authors have done an immense amount of work to present the short stories and film episodes not only in their audio formats, but also have written texts available directly below each chapter's videos. In addition, they have linked every single word of both the film and story texts to the impressive grammatical dictionary by Slava Paperno and Richard L. Leed, *The Russian Dictionary Tree*. This resource alone is worth the cost of *Advanced Russian* and, in offering *The Russian Dictionary Tree*, Dr. Paperno offers the student the considerable benefit of his previous work. All words have been embedded with links that the user can navigate to, and click. This click takes the user to all related dictionary and other notes. Opening any chapter the user will see that all stories, poems, songs, and photographs come with annotated and detailed linguistic and cultural comments. All video materials include a full transcript that can be viewed simultaneously along with the episode.

Multiple open-ended assignments are provided for each of videos to extend the practice the chapters offer. The tasks of each chapter are suitable for both written and oral completion. Often, the tasks involve a photo or film selection and a prompt to describe what is visible in the selection. The photo or film selections are taken from the lives of the authors, bards, poets, or actors presented in each chapter. A significant amount of effort was made to choose film clips and stories that complement one another within the theme of the chapter. The tasks are communicative and focus on producing paragraph-level speech, appropriate for the advanced student. Some tasks involve the content of the material, others highlight the presentation of the actor. An offering of notes and exercises associated with Viktor Pelevin's short story "Nika" is included in a section called *Guided Reading*.

Among Russian language learning resources available in a multimedia format, *Advanced Russian* stands alone. *Advanced Russian* fills several voids among Russian language learning materials currently available: the language is modern and conversational, the literature and

film selections are contemporary, the themes are timeless. For students needing to understand contemporary Russian language, the resource offers rich possibilities to develop reading and listening skills in the context of a multimedia environment. Paperno, Lubensky, and Odintsova deserve our thanks.

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