

## Readers and 'Readers'; Foreign Language Reading in 18+ Learners. Russian as a Case Study and some Strategies

Colin Bearne

*University of Sussex*

This article examines the foreign language learning needs of a specific group of undergraduates and postgraduates, principally learners of Russian, with particular reference to their need to develop reading skills in the foreign language. It examines what actual reading this group do and how this relates to their previous language learning experience. Traditional educational publications designed to foster reading skills – readers, are examined, taking Russian as an example, and their effectiveness evaluated. In the light of the evaluation alternative strategies are explored – with a view to integrating reading into the total FL learning process.

### THE NATURE OF THE LEARNER AND THE LEARNING BACKGROUND

Since the early 1960s the School of European Studies at Sussex has been admitting undergraduates to four year courses which involve study of German, French Russian or Italian language plus the literature and history of the country concerned, and include a period of one year's study at a university abroad, or one year spent working as a foreign language teacher. This is normally the third year of the undergraduate's course. Shortly after its inception the course was extended to students whose main area of study lay outside language and literature, e.g. Economics, History, Philosophy, Politics. Fresh disciplines have been added to this list from time to time, and there have been other minor changes, but in its essentials the scheme has survived for almost 25 years, and flourished.

My interest in using this course as an example is not so much that I have taught it and still do so, or that I have a particular partisan attachment to it, but that it has continued against a background of great changes in the philosophy and methodology of language teaching.

The course continues to be based upon the assumption that applicants will possess an 'A' level pass in a modern language, and that they will have come, in the main, straight from secondary school – with perhaps little or no first hand experience of living, working or studying in France, Germany, Italy or the Soviet Union.

As a language teacher of Russian and German my interest lies in the extent and way in which we have developed particular expectations about the former 'O' level syllabus and the present 'A' level. Over the years, however, changing groups of students have developed specific needs in terms of language skills, needs which were

---

Colin BEARNE lectures in German and Russian at Sussex University, and has twice been Director of the University Language Centre. He has contributed to the *Journal of Russian Studies*, *BALT Journal*, and has published in the field of Soviet Literature. He may be contacted at the Language Centre, University of Sussex, Falmer, Brighton BN1 9QN

not perhaps as dramatic in, say, 1969, or even 1979, but with which now, in 1989, university and college language tutors will have to cope.

One of the basic aims in the first two years of language teaching at Sussex is to ensure in broad terms that students can **cope with a learning situation entirely in the foreign language**. The ability to read in a variety of frames, both for information, extensively, intensively (and for pleasure), ranks high as a skill in this respect. Is reading of this kind developed by the present 'A' level course? An examination of the syllabus for the Russian Advanced Level Oxford and Cambridge Board Examination shows that the reading tasks performed at this stage are of a particular kind, closely related to the demands of the examination (i.e. the 'set books' and/or brief comprehension passages) and that even if these are successfully performed they are not likely to be helpful to students following courses (with a foreign language element) at college or university where information gathering through use of the language is concerned.

The situation has been exacerbated by two other factors. One is that in much language teaching carried out in the secondary schools a greater emphasis has come to be placed on the so-called "productive" skills. In many ways this is a thoroughly understandable and a laudable development as it corrected the previous imbalance in favour of translating as a skill with little regard to subsequent use of the language. Reading never ranked high as a skill to be developed.

To this must be added (for reasons which will become obvious below) the changes which have also taken place in the teaching of English as a first language at school, in particular a move away from the reading of complete texts towards the critical analysis of gobbets. English is now very often for many the **only** subject in the curriculum which permits the study of written language in use – and this argues for the analysis of discourse of various kinds. This has been the case particularly since the demise of Latin in many ex-grammar schools. Research findings on reading habits, however, and the teaching of reading in English schools shows that:

“those occasions when pupils deliberately set themselves to study from printed texts in a systematic way [were] very rare” (Lunzer and Gardner 1979).

The same research showed that the schools surveyed were in the majority of cases without a language policy which went across the whole curriculum level.

It should be noted in passing that the research concerned included reading from the board and from OHPs etc. – not simply books – in other words not only what would at the tertiary level be regarded as reading texts. Evidence that little reflective reading takes place at the secondary level must be disturbing for the foreign language teacher – at least for those concerned with the **whole** spectrum of study skills.

This constitutes a problem not only for university undergraduates as there is now a

steady trickle of post-graduates who may or may not have these basic skills in the language concerned. In the case of such postgraduates the need is mostly for reading skills. It is the case that many of these students, in History, Law or Economics for example, do not have any previous in depth experience of the language – but they *do* have a very clearly defined aim and a great deal of motivation, and this is of vital importance to the ways in which they learn.

Many tutors involved in language teaching at this level have also become active in the field of adult education – and much has been realised about the needs of the student who has completed only a 20 week beginner's or intermediate course. This category of student has grown in numbers and is in desperate need of follow-up distance-learning material, much of it to do with the development of reading.

Taken together, all these students, both those of whom we have experience at Sussex, and those in the wider arena, form a (new) class of Language for Special Purposes learner outside the Secondary School system. It would seem that we need to take special measures to cater for them both in methodological and in material terms and especially in the field of developing reading skills. This particular problem area causes us some concern at Sussex and in the light of all the changes that have taken place in expectations, preparedness of students and in other areas it was decided to establish by means of a brief and simple survey exactly what foreign language reading took place at a critical point in the year, the middle term, Spring 1988.

Fifty undergraduates in their second or fourth years (35:15) supplied information. This is roughly 30% of the students in those year groups. The majority had French as their first foreign language. In most cases the French was combined with the study of various other disciplines, e.g. Economics/Law/History of Art/Philosophy.

A number of important and disturbing points emerged from this survey.

(a) Despite the fact that the students are all reading a degree course with language as a central integral component, their foreign language reading is limited to less than 3 hours a week, and in most cases significantly less; in other words a very small proportion of their available time.

(b) Despite the fact also that they themselves consider their pre-University training to be "adequate" as far as preparation for reading is concerned, the majority admit to finding reading more than 1,000 words of continuous prose in the foreign language a difficult task.

(c) The reading which is done falls in the main into two categories: books, which are presumably read completely for the purpose of a tutorial assignment or short

reading exercises for comprehension set them in their weekly language classes. There is little or no evidence to show that they read in the foreign language for information about their major discipline. There is an element of self-fulfilling prophecy at work, so that tutors do not recommend students to read in this way since experience has shown that students do not (or cannot) do so. Thus some reading lists on Law, Economics, for example, contain virtually no foreign language texts.

If this is not a distortion of the national picture for this group of learners, and we have no reason to think that it is not true of the remainder of the approximately 700 undergraduates at Sussex following the same or similar courses, then what measures can be taken? Do these measures perhaps include recourse to a "reader"? Can reading in a foreign language be taught?<sup>1</sup>

Before moving on to see what might be done it is worth while reviewing just what material is (or has until recently been) available to help the tutor. I have chosen to look at Russian because, despite certain shortcomings as an example, it nevertheless serves well as a guide to the way both those involved in language teaching and the publishers concerned have so far reacted to the needs of imparting the particular skill I have described above.

The almost unnaturally rapid development in the early 1960s of materials for Russian teaching meant that both traditional and more advanced teaching methodologies coalesced, and that the range of texts available for "developing reading" at any given time has been very wide indeed. We have to see what would be available to answer the needs of two groups of learners in Russian, non-beginners and beginners at both undergraduate and graduate level with the associated varying degree of application and motivation.

## SURVEY OF READERS

I have reviewed the availability of so-called "readers" (or texts of this kind) in 1987-8, basing my information on the microfiches of *"Books in Print"* for those years (cf Coles 1986). In addition I have analysed significant aspects of materials which have traditionally been used to encourage 'reading' in students in whatever way this skill has been perceived. Russian will not prove to be an unfair reflection of what has been available in methodological terms in other languages.

The 1987 UK Books in Print listed just four possibilities: an intermediate and advanced level reader (various texts) produced by Ardis Publishing in 1985;

<sup>1</sup>One's immediate reaction is to consult current research in the field. Not surprisingly most of the research and evaluation in this area has been so far carried out by activists in the EFL/ESP fields, with the exception of sporadic echoes of difficulty in Modern Language journals, and the outstanding task would seem to be to bring these two areas together - the needs of foreign language learners with English as their mother tongue and the methodological innovations from EFL/ESP.

Colletts New Russian Reader (itself already a reprint of the original Penguin Russian Reader, edited by Peter Meades; Colletts two part Practical Russian Reader, a collection of short texts, with associated exercises and no vocabulary (the whole based on a Soviet-produced original).<sup>2</sup> The fourth is a series of Graded Russian Readers, produced by Bond and Bobrinsky for College Publishers as long ago as 1961.

While that is the current selection we must also take into account the fact that many tutors will have access to older texts no longer in print and that, financial exigencies being what they are, they will be encouraged to go on using them with their (usually small) Russian groups. Now that we are at a point where needs and ways of satisfying them are being re-assessed we should turn some of our attention to what has been available as well as what still is. From the past 50 years of Russian learning in the UK I have chosen 10 texts to illustrate the strategies adopted by compilers and publishers.

1. A.H. SEMEONOFF: (*A First Russian Reader*) Dent 1935. (repub. at roughly 5 year intervals until 1960s)

72 passages of non authentic material based on Russian children's books.

21 pp. of vocabulary with 1,600 – 1,800 words.

The 1942 preface speaks of the texts as prompts to conversation.

The exact target audience unspecified but the cyrillic is in large type – for school learners?

Comment by the compiler: "It is difficult for the reader to deal with long compound words at the early stages, so the first dozen or so stories have words with no more than two syllables . . ."

2. I.B. FADEN: *Elementary Russian Science Reader*. ATR/Methuen 1960.

46 texts graded – not selected according to subject area coverage.

Based on material for 11-15 year olds in Russian schools.

450 items listed alphabetically in an "index" – no vocabulary.

A basic knowledge of the language is assumed – some of the "texts" are very short; all are annotated.

<sup>2</sup>For comparison the US picture shows 2 general readers – based in the main on literary texts – a "Science Reader", dating from 1963, and one "methodological" type approach – *Russian Reading and Grammatical Terminology* (S. Wobst) published by Slavica in 1978.

3. A. DRESSLER: *An Introduction to Russian Science Reading*. EUP 1961.
  - Four part presentation.
  - Part I Grammar of the Language.
  - Part II Graded non-authentic passages on general subjects.
  - Part III Passages adapted from popular science journals and text books.
  - Part IV "more difficult passages".

There is **no** vocabulary or glossary, but a brief 3 page index, but there are hints on the structure and use of dictionaries.
4. GREENE & WARD: *A graded Russian Reader*. Oliver & Boyd 1961.
  - 38 texts.
  - Three part presentation.
  - Only part III contains authentic passages.
  - Each section is "progressive" and staged according to grammatical complexity.
  - General vocabulary of some 1,200 items (some quite exotic, e.g. (*sudak*: a kind of pike-perch).
5. D.M. COOPER: *Russian Science Reader*. Pergamon Press 1964.
  - 104 texts ("all compiled from contemporary soviet sources").
  - Two part presentation.
  - Part I General passages.
  - Part II Separate sections on Chemistry, Physics etc.
  - There are two appendices on Mathematical signs, Chemical terms etc.
  - There is a vocabulary of 3,500 items.
  - The target audience is Sixth Forms with the aim of encouraging the reading of modern Russian scientific journals.
6. P.L. WYVILL: *Russian for Chemists*. Royal Institute of Chemistry 1966.
  - 24 Lessons – texts are introduced from Lesson 9 onwards. Texts are authentic, but (probably) adapted.

Texts have an English translation in the key. The students are asked to translate them and answer specific questions on them.

20 pp. of "word index" lists some 900 items by lesson in which they occur.

Intended "primarily for Chemists who wish to read Russian language material on their own subject.

7. P.H. MEADES: *Penguin Russian Reader*. Penguin Books 1909. Re-issued 1978 as *Colletts New Russian Reader*.

100 passages (authentic) from variety of sources, including signs, notices, literature. Each annotated with an English introduction.

Passages are (very roughly) graded.

A swatch-book of modern Russian which aims to present written Russian as a living language.

There is a vocabulary listing some 1,700 items.

8. *Colletts Practical Russian Reader*. Colletts 1970 (originally Leningrad University 1969).

100 'texts' (some poems – some hardly texts but a series of cartoons).

Texts are graded.

Each is accompanied by questions and exercises.

Later texts are adaptations from Soviet authors.

Texts arranged thematically, e.g. 1. Seasons, 2. Nature, 3. Man etc.

There is **no** glossary or vocabulary.

9. V.D KOROLYOVA: *Russian Popular Science Texts*. Moscow Foreign Language Publishing House 1971.

70 texts (some very short). Texts are said to be abridged and slightly adapted. They do not appear to be graded but are arranged according to subject matter, i.e. Chemistry, Physics, etc.

There is an extensive vocabulary containing some 5,000 items. There is a guide to reading mathematical symbols and signs.

The end aim is said to be to encourage the reading of original Russian scientific books.

10. *Easy Readers*. 5 titles in the Russian Series. John Murray 1975-7.

1 title each in the A/B grades and 3 titles at grade C. (A based on vocabulary of 1,000 words; B on 1,800; C on 2,400)

Texts all literary with brief biographical notes – also in Russian.

There is no glossary or vocabulary, 'difficult' words are footnoted, in Russian; there are also illustrations in the text. Questions in Russian at the end of each chapter. The aim of these 'abridged' and 'simplified' editions is to provide 'graduated reading exercises'.

## DISCUSSION

Underlying this high representation of so-called science readers is the curious assumption that Science students need reading skills more than Arts students, who are presumed to spend their time reading literature in the original, for which they are in some way magically prepared simply by being Arts students.

In general the science texts demonstrate a more thoughtful approach to the business of acquiring reading skills, supplying ancillary information, signs, plus hints on the structure and use of dictionaries and making some effort to explain the nature of Russian scientific discourse – frequency of certain grammatical structures, etc. The five science texts share a common aim – to bring the student to a stage where they will be able to read Russian science texts in the original.

The majority of the books, whatever the overall number of texts they offer, would seem to represent roughly one year's work at some stage in a U.K. college or secondary school. There is an overall aim, stated in the case of the science books, implicit in the case of the other publications, towards reading for information and understanding, indeed comprehension testing strategies are widely used.

The degree to which the books differ one from another can be most easily assessed by measuring them on two completely different fronts. How the texts themselves are used, and what additional language information is provided.

On the first level there are those which are specifically prepared as selections of varying registers, texts of authentic language, with no attempt at 'simplification'. At the other extreme there are those which are simply collections of original texts taken from longer short stories or novels – though glossaries and vocabularies are included. In between are those texts which are 'adapted', 'simplified' or modified in some way – this is by far the commonest category of "reader" and one which is very difficult to assess, since all kinds of different assumptions have been made by the editors and compilers.

Some publications assume a basic knowledge of the language, others are in practice little different from course books in their structure and in the amount of very basic grammatical information which they feel it necessary to supply. Dressler contains a large proportion of grammatical information, Wyvill is modelled on a 20+ unit block, not unlike the *Penguin Russian Course* or *Russkii Yazyk dlia vsekh*.



Other books which contain little or no grammatical information are very often, as in the case of Semeonoff or the Penguin (Colletts) Reader, intended to relate to or accompany a sister publication of purely grammatical content.

A review of all the texts causes one to reflect on two further assumptions. One is that translation is a reliable technique for the development of reading skills. The second is that the presentation of 'authentic' written language need not be accompanied by any preparation in specific areas of syntax, only a general coverage.

Certain it is that the drift away from heavily adapted or manufactured texts is general. 'Authenticity', however, carries with it the pitfall into which *Gazeta*, for all its good points, has fallen fair and square: its texts deal with Brezhnev's Russia – we are now in the era of Gorbachev and '*glasnost*'.

Though there can be no doubt that, as the authors claim, the texts have "greater authenticity" and "more inherent interest" than specially written material, or even, as they go on to say somewhat mysteriously, than "real fiction", it is unfortunate that this immediacy, topicality and instant appeal to that highly valuable quality – the reader's interest – is bought at the cost of the book dating within a few years, and this is not merely a result of the fact that Gorbachev and *glasnost* have pushed Brezhnev and his Russia into the background. This is a problem which may not be resolvable but has constantly to be grappled with in trying to identify texts which will answer a number of different requirements. It was after all one of the reasons given by tutors for using works of literature as readers – they were said not to date.



We have now had a sufficient overview of all the variables involved, both the changing groups of students, and their changing needs – and the resource response made by the publishers and their academic collaborators – the remaining issue to be tackled is – how can course designers and teachers react? What conclusions can be drawn in the face of the needs of the students described at the beginning of this article?

## POSSIBLE STRATEGIES

I began as many lecturers do by using material that was already available. My only primitive way of measuring success was how long it took students to cope with a particular text – though it was quickly borne in on me that this could vary enormously between individuals, and there was little or no correlation between speed and resulting comprehension. The latter I tended to measure, like my colleagues, by putting content questions and assuming that comprehension questions were in some way linked to the development of speedy reading

proficiency. I probably also wrongly assumed that they would measure gist reading ability.

As time went by I passed on to two alternative methods to answer students' falling interest in the printed material I was giving them. One was to copy my own authentic, topical material and to give it to students – this was clumsy and time consuming especially in the days before xeroxing or photocopying.

One reason for rejecting graded readers was that those available had been designed primarily for the 13+ school learner; they did nothing to answer the need for a vital link between the students' overall studies and the 'reading material' issued to them. A second was the observation that nearly all the graded readers available tended to practise what have been called "word-attack" rather than "text-attack" strategies (Nuttall 1982). Another was a growing suspicion, which has largely been borne out by this present research, that there was not necessarily a connection between the grading of readers (at whatever age the material was aimed) and the production of reading proficiency. Since one aim was to get undergraduates reading both fiction and non-fiction as soon as possible, there also seemed little point in using texts which were essentially adaptations or simplifications of originals quite apart from whether or not this constituted a lack of "aesthetic tact" (Stupples 1969). It was necessary, and still is, to teach to specific target forms of the language. There are as many specific target forms of the language as there are students from different disciplines in the largely heterogeneous groups. Even science groups in Russian were composed of students whose real vocabulary needs soon began to reflect the disparate nature of their studies. In this respect two very different, and I suspect mutually opposing, tendencies were observed. By the third term of their studies science students who were introduced to texts for reading and comprehension were in fact least motivated by texts intended to appeal to them on a "common science" basis. If the texts were in the area of their own major discipline some were marginally interested, but usually the processes described were too simple for this interest to be long sustained. Current research in the area of Business Studies teaching has shown that as much as 71% of apparently "specialist" texts may consist of neutral non-specialist speech items.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand more general texts with a **largely literary bias** did appeal, students were often moved by the subject matter to seek out the relevant novels or short-stories in translation. Defining a target form is not an easy matter, nor is holding a balance between a form of the language which in itself encourages the desire to read and a form which contains information thought likely to be needed by the student.

There is also the thorny question of the way the text is presented and the

<sup>3</sup>Karen Hermann, speaking at a seminar organised by the Goethe Institut, Munich. Survey as yet unpublished.

relationship between that and the tutor's own perception and evaluation of the text. Is a 'science' text best presented by an FL speaking science tutor? Does a 'literary' text seem more effective because it is backed by the sympathy of a largely humanities trained tutor?

Given the present stage of research into the teaching of reading as a foreign language skill the methodological approach is often very largely composed of a reflection of the tutor's own attitude to reading. Not all tutors are aware that their students may not be 'reading addicts' (Nelson 1984). The tutor's attitude may also contain reflections of the fact that tutor control in this skill area is relatively weak precisely because reading is par excellence an individual activity – a truly "self-maintaining skill".

What conclusions can be drawn, then, about the optimum design of Reader and, perhaps more important, about the best way to build the development of reading skills into a general language course?

The first conclusion would seem to arise directly out of the evidence of the analysis of Readers. **Class readers**, whether graded or not, and whether or not they are accompanied by reinforcing exercises, and irrespective of whether they are part of a specialist package, i.e. Science Readers, Social Science Readers, Literary Readers, History Readers etc., are of little or no value for use with 18+ learners. The extreme logic of the learning situation I have described at the start of this article would be that every learner or minute group of learners would need their own individual set of texts bound together and called a "reader". Such is their varied previous reading experience, such the multiplicity of their motivation, so different the individuals in their attitude to the process of language learning that any attempt to force them into a homogeneous group for the purpose of this aspect of language learning is doomed to failure. This is true even though it is possible to treat them as a homogeneous group for the imparting of other, shall we say more communicative, language skills.

Other strategies must be adopted to produce 'readers' (students) out of people who may have spent as little as two years, in the case of Russian, in studying the language, and to whom reading must not be presented as a separately defined skill.

How many secondary or higher education language teachers still run a class library (apart from some enlightened souls engaged in teaching EFL)? That would seem to be one answer to our problem above. If the actual act of reading is a highly individual interpretive process then let it be treated as such. A collection of texts which as far as possible cater for all likely interests and a well-tuned system of monitoring the process may well be a major contribution to learning. But that still leaves open the question of how students can be brought to a position where they

can handle the texts they are being offered in a number of different ways – both intensively and extensively.

The use of a class library has to be accompanied by other strategies. One such strategy which has been developed at Sussex is the so-called *Langlit* scheme, which had its origins, as the title suggests, in an attempt to bring together the study of literature and the process of language learning. With the passage of time and changes in emphasis the *lit* component has come to stand for any kind of text, not simply those taken from creative fiction.

The exercise depends upon a minimum of three separate language classes a week, one of which is timetabled in a language laboratory. In fact this laboratory session is the first in the sequence, and contains the introduction to the text. All the texts are recorded – none is longer than four or five pages, often, in the case of excerpts, considerably shorter. The recordings are by professional radio actors or presenters and in some cases by the authors themselves. A good collection of recorded sound with transcripts is essential, as is access to native speakers with ‘recordable’ voices. Some have even gone so far as to recommend a library of borrowable cassettes for the ubiquitous personal stereo. The answer is to have a very flexible framework of teaching into which reading materials of an appropriate, authentic and topical kind can be inserted or withdrawn at will.

As examples of the kind of literary text used I have introduced below the first page of a short story *Na polustanke*, (At the Railway Halt), by the Soviet author Yurii Kazakov, and the opening page of a lengthy poem, *Rasgorov s fininspektorom o poezii*, (Conversation with a tax inspector about poetry), by the poet Vladimir Mayakovsky. In both cases students would actually see the whole text (seven sheets in the case of the poem, and five in the case of the story). In both cases the totality of meaning of the text as a text is important, and each represents an assignment lasting 10 days to two weeks. The prose work is used with first year (post-A level) students, and the linguistically more sophisticated and experimental poem is used with the second year group.

In this first session the recording has been copied onto the student booths and the students listen to it at their own pace and for a number of times, **without a copy of the text**. Very often texts have been recorded twice – once straight-through reading and one exploded copy. In the pauses (between breath-groups) the students can either clarify new material or repeat the breath-group. This development of aural perception, forecasting, etc. plays a significant role in developing reading skills. The tutor is present, monitoring, and students are encouraged to make notes on what they hear and to put queries to the tutor, either in English or in the Foreign Language, depending on level. This process of acclimatisation and familiarisation

## Prose

Kazakov I

## НА ПОЛУСТАНКЕ

Была пасмурная холодная осень. Низкое бревенчатое здание небольшой станции почернело от дождей. Второй день дул резкий северный ветер, свистел в чердачном окне, гудел в станционном колоколе, сильно раскачивал голые сучья берёз.

У сломанной коновязи, низко свесив голову, расставив оплывшие ноги, стояла лошадь. Ветер откидывал у ней хвост на сторону, шевелил гривой, сеном на телеге, дергал за поводья. Но лошадь не поднимала головы и не открывала глаз: должно быть, думала о чём-то тяжелом или дремала.

Возле телеги на чемодане сидел вихрастый рябой парень в кожаном пальто, с грубым, тяжелым и плоским лицом. Он частыми затылками курил дешёвую папиросу, сплевывал, поглаживал подбородок красной короткопалой рукой, угрюмо смотрел в землю.

Рядом с ним стояла девушка с припухшими глазами и выбившейся из-под платка прядью волос. В лице ее, бледном и усталом, не было уже ни надежды, ни желания; оно казалось хододным, равнодушным. И только в тоскующих темных глазах ее притаилось что-то болезненно-невывказанное. Она терпеливо переступала короткими ногами в грязных ботинках, старалась стать спиной к ветру, не отрываясь смотрела на белое хрящеватое ухо парня.

Со слабым шорохом катились по перрону листья, собирались в кучи, шептались тоскливо о чём-то своем, потом, разгоняемые ветром, снова крутились по сырой земле, попадали в лужи и, прижавшись к воде, затихали. Кругом было сыро и зябко...

— Вот она жизнь-то, как повернулась, а? — заговорил вдруг парень и усмехнулся одними губами. — Теперь мое дело — порядок! — Что мне теперь в колхозе? Дом? Дом пускай матери с сестрой достается, не жалко. Я в область явлюсь, сейчас мне тренера дадут, опять же квартиру... Штангисты-то у нас какие? На соревнованиях был, видал: самодульные еле на первый разряд идут. А я вот норму мастера зимаюл запросто! Чуешь?

— А я как же? — тихо спросила девушка.

— Ты-то? — Парень покосился на нее, кашлянул. — Говорено было. Дай оглядусь — приеду. Мне сейчас некогда... Мне на рекорды давать надо. В Москву еще поеду, я им там дан жизни. Мне вот одного жалко: не знал я этой механики раньше. А то бы давно... Как они там живут? Тренируются... А у меня сила нутряная, ты погоди маленько, я их там всех вместе поприжму. За границу ездить буду, житуха начнется — дай бог! Н-да... А к тебе приеду... Я потом это... напишу.

Poetry  
Mayakovsky I

РАЗГОВОР С ФИНИНСПЕКТОРОМ О ПОЭЗИИ

\*\*\*\*\*

Гражданин фининспектор !  
Простите за беспокойство.  
Спасибо... не тревожьтесь... я постоя...  
У меня к вам дело деликатного свойства:  
о месте поэта в рабочем строю.  
В ряду имеющих лабазы и уголья  
и я обложен и должен караться.  
Вы требуете с меня пятьсот в полугодие  
и двадцать пять за неподачу деклараций.  
Труд мой любому труду родствен.  
Взгляните - сколько я потерял,  
какие издержки  
в моем производстве  
и сколько тратится на материал.  
Вам, конечно, известно явление "рифмы".  
Скажем, строчка  
окончилась словом "отца",  
и тогда через строчку,  
слова лектория, мы  
ставим какое-нибудь:  
лампадрица-ца.  
Говоря по-вашему, рифма - вексель.

with the sound shape of the text can last up to 35 minutes. For the remainder of the hour's session students have the text in front of them. They listen again, this time with the text, marking it as they go. The marks they make on the text at this stage can be guided to be either syntactical, phonetic or lexical. If the text is of an appropriate kind they may even try recording certain sections – or ghost-reading them.

The short sentence structure of the first passage, characteristic of modern Soviet literary prose, and Mayakovsky's idiosyncratic typographical presentation of his verse both render the identification of breath- and sense-group much easier for the student. The opening scene-setting five paragraphs of Kazakov's story are a particularly fine example of economy of descriptive adjective use, the finite verb forms rapidly moving the reader's attention from one concrete object to another, like the eye of a camera. This is a syntactic feature of the text and one to which the student's attention can be drawn. Lexically the quality of almost all the adjectives used is negative and the overall effect produced is one of forlorn dejection. Some 15-20% of the lexical items in the opening five paragraphs may be assumed to be unfamiliar to students. In both texts these are underlined.

The second stage begins when students take the text away with them, and check up on unusual meanings, lexical forms or difficult points of syntax. When they return for the second lesson in the sequence (and the third stage) they will have a thorough formal knowledge of the text.

The third stage will occupy a small portion of another weekly lesson. For some ten to fifteen minutes the tutor answers questions and corrects or fills out points arising from the students' private perusal of the text. The tutor then sets the students a number of tasks which can loosely be described as 'activation' of the text. The task can be the writing of a summary in the language, or a *précis*, or a continuation of the story or a critique of the arguments presented.

In the case of the Kazakov story students will be asked to account for the 'events' of the story "in their own words", using a minimum of lexical items from the original, and avoiding what they consider emotionally loaded items. At this stage also students may be asked to list and evaluate what they consider to be emotive lexical items and comment on any syntax strategies they recognise as significant. The 'plot' is relatively simple and open-ended so that the group may be asked to continue the story using freely the lexical items of the original.

As I have indicated, Mayakovsky's poem is more sophisticated, representing an extended apology for poetry in the structure of the Soviet state. In view of this, in addition to accounting for the formal items of the text, students are asked to summarise the main points the poet uses in his defence.

When this piece of written work is presented the grammatical points arising from the tutor's corrections form the basis of the final phase.

It will be appreciated that this entire scheme relates to a whole range of discrete skills. It acts as a basic backbone of the language teaching on which a number of branching sessions can be set up. It services grammar revision and practice for those who have already done a structured grammar course. It builds vocabulary. It trains the eye and ear, developing listening comprehension. If the working over or re-working of the text is made the basis of an oral practice session then it has a role to play there too.

But what cannot be doubted is that it plays a central part in developing reading skills. The texts can be varied infinitely, giving different shades of emphasis and acting far more flexibly than any reader. The students are actively involved in creating their own glossaries on the text. An extensive range of texts can provide a really broad base of *civilisation* or *Landeskunde* type of information. The teacher is also presented with a logical way of introducing a study of text organisation and discourse markers – particularly in students' recreations of the text.

Our practice at Sussex has been to offer this pattern over two years, containing some 25-30 weekly meetings each year. In this way 50-60 texts can be processed, helping to bridge the gap between the language text – seen as a task, and the total text – seen as a reservoir of information (Stanley 1984). The relationship with the active class library is obviously vital, but there is no reason at all why this pattern should not be carried out over a shorter period of time and at a more intensive pace.

## Conclusions

We started by accepting that there are now large bodies of foreign language learners, in Universities, polytechnics, colleges and in adult education, who need to acquire reading skills quickly – in some cases their need is for reading skills exclusively.

We have looked at the methodological tools apparently specifically prepared to deal with this situation and found, with very few exceptions, that they are not appropriate. Those which are most suitable are either grammar books with textual illustrations – though these are of limited value in developing reading skills as such. Or they are collections of brief, well-annotated and extremely topical texts of a kind which may motivate the student well but soon date. An almost "throw-away" collection of texts which may last the tutor one or two years at most.

The alternatives are to give reading a special place in the total language teaching programme, using the interplay of eye and ear and thereby developing forecasting and inferencing as skills. The practice of a scheme like the one I have described



above must take place against the background of a well-run class library (now seen to be a strategy which applies to any group of FL learners, and not just to the 8-16s) with work cards, discussions etc. and a recorded sound library with a plentiful supply of transcripts. In a world where not all undergraduates look upon reading as an exciting and pleasurable way of acquiring information, rather than a chore, it seems to me that the development of reading skills can only be presented as part of an integrated language learning situation.

## REFERENCES

- Coles, W. (1986) A survey of course books for German reading courses. *Treffpunkt*, 18(2), 20-25.
- Lunzer, E. & K. Gardner (eds.) (1979) *The Effective Use of Reading*. London: Schools Council/Heinemann.
- Nelson, P. (1984) Towards a more communicative reading course: motivating students who are not "Reading Addicts". *Reading in a Foreign Language*, 2(1), 188-196.
- Nuttall, C. (1982) *Teaching Reading Skills in a Foreign Language*. London: Heinemann.
- Stanley, R.M. (1984) The recognition of macrostructure: a pilot study. *Reading in a Foreign Language*, 2(1), 156-168.
- Stupples, P. (1969) Reading Russian. *Journal of Russian Studies*, 18, 40-47.