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Literary Texts in the Undergraduate Russian Curriculum: Leveraging Language Learning and Literary Discussion through Scaffolding

WILLIAM J. COMER

Situating the Discussion

In this article, I want to summarize the broader discussion about literary texts in the undergraduate curriculum for the more commonly taught languages, consider the nature of Russian undergraduate programs in light of that discussion, and then suggest a way that upper-division Russian classes can work with literary texts through the effective deployment of scaffolding in classroom tasks.

Grabe (2009) and Bernhardt (1991, 2011) have presented excellent syntheses of the research base in second language reading, and Kramsch (1985), Bernhardt (1995), Scott and Tucker (2002), Polio and Zyzik (2009), and Paesani and Allen (2012) have addressed the issue of reading literary texts in the upper-division undergraduate curriculum for the more commonly taught languages. The latter group of scholars generally note the large chasm in those programs between lower-division course work that is focused on language learning and upper-division course work that is devoted to literature and culture and is taught in the target language. Byrnes and Kord point out the artificial nature of this gap and describe the restructuring of the German undergraduate major at Georgetown University so that the carefully conceptualized sequence of courses “continually integrate[s] content and language acquisition” (2002, 42). Bernhardt similarly emphasizes the need for a dual language and content approach, noting that “students deserve linguistic support and instruction in literature classes” (1995, 6).

The need for a more robust pedagogy that provides linguistic support for student discussion of literary texts is clear as well from recent studies into the nature of the language use that learners engage in when taking advanced literature classes in the target language. Donato and Brooks (2004), Polio and Zyzik (2009), and Darhower (2014) have documented the frequent disparities between the level of discourse that the profession has assumed learners will engage in (usually, ACTFL Advanced/Superior levels) and the kind of discourse they actually produce (often, Intermediate level) in such classes.¹

While these discussions are useful in mapping the tensions and directions of the larger language learning endeavor across the United States, the divisions that exist in Russian undergraduate programs are different in a number of ways.² First, in Russian programs our courses generally split on the question of the language of instruction. Unlike literature courses offered in the more commonly taught languages, the vast majority of instruction about Russian literary and cultural content is done entirely in English. This English-language content instruction is generally distributed throughout the curriculum, with courses in translation taught at both the lower-division and upper-division levels. Within the “language program,” upper-division courses are more likely to be named

¹ One can speculate that there has been less discussion of the transition from lower- to upper-division coursework in Russian programs not only because student numbers are smaller but also because the transition point when students move from basic language instruction to more content-rich language learning often occurs during a study abroad program. The Russian field has much data about changes in student proficiency during study abroad contexts (Davidson 2010), but we do not have much documentation about the kinds of classroom discourse that learners engage in during study abroad.

² I draw these generalizations after examining undergraduate major requirements and course listings at the following twenty-four institutions: Cornell C, Middlebury C, Pomona C, St. Olav C, Williams C, Brown U, George Washington U, Georgetown U, Indiana U, Miami U of Ohio, Northwestern U, Portland State U, U of Arizona, U of California, Berkeley, U of Colorado, U of Kentucky, U of Maryland, U of Michigan, U of Missouri, U of North Carolina, U of Oregon, U of Wisconsin-Madison, UT–Austin, and Yale U.

“Third Year/Fourth Year/Advanced Russian” than for a particular kind of content focus. Alongside these language courses, some programs offer advanced courses titled “The Introduction to XXth Century Literature,” “The Russian Short Story,” “Russian Culture and Civilization,” and “Russian Prose.” Generally, one or two of these courses are required of a Russian major, and they can be taken sometime during the fifth through eighth semesters, often concurrently with a “language” course. Even for programs without a specific literature course taught in Russian, the descriptions of these Third Year/Fourth Year/Advanced Russian courses often mention literary texts among the materials that students work with.

In some ways then, the situation for Russian, where literary texts figure to some degree in the curriculum of advanced-level language classes, seems to manage the integration of literature and language focus that seems so elusive in programs for the more commonly taught languages. And yet the presence of literary texts by themselves does not tell us how they are being used to develop language skills and whether they are at the same time being used to develop skills in critical reading and literary analysis.

The purpose of this article is to examine the types of linguistic support (hereafter referred to as scaffolding) that instructors can make available to students in tasks for comprehending a literary text and more importantly for discussing that text in class in Russian. Scaffolding that accompanies tasks should be adjusted to the specific goals of the course, and the professors can select and order tasks to address the continuum of development of the students’ language and literary analytical skills. The article will provide a reasoned pedagogical framework for specific choices that instructors can make about tasks and their relationship to course goals for working with literary texts. Further, the article will provide well-explicated examples of successful scaffolding in activities that foster student discussion of a literary work when students are at the fifth or sixth semester of language study. The variety of activity types (and the explications of the mechanisms that guide

their construction) presented here can be used with literary texts, whether they appear in an upper-level “language” class or in a first course introducing students to the reading of Russian literature in Russian.

Models of Scaffolding

Although reading literary texts has been a long-established part of the traditional undergraduate major in Russian, the field has a relatively shallow research base for discussing *how* to teach the reading of a literary text in Russian at the upper-division level. Instead, what is most available to instructors are readers, anthologies, or editions of literary texts that have been, to a greater or lesser degree, prepared for nonnative readers.³ While the exercises in such materials can provide teachers with models for working with texts, their prefaces rarely provide deep methodological discussions, and editions of this type rarely provide the extensive scaffolding that an early intermediate-level reader will need to talk about a text.

³ I am thinking here primarily of the Russian Texts series (originally published by Bradda, now issued under the Bristol Classical Texts imprint, and distributed by Bloomsbury Publishing [www.bloomsbury.com]) and the Biblioteka Zlatoust graded reader series of adapted texts (Zlatoust [http://www.zlat.spb.ru]). Scaffolding for text comprehension varies widely among individual titles in these series. Some texts have vocabulary lists, glossing, glossaries, notes about complex grammar, comprehension questions, and some discussion questions, but most texts have only a few of these components. At the opposite end of the spectrum is Lubensky and Odintsova (2010), whose two-volume *Advanced Russian: From Reading to Speaking* uses short literary texts, accompanied by an overwhelming number of lexico-grammatical activities that are quite prescriptive in interpretations of the stories. In the middle, Comer’s (2008) edition of Tokareva’s *Day without Lying* strikes a balance between language focus and questions about literary interpretation.

Better and thoroughly explicated models of scaffolding student tasks involving literary texts can be found in Byrnes and Kord (2002) and Katz (2002). Byrnes and Kord (2002) illustrate their discussion of how to provide language support in a fourth-year literature course with sample materials from a course on German comedies. In addition to the course syllabus, which lays out the major course goals, they provide students with sentences/expressions related to discussing a dramatic text as well as a set of phrases and sample sentences for making and countering arguments. The sample assignments presented show a step-by-step guide for students to accomplish the output goals (oral and written) that the instructors expect from them. The activities make the students work deeply with textual language while at the same time asking them to transform the main events of the text, which requires the students to make interpretive choices. The materials provided in Byrnes and Kord are very instructive for solving some of the macro questions about tasks that might work with Russian texts and learners. Nevertheless, even these activities adapted for a Russian text would require significantly more scaffolding in terms of vocabulary and grammatical support.

Katz (2002) illustrates techniques for working with French literary texts at an early intermediate level of instruction, where she repurposes the notions of structured input and structured output. Her exercises and discussion show a language-focused expansion of typical prereading activities, and her sample postreading activities show how to build students' discussions of a work from sentence-level utterances to extended discourse.

Relatively little work has been done to explore the use of literary texts in the Russian curriculum in the past twenty years, and most studies present only scattered examples of scaffolding in their activities.

Rosengrant (2000) explains the pedagogical choices that she made when developing the literary anthology *The Golden Age* (Rosengrant and Lifschitz 1996). She emphasizes that, when working with ACTFL Intermediate-level readers, the tasks accompanying literary texts need to push readers toward

production at the next major level (i.e., Advanced), where learner output is characterized by paragraph-length description, narration, comparison, and explanation. To deal with the complexity of syntax students encounter in authentic literary texts, she advocates activities that have students decode difficult structures from the text as prereading work. To deal with the many unfamiliar vocabulary items, she emphasizes judicious glossing of key words that are likely to be unfamiliar. Her advice, particularly for productive tasks and discussion, is useful, although how exactly to support learners dealing with complex syntax and vocabulary as they perform output-based tasks needs further exploration.

Kulibina (2001) gives extensive methodological advice for teaching literary texts in the context of Russian as a foreign language. For her, the goal of working with a text is to help nonnative readers understand the explicit meaning of the text so that they can create their own interpretation of it (“создание каждым читателем собственной ‘проекции текста,’” 102). She favors contemporary literature over texts that are more culturally and historically removed from the readers’ daily experience. She recognizes three stages of work on a text (prereading, close-text reading, and after-reading), where the prereading stages focus on the author and the context surrounding the text’s creation. She eschews the notion of doing extensive prereading lexical work, leaving learners on their own with a dictionary while reading the text outside of class. In the close-text reading stage, the teacher engages learners in question-and-answer dialog as the scaffolding to help them move from an understanding of words (“значение языковой единицы”) to the larger sense (“смысл”) of the text. For Kulibina, after-reading work is not essential, and she has little to say about getting learners to discuss the text or to use the text to promote learner output.

Keefe (2004), at the conclusion of her discussions of reading pedagogies in Russian, offers a sample literary selection for intermediate-level students, implementing a strongly top-down comprehension approach to the opening sections of the novella *Бабий дом*, by Anatolii Kurchatkin. In contrast, Blech

(2007), recommends working with shorter texts (under five hundred words) with students at the early intermediate level, and she offers a specific list of texts, working from the most contemporary writers to earlier literary figures. She illustrates her work with two examples of prereading, comprehension, and postreading tasks related to two stories. The activities for the stories include both comprehension and limited production work. Blech reports using these activities with a small group of volunteers, who had a positive reaction to the stories.

Reyfmán (2014) takes a completely different approach to the reading of literature, setting as her major goal that students notice how an author uses specific grammar and lexical features to create important layers of meaning. She illustrates her stylistic approach with an analysis of Chekhov's story "Новая дача." Reyfmán is not particularly concerned with scaffolding for basic comprehension of the texts, assuming that is taken care of by student dictionary work.

Setting Goals for Work with a Literary Text

Despite these useful discussions with their general guidance about reading literary texts with students, the question remains of how to guide learners through the comprehension of a literary text and promote their oral discussion of the text. In the second half of this article, I will demonstrate techniques for doing this, illustrating my recommendations with sample activities that accompany the reading of Pushkin's short story "Выстрел" for students who have had roughly 280 contact hours of Russian instruction and whose reading skills range from Intermediate Low to Intermediate High.

The first, and perhaps most critical, decision that teachers need to make is determining the outcome goals for the students' interaction with the literary text. What oral or written product(s) will the students create to reflect their comprehension and interpretation of the text? Determining the outcomes in advance allows instructors to reverse engineer the students' encounter with the literary text, defining what essential vocabulary, grammar, and understandings the student will need to take away

from the text. Analyzing the linguistic and cognitive demands that the desired outcome will place on learners, the teacher can plan deliberate work with specific vocabulary, rhetorical devices, and grammar so that students can develop their readiness for the culminating task successfully. For example, if the final activity after reading a short story is to describe the psychology of a character by drawing inferences about motivations from the character's actions in the story, then the story itself will provide much of the vocabulary for the students to talk about the character's actions, but the teacher may need to supplement that base with a large number of lexical items describing motivations and emotional states. Since these are to be inferred from the character's actions, those words are unlikely to appear in the text itself. The teacher might need to supplement that list further with rhetorical devices expressing reasons (e.g., "так как," "поскольку," "поэтому") and reasoning (e.g., "судя по ..."). Depending on the complexity of these words and devices, the teacher may need to incorporate them into classroom discussions long before presenting them to students with the final assignment.

Building Scaffolding for Vocabulary

In trying to prioritize what vocabulary from the text itself learners will need to focus on, the teacher might analyze word frequencies in the text, using a concordance and visualization program, such as www.voyant-tools.org. If a digital version of the text is available, the teacher can use the Voyant tools to extract a word list from the story with information about each word's frequency in the text. This information can help a teacher recognize what lexical groupings the reader will encounter in the text more than once. Reviewing that same list sorted alphabetically, the instructor can note what forms of a single lexical item appear in the text. They can examine the list for word families and words sharing the same verbal prefixes. This information can help teachers decide on items that will fit into activities that reveal word formation patterns in Russian, an

important skill for students to improve their word recognition when reading.

In Pushkin's story "Выстрел," words built on the base *стрел*– appear with high frequency from the opening page of the story. As a prereading activity, it is important to help learners distinguish the items in this word family, which encompass a number of nouns (выстрел, стрельба, стрелок) and verbs (стрелять[ся], застрелить, застрелиться, прострелить) in the opening paragraphs of the text, none of which is likely to have appeared in textbooks for first- and second-year Russian. To introduce this vocabulary in a way that engages learners to start mapping forms to meaning, the instructor can prepare a slide show, using images from the internet to illustrate sentences containing these words, working from simple sentences such as: "Это выстрел" (illustrated with photograph of a bullet exiting a pistol) to the verbs with their more complex governance. For example, an illustration showing Pushkin and D'Antes with pistols raised can be captioned with the sentence "На картине мы видим, как мужчины стоят и стреляют друг в друга." As the learners listen and view the slideshow, they complete an activity matching these unfamiliar Russian words in their dictionary forms with English equivalents. Using the picture search function in www.google.ru, the teacher can choose from a variety of culturally appropriate images to help learners understand and notice the semantic differences between these textual lexical items. Judicious selection of illustrations suggesting nineteenth-century realia can also help the learners mentally situate "Выстрел" in time and place.

Subsequent activities should have the learners work with the complement structures for these verbs possibly through contrastive analysis with English equivalents. For example, learners listen to the teacher read the sentence "На картинке мы видим, как Дантес стреляет из пистолёта в Пушклина," while they fill in the missing prepositions and case endings on their worksheet in the sentence "На картинке мы видим, как Дантес стреляет ___ пистолёт__ ___ Пушкин__," and compare the different distribution of prepositions in the English equivalent.

For further practice, an instructor could write five or six sentences based on events in the story that feature verbs from this word family with their different complements. The instructor then separates the sentences into an opening part with a subject and verb and a second part with the complement and ask the students to match beginnings with endings based on verbal governance. Once grammatically correct sentences are formed, the students are asked to reread them and decide whether or not they accurately reflect events described in the story. Thus, the activity directs learners' attention to both form and meaning.

When the connection between items in a word family and their English equivalents is more transparent (e.g., a single root with various derivational endings), it can be useful to draw learners' attention to suffixes that change a word's part of speech. For example, in the opening pages of "Выстрел," both "таинственность" and "таинственный" (a key feature of the dark Romantic hero) appear, and, in drawing attention to those words, the teacher can also introduce "тайна," "тайный," "тайно," and the verb "затаить." Building the students' awareness of suffixation and its relationship to parts of speech can help them recognize other word families, such as "война," "воин," "военный," and "воевать." Such vocabulary-expansion activities can be done as part of homework assignments, but the teacher can recycle the words in class by having students work on circumlocution activities, where they try to define one member of the word family by using others, so that a possible explanation of "таинственный" becomes "Это можно сказать о человеке, у которого много тайн, о котором мы мало знаем."

Depending on the outcomes teachers are working toward, it may be necessary to help students learn vocabulary groups that are essential to that outcome by having students locate them in the text or by giving students additional vocabulary (e.g., evaluative words, rhetorical devices) that will let students discuss the text. Sometimes, teachers can do this with activities that have students match these words/phrases to English equivalents (as in Figure 1); other times teachers may need to present them as glossed vocabulary items (as in Figure 2). The

choice of how to present the items will depend on various factors. The matching activity in Figure 1 relies on the fact that the students have seen most of these words of emotion/attitude in the first pages of the story in the narrator's description of his feelings toward Silvio. For students struggling to form an idea of Silvio's character, these words may seem of secondary importance, and yet they are essential for describing the feelings of many of the characters in the story. Singling these words out helps students focus on textual words that will be useful for later discussions of the characters and their attitudes.

Часть 9. Эмоции и отношения к человеку. Установите соответствия.

___ 1. мне было со́встно	а) I hoped
___ 2. это огорча́ло меня́	б) I was worried, anxious
___ 3. я был озабо́чен	в) I doubted
___ 4. я наде́ялся	г) I was surprised
___ 5. я ненави́дел	д) I was ashamed
___ 6. я сомнева́лся	е) I honored, respected
___ 7. я удиви́лся	ж) I was pained; it grieved me
___ 8. я уважа́л	з) I hated

Figure 1. Vocabulary-building activity

While some of the glossed words presented in Figure 2 appear in the story, students are unlikely to pay great attention to them if they were focused primarily on understanding the plot of the story and following the internal chronology of events. In choosing the words to include in the list, the teacher must match the words to the intended outcome task(s). Here, the words in Figure 2 offer students a wide range of vocabulary to evaluate Silvio's behavior and motivations at the conclusion of the story. The vocabulary list also offers some rhetorical framing devices ("На мой взгляд / Я считаю," "что") so that students can effectively mark the opinions as their own. While Figure 2 offers some words to the students, it does not preclude students from introducing additional evaluative words. The list which includes "жестокий" (cruel), "мстительный" (vengeful), "злой" (spiteful, malicious), "злой" (evil), and "гро́зный" (threatening)

pushes students toward nuanced evaluations of Silvio by making them distinguish fine shades of meaning.

Что вы теперь думаете о Сильвио? Изменилось ли ваше мнение о Сильвио с начала рассказа? Возможно, вам помогут следующие слова:	
На мой взгляд – in my view	счастливым – fortunate, lucky
Я считаю, что – I consider that	трусливый – cowardly
Поступок/поступки – action, actions	мстительный – vengeful
жестокый / жестокость – cruel, cruelty	злбный – spiteful, malicious
милосрдный – merciful	злой – evil
справедливый – just	грозный – threatening

Figure 2. Providing vocabulary and rhetorical framing phrases

Depending on the selection of a final outcome activity, a teacher may need to include some relatively basic lexico-grammatical work. For example, if the teacher plans activities that include retelling the plot of the story, it is very likely that the learners will need control of reported speech in Russian, starting with the usage of basic verbs of speech (“говорить/сказать кому?,” “отвечать/ответить кому? на что? спрашивать/спросить кого? о чем?,” “задавать/задать вопрос кому?,” “просить/попросить кого? делать что?”). These are a challenging, but essential, piece of the scaffolding work that a teacher needs to build into classroom discussion of the story. Activities using the structured input technique (Farley 2004) and the content of the story can help students notice the multiple form-meaning possibilities in the governance of these verbs.

Another important aspect of dealing with vocabulary development for students at this level is to help them expand the *depth* of their word knowledge. Sure, but shallow, knowledge of words encountered in a text is likely to lead students down a garden path when they use bottom-up strategies to build their understanding of a sentence. Vocabulary work can help learners notice the difference between pairs (e.g., “прощать/простить кого? за что?” and “прощаться/попрощаться с кем?”) and a lexical cluster (e.g., “собирать/собрать что?” and “собираться/собраться где? у кого?” and “собираться делать что?”). After drawing out the basic English equivalents for these

verbs, students might review sentences from the text that include these words and note which meaning applies. When deciding which sets of words require this attention, the teacher will need to think about the frequency of usage in the text and the relevance of the words toward the final output that learners will produce.

Building Scaffolding: Comprehension Checks

One of the most ubiquitous activity types with stories are comprehension questions following the text or excerpt. Such questions are usually in the target language, and they anticipate that readers will respond in the target language. And this expectation can sometimes undermine the comprehension checking purpose of the activity. If a comprehension question narrowly targets part of the passage and uses specific vocabulary from the text, the student answering the question need look only for key word(s) and copy out the near context. Whether the student has actually comprehended the bit of text being written out and whether the student can do anything with those words other than repeat them remains unclear. In contrast, open-ended comprehension questions, such as “Who is Silvio?” may invite the student to rely on the evaluative words that he or she already knows in offering an opinion (e.g., “Он интересный / Он мне [не] нравится”), without drawing any new words from the text. The teacher then needs to design tasks that (1) take students into the language of the text (so that they can expand their vocabulary) and (2) have students interpret those words and phrases by resetting or paraphrasing them in (re)constructing a representation of the text.

Two types of activities can be very helpful for this. For example, in the second paragraph of the story “Выстрел,” the narrator gives quite a lengthy description of Silvio, parts of which are easily digestible by an intermediate reader (as long as they break up the long sentences), while other parts can pose comprehension problems because of the elaborate syntax and the narrator’s irony. To deal with this and to focus a class session on discussing Silvio, the teacher can ask the students to read the

opening at home and to prepare a list of ten to twelve words and phrases taken directly from the text that describe Silvio. They are told to look up any words in the phrases that they do not know and gloss them in English. At the start of class, each student posts one of their phrases on the blackboard, taking care not to repeat phrases already written by others. As a group, the teacher guides the students into evaluating the phrases, making sure they do describe Silvio, and not the narrator. The teacher can help learners fix phrases that are missing initial or concluding elements. If the teacher finds some key phrases missing from this first set, he or she can probe for other phrases that the students found interesting (or avoided because they were uncertain of their meaning). The teacher then models how to paraphrase these chunks of the text, taking the quoted phrases from the text and helping the students find appropriate synonyms which may be closer to their active language. For example, the textual phrase “Никто не знал ни его состояния, ни его доходов,” with its nineteenth-century cultural notions of состояние/доходы, can be turned into the stylistically and culturally neutral phrases—for example, “Никто не знал, сколько у него денег” or “Никто не знал, бедный он или богатый.” The teacher will also need to help students unlock specific grammatical forms in the quoted phrases so that the words can be used in different contexts. For example, the textual phrase “не будучи военным” can be turned into “не был военным/не служил в армии/не был в армии/не был офицером.”

After the interactive work of taking the phrases apart and turning them into small sentences, the teacher can ask the students to work in pairs and decide what order they would assemble the phrases in to make a paragraph-length description of Silvio. After the paired discussion, the teacher can ask one pair to share their ordering, numbering the phrases on the board. Other students can suggest alternatives and discuss the pluses and minuses of a particular order. Once a reasonable (and reasoned) numbering is arrived at, the teacher can ask students for some conjunctions and connective phrases to link the simple sentences, possibly helping them to embed a detail in a judicious

который clause. This rough text now starts to resemble a loose, paragraph-length, textually based answer to the question “What does the reader learn about Silvio?” The teacher can give student pairs a few minutes to practice saying this rough paragraph aloud to his or her partner. At the end of class, the teacher can take a picture of this blackboard discussion and share it with students on a learning management system. For homework, students are asked to refer to this skeleton and turn the rough paragraph into a smoother written text, adding anything else they found important.

Once the teacher has modeled this way of taking textual phrases and paraphrasing them, that task can be incorporated into the students’ homework activities before class discussion. For example, when the Count first joins the regiment where Silvio serves, Silvio presents a lengthy description of him that is filled with highly colored vocabulary. The task for the students is formulated as in Figure 3.

<p>Как описывает Сильвио нового офицера, который поступил в их полк? Выберите из текста 6-7 фраз и впишите их в левую колонку таблицы. Потом напишите своими словами предложение, которое передаёт ту же идею (the same idea).</p>	
фразы в тексте	Передайте эту идею своими словами
1)	
2)	

Figure 3. Accessing textual vocabulary

By having the students locate specific textual phrases, the teacher verifies that the students are indeed getting at the right information in the text to answer the question. By having the students complete a paraphrase at the same time, it becomes clear how the students interpret some of the phrases describing the Count (e.g., “громкое имя / деньги,” “которым не знал он счета”). Some of the textual vocabulary may (or should) certainly become part of the learner’s active knowledge as they move toward the Advanced level; however, the paraphrases should

always reflect the broad general vocabulary that can be used in the twenty-first century.

To verify the learners' comprehension of syntactically dense portions of Pushkin's text, the teacher might use translation and guided translation. These strategies should be used judiciously to get at particularly telling details that the intermediate reader may miss or misinterpret. For example, the description of the painting in the Count's study ("она изображала какой-то вид из Швейцарии; но поразила меня в ней не живопись, а то, что картина была прострелена двумя пулями, всажеными одна на другую") is a key, foreshadowing detail about what the narrator will learn, and understanding the sentence will help the readers make sense of the conclusion of the duel at the Count's house. For other syntactically complex sentences, the instructor might have the students notice the differences between the original and the English by having students fill in some small gaps in a translation, as in Figure 4.

Fill in the missing words in the English translation of this sentence from the reading.	
Малое число книг, найденных мною под шкафами и в кладовой, были вытвержены мною наизусть.	The small number of _____, which I had _____ under the _____ and in the _____ had been learned _____ by he art.

Figure 4. Partial translation for decoding syntax

Another effective comprehension-building technique is to stage a particular scene from a text. After describing Silvio, the narrator observes a conflict that flares up between Silvio and a new officer while playing cards. Students often have problems following the shift in narrative focus when this event is introduced. They struggle to establish who is thinking/saying what in the text, and who does what actions and why. A very

usable classroom activity is to have the students divide into four groups, where one is responsible for coming up with a list of characters present in the scene, another the list of props and the stage setting, and the other two groups figure out what actions/words the new officer says and what Silvio says. After students make those determinations, students select roles of all the characters present and take to the stage. The students remaining in the audience become the voices for different characters, calling out to the appropriate student/actor on stage what actions and words are said in the text. The student/actor is responsible for performing those actions. The teacher offers suggestions to the students/actors when they fail to show complete comprehension of the textual words and can also help turn the students'/audience's directions into grammatically clean command forms. The teacher might also provide some small props (e.g., cards, a brush, chalk, green felt, and a candlestick) to add some visual details to the classwork. After this detailed work on the scene, students have a clearer picture of what happened and can finally begin to appreciate the odd fact that Silvio does not call the new officer out. This can then lead to a discussion of why Silvio, as master of the house where the insult happens, has the right not to demand satisfaction.

Building Scaffolding: Narration

In working with classic literary texts, teachers can take advantage of the fact that these stories have been illustrated by various artists for children's and textbook editions. Selections of images from the texts can be found online, and illustrations can be an opportunity for students to caption pictures with appropriate lines from the text. The teacher might ask the students to identify specific people, objects, and events in the picture that are named in the literary work and/or to describe the action depicted in the illustration in their own words.

If the teacher's final outcome goal for the work is to have the students retell the plot of the story from a specific point of view, or retell the events of the story in a way that untangles the *fabula* from the *siuzhet*, then the teacher will need to build up

activities that have the students work on narrating events. As a first step to this work, a teacher can create a list of events from the story that model, to the extent possible, the neutral narrative language that the teacher would like to see in the students' active command. These sentences should be relatively short, without specific temporal markers. The teacher should be consistent in the use of tense in the sentences so that the students will narrate in the past or the (historical) present. The sentences can be printed onto cards, which are then shuffled and distributed among students (Figure 5). In pairs, the students take turns reading the sentences aloud, trying to place each new sentence before or after the ones already read. When they have laid out all the sentences, they are asked to read them one after the other to make sure that they have them in order.

At this point the teacher could hand out a new version of the sentences arranged in the preferred order but in paragraph format. Groups of students can work on different ways to make the sentences hang together more naturally. One task might be to replace nouns with pronouns to make the paragraph have more cohesion. Another might be to combine some sentences with temporal conjunctions (e.g., "после того как," "когда," "как только"), or linking actions with temporal adverbs (e.g., "сначала," "потом," "сразу же," "после этого," "наконец," "в конце концов"), or other connectors (e.g., "но," "однако," "несмотря на то," "что," etc.). Not all of these sentences will need additions or changes, and the teacher should help the students notice that building a paragraph is not simply a mechanical exercise.

It should be noted that another important device that Russian uses for building coherence in a paragraph is word order, and the teacher will need to decide what aspects of word order to draw students' attention to as they make a paragraph. The sample activity presented in Figure 5 outlines the events related to the first duel between the Silvio and the Count in fourteen past-tense sentences, each of which was printed on a separate card.

Рассказываем события по порядку.
Прочитайте вслух по очереди каждое предложение. Поставьте их в хронологическом порядке.

1. На балу Сильвио сказал графу какую-то грубость.
2. Граф обиделся и дал Сильвио пощёчину.
3. Сильвио вызвал графа на дуэль.
4. Граф пришёл на место встречи, где его уже давно ждал Сильвио.
5. Как оскорблённый, Сильвио имел право стрелять первым.

.....

Figure 5. Working on retelling the plot of an episode

The teacher can model how to write a paragraph-length summary of a specific plot episode by creating a grammatically correct, but factually flawed, paragraph for one episode in the story (Figure 6). To draw learners' attention to meaning, the teacher asks the students to take turns reading the sentences aloud and deciding if everything is correct, or if there is a mistake, and what the factually correct version of the plot summary is. Finding mistakes in the paragraph forces students to reread the original section of the text closely. Mistakes can be fixed in various ways, and that allows for comparisons of options.

Найдите ошибки. Вот краткое содержание последней части рассказа "Выстрел", но в нем есть ошибки и неточности. Найдите 11 ошибок или неточностей и исправьте их. (Если вам нужна помощь, посмотрите на вторую страницу.)

Граф и Сильвио снова встретились три года назад. Это было до свадьбы графа.

Граф тогда жил в богатом поместье своей жены. Однажды вечером граф вернулся домой и узнал, что в кабинете его ждёт иностранец, у которого есть к нему дело.

Figure 6. Fixing plot mistakes in a summary

After identifying and fixing the factual details in the paragraph, the teacher might draw the students' attention to how the paragraph works, asking them to find formal features such as temporal expressions (e.g., "тогда," "однажды вечером"), and connectors and pronouns (e.g., "у которого," "поместье своей

жены," "к нему дело"), asking students to find the referents and notice the case usage.

After these kinds of repeated practice with retelling the story line, the students are ready to try an oral narration task with less scaffolding. "Выстрел," like many texts from the Russian nineteenth-century canon, has also been adapted for film in a realist interpretation (1966, Mosfilm, directed by Trakhtenberg) which is widely available online. Of the many pedagogical uses of a film adaptation that a teacher can make, I want to draw attention to one specific way of using the film's visuals to support guided narration. Using the online version of the film, the teacher can use a computer-based screen capture program to take screen shots of key scenes. The teacher can then print these screen shots (preferably in color) onto cards or separate sheets, distribute sets of the pictures to small groups of students, tasking them to put the events depicted in the order that they occur in the story. Before releasing the groups to individual work, the teacher should show the whole group one or two of these screen shots, getting everyone to identify the major characters. Once the pairs put the pictures in order, they need to move on to the next step of the task, which is retelling the story based on the scenes depicted. Teachers can ask student pairs to practice this narrative for a set number of minutes so that they take turns retelling the story, building their fluency until they can do the narration well in two minutes. If the teacher wants to document the students' progress in this narration task, he or she can, as a last step in this activity, have each student telephone the teacher and leave an audio message on their teacher's voice mail. The teacher can use these recordings as a formative assessment, giving feedback to individuals on ways to improve their retelling, pronunciation, and vocabulary control, or as a summative assessment, grading the audio recording as an oral quiz.

Although this task requires less linguistic scaffolding presented to the students, teachers will need to set certain conditions or expectations for this narration based on screen shots. Teachers should stipulate whether the retelling will be a

present- or past-tense narration, and they should stress that students be consistent in the narrative time frame. Consistent use of verb tense in a narration is likely only to be an emerging ability for students at this level. Teachers need to make a conscious pedagogical choice about the time frame that the students are working with, since, without a lot of intensive work on morphology, students are unlikely to develop equal facility with these two modes of narrating. Such focused work on developing verb morphology may make sense when reading the story in the context of an advanced language class, but there may not be time for it in a course focused on reading multiple literary texts.

Building Scaffolding: Interpretation

The narration activity described above with screen shots from the film adaptation of “Выстрел” could be repeated with a more literary task of asking students to put all the episodes in their absolute chronological order (*fabula*) rather than the order presented in the text (*siuzhet*). The literarily inclined instructor could present a small talk on these two concepts, rooting them historically, and helping students to see how an author like Pushkin manipulates the retelling of events to create suspense in the story. The teacher’s brief talk on this topic can be an occasion for a note-taking task for the students, or be accompanied by a small listening comprehension task.

After noticing the order of events in the *fabula*, a teacher might also have the students notice how all of these events are introduced into the story, who presents the information to the narrator, or how the information comes to the narrator’s attention. The scaffolding for this activity might include a set of sentences below that the students need to match with episodes from the story:

- Об этом рассказчик узнает от _____
- Об этом рассказчику рассказывает Сильвио
- Об этом рассказчику рассказывает граф
- Об этом рассказчику рассказывает графиня

Об этом рассказчику рассказывают другие офицеры
Об этом Сильвио рассказывает рассказчик
Об этом графу рассказывает рассказчик
Об этом _____ узнает в письме от _____

By giving the students a variety of grammatically correct permutations of who tells what information to whom (with the word order emphasizing who provides the information), students can concentrate on interpreting the paths of transmission of information in the story.

Although learning how to describe Silvio is an important task in discussing the story “Выстрел,” the more engaging literary question is why Silvio behaves as he does. Speculating about his motivations and connecting them to specific actions in the text will ultimately help the teacher guide learners to sketch important features of the inner emotional life of the dark Romantic hero. Over a series of nineteenth-century texts, the teacher can guide the literary readers to a nuanced appreciation of the superfluous man (лишний человек). The discussion of motivations is often stymied because the students lack even the most elementary vocabulary to describe the character’s feelings and grammatical constructions to express cause. As a first step to foster discussion of this question (and the vocabulary needed to talk about it), the teacher can create a set of sentences suggesting a range of possible motivations for Silvio’s dislike of the Count, when the latter is first transferred to Silvio’s unit (Figure 7). The students are then asked to work in pairs reading the sentences aloud in turns and evaluating each possible motivation on a three-point scale (*highly likely*, *possible*, *hardly likely*). After the initial evaluations, the class can count up which ideas got the largest number of *highly likely* evaluations and whether they all agree with those evaluations. The teacher can encourage students to add further thoughts that were not included in the original list. It is important that teachers construct an exercise like this with a range of opinions, including some that are very unlikely, so that students are making real choices when they evaluate the sentences. This kind of activity can be repeated at the very end of the story to start the discussion of why Silvio chooses not to

shoot at the Count. The teacher's initial supply of sentences might include possible motivations that the Count (and/or the Countess, and narrator) might attribute to Silvio, as well as the reader's conclusions.

Сильвио говорит, что он возненавидел этого нового офицера. Почему у него возникло (arose) такое чувство? Отцените возможные причины.

	Очень вероятно	Возможно	Вряд ли/Этого нет в тексте
Новый офицер обидел Сильвио.	___	___	___
Сильвио не понравилось поведение (behavior) нового офицера.	___	___	___
Сильвио завидует успехам нового офицера.	___	___	___
Новый офицер не признал первенства Сильвио.	___	___	___
Новый офицер отказался (refused) дружить с Сильвио.	___	___	___
Сильвио боялся, что новый офицер будет популярнее его.	___	___	___
Сильвио не знает, как вести себя (to behave) с богатыми людьми.	___	___	___
Сильвио оскорбил нового офицера.	___	___	___
Новому офицеру было всё равно, хочет ли Сильвио с ним дружить.	___	___	___

Ваши идеи (если их не было в списке): _____

Figure 7. Scaffolding discussions of emotional motivations

Conclusion

The goal of this article has been to outline tasks for working with a literary text and describe the scaffolding needed to help ACTFL Intermediate-level learners complete them and push the development of their language comprehension and production. While illustrations are drawn from work on one story, the principles for scaffolding discussed here should help teachers apply these examples to new texts. Some of the suggested activities will be more useful to accomplishing certain kinds of pedagogical goals, and some may require a great deal of class time to work through. Nevertheless, the scaffolding in all the activities will work to expand the students' vocabulary, perhaps the greatest limitation that intermediate-level readers face.

Evaluating the whole set of tasks and scaffolding, readers will notice the consistent attention to vocabulary development that runs through them all. Traditionally, vocabulary learning in courses at the second and third year of language learning often receives little direct instructional focus, as if students will either assimilate the words through grammar exercises, or simply learn them on their own with flashcards or other memorization techniques. While it is useful for students to take the first step in building word knowledge by using flashcards or other techniques, the teacher can aid the students' efforts significantly by indicating that the words students should pick for memorization appear in the scaffolding for class assignments. In addition to guiding the selection of words, the scaffolding can help learners build deeper knowledge of the words, their range of lexical meanings, inflectional morphology, and their grammatical combinability (particularly important for verbs).

Readers may rightly wonder, if they use all the activities suggested in this article, are they teaching a class in Russian literature or a class in Russian language. My response is that they are teaching both simultaneously, using the technique of scaffolding to help students overcome the content-versus-language divide described at the beginning of this article. Certainly, the activities discussed here will not support students in a deep classroom discussion of literary issues, such as Pushkin's irony, parodic stance toward Romantic literary conventions, use of literary allusion, and so on. But, having used the activities presented here, an instructor can be certain that students have a solid understanding of the plot and characters of the story before creating similarly scaffolded activities to embark on those more cognitively and linguistically complex topics about the nature of literary texts. Will a teacher be able to foster as rich a discussion of all those literary features in the students' L2 as in the students' L1 and in the same amount of instructional time? Probably not, but instructors should ask themselves if that ever was a feasible instructional objective. Teachers have control over the course goals and learning outcomes, and they can pick the ones they deem most pressing and develop the right kinds of

scaffolding to deal with those points. For example, if a teacher wants to help students understand some of the historical-cultural background of the story concerning honor and dueling but knows that this would require a lot of complex reading in Russian, then he or she might want to prepare a bilingual discussion that provides the reader with the most relevant information in English but that glosses key phrases and vocabulary items in Russian (similar in format to Gerhart and Boyle 2012).

No matter what specific issues in a story teachers want to encourage classroom discussion on, if they provide students with the right kind of linguistic scaffolding, learners should be able to engage the topics in the target language. Scaffolding is a key technique that makes discussion viable and that keeps classrooms learner centered.

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