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Introduction to Volume 55

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Introduction to Volume 55

The papers in the present volume were originally presented at an international symposium, "Summit Conference on World Languages," hosted in Washington, D.C. by ACTR in cooperation with MAPRIAL (International Association of Teachers of Russian Language and Literature) in July of 2001.¹

The present issue of *RLJ* reflects the new editorial board's view of the state of Russian study in the U.S. and the world today in the context of globalization, internationalization of curriculum, and increased expectations regarding the outcomes of language study everywhere. (Verbitskaya) While more modest than the bold Soviet-era policy assertions concerning Russian as a "primary language of mass international communication," Kostomarov addresses the new role of Russian as mother tongue, second language, or major foreign language for more than 300 million speakers in the world, nearly 3 million of whom are now resident in the United States, and contributing thereby to a new concept of the meaning of "world languages." With this change in status has come the need for a much more "activist" and outreach-oriented role for the professional associations that support the study and teaching of Russian, and for the donor organizations that make their work possible. (Brecht) The editors are pleased that Dr. Brecht's new model of field architecture derives to some degree from his firsthand role and observations of the evolution of ACTR itself over the past 30 years.

Two new research studies in psychology relate current work on individual learner differences to SLA and Russian in instructed settings (Ehrman) and in faculty professional development (Leaver, Oxford). Keeping individual learner motivations and academic needs in view, Byrnes analyses contexts, approaches, and principles for curriculum construction in university-level instruction, developing further the author's own highly influential work on the concept of literacy development in the second language classroom from the elementary levels of study onward. Noblett, in turn, helps bridge the gap between the humanistic traditions of classroom-based learning and the individual need for customized learning environments with his expert overview of the power and often untapped potential of online learning for the adult second language learner.

The final group of three papers focus attention on outcomes of second language learning, beginning with the challenges of assessing outcomes over time. (Spolsky). For most American learners, one of the first high-stakes assessments of learning outcomes takes place when the student attempts to negotiate the school-to-college transition. Abbott draws attention to the need not only for reference to common metrics and shared standards in this process, but also the importance of

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broad professional consensus on performance standards for each parameter of evaluation. Finally, Davidson and Lehmann present the results of a longitudinal survey of language learning careers of a group of more than 700 alumni of the ACTR study abroad programs in Russia over the past 30 years. Alumni of more than 225 U. S. language programs and study abroad self-report on their current language proficiencies and language utilization patterns, while reflecting on the contribution their knowledge of Russian has had in the development of their professional careers.

The Summit Conference and this volume attempt to demonstrate the richness of connections which can be drawn between research in SLA, language policy formation, information technology, and the study and teaching of Russian at all levels. The interdisciplinary nature of this volume further demonstrates, perhaps not surprisingly, that the particular challenges of relating research and practice that led to the creation of ACTR through the Soviet-American Conferences on Russian of 1974, 1981, etc., continue to energize and inform the Russian and modern language fields today.

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