Review: Russian for All Occasions: A Russian-English Dictionary of Collocations and Expressions

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самобытность. One of the prompts for the crossword puzzle in the same chapter asks students to put in the synonym for the words тождественность, общность, одинаковость.

More importantly, there are no grammar explanations throughout the book, although notes on the formation of participles and verbal adverbs as well as a brief list of nominal suffixes are included in the appendices. Nevertheless, the philosophy of this book seems to be that students can learn this grammar on the basis of examples of pre-formed participles and verbal adverbs and derive new words by analogy.

Overall, Russian in a Contemporary World is a wonderful resource with a fascinating selection of topics and a broad range of well-designed activities. Depending on the language instructor’s teaching methodology and philosophy, it may be easier to use it as a companion to another textbook. However, if the instructor finds it necessary and is willing to put in time and effort, they can refine vocabulary lists and provide additional grammar explanations in order to use it as their core textbook. Ultimately, the activities presented in the book are geared exceptionally well toward developing an Advanced level of language proficiency and as such, this resource should not be overlooked by instructors of third- and fourth-year Russian courses.

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References


Russian for All Occasions is an ambitious book that places itself somewhere between a bilingual thematic dictionary and a grammar textbook, while covering an impressively wide range of linguistic contexts. Its authors describe it as “a new type of dictionary” (xxvi) intended to aid learners of Russian in comprehending and constructing idiomatic speech. Theoretically,
the project is rooted in the concept of the “communicative fragment” as defined by Boris Gasparov—the idea that indivisible combinations of words, rather than individual words, “provide speakers with the base units for the mnemonic ‘lexicon’ of their language” (xxvi). With this theory in mind, the authors offer an extensive collection of “frequently occurring mini-contexts” (xxvi), which they organize thematically into four large sections: the person/the family, culture/technology/daily life, society, and the natural world. These sections are in turn divided into thirty-three chapters on more specific topics.

Following the logic of many traditional textbooks, *Russian for All Occasions* begins with the individual and moves outward into broader and more abstract themes, which progress in a logical order. Regardless, the book does not need to be read from cover to cover, and it offers a wealth of materials for learners of Russian with more specific interests that are presented within an easily navigable structure. Readers looking to develop their proficiency along thematic lines can turn to a detailed table of contents at the beginning of the book to explore vocabulary and grammar associated with particular topics. Meanwhile, students of Russian seeking to expand their vocabulary will find the index at the end helpful for tracing the thematic contexts in which particular words appear.

Since the book uses communicative fragments—combinations of vocabulary words that frequently appear together—as its base units, it eschews alphabetic listings in favor of blocks of thematically related entries. For example, a section called “Спать” unites 40 fragments treating different contexts involving the act of sleeping (3–5). The fragments themselves typically appear in the form of full Russian sentences and are paired with complete English translations. The authors helpfully gloss the grammatical and cultural particularities of key words, with a focus on highlighting their differences from English equivalents. They additionally provide stress marks throughout for the benefit of less-experienced language learners.

The book is most valuable as a resource for tasks involving the passive use of Russian, such as independent reading and Russian-to-English translation assignments. Its entries are representative of the kinds of “mini-contexts” learners of Russian are likely to encounter in authentic texts, making it an excellent reference for students. Its structure, which brings together fragments that deal with similar themes, vocabulary, and grammar in different ways, allows it to gloss linguistic subtleties in a way that readers will no doubt find instrumental. The English translations, which are accurate and generally idiomatic, serve as a model of good translation practices. Finally, the authors’ decision to include
both contemporary and Soviet-era examples of the Russian language will particularly be appreciated by language learners working with historical or historically themed texts. Overall, the book most distinguishes itself from other thematic dictionaries in that, along with collecting high-frequency words and phrases and their translations, it also seeks to recreate a larger linguistic context that will leave readers better prepared to handle the nuances of the Russian language on their own.

Although the authors envision their book equally as an asset to “those seeking to improve their active command of Russian” (xxxiii), it makes less of a contribution in this area. *Russian for All Occasions* will certainly allow students to augment their presentations and compositions with individual examples of idiomatic Russian adapted from its entries. However, it is difficult to imagine learners of Russian improving their active language skills based on dictionary entries without substantial supplementary materials. Moreover, while the authors devote significant space to explaining and translating Russian phrases that native English-speakers may find difficult, equal attention is not paid to presenting Russian equivalents for concepts idiomatic to English language contexts. To cite one example, in a section on politics, the text cogently glosses the word “либерал” in the context of debates between the Slavophiles and Westernizers (391–92), yet it does not at all treat the ways in which the English word “liberal” differs contextually from its Russian counterpart. As a result, students may find the book less useful in developing their ability to express themselves intelligibly in the Russian language.

Regardless, Khairov and Dunn have created a comprehensive resource that is of obvious use to intermediate and advanced students engaging in any tasks requiring the passive use of Russian. Prospective Russian-to-English translators, along with historians and political scientists looking to improve their Russian skills, will also find much to appreciate.

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*Acquiring the Major Speech Functions in Russian* is designed to help Russian learners build communicative skills related to major speech situations such as greetings, requests, invitations, expressing gratitude, and so on.