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1. Introduction

Teaching information and media literacy is a critical aspect of undergraduate education and a crucial part of the study of Russian language and culture, particularly now, when the media landscape is rapidly changing and the stakes are so high. This article will describe how students of Russian at the Intermediate High through Advanced levels develop listening and speaking proficiency and media literacy skills through narratives in a course focused on contemporary Russian-language media. The course teaches students how to analyze and synthesize information from a variety of media sources and to formulate spoken arguments: tools which will enable them to make forays into Superior-level discourse in the future or, if they already have Advanced High proficiency, even during the course. I will argue that narratives serve three purposes for students at this proficiency level in this course. First, narratives are key to Advanced-level discourse: students listen to narratives and develop their own narration and description skills. Moreover, through analysis of multiple and sometimes intersecting narratives of and about important figures in the tumultuous history of the past several decades in Russia, from perestroika to the present, students develop higher-order critical thinking skills on Bloom's Taxonomy (Bloom, 1956, as cited in Shrum & Glisan, 2010, pp. 78-80), from comprehending the content of audio and video materials to analyzing the narratives in these materials, synthesizing them, and coming to their own interpretations of major events in recent Russian history and their more recent implications. Finally, narratives provide undergraduate students often at the end of their domestic studies, together with graduate students who bring their own knowledge and experience to the class, with opportunities to reflect on what they have learned throughout the course of their

studies while also reflecting on some of the major questions in recent Russian history and in Russia today. Narratives provide a unique window for interpretation and expression.[1]

2. Context of the course

The Russian Flagship program, described in detail in previous issues of the *Russian Language Journal* (2012, 2020), is part of the Language Flagship program, a federally funded initiative sponsored by the National Security Education Program in the U.S. Department of Defense, with the goal of enabling undergraduates of any major to reach a Superior level of proficiency on the ACTFL scale (ILR 3) in one of six languages deemed critical to U.S. national security and economic competitiveness through a combination of domestic coursework, individualized study, co-curricular activities, and study abroad (The Language Flagship).

The Advanced Russian Listening and Speaking course is placed strategically at the end of a carefully structured Russian Flagship curriculum, although the course is open to any student with at least Intermediate High-level proficiency. Students in the Russian Flagship come to this spring-semester course with preparation in media literacy after having taken at least one of two semesters in a required two-semester sequence in the history of Russian culture, which includes readings from a variety of sources and genres on Russian history and culture; students in that culture sequence examine a variety of news sources and give weekly mini-presentations of news topics of their choosing from Russian-language media. The culture sequence, revised significantly since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, encourages the development of critical perspectives on official narratives and provides tools for analyzing news sources.[2] With this preparation, most students come to the Advanced Listening and Speaking course with a strong knowledge of the complex and constantly changing Russian-language media landscape, an eye for propaganda and politically charged rhetoric, and experience synthesizing information from disparate sources. In addition, Russian Flagship students in the Advanced Listening and

[1] I am deeply grateful to the anonymous reviewers of this article for their insights and helpful suggestions.

[2] The two-semester culture course sequence was developed in 2010 by Galina Lapina; since 2018 it has been taught and redesigned by Sara Karpukhin.

Speaking course will likely have taken a fall-semester Senior Capstone Course in Russian Literature and Culture, which focuses on reading, discussion, and writing primarily on literary texts in their cultural contexts.[3] The positioning of the Senior Capstone Course in the fall semester is designed to focus student attention on reading literary texts, writing, and discussion skills in preparation for the proficiency exams that play a role in the admissions process for the capstone academic-year Russian Overseas Flagship program in Almaty, Kazakhstan.[4]

As a result of this curricular design, the Advanced Russian Listening and Speaking course is often the last Russian language course that undergraduate students take either prior to participation in the Russian Overseas Flagship program or, if students do not participate in that program, prior to their graduation. It is thus ideally positioned to provide students with opportunities to interpret, discuss, reflect on, and present narratives. This course also provides students with ways to synthesize knowledge they had acquired throughout their Russian studies, to interpret and provide spoken narratives on various topics while also focusing on their listening skills through Russian-language media, and to present on and participate in discussions of major events, figures, and themes in late Soviet and post-Soviet history. It focuses on issues of primary importance to Russian speakers today.

3. The role of narratives

Why narratives in particular? The simplest reason is that narratives provide models for students striving toward Advanced-level proficiency. Narration in all major time frames is among the indicators of Advanced-level proficiency as defined by the ACTFL Guidelines. Learners in this course hear examples of narration from which they can take models to formulate their own Advanced-level discourse, following Shekhtman's notion of "islands" (Shekhtman et al., 2002, p. 121), to be explained below. Narratives also provide students with a framework for interpretation, comparison, and analysis at the Advanced level, a means to develop their interpretative skills by focusing on elements in a story and comparing

[3] This repeatable course is taught by various faculty; the instructor selects the topic for each iteration.

[4] The Russian Overseas Flagship program, which takes place at Al-Farabi Kazakh National University, is administered by American Councils for International Education.

elements of various stories on the same topic or by the same interlocutor. As will be demonstrated in this article, tasks based on interpretation of parallel narratives challenge students to detect elements present in one version of a story but missing from another, and to compare various people's versions of one event, phenomenon, or historical period. These interpretation skills lay the groundwork for future attainment of Superior-level discourse in analyzing historical events on a broader scale, as Superior-level speakers must be able to provide abstract or hypothetical arguments and support them with concrete evidence.

In addition, narratives within the context of interviews provide students with material for the analysis of discourse in the give-and-take inherent in interviews. As De Fina and Georgakopoulou write, "Narratives told within interviews are clear examples of co-constructed texts since interviewers often try to get respondents to develop certain parts of their stories either by asking for elaboration or by prompting evaluations of events and characters. […] Narrators often change the course of their stories because of interview questions and interruptions, they provide orientation details when asked to do so, and negotiate the meaning of experiences with interviewers." (De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2012, p. 96) As will be shown below, students are taught to focus on ways in which interlocutors take turns, pose and answer (or avoid answering) questions, interrupt and resist interruption, argue, flatter, and so forth. Observation and interpretation of these discourse strategies constitute a first step toward future deployment of these strategies. Analysis of such discourse strategies can also open windows into culture through comparison, as students are taught to note differences between discourse strategies familiar to them and unfamiliar discourse strategies in such situations as interruptions, objections, arguments in a formal register, and expressions of gender and status relations between interlocutors.

Finally, narratives can serve as a mechanism for student agency and reflection, contributing to a student-centered learning environment (Martin & Nuss, 2023). They provide students in the context of a course at the end of their undergraduate studies, prior to an academic-year study abroad experience, or as part of their graduate studies – all major markers in their lives – with opportunities to reflect on their own identities and future paths. In discussing reasons for the "narrative turn" in social sciences research, De Fina and Georgakopoulou write that "the

assumption here is that narrative uniquely affords the analyst a glimpse of how people construct a sense of self" (De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2012, p. 160). In observing how major historical or media figures narrate their own sense of self at decisive moments in their lives, and in history, and in comparing narratives by such figures across time, or across a variety of genres, students can come to their own conclusions about these biographies and historical events, drawing on their own prior studies. At the same time, as they reflect about turning points in the lives of those they observe, students are prompted to reflect on their own studies, turning points, and future paths. Narratives can inspire students to ask big questions by observing how others ask and answer them.

4. Course learning outcomes and strategies for proficiency development

Since students come to the course with a fairly wide range of proficiency levels, with some students at Intermediate High aiming to cross the Advanced threshold and others with solidly Advanced Mid-level proficiency ready to develop their interpretative skills, and even speaking skills, toward the Superior level, the Course Learning Outcomes must encompass this range. Students are assessed according to their own proficiency baseline and their ability to progress from that starting point, according to principles of differentiated instruction (Martin & Nuss, 2023, pp. 195–197, 199). The baseline is established either through previous proficiency testing or with an internal (advisory) Oral Proficiency Interview conducted at the beginning of the semester to assess speaking, and through in-class and homework performance early in the course to assess listening. Course Learning Outcomes are structured mainly around the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines for the Advanced level, with forays into Superior-level analysis for those students prepared to aim toward that level; the World-Readiness Standards for Learning Languages (National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project, 2015); and around principles of media literacy, critical thinking, and oral and written communication and analysis. From the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines come the course Learning Objectives to read or listen to, interpret, and analyze Russian-language media sources on recent history and current events; to discuss this material in paragraph-length discourse in the past and present, and as relevant, in the future, including possible consequences of current events; to

describe news-making figures; to compare and analyze various sources; and to present on topics of interest and respond to peers' questions at the Advanced level. The World-Readiness Standard for Connections is reflected in the Learning Outcome to apply knowledge of historical and current events to each student's discipline. The Standards underlie other Learning Outcomes as well: students engage in Communication in interpretative, interpersonal, and presentational modes; relate products and particularly practices to cultural perspectives (Cultures); and make Comparisons of language and cultural practices to their own (National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project, 2015). Principles of media literacy and critical thinking are inherent in the interpretations, comparisons, and analysis required in the course Learning Outcomes. Because this is a 500-level course, Course Learning Outcomes do not differentiate graduate- and undergraduate-level instruction; the course was designed with both levels in mind, and the individualized approach to assessment takes into account students' academic preparation as well as their proficiency level (Martin & Nuss, 2023).

The course works on the principle of alternation between the development of top-down and bottom-up strategies (Paesani et al., 2016, pp. 141-142) in interpreting information through pre-viewing, viewing, and post-viewing activities. Students develop interpretative abilities through instruction in listening strategies and extensive practice, and they work to improve their speaking proficiency through tasks designed to develop skills in narration, description, and analysis, involving reconstruction of speakers' arguments and formulation of their own; thus, Learning Outcomes are focused on Advanced-level skills but enable students to venture into Superior-level tasks if they are able. Since one of the features of Advanced-level discourse is the ability to compare, students are presented with various narratives on the lives of key figures in recent Russian history that allow them to compare perspectives, the life of one figure at different periods, and the effects of political and, ultimately, historical events on the course of these figures' lives. This invites students not only to compare, but to synthetize various perspectives and come to their own conclusions. Throughout the semester, students acquire greater knowledge of the figures and periods they study; this knowledge provides them with more material to draw on for top-down processing.

Bottom-up processing, on the other hand, gradually changes throughout each unit and throughout the course, as students acquire vocabulary relevant to each topic and are able to focus on interpreting, processing, and employing larger chunks or "islands" (Shekhtman et al., 2002, p. 121) of speech. Shekhtman describes an island as a "very well memorized, much practiced, or frequently used monologue." He notes that native speakers also make use of "islands," which can take the form of well-rehearsed "opening lines," "formulas for expressing certain positions or conceptions," or stories that become more polished through frequent use (Shekhtman et al., 2002, p. 121). In an Advanced-level course on listening and speaking students have the dual task of noticing such formulas and set phrases used by the speakers in the videos they watch, and of adopting (and adapting) these chunks of speech for their own use as "islands"; these "islands" help students internalize and expand vocabulary and move from Intermediate-level chains of sentences to the paragraph-length discourse expected in Advanced-level speech.

5. Selection of topics and materials: Intersecting narratives and genres

The course was designed to enable students to interpret, analyze, and discuss audio and video material on thematic areas likely to be of importance to students in Russian area studies, international studies, and related disciplines: recent history (since perestroika, more recently moved back to the late pre-perestroika period), current events, politics, foreign policy, economics, healthcare, and culture. That said, a course on media must by its very nature change with each iteration. Selection of course materials is based on the criteria of comprehensibility (within the students' Zone of Proximal Development, following Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86) for students at or close to the Advanced level; relevance to students of various majors; diversity in background, identity or voice, gender, accent, and speaking style of the speaker, and of register (formality vs. informality) of the speech; and usefulness in enabling students to develop the vocabulary needed to discuss events in the general topic areas listed above. Since February 2022 two new selection criteria have been introduced: accessibility of video sources in the face of media sanctions and growing censorship, and the avoidance of material that could be traumatizing to students, such as war footage or highly offensive language. Because the course is modular, its flexible structure allows for changes to reflect contemporary events in

countries where Russian is among the dominant languages: from elections and election fraud, to transitions of power, to COVID-19 and healthcare systems, to changes in media and the effects of censorship and propaganda, to economics, foreign policy, and most recently, the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine and its consequences. Students work primarily with authentic materials, with the exception of some semi-authentic materials at the beginning of major units in the form of listening comprehension tasks and vocabulary-building exercises from a three-volume media textbook series, Larisa Moskvitina's «В мире новостей» [In the World of News]. Even while some of the texts from that (and, indeed, any) textbook become outdated with time, the vocabulary and collocations remain relevant, and students are trained to focus on generic clichés used in discussions of politics and election results, foreign policy, and economics, and to integrate these set collocations into their own speech as appropriate – to build their own "islands."

The course focuses on narratives told by and about figures in contemporary Russian history, politics, and media through a cross-section of genres, from documentary film to interviews, debates, news broadcasts, speeches, and lectures. Students interpret narratives from these genres and acquire knowledge to construct their own narratives about key figures in contemporary Russian history and media, including political leaders (Mikhail Gorbachev, Boris Yeltsin, Vladimir Putin, Volodymyr Zelensky), opposition figures (Boris Nemtsov, Irina Khakamada, Mikhail Khodorkovsky, Alexei Navalny, and others), media figures (such as Vladimir Pozner, Leonid Parfyonov, Evgeniia Albats, Iurii Dud', and Natalia Sindeeva), scholars (such as economist and geographer Natalia Zubarevich), and documentary film directors (Marina Goldovskaya, Vladimir Kara-Murza, Vitalii Mansky). The principle of spiraling underlies the course structure, as students gather and synthesize knowledge about figures and events by seeing the same person in different genres and by seeking out answers to various questions on historical events, politics, economics, and societal issues through various media.

Documentary films on the lives of two different politicians, Mikhail Gorbachev and Boris Nemtsov, provide examples of varied perspectives for students, and of the development of skills in top-down and bottom-up processing and synthesis of information. Toward the beginning of the course, after an introductory unit from Moskvitina on media vocabulary,

students watch Leonid Parfyonov's 2011 documentary on Gorbachev and perestroika, «Он пришёл дать нам волю» [He Came to Bring Us Freedom], made when Gorbachev was 80 years old. This film provides students with an overview of perestroika and of Gorbachev's life, from his childhood to his life after leaving office on 25 December 1991. For homework the students are assigned general content questions to answer in Russian, with the task of drafting their responses for class, refining them through class discussion, and turning in their revised answers by the end of the day. Content questions at first focus student attention on the development of bottom-up processing skills: recording dates, places, events, words spoken at specific instances, such as the specific words Gorbachev used upon his resignation. Questions also request brief narratives, for example to retell the story told in the film about Gorbachev's meeting with Leonid Brezhnev, as orchestrated by Iurii Andropov, as well as Parfyonov's narration of Gorbachev's resignation. Questions also address more complicated tasks, including one of the most complicated questions of all: Gorbachev's response to questions about the collapse of the USSR. Class discussion both provides students with opportunities to discuss their draft responses to these questions in small groups and then with the entire class, and provides an opportunity for development of bottom-up processing skills in listening. For example, the opening scene from Parfyonov's film, lasting 1.30 minutes, is shown in class without captioning. The event depicted is Gorbachev's impromptu first meeting with people on a Leningrad square. Students are asked to listen first for responses to basic W questions on the event: where it took place (with details as specific as possible), on what date, what was considered unusual about it, and how Soviet citizens learned about it. Then students are charged with the task of figuring out exactly what Gorbachev said to the crowd, what they asked of him (according to Parfyonov's retelling), and Gorbachev's response (recorded and conveyed directly in the film). Students first compare their responses in small groups before responding in the whole class group. After these tasks, focused on bottom-up processing, students are asked to summarize this first scene. The same kind of in-class exercise is then conducted for a slightly later scene in the film, on Gorbachev's advertisement for Pizza Hut, made in order to raise funds for his foundation. Here the task is easier for students, because the acoustics are more favorable and the articulation of participants in the

ad clearer. Students fill in the blanks to complete actors' sentences in the ad, compare their responses, and discuss them with the class. Students learn through these in-class activities how to listen for word roots, words, collocations, and sentences, after a pre-viewing discussion of the larger context. Given that it is possible for students to watch YouTube videos with captioning, students learn through in-class tasks without subtitles that they can obtain information by listening for details, while also accessing their global knowledge of events. Similar in-class activities are assigned for other scenes in the film with increasingly complicated narratives, including the above-mentioned meeting with Brezhnev, Gorbachev's election by the Politburo and the circumstances around that election, events leading to the collapse of the Soviet Union, Gorbachev's resignation, and Parfyonov's depiction of Gorbachev's departure from office. By this time students have moved from several-word fill-ins in class to a dictation task involving Gorbachev's resignation speech. Students acquire historical information that enables them to accumulate knowledge for top-down processing as well; for some students, this film provides their first exposure to some of the events leading to the collapse of the Soviet Union, while for others, this film supplements knowledge they have already acquired through courses in Russian history or politics. Although the information in one documentary film is limited, it provides students, in video form, with some basic information on perestroika and the fall of the Soviet Union which establishes a basis for further discussion of contemporary Russian history and foreign policy.

Students are then assigned a later documentary film on Gorbachev, Vitalii Mansky's «Горбачёв. Рай» [Gorbachev. Heaven], released in 2020, when Gorbachev was approaching 90. The film begins where the Parfyonov film had left off, in the state dacha where Gorbachev lived in retirement. Students are also assigned two interviews with the director of the film, one prior to viewing, with Timur Olevsky, and one after viewing, with Natalia Sindeeva. This broadened focus provides students not only with perspectives on Gorbachev almost a decade apart, with the task to compare the two depictions, but also, through the two interviews, with insights into the process of making a documentary film, the complications around showing the later film in a starkly changed political atmosphere and censorship landscape in Russia, and the interactions between interviewer and interviewee. Students hear Mansky behind camera in the

documentary film, repeatedly asking questions which Gorbachev refuses to answer directly, and see Mansky with the tables turned, in the role of interviewee, both talking about the role of the film director and avoiding responses to some questions in the politically charged atmosphere of 2021. This film does not lend itself as easily to bottom-up processing exercises, as the pace of the film is deliberately slow, reflecting the late stage in Gorbachev's life; however, it allows students to join the director in making comparisons between Gorbachev and Putin, and to ask with the director and other viewers what freedom means to Gorbachev when his movement is restricted, to observe ways in which Gorbachev avoids more persistent questions about the fall of the Soviet Union than were posed by Parfyonov in the previous film, and to return to Parfyonov's question about whether perestroika and Gorbachev himself succeeded or failed. The film allows students to interpret varying narratives on Gorbachev in different political contexts, as related by various people (journalists, film directors, other figures in the films), to make discoveries about the work of the film directors, and to draw conclusions about changes in the political and cultural landscape. These increasingly abstract questions allow students to challenge themselves, both in class discussion, supported by content questions assigned for homework, and later in preparing for oral exams. Those students able to make forays into Superior-level discourse acquire material to do so; those still comfortable only in Advanced-level discourse have ample material to work with in describing, narrating, and making comparisons. By watching the two interviews with Mansky, students are able to observe and analyze pragmatic and cultural issues as well: how interviewers interrupt, object, coax information out of their guest, and share their own insights, which in turn provide further material for comparing and contrasting viewpoints. Students can also compare differences in gender dynamics when the interviewer is male or female and the interviewee is male. Mansky compliments Sindeeva on her appearance at the beginning of the interview, and in class we discuss that compliment, Sindeeva's response to it, and the cultural implications of the exchange – an important point in preparing students for study abroad in Russian-speaking settings. Thus, the combination of documentary films about the same subject, nine years apart, and interviews about the making and release of the second documentary film, provides students with opportunities for analysis and comparison of narratives, discussion

of varying points of view (for example, on Yeltsin and the transfer of power before and after his time in office), and discussions of pragmatics and culture. Students by this point have material for discussion of larger questions: about the fall of the Soviet Union, about transfers of power, about Russians' and others' views of Gorbachev and perestroika, and about Russia today.

At the end of the course in 2023, students were assigned Iurii Dud''s interview with Leonid Parfyonov in Bulgaria and thus were able to reexamine questions on journalism, documentary filmmaking, censorship, and the position of the Russian journalist abroad during wartime. Students can draw on the varied perspectives they had seen on the work and interview responses of a documentary film director at the beginning of the course in analyzing the interview with Parfyonov, when, as in the case with Mansky, the tables are turned. Students have the intellectual satisfaction of returning to topics they had discussed before with more linguistic tools and greater knowledge at their disposal.

Students are presented with a similar complex of sequenced tasks related to the life and political activity of Russian opposition figure Boris Nemtsov. Unlike Gorbachev, Nemtsov is an unfamiliar figure to some students prior to this course. Students watch Vladimir Kara-Murza's 2016 documentary film *Nemtsov*, and then a portion (or, as an option for later assignments, the entirety of) the 2016 film «Слишком свободный человек» [The Man Who Was Too Free], directed by Vera Krichevskaia. After watching these films, students also learn about Nemtsov through an interview with Russian politician Irina Khakamada made for RAILS, the Russian Advanced Interactive Learning Series created at the University of Wisconsin – Madison (Rifkin et al., 2006). By this point in the course, students are prepared to compare perspectives on Nemtsov from the point of view of the many people interviewed for both films, including Khakamada, and to retell and construct narratives about Nemtsov's life and career, about the role of media in Nemtsov's rise and fall, and about transitions to and from power. By the end of this unit, students are invited to make comparisons of several different narratives about the circumstances surrounding Putin's rise to power, to synthesize that information, and to draw their own conclusions. Those who wish to research the topic of Nemtsov's life and role in Russia further have rich material in the form of many interviews with Nemtsov posted on YouTube. Students are

also tasked with learning about Kara-Murza's life and political activity, about his role in U.S. politics, and about his 2022 arrest in Russia, and thus expand their views on the role of a documentary filmmaker and the relationship between documentary filmmaking and politics.

As noted above, the interview is a particularly useful genre for students, in that they can observe and analyze not only the creation of a narrative, but its "co-construction" through interaction between the interviewer and interviewee (De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2012, p. 96). An excellent example of this is Evgeniia Albats's interview with Mikhail Khodorkovsky in Berlin soon after his release from prison, «17 часов на свободе» [17 Hours After Release]. In this interview students see examples of narration, spontaneous additions to the narrative, requests by the interviewer for clarification, devices for interrupting and for refusing interruption, reactions and remarks by the interviewer, and objections to the interviewer's line of questioning. In-class tasks have them focus on these discourse features in selected excerpts from the interview. As the narrator provides information in parts, in co-construction with the interviewer, students face the challenge of reconstructing and retelling the complicated narrative of Khodorkovsky's release from prison, and of reconstructing the timeline of events. As they work in small groups in class to discuss their answers to questions on the content of the interview, students negotiate meaning as they clarify their responses, compare them with others', and come to an account as close as possible to what they heard. In one iteration of this course, students were also assigned Ksenia Sobchak's interview with Khodorkovsky, conducted somewhat later than the Albats interview, so that students could compare his answers, no longer as spontaneous as they were during the Albats interview, and his manner with the interviewer. In summative assignments, such as oral examinations, students are asked to retell Khodorkovsky's narrative, and to provide clarifications and more supporting details from the interview. In some iterations of the course, students have been assigned more recent interviews with Khodorkovsky, either as a homework assignment or as an option for take-home essay exams.

As the unit on political opposition progresses, students begin to make connections between the political lives and fates of various opposition figures, from Nemtsov to Khakamada to Khodorkovsky to Navalny: their impacts on each other, their descriptions of each other,

their depictions in Russian-language media. Students are asked to narrate events from the lives of these political figures, to describe them and the points of view of those who describe them in interviews and to compare those descriptions, to compare the circumstances of their political careers, and then to move further into larger discussions of the fate of perestroika, the nature of political transitions, the rise of Putin, the role of political opposition in and outside Russia and the fates of opposition figures, and the role of state media, independent media, and censorship. They are invited to engage in discussion of politics and journalism in other countries, and to make comparisons, if they feel prepared to do so. In other words, they are asked gradually to move from Advanced-level narration, description, and comparison into the Superior-level territory of larger, more abstract questions and synthesis.

Throughout the course, student responses to content questions assigned as homework provide material for work on bottom-up processing tasks in class. Brief excerpts from assigned interviews and films are examined in class to check students' recognition of word roots, recognition and development of vocabulary, collocations, and clichés used in various genres of formal discourse. The beginning of each unit focuses on vocabulary, which students then hear in authentic discourse and are asked to employ in their responses to questions. A notable example of this integration of vocabulary into larger descriptions and narratives is in the economics unit, as most students come to the course with limited vocabulary on, and sometimes knowledge of, economics. Natalia Zubarevich's interviews on the economic situation in Russia provide excellent examples of authentic speech using vocabulary students had been exposed to in the vocabulary exercises from Volume 2 of the Moskvitina textbook – and an example of an expert speaking in Russia after February 2022. The economics unit challenges students to integrate narration and description in past, present, and future tenses in relating information on economic processes from interviews with Zubarevich – information to which they may have limited access for top-down processing from other sources. Students are invited to compare what they learn from interviews with Zubarevich to what they may read or hear from news media from sources in other languages, including English; in this broader context, the much-used phrase «пара*лл*ельный импорт» [parallel import] in the face of sanctions, which they hear in

her interviews, takes on new meaning for them. In this unit they learn more about the economy of the Russian Federation, and are invited to discuss the interrelationship of foreign policy and economic questions (Connections in the *World-Readiness Standards*).

6. Assessment

Assessment takes an individualized, student-centered approach (see Martin & Nuss, 2023, p. 199). Because this course covers a wide variety of topics, and because students come to the course with various academic backgrounds and proficiency levels, students are provided with choices in summative assignments: options on written essay exams, a question to choose from the array of questions assigned in advanced for oral exams (others are chosen by lottery, «по билетам», from a list of questions distributed in advance), and most notably for presentations. Students are invited to give a presentation or presentations (the number varies according to the number of students in a class) on a topic of their choice within the broad larger topics of the course units. Students have given presentations on topics from history to culture to economics to military subjects to language. They are required to turn in their topics at least one week in advance of their presentations and, upon the advice of Cynthia Martin (personal communication), to turn in their slides at least two days before their presentations, so that their slides can be edited for accuracy. Students are instructed to use vocabulary acquired in the course appropriately, as much as possible. Students in the audience are required to ask questions, and general questions on the topics of student presentations sometimes appear on unit tests. PDFs of student presentations are posted in the course management site, Canvas, so that students can review their peers' presentations in advance of tests, and for their reference.

Assessment in the course has changed since COVID-19 and the reflections about what we are assessing and why, prompted in part by campus and national discussions of "ungrading" (Blum, 2020). The course used to feature more in-class unit tests featuring fill-ins, mini-dictations, multiple-choice and true-false questions on content, and short-answer questions. Since COVID-19 and the rise of online instruction, assessments have provided more options and involved more global skills, such as essay-writing based on a choice of video interviews on a

certain subject or on scenes from an assigned documentary film. Course assessment has been inspired by Cynthia Martin's discussions with students about development of independent learning strategies and our role as instructors in guiding student learning. Martin suggests we ask students what they need from us, in order to help them develop agency as independent learners. Our assessments, she notes, should focus on each student's progress; grades should not reflect one abstract standard for all students (Martin, 2021, pp. 337-338; Martin & Nuss, 2023, p. 199). This is the most logical way to assess students who come to an advanced course with various proficiency levels, language backgrounds, and language learning strengths and areas for improvement; indeed, the more advanced the course level, the greater the differences among students in language background (such as study abroad and summer immersion study) and proficiency levels (Martin & Nuss, 2023, p. 199).

7. Journalism and censorship before and since February 2022

The course begins and ends with discussions of media and censorship. The final assignments are kept open on the syllabus, in order to respond to student requests and interests, but there is always a final unit on journalism, most recently in the form of interviews by Iurii Dud' with Vladimir Pozner on that subject (2017) and, as noted above, with Leonid Parfyonov (2022). By the end of the course students are able to draw on the documentary films, interviews, speeches, and press conferences to synthesize narratives from the course, to discuss the interrelationships between figures and topics studied, to ask and answer larger questions about history, politics, opposition, foreign policy, economics, and culture. This course aims to help them interpret and then develop narratives relevant to their own learning trajectories; to increase their knowledge in areas relevant to their academic, personal, and professional goals; to develop their listening and learning strategies; to make progress on their path toward professional-level proficiency in Russian; and to learn metacognitive strategies and reflect on their own learning. Students thus go abroad, graduate, and continue their academic and professional paths more knowledgeable, more aware of manifestations of censorship, and better prepared to interpret and analyze information in spoken form. They also learn strategies to help them interact with others in Russian, particularly in more formal registers, and to present their research and

opinions in a variety of settings. They can interpret and participate in interactions in Russian with greater confidence and greater cultural understanding, no matter what professional path they take.

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