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### Book Review: **Любимые советские фильмы на уроке РКИ**

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**Leo Will, Wolfgang Stadler, and Irma Eloff, eds. *Authenticity Across Languages and Cultures: Themes of Identity in Foreign Language Teaching and Learning*. Bristol: Multilingual Matters, 2023. 296 pp.**

The word “authenticity” and its derivatives have become almost a catch-all in language pedagogy. While language teachers strive to use authentic materials in their teaching and attempt to prepare students for authentic communicative situations, few teachers of Russian are aware of the connection between personal and cultural authenticity, as the term itself is not clearly defined in the field of Russian as a Foreign Language (RFL) and is often seen as self-explanatory. The authors of the current volume explore the conceptualization of the word “authenticity” in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) more broadly, bringing together authors from different languages; however, this review will focus on the work’s potential contributions to RFL.

The authors of this volume raise extremely important questions for our field by exploring topics that have long been the subject of discussion in ESL (see the chapter by Leo Will and Richard S. Pinner), but not yet fully introduced into the world of Russian instruction. In the foreword to the volume, Claire Kramsch states that the term “authenticity,” in our age of digital communication, is in crisis. Today, when English is the global lingua franca connecting the world through the media outlets, the understanding of what is “authentic” in SLA is problematic. The goal of this volume is to build transcultural connection and to envisage what authenticity is in the contemporary multilingual world. The three parts of this volume each cover a different aspect of authenticity as a notion: part one focuses on “Authenticity and Language Teaching,” part two – “Authenticity and Identity,” and part three explores the connections between “Authenticity and Aesthetics.” Each part consists of four to six articles, which cover a diverse range of contexts and languages, like English, German, Afrikaans, and Russian.

The main benefit for RFL in this volume is the topic of native-speakerism, an issue which presents a fundamental epistemological

challenge that needs to be reconsidered as the field rapidly changes. In the first part of the volume, the authors of the chapter “Что такое аутентичность? The Concept(s) of Authenticity in Russian as a Foreign Language,” Wolfgang Stadler and Anna Dreher, ask the following questions: “What role does the Russian native speaker play? Is he [sic] still the role model we have emulated and striven for in teaching, with tasks and language use situations as close to the Russian culture and the Russian environment as possible?” (p. 18). Stadler and Dreher challenge the notion that an authentic source is one produced by a native speaker for other native speakers, arguing against the idea of unaccented speech. Stadler and Dreher emphasize the fact that such a view of authenticity creates an idealized image of the Russian native speaker and promotes the idea of monolingual native-speakerism, which does not correspond to the realities of Russian language usage. The idealized Russian native speaker presented in Russian language textbooks and in Russian language classrooms creates an illusion that fails to explain the complexity of the cultures where Russian is spoken. This chapter takes a step forward in promoting the idea of a wider Russian-speaking world. However, some questions remain unanswered: for example, what is authenticity in the context of the post-Soviet Russophone space? How does the understanding of authenticity change in a given political situation, such as in the context of the Russian invasion of Ukraine? Responses to these important questions would be a great contribution in a future study.

The authors in the volume frequently noted the growing importance of translanguaging, which they see as honoring all the languages to which a multilingual person has access. Deconstructing the monolingual native speaker, the authors of the volume encourage the idea of the multicompetent language user. Maria Bondarenko’s “Rethinking Authenticity in SLA from the Perspective of Cognitive Authenticity” presents a different view of authenticity, one that is generated within the classroom. In contrast to a general understanding of authenticity as something that is brought to the classroom from outside, Bondarenko argues that students and teachers are active agents in the production of authenticity. Teachers can use their identities as a pedagogical resource and, through the act of self-representation, can establish authentic connections with their students. A teacher’s identity as a pedagogue enables “authenticating” learning. Bondarenko encourages acknowledging the bilingual identity of the

classroom actors. For North American teachers in RFL who are non-Russians and/or not originally from Russia, a bi- or even trilingual identity can promote authenticity within the classroom better than solely focusing on the Russian aspect of their linguistic self.

The question of legitimacy and identity, essential for RFL, is addressed in the book's second part, "Authenticity and Identity." Irene Heidt, in her chapter "When Moral Authority Speaks: Empirical Insights into Issues of Authenticity and Identity in Multilingual Educational Settings" explores the issue of "ownership" of language. Heidt's research examines the experiences of finding an authentic self in the context of multilingualism. Heidt's study shows how our identities are translated into other languages and how they are (re-)shaped in a linguistic and social context. In the age of globalization, Heidt concludes, the notions of the native speaker and authenticity must be reconsidered. The frame of reference is no longer the language of some idealized native speaker, but navigation within normative discursive knowledge systems to express the most authentic sense of self. This approach has direct implications for reframing authenticity in RFL: the normative view of the authenticity of monolingual Russian native speakers leaves the diversity of authentic Russophone voices unrecognized, yet enormous effort will be required to change the existing discourse.

Overall, this volume significantly expands the definition of authenticity, and its criticism of native-speakerism, which still prevails in the field of RFL, is particularly valuable. The theoretical, philosophical, and practical approaches presented in the book around the conceptualization of authenticity provide a well-rounded picture of the state of SLA. Particularly valuable is the connection between different languages addressed in the volume. Given our global interconnectedness, the correlation between identity, language(s), and authenticity in manifold contexts is a complex phenomenon. The authors of this volume repeatedly emphasize the all-encompassing nature of authenticity, which bears deeper analysis in the context of the Russian language. The volume advocates moving away from a homogeneous view of authenticity toward a transcultural one. It is a great contribution to the field of SLA and provides hope for much-needed change in RFL.

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**Carmen Herrero and Marta F. Suarez, eds., *Teaching Languages with Screen Media: Pedagogical Reflections*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2023. 280 pages.**

Herrero and Suarez's edited volume *Teaching Languages with Screen Media* explores a range of innovative approaches to incorporating screen media in foreign language instruction. Although none of the authors' contributions discuss teaching Russian as a foreign language, the book offers a broad theoretical overview of screen studies as well as case studies drawing from diverse contexts (teaching Spanish, French, and English in secondary and university-level education) that can inform the teaching of any modern foreign language.

As the editors note in their introduction, screens are thoroughly enmeshed in the fabric of everyday life; they mediate how we work, learn, communicate with one another, and seek entertainment. The expanding ubiquity and versatility of screens at our fingertips continues to qualitatively change how we interact with media, creating new digital spaces in which the consumer plays the role of curator and producer of shareable, personalized, and immersive content. "Screen media" thus encompasses not only traditional audiovisual genres (such as television and film) but also a "growing taxonomy of Web 2.0 audiovisual subgenres" that ranges from user-generated online video blogs, tutorials, and reaction videos to video games and social media (p. 8). As more than one author in this volume points out, the COVID-19 pandemic has made it all too clear to educators and learners alike that there is an urgent need to understand how to adapt language learning to this new media landscape.

Nevertheless, the first part of the book, on the research and practice of what the editors label "entertainment media," primarily focuses on approaches to using more traditional audiovisual media, such as films and TV shows, in foreign language education. In Chapter 2, Herrero, Suarez and Sánchez-Requena provide a thorough discussion of existing scholarship on screen media and "screen culture" from a diverse set of fields, supplementing the overview in the book's introduction. The authors point out the many opportunities for "exploiting screen media in language education" brought forth by recent technological innovations and identify five roles (or "functions") that screen media can play in the language classroom: they can help develop communicative language

competences, support the acquisition of sociocultural knowledge, develop media literacy, serve as core content in culture modules, and be incorporated into cultural activities. Herrero, Suarez and Sánchez-Requena also offer guidelines for selecting and integrating screen media and designing project-based activities, including a helpful template in the appendix that can be used to assess audiovisual materials. Among the wide-ranging assessment criteria, the authors discuss the quality and complexity of the language in the audiovisual text, types of competences it develops, the appropriateness of its thematic content, the technological capabilities of the learning environment, and copyright considerations.

In Chapter 3, Herrero addresses the important question of how to prepare educators to incorporate film into L2 curriculum design by examining two case studies, the Teacher Training Project and the New Approaches to Transmedia and Language Pedagogy Project. She includes another comprehensive overview of scholarship in language pedagogy with regard to new screen media, noting that while educators and educational institutions adopt multimodal practices that correspond to the demand for digital and film literacy, screen media remain underutilized in comparison to more traditional oral and written texts. Herrero concludes that integrating new media “requires nurturing critical prosumers, who can understand the cultural references and create and share screen media artefacts” (p. 63). In a similar vein, in Chapter 5, Pérez Nieto and Llop Naya present a useful case study regarding how to increase Generation Z learners’ motivation while consolidating specific aspects of the target language through film and TV series, providing a sample lesson and guidelines on how to solicit student feedback.

As the editors outline in the introduction, the chapters in Part 2 explore the intersection between foreign language pedagogy and what they term “interactive screen media.” In Chapter 7, Veróz González and Díaz Alarcón share an innovative collaborative research project in which students designed an international tourism fair. In the following chapter, Oaknín describes a case study of a project that is similarly interactive, but still oriented toward more traditional media—translating film reviews. She offers practical guidelines on how to employ this in any language instruction setting. In Chapter 9, Bobkina and Domínguez Romero discuss social media, an important example of new screen media used in foreign language instruction. In their case study among university-level

learners of English for Specific Purposes, they highlight how social media sites such as Facebook allow learners to be “prosumers,” both producing and consuming content in collaborative context; however, the authors also note potential drawbacks, including the risk of information overload and social media addiction.

Despite the helpful theoretical considerations and practice guidelines provided in the introduction and in Chapter 2, the book contains relatively few examples of how educators might incorporate some of the latest developments in screen media. One significant absence that comes to mind is the rise of the app TikTok, currently massively popular among members of Generation Z, on which users create, share, and modify exclusively short-form content. The app’s video format constraints encourage consumption habits that would likely present a new set of challenges in any educational context. The same could be said of the widespread popularity of video gaming or about the immersive virtual worlds made possible by new AR/VR technologies, both of which are discussed only briefly. As the editors suggest in their introduction, the latter could produce some kind of alternative to certain real experiences students would encounter during a study abroad program, granting an accessible immersive environment to students who cannot visit the country (or countries) of the language they study. For many of today’s students of Russian, this may seem an attractive option indeed. These shortcomings notwithstanding, *Teaching Languages with Screen Media* is a welcome addition to the growing literature on integrating digital media into foreign language curricula.

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**Svetlana V. Nuss and Wendy Whitehead Martelle, eds., *Task-Based Instruction for Teaching Russian as a Foreign Language*. London and New York: Routledge. Taylor & Francis Group, 2022. 247 pp.**

This volume stands as an invaluable resource, offering task-based practices beneficial for both novice and experienced instructors of Russian as a second and foreign language. The contributing authors provide excellent examples of classroom activities supplemented with

suggestions on how to design task-based syllabi. It is noteworthy that the team of authors is extraordinarily diverse, encompassing educators from various kinds of educational institutions and engaged in different language teaching formats. This work is of great interest not only to practical teachers, but also to researchers in the realm of second language acquisition, particularly concerning the acquisition of Russian as a second language.

In Chapter 1, the authors and editors of the volume, Svetlana V. Nuss and Wendy Whitehead Martelle, introduce the readers to the foundational aspects of task-based language teaching (TBLT). They shed light on its cyclic nature by drawing connections between TBLT and various other pedagogical concepts. Additionally, they provide an overview of the most critical recent publications that bolster this approach. The chapter introduces several principles that unify the authors of this volume in their understanding of task-based instruction. These principles emphasize the necessity for a meticulous analysis of students' needs, a clear articulation of tasks and expected outcomes of task-based assignments, as well as the preservation of task authenticity in some form. Moreover, they highlight the importance of focusing on students and fostering their interaction with both one another and learning material. At the conclusion of the chapter, Svetlana V. Nuss introduces two key concepts that are central to the entire volume: *systemic mode* (instruction that is structured according to the principles of the task-based approach) and *incremental mode* (where instructors incorporate elements of this approach partially into their course), which delineate the role of task-based practices within the course curriculum.

Chapter 2 presents a review of the research on the acquisition of Russian morphology and discusses its implications for teaching Russian as a foreign or second language. Svetlana V. Nuss addresses the gap between Second Language Acquisition (SLA) research and teaching practice, advocating for a central role of Russian morphology in L2 Russian instruction.

In Chapter 3, Nina Kositsky describes a pedagogical framework designed to tackle the challenges that instructors face when applying TBLT, making it a more practical endeavor for language educators. Instructors will find detailed, step-by-step stages designed to help them internalize the core principles of this approach. To demonstrate a model



TBLT lesson, the author shares the experience of conducting a lesson simulation that utilized an inductive method to introduce the Russian alphabet to a group of language learners with no prior knowledge of Russian.

In Chapter 4, Aleksey Novikov and Valentina Vinokurova argue for incorporating a learner corpus in the task-based teaching of Russian. They delve deeply into the nuances of focused tasks, drawing upon the principles of language-awareness, and introduce Data-Driven Learning (DDL). The authors elucidate how a learner corpus can bridge the gap between the more traditional structure-trapping tasks and innovative DDL tasks. Furthermore, they offer several examples of both types of activities suitable for first-semester learners of Russian. The authors highlight a significant challenge for instructors: even a highly engaging task can overwhelm students if accompanied by complex rubrics or instructions, potentially undermining the intended outcomes of the activity.

Chapter 5 explores the theoretical foundations of task-based methodology, examining a rich collection of literature that underscores the effectiveness of technology-based assignments in both communicative and TBLT classrooms. Such assignments are promising in terms of bolstering vocabulary acquisition and minimizing affective variables. Katie Esser guides readers through the nuances of video-based assignments utilized in an elementary Russian classroom, clearly outlining their task-based objectives, thematic elements, and language targets.

Chapter 6 endeavors to dispel prevalent misconceptions among language educators regarding the unsuitability of TBLT for novice students. Vita V. Kogan and Maria Bondarenko outline specific design strategies that can assist Russian instructors in making tasks accessible for beginners. They propose eleven design principles for developing task-based activities in L2 Russian instruction for learners with low proficiency levels. Particular emphasis is given to the principle of prioritizing authenticity and functionality over mastering a specific skill and refraining from viewing speaking ability as a prerequisite to successfully accomplishing a task. The authors highlight the fundamental role of repetition within task-based activities.

In Chapter 7, the authors characterize the context of teaching and learning Russian in Brazil, along with a discussion on the application of a task-based approach within that region. The authors

provide an intricate description of nine tasks that are commonly utilized in three Brazilian language schools. They also pinpoint the mixed-level nature of groups as a significant challenge encountered during the implementation of TBLT.

Chapter 8 enumerates six major pedagogical principles governing Russian language instruction at Concordia Language Villages (CLV). These principles are brought to life through a series of task-based assignments and are further augmented by the immersive learning environment unique to CLV. To illustrate the intricacies of task-based activities, the authors delve into a detailed account of one of the most extensive tasks in the Russian curriculum: a simulation of immigration to Russia. This immersive simulation encompasses a series of modules that provide deep insights into Russian geography and cultural diversity, along with an exploration of post-Soviet political divides and migration patterns.

In Chapter 9, Ekaterina Burvikova and Yevgeniya Stremova propose a task-based approach to teaching Russian in short-term study abroad courses, specifically targeting students who have not previously engaged with the Russian language. The authors describe a learning model centered on the practical application of survival language skills within a study abroad context.

Chapter 10 is devoted to the study of task-based peer interactions. Dmitrii Pastushenkov introduces a series of five task-based peer interaction activities, systematically categorizing them according to the language proficiency levels of the participants. Furthermore, the author critically analyzes the influence of learners' individual differences on the effectiveness of task-based peer interactions.

In Chapter 11, Evelina Mendelevich unveils the *Kommunalka* project, a virtual space initiative grounded on Google Slides, meticulously designed to facilitate vocabulary acquisition and reinforce repetition amongst intermediate learners. This chapter covers the structure and setup of the online environment, ingeniously transforming typical textbook assignments into engaging role-play tasks. Additionally, the author proposes a potent solution to a prevalent issue identified by numerous Russian language instructors, highlighting the challenges associated with the implementation of TBLT. These challenges notably encompass finding the optimal balance between efficacious grammar instruction and providing ample opportunities for meaningful

communicative practice. To address this, the author advocates for the adoption of a flipped-classroom approach.

In Chapter 12, Snezhana Zheltoukhova elucidates the way task-based activities can be utilized to equip students for global citizenship, particularly within the context of content-based advanced-level language courses. The author unveils a pilot content-centric course aimed at enhancing learners' global competence through academic discussions and creative projects rooted in Il'f and Petrov's insightful travelogue, *One-Store America*. A significant hurdle during the preparatory phase, as highlighted by the author, is the scarcity of learning materials available to Russian teachers.

The editors of this compilation, along with every contributing writer, deserve high praise for their exemplary efforts — efforts that hold the promise of revolutionizing classroom methodologies, including your own teaching practices, and substantially influencing the world language education landscape for students at all levels.

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**Svetlana le Fleming, Susan E. Kay, and Mikhail Vodopyanov.**  
***Colloquial Russian: The Complete Course for Beginners.* Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2023. 399 pages.**

*Colloquial Russian: The Complete Course for Beginners*, now in its fifth edition, has been updated to reflect the diversity of the Russophone world, including modernized language, as well as new characters (whose storylines run through the textbook) “to highlight the diversity of speakers of Russian, both within Russia and beyond” (p. xi). Part of Routledge's Colloquial Series, this traditional textbook is intended for adult learners and students working on their own or with an instructor. *Colloquial Russian* is designed to bring students up to the GCSE level (the British equivalent of the American GED) and includes advanced-level grammar, such as gerunds and participles.

The new 5<sup>th</sup> edition now provides full audio coverage of all textual materials (available on the Routledge companion website and accessible without a password), new images, and more feminine forms in

example grammar sentences and exercises as to present a more “balanced representation of gender” (p. xi). Post-reading comprehension questions are now presented in Russian.

*Colloquial Russian* begins with a preliminary chapter, “Introduction to the Russian Language,” which familiarizes readers with the Cyrillic alphabet and provides explanations on pronunciation, including stress and vowel reduction. A grammar summary, dictionary, and a key to the textbook exercises are included in the back of the book. The bulk of the textbook is organized around twenty thematic chapters covering a wide range of topics. The first nine chapters cover relatively simple topics, such as Типичный день, Семья, Спорт, Любимый отдых, and Праздники, and are intended to be covered in order. Chapters 10-20 focus on more complex topics, such as Российские СМИ, Здравоохранение, Равноправие and Образование, and can be completed in any order, as they cover more complex grammar topics.

Each unit begins with dialogues and short texts, which serve as the backbone of the textbook. The unit texts, which are well-written, are clearly the textbook’s best feature. Not only are they interesting and informative, but they are also indeed written in modernized, colloquial Russian. Fitting with its compact structure, the textbook’s grammatical explanations are clear and concise. The jargon-free explanations are a welcome component; I will likely use some of them as supplementary material in my classes. The textbook’s presentation on verbs of motion, however, is relatively anemic and would need to be supplemented. *Colloquial Russian* moves very quickly, at a pace that would be inappropriate for most of traditional undergraduate students. For example, the prepositional case is presented in the first chapter, when students are presumably still grappling with the Cyrillic alphabet.

Although the authors assert that the 5<sup>th</sup> edition includes new images that “offer learners a refreshed glimpse into Russian life, architecture and culture” (p. xi), each unit includes, on average, one black and white photograph. For visual learners, the dense text with few images will be problematic. Audio tracks to the texts are now available free, online, but are cumbersome to navigate; instead of clearly labeling each audio with its online location within the textbook exercises, the listing key is located at the back of the book. Also, the absence of relevant internet resources could make the textbook come across as isolating to today’s students.

*Colloquial Russian* is heavy on traditional texts, translations, and exercises, but lacks pair or group activities. The exercises are focused, as claimed on the publisher's website, but many come across as rote and irrelevant, with few opportunities for students to talk about themselves and their own lives.

*Colloquial Russian* is compact, efficient, and to the point, but perhaps best suited for observant students who are prepared and equipped to go over the text with a fine-toothed comb. The textbook could be appropriate for individuals working with tutors, and it could serve as a helpful grammar resource for students learning in a classroom setting. In today's age of online open-source textbooks, AI, and YouTube, *Colloquial Russian* presents itself as an artifact from a bygone era.

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**Наталья Кабьяк (2022). *Любимые советские фильмы на уроке РКИ*. Moscow: Flinta. 392 pages.**

*Любимые советские фильмы на уроке РКИ* is the perfect example of the material for the linguo-cultural approach to language learning. The book is designed for Russian as foreign language students at the Advanced Low level of language proficiency and above. The book is built around the exploration of ten popular Soviet movies in the entertainment genre. Each movie is covered in a separate chapter, including the necessary language and culture-related details to promote language acquisition and facilitate comprehension of the cultural references.

Essentially, the book's rationale stems from the fact that even today Soviet movies are still recognized as a popular source of intertextual references for Russian speakers along with other sources, such as proverbs or classical Russian literature. Viewed by millions of people, the Soviet entertainment genre films from the 1960s to the 1980s resonated with their viewers largely because their directors tried to negotiate a balance between audience demands, artistic vision, and state control (e.g., Michaels, 2009; Prokhorov, 2003). For those looking for light entertainment, these movies offer fun visual comedy, while those eager to read between the lines could find clear satire in them (Milić, 2004).

This versatility could potentially explain the fact that the quotations from those movies are still present in various contexts: from political speeches (Weiss, 2016) to internet memes (Wilk, 2022).

Recognizing the importance of culturally rooted allusions in daily Russian, the author of *Любимые советские фильмы на уроке РКИ* offers the students an engaging way of learning the language through culture. The ten movies examined in the book are accessible on the Mosfilm website free of charge and cover various aspects of Soviet history, culture, and daily life:

- 1) Kidnapping, Caucasian Style (1967);
- 2) The Diamond Arm (1969);
- 3) Gentlemen of Fortune (1971);
- 4) Ivan Vasilievich: Back to the Future (1973);
- 5) Unbelievable Adventures of Italians in Russia (1974);
- 6) Office Romance (1977);
- 7) Moscow Does Not Believe in Tears (1980);
- 8) Autumn Marathon (1979);
- 9) The Most Charming and Attractive (1985);
- 10) Where is Enokh located? (1987).

Each chapter of *Любимые советские фильмы на уроке РКИ* offers scaffolded exercises to facilitate comprehension while watching the movie. The students get the necessary background by learning about the film creators, exploring the film title, answering questions about the historical period shown in the film, and reading a short summary of the film. The pre-viewing tasks contain key vocabulary from the film and some word-building activities related to the title. While viewing the movie, the students are asked to note the names of the main characters and identify connections between them. Thus, the students get engaged in an entertaining yet educational listening activity.

The main focus of *Любимые советские фильмы на уроке РКИ* is on post-viewing activities: 1) speaking tasks include a classical discussion through questions and descriptions of the main characters; 2) reading assignments are built on role-playing several dialogues from the movie with intonation practice; 3) numerous vocabulary tasks deal with word-building, phraseology, synonymity, and grammatical

forms; 4) writing tasks that imitate short scenes from the movie, e.g., writing a toast for Shurik to add to his collection. All in all, each chapter provides a framework for advancing all four language skills through the communicative approach.

The textbook's modular structure offers flexibility for the instructors to choose films and tasks which best suit their particular pedagogical objectives. The book is also suitable for self-study as it contains the keys to grammar tasks. The book can be used as a supplement in any Advanced-level course, giving the students an opportunity to start gradually building the competence of using cultural references, a characteristic of the Distinguished level (ACTFL, 2012, p.4). Thus, the book provides not only a fun and entertaining ground for skill building at the targeted level, but also sows important seeds for a much higher level of language proficiency.

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