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**Echoing Their Lives: Teaching Russian Language and Culture Through  
the Music of Vladimir S. Vysotsky**

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**Echoing Their Lives: Teaching Russian Language and Culture Through  
the Music of Vladimir S. Vysotsky**

**by**

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**Dissertation**

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

The University of Texas at Austin

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

**Doctor of Philosophy**

**The University of Texas at Austin**

**May 2008**

## **Dedication**

For my mother who first taught me the value of questioning, and my sister who believed.

## **Acknowledgements**

The grounding and heart of this dissertation were laid long ago when a former teacher and colleague, Dr. Anna V. Orlenko, willingly shared with me her full collection of the music of Vysotsky, in the days before such music was commercially available. There are no words to acknowledge fully the debt I owe her generosity. Without that impetus and her influence, my interest in this area of Russian culture and this dissertation would never have seen fruition.

I wish to express gratitude to my dissertation committee, especially my supervisor, Thomas Garza, without whose guidance in keeping me focused not only on reaching the end of the road, but on acquiring the technical expertise required to navigate it. I would never have completed the dissertation without such guidance, which includes both intellectually challenging classes and stimulating conversations with all members of my committee. The guidance and intellectual challenges fostered by contacts with my committee members, Cynthia Buckley, Elaine Horwitz, John Kolsti, and Gil Rappaport, are, hopefully, reflected in the dissertation.

Without the financial support of the Department of Slavic and Eurasian Studies, FLAS Scholarships and ACTR Summer Program for Russian Language Teachers, much of my research would have been impossible. I offer special appreciation to the staff of The State Cultural Center-Museum (GKTsM) V. S. Vysotsky, in Moscow, Russia, for the

immeasurable help they gave me. Not only did they help direct my search for research materials, provide some original materials, but also guided me to other sources of information and materials which I obtained through the kind offices of their staff. I also express deep gratitude to Dr. Tatiana V. Tsiv'ian, Institute of Slavic and Balkan Studies, Moscow, Russia, who gave additional insights and suggestions about directions for my research.

I owe a great debt to my friends Oksana Lapshina, Tatiana Segura, and Luda Voskov for their willingness to come to my aid in checking and correcting my transcription of Russian. Karen Polachek showed me that sometimes the simplest things are lost in cultural translation. Special warmest thanks go to my family—my sister Mary Alvania Stevenson and my mother, Ellawee Jones—without whose all-enveloping love and support I would never have been able to devote the resources and years to following my dream. And, last, but not least, to those brave, nameless Soviet citizens, who dared to “go beyond the flags” to record the songs of Vysotsky which are the foundation of this dissertation—thank you!

# **Echoing Their Lives: Teaching Russian Language and Culture Through the Music of Vladimir S. Vysotsky**

Publication No. \_\_\_\_\_

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2008

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Using vocal music in the foreign language classroom to teach language and culture can become the foundation of an approach specifically geared to encourage students to take charge of their own language learning, and thereby improve their overall language competencies. Many researchers have already noted that the usual classroom program of instruction does not provide sufficient exposure time for students to achieve a level much above the ACTFL Intermediate level. Most students who enter university language programs with plans to major in a language have certain expectations, usually elevated, and the problem is exacerbated by commercial products which promise that, “You will speak like a native in months!” The problem is compounded by the disappointment experienced when these high expectations are not met, and students cease trying before they approach the levels to which they originally aspired.

One way to help students not go through this demotivation phase of language learning, is to help them improve their language skills beyond that usually attainable through classroom instruction alone. Training in the use of learning strategies, increased time spent listening to authentic vocal music, and the anticipated personal satisfaction gained by attaining successful results can all be positively related to an increase in motivation. By introducing students to the music of Soviet bard/poet/actor Vladimir S. Vysotsky, early in their language-training career, and using his compositions as supplementary material in a syllabus, the Russian language teacher can provide versatile authentic language material. Selections from the prolific output of approximately 700 poems and songs by Vysotsky can be used to introduce: a) language forms, b) pronunciation, c) cultural idioms and contrast, d) historical-political items, e) social customs, and f) literary works and characters.

In the case of language learning and metacognitive strategies, ignorance is not bliss: ignorance is the destroyer. Students who become aware of the strategies available (e.g., memory, cognitive, compensation, affective, social, or metacognitive) and pleasurable ways to improve their own language competence are more likely to be encouraged to continue studying the language and more likely to devote the extra time to the endeavor.



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## **Chapter One: Introduction**

Foreign language specialists have for centuries been revising approaches to Second Language Acquisition (SLA). The present state of second language education pedagogic theory has been seen time and time again: each new approach is touted as the latest, the newest, the best—able to answer all the questions and problems left unanswered by the old approaches. If we have learned one thing at the beginning of the twenty-first century, it is that there is no “one best way.” Tarone and Yule advocate the “eclectic approach” as a “reasonable response from the practicing teacher” when making choices in the classroom (205). The 1986 ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines propose four competencies (grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse and strategic) and four modalities (reading, writing, listening, speaking) for successful language production (Omaggio-Hadley 6). All these components must be taught if we are to produce linguistically competent students, but these competencies are still being taught for the most part as separate entities in our language classrooms. Only occasionally do we teach grammar as a separate class; the aversion of the language teaching community to the practices of Grammar-Translation is still in effect. However, conversation is separated from vocabulary, which is separated from pragmatics, *ad infinitum*. This practice continues in spite of research which has shown that when input is presented across multiple modalities, its memorability increases. In research conducted in vocabulary acquisition, when students see, hear and write a word, they are more likely to recall that word even weeks later—with no additional repetition or practice (Read 154). Read posits that the higher level of mental engagement or multiple levels of processing required to carry out

the different activities are instrumental in fixing the information in the students' long-term memory (LTM).

In spite of these findings, research has been conducted on almost every different skill or competency within language--as individual competencies—possibly because operationalization of the research variables constrains this process. Testing does not allow one to verify empirically and produce results when one cannot separate the variables such that the individual influences and variables can be clearly identified . I rely upon and benefit from the results of empirical research to help shape my approach to teaching. By incorporating the various approaches and the results of others' empirical research into an integrated whole, every practioner's approach to teaching benefits.

### **THE QUESTION OF OPERATIONALIZATION OF CONCEPTS**

Researchers and teachers dispute everyone else's empirically defined factors, methodologies, etc. With all the, granted, intellectually stimulating arguments being conducted about validity, falsifiability, new definitions, refinement of concepts, et al. within SLA, one is reminded of Marc Anthony's oration, "...so are they all, all honorable men." But, where does that leave the poor teacher who simply wants something that has been "somewhat more effective" than other methods and approaches? The classroom has more often than not been the center either of the This-is-the-way-I-learned school of language teaching, or an eclectic mix of the best (hopefully) from many recognized (and accredited) approaches. Although evaluations are still conducted to determine how much and what students know, the communicative approach has shifted the focus in the language classroom to how well they communicate the knowledge they have acquired. According to Gass, "The goal of SLA research is to determine what second language learners know about a language (i.e., what sorts of grammars are formed and are not

formed), when they come to know it, and how they come to know it" ("Innovations" 226).

Gass's description of the goal of SLA research makes it unusable in the SLA classroom as such. However, through careful extrapolation of the results and application—given the constraints of a classroom containing many different learner types—the results of the research can point the way to practices to enhance the language learning experience for our students.

Another concern for language teachers harks back to the days of Grammar-Translation, when students “knew” Latin, but did not converse in it. The knowledge about a language (grammaticality judgments) which seems to be the focus of much of the research does not guarantee, or even promise, that our students will be able to practice the much-touted communicative competence, which we teach (DeKeyser "Automaticity"; Hulstijn "Vocabulary"). The judicious application of the results of SLA research in the classroom can only improve the teacher's effectiveness. The classroom is not the laboratory in which we test the theories of SLA; but, it is the one in which we can, and must, put them to the test.

When applying the results of SLA research, language learning and teaching must be treated as an integrated whole, similar to an organism. Just as a body cannot function without a brain or a heart, so communication in a language is impossible without all the requisite components: the brain (cognition, memory, listening, affective factors, et al.), the body (lexicon) and the heart (culture). This dissertation does not propose new research into the mechanisms of second language instruction, but rather an amalgamation of the fruits of others' research into cognition, listening comprehension, affective factors, the efficacy of music in, and outside, the classroom, combined with the introduction of

the music of Vladimir Vysotsky. I propose introducing Vysotsky, first, into the beginning Russian classroom as a motivational focus and introduction to Russian culture, and later, into the intermediate Russian classroom as an aid in teaching language (vocabulary building, chunking, phrasal construction, pronunciation), listening comprehension, and culture.

Music has frequently been used in language learning to relax and calm people (Murphey; Iuden-Nelson; Griffie). The music of Bulat Okudzhava, a Russian bard, poet, and contemporary of Vysotsky, has been used to teach Russian language (Tumanov). Jazz chants utilized the power of repetition, rhythm and rhyming in call-and-response participatory dialogues to improve competence in EFL (English-as-a-Foreign-Language) classrooms (Graham). Murphey advocates using the simplicity and repetitions of pop music lyrics to enhance learning (184).

The music of Vysotsky, aside from its topical and rhythmical similarities to the blues, is distinctive for its colloquial phrasings and common language (Lazarski; Skobelev and Shaulov; Andreev and Boguslavskii; Evtiugina). Vysotsky himself, in a monologue from one of his performances, described his musical performances thus:

*Мои выступления—это беседа со зрителем, возможность рассказать в той или иной форме, смешной или серьёзной, о тех вещах, которые тебя беспокоят и волнуют, в надежде, что и зритель тоже точно так же относится к тем вещам, о которых ты ему рассказываешь.*

My performances are a conversation with the individual audience member, the possibility of conversing in some form or another, humorous or serious, about

those things which worry and concern one, in the hope that the viewer reacts to those things that you're telling him in just the same way [that you do] (Terent'ev 137).<sup>1</sup>

The fact that these songs are already in the form of discourse increases their applicability for language learning. That the texts of Vysotsky's songs "became an encyclopedia of contemporary life of the 1960-70s" (*стали энциклопедией сов[ременной] жизни 60-70-х гг.*) assures that there are topics and styles to suit almost any student or topic (Landa) 143). For students of Russian, listening to the music of Vysotsky can:

- [musically] aid in decreasing the level of language learning anxiety through the power of music;
- [linguistically] introduce collocations and common chunks of language to aid in retainability of lexicon and ease of recall;
- [phonetically] model correct pronunciation since Vysotsky was a stage actor and spoke the Moscow koine, which is the standard literary variety; and
- [culturally] introduce cultural idioms or items specific to the society, history, personalities, etc. of Russia.

With a decrease in anxiety, an increase in cultural and pragmatic literacy, and the accompanying increase in linguistic knowledge, students in the Russian language

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<sup>1</sup> All translations and transcriptions are the author's.

classroom could be motivated to put in the extra work, which would manifest itself in proficiency gains.

#### **DEFINITION OF TERMS: “FOREIGN” VS “SECOND” LANGUAGE**

The term *foreign language* has at its core the concept of “foreignness,” “alien,” therefore not native or part of one’s comfort zone. The concept of foreignness can set up the students’ initial difficulty with the language they are trying to learn. If teachers can minimize this concept of foreignness, and replace it with the sense of commonality, it may become easier for students to acquire the language—in this case, Russian.

Ellis and Oxford both acknowledge that there is a difference between *second* and *foreign* language, but stress that these differences do not seem to have a major effect on the learning strategies used by students, but can influence their choice of communicative strategies. Foreign is not so simple an idea to define as has been touted in publications. Oxford distinguishes foreign from second language by asserting that “...a *foreign language* does not have immediate social and communicative functions within the community where it is learned” ( 6). These words presuppose that community is a monolithic construct and that only one exists within a narrow geographical area. This interpretation of the concept is in direct contradiction to the reality of contemporary life, where sub-cultures are not totally isolated. For many of our students, especially those from a blended family, or those who have friends from a different language background, the concept of *foreign* or *second* can not be so narrowly defined. The definition is more an internal response to which we give voice, and classify under the nebulous term *foreign*.

The Russian word *иностранный* (“foreign”) is a starting point in trying to clarify what I mean when I use the word “foreign.” The etymology of this word is based on an adjective-noun fusion: *иной* (“other”) and *-странный*, which itself is an adjectival form



derived from the noun *страна*, which is defined as "...a country, land" in The Oxford Russian-English Dictionary (Wheeler; Fasmer). However, in the Современный толковый словарь русского языка (Modern Russian Explanatory Dictionary), *иностранный* is defined as «относящийся к иному государству, другой стране или принадлежащий им» ("relating to a different state, another country, or pertaining to it") (Kuznetsov). Although the difference in definitions is slight, it is significant enough to present problems if these definitions are allowed to influence the way the language is taught in the classroom.

In common usage, the word *страна* is not confined to a purely physical, geographical or political, reality; its figurative usage, in both English and Russian, can relate to internal spaces, interpretations of relations between cultures or subcultures. If the word *страна* did not have these additional figurative meanings, sayings such as "In the land of the blind, the one-eyed man is king," or productions/titles such as Алиса в стране чудес (Alice in Wonderland) or "Страна глухих" ("Land of the Deaf") would have no meaning (Carroll; Todorovskii). All of these usages attest that *страна* can be a completely internal understanding of mental space, where an individual builds and disposes his world. Therefore, for Russian, the word *иностранный* almost completely denies validity to the concept that there is a substantial distinction between foreign and second language. The mental distance and attitude is internal and can be interpreted and assigned meaning based on observed or reported behavior of the student.

As far back as the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Georges Simmel wrote about the role of the stranger in society, his definition and separation from "us" as societal creations (Simmel). In the world of creative literature, Camus wrote about him in L'Etranger; Robert Heinlein, in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, wrote about another stranger, Stranger

in a Strange Land, who had powers and thought processes alien to the rest of the people on earth. There is a special place, both in our lexicon and in our psyche, for the stranger. One sure sign of the stranger is that he doesn't speak "our language" – whether that language be foreign (an L2) which we don't understand, or simply usages, slang words, buzz words which we do not share with the outsider. When we as teachers try to teach the foreign language, we must first surmount the students' expectations attached to this idea of foreignness, to the language of the stranger.

When students first step into a foreign language classroom, they are preparing to enter a different country – one with not just a different language, but a different culture, different concept of reality, different words for that reality. The expectation from students, if they want to immerse themselves in that world, is that, "If I can learn the words, I can learn the world." The problem is that this is not always true, or seldom true, because the word is seldom fully contained in the sum of letters within it. Each word is a synergistic reality, which is always more than the sum of its parts. How does this feeling or knowledge of oneself as stranger, unable to fully express one's ideas in the new language affect the students' ability to learn this new world? If teachers do not provide language students with more than the rudimentary vocabulary of a foreign language, they will always remain only visitors to James Baldwin's "another country." One of the most important roles for the foreign language teacher is the transformation of this strange environment into something where the students can really, in the words of a Russian saying, «*быть как дома*» "feel at home" (literally, "be as at home").

For some, *foreign* can be as simple as generational differences in slang and usages within sub-cultures in a single language. For others, a language which they do not fully understand, but, to which they are exposed on a daily basis, can not seem foreign at all. For example, children of immigrants who speak an L2 at home, but who are not taught

that language (specifically, all of the skills), often do not feel that the L2 is completely foreign. For me as a teacher of language, *foreign* describes any language taught, in which the students are not linguistically and culturally competent. This definition, because it is so broad, can easily encompass the novice as well as the heritage-speakers, those who may speak the language fluently, but still do not read or write the L2 on a level comparable to their command of their L1.

In describing linguistic competence, certain phrases are familiar to us all: “failure to communicate,” “They don’t speak the same language,” “He took it all the wrong way,” or “She just doesn’t understand.” All of these comments normally apply to misunderstandings produced when the two speakers are using the same language. The problems are simply magnified and compounded, when the actual lexical items are unknown—in a word, foreign. For each of us, words, although they share a common dictionary meaning, have their own idiosyncratic meanings, frames and associations generated by the sum of our experiences and expectations (Vereshchagin and Kostomarov 120). These frames, an essential concept in cognitive psychology, include and contain all those nuances of meaning attached to words: where, when, why, with whom and to what, certain words apply. In linguistics, these minutiae are subsumed under the heading of stylistics or pragmatics.

Who makes the choices about which word to use in any given environment? How do novice students, who know very little about the language, make intelligent choices with the limited resources available to them? Our senses mediate our interpretation of the world: words become the tool by which we interact with that world. One example from Russian is the very simple concept of color: *синий* as opposed to *голубой*. For native Russians, the distinction between the two colors, or shades, of blue is very clear. For Americans, this distinction is not quite so clear. How dark must something be to be

*синий*? Where is the fine line of linguistic distinction, and how do we explain it to students? The best that we can normally do as teachers is get the students “somewhere in the ballpark.” For example, jeans are always *синие*, even when faded to the palest of blues, while eyes are almost invariably *голубые*. This simplistic example is only one of the more innocuous linguo-cultural traps which students must learn to maneuver with the help of teachers. To learn to escape these traps, students need to be motivated to take charge of their own learning (Csizér and Dörnyei). Although motivation is an internal factor beyond the control of teachers, one of our primary responsibilities is to provide interesting, engaging materials which not only provide information about the language and culture which we are teaching, but also the emotionally attractive elements which make the students willingly immerse themselves in the foreign culture and language.

## **MOTIVATION & AFFECT**

The affective factors in language learning can be viewed as closely related to the degree of affinity students feel for the foreign language. The sense of foreignness or alienation in a foreign language can function as an inhibitory factor in language learning, while a sense of affinity or comfort can facilitate language learning. If the language is closely associated in the students’ minds with a particular culture, the emotional reaction to the culture is likely to transfer to the language. Thus, if the language and culture (or people) are seen as too alien or too strange, the students’ responses to acquiring that language will probably mirror their evaluation and attitude toward the culture, whether it is considered *свой* (one’s own) or *чужой* (alien). The sense of identification with a group can easily override the students’ initial unfamiliarity with the language and culture. The teacher, as a transmitter of both language and culture, can play a pivotal role in

reshaping the students' definitions of that which is foreign and therefore, uncomfortable, and that which can become familiar and comfortable.

Students who take foreign languages (if not simply to fulfill an institution's language requirement) are likely to have any number of motivations for their language choice – internal or external, --- or instrumental. Internal motivations are often touted as the stronger because the students usually already have a positive attitude towards the language and/or culture, and are therefore more receptive to the language. If, however, students want to learn the L2 for gain (to adjust to a new environment, to fulfill job requirements, etc.) – they may have no personal interest in the language and feel no affinity towards it. If they are members of the first group, those who feel an affinity for the language or culture, they are less likely to experience any negative reaction to the L2 as foreign, or alien. Those students who have no integrative motivation, or prior positive experience with either the L2 language or culture, are more likely to experience the culture shock and anxiety of first contact . Language teachers have long sought different tools to reduce students' negative reactions to foreign language classrooms. The introduction of vocal music as the foundation on which to either build a coordinated language-culture course or, more often, supplement an already established program, can be a powerful tool, especially when the music is a faithful reflection of the culture from which it derives.

Lack of time is our greatest enemy in trying to teach students a language—along with the expectations of an inherent cup-o-soup mentality: if it's not quick and easy, it's not worth doing. Unfortunately, language competence is not quick and easy; it does require work; but, it is definitely worth doing, for the world that it opens up to the students. It becomes the task of the teacher to encourage those students into wanting to devote an extra ten to thirty minutes per day working to improve their language. The

payoff will be just as great—with a more flexible mind and an agile tongue in the foreign language. Although vocal music has not been shown to increase vocabulary acquisition in children, “the children’s enthusiasm for songs” led the researcher to recommend “that classroom teachers make greater use of story songs as a means of promoting language acquisition” (Medina). The enthusiasm for songs is not limited to children as evidenced by the presence of both vocal and instrumental music in our daily lives (Jourdain; Murphey; Alvarez-Pereyre and Arom).

## **MUSIC**

One of the benefits of using any vocal music in teaching an L2 is that music holds the attention of the listener. Music has been used to calm, soothe, arouse, et al.; it both attracts and holds the attention of the listener. Attention, in the arsenal of cognitive psychology, is considered one of the most powerful and central factors in language learning. Individuals have only limited attention resources, and must choose where to allocate these resources. In the real world, we are surrounded by all kinds of stimuli, but we can only attend to a limited number of them at any one time. Awareness of the signal must reach a certain threshold level before consciousness of it engages our mental facilities. This phenomenon is very like the situation with sounds and colors (e.g., sub-sonic and ultra-violet) which are outside the range of human perception: we are not aware of them when they occur, and therefore, cannot respond to them. Any words and sounds which are outside our normal perception are also not responded to. This phenomenon has far-reaching results for language students.

If sounds are so alien as to be unrecognizable, students cannot respond to them; in other words, if the students do not perceive the sounds as intelligible, they cannot process and understand them as input. A prime example of this is frequently seen in works about

the problems certain speakers of Asian languages, who have not received training in a Western language, have with distinguishing the phonemes /r/ and /l/, or the problems many Western speakers have with distinguishing tonal differences.

A second benefit of using music in language instruction is that the small units of which language is composed are invariably presented in the correct forms and with the correct prosodic structure, regardless of the musical accompaniment. Small “chunks” of language form the framework on which larger utterances are built (“in the house”, “she speaks,” “he went,” etc.). For non-declensional languages like English, the forms of words are mostly invariant, with word order imparting the greater semantic value. On the other hand, the Russian declensional system presents major problems for English-speaking students who are accustomed to using word order as the driving force for their grammatical constructions. The case endings which impart additional meaning and usage within the Russian sentence can, in this sense, be similar to the ultra-violet and sub-sonic signals for non-native speakers. This lack of familiarity with the case endings can thus be more difficult for students to acquire, especially in the speech stream. Although poetry (and, by analogy, the lyrics of a song) is constrained to fit certain patterns, including the rhyming system (ABAB, ABBA, etc.), the small units, of which the larger ones are composed, remain internally consistent. The internal rhythm of small linguistic units and the rhyme of agreement with the repetition of sounds (e.g., *Она читала / хорошую книгу*) can focus attention and make it easier for language learners to remember them. Vocal music presents these endings in a highly palatable form.

Vocal music also provides a ready-made source of authentic material for modeling the sounds of a language. Russian, with its system of pronunciation, in which final consonants are devoiced and unstressed vowels are reduced, presents major difficulties for students whose native languages do not have/share the regularity of this

system. For example, the Russian word *входить* (“to enter”) is often pronounced \*/ve khoDIT/ by English speakers who (1) do not devoice the initial consonant, (2) insert a vowel within the consonant cluster, and (3) do not soften the final consonant. This tends to produce their rendering of \*/ve khoDIT/ instead of /fkhoDIT’/ and their failure to recognize the word when encountered in fluent speech (*белая печь*). Further, most people sing along, or hum along, with vocal music. This practice lends itself to an increase in “Time-on-Task,” the actual use of the language, not as a conversational component, but as an activity (pronunciation of the language sounds) which can, with repetition, become automated. The relationship between accurate pronunciation and listening comprehension has already been widely documented (Gilbert; Morley "Pronunciation"; Wong; Jenkins; Wilcox). The combination of these two activities, speaking (singing) and listening, lends itself to classroom and out-of-classroom use in improving language skills.

## **CULTURAL & HISTORICAL SIMILARITIES**

The sense of cultural difference and dissonance is the first and most obvious marker of the foreign language (Bialystok and Hakuta 7; Bauman "Hearing"). One can approach teaching the cultural component of Russian by performing a cross-cultural analysis of the history of the US and Russia. Such an analysis looks at the products and practices of societies in an effort to find commonalities and contrasts.

As a teacher, you want your students to realize that the new language is foreign – and that they must not carry over their habits and expectations from the native language; but, at the same time, the people, reflected in the language, must not seem so alien as to turn them off. Vysotsky, in my mind, can bridge that gap. The language and topics of



his songs share a commonality with the native United States folk music and blues, and through these, with rock and other expressive forms. My primary focus is on the blues, since I am more familiar with that genre than with others. However, I have seen similarities in some country and folk music – especially those songs generated in the same period as Vysotsky – 1950s – late 1970s. Thus, the language in Vysotsky’s songs can serve as models of authentic language. Part of the appeal of Vysotsky’s songs and poems is the cultural legitimacy awarded them by native speakers of the language. People from all walks of life, in the former Soviet Union and in émigré communities around the world, describe his songs as real and sounding as though Vysotsky himself lived through each adventure, or experienced each pain. Since culture is inseparable from the language in which it is expressed, these songs in Russian, and expressing experiences of the Russian people, in my mind, are a resource too rich to be ignored.

I’ve already explained why I feel that Vysotsky is important for teaching the language as such (including the culture component), but the infamous “affective filter” can still rear its ugly head, especially if the students feel that the language and culture are so very foreign as to be alien. This is where the second prong of attack comes in. Vysotsky’s topics for his songs are very familiar to anyone who has listened to the blues, country, folk, or rock music. In fact, they’re the same topics which appear in operas and in the plays of Shakespeare. But, in these songs, the people are common, their problems are common and shared. Their reactions are not those of the aristocracy, who figure prominently in operas and Shakespearean plays. Their reactions are those of people trying to cope with a world they don’t control.

The songs and poems of Vysotsky are similar in form and subject matter to the blues, which is purported to be unique to the United States. If one examines the late history of the serfs in tsarist Russia, and the common Soviet citizen who was not a

Communist Party member (or not very high in the Party hierarchy), their history closely parallels that of the black slave in the United States. Both groups lived through slavery, which ended in the same decade in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

After gaining freedom, Russian serfs and American slaves still had no power: former slaves lived through the Jim Crow period in the US, while former serfs lived under the totalitarian control of the Communist Party of the USSR. Jim Crow and Soviet Communism shared a common trait, which left a large number of citizens without enforceable rights and without power. The blues arose from this cultural and social environment in the United States. It is my contention that Vysotsky's style of music arose from a similar environment in the Soviet Union. The historical similarities and the music which arose from them are the foundation for one approach to teaching Russian language and culture and trying to bridge the gap for our students.

Pierre Bourdieu (1984) has written much about societal taste and how it is determined by the culture or sub-culture in which it is generated. According to basic sociological theories, similar experiences should shape similar cultures; and, if the cultures are similar, one could expect the tastes to be similar. But, taste is not a homogeneous entity; one's place within the society in relation to the "accepted" norms of that society is also reflected in our taste. Taste is a social construct which assigns relative aesthetic value to a society's products, practices, and sometimes even people. Taste is that learned system of judgments about good and evil, beauty and ugliness, honor and shame, etc. That which is considered to have social value is what is taught and passed on in the educational system; it is the means by which a society ensures its survival (Bourdieu Power 49). The schools in the USA teach Shakespeare, not Ludlum; students are encouraged to listen to Bach or Beethoven, but not the Beatles or B. B. King. These value judgments in taste are, in turn, reflected in our language. The standard, literary

language is always that variety which is used and approved by those in control of the society (Kolesov; Vereshchagin and Kostomarov; Bourdieu Power).

Even beyond the demands of function and participants' communicative needs, language style is the most obvious outward marking of group membership (Wardhaugh). Youth use their own slang, stockbrokers use special terminology, academicians speak in a particular manner. All of these choices of language use are determined partly by the specific demands of the milieu in which the language is used, and partly by the need to prevent the uninitiated from participating in the exchange of information. Although many of the variations in language use are purely lexical, some include syntactic variation. Those who are farthest away from the centers of power usually use speech patterns which also deviate from the accepted standard. This deviation can either be a mark of shame or of pride, with the resultant state being defined by those who deviate. For some, the use of such deviant forms can then become the mark of rebellion, or of simple non-conformity. The fact that such deviations in language and norms is a common factor, shared by all societies, can be the basis for lessening the initial sense of foreignness, which is a powerful affective filter, frequently inhibiting the students' openness to learning the L2.

The blues writers of the US started out as uneducated (for the most part) outsiders, who wrote about their lives and their exclusion from the mainstream of society—using the language of their everyday lives. The style of the blues, established by those early writers, remained mostly unchanged, even when the writers themselves became better educated. Its language was the language of “Everyman.” Vysotsky, although well-educated, could also speak this language, with the stylings of the Soviet *народ* (“folk”), of the drunk on the corner, the worker in the coal mine, or the city-dweller bemoaning the dullness of his life. If one examines the content and style of

Vysotsky's songs, many mirror the topics of the American blues, others are distinctly Russian in their stylings; some use standard language, others use sub-standard; some are contemporary, while others are historical. In all, his almost seven hundred songs run the gamut of human experiences and reactions. Since these experiences require the use of different styles of language, and Vysotsky was an actor as well as a poet and singer, we can expect these various styles to be used in Vysotsky's songs.

### **STYLISTICS / PRAGMATICS**

Stylistics is part of language, one of the essential factors which must be determined and assigned before we can use language appropriate to the situation. The words and forms which are appropriate for conversation with friends over coffee are completely unsuitable for giving a lecture, making a report, or interacting with people on official business. The term *stylistics* is usually applied to group-defined, individual, and situational choice in language use. In more common usage, the term *style*, although more broad in application, is sometimes conflated with stylistics, and the situational choices of lexicon, "especially the level of formality" (Crystal 368). The choice of lexicon when talking with family at home, when collaborating with co-workers, or when giving a formal presentation at a conference, is a matter of stylistics; group-specific jargons are also studied under the rubric of stylistics. Pragmatics, however, relates to the choices of the individual, are based on the interlocutor, and arise from the "point of view of the users, especially of the choices they make, the constraints they encounter in using language in social interaction" (Crystal 301). (Training in pragmatics is usually, of necessity, postponed until students have attained a relatively advanced level of language.) Teachers in the classroom try to give students the language necessary for at least minimal communicative competence: requesting and giving information, following simple

directions, performing social and directive functions. However, the language style taught in the classroom, since it is neutral, has a limited relationship to the language which native speakers use in normal circumstances (Burke; Zemskaja).

For too long colloquial speech and usage (*язык речи*) have had no place in the foreign language classroom. Of necessity, the language which has been taught in the classroom has been in a neutral style, which is neither too bookish, obsolete, slangy, nor crude. Vocal music usually can contain elements of all or any of these styles. In classical opera, the lyrics are usually subordinate to the instrumentation, frequently contain obsolete lexicon, change the natural intonation and rhythm of speech. The style of language in classical opera is constrained by the demands of taste and educational capital (Bourdieu Taste). As such, opera is not especially suitable for listening comprehension.

Russian also has a much broader repertoire of intonational contours than does English (Bryzgunova; Odintsova). Vysotsky frequently spoke the introduction to his songs, or, as with many other bards, used the style which is half song, half storytelling. This style provides students with a much easier, more speech-like system of sounds which are easier for them to understand. The more recent developments within the genres of vocal music – conversational, poetry and rap -- share one commonality: although there is almost invariably instrumental accompaniment, the instrumentation does not completely override the intonation patterns of normal conversational speech. One of the frequent complaints against the songs of Vysotsky was that he was not a professionally-trained musician and did not play the guitar, but only strummed to accompany his poems, using, for the most part, three chords (Cherednichenko 205). His use of colloquial language and jargon peculiar to specific sub-groups within the larger culture also makes his songs similar in format and style to the recently developed rap or

hip-hop music, as well as the more recent genre of *шансон* (“chanson”) in Russia (Kishkovsky).

The instrumentation is secondary to the words of these songs; therefore, it does not completely subdue traces of intonation contours, but they are affected. Since neutral word order (NWO) in Russian usually orders information in sentences as old-new, or Theme-Rheme, but poems (and, by extension here, songs) do have to deal with the demands of rhyme and meter, the word order is not free to follow the NWO or inverted word order (IWO) for emphasis. Although the sentence-level intonation is, naturally, changed, the mid-level phrasal groupings remain fairly consistent. Even when adjectives are pre-posed for emphasis, they remain paired with their noun, with no extended pause between. These songs are much more conversational in nature, with incomplete sentences, and with shared knowledge not being repeated. The simpler lexicon, the use of repetition and rhyme all combine to increase the efficacy of this style of music as an effective tool for language teaching.

## CULTURAL COMPONENT

Soviet life is the subject matter of Vysotsky’s songs. His songs can be useful in teaching students about the history of the Russian people; about their values, morals and attitudes; about service in the military, working and living conditions; and about interpersonal relationships between average citizens and their leaders (Kanchukov, 1997; (Zolotukhin). The language used in Vysotsky’s songs includes all authentic registers and complexities of Russian language: literary (*литературный*), colloquial (*разговорный*), substandard (*просторечие*), slang (*сленг*), jargon (*жаргон*), etc. One can use the songs of Vysotsky to teach all registers of Russian language, presenting them in coherent and consistent groupings indicative of their place in social settings and their proper use.

Songs, as authentic language materials, can be used for all levels of language instruction, from introductory to the most advanced, and is most useful for teaching phrasing and common usages, which are especially important for an inflected language like Russian. With the wealth of varied compositions by Vysotsky on hand, the teacher has a wide range of topics and styles available for classroom instruction. Highly motivated students also have abundant authentic material in both written and aural form to surround themselves with the sounds of Russian.

Having said all of the above, and after reflecting on my own learning and teaching experiences, these are the questions which come up:

### **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

1. Are the political, historical and cultural similarities between Blacks in the USA and the common folk (*народ*) in Russia significantly reflected in the blues also present in the topics and stylings of the bardic songs of Vladimir Vysotsky?
2. Can students be encouraged to increase the time spent with Russian language outside of classroom instruction through an introduction to the music and life of Vladimir Vysotsky?
3. Can listening to Russian music increase passive word knowledge by increasing the number of phonemic units recognizable (stored in Long Term Memory) by the Non-Native Speaker?

With these questions guiding my research, I arrived at the following hypotheses:

## Hypotheses

a. Motivation has been positively correlated with time spent on tasks and with task achievement. With increased motivation, initiated in the first years of introduction to the language, and sustained for the duration of study, students will spend more time trying to improve their language. Given the limited hours of exposure available to students during classroom hours of instruction, some motivational trigger must be provided to increase outside exposure to language input.

b. Given the limited hours of language exposure available to students during classroom instruction, some motivational trigger must be provided to increase students' willingness to increase outside-of-class input. Listening to authentic language will present the students with more exemplars of language units to increase acquaintance. With increased cognitive awareness and recognition of the sounds of the language, level of anxiety should decrease, which, in turn, could decrease factors which hinder students' ability to attend to linguistic cues—increasing incidental learning of lexicon.

c. Given historical and political similarities between Blacks in the USA and the common people in Russia, the style and content of his songs and poems, the musical output of Vladimir Vysotsky can be interpreted as a form of blues expression. These similarities can serve to lessen alienation, increase affect and motivation, and through these, competence level. Intercultural and historical similarities can be the foundation of an affective approach to making Russian seem not so foreign—making the students aware that the language, and the people who speak it, are not so foreign after all.



In the following chapter I discuss some of relevant literature on the mechanisms of language learning, specifically listening comprehension, memory, schema, lexical choices, etc.

## **Chapter Two: Literature Review—A System of Competency**

Although language teachers and researchers speak of language competence as the ability to communicate appropriately within social contexts, the particulars of the mechanisms and processes involved in successful communication have rarely been elucidated. How does one begin to describe the processes of language learning? Language researches and teachers have, for decades, been trying to define and measure the processes by which our students acquire, or learn a foreign language. We act as though our ability to accurately define these processes will ensure that our students will acquire the skill sets we present in the classroom. One flaw in our idealized vision of imparting linguistic competence to eager students is attributable to the most obvious, and salient, characteristic of these processes: language comprehension and language ability are invisible processes—therefore, impervious to our analyses. We can only assume certain levels of knowledge obtained by the language learners based on observed behavior.

When students respond with enough linguistic and pragmatic competence in an L2 conversation or on an exam, the assumption is that they understood what they heard. Their responses may be the result of comprehension and our excellent instruction; or, they may be lucky guesses. Because they are invisible, and impossible to observe or measure, language teachers have, for too long, ignored the internal processes of listening

comprehension and concentrated primarily on teaching the so-called active skills (reading, speaking, writing). Traditionally, reading has been called a passive skill, but much of the recent research has encouraged a re-evaluation of that passivity because of the parsing of sentences, phonological processing, prosodic phrasing, and grapheme-phoneme mapping required for reading comprehension (31; Schreiber; Perfetti, Van Dyke and Hart). Although we test listening, we rarely conduct lessons dedicated to the intricacies of listening (R. Ellis Study of SLA; Omaggio-Hadley). If visibility were the only criteria by which we determine the viability of working with a concept, all psychologists and psychiatrists would be out of work. As teachers, we must go beyond this self-imposed limitation and deal with the manifestations of competence—whether we can empirically measure them or not. The final judgment of communicative competence is not in our books, but in the real-time communication taking place—to the mutual satisfaction of participants of the conversation.

Although, in speaking about L2 competence, we always treat each skill set as a separate entity, we would be in serious error to assume that our externally imposed borders between the skill sets actually exist (Gass "Innovations"). Phonological processing, orthographic recognition, pronunciation, semantic encoding, listening comprehension, syntactic awareness all combine to create what we call communicative competence. A language without its multimodal components ceases to be a language for communication and is reminiscent of Latin and the Grammar-Translation approach.

Because it is a foreign language, students frequently forget to apply the techniques or strategies which they routinely utilize in the L1. While teaching transcription, I formalized some of these metacognitive listening strategies into a handout which I called “Jones’s Joggers”: (1) It ain’t all together; (2) It ain’t all separate; and (3) If it don’t make sense, they didn’t say it. The first two of these “joggers” addressed the problem students face in recognizing word boundaries in a stream of normal conversational speech, reminding them that they might have combined two words into one, or separated a word which is whole. The third “jogger” was a reminder that interlocutions rely on mutual comprehension. In our L1, we unconsciously (or consciously and aloud) say, “Oh, he couldn’t have said that!” At which point, we begin to scan our store of similar words, using syllabic structure, stress patterns, and assumed collocations until we find a semantically valid fit. This simple metacognitive strategy—increasing awareness of strategies which students already use—is one which can help students increase their receptive skills. (See Appendix One: Metacognitive Strategy Handout.)

The volatility of the language skill-set itself, and the much-vaunted difference between our definitions of competence and performance make this insistence on ‘either-or’ statements untenable. Hansen highlights, or alludes to, the interplay between competence, retention and attitude, which factor includes the affective element of language learning:

With the introduction of an affective component into the design of the third study (Shewell & Hansen, 1999), however, a path analysis indicated that both the higher literacy and better L2 maintenance were attributable to a third factor, the learner/attriter’s language attitudes and motivation (66). ...

In fact, Yukawa (1997), finding little restructuring in the L1 regaining of her children, claims that attrition was the result of a processing failure to use knowledge that has remained virtually intact (76).

Yukawa's assertion supports my premise that the retrieval of knowledge, and the automaticizing of such retrieval, are central to any discussion of language competence. Once learned, linguistic or lexical elements, according to some of the latest findings in cognitive psychology, are never lost; they are encoded in long-term memory (LTM) (Hansen; Perfetti, Van Dyke and Hart; Robinson "Attention"). However, the pathways by which we retrieve these elements may become weaker through lack of use. I equate this process to the development of ruts in a roadway, or pathway. Any pathway, which is seldom accessed or traveled, will eventually become overgrown, with this growth impeding speedy travel along the pathway. If this pathway is in the brain and involves language data, the overgrowth is perceptible as hesitations, increased use of empty fillers, or failure to respond—in other words, language attrition/loss. On the other hand, once the ruts are firmly established as frequently accessed pathways to language data, the L2 speaker/user can easily slip into the rut and retrieve the required language elements. The deeper the ruts, the quicker the retrieval; this equates to automaticity, although there are disputes about exactly how to define this concept of automaticity (R. Ellis "Factors"; Tarone and Yule; Segalowitz "Automaticity").

The key characteristic of the concept is that the information or process is so well established in memory that its retrieval does not require conscious control or the allocation of conceptual resources. For example, there are numerous tales of the shock

experienced by older people, when “out of the blue” they recall the name of a peer from more than forty or fifty years earlier. Usually these are not the names of friends with whom they have constant or frequent contact; however, the name, along with its associations, once stored, remain in LTM. Simply reading a list of words or encountering an individual once or twice does not (except for the exceptional person with eidetic memory) usually result in long-term storage. The amount of exposure required to imprint on LTM varies by individual, just as the number and size of items available for immediate recall from Short Term Memory (STM).

Many researchers warn of the pitfalls inherent in relying on self-report as the actual measure of language processes (Sparks and Ganschow; Wigglesworth). Sparks and Ganschow criticized “self-report instruments of FL anxiety because most of the items are also measuring receptive language, expressive language and verbal memory skills (Sparks & Ganschow, 1991), or reading skills (Sparks, Ganschow, & Javorsky, 2000)” (93). This critique also highlights the difficulty inherent in separating the individual components of language competence. At the same time, much research has been conducted on affective factors as one powerful influence on competence. Sparks and Ganschow summarize thus:

Gardner (1990) defines affective variables as ‘...those motivational or predispositional characteristics of individuals that influence their perceptions and impressions of the language learning context’ (p. 179). Examples of frequently investigated affective variables are attitude and motivation... (92).

In the aftermath of all these studies, there are more questions and contention today than before, when the concepts were undefined and the variables had not been operationalized. This is another instance of the either-or mentality. The ability to separate and assign blame or credit to any one factor among the multitude responsible for language competence, as the one at fault can never become the overriding concern for the language classroom, as it must be in the experimental setting. The chicken-or egg argument does not carry nearly as much weight as the ‘can-they-communicate’ argument. Nearly half a century after we as foreign language teachers began operationalizing and measuring the factors, characteristics and behaviors of successful language learners, we are still stuck in the quagmire of defining and separating that which has a positive effect on language competence from that which has a negative effect (Horwitz).

Of all the arguments put forth, not one has refuted the idea that differences in attitude, aptitude, and motivation—all those affective factors, which are so difficult to separate and measure without “contamination” from other similar factors—do influence how well or poorly students learn an L2. Operationalizing factors is essential for empirical studies, but not necessarily for classroom application. Motivation seems to be the factor which, all other things being equal, can determine language success (Oxford).

Most research on affect, motivation and strategy use relies on the self-report protocols, or think-aloud protocols, to determine what participants do when communicating (Smagorinsky). Even the self-report has been acknowledged as inadequate because the steps in communication, as reported to the observer, have already been filtered through memory (limitations of working and short-term memory storage capacity), expectation (“Is this what they expect me to say?”), self-image (“Can I really

admit that I didn't go through this stage, or that I didn't understand that word?"), etc.(Oxford; R. Ellis Study of SLA). Csizér and Dörnyei have addressed this problem through *structural equation modeling* (SEM). In this statistical approach the interacting components of internal factors affecting language effort and motivation are examined within a single framework to identify paths and directions among variables and not just information about how the variables 'hang together'" (19). They examine the *ideal self* of learners and show how this self-image influences their level of motivation and effort in learning a foreign language. Csizér and Dörnyei claim to have simply expanded on and confirmed Garner's earlier works on Integrative motivation (30).

Since so much of what we know about the internal processes of language learning, motivational triggers, affective filters, et al. is based on the self-report, it behooves us as teachers to add as much as possible to our arsenal of tools to help students take charge of their own learning. A combination of strategy training with the use of chunks and phrases is beneficial for communicative competence: students must be taught to not approach the language from the word-by-word level, but from the phrase level, from the collocation. For example, one of the simplest words in Russian *na* can translate as "in," "on," "at," "to," or "for" depending on the context—both that which proceeds and that which follows the preposition. (See Table 1 below.) Without knowledge of context, and contextual changes, students are lost at the most basic level.



	<i><b>Russian</b></i>	<i><b>English</b></i>
<b>on</b>	<i>Письмо лежало <u>на</u> столе.</i>	The letter was lying <u>on</u> the table.
<b>at</b>	<i>Он был вчера <u>на</u> концерте.</i>	He was <u>at</u> the concert yesterday.
<b>to</b>	<i>Я пойду <u>на</u> почту.</i>	I am going <u>to</u> the post office.
<b>in</b>	<i>Мы вошли <u>на</u> стадион.</i>	We went <u>in</u> the stadium.
<b>for</b>	<i>У меня билет <u>на</u> концерт.</i>	I have a ticket <u>for</u> the concert

Table 1: Contextual Meanings of the Preposition *на*

## HOW WE LEARN

The distinctions between the mechanisms by which we learn L1 and L2 are still a matter of debate. Some scholars still adhere to the concept that the mechanisms for all language learning is the same, while others claim that the presence of a native language has already shaped and changed the brain, thereby changing the mechanisms by which we learn additional languages: the *tabula rasa* of an infant brain cannot operate in the same manner as the brain which has already acquired a language (N. Ellis).

Current theories of cognition assert that the use of multiple modalities increases the speed and strength of long-term storage of information (Bialystok and Hakuta; Pinker). Language itself is encoded in at least two modalities (visual and auditory input), and the addition of music can intensify the effect of the input, even when it is only background music (de Groot, 2006). Caution must be used when quoting any experimental data for a number of reasons: (1) most experiments are carried out in laboratories or classrooms under controlled conditions; (2) they have all been of limited

duration, no longitudinal studies have so far been conducted; (3) most involve grammaticality judgments, which do not necessarily entail use of the language (DeKeyser, Hulstijn). As DeKeyser states, “(Relative) absence of evidence is not evidence of absence” (329). In McLendon’s dissertation, research supported the effectiveness of communication without complete control over grammatical structures, and the Native Speaker’s (NS) acceptance of such errors given acceptable pronunciation (107).

For most of Western history, language learning was not distinguished from the learning required for any other discipline (L. G. Kelly). One learned the facts of mathematics and the facts of Latin—there was no difference: knowledge was knowledge. As long as the language was a “dead” language, or there were no requirements for social interaction, this approach to learning presented no problems. However, with the advent of the focus on communicative competence in the 1980s, the approaches used for language learning proved inadequate to the task. In order to communicate in the L2, students were required to have two types of knowledge: declarative (facts) and procedural (know how).

However, before students can participate in conversations with NSs, each other, or with the teacher, they must first have a store of words with which to work. Although rote memorization and drills have fallen into disrepute, successful language students have acquired a store of word forms (P. Kelly; Zaid).

## **SOME UNDERLYING PRINCIPLES OF LEARNING AS APPLIED TO LANGUAGE**

A very brief overview of some of the underlying principles of learning is essential for understanding language learning in general and listening, in particular. Probably one

of the most widely alluded to principles is from the world of ESL and first language acquisition, and the acquisition of the past *-ed* particle. Initially students tend to apply simple solutions which are rule based: “To form the past tense in English, one must add *-ed* to the base form of the verb”; “If the infinitive ends in *-амь*’ in Russian, the verb will conjugate thus.” This is one of the simpler ways in which we learn. Similar cases cluster together, and prototypes are formed in the mind. This clustering is an unsupervised learning process, in which students assume that surface similarities assure morphologic, conjugational similarities (Gureckis and Love). But, learning can also be supervised, in which an outside agent, whether an instructor, peer, or NS collocutor provides “corrective” feedback.

Supervised learning involves feedback and the formation of inferred category structures. Language learning involves both unsupervised and supervised processes. Supervised learning, however, except for the learning strategies and cultural awareness training, are not relevant to this dissertation and will, therefore, not be addressed here. In ongoing research into the nature of learning, it has been noted that “unsupervised learning is seen as an incidental, undirected, stimulus driven, and incremental accrual of information” (Gureckis and Love 886). Long-term listening to music can help students in gaining both exposure to the language and in the tuning of the ears. Vereshchagin and Kostomarov affirm the efficacy of this tuning (*настройка*) procedure, as well as preparatory activities in connection with reading literature (115). If we do not look at language as separate skills, but as a unified, interactive system of skills, the tuning can and must also be applied to listening.

## LISTENING COMPREHENSION

Listening comprehension is one of the most powerful and frequent components of language competence, especially when we speak of communicative competence. The speed and invisibility of the processes of listening itself only serve to complicate the task of teaching students how to listen. Recognition of words, and their associated meanings, is the mark of language competence. However, the meaning of “recognition” is also problematic and highly idiosyncratic. Individual recognition is assumed on the basis of an appropriate response. The outsider has no way of knowing what is going on inside the mind of the listener. Cognitive psychologists assert that word recognition requires storage in working memory, then transfer to short-term memory, which then accesses conceptual meaning in long-term storage (Monsell; Norris). If there is no corresponding entry already in the long-term memory store, there will be no retrieval, therefore, no comprehension. Long-term storage retrieval can be viewed as analogous to developing ruts along a familiar path in the road: the more frequently one travels the path to retrieve a stored memory, the deeper become the ruts, and the easier and quicker becomes the retrieval process.

Although students always have some kind of listening comprehension exercises associated with classroom language instruction, it is usually difficult to get them to listen even the first time outside of class time. For most full-time students, there is simply not enough time to listen and pay close attention to the spoken word a second, third, or fourth time. However, if one looks around, students (and the rest of the world, it seems) are almost always listening to music—in the gym, on the bus, while walking or riding. Vocal music in the L2 can bridge the gap between forced listening of dialogues and the strictly-

for-pleasure listening of vocal music. A frequently ignored factor in language learning is the incidental learning which occurs when students are not concentrating on learning (R. Ellis "Factors"; Hulstijn "Learning"). Vocal music can be more pleasurable, and is therefore, more likely to be listened to more than once. If, as is often the case with music, students do not really pay close attention to what they are hearing, but simply let the music surround them, they can experience incidental learning. The more often they listen to the music, the more familiar the sounds will become and the easier the retrieval of those sounds when next encountered.

For students to engage in conversation and develop fluency, they must understand the input, spend time on developing their lexical arsenal, and develop speed in performing all these steps for producing language. One way to develop speed is through the use of ready-made phrases, called lexical phrases, chunks, collocations, etc.

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Although our students are, for the most part, adults, their knowledge of prosodic structures and syntactic boundaries in the second language are decidedly not at an adult level. They have to start from scratch, building a system, making sense of how the new language works. If they try to build that system item by item, they will be buried under a mass of incomprehensible and irreconcilable bits and pieces. If we can show them how to take charge of the linguistic cues which are present and redundantly layered in the language, then language learning for them will be easier, more fun, and, hopefully, production will be more fluent.

The first of the cues for word recognition are the phonemes themselves. Beyond this first level of recognition comes a secondary, which I'll call context here, specifically for homonyms. The next level of cues is word stress. Stress is "syllabic prominence" or the amount of relative force used in pronouncing a syllable in a word (Schreiber 159). The next level is intonation, which is the rise and fall of pitch during pronunciation of a series, usually above the word level. Most of the time when we speak of intonation in the Russian language classroom, we speak of sentence level intonation, and the Intonation Contours (*интонационные конструкции*), or Bryzgunova's famous seven Intonation Contours (Bryzgunova). However, intonation applies to phrase level as well as sentence level. One of the main problems with both production and comprehension of a language involves the incorrect grouping of units of words into phrases. Before students can begin to learn the intricacies of prosody and intonation, they must first have acquired a knowledge base to which they can apply.

## LEARNING AND THE LEARNER

The distinction between language acquisition in a “naturalistic environment” and in a classroom environment must be addressed as central to my approach in SLA. Krashen has long espoused the position that language acquisition can only take place outside of a teacher-directed classroom, when the conditions for I+1 are met (R. Ellis Study of SLA 27). However, in the last few years, he has added in some support for the benefit to be gained from learning a language with the introduction of the concept of “narrow listening” and “narrow reading”—both of which seem to contradict his early insistence on the ineffectual nature of “learning” (Krashen).

“Narrow listening” and “narrow reading” also support the efficacy of repetition: learners listen to or read the same units over and over again because they have chosen topics in which they are interested. With each repeat of the input, students are able to access more of the details of the linguistic data. The attention to detail which these new practices support are in keeping with the interest in “implicit” and “explicit,” as well as “incidental” and “intentional” learning. The debate on the comparative efficacy of each type of learning I will leave to other researchers, as even the definition of learning, and distinctions between the different types, is still being debated (DeKeyser, Hulstijn).

In the classroom, the ultimate goal is not to determine which of X, Y or Z ignited the spark in Student A, B or C, but to provide them with the best instruction possible. Unless one is in a one-on-one tutoring situation, it is difficult to fine tune a lesson to an individual, but must try to provide input for the various types of language learners in the classroom while not discouraging them. This proposal involves encouraging students themselves to make the transition and continue the learning begun in the classroom outside of the classroom—in the free time which teachers do not control. This proposition



is a melding of affect with motivation—two intangible elements of success in language acquisition, which have been problematic for teachers for decades. However, both the positive attitude toward the language and the motivation to use and experience the language are useless without a concrete foundation of linguistic knowledge. For that, students must first learn and gain control over the phonology, lexicon, syntax, et al., of the language being studied.

One of the current models of learning is the SUSTAIN Neural networks by Love , et al. (Yasuaki and Love; Gureckis and Love). A simplified depiction of its basic concepts are provided in Table 2 below:

<b><i>Modeling inference (inference learning)</i></b>	<b><i>vs</i></b>	<b><i>Classification learning</i></b>
I know it's a chair; therefore, I assume that it has four legs, whether I see them or not.		Here's something. Does it have a seat, four legs, can you sit on it? Then, it must be a chair.

Table 2: Learning Models

As this model relates to foreign language learning, the end result has not been tested or falsified as to efficacy. If we could prove the superiority—or the existence—of each model for learning in students, or could know that helping students learn the necessary cognitive strategies to consciously employ one or the other, the benefit for language teachers would be immeasurable. For teaching Russian, using inference learning, students hear (or see) a conjugated verb form, e.g., *читает* (“he/she/ reads”), or a longer, but still easily analyzed verb form, *великодушиничает* (“he/she affects generosity”), there’s a pronoun (*он, она*) before this form, and the students begins to

think: I see the ending *-aem*, so this is probably a verb, singular, more likely imperfective, and, if I look it up in the dictionary, I should be able to find an infinitive ending in */-amь/*.” If one approaches the problem from the other direction, classification learning, *великодушничает* queues the recognition of */-aem/*, the collocation of a pronoun or noun in the immediate vicinity, and the student thinks that this must be a verb.

Oller has addressed this same process as a pragmatic problem of linking content and form, in which he explains that, “...the bootstrapping problem—the difficulty of priming the pump that will connect target forms with meanings in a FL—is a common one” (93). Syntactic bootstrapping as defined by Gleitman (1990) focuses on “formal solutions to the bootstrapping problem” (qtd. in Oller). This model equates to Love’s classification learning, in which similarity of form serves as an intellectual aid in comprehending new, unfamiliar forms in the language.

These examples are somewhat simplistic and, for Russian, probably would be more salient in a different tense, e.g., the past tense, where the endings can easily mimic noun endings. Once students become aware of, or are taught to look for the patterns of these forms, the learning can become easier. For example, in Russian the stems of all words end in a consonant; to this basic component are added inflectional or derivational endings (Townsend). For masculine nouns, nothing is added; in other words, they have a “Ø-ending.” The past tense marker for Russian verbs is also consonantal, usually */-l/*, to which is added either a Ø-ending for masculine, */-a/* for feminine, */-o/* for neuter, and */-i/* for all plurals—all of which agree with the gendered endings of their corresponding nouns. (See Table 3, below.) The only way for students to properly assign meaning to the lexical unit is for them to recognize the role or function which that unit plays in the sentence or utterance. Recognition of this function relies on the presence of prototypes against which to compare the lexical unit(s).

<i><b>Russian</b></i>	<i><b>English</b></i>
<i>Иван читал ... (Ø -ending)</i>	Ivan was reading...
<i>Книга лежала ... (-a ending)</i>	The book was lying...
<i>Окно выходило ... (-o ending)</i>	The window opened out onto...

Table 3: Redundancy of Noun & Verb Endings Attention

### ATTENTION

Attention is one of the key components in learning (Wigglesworth; Gass Learner). According to Morley, teachers must recognize the “...importance of well-structured attention to aural comprehension” and take responsibility for “guiding students toward active awareness of their learning role” (Morley "Perspectives"). Part of that learning role is starting to pay attention to phonemic elements of the language. However, we can not pay attention to something of which we are unaware (Robinson "Noticing"). For example, most of us know people who sleep through the sound of trains, televisions blaring, loud music playing. For them, all these noises have become background, and are filtered out. They remain ambient noise, and the individual sounds remain indistinguishable and unnoticed by the listener. In other words, they do not pay attention to these noises. The sounds of a foreign language begin as undifferentiated noise until students learn how to pay attention to the salient items

One way to catch the attention of students is with music; sometimes the music is the entire message—e.g., “Taps” (usually accompanying memorial and funeral services) or “Hail to the Chief” (played when the Commander-in-Chief enters). If as teachers we couple this power with words in the foreign language, we have a ready-made vehicle to

aid in retention, not just of melody and rhythm, but of the words associated with the rhythm—including the prosody inherent in word pronunciation patterns. The learning and retention of the prosodic footprint of words and phrases is especially important in Russian with its more numerous and dramatic shifts in intonation, vowel reduction and devoicing of word-final consonants. In conclusion, benefits to be gained by introducing students to authentic music include: get their attention; encourage them to spend time on task; then become accustomed to the acoustic patterns of the language. Since attention span is a limited commodity, learners must learn to focus their attention and limit distracters. Most people have mechanisms or strategies which they use to concentrate or focus their attention, whether they are aware of them or not. Closing the eyes, or unfocusing, looking into space to pay attention to sounds—all are mechanisms for focusing attention, thereby limiting or dulling the input from other conflicting senses in order to heighten one (Gass Learner; Robinson "Attention"; Calvin). The Non-Native Speakers (NNS) are hampered not only by their lack of familiarity with the phonology of the language, but also by their lack of cultural knowledge.

Minimal attention can be paid to conversation by Native Speakers (NS) because of confirmation of expected sounds. The awareness of usual phrasal collocations and cultural expectations are reflected in fluency, because it allows the speaker to allocate their sparse reserves of attention. They only need to pay special attention is when the sounds don't confirm to the expected sequence of phonemes (Nattinger and DeCarrico). Then the NS focuses in closer and makes corrections to expectations and retrieval. This refocusing includes not only variations of the Questionable Word (QW), but also words before and after the QW—in other words, the expected collocations, which aid in comprehension (Norris 112). NSs have “a commonality of references and a shared level of expectancy” which facilitates their comprehension, and is usually lacking in the NNS

(Cradler and Launer 26). One of the primary sources of difficulty for NNSs in the use of colloquial speech is that it relies so heavily on the use of expectation, ellipsis and non-standard usages (Rozental and Telenkova; Burke). The situation is complicated for L2 speakers because they do not have the NS's awareness of lexical collocations, and therefore cannot anticipate. All their attention resources are needed to parse the language stream.

Rozental writes that although lessons in the classroom are built on grammatically correct utterances, using neutral language, that is not the norm for colloquial speech (Golub and Rozental). The everyday speech of NSs is full of ellipsis as well as non-standard lexicon. Ellipsis is inextricably tied in with expectation – one can only omit that part of an utterance which both speakers already know. NNSs, unlike NSs, have little experience and almost no training in recognizing these ellipses as well as the non-standard lexicon. The NNSs must consciously learn and commit to memory the lexical context (*лексический фон*) which the NS has acquired—consciously and unconsciously—over a lifetime of language use. Vereshchagin and Kostomarov distinguish this *лексический фон*, which entails the totality of the word's conceptual semantic meaning, from the background knowledge (*фоновые знания*), which is the common, culturally shared knowledge base. They emphasize that even when the lexical conceptual knowledge is complete, this background knowledge is only a potential of the individual and of the group; the actualization of this *фоновые знания* depends on demands and circumstances (43). NNSs have the burden of trying to learn both the *фоновые знания* and the *лексический фон* in conjunction with the basic lexical meaning of new vocabulary. For each new word, the memory demands go far beyond the demands of orthography and phonology.

## **MEMORIES ARE MADE**

If we look at competence as being on a continuum, then even the highest level Novice, in the words of ACTFL standards is only capable of understanding “short, learned utterances and some sentence-length utterances, particularly where context strongly supports understanding and speech is clearly audible.” This lack of comprehension on the part of students does not mean that those words are not present in the stream of the FL, but that the learners do not have the capacity to comprehend or understand them. They may not even notice or be able to separate the individual words. The functions of noticing and paying attention are analogous to a focusing tool in that the student must be aware that something exists before they can pay attention to it. Ellis alludes to this phenomenon in what he terms consciousness raising, a form of instruction which does not rely on practice with features of the language, but instead helps students in “...formulating some kind of cognitive representation of how it works” (R. Ellis Study of SLA 643). This approach is an intersection of attention and prototypes.

As Pinker notes, these prototypes in our memory allow us to make inferences about all the other things in the world which we can’t possibly know. Omaggio-Hadley applies the term schema for that background knowledge or context in L2 which aids in top-down processing (302). However, she applies this to major, gross concepts, ignoring that for the smallest of units, there also exists schemata by which we classify new information, such as “bird” or “sentence.” Linguists have long noted that each utterance is unique; however, our prototypical knowledge of how an utterance is formed--the syntax, lexicon, morphology, etc.—allows us to parse and understand each new utterance as it is formed. For the NNS of a language the prototype knowledge base is limited and undeveloped, and therefore, complicates and makes more difficult the process of parsing the L2 into comprehensible chunks.

Cognitive psychologists have provided us with, to date, the most widely accepted of the latest models for understanding and describing the processes of language comprehension and production (Segalowitz "Psychology"; Yasuaki and Love; Robinson Cognition). Teachers must be willing to use the newer models of learning without demanding that they pass the test of abstract observeability when the processes themselves are internal and invisible. These models rely upon descriptions of how humans learn and acquire knowledge, both procedural and declarative. Declarative knowledge, according to Omaggio-Hadley, is "explicit and conscious, and can be articulated by the learner" (67). In other words, this is knowledge about language, the facts and structure. Procedural knowledge, on the other hand, involves manipulating that same language, performing linguistically. Both declarative and procedural knowledge must be based on memory.

Memory is not a monolithic entity. Contrary to the popular TV ads promising to show you how to improve your memory, there seems to be no way actually to do this. So far, cognitive science has not supported their claims, but has shown that the limitations of working memory capacity are physiologically determined. According to research conducted by Miller,  $\pm 7$  items seems to be the limit: the size of those items can, however, change (R. Ellis Study of SLA; McGroarty and Rivers; Robinson "Individual"). Whether each item is a separate phoneme, or entire chunks/sentences/phrases, the number still remains relatively constant. Memory is divided into Long-term memory storage (LTM) and Short-term memory storage (STM), each of which has common and distinct elements. LTM is the repository of what we have learned; STM is the area for recognition of what we experience through our senses. The central question for teachers

is not necessarily understanding the mechanisms of how exactly humans learn, but rather how to influence the learning.

## **PRODUCTION AND PERCEPTION**

Much has been written about the inter-dependence of production and perception, but primarily in the fields of ethnomusicology and cognitive psychology (Bauman "Observation"; Cutler). Although it has not been tested, experience (and common sense) shows that people expect words to sound the same way that they themselves say them—or close enough to be recognizable. As evidence of this, the broadcast and cable news programs, in the last ten years or so, have increasingly been providing captions for speakers of English who have what someone has determined is a heavy accent, or at least, an accent which might present comprehension difficulties for the average US listener. This problem has drawn the attention of a number of researchers in reading; but not listening and speaking. The research for reading has examined the effect of consistency between the orthography and pronunciation for reading competence in an L2: the more consistent the relationship, the higher the skill level acquired by learners (Perfetti, Van Dyke and Hart). This study would seem to have possible positive impact for Russian, where, although the pronunciation is much more consistent with the orthography than, for example English, the vowel reduction and voicing assimilation present major problems for novices. For example, the word *язык*, pronounced as /jiZYK/, or *поняла*, pronounced as /pənjiLA/, or the devoicing or a word-final consonant in a word like *зуб*, which is pronounced /zup/, present special problems for novice students of Russian.

Tarone and Bigelow examine the question of production and perception by delving into the link between the written representation of words and their internal phonological representations for both comprehension and production. Although most of the research



examined has been done in the area of first language acquisition and literacy, they do say that there are implications for SLA research. Reis and Castro-Caldas (1997) are widely quoted in the article, with conclusions and comments based on their case study of Portuguese adult women (Tarone and Bigelow 83). In describing the process of reading in an alphabetic language (such as English or Russian) for a literate adult, Reis and Castor-Caldas state that, ““Learning to match graphemes and phonemes is learning an operation in which units of auditory verbal information heard in temporal sequence are matched to units of visual verbal information which is spatially arranged’ (p. 445)” (qtd in Tarone and Bigelow 83).

For literate novice language learners, the process of associating graphemes with phonemes is not new. However, if the script itself is different, i.e., Cyrillic, the learners may be trapped in a what I would term a semiliterate phase: they know what they must do (skills acquired in L1), but must revert to a childlike level due to lack of familiarity with the new script.

Reis and Castro-Caldas believe that semantic processing is implicit, and learning to read and write brings an explicit dimension to the process of phonological processing. They conclude that absence of the ability to associate grapheme and phoneme decreases the efficiency of explicit phonological processing of oral language in adult life: ‘the missing of a single skill (grapheme-phoneme association) interferes significantly in the higher development of the language system’ (p. 499) (qtd in Tarone and Bigelow 83).

Tarone and Bigelow, while basing their conclusions on the studies cited in their article, conclude that noticing may not be as important for acquisition as previously assumed (88). However, I contend that they do not allow for the possible influence of outside intervention (such as a teacher) in the subjects' ability to notice specific details in the input. The assumption is that "if L2 learners do not have awareness or ability to consciously manipulate phonemes, morphemes, and words in the L2, then they cannot notice enhanced input or corrective feedback targeting those phonemes, morphemes, and words" (Tarone and Bigelow 88). Although these objections/points are presented as possible implications for further study, they do not allow for focused input by the teacher, which is one of the responsibilities of an L2 teacher—to make the student aware of just what they need to pay attention to. The use of nonsense words, and the manipulation of single graphemes/phonemes for subjects who do not know graphemes (i.e., illiterate) in some of the studies cited, somewhat reduces the applicability of these findings to an instructional environment. However, these findings do strengthen our understanding of the link between cognitive phonological processing and grapheme recognition, and emphasizes the importance of explicitly teaching such links when students are learning an L2 using a different alphabetic script.

"Phonological processing" is the latest buzzword being used for the underlying factors in analyzing an invisible process. What, exactly, does it mean? How does the learner store the concept of the letter /a/? Do we store the shape of the lines and curves, or, do we see the letter (grapheme) only as a representation of the sound (phoneme, complete with allophones) with which we associate it? Geva & Wang claim that there are universal principles of reading (and by extension, language competence), and that "the ability to segment and delete phonemes in words is important for word recognition

accuracy” (184). Is this not simply validation of the methods already used in teaching reading? We have placed a new label on it, but the actuality has not changed. “A rose by any other name would smell as sweet.” One of the first things that students do in the Russian language classroom is learn the Cyrillic alphabet. We provide the orthography by means of the phonology: in Russian: “*a* = /ah/, *б* = /beh/, *в* = /veh/, etc”; in English, “a-b-c-d, etc” . We do not expect the students to remember the graphemes without the accompanying phoneme. It may be simplistic, but I doubt if it is even possible to do it without naming (in some manner) the letters. In classrooms (I know that it happens in Russian language classrooms with L2), teachers instruct students to “Sound out the letters,” “Read it aloud,” or “Let’s take it letter by letter” (Davidson, Gor and Lekic; Smyth and Crosbie; Lubensky et al.). We do not ask students to describe the geometric shape, but the sound associated with the letter: this is phonological processing at its most basic. Exceptions and the effects of linguistic environments are pointed out, especially for languages like English and Russian, where the orthographies are not as “shallow” or “transparent” as in some other languages (Geva and Wang 183). The read-aloud phenomenon itself attests to the prevalence of the grapheme-phoneme association in our world. “Inner speech,” a bulwark within the theory-field of language competence (development of such competence), relies solely on phonemic representations, or the sounds of the words, which we use internally to express our thoughts (Vygotsky Trudy).

Yukawa’s assertion supports my premise that the retrieval of knowledge, and the automaticizing of such retrieval are central to any discussion of language competence. Once learned, linguistic or lexical elements, according to some of the latest findings in cognitive psychology, are never lost; they are encoded in the LTM (Hansen 63). However, the pathways by which we retrieve these elements may become weaker

through lack of use. This process equates to the development of ruts in a roadway, or pathway. Any pathway, which is seldom accessed or traveled, will eventually become overgrown, with this growth impeding speedy travel along the pathway. If this pathway is in the brain and involves language data, the overgrowth is perceptible as hesitations, increased use of empty fillers, or failure to respond—in other words, language attrition/loss. Still, once the ruts are firmly established as frequently accessed pathways to language data, the L2 speaker/user can easily slip into the rut and retrieve the required language elements. The deeper the ruts, the quicker the retrieval; this equates to automaticity, although there are disputes about exactly how to define this concept of automaticity. For example, there are numerous tales of the shock experienced by older people, when “out of the blue” they recall the name of a peer from more than forty or fifty years earlier. Usually these are not the names of friends with whom they have constant or frequent contact; however, the name, along with its associations, once stored, remain in LTM. Simply reading a list of words or encountering an individual once or twice does not (except for the exceptional person with eidetic memory) usually result in long-term storage. The amount of exposure required to imprint on LTM varies by individual, just as the number and size of items available for immediate recall from STM.

Although teachers assume that students are interested in the language when they enroll in one of the more difficult languages, this interest does not simply or directly translate into an ability to pay attention to the acoustic features of the language. All who have heard a foreign, unfamiliar language are familiar with the sound babble, in which the sounds of the foreign language are only a noise, when the individual sounds are not distinguishable and have no beginning, no ending, and no meaning. For the Novice NNS, it is easy to drown in this “flood of sound” (*номок печу* in Russian). One way to define

listening comprehension is the parsing and assignment of meaning to the elements within a phonemic signal.

We as teachers can not open the skulls of our students and look inside at the brain to see how the listeners process the words. If I could, I might look in, find the word as spoken by me, only to find that the students' internal representation is not what I said (or thought I said). Here lies the crux of the matter: it is irrelevant whether the internal representation is perfect or not: the connection between the actual word and the students' internal representation is supreme—the link between the concept and its form, the word. The parameters within which the auditory signature of a word or phoneme can vary are constrained, but are not absolute. A certain degree of mispronunciation is acceptable because the ear and brain make corrections and allowances for variety (prototypical acoustic signature/pattern). The students' pragmatically and linguistically correct responses and the ability to engage in a conversation is the ultimate judgment of comprehension.

In language acquisition schema formation depends on exposure. All new knowledge is analyzed, classified and either stored or discarded, based on prior knowledge—the schemata already present from a lifetime of learning (Oprandy; Gureckis and Love). Omaggio-Hadley defines schema rather broadly as “previously acquired knowledge structures accessed in the comprehension process” (147). This definition somewhat skirts the underlying issue that all our knowledge is built on “previously acquired” structures (Oprandy 160). It is the integration of the new knowledge within the old structures that results in the formation of new patterns of knowledge. Without sufficient exposure, one can not see normally the pattern. For language students, repetition of the musical rhythm, together with the words (also usually in rhyming,

rhythmic units) makes that repetition and exposure palatable (Gilbert). The repetition can be seen as a tool for cognitive rut-formation; the more repetition there is, the stronger the mental and conceptual connections in the mind. As Robinson notes, “language is learned in the process of using language, and the best predictor of language facility will simply be time-on-task” (63).

Schema formation also lies at the heart of grammaticality judgments (GJ), although Juffs does not explicitly state it. He asserts that, for the L2 learners, GJs on ungrammatical sentences take longer than normal. This “structural description” is in reality a set of schema which circumscribes the normal limits of sentence formation. Chomsky has claimed that we have an LAD (Language Acquisition Device) which allows humans to acquire language, including its grammar (Cook). But, since each sentence or statement, according to Chomsky, is unique, the formation of each grammatical sentence must follow some schema or prototype in the speakers’ memory. Cognitive psychologists claim that humans live in a world of prototypes (even stereotypes) which force, or allow, us to classify each new phenomenon according to its closeness to an ideal already stored in long-term memory. On this basis, Juff’s GJ reaction time results are not unexpected. The more complex the structure of a sentence, regardless of grammaticality, the longer it takes a subject to compare it with prototypes in LTM, especially if the language is an L2.

It is assumed that ungrammatical sentences may take longer to judge because there is no structural description in the learner’s newly acquired grammar which matches that ungrammatical sentence; as a result, the parser may attempt a number of different analyses before giving up and assigning an ungrammatical status to it. This process will

take longer than one in which a grammatical sentence can be quickly identified as such (Juffs 208):

<i>Type</i>	<i>Sentence Form</i>	<i>Example</i>
Prototype 1	S-V-O	Tania bought the book.
Prototype 2	S-V-O-PP	Ivan bought books in the library
Prototype 3	ADVP- INDEFART-ADJ-ADJ-S-V-PP- REL-PRO-ADV-V-ADJ-OBJ	Early yesterday morning, a bleary-eyed, hung-over Ivan stumbled into the library, in which he usually buys used books.
Legend: ADVP = <b>Adverbial Phrase</b> ; INDEFART = <b>Indefinite article</b> ; ADJ = <b>Adjective</b> ; S = <b>Subject</b> ; V = <b>Verb</b> ; PP = <b>Prepositional Phrase</b> ; REL = <b>Relative clause</b> ; PRO = <b>Pronoun</b> ; ADV = <b>Adverb</b> ; OBJ = <b>Object</b>		

Table 4: Sentence Prototypes

Even though all the sentences in the Table 4 above are grammatical, reaction time for a GJ on a sentence similar to Prototype 1 will be much shorter than for Prototype 2, and significantly shorter than for Prototype 3. As depicted in the table, each of these grammatically correct sentences, beginning with Prototype 1, and ending with Prototype 3, takes progressively more time to process—and not simply because of the number of words, but because of the complexity of the structures. The complexity ensures that each element (adverb, noun, verb, adjective): (1) actually exists, (2) is in an appropriate location, relative to the other elements of the sentence, and (3) have semantic validity.

In Table 5 below, although the sentences all contain only three elements, GJs for the L2 learner are complicated by the dilemma of L1 versus L2 word order and the semantics and verb control characteristics of unfamiliar lexicon.

<i><b>Word Order</b></i>	<i><b>Examples</b></i>
S-V-O	Tania bought the book. ( <i>Таня купила книгу</i> ) vs. ( <i>Книгу купила Таня.</i> )
S-V-O	*Tania slept the book. (* <i>Таня спала книгу .</i> )
S-V-O	*The book slept Tania. (* <i>Книгу спала Таню.</i> )
S-V-O	*The book bought Tania. (* <i>Книга купила Таню.</i> )
<b>Legend S = Subject ; V = Verb ; O = Object</b>	

Table 5: Grammaticality Judgments

For the L2 learner, especially for the speakers of languages with non-overt (covert) morphological markings, the syntactic significance of endings such as /-u/ versus /-ia/ only complicates the judgment-making process. They must learn the saliency of such markings for the meaning of utterances (sentences) in the L2. As shown in Table 5, above, and as experienced by Russian teachers everyday, many novice Russian language learners assume that if the word order of a sentence is SVO (the standard word order for English), the sentence must be correct. This GJ would cause them to assume that the alternate sentence in the first example is grammatically incorrect, which it is not. For communication purposes, especially in the initial stages of interlanguage development, the ability to make a GJ may not be as important as the “good enough” sufficient to maintain the conversation.



## **PROTOTYPES AND STEREOTYPES:**

Recognition of linguistic symbols, whether oral or written, and which forms the basis of linguistic competence, relies on both LTM and STM. If there is no entry in LTM with which to compare input, there can be no recognition. However, recognition is also not a monolithic phenomenon: it requires detecting, then noticing. According to Robinson, “noticing is defined to mean detection plus rehearsal in short term memory, prior to encoding in long-term memory...” (“Noticing” 296). Recognition relies on finding patterns of similarity between what is already known and the input. Another component of recognition is attention. Because we are surrounded by so much sensory data, and our processing capacity is limited, we must decide what to ignore, what to pay attention to and try to analyze, or process. To do this, we rely call up stored schemata to make sense of this new information.

All our experience with learning and reality relies upon the formation of prototypes (of which stereotypes are simply a matter of degree) – otherwise, each new item met would present unclassifiable raw data, with no relationship to anything already stored in memory. With enough items of a similar type stored in memory, students can begin to form schemata for anything.

One of the few undisputed axioms of SLA is that time with the language, exposure to and experience with the language and culture, and time devoted to its study all can lead to higher competence (Omaggio-Hadley; Rifkin; R. Ellis “Factors”). For training purposes, the Interagency Language Roundtable (ILR) has classified languages according to level of difficulty, on a four-point scale—Category One through Category Four. Category One includes French, Spanish, et al.; Category Two includes German, Dutch, et al.; Category Three includes Russian, Thai, et al.; and, Category Four includes

Chinese, Arabic, et al. The number of hours of study necessary for students of “average” aptitude to achieve a level of 2 on Listening and either Reading or Speaking (ACTFL Advanced) has been quantified. For Category One, the average contact classroom hours (maximum class size of 10 students) is 750 hours; for Category Two, 1020 hours; for Category Three, 1410 hours; and, for Category Four, 1890 hours. These are the standards adhered to by the government training facility in Monterey, California, Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center (DLIFLC) in their training. However, at the typical American university, the number of classroom hours barely exceeds 400 hours (Rifkin 12)

In English, we have the saying “Practice makes perfect,” while Russian has *«Повторение—мать учения»* (“Repetition is the mother of learning”). Researchers Newell and Rosenbloom (1981) have operationalized this apocryphal wisdom in The Power Law of Practice:  $RT = a + bN^{-c}$  (DeKeyser "Automaticity" 131). DeKeyser adds a caveat to their theory of automatization, as well as to results of other documented studies of this effect, that “the automatized behavior that results from consistent practice is highly specific” (131). In other words, if students listen more, one should detect decreased reaction time in their processing of audio input. He warns, however, that the effect does not necessarily transfer to other skill sets. Ellis adds that “it is necessary to form a stable representation of their phonological form” in order to learn these new words, and these words become significant for language acquisition ("Factors" 21).

In a later article, DeKeyser noted that Saffran, et al. (1997) found that incidental learning of vocabulary in an artificial language took place “through exposure to a tape-recording playing in the background” (DeKeyser "Learning" 333). This lends support to the premise that benefit can be gained from listening to authentic music. If parsing of vocabulary can be improved in an artificial language, without multiple linguistic cues, by

listening to audio input, it should be more beneficial and more pleasurable with authentic music. Rod Ellis adds that:

It seems reasonable to suppose that oral input may well constitute an effective source of data for incidental vocabulary learning. Indeed the success which children have in developing a substantial vocabulary in their first language, before they come to school, testifies to this (R. Ellis "Factors" 3).

Whether language teachers call up the folk sayings or the “Power Law of Practice,” our primary focus must remain the same—encouraging students to find or make the time to improve their Russian, through motivation.

One of the most frequent complaints levied against the Audio-Lingual Method (ALM) was that it produced prepackaged chunks of language (i.e., dialogues) to be memorized, which were then not applicable or transferable to normal conversation, just as orators in classic narratives would expound to the public with pre-learned scripts (Ong 61). These were opposed to “verbatim renditions” (direct, word-for-word translations) which also did not exist in nature. These phrases were taken out of context and did not teach students how to create their own utterances in response to their L2 interlocutors. The approach which I favor involves the use of ready-made units of language in the teaching of comprehension and the development of fluency. These units of language have variously been called prefabricated language, chunks, collocations, lexical phrases, et al. (Nattinger and DeCarrico). Lee concludes that these units are at the very center of NS command of language, that they “have a prodigiously large mental store of set

phrases and expressions” (199). These pre-digested, ready-made pieces of language are the foundation of fluency.

The sine qua non of language competence is lexicon. One must have a substantial lexicon at your command before you can apply the rules or take advantage of the good habits one has developed. The interplay of these two, top-down (using prior knowledge) and bottom-up (using lexicon) processing, produces the most competent language learners (Hulstijn). Without these “chunks” of languages which can be retrieved from long-term storage for immediate usage, fluency and speed of delivery are impossible to achieve. Russian dictionaries, especially the *толковый* (“explanatory”) editions, regularly present the most common fixed phrases, especially those which are set in idiomatic usage.

Any interpretation of a word must be based on collocation or environment in which the word appears—both in L1 and L2. Context is meaningful, relevant and applicable; it answers the questions: who, with whom, why, where, when (Omaggio-Hadley, 93). Context limits the lexical choices and leads to expectation, what is sometimes called contextual guessing. For example, suppose the topic is language learning, and the discussion is about what an individual is doing. If one starts a sentence, “When someone is...”, the blank is more likely to be filled by the word *talking* than by the word *cooking*. In language classrooms, it is standard practice to initially provide a title or topic, which provides the context for an activity. Each pre-listening, pre-viewing or picture presented prepares students for this topic and the selection of appropriate lexical items.

While this practice helps students by limiting their choices, it also creates another problem. This practice of providing contextually relevant glosses to students presents

great difficulty for teaching basic vocabulary which may have a “gloss” for a particular passage, but have multiple shades of meaning, which do not have a 1:1 correlation to its L1 counterpart. The shades of meaning, register, or background against which a word is used, along with its historic-cultural connotations can be thought of as a frame. Duchan defines frames as “The conceptual structure used to make sense of and construct realities,” which are then divided into four categories of subordinate frames, including models and schemata (12). Ausubel adds that “The most important single factor influencing learning is what the learner already knows” (qtd in Oprandy 160). What the learner already knows is called by various names, depending on the level of analysis—from meta- to micro. Frames can be visualized as the outside constraining limits for the interpretation of each linguistic reality. A frame can be as broad as the concept of a conversation; i.e., regardless of the culture, a conversation involves no less than two people. Within the limits of a conceptual frame is the background knowledge (*фоновые знания*), which serves as the background of the picture, and may or may not be shared by all members of a cultural group. The background knowledge is shaped by group memberships, past experiences, education, et al., is culturally shared, but not necessarily commonly shared (Vereshchagin and Kostomarov). At the lower level of this analysis is the lexical context (*лексический фон*) of the word itself, which, for each individual, is also unique.

Not only the frame, but prototypicality of words are frequently incomplete for the beginning student. For the NNS, the word is frequently learned from a glossary in a textbook, or in a Russian-English/English-Russian dictionary which presents a limited number of definitions or synonyms. Therefore, the new word is viewed as roughly equivalent to its L1 counterpart, with all the contextual similarities of the original.

Even the conceptual frame of simple words are difficult for NNSs. For example, in Figure 1, below, the circles represent the frames for the Russian word *cocmaб*; The “X” indicates the prototypicality of its usage with the meaning of “train car.” As presented in a glossary or R-E dictionary with the meaning “train car,” *cocmaб* has a much narrower circle of usage (or frame) for the NNS than for the NS, although this may be the only interpretation which novice language speakers have. However, for NSs the meaning of “train car” is not the first to come to mind; they have more typical and frequent meanings (composition, make-up, structure, mixture, solution, staff, personnel, membership, and cast [theatrical]) for this word *cocmaб*. The meaning “train car” is the last listed in numerous Russian-language dictionaries (Kuznetsov; Ozhegov; "Lingvo"). The larger circle, labeled for the NS, shows the greater semantic breadth of *cocmaб* for the NS: Position “A” represents the most frequent meaning ‘composition’; Position “B” represents the next most frequent meaning ‘structure’; while, Position “X,” is not as centrally prototypical.

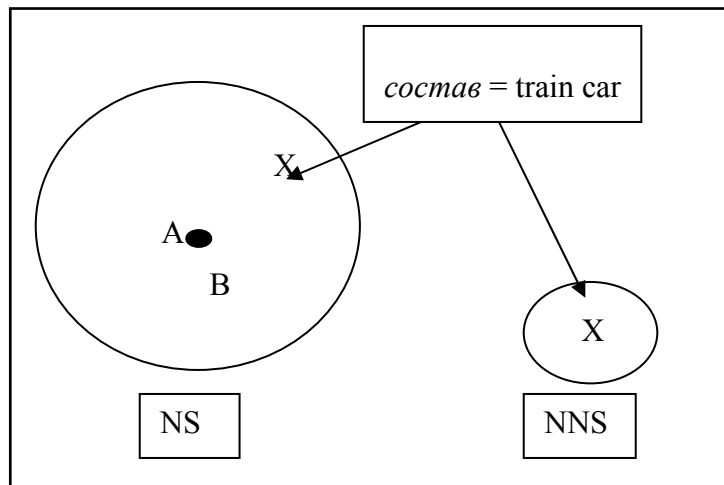


Figure 1: Conceptual Frame for NS versus NNS

Problems and difficulties with frames are not limited to word definitions, but can encompass entire phrases. Use of Imperfective, past tense verbs of motion is one such frame where the concept for the novice NNS usually differs radically from that of the NS. The NNS often uses the phrase, «Я ехал домой», and sees this sentence as completed action in the past, being equivalent to the English, “I went home.” However, the NS, when using this phrase «Я ехал домой» (“I was going home...” or “... when I was going home.”), sees it as either the end or the beginning of a discourse element. It never stands alone.

Students of Russian learn the word *дом* (“house” or “home”) usually within the first two or three lessons in the classroom. However, the phrase «В этом доме живут около 500 человек.» (“Approximately 500 people live in this building.”) is a classic frame problem between Russian and English. Although most standard Russian-English dictionaries used in American settings present “building” as one of the first two translations of the word *дом*, most textbook glossaries present only “house” (Benyukh; Wheeler; Katzner; Airlie; Davidson, Gor and Lekic; Lubensky et al.) The British textbook *Rus’* presents the same translation of *дом*, but with an accompanying figure of the typical Russian multistoried building (Smyth and Crosbie 33). The word *дом* refers to both picture A and B in Figure 3 below. The cognitive frame for this sentence slows down for the NNS. Phonological processing may take place quickly, but the frame for the simple word *дом* in the Russian context must shift from “A” for the American context to “B” for the Russian context.

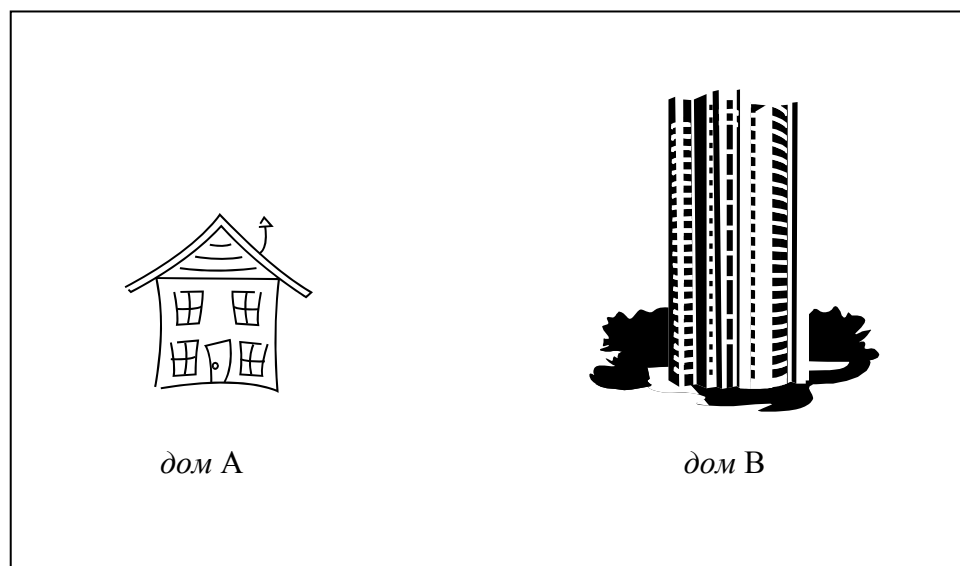


Figure 2: Cognitive Frame for “House” or “Home”

So, comprehension of the phonological signal is the least of the problems faced by the NNS of Russian. Consider the word “breakfast” as a concept in the USA, England, Germany, Europe; although the word is the same (allowing for translation of “first meal of the day”), but the prototypical frame and associations (i.e., what one gets for breakfast!) are different for the different cultures and languages.

The first element of context, according to Frommer (qtd. in Omaggio-Hadley 93), at its most basic level includes the choice of lexicon itself. For each lexical choice, there are available phrases and modifiers which range in usage from frequent (high probability of co-occurrence) to rare (low probability of co-occurrence). Although, according to some linguists, the lexical supply of a language is infinite (with new words being, coined



to describe changing reality), as is the number of possible sentences which can be constructed, at any one point in time, there are limitations placed on which words are in current standard usage (Vereshchagin and Kostomarov). For example, the terms *beatnik*, *cool*, and *groovy* are no longer in common usage. But, even when words are not obsolete or not in common usage, the lexical concepts as defined in standard dictionaries are incomplete for the NNS. Vereshchagin and Kostomarov state that, «...семантика слова не исчерпывается лексическим понятием, но включает в себя также компонент, называемый лексический фон» (“...the semantics of a word is not exhausted by the lexical concept, but involves also a component called a lexical background”) (Vereshchagin and Kostomarov 60). This lexical background is more than simple context; it includes the “semantic core” which usually translates fully from one language or culture to another. But, beyond this core lies the background, which usually includes those culture-specific nuances of meaning which must be learned. For example, in Russia (and in the former Soviet Union), *Дом отдыха*, (“holiday/rest home”) and *Дом культуры* (“Palace of Culture”) do not refer to a “structure serving as a dwelling for one or more persons” (Am. Heritage).

Many of the words in a language form phrases, which occur with such high frequency that hearing the one word, the NS can anticipate the next word or the rest of the utterance (Oller; Denisov and Morkovkin). This expectation enhances the NS’s ability to process the linguistic input. For the NNS, there are simpler problems of collocations and grammatical expectation, below the phrase level, which impede his ability to process the L2 in a timely manner. The verb and preposition control which is second-nature for the NS must be decided each time for the NNS until they become automatic. For example, in Russian the preposition *под* (“under”) requires the Instrumental case, while the preposition *к* (“toward”) is followed by the Dative case. In

the phrases *нод вечером* (“towards evening”)— *к вечеры* (“by evening”), novice students must spend a lot of time deciding which ending to choose for the noun following the preposition. If, however, they learned the unit as a fixed lexical phrase, they could retrieve it from memory without searching for the correct case and ending.

Although the idea of teaching lexicalized phrases to be memorized is reminiscent of the Audio-Lingual Method, the current approach is different in that the units to be learned occur in nature and are culturally and linguistically neutral. This is not rote memorization, but rather, the application of learning strategies (e.g., memory, cognitive, or compensation strategies) which enhance the learning experience and facilitate communication. One benefit of knowing collocations and phrasal constructions is especially important when the phrase created by learners is “grammatically correct” but the response from native speakers is “...but we don’t say that,” or “we don’t say it that way” (Vinogradov; Zemskaja). Not just the chunks, but the pattern of the forms becomes vital for language training. According to P. Kelly, it is knowledge of the collocations themselves which thwarts novice language learners: when one knows what to expect, it’s easier to hear (147).

Although teachers may not support the ALM, many already use this approach to a limited degree in beginning language classrooms. Even today, in classrooms with an emphasis on proficiency, some canonical phrases are taught in the very beginning of instruction, without elaboration, and without grammatical dissection. In Russian textbooks, most students are taught how to ask someone’s name before the Accusative or Genitive case endings or impersonal verbal constructions are presented in the classroom. The phrases, *«Как вас зовут?»* (“What is your name?”) and *«Меня зовут...»* (“My name is...”) are presented as a lexical unit, unanalyzed but grammatically analyzable,

long before the use of (1) accusative case, (2) pronouns in accusative case, or (3) impersonal verbal constructions. Within three-four months, students have learned the component grammatical elements and why the forms are as they are. However, after learning the structure, students do not backtrack and begin reexamining and reconstructing the phrase. Nattinger and DeCarrico remind us that

...it is important to recognize that as syntactic rules emerge and become part of grammatical competence, the conventionalized association between the lexical phrase, as a chunk and its function in context is retained. This language chunk—analyzed or not—continues to be available for ready access as either a partially or holistically pre-assembled pattern. As such, knowledge of the fixed lexical phrase frames as one kind of dictionary entry is also a part of linguistic competence” (12).

Students continue using the phrase as they did before they learned how it is constructed. Nattinger and DeCarrico claim that the use of collocations and lexical phrases (which two concepts they define as having different characteristics) are essential elements of fluent language production for the NS as well as for the NNS. The knowledge and use of chunks by students “...would allow the expression that they were unable to construct creatively from rules, simply because these chunks could be stored and retrieved whole when the situation called for them” (Nattinger and DeCarrico 27-28).

For Nattinger and DeCarrico, the distinguishing element for the use of chunks and lexical phrases does not presuppose that these chunks remain unanalyzed. They state that

the NSs first learn these phrases, use them, then attend school, where they learn the structure and control necessary. This statement assumes that all adults go beyond the initial stages of acquisition to analysis and understanding of structural patterns. NSs then, for the most part, in fluent conversation, retrieve the chunks from memory without further analysis and without element by element reconstruction. This use of chunks does not preclude knowledge about their proper use or the ability to break them down into their component parts.

### **LISTENING STRATEGY**

At approximately the 6-month stage, infants begin to lose the ability to discern sounds from all languages, and their listening, and babbling, become language-specific (Scovel). Their ability to discern sounds which are not in their L1 does not dissipate, but becomes dulled through lack of stimulation. At this beginning stage of language learning, the students' ability to make sense of and separate these sounds is still undeveloped, but some parts of them become familiar (Lund 201; Ferguson 309). We all recognize that infants do not speak for a long period or time, although they are surrounded by the sounds of the language. For the child, this relative silence and linguistic incompetence continues for years, while pathways are being built and reinforced in the brain. When talking about the superior language skills of young children, even those academics who specialize in Critical-Period Hypothesis research often ignore the effect of the constant bombardment of language-specific sounds on the ease of acquisition. Hakuta, Bialystok and Wiley (2003) acknowledge that, although the

...claim that there is an age-related decline in the success with which individuals master a second language is not controversial.... [w]hat is controversial, though, is whether this pattern meets the conditions for concluding that a critical period constrains learning in a way predicted by the theory (31).

Among the most significant factors which they list as constraining the language learning abilities of adults are social and educational. On the average, the younger the learner, the more varied will be the social contacts (and thus, varieties of language) and the more hours of formal education received in the second language. These influences have frequently been cited as evidence of the superior learning abilities of children and the inescapable maturation constraints, without accounting for the number and breadth of contact hours in the L2. Proponents of the Silent Approach came closest to admitting the importance and efficacy of the listening skill; but, even they fell victim to the all-or-nothing school of foreign-language pedagogy (L. Kelly).

One of the most difficult problems facing the foreign-language teacher is teaching students how to begin paying attention to word endings as more than carriers of sound and case endings—but also as carriers of function tags. This increased linguistic awareness is part of the distinction between novice- and intermediate-level language learners. The functional meaning being attached to certain sounds is one of the more difficult concepts for a language learner whose native language is a non-declensional language like English. Position and word order occupy the first place of importance for native speakers of English—the majority of our students in an American classroom setting.

For this reason, it is also a difficult habit to overcome or unlearn when faced with a declensional language such as Russian. The fact that clues for comprehension and function are usually redundantly layered in any utterance, including the noun/adjective endings, verb endings, is one of the most difficult new skills acquired by second language learners.

<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>Мой друг Иван прочитал</i>	<i>новую интересную книгу</i>	<i>о самой хорошей поездке</i>	<i>на Сахалин</i>
My friend Ivan read	an interesting new book	about the best trip	to Sakhalin
(1. stem + Ø)	(2. final -u sound)	(3. /-oy/ (/ -ey/) sound)	(4. prep)
1. Adjective, subject, appositive noun, and verb all end in a consonant. If students don't hear the individual endings (or lack thereof), they have four chances to get it right.			
2. Two feminine adjectives, plus noun = three chances			
3. Preposition sound, plus two adjectival endings, plus noun ending = four chances			
4. Preposition sound, plus preceding noun <i>поездке</i> plus noun = three chances			

Table 6: Redundancy of Phrasal Endings

The redundancies of endings, which translate into similar sounds, are so layered in the speech flow that students do not need to catch every word ending. As shown in Table 6, novice language learners have multiple opportunities to detect the correct signal in the auditory stream. Unfortunately, students too often are not aware of this. They are usually not aware of the redundant linguistic signals in their native language; the signals in the L2 are even less obvious to their perceptions (Nattinger and DeCarrico 17). What is simple for the native speaker is not necessarily simple for the NNS. Frequently, it is just the opposite: the shorter the word, the fewer redundant cues for recognition. In Russian there are a number of monosyllabic particles, *ведь, же, ли* – recognition of these

in the speech stream are complicated by the speed of passage and the lack of markers (like number of syllable, location of stress, order of recognized sounds) and complex patterns (Vasilyeva). In speech, for the NS, and to the detriment of the NNS's comprehension, the KISS principle reigns.

Therefore, students waste their time and attention stores trying to hear everything, unaware that they do not hear and process everything in L1. NSs only process the salient information; all other signals are ignored. Just as with Juff's GJs, the saliency judgment also is predicated on advanced knowledge of the language, therefore is frequently not available to the novice. Ellis (1994) equates this idea of saliency with noticeability. The teacher provides hints and background knowledge to aid in focusing students' noticing by means of repetition, emphatic placement of elements, instructional focus, purposeful information gaps, et al. (R. Ellis "Factors"). But, having noticed the acoustic signature and recognized the lexical items, students must still somehow connect the new lexical item with concepts of reality already stored in their minds. They must deal with the lexical store of the new language.

### **Words—The Body of the Beast**

Words are our bridge to reality: they allow us to interact with our world. Soviet psychologist Lev Vygotsky was one of the first to state eloquently this premise in his Thought and Language (1987). Words are the only tools available to us to give shape and form to the experiential representations of our life (cf., 100 Eskimo words for "snow"). In going from L1 to L2, students frequently, especially at the beginning, translate using either glossaries from textbooks (probably the most common tool), or dual-language dictionaries. Unfortunately, neither glossaries nor dictionaries include the cultural nuances needed to understand the L2, and not all synonyms are equal. Here, the

role of the teacher is especially important in filling in the gaps of comprehension caused by a lack of the proper milieu—that background knowledge which tells a foreigner in America that certain words or phrases are pragmatically unacceptable.

I, myself, have gone through the stages of being *Negro*, *Colored*, *Black*, *Afro-American*, *African-American*, *Person of Color*, and, of course, *nigger*. Although the word *nigger* is clearly labeled in the dictionary as offensive, the term *Negro* in the Oxford English-Russian Dictionary has no additional commentary, indicating (to the non-native speaker) that it is linguistically neutral (Falla). Any American teacher of Russian can easily imagine what would happen if a foreigner (e.g., a Russian, who is accustomed to the socially acceptable *чёрп*), were to use the term *Negro* in addressing an American Black. The term *Negro* is not necessarily offensive, but is pragmatically unacceptable. This example taken from my native language is, of course, obvious to me; it might not be as obvious to the NNS of English. The cultural background and colorations attached to a word are just as important as the word itself. As Vygotsky noted, “A word acquires its sense from the context in which it appears; in different contexts, it changes its sense. Meaning remains stable throughout the changes of sense” (Thought 245). The teacher of a foreign language must convey to students the “sense” of the foreign word which is not usually contained in the glossaries and dual-language dictionaries.

Language has been described as an instinct, a facility, or a reflex. It has also been closely linked to its culture as a reflection or expression of that culture (Vereshchagin and Kostomarov; Bakhtin; Bourdieu Taste; Kolesov). At the same time language and thought are seen as interdependent entities: language shapes thought, which shapes language (Vygotsky). For me, language and culture are simply two sides of the same coin: they



share an identity and cannot be separated. Language is central to human culture, and culture can often only be expressed and reflected through language.

The phrase “Familiarity breeds contempt” is often interpreted as a negative thing, “not giving something or someone the proper respect.” If the proper respect is considered maintaining a proper distance, then, in the language classroom, we do not want such respect. We want students to close the distance between L1 and L2, to become familiar with the new language. Becoming familiar with the foreign language entails learning a new way of thinking and not simply mapping either the sounds or the structures of the native language on to the corresponding structures in the foreign language.

If we as teachers can minimize the feeling of foreignness for students in the foreign language classroom, and replace it with a sense of commonality and cultural comfort, it could become easier for them to acquire the language. Csizér and Dörnyei have examined the phenomenon, which they term integrativeness, and consider it “the single most important factor in shaping students’ L2 motivated behavior” (22). They warn that the survey which they conducted with Hungarian high school students has limitations, but it does show promise in supporting anecdotal reports on the efficacy of motivation on achievement.

In contemporary SLA research, as Wilga M. Rivers (2001) states, “... there is no longer a ‘one size fits all’ mentality” (McGroarty and Rivers xix; Gombert). However, there does seem to be still a very black-and-white mentality—where each element must be separate and separately accountable. The processes considered essential to effective language learning are also at the center of a controversy (dispute): top-down as opposed to bottom-up processing. The efficacy of learning vocabulary (bottom-up processing) is frequently depicted as being inferior to that of the use of metacognitive (top-down)

strategies. There are an increasing number of scholars who are questioning the wisdom of such assumptions, and are advocating a more balanced approach, appreciating the importance of both factors in language proficiency, especially at the more advanced levels. They have acknowledged that, if students are to advance beyond the ACTFL Novice or Low-Intermediate level, they must have a more balanced set of skills—top-down (metacognitive), bottom-up (word store) and enough practice to make them comfortable with the other two.

I envision language competence as a closed system, with each part essential for the successful completion of the task of communication. Students must have an entire system in place, and cannot apply the good habits which they develop in the classroom if they have not already acquired a knowledge base to manipulate. The Russian term *навыки* (“acquired habits,” “skills” [in practical work]) applies to so much more than its English translation, but that component is essential for my conceptualization of competence. The Russian concept of this “skill” presupposes time applied to the processes being studied. Learners must then have sufficient practice in using these newly acquired skills with the words of their new language. If any one element is missing, the entire system can not function. (See Figure 1, below.) Menyuk (1985) has also allied herself with those who propose that our students apply themselves to learning something as they try to speak a new language, saying that, “(‘we cannot use knowledge which we do not have’: p. 256)” (qtd. in Gombert 4). P. Kelly proposed that we need to go back to vocabulary building, Farghal proposed collocations, while Robinson has advocated chunks (Robinson Cognition; P. Kelly; Farghal and Obiedat). All these proposals require that the students apply themselves and study. Some of these elements will have to be memorized, no matter how anachronistic that term sounds.

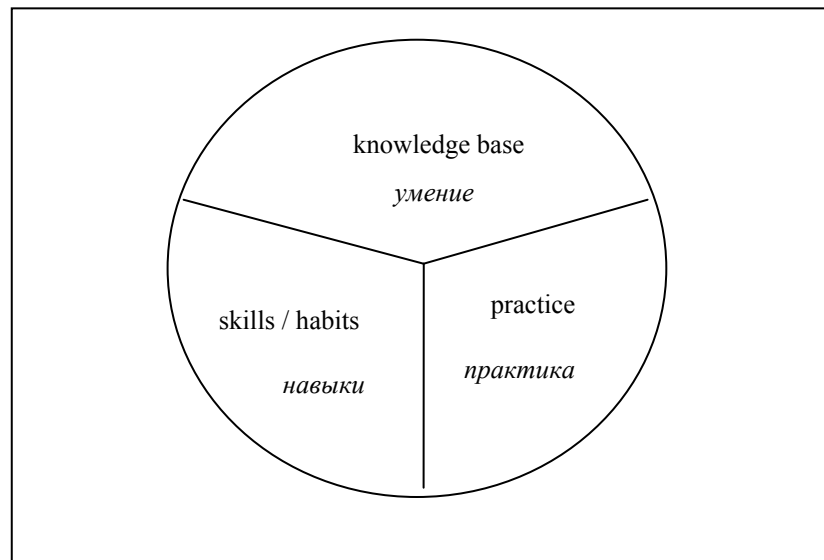


Figure 3: System of Competency

Although this project is primarily intended for Intermediate-Advanced level language learners, I feel that elements of this approach can be utilized as early as the first semester—even the first week of language training—when the language itself is still just a noise in the head of students. This period can, for the language teacher, be the make-or-break time of awakening students to the dynamics of the language, culture and lives of the world that they have, sometimes unwittingly, entered.

I also rely most heavily on the efficacy of listening comprehension (LC) as the central component for this approach. Although little (or almost no) empirical research has been done linking LC with reading, some has been done linking LC with speaking. Ong (1989) has linked orality with reading, but the concept is far removed from our pedagogic concept of oral production (speaking). Most of this work has been done in the field of cognitive psychology. Pinker does report on experiments by Posner, et al., in which response times seemed to indicate that “...after a few seconds the mind

automatically converts a visual representation into an alphabetic one, discarding information about its geometry” (89). The experiments were conducted judging response time for similarity of groups of letters, for example “AB,” “AA,” “Aa,” etc. There was no appreciable difference in reaction time for recognition of “AA” or “Aa” although the orthographies differ. This does seem to point toward sound as the basic storage unit of memory.

Cutler highlighted the interplay of speaking and listening, when she emphasized the interdependence of the two variables. The overriding importance of segmentation and rhythm in both production and perception of the auditory signal makes it crucial that students recognize these rhythms when they are encountered. The segmentation of which Cutler speaks is, however, not at the word level, but phrasal since in the flow of speech word boundaries are not as significant for segmentation as patterns of stress (34). Cutler goes on to say that “listeners make active use of rhythmic structure in speech perception” (35). It behooves us as teachers to give students as many chances to practice this skill as possible. From personal experience, I have found that if I could not pronounce a word correctly (at least, in my head), I could not hear that word when pronounced by others. I call this the trap of expectation. If I expect to hear the stress of a word on the first syllable, with no vowel reduction, but the NS pronounces it with stress on second syllable and vowel reduction in the first syllable, the entire acoustic signature of the word has changed for me. The word that I have stored in my memory does not get activated by the correct pronunciation, and I don’t understand what the NS has said. For example, if I expect to hear \*/JAzyk/ for *язык*, which is a direct transliteration of the Russian with the common English stress on the penultimate syllable, and the NS says /jiZYK/ (the correct pronunciation), I am unlikely to recognize the word if I do not expect this correct pronunciation.

Almost every beginning Russian student has gone through the drill of being corrected for saying «Я *хоЧУ ПИсамь*» (“I want to urinate” [rude]) instead of «Я *хоЧУ нуCATЬ*» (“I want to write”), which, fortunately, usually only causes understanding, sympathetic laughter. Another frequent example where stress changes the meaning, not even considering the problems students have in distinguishing between soft and hard consonants, is the infinitive form *хоДИТЬ* (“to go”) as opposed to the 3<sup>rd</sup>-person singular form *ХОдит* (“he/she/it goes”). Although the orthography of Russian is more transparent than that of English, the system of vowel reduction complicates comprehension for the unsuspecting NNS.

This pronunciation expectation from LC also holds true for my reading. When reading, even when reading to myself, the sound of the word is what is represented in my head—it is not the geometric shape of words or separate phonemes, but sounds. If I do not recognize the word, or know where the stress falls, my pace of reading significantly slows down. Communication, thus, involves not only recognizing and assigning meaning to the form of the words, but also to the associated acoustic signatures as stored in LTM, associating these with the relevant concepts, and performing all these simultaneous actions at the speed of light (Marlsen-Wilson and Tyler).

Students frequently are encouraged to believe that all this communicative competence can be achieved with a minimum of effort. Students must learn the forms of an L2 before they use them. Knowing the forms, being able to not only convert them, but also call them up from memory is essential for language competence (Mecartty). After they have learned the grammar, vocabulary, metacognitive strategies, listening strategies, the rest should be easy. To overcome the difficulties inherent in teaching students how to master new skills, teachers must rely on internal characteristics of the students

themselves—those motivational factors which teachers can influence, but only students can control. Just as for any skill, motivation alone does not assure competence.

### **Chapter Three: Vladimir S. Vysotsky in Russian Culture**

*Явление Высоцкого ... одно из значительнейших и своеобразнейших в русской поэзии второй половины XX века, а поскольку и в ней в целом. Оно отзывается аналитическому интересу любого свойства и привлекает исследователей самых разных направлений, лишь усиливая при этом впечатление подлинности, универсальности, и непреходящей историко-культурной ценности.*

The phenomenon of Vysotsky ... is one of the most significant and distinctive in Russian poetry in the second half of the twentieth century, if not within all of it [Russian poetry]. It [the Vysotsky phenomenon] resonates with all kinds of analytical interests and attracts researchers from the most varied areas, only increasing, through this, its impression of genuineness, universality, and imperishable historic-cultural value (Skobelev and Shaulov 151).

#### **CULTURE ACROSS THE OCEANS**

Within each society exist cultural idioms, or items of so-called cultural literacy, which help shape and reflect that group's cultural identity. These idioms are part of the common knowledge base, shared by most literate members of that society (Hirsch, Kett and Trefil). In the USA, if one mentions John Wayne, Elvis or Marilyn Monroe, there are few (if any) Americans who would not recognize the names and immediately be able

to produce associations, items that “everybody knows” about their lives. In post-Soviet Russia, actor/poet/bard Vladimir Sem’enovich Vysotsky holds a similar niche as a cultural idiom, or icon (Tolstykh; Smith; Andreyev and Boguslavsky; Razzakov). Every modern Russian, even those who were born after Vysotsky had already died in 1980, knows something about him. This knowledge about Vysotsky is evident in the language—in *крылатые слова* (“catch words” or “catch phrases”) (lit. “winged words”), allusions to his life and times, and quotations from his songs and acting roles. Although the expression “winged words” is not in common usage among English speakers, the concept has been around since the time of Homer, and is widespread in many other cultures (Berkov, Mokienko and Shulezhkova). These expressions are defined as,

*КС выполняют в речи очень важную и специфическую функцию. Они дают возможность ярко и сжато выразить мысль, метко и кратко охарактеризовать явление, ситуацию, отношение, человека, в превосходной литературной форме высказать свое чувство. Это—«готовые» формулировки человеческого опыта, жизненной мудрости, емкие обозначения типов, характеров и положений, выражение восхищения и иронии, благоговения и насмешки, печали и шутки, и т.д.—Это облеченные в отточенную языковую форму мысли выдающихся философов, ученых, писателей, государственных деятелей. Это—золотой фонд мировой и национальной культуры.*

“Winged words” fulfill a very important and specific function in speech. They give the possibility to clearly and concisely express a thought, neatly and shortly



characterize a phenomenon, situation, relationship, or individual in an outstanding literary form to express one's feeling. These—'ready-made' formulations of human experience, life wisdom, weighty designations of patterns, characteristics and situations, expression of delight and irony, reverence and mockery, sorrow and jokes, et al.—this is dressed up in clear-cut linguistic form the thoughts of outstanding philosophers, scientists, writers, governmental figures. This is a golden fund of world and national culture (Berkov, Mokienko and Shulezhkova 3).

Evidence of his creative output has so permeated Russian culture that much of his work has been ensconced into the fabric of the everyday language and cultural idioms. Although Vysotsky was not a politician, scientist, or noted public leader, his picture is included among world notables on the cover of the Biographical Dictionary less than 30 years after his death (Landa). This fascination with and knowledge of Vysotsky is not limited to Russians, or even second- or third-generation émigrés. An Internet search of Google produces 113,000 results for "Vladimir S.Vysotsky," many of them in English, and many other languages of the world.

Each social group likes to think of its cultural idioms, just as its speech idioms, as being specific to the group, something which is theirs and theirs alone, which sets them apart in some clearly definable way from all the "Other," who are not "us." However, just as living in a tropical climate tends to produce people with darker skins, which are more suited to the force of the sun, similar historical experiences seem to frequently result in the development of similar cultural idioms. Some of these cultural idioms have become stereotypes—not all of which are negative—which almost immediately come to

mind: “the smart Asian student,” “the hot-blooded Latin lover,” “the blond Nordic skier,” etc. As is obvious, not all Asian students are smart, not all Latin people are hot blooded, and not all Nordic people are either blond or skiers. These stereotypes, while seemingly innocuous, are persistent. They are part of what everyone knows. In the introduction to their Dictionary of Cultural Literacy, Hirsch, Kett and Trefil state that,

...no two humans know exactly the same things, they have a great deal of knowledge in common. To a large extent this common knowledge or collective memory allows people to communicate, to work together, and to live together. It forms the basis for communities, and if it is shared by enough people, it is a distinguishing characteristic of a national culture (ix).

Vereshchagin and Kostomarov essentially state the same in Iazyk i kul'tura (1990):

*Нами принимается ... тезис социальности языка. Он означает, что природу языка следует понимать как диалектическое единство вербального средства общения и общественного сознания, или, в более определенных терминах, как единство языка и национальной культуры. Общественная природа языка реализуется в ряде функций, из которых для лингвострановедения особенно важны три ... коммуникативную функцию ... в директивной функции ... аккультурации иностранца (формирование у учащихся позитивной установки к народу-носителю языка).*

We are concerned with the concept of the social nature of language. This means that the nature of language must be understood as a dialectal unity of the verbal means of communication and social awareness, or, in more specific terms, as a unity of language and the national culture. The social nature of language is realized in a number of functions, of which there are three especially important ones for linguoculture, [the relationship between language and culture-RJ] ... the communicative function, ... in its directive function, ... acculturation of the foreigner (formation in the student of a positive attitude toward the people [who are ] native speakers of the language) (10-11).

Vereshchagin and Kostomarov include in the communicative function of language its use as a tool for communication between people, which brings us back to Hirsch, Kett and Trefil and their discussion of cultural literacy. The background knowledge (*фон* in Russian) associated with each word is an essential part of its meaning, part of the recognition of the world about which the individual speaks. If the language is not shared, as with a foreign language, there is a greater possibility of misunderstanding in the linguistic exchange. This cultural “common knowledge” is part of what we try to teach students in the language classroom along with introductory, basic vocabulary. The problem arises for the teacher: how does one combine these two seemingly incompatible goals? Part of the answer to this seeming conundrum is to get the students to do most of the work themselves—outside of class, in their free time, when they’re relaxing or driving in the car—in other words, through motivation.

Beginning students have only a rudimentary knowledge of the language, and yet are often expected to leap into the deep end of cultural waters with the correct usage and

subtle lexical choices. Even when students look up the word *hot* in an English-Russian dictionary, they find the choice of *жаркий* or *горячий*—often without further distinction to guide students in determining that only days can be *жаркий*, while soup can only be *горячий*. Another not so innocuous example is the word *козёл* (“goat”), when used to describe a human male, is never a complement. However, the depth of the insult associated with the use of this word in Russian culture is so much greater than that of its English counterpart, that students can deeply offend a collocutor when they try to make the transfer—unaware of the cultural differences. This, too, is part of the students’ problem as addressed by Vygotsky when he wrote about the gradual conceptual maturation of the word. He wrote that we must always remain aware,

*что в момент усвоения нового слова процесс развития соответствующего понятия не заканчивается, а только начинается. В момент первоначального усвоения новое слово стоит не в конце, а в начале своего развития оно является всегда в этот период незрелым словом.*

...that at the moment of learning a new word, the process of developing a corresponding understanding [of the concept] is not ending, but is only beginning. At the moment of initial learning, the new word stands not at the end, but at the beginning of its development, [and] it is always an immature word during this period (Vygotsky Trudy 278).

It falls to the teacher to teach students this distinction—part of the “awareness-raising” strategies, some of which were examined by Nakatani in his study of Japanese

students studying English. When Nakatani speaks of “awareness,” he Those who received strategy training learned how to use various strategies and increased their communicative skills over those gains achieved by the control group (Nakatani). Although I have not seen this particular problem mentioned except in Vygotsky, and then when talking about developmental psychology, I have observed Novice level students whose lexical choices become constrained and “fossilized” through reliance on the use of glossaries. The first meanings learned from these beginning glossaries frequently become frozen, leaving students with only a rudimentary understanding of the cultural breadth of even simple words. Learning a foreign language is very like Vygotsky’s characterization of a child’s initial grasping of a concept: even with the aid (or hindrance) of a translation, the meaning of the word or concept is still only at an initial stage of development. For the students to advance beyond the Novice or Intermediate level, they must be made aware of these limitations as progressive stages in their linguistic development, and not as errors to be corrected.

For the new students, the foreign language must be built from scratch. This structuring of a linguistic world is similar to that of Vygotsky’s child stage, however much we choose to deny it. The glossary dilemma is one for which I do not have the answer, but I am convinced that, as a teacher, I must make my students aware of both the shortcomings and the benefits of the use of a glossary. Metacognitive strategy use allows the students to control their own learning; however, they cannot benefit from the strategy if they don’t know that it exists. Because we cannot overload their minds with all the nuances of meaning attached to each word introduced in the language classroom, does not mean that we as teachers must not introduce them to a concept that I call “flexibility of lexicon.”

For the NS, “flexibility of lexicon” is an unconscious concomitant of conversational lexicon in their native language. They have had years to learn the usual usages and collocations for common words. For example, if one looks in a typical English-language dictionary at the word “go,” and in a Russian-language dictionary (e.g., Kuznetsov; Ozhegov) at the word *идти* (“go”), one immediately becomes aware of just how many variations there are for even such a simple word—more than a full column of entries in each language (Am. Heritage; Kuznetsov; Ozhegov). (See Appendix Two: “Go” What?! [How Many Meanings Can There Be?]) As an awareness-raising aid, such a dual-language handout makes students aware that there is more to each word than is listed in a textbook glossary, which may contain two or three foreign-language synonyms as a maximum.

The idea that words are not narrowly defined is already accepted by the NS for the native language; but, this acceptance does not easily transfer to the foreign language. The foreign language teacher, by providing students with awareness-raising tools, equips them to use their skills more effectively and with less wasted effort in the foreign language classroom. The tools which are unconsciously applied in the native language must be just as effectively re-applied in the new language. However, since for the NS language use was acquired as an L1, we have no memory of learning the techniques and strategies that we use. The foreign-language teacher re-introduces students to the techniques and skills of which they are no longer conscious. For example, one of the first adjectives which students learn in the Russian classroom is *большой* (“big, large”), but such a translation is inappropriate when paired with *большие люди* (“big shots” or “powerful people”) and *большие деньги* (“lots of money”), and we simply do not translate *Большой театр*, but treat it as a lexicalized noun.

One of Vereshchagin and Kostomarov's second most important functions of language, the directive, will not be directly addressed in this dissertation because the lower level, concrete language of Novice and Intermediate skill levels is already suitable for such. The concrete level of language, including names of common items, actions, emotions and ideas are obligatory in introductory textbooks. Students are taught all those elements of language necessary to interact with the new language world: to introduce themselves, elicit concrete information, give and take basic directions, carry out everyday functions of life (Vereshchagin and Kostomarov 10). Because those functions of language are already adequately covered by numerous textbooks, they will not be addressed here.

Vereshchagin and Kostomarov's third function of language for linguoculture, what they term "acculturation of the foreigner," is another way of describing the affective factors which influence whether students are motivated to learn a language. This dissertation centers on this third function of language as a crucial mechanism for raising both the motivational level and the skill level of students. Regardless of the approach or method, one common complaint of both teachers and students is the lack of time for actual language use. According to Rifkin the maximum exposure that Russian-language majors receive is approximately 400 hours for a typical four-year university program (6). On the average, students who fulfill a two-year language requirement, receive a maximum of 250 hours classroom exposure. It must be noted that this is "classroom exposure" and not actual speaking practice; it does not consider holidays, sick days, absences, or turn-taking by students, etc. In sum, the average college students are fortunate to engage in conversation or hear actual Russian (and not modified "teacher speak") 30 minutes per week in the classroom. To achieve greater exposure to, and usage of, the language, time outside of the classroom must be utilized—both of which are also

beyond the control of the teacher. Many speak of the “student-centered classroom,” but that presupposes that the students are taking responsibility for their learning. With a high level of motivation, students are encouraged to surf the Web, finding the many You-Tube sites including archival clips of performances and interviews with Vysotsky, chat rooms encouraging discussion, various music sites, as well as historical and cultural information sites.

With the artistic output of Vladimir S. Vysotsky, there is something for everyone. There are songs for the auditory learner; there are movies and interview clips for the visual learner; there are books containing lyrics and still photos for those who must read and touch; there are web pages in many languages—official and unofficial (See Appendix Three: Some URLs Associated with Vladimir Vysotsky). The lyrics of Vysotsky present much of the essential linguocultural background and content essential for comprehension of both the language and the culture in a palatable form. Communication itself presupposes that there is a two-way flow of information, which relies upon the willingness of the collocutor to engage in and support the conversation—in Vysotsky adds a certain cache to the non-native speaker of Russian. Vereshchagin and Kostomarov call the affective component, “the inculcation of a positive attitude toward the speakers of a language” as one of the three most important in language learning (11). The affective component of language learning has been recognized to be one of the most important and powerful ones (Gardner et al.; Masgoret). If, in addition to knowing the name Vysotsky, students know something about the content of Vysotsky’s songs and his life, not only do they create a good impression on Russians, but they also help themselves by providing additional information to improve their own comprehension (Weinert; Howarth; P. Kelly).



This one component/ aspect of cultural knowledge can begin to open the Russian world for our students. The content of Vysotsky's songs can become the vehicle by which we introduce them to the rich history of his world. His songs have been divided (classified) into cycles—the most common of which are *военные* (“military/war”), *сказочные* (“fairy tale”), *блатные* (“street life”), *спортивные* (“sports world”), *дружеские* (“friends”), et al. (Zhil'tsov). These can form the foundation for a syllabus, or present a smorgasbord for the teacher to choose from in support of class work or units for extra credit. I, however, feel that the greatest benefit to be gained from this approach is the interest and motivation awakened in students. By introducing students to these common, more contemporary (in cultural terms) topics, with the common language, much of which is easily recyclable into their own conversational vocabulary store, teachers can (1) provide the students with pleasurable examples of Russian speech patterns, which they will more willingly return to again and again; (2) shift the responsibility of learning to the students where it rightfully belongs; and, (3) provide guidance in helping students find their own best way to learn and strengthen their bonds with the language.

## **SOCIAL BACKGROUND COMMONALITIES**

At least three themes are common to the cultural idioms of both the Russian people and Blacks in the United States: a history of slavery, the concept of *душа* or “soul” as one of the most essential personal characteristics, and suffering as an elevating experience (Kolchin; Nemirovskaya; Peterson; Urban; Davis). These historical and cultural similarities reinforce the similarities between the output of the Vysotsky and the blues singers.

### **Cultural Literacy-- Idioms**

That cultural groups develop some of these idioms or self-concepts (identity) is indisputable, but the similarities between two such distinct cultures as Russia and the United States cannot be coincidental. I have found that different genres are frequently excluded from our conventional definitions of literature – although there is a history of acceptable literary recognition for some products of the counter-cultures of both countries. A people's voice is necessarily mediated through their experiences. What and how authors write, what they consider worthy of recording—are the result of a combination of the society's level of literacy, orality, technology, standards of aesthetics, et al. (Jay; Ong). If one defines literature as a codification or reflection of a people's culture, of their hopes, dreams and strivings, then one must expect that the literature of an alienated sub-culture will differ from that of the dominant culture (Peterson).

In this period of cultural comparisons, intercultural borrowings, and the push to include culture as an integral component of language competency, the similarities between the history of the Blacks in America and the Russian peasant can easily form the basis for a different approach to looking at and teaching culture in the Russian language classroom. Although American students may not remember details of the American Revolution, Thirteen Colonies, the history of slavery, The Civil War, The Emancipation Proclamation, Reconstruction, Jim Crow, et al., these concepts form a cultural background against which they, and the language they speak, have developed. In a parallel vein, in tsarist Russia, the Russian language has evolved against the background of *Киевская Русь* ("Kievan Rus"), *Татарское иго* ("Tartar Yoke"), *царская Россия* ("tsarist Russia") *крепостное право* ("serfdom"), *Октябрьская революция* ("October

Revolution”), *Великая отечественная война* (“Great Patriotic War”), et. al. There are historical parallels in the US and Russia, which fostered the development of similar character traits within the populations which experienced slavery and serfdom, which, in turn, led to similar expressions—Dostoevsky and Du Bois in the area of literary commentary, the blues musicians and Vysotsky for cathartic relief of suffering. If we begin with the “peculiar institution” of slavery in the United States and serfdom in Russia, both of which were discontinued in the 1860s, we see a pattern of similar historical and economic systems, which appear to have resulted in the development of similar patterns in literary and quasi-literary expression. For these two countries, the response of some of their people to similar social conditions was expressed in similar genres, in spite of language differences.

I approach both the blues and Vysotsky from the perspective of the common person, not a musicologist, but closer to that of an ethnographer who observes the “little-c” culture based on my own longstanding relationship with the genre of blues (Omaggio-Hadley). I was born in Mississippi, but the family soon moved to Memphis, Tennessee, and I grew up in the 1950s-60s listening to the blues, spirituals and gospel music. Memphis had seen the rise of blues performers like Bessie Smith, B. B. King, Howling Wolf; country performers like Johnny Cash, Jimmie Rodgers, Charlie Rich; and, of course Elvis Presley. W. C. Handy, often called the “father of the blues,” was based in Memphis (Nager 30). There was a pervasive mixture of styles of music, while the ethnic and social groups which produced this music were strictly separated (Nager 112). Larry Nager, a long-time music editor for the *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, describes the environment and summarizes it thus: “If there’s a single reason why Memphis became the most important city in the evolution of American popular music, it’s the unique mix of strict social segregation combined with cultural integration” (153).

This was the heyday of Sun Records, the music/record company run by Sam Phillips, which was directly associated with the launching of White performers like Elvis Presley, Johnny Cash, Jerry Lee Lewis, Roy Orbison and Carl Perkins in the 1950s (Davis 192). Earlier in the decade, with other fledgling record companies, Philips was also involved in recording Black performers like Muddy Waters (a.k.a. McKinley Morganfield), B. B. King, Ike Turner, Howlin' Wolf (a.k.a. Chester Byrnett), et al. I cannot remember a time when I was not surrounded by these two similar, yet opposed genres. The music with which I lived was not that of the ballet or opera, but the sounds of the common people around me. In these songs, there were always stories of suffering and of joy. The gospels spoke of joy in the afterlife, while the blues often spoke of joy on the weekend. The topics were as familiar as the air around us, because the topics were our lives or our histories.

Although the music of Vladimir Vysotsky was created on the other side of the world from the blues and gospel, I recognized a similarity when I first heard his songs during my first year of studying Russian in 1980. The words of his songs, which I, naturally, did not understand, were insignificant compared to the rhythm and the sound of his voice. His raucous, sometimes moaning, sometimes screaming voice elicited a familiar, visceral reaction in me: his voice, for me, was the essence of the blues. It was only later that I found out that many of the initial complaints about Vysotsky's performances were about his *хриплый голос* ("rough voice"), which reminded me of Howling Wolf and Muddy Waters—both of whom were renowned for their "rough" voices (Razzakov 43; Davis 178). My initial reaction to Vysotsky's music astounded me. However, as I continued my study of Russian, and began to understand the lyrics, this feeling of comfort and familiarity did not wane, but instead, grew with time. The question of why Vysotsky's songs should seem so familiar became the focus of my

research and, joined with my purely amateur love of music, formed the basis of an approach to language skill enhancement.

One of the first positive results of listening to Vysotsky's songs, even before I understood the lyrics, was the influence on my listening comprehension and pronunciation. Although, as a novice in a situation familiar to many of our students, I was hesitant to talk in class, I had no problem trying to follow the tapes, hum along with the voice, even try to pick out and sing the individual words as they transformed from the initially pleasant rhythmic noise into comprehensible input. For me as a beginning student, one of the most beneficial aspects of getting to know Vysotsky was my willingness to listen repeatedly to his music.

### **Blues and Reds**

Although the blues has been exported to many different countries around the world, it has continued to be seen as a purely American form of expression. Blues has been described as a particularly American genre, rooted in slavery and post-slavery (i.e., Jim Crow) periods of US history, which arose as an expression of the people's pain and suffering (Busnar; Davis; Moore). To complicate a comparison of blues origins and authenticity, there are probably as many definitions of the blues as there are people to formulate them (Pearson; Oliver; Drake; Baraka; Baker). The one commonality within all these definitions is that the blues has almost always been Black (or Negro or Colored or African-American). And, naturally, the language has always been American English.

This limitation placed on the blues has become one of the truisms of cultural awareness: that the blues (however defined) are a particularly American manifestation. This statement is rarely questioned. In a song written to commemorate our nation's

Bicentennial, “The Bicentennial Blues,” musician-poet Gil Scott-Heron describes this common knowledge, thus:

Some people think that America invented the blues, and few people doubt that America is the home of the blues ... The blues has always been totally American—as American as apple pie. ... The question is why. Why should the blues be so at home here? Well, America provided the atmosphere. ... And, you can trace the evolution of the blues on a parallel line with the evolution of this country ... The blues remembers everything the country forgot (Scott-Heron).

However, if we strip the definition of the blues of its color and its language, we are left with its emotions, topics and origin. The “atmosphere” for the creation of the blues was, unfortunately, not limited to the United States. The concepts of blues and soul are not unique to the Black experience in America, but can be found (classified under different rubrics and in different tongues) around the globe. The topics, pathos and raucous sounds of the blues are present in the music of Vysotsky, just as some of the social injustices which helped shape the dispossessed in America are present in the history of the Soviet Union. Dale Pesman quotes one Russian woman, Lena, who, when describing the Russian people, assumes that they have the *rusaskaia dusha* “Russian soul,” and further states that, “...soulfulness presupposes suffering” (87). One can as easily change the name to Alberta, place her in the Jim Crow South, and be talking about Blacks in the USA. The cultural realities and reactions are so similar in tone. It is this similarity which forms the basis for an interpretation of lyrics by Vysotsky.

In the same decade in which Gil Scott-Heron sang his definition of the blues, Vysotsky was writing and singing:

*Купола в России кроют чистым золотом —*

*Чтобы чаще Господь замечал. ...*

*Душу, сбитую утратами да тратами,*

*Душу, стёртую перекатами,—*

*Если до крови лоскут истончал,—*

*Залатаю золотыми я заплатами —*

*Чтобы чаще Господь замечал!*

The church domes in Russia are covered with pure gold—

So that God would more often take notice. ...

[My] soul, beat down by losses and costs,

[My] soul, rubbed raw by life's ups and downs,—

If the shred gets scraped down to the blood,--

I'll fix it up with golden patches—

So that God would more often take notice. (Krylov 502)

These lyrics, written by Vysotsky in 1975, describing the distance of common man from the power wielders of a communist society, could just as easily be applied to the powerless Blacks in the US, about whom wrote musicians such as Gil Scott-Heron, Richie Havens, John Anderson, et al. The almost painful, screaming rendition of this song, which ends with a calmer, prayerful plea in the last stanza is reminiscent of many blues songs which use the contrast as a principle device. The common topics of soul and suffering, as well as the generous use of podtext (implied sense), to hide the meaning from the government censors, are all reminiscent of the blues.

According to the notes on an updated re-release of “The Ghetto Code,” this song was also written in 1975 (Scott-Heron). In this excerpt, Scott-Heron’s participants used a simplified infix to interrupt the stream of sound, to confuse the assumed governmental listeners.

Old fashioned ghetto code. You remember, you used to jump on the telephone, say “Hey. Bree-is-other me-is-an, how you feel-is-seal? Is everything all-is-all-right? Well why don’t you tell me about the pe-is-arty to ne-is-ite? You goin’? Well, Why don’t you bring me a nee-is-ickle be-is-ag? I know who ever it was they was paying to listen in on my phone had to be saying well. “Dot-dot-dit-dit-dot-dot-dash, damned if I know (Scott-Heron).

Although the mechanisms may have differed, the recognition of a need to hide certain aspects of life and attitudes from those in power was shared in Black America and in the Soviet Union—and expressed in the music. In describing his own use and choice of venue for expression (in the insert which was included in the compact disc re-release of



an earlier vinyl album of the same name), “The Mind of Gil Scott-Heron” [1978]) Scott-Heron also describes, in my mind, Vysotsky:

I generally use as my response and reference point to these questions the examples of Paul Robeson and Langston Hughes, men who used a range of artistic media-song, poetry, acting and oration—to convey in a variety of ways, contemporary social ideas and political circumstances. These ideas may have been common to most people on an individual level, but when placed in a creative context by the artist they dramatize, politicize, and promote a group level of conscience and awareness (Scott-Heron).

If one changes the references from Robeson and Hughes to the Russian bard Alexander Galich and the Soviet poet Sergei Esenin, the similarity in style and choice of expression are astounding. In one of the first books to attempt a literary analysis of Vysotsky’s lyrics, Skobelev and Shaulov point out the difficulty inherent in publishing the type of songs and poems which Vysotsky produced:

*Соответственно и вопрос об издании стихов Высоцкого лишь поверхностно относился к компетенции литературоведов или Союза советских писателей, в подтексте же скрывал зачастую предмет более кардинальных дискуссий, невозможных тогда в открытую: о степени антидемократичности общества, об антигуманности и кретинизме господствующего в стране тоталитарного режима, о несвободе человека и*

*ежедневном надругательстве над его достоинством. Художественный феномен Высоцкого оказался нераздельно впаян в самую сердцевину нашей жизни. Любой разговор о нем был чреват или становился разговором о нас, наших бедах и перспективах..*

Accordingly, even the question about the publication of Vysotsky's poems only superficially related to the competence of literary critics or to the Writers' Union, since in the subtext of these [poems] partly hide the discussion of more crucial topics, which was impossible to do openly at that time: about the degree of lack of democracy within the society, about non-humanitarianism and general cretinism which was reigning in a totalitarian country, about lack of freedom of individuals and everyday offenses against their dignity. The artistic phenomenon of Vysotsky turned out to be integral to the core of our life. Any conversation about him was fraught with, or became, a conversation about us, our troubles and our prospects. (8).

This description of Vysotsky and his role in Soviet society is similar to that of the role of "the blues man" in Black society. As J. C. Burris, blues singer and harmonica player, notes in an interview, "Blues are more than music. They are a way of telling about life. Not everybody's life, just the lives of some people. You make them and sing them from life" (Pearson xxiii). Taking the lyrics written in a style about life, about everyday situations (troubles, joys, prospects), presents students with language which is contextually appropriate for those situations, as well as being a convenient, mobile language tool. Since these lyrics are also supported by music, which encourages repeated

exposure, students, if motivated, will listen again and again, trying to “get into the language.” Since our purpose as teachers is to prepare our students to engage in conversation, to become communicatively competent, these lyrics in Russian, about common topics, are excellent tools to accomplish these goals. In the Soviet Union, with its strict system of censorship and government control of dissemination of information, one of the ways to avoid the harshest of governmental restrictions was through the use of metaphor as noted above by Skobelev and Shaulov. Because Vysotsky had received an education in the arts, had a deep love of literature, and loved to play with words, he had the background to use metaphors in his lyrics, which allowed the government to acquiesce in the performance of his non-traditional lyrics (Kulagin).

### **Vysotsky’s Use of Metaphor**

Vysotsky was a master of the use of metaphor. This exquisite control and use of the Russian language, and the fun Vysotsky had in playing with words, which was evident when he wrote limericks to his mother as a child, multiplies the ways in which the Russian teacher can use various songs in the classroom. Not only the linguistic content, but also the cultural content of Vysotsky’s songs developed as he grew older and matured. This cultural content is based on Vysotsky’s thoughts about the world that he knew:

*Я в своих стихах рассказываю о том, что меня беспокоит в этой жизни.  
Что происходит с моими близкими, с моими друзьями. Что происходит в  
мире, что происходит в моей стране. Что мне нравится, что мне не  
нравится. Когда я пишу песни, я пытаюсь разобраться в этом. Главное в  
моих песнях—это человек. Предмет моих песен—человек.*

In my poems, I talk about what concerns me in this life—what happens with those close to me, with my friends, what happens in the world, what happens in my country, what I like, what I don't like. When I write, I try to make sense of this. The main point in my songs is the individual. The subject of my songs is the human being (Terent'ev 153).

Vysotsky went on to talk about the further development of the use of metaphor in his songs:

*А потом песни стали глубже, стали меня волновать другие темы, другие проблемы. Я стал задумываться о судьбах людей, страны и мира. Люди с возрастом начинают больше думать. В моих песнях появилось второй план, подтекст. Они стали более образными.*

But, then the songs became deeper, other topics started to concern me, other problems. I began to give a lot of thought to the fate of people, the country and the world. With age, people begin to think more. A second layer appeared in my songs, a subtext. They became more figurative, started using more images (Terent'ev 155).

As noted by Skobelev and Shaulov, the copious use of subtext may have been an element in the censors' refusal to allow publication of Vysotsky's songs, but this same subtext allows teachers to employ songs on numerous levels in the classroom.

His earlier songs were *блатные* ("blatnye"), very simplified, and simple, both in concept and in execution. Even for Vysotsky, these songs usually contained no deeper

meaning than that obtained from the joy of the search for forms and styles (Terent'ev 154). Teachers can use these texts for the most simplistic structural or phonological analyses. (Cf. Appendix Four, Lessons 2 & 3.) Although much of the lexicon of these earlier songs is substandard or slang, which makes comprehension more difficult, the rhythm is usually lively, the diction is good and clear, with only guitar accompaniment, which makes the songs more appealing to students. On a more advanced level, the teacher can analyze the metaphorical layers of Vysotsky's songs with students.

Vysotsky frequently used metaphor to comment on either the human condition or social and political situations in the Soviet Union and the wider world of the 1960s and 1970s. Even many of the earlier songs which Vysotsky wrote, and to which he apparently attached no deeper meaning in the process of writing, have been received as deeply philosophical. Commenting on fans' frequent requests for explanations or interpretations of what he had in mind in particular songs, Vysotsky replied, *«Ну, что я имел в виду, то я и написал. А как люди это поняли—это в меру образованности.»* (“I wrote exactly what I had in mind. But, how people understood it, that depends on their education.”) (Terent'ev 168).

Vysotsky wrote many of his songs in the “voice” of others. This led fans to conflate the personalities of his characters with the personality of Vysotsky himself: *«Одна девушка подлетала ко мне во время выступления в Куйбышеве и спросила, ‘А правда, что вы умерли?’ Причем совершенно серьезно.»* (“A young woman rushed up to me during a performance in Kuibyshev and asked, ‘Is it true, that you died?’ Moreover, she was completely serious.”) (Terent'ev 161). This problem did not arise when the я (“I”) in his songs was not a person, but an animal, or some inanimate creature.

Many of Vysotsky's most philosophical songs give voice to the voiceless, on multiple levels.

The song «Иноходец» (“The Pacer”) is one of the songs by Vysotsky which is most difficult for a non-Russian to grasp, although the lyrics are, on the surface, about horse races, and written from the point of view of the horse. The pacer, *иноходец*, is already not one of the herd, because his gait is different (the untrained gait is not parallel, but diagonal); he stands out in some way, he is a non-conformist. Although the horse objects to the constraints placed by the rider on his back, by the weight of the saddle, and by the pressure of the bridle, he still takes pride in his abilities to run and win a race.

*Я скачу, но я скачу иначе —*

*По камням, по лужам, по росе.*

*Бег мог назван иноходью — значит:*

*По-другому, то есть — не как все. ...*

*Мне набили раны на спине,*

*Я дрожу, боками у воды.*

*Я согласен бегать в табуне —*

*Но не под седлом и без узды! ...*

*Что со мной, что делаю, как смею —*

*Потакаю своему врагу!*

*Я собою просто не владею —*

*Я прийти не первым не могу!*

I gallop, but I run in a different style—

Over the stones, the puddles, while the dew is still on the ground.

The run could be called a pace—that means:

Differently, that is—not like everybody else. ...

They've raised wounds on my back,

I quiver, with my sides dripping wet.

I'm willing to run in the herd—

But not under a saddle, and without a bridle. ...

What's up? What am I doing? How do I dare?—

I'm conniving with my enemy!

I'm simply not in control of myself—

I cannot not come in first! (Lvov and Sumerkin 344v. 2 )

There is not far to look for the metaphor in this song; however, the expression of the metaphor is what makes this song extraordinary. The rider in «*Иноходец*» can easily become a metaphor for a repressive government, a governmental agency, even, on a more individual level, a boss. The interpretation of the metaphor, as always, will depend on the background and point of view of the reader/listener. The language teacher in the classroom can elicit interpretations from students and begin a lively discussion around this one song. The internal conflict of the *иноходец* (“pacer”) has universal resonance—the 1968 Mexico City Olympics, in which some Black athletes raised the “black power” fist on the awards stand; the present-day protests against the 2008 Beijing Olympics.

What is the cost to the athlete, the man of conscious, the writer, the gifted performer, who has a skill being used for the benefit, or for the glory, of powers which *набьют раны* (“raise wounds”) on the populace? Vysotsky, in *«Иноходец»* answers this question and paints a dynamic picture of the internal struggle.

This internal struggle is also given voice by the microphone into which the singer expresses his thoughts and opinions. *«Песня микрофона»* (“Song of the Microphone” speaks to the voice of the people—the role of the artistic creator in supporting the government, and both the responsibility they have, and the price they may be asked to pay, for that which they support.

*Я оглох от удара ладоней,  
Я ослеп от улыбок певиц —  
Сколько лет я страдал от симфоний,  
Потакал подражателям птиц! ...*

*В чем угодно меня обвините—  
Только против себя не пойдёшь:  
По профессии я — усилитель,—  
Я страдал — но усиливал ложь. ...*

*Застонал я — динамики взвыли,—  
Он сдавил мое горло рукой...  
Отвернули меня, умертвили —  
Заменяли меня на другой.*



I'm deaf from the clapping of hands,  
I'm blinded by the smiles of singers—  
So many years I've suffered from the symphony,  
I connived with the imitators of birds. ...

You can accuse me of whatever—  
Just don't start up against me:  
It's my job to be an amplifier—  
I've suffered—but I've amplified the lie. ...

I groaned—the loudspeaker howled.—  
He grabbed me by the throat ...  
They unscrewed me, did away with me—  
Exchanged me for another (Lvov and Sumerkin 290v. 2).

These are but two of the numerous examples of the use of metaphor in Vysotsky's songs and poems. As can be noted from these short excerpts, Vysotsky was able to meld his voice and world view with the characters which he developed in each song. That the characters were fully developed and real, is witnessed by people's reaction to and reception of his songs. Although these two excerpts are not culture-specific, Vysotsky has written numerous songs which highlight aspects of Russian cultural knowledge which is essential for students to acquire if they are to become functionally competent in both the language and the culture.

## **Unfree Conditions**

The first parallel which between the economic systems in the United States and tsarist Russia in the middle of the nineteenth century, both of which had been relying on systems of what Peter Kolchin has termed “unfree labor.” Kolchin has done a comparative analysis of the “peculiar institution” as practiced in the USA and serfdom in Russia in his book Unfree Labor: American Slavery and Russian Serfdom (1987). Although an ocean separated these two nations, a portion of their inhabitants experienced similar fates. The two systems, slavery and serfdom, were similar in many ways, but were not identical. Both economic systems relied on the unfree labor of an alienated group, had become a customary way of life for certain areas of the country, and both ended in the same decade (1861 in tsarist Russia, and 1863 in the United States) (Conte 130; Seaberg 68).

Slavery has existed all over the world in many different forms and was usually the result of conquest: if your tribe or family was attacked and lost, you became a slave. Slavery was primarily a matter of economic and political status. Tribes or countries enslaved the foreign conquered peoples, almost never their own. The cultural baggage of a predestined subordinate status for certain groups was unique to the US and Russia within the world of Christian societies (Kolchin). Russia and the United States had changed the rules: slavery became the pre-determined fate of inferior folk, and there was no prohibition against enslaving one's own. (I will not address here the lack of citizenship and separate, dependent status of slaves in the US, or the hereditary status of slavery, where even “one drop of black blood” made one a slave. In contravention of British common law, the children of slaves also became slaves (Stampp 194)).

Beginning in the seventeenth century, black slaves were imported into the US and were alien to the white community. However, by the time of the Emancipation Proclamation in the middle of the nineteenth century, most, if not all of the slaves in the southern United States, had been born in the US. The Russian peasant, in contrast, had been born on the land, but by the nineteenth century, they too were being considered racially distinct, to a certain degree, from the European aristocracy.

This evaluation of the peasant and the black slave as “less than” the white-skinned European citizens made it easier for both countries to justify their enslavement in spite of the Judeo-Christian ethic, which provides for love of all mankind. How does one justify the ownership of slaves or serfs if they, too, are part of mankind, the same as you? For these intellectually backward and inferior peoples, slavery or serfdom was their destiny, pre-ordained by God and nature (Stampp 420; Kolchin 171). It thus became the responsibility of the superior, “civilized” (in other words “western Europeanized”) people to take care of them.

By the middle of the nineteenth century, slavery was also a firmly rooted economic feature of the southern United States, where the labor-intensive farm economy, especially cotton production, relied heavily on the labor of slaves (Stampp 383). Negro slavery was frequently justified because of the firmly held belief that “slavery was not an unmitigated evil for the Negro, because whatever of progress the colored race has shown itself capable of achieving has come from slavery (Tillman 68). Although the Russian serfs had not been forcibly imported into an alien land, by the 19<sup>th</sup> century, certain Russians (including the well-known writer and historian N. M. Karamzin) considered them almost a separate race:

What is more noteworthy is that by the eighteenth century Russian noblemen had come to regard themselves as so different from their peasants that they were able to invent many of the same kinds of racial arguments to defend serfdom that American slaveowners used to justify their peculiar institution. ... The basis assumptions, however, were similar; they were “racial” in that they were predicated on the belief in inherent and immutable differences rather than in distinctions based on particular social or environmental conditions (Kolchin 170).

The serf in eighteenth and nineteenth century Russia had no more freedom than the black slave in the United States. The harsh treatment and justification for their lower status did not change with freedom, because the freed people were still considered morally and intellectually inferior. Although serfdom in Russia and slavery in the US ended in the same decade (1861 for serfdom and 1863 for slavery), freedom did not bring the expected benefits to the freed peoples. What was written and decreed by law did not impinge on everyday life or attitudes toward the disenfranchised. Those who were considered inferior before they were freed were still powerless and voiceless. They were far removed from the wielders of power; and the freedom, which they had finally gained, still did not allow them to express any discontent. In spite of the promise of Reconstruction, the “40 acres and a mule” did not materialize in the United States; most of the slaves, with no money and no place to go, became sharecroppers on the same land on which they had been slaves. In tsarist Russia, “New forms of dependency that provided the ex-bondsmen with at best semi-freedom became the rule. Exploitation, poverty, and bitterness endured, even as the freedmen struggled to take advantage of changed conditions” (Kolchin 375)

## **A Question of Soul**

Peterson in his book, Up from Bondage: The Literatures of Russian and African American Soul (2000), addresses the various forms of literary expression employed by the alienated people in the US and Russia. Peterson claims that most literatures of subcultures pass along a continuum in the course of their development (7). The speed, direction and duration of any one stage along this continuum seem to be a function of social distance and degree of alienation of the specific sub-culture. The more the subgroup views itself as alien and distinct from the dominant culture (in mores, attitudes, goals, etc.), the more likelihood there is that the group will seek to maintain its separate form of expression.

The first stage along this continuum is emulation, when the subculture uses standards and values of the dominant culture because that culture is “civilized.” In the mid-nineteenth century, Peter Yakovlevich Chaadaev (c.1794-1856) in Russia and Reverend Alexander Crummell (1819-1898) in the United States responded in similar fashion to the expression of a debased people, with emulation of the literature of the dominant culture (Peterson,14). Only by showing that they were worthy and could adhere to the same standards as the white man in America and the Europeanized Russian aristocracy could the freed slaves and educated peasants take their rightful place in society.

Peterson’s second stage is separation, when the subculture attempts to establish or underline its separate cultural identity; this stage is also sometimes allied with the emergence of nationalism. In the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, Fyodor M. Dostoevsky and W.E.B. Du Bois were both examples of the second pattern—

a deliberate attempt to separate and show the worth of a non-Europeanized personality, who was still complex and worthy of respect.

A third stage, which I label “rejection,” is not addressed by Peterson, but I see evidence that it exists. Under rejection, there is a deliberate attempt to express the antithesis of the civilized culture’s ideals. In this rubric, I place the not-quite-accepted literary output of countercultures, specifically, the blues writers and singers of the United States and the songs of Soviet bards, especially Vladimir Semenovitch Vysotsky prior to his death. This is not to say that all subcultures move inexorably to the extremes, but only that there is a possibility. The (perceived) similarities between the literary and quasi-literary traditions of Russia and Black America helped shape their expression of identity in contrast to that of accepted Eurocentric identity or civilization. In the words of Peterson:

The literatures of Russian and African American “soul” represent an active quest to invent an idiom, an expressive medium that can effectively convey “the uncreated conscience of the race.” In a series of remarkable inventive philosophical and literary texts we can observe the unfolding of a culturally constructed and dialogically shaped experiment in scripting a historical presence that Western eyes had simply failed to see (6).

Building on Peterson’s and, to a lesser degree, Kate Baldwin’s excursions into more than a century of intersections between Blacks and Russians, I highlight only two disparate phases in a fascinating series of cultural and historical parallels. The political and economic environment set in nineteenth-century, tsarist Russia and the post-slavery

United States helped shape the world which produced both Dostoevsky and Du Bois, who are considered giants in the world of literary expression. The other parallel is in the mid-twentieth century, when various blues, and rhythm & blues, singer-songwriters in the US and bards in the Soviet Union sang about the topics usually not addressed in high literature. The period between these time frames can be encapsulated by the works of two exceptional thinkers: Mikhail Bakhtin and Lev Vygotsky—primarily on the basis of the interpretation and use of their work in the area of contemporary language acquisition and cultural studies. This pattern of almost uninterrupted similarity of expression, and the reflections of the cultural idioms of these two countries, has been seen in parallel time frames almost up to the present. Building on this premise about the source of expressive genres, the blues singers in America and the bards in the Soviet Union can be seen as another stage in parallel responses to a parallel history for the underclasses of two nations.

### **Essential Personal Characteristics**

The concepts of soul, work and suffering are shared parts of the cultural idiom of American Blacks and Russians. The Negro in the United States and the Russian people have elevated the concept of *soul* or *dyua* into one of the identifying characteristics of self worth. Any Black in the US is assumed to have *soul*; if he does not, he is either considered a sell-out or “not truly Black.” If someone in the US is called a “blue-eyed soul brother,” we assume that his skin is white, but his mannerisms are “Black.” As with most such common concepts, there is no single definition accepted by everyone. “If you got *soul*, you know it.” But any member of the Black ethnic group will assure outsiders that s/he “knows” what soul is. In the same spirit, any Russian can talk about *dyua*, about how central the concept of soul is to one's identification as a real Russian.

Just as there are different, but similar, definitions of *soul* in the USA, there are different understandings of *душа* in Russia. Although Peterson examines the literatures of Russian and African American *soul*, at no point is that phenomenon defined. Nemirovskaya, in her Russian-language textbook Inside the Russian Soul (1997), also does not define the concept mentioned in the title of her book. That neither author feels the need to define *soul* or *душа* is evidence of the depth and breadth of meaning attached to the concept in both Russian and Black culture.

Stepanov defines *dusha* from a scientific, etymological point of view. He begins by classifying *душа* as one of a group of *культурные константы* “cultural constants” which all societies have. These “constants,” usually numbering fifty to sixty in each society, are the underlying unifying concepts of societal knowledge, the definition of which may change slightly over time, but which definition will be shared by most members of the society (Stepanov 6). Stepanov further distinguishes his constants by separating them from the common European base—only in their distinction from the European source does he view these constants as a distinctly Russian phenomenon: *«предмет этого Словаря—концепту русской культуры как часть культуры общеевропейской, взятые, прежде всего, в момент их ответвления от европейского культурного фонда или фона»* (“the subject of this dictionary is the concepts of Russian culture as part of common European culture, taken at the moment of its first branching from the European cultural stock or background”) (Stepanov 6). He begins with the classic definition taken from the Russian-language explanatory dictionary by Vladimir Dal’: *«бессмертное существо..., одаренное разумом и волею»* (“the immortal essence, gifted with reason and will”) (504). Not only does Stepanov consider this the starting point for all Russian understanding of the concept of *душа*, but as the part of the individual distinct from the body and spirit.



Even when the average Russian can not quote the definition from Dal' or the etymological derivation of the concept, the associations of *душа* are based on the definitions contained therein. Stepanov even digresses onto the significance of *душа* being a feminine, derivative noun, and therefore, secondary to the original source, root-stem of *дых* ("spirit") which is masculine, "in accordance with the general rule of Indoeuropean grammar, the first indicates something basic and dominating, and the second, the feminine gender, indicates something derived, partial and subordinate" (738). In summation, the internal world of the individual, the invisible particulars of his character or personality, consciousness, those characteristics which separate the individual from the trees or the animals—without the religious or philosophical justifications—are Stepanov's definition of *душа*.

Vladimir M. Solov'ev, who has written numerous books on Russian language and culture especially for foreigners and émigré Russians, speaks of *душа* more as a complex of character traits, which have been instilled by the vast expanses of Russia itself, a tradition of paganism, almost 250 years of suffering under the *татарское иго* ("yoke of the Tartars"), and almost three hundred years of serfdom (46). In explaining the "problem" with the Russian *загадочная душа* ("mysterious soul"), Solov'ev quotes one Englishman saying, «Проблема русских в том, что они белые. Если бы они были черные, желтые, или коричневые, не было бы такой деинтерпретации.» ("The problem with Russians is that they are white. If they were black, or yellow or brown, there wouldn't be such confusion.") (58). This discrepancy underlines the weight society attaches to outward racial characteristics relative to the historical, geographical, or political factors in the shaping of a group's most salient characteristics, and complicates the process of finding a definition of soul or *душа*. Dale Pesman, in his interviews with

Russians, also failed to find one precise definition of *dyua*, but found what he called “associations” (80). Two of the primary associations were music and suffering. The love of music and singing, the expressiveness and exaggerations, the love of literature—especially the oral recitation of poetry, a kind of music—are seen as signs of strong *dyua* (Pesman 84). African American *soul* or Russian *dyua* can, in the end, best be described as a set of character traits, a way of looking at and interpreting the world based on experience. However, this definition itself is a tautology, since all our character traits are based on learning and experience. The historical and societal similarities in Russia and the USA have shaped these two alien, yet mirrored conceptual identities. For many Blacks in the USA, “having soul” means “keeping it real” and not pretending to be something that you’re not. Having an understanding of *dyua* and the constant striving to perfect that *dyua* are, for the “real Russian,” the foundations of a moral life (Stepanov).

One way to perfect the soul is through work. But not just any work will suffice. The Russian language has many words for “work” – *работа, труд, деятельность, служба*, et al. *Работа* and *труд* are the more general terms meaning work, but only *труд*, the more dirty, onerous, low-paying, difficult work will perfect the soul. *Труд* is defined as “activity by a person intended for the creation, with the help of a tool, of a product of material or *spiritual value*” [italics mine] (*«целесообразная деятельность человека, направленная на создание с помощью орудий производства материальных и духовных ценностей»*) (Bol'shoi 1348). None of the other Russian words for work include this idea of spiritual value within the definition. In the United States, in the 1960s, John W. Anderson wrote and performed a song, in which a Black laborer, Mose, was describing his life to white society: I could smile carrying burdens that would have you crying. ... and you don’t even know, that my name is Mose

(Anderson). This source of pride in suffering is shared by Russians and frequently is expressed also in song, a cultural tradition dating from the Middle Ages:

*В бытовых песнях Высоцкого ... ассоциируются с особой культурной традицией—горького смеха. ... смех направлен на самого смеющегося. А смеющийся принадлежит к неофициальному, низкому миру, в котором нет ничего из составляющих мира 'официально'-высокого: ни богатства, ни сытости, ни семейных уз и домашнего очага.*

In the common songs of Vysotsky ... are associated with a particular cultural tradition—bitter laughter. ... laughter directed back on the laugher. But the one who is laughing belongs to an unofficial, lower world, in which there is nothing from the proper, 'officially'-high world: no wealth, no satisfaction, no family ties and no home (Cherednichenko 210).

For both the American Negro and Russian common man, exclusion by the European civilized world was transmuted into a pride in their differences, a sense of moral superiority gained through suffering. Du Bois highlighted the strength of the Negro who was not broken by slavery, while Dostoevsky showed the strength of the Russian folk, who survived in labor camps and grew strong in a climate which defeated Napoleon (Peterson). The early dichotomy between the European, Western world, which emphasized power and individualism, was contrasted with the Russian emphasis on Orthodoxy (spirituality) and communalism and the Negro emphasis on tribal roots, (another way of saying spirituality and the church) and communalism did not cease to

exist in either the Soviet Union or Jim Crow America. (Although the Soviet citizen was not a serf, his freedom was as constrained by the communist system of controls as that of the serf had been in tsarist Russia.) Even in the middle of the nineteenth century, there was an awareness of these differences, which, although imposed from the outside, were adopted and internalized by the despised people. These differences became a source of pride and strength in the move toward a separate identity and awareness. The despised people, although legally considered part of the larger culture, were still socially alienated, and continued to express their cultural identity as separate from the power wielders. I believe that these historical parallels can lead us to a broadening of the term “blues.”

#### **VYSOTSKY AND THE COLOR QUESTION**

As Maslow and Bourdieu state, although from different disciplines and from differing points of view, there are commonalities between people (Maslow 168; Bourdieu Taste). The commonalities may only be intensified if there is a history—however distant—of an unfree, or disadvantaged state. Descendants of these groups may share an awareness of this state or a sensitivity to evidence of its presence—similar to the awareness of a recently-healed wound, which one must touch to see it still hurts or if it is completely healed. Perhaps the same instinct which moved a nineteenth-century Pushkin to place on his desk an inkwell depicting his putative ancestor standing between two cotton bales, also moved my mother, the daughter of a twentieth-century Mississippi sharecropper, to place miniature cotton bales on the what-not stand of our small Memphis apartment (Shaw 94).

Perhaps this commonality is the basis of Vysotsky’s sensitivity to and concern for racial and ethnic inequities. Although in the USSR in the post-Stalinist years, there were

very few if any Africans, there were Jews, to bear the brunt of xenophobia and racial hatred, to become for the ethnically Russian, the “nigger in the woodpile” with which to frighten the populace. In one of the numerous biographies about Vysotsky, Razzakov points out that in the late 1960s and early 1970s, with the expulsion of Alexander Galich, multiple defections, and with tensions rising at home, the *«евреи всегда и везде выступали в качестве козлов отпущения»* (“Jews always and everywhere appeared as sacrificial lambs”) (143).

It was into this atmosphere of post-Stalinist thaw, and initial taste of relative freedom, combined with the sensitivity of the son of a Jewish father, that Vysotsky, as well as the other bards of that period, interjected a new voice. Although Jewish tradition does not track heritage through the father’s lineage, but through the mother’s, Vysotsky considered himself Jewish, possibly just as Pushkin often considered himself a blackamoor by descent, regardless of the generational gap. Vysotsky was uniquely placed to both notice and be sensitive to the atmosphere of racial and ethnic attitudes in Soviet society of the post-Stalinist era. Although the communist government had long espoused the brotherhood of mankind, and the unity of all races, in its endeavor to spread communism around the world, the system of internal passport and the infamous *пятый пункт* (“fifth entry”) in the passport (which indicates ethnicity) hint at a different reality. According to Razzakov, for Vysotsky the very idea of prejudice was anathema: *«Ему было глубоко чуждо и омерзительно деление людей по национальному признаку. это была его твердая жизненная позиция и кредо»* (“The division of people by nationality was for him deeply alien and loathsome; this was his firm life-long position and credo.”) (144). As early as 1963 Vysotsky wrote the ironic song, *«Антисемиты»* (“Antisemites”) in which he humorously points out, in rollicking lyric form, the illogic of stereotypes and the people who hold them. Although, as with the official party line and

officially sanctioned literature or artistic productions, only the positive aspects of Soviet society could be portrayed. As the following lyrics indicate, this was not the case and formed the core of Vysotsky's lifelong tensions with the government, literary critics (although a prolific writer, he was asked to join the Writers' Union), et al. (Novikov Soiuz).

*Зачем мне считаться шпаной и бандитом?*

*Не лучше ль податься мне в антисемиты?*

*На их стороне хоть и нету законов, —*

*Поддержка и энтузиазм миллионов. ...*

Why should I be considered a hooligan and bandit?

Wouldn't it be better just to join the anti-Semites?

On their side, at least there's no law against it,--

And the support and enthusiasm of millions (Lvov and Sumerkin 168).

Then, in typical form for Vysotsky, comes the innovative word play, «*Но надо же узнать, кто такие семиты.*» (“But, I just need to find out who these ‘Semites’ are.”) The song continues with all the Jews that Vysotsky knows, including his friend Rabinovich, Albert Einstein, Charlie Chaplin, «*и даже основоположник марксизма*» (“and even the founder of Marxism”) (Lvov and Sumerkin 168) And yet, in spite of all the “facts” that he knows about Jews, the singer is informed by his «*друг и учитель, алкаш*» (“friend, instructor, and heavy drinker”) that Jews «*пьют они кровь*»

*христианских младенцев, ... очень давно они бога распяли* (“they drink the blood of Christian babies,...a long time ago they crucified Christ”). All the stereotypes are presented in the song, and the good Russian singer finally agrees, *«На всё я готов — на разбой и насилие, // И бью я жидов, и спасаю Россию!»* (“I’m ready for anything—using robbery and force// I’ll beat up the Jews and save Russia!” (Lvov and Sumerkin 168)

From such a background Vysotsky came to play the role of another dispossessed, non-white character, Ibrahim Petrovich Gannibal the great-grandfather of Alexander Sergeevich Pushkin, the “Father of Russian Literature.” In 1976 Vysotsky starred in the film, *«Сказ про то, как царь Петр арапа женил»* (“The Tale of How Tsar Peter Married off His Blackamoor”) (Mitta). This film, directed by Aleksander Mitta is based on the unfinished book, *Арап Петра Великого* (*The Blackamoor of Peter the Great*), by Alexander S. Pushkin, which detailed the history of his great-grandfather. Vysotsky, in a monologue from the stage, recounts changes in the actual naming of the film, from *«Арап Петра Великого»* (“The Blackamoor of Peter the Great”) during the filming to *«Как царь Петр арапа женил»* (“How tsar Peter Married Off His Blackamoor”) (Terent'ev 41). The final release name of the film includes the Russian word *сказ* (skaz), which, in literary lexicon indicates that either the story lies somewhere between truth and fairy tale, or that it is “‘quoted speech’, i.e., language marked as not the author’s own” (Terras 420). The addition of this term allowed the melding of fact and fancy to create a film which showcased not only Pushkin’s unfinished biographical endeavor, but also Vysotsky’s sometimes untapped acting abilities.

Although most of Vysotsky’s film roles were rather insignificant, his role as Gannibal is considered one of his finest, on a level with his portrayal of Gleb Zheglov in *«Место встречи изменить нельзя»* (“The Meeting Place Cannot Be Changed”) and his

stage roles at the Theater on Taganka (Kuznetsova 440). According to Aleksander Mitta, the film's director, in complete agreement with the screenwriters Iurii Dunsii and V. Frid, «с самого начала предполагался фильм не только про арана, но и про Высоцкого» “from the very beginning the film was intended to be not only about the *aran*, but also about Vysotsky” (Kuznetsova 439). No other actor was ever considered for the role, almost as though the lives of Vysotsky and Pushkin were linked in their minds. Vysotsky himself asked about the choice of a White to play an African slave, and suggested either an *эфиоп* (Ethiopian) or *негр* (Negro), since his own features, especially the lips, regardless of the daily make-up to darken his skin, would never be right. He was overruled because, in his words, «Но весь смысл этого фильма в том, что этот человек, несмотря на цвет кожи, глубоко русский.» (“But, the whole idea of this film was that this man, despite the color of his skin, was deeply Russian.”) (Terent'ev 40).

The use of the term *aran* (“blackamoor”) is itself an anachronism and brings up the questions of race in the midst of a society which had for decades tried to ignore the question of race and its effect on societal relations, while at the same time enhancing the perception of themselves as a tolerant and accepting society. However, at the time of Peter I, *arap* was the accepted term for all the peoples from Africa, particularly those «по природе, по племени чернокожий, чернотелый человек жарких стран Африки» (“by nature, belonging to the tribe of black-skinned, black-bodied person of the hot countries of Africa”) (Dal' 21). The lexical item has been replaced in contemporary usage by *араб* (with the same pronunciation), but without the additional obsolete translation options of “Moor” or “blackamoor.” Vysotsky, in his blackface makeup, imbued the persona of Gannibal with nobility of character, truth, honesty, hard work and that striving toward perfecting of the soul (*усовершенствование души*) that is the mark of a “true” Russian.



The problems which arose for the character in the film arose not through his own fault, but because of the color of his skin.

Ibrahim Gannibal, given to the tsar' as a gift, instead of being treated as a slave, became the god-child of the tsar' of all Russia, was educated, sent to France (or left there) for training where, in the film, he encountered his first race-based discrimination. Ibrahim is presented as a brave, outstanding soldier, officer, well-trained (*отличился в компании проф испанцев*<sup>2</sup>), who happens to have a love affair with a French *графиня* ("countess"). The lover Luisa, writes to her friend Elise that she has the «самый экзотический любовник в Париже, офицер, смекнись, ученый, поморицись, из дикой России, удивись, необузданный африканец» ("the most exotic lover in Paris, an officer, just think about it, a scientist, how droll, from wild Russia, just imagine, an unbridled African"). Upon discovery of the affair, there is an obligatory challenge by the countess's husband and the ensuing duel.

Keeping in mind that the title of the film includes *skaz*, the directors and writers allowed themselves the freedom to exaggerate. The ensuing duel with the French *граф* ("count") included noblemen (probably retainers) wielding swords and brandishing firearms, as wells as servants wielding brooms, serving trays, dusting rags, mops, etc. Of course, Gannibal behaved in a noble manner and *много простил ему от жалости* ("forgave him much out of pity"), but finally wins the "duel" with the cuckolded husband, proving his superiority in spite of overwhelming odds; but there is no happy ending. The *графиня*, left in 18<sup>th</sup> century France without a husband, and with a black-skinned baby does the only sensible thing: she sends the dark child to Haiti with the expressed hope that it will survive and substitutes a white child to become the next count.

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<sup>2</sup> All quotations cited here are transcribed from the film and translated by the author R.J.J.

In a final letter to Gannibal, whom she addresses as *друг* (“friend”), she informs him that she never loved him and that he was for her, as for all of Paris, simply a *забавный, прихотливый зверь* (“entertaining, whimsical beast”). After an exchange of letters between the sovereigns, our debased, disheartened soldier-hero is forced to return home in disgrace. En-route, his coach is robbed by, what one assumes is a noble-hearted Russian fallen on hard times in the heartless European country of France. The contrast is constantly emphasized that although the French are European and consider the Russians *дикие* (“wild”) and not quite as civilized as the rest of Europe, the Russians—and even the *апан*, from uncivilized Africa—have more soul and noble character.

The very polite robber, who, although he has a firearm which he brandishes in a threatening manner, requests only some food, a change of clothing and horses. He even addresses the coach driver and unseen passenger (Ibrahim) as *добрые люди* (“kind people”). And he does assure them that it is only a request because, although he needs these things, *«Но, силой я ничего ни у кого не отнимал.»* (“I’ve never taken anything by force from anyone”). However, both would-be thief and would-be victim, upon recognizing, apparently by the voices, that the other is Russian, immediately become ecstatic, *«Родной ты? Русский?» «Да, русский, русский!»* (“Are you a fellow countryman? Russian?” “Yes, Russian, Russian!”); they kiss, and travel on toward home. Neither apparently notices the difference in skin color or the difference in class origin. Philimon, the white-skinned, would-be thief, informs Gannibal that he was a *беглый холоп* (“runaway bond slave”)—and yet he returns to Russia to the *родина* (“homeland”) in spite of the danger. When Philimon asks, *«Кто вы?»* (Who are you?), Ibrahim responds *«Лицом апан, душой русский.»* (“By the face, I’m a blackamoor, in my soul I’m a Russian).

After arriving home, the assumption, and the presentation is that all things will be better because the main character no longer has to deal with the decadence of European France. He is back in Russia, with the honest people as represented by the tsar' and the bond slave. In spite of the boisterous welcome by the tsar' at the castle, the race question arises. Natasha, a young woman, urged by her friends to approach the *arap*, actually dances with Gannibal, but, in the presence of his silence, she asks, «Почему вы всё молчите? Вы не понимаете по-нашему?» (“Why are you so quiet? Don’t you understand our language?”). She allows his skin color to determine who Gannibal is before anything else. In turn, Gannibal answers with a question, «А чего же? Русский язык мне родной.» (“Why do you ask? Russian is my native language.”). From this first minor incident upon his return to Russia, Ibrahim Gannibal uncovers the not totally hidden racial biases from which the tsar' protection has shielded him. And through him, and the film, we also get a glimpse at the undercurrents of eighteenth century Russia, and by extension twentieth century USSR.

Tsar' Peter, although the racial situation is never mentioned directly, is aware of the tenuousness of Ibrahim's situation, and, in one of the most powerful monologues of the film, asks,

*Ты кто есть, кому надобен? Безродный, безземельный и безденежный.  
Умри я сей день, завтра ли, что с тобой станет? А, я хочу укоренить  
тебя, укрепить накрепко, связать с исходным русским родом. Я тружусь  
как раб для блага России. Хочу насадить округ себя мужей державных.  
Мне помощники нужны, дел невпроворот. А этот из-зи девки ум потерял.*

*Не серди меня, аран; лучше обними меня, поцелуй и скажи, что сделаешь по-моему.*

Who are you, who needs you? No family, no land, and no money. If I were to die today or even tomorrow, what will become of you? And I want to get you settled, firmly consolidate power, bind you to an original Russian family. I work like a slave for the good of Russia. I want to settle sovereign men around me. I need helpers; I'm up to my ears in work. And this one has lost his mind because of some girl. Don't anger me, *аран*; you'd do better to hug me, give me a kiss and say that you'll do what I want.

In spite of Peter being the tsar' of all Russia, the star of this film is undoubtedly the *аран*: the stolen child from Africa «*аран с обугленной душой, царю наперсник, а не раб, России сын родной*» (“the blackamoor, with a charred soul, god-child to the tsar’, and not a slave, a native son of Russia”), played by the actor/poet/bard Vladimir Vysotsky. The action of the film begins with the *аран* and ends with his being embraced into Russian high society. The tsar’ set the tone for racial tolerance in his Russia, as was shown in the film, but it did not reach all his subjects. Vysotsky, by playing to his strengths—his ability as not only a vehicle of language, but a producer of language, both actor and poet—and by showing the personal nobility of the *аран* in this story written by his descendant, gives us a unique glimpse into Russian culture. With the addition of greasepaint, Vysotsky manages to strip the veneer off the thorny history of racial and ethnic harmony and shows in his portrayal of Ibrahim Petrovich Gannibal, that some things in life, some qualities and characteristics transcend race and time and culture.

## DEFINING A SOURCE OF THE BLUES

If the blues can be seen as the product of specific political and social factors, which foster a sense of alienation within a culture, then anyone can have the blues. The similarities between the social and political histories of the USA and Russia (including all its iterations for the past two centuries) have only recently become the topic of scholarly enquiry. Possibly the most blatant reason for this is that the color question has eclipsed all other similarities, as though color were the most important component of any question. Color is an excuse, not a reason. When we strip the concepts of all the extraneous clutter, slavery and powerlessness are, unfortunately, common human experiences. The reactions to these conditions are also common, or shared. In social situations, when the threat of reprisal (lynching in the USA, and transportation or exile to Siberia, or death, in the Soviet Union), are realities, people usually find a different (veiled) way of expressing their reactions to life conditions. Abraham H. Maslow, in setting forth his “Hierarchy of Needs,” originally in 1954, may have said it most clearly—but probably not first—that people are just people, or, in the words of the Russian idiom—«люди как люди» (Maslow). In the decades since his “Hierarchy of Needs” first appeared others have expanded on it, twisted it around and explored it: none have refuted it or replaced it with an updated version. Maslow’s needs are ranked not by strength, but by position: considered common to all people, and ranked in order of demands placed on the organism—which needs must be filled before others can be considered (Maslow). Bourdieu has keyed in on the upper level of these needs in analyzing his distinctions in taste, or our societal evaluation of esthetics (Bourdieu Taste).

Taste is determined by the educational system, which is a tool of the powers that be. The educational system and all the institutions of any society are geared toward maintaining that system. Therefore, those who control the system, use their own stratum within the system as the standard by which to determine what is taught as “educational capital.” That, which is valued by sub-cultures not adhering to the accepted norms, is immediately suspect. The blues performers and any Soviet bards who wrote about topics not in accordance with those values were relegated to these sub-cultures. They were not the “big-C” (formal) culture which supports the status quo and which were to be taught and emulated (Omaggio-Hadley 350). Instead, the topics of bards and blues singers were “little-c” culture: how people live, eat, interact, socialize, etc.

Peterson has looked at similarities in the literary traditions of Russia and the United States. Both literary traditions are deeply rooted in examinations of the *soul* or the Russian *dyua* as partial refutation of the Euro-centric cultural evaluation of certain peoples, which left both Blacks in the United States and the native Russians as distant cultural throwbacks, not worthy of being included in the world of the more “civilized” Europeans. At a time when European society was considered the epitome of civilization, Fyodor Dostoevsky and W.E.B. Du Bois, presented the world with a new view of the non-Europeanized Russian peasant and the American Negro (Peterson). Dostoevsky, in Notes from the House of the Dead, describes the life and denizens of a labor camp and the convicts who inhabited a world, which was normally veiled from view of the nobility. Du Bois, in The Souls of Black Folk, also tries to present the black folk in a manner comprehensible to the larger, white society.

... the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world,-- a world which yields him no true self-

consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness,— an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder (Johnson 215).

Both writers, products of the larger Europeanized system, and educated within that system, were establishing the validity of a different form of expression. Neither Dostoevsky nor Du Bois could completely repudiate the European norm for expression, but, within the confines of that system, each proposed a different view of reality, one in which there was a different language and a different world view, where a double-consciousness and double-voicedness of the alien held sway and shaped their reality. Each author pierced the veil of alien otherness, which had hidden the American Negro and the Russian *народ* (“folk”) from their European compatriots (Peterson 73). Du Bois explained the Negro double-consciousness as a constant awareness of the need to use the language of the dominant culture to communicate accepted ideas, while, at the same time, using it as a medium for communicating with other Negroes.

Mikhail Bakhtin, in his analysis of Dostoevsky's Notes from the Underground, wrote about the same dialogic meanings in the Underground Man's dialogue with himself (Morson and Emerson 159). The central issue was not just that the Underground Man was carrying on a dialogue with himself, but also with the wider society—that there were layers of meaning in the words he used. He chose the words based not just on what he

himself meant to say, but on what he assumed the unidentified member of the Eurocentric male audience would understand.

American blues writers also wrote in words that would be acceptable to the censors, with the hidden meaning, which would be clear to the Blacks who were listening to their songs. The “signifyin’” that popular blues singers talked about, the “signifying” about which Henry Louis Gates, Jr. wrote, and Bakhtin’s “signifying”, differed not in essence, but only in the language used to express it (Peterson 190). Gil Scott-Heron, in his song “The Ghetto Code (Dot Dot Dit Dot Dit Dot Dot Dash),” described the ghetto use of language and the double (even triple) meanings contained therein. American visitors to the Soviet Union frequently spoke of the coldness of the average Soviet citizen. What they failed to take into account, or possibly never knew, was that the Soviet individual, just as most of Dostoevsky’s protagonists and Du Bois’ “black folk” had a public and a private self, each of which spoke in a voice constrained by the environment. In the same way, the Negro in America knew that there were certain attitudes and ideas which could not be expressed to the White man, but only at home, within a narrow circle of friends and family – and not always then. Both these works (by Dostoevsky and Du Bois) are usually brought forth as prime examples of double-voiced expression, a necessary mechanism in a world where language is the only interface between the internal and external world of the individual. This language is used to both express and hide certain vulnerabilities within the protagonists; but its use also sets up an internal tension, which can just as easily destroy him, if it is not allowed release. Blues is one means of release.

Blues expression and the language peculiar to this genre, fits in as a medium which is consciously different from that of the dominant culture, and always full of the signifying, which never quite says anything in a straightforward, monologic way. The



raucous, moaning sounds of the blues help emphasize this separateness or sense of alienation. There have been varied explanations for the difference in sound: (1) the African heritage of the former slaves; (2) the conscious refutation of European values and valuation of beauty (Baraka). Most people accept the idea that the blues in America grew out of slavery's 'sorrow songs' and the gospel. The Russian bardic tradition, likewise, did not come from nothing, but came out of the tradition of folk songs, ballads and bitter romances (Korkin; Smith).

In the mid-1960s, the Soviets produced their own popular musical hero – a bard, who wrote and sang the story of their lives, just as blues and folk and country singers have recorded the story of the American *folk*. Vysotsky was a stage and screen actor who managed to write and perform his own songs in the repressive Soviet Union of the 1960s and 1970s. He was officially recognized by the Soviet government only as an actor. The majority of his recordings were the product of *самиздат* (samizdat) or *магнитуздат* (magnitizdat), the well-documented system of self-publication of underground or censored writings and recordings which were not approved by the Communist Party censors. In the beginning, Vysotsky sang in homes, school gymnasiums, meeting halls, and other unofficial venues while attendees would sit in the front and record his performance; they would then duplicate these recordings and pass them to friends and acquaintances, who, in turn, would duplicate and pass them on. One of the still unexplained mysteries of the Vysotsky phenomenon was his ability to perform and travel all over the Soviet Union, much of the Warsaw Pact, and even to Western Europe and the Americas as an “unofficial” bard. Vysotsky wrote and performed songs in films and on stage, but was “not a writer or singer.” Although he was officially cited for earning money on the side, a punishable crime, called *халтура* (“khaltura”), under the Soviet system, at no point was his movement between cities so restricted as to prevent his

performing (Razzakov). Just as rock musicians in America still record and listen to so-called blues classics, Russian youth, who were not even born when Vysotsky died in 1980, still know his songs. While Vysotsky was writing his poems and performing songs in homes, schools and meeting halls in the Soviet Union, young Blacks and Whites were writing about both sides of life in America.

The social and cultural conditions which had helped provide the background for the blues in the USA (as one form of expression), did not simply dissipate in the Soviet Union, but found partial expression in the creative output of a number of Soviet bards. Vladimir Vysotsky was one of the most prolific and eloquent of these bards. His poems and songs have been proclaimed as giving voice to the people, singing out their pain and suffering. The expression of suffering and loss of a dispossessed people has long been considered one of the central earmarks of the blues, one of its distinguishing characteristics. If this definition holds true, Vysotsky can easily be included in the ranks of blues artists.

Vysotsky's creations seem to reflect the mostly negative relationship of the Soviet people with those in power; in this respect, they share a commonality of topics and sounds with the blues. His music speaks to the people of their large troubles, small successes, and most of all, their soul. The experiences of which Vysotsky sings are shared and recognized by the majority of Russian people. His talent in eloquently expressing these elements of Soviet/Russian culture is what set him apart and has allowed his music and words to not only survive his death, but to grow with exposure to new generations.

Although Urban, among others, has wondered why Russians—who imported and adopted jazz and rock, along with a great portion of the rest of the world—did not so readily import blues, it is not strange for a number of reasons. First, the blues is a vocal

means of expression, dependent upon the lyrics, which, being culture-specific, written in English, and coming out of the Black, American cultural milieu, must reflect that culture and resonate expressly with those most familiar with that culture. “The blues is formed out of the same social and musical fabric that the spiritual issued from, but with blues the social emphasis becomes more personal, the ‘Jordan’ of the song much more intensely a human accomplishment” (Baraka 63). “Each phase of the Negro’s music issued directly from the dictates of his social and psychological environment.” (Baraka 65). This confluence of conditions makes it much more difficult for the music to have the same effect on ones who do not understand the language. Second, the language itself is very conversational, slang-heavy, or sub-standard, making it difficult for the NNS to understand. Third, blues seems to serve a social function. According to Baraka, this music was “...directly out of the lives of the people involved” and allowed them a method of expression in a world which they did not control (104).

During the 1960s-1970s when Vysotsky was writing and performing, there was an influx of rock-and-roll and jazz past the Iron Curtain. But even contemporary Russians wonder why the blues was not included in the imports until after the fall of the Soviet Union. According to one Russian scientist who likes to listen to the blues:

Well, what we’ve got in Russia now is just the same thing that existed in the United States when blues first appeared. A big element here is frustration. There are a lot of Russians who feel that they’ve actually become different people now that the Soviet Union no longer exists. They feel they’ve become Negroes (Urban, 4).

However, if one looks at the situation from a different point of view, one can argue that Vysotsky in his writing had already fulfilled one of the basic functions of the blues—catharsis. The lyrics of the blues frequently express the frustrations of powerless people who have no other outlet or voice for their suffering. From listening to and reading the lyrics of Vysotsky's songs, my first impression is that that niche in the cultural fabric was already filled. There was no need to import what was already there. An unnamed prisoner, interviewed in 1981 in a labor camp, recalls the personal and societal reactions of his peers to the phenomenon of Vysotsky:

*Весна 1981 года «урок Высоцкого» в исправительно-трудовой колонии*

*В наше время, это 64- год, это времена, что ли, бурного рок-н-рола, твиста. Это, ну, что ли, эра Чака Бери, Бо Дидли, Била Хэйли, Элвиса Пресли. Вот, и мы все студенты увлекались, что ли, вот, этой новой волной музыки. Тут на арену входят Битлз, вместе с Полом Маккартни, с Ленноном, с Харрисоном, с Ринго Старром. И вот, а также из наших, из певцов, это Окуджава Булат. – И, вдруг в 64-ом году я впервые услышал, а значит, Владимира Высоцкого. Это было потрясающее. Это потрясающее было, ну и не только для меня. Вот, я был и в кругу своих товарищей, и мы ... Впервые принесли эту пленку, эту пленку. У меня был этот знакомый студент Вова, из политехнического института. Он специально ездил в Москву, специально ездил в Москву. Где-то он там за большие деньги купил эту пленку, и буквально принес к нам, вот, на вечеринку, говорит, 'Ребята, вот, послушайте, значит, записи нового, вот,*

певца, значит, Владимира Высоцкого.' И вот, буквально мы все были потрясены его песнями. Я не помню песен тех лет. Они были спортивного, помню, плана. Помню, значит, что-то такого сказочного плана, чудо-юдо, и ещё-там прочее. Но так они нам все здорово понравились. Почему они нам здорово понравились? Что мы, вот, современники в его лице, вот, у нас накопилось всё это в душе. Вот, но мы не могли это высказать. ...

Высоцкий, ведь, рос вместе с нами, с нашим поколением. И он в своих песнях рос. Он, и все песни, вот, и ему, они проблематичные, философского направления, философского плана. Они заставляют размышлять человека о жизни, как дальше жить, чем жить. И вот поэтому, вот поэтому, в этих песнях отразилось не только ведь мое поколение, но и моих отцов. ... Ведь, времена вы сами знаете, были и культа личности и времена ещё. Да, историю нашу – вы это прекрасно знаете. И в народе все накопилось, накопилось. Но, вот, народ под впечатлением всего прошлого, всего прошлого, он держал это в себе. Он боялся сказать правду. И вот, а вот, Высоцкий, что-ли, он как бы раскрепостил это всё, он раскрепостил, что ли, в своих песнях думы народа и чаяния, и я считаю, что Высоцкий-- это не просто человек. Это гениальный человек, гениальный человек. И не просто он большой человек, это большой человек, это с большой буквы. Но и он гений, гений нашего времени, и мы, ну, что ли, всегда, что ли, помнить быть свято, свято его имя хранить и должны помнить всю жизнь, какая бы ни была эра рок-н-

*рола, или ещё какая-либо. Он наш свой, он наш русский, русский, и именно отражает то, что нужно. Есть и в Соединённых Штатах Боб Дилан, там и ещё прочее, Жак Брэль там во Франции, или прочее, но они не отвечают нашему русскому бытию, бытию. Высоцкий же отразил именно русское бытие. Вот что я хотел сказать. Но это примерно, но я бы мог о нем говорить очень много.*

Spring 1981, 'the lesson of Vysotsky' in correctional facility

In our time, that is 1964, these were times of, uh, wild rock and roll, the twist. This was, well, the era of Chuck Berry, Bo Diddley, Bill Haley, Elvis Presley. And we, all us students were wild, you know, about this new music. And then, the Beatles come out the scene, with Paul McCartney, Lennon, Harrison and Ringo Starr. And then, there were also ours, among the singers, there was Okudzhava, Bulat. And suddenly, in '64, for the first time I heard, Vladimir Vysotsky. It was astounding. It was astounding, but not just for me. Well, you know, I was in with this group of my comrades, and we... For the first time they brought this tape, this tape. I knew this guy, Vova, from the politechnical institute (trade school?), and he made a special trip to Moscow, special trip to Moscow. Somewhere there, for a whole lot of money, he bought this tape, and he literally brought it straight to us, to this party, and says, "Hey guys, listen to this, uh, recording of this new singer, uh, Vladimir Vysotsky." And we were simply shaken by his songs. I don't remember the specific songs from those years. They were, I remember, something about sports. I remember, I think, there was something about fairy

tales, monsters, and other stuff like that. But, just that we really liked them a lot. Why did we like them so much? There we were, his peers, just like him, well, and all these things had built up in our souls, but we were unable to express it. ...

Vysotsky, really, grew up with us, with our generation. And, in his songs, he also grew. He, and all his songs, and even for him, they're problematical, have a kind of philosophical direction, a philosophical bent. They force a person to think about life, about how to live, what to live on. And that's why, that's why in these songs, not only is my generation reflected, after all, but also that of my father's. ... After all, these times you yourselves know very well, there were the cults of personality, and still others. Oh well, our history—you know this all very well. And, inside the people, all these things were just building up, just building up. But, you know, under the influence of the past, of all the past, the people just held it all in. They were afraid to speak the truth. And there's, uh, then, Vysotsky, you know, it's as though he freed up all of this; he liberated, you know, in his songs, the thoughts and dreams of the people, and I think that Vysotsky is not simply a man. He is a brilliant man, brilliant. And not simply is he a great man, he is a great man, with a capital "G." But, he is also a genius, the genius of our times, and we, right, always, uh, it is our sacred duty, sacred, to remember and revere his name, and we must remember it for all our life, no matter what kind of era of rock and roll or other kind of music comes around. He is our own, he is our Russian, he is Russian, and exactly reflects just what is needed. In the United States, they have Bob Dylan and the like; in France, they have Jacques

Brel and others; but, they don't fit our Russian reality, reality. Now, Vysotsky, he reflected precisely the Russian reality. That's what I wanted to say. ... But, that's just approximately, but I could say a whole lot about him (Soldatenkov).

This prisoner's emotional outburst, recorded in a documentary film about the life of Vysotsky, "*Я не люблю*" ("I Don't Like It") is familiar to most Russians, and the emotional reactions are shared as cultural memory . The experiences about which Vysotsky sang—except for the Great Patriotic War (the Fascist Occupation of USSR in 1941-45)—are common cultural phenomenon, and are expressed in the common colloquial language which our students must seek to learn and use in the proper context. Since many of Vysotsky's songs are arranged as short, lively vignettes of Soviet life, the lexicon is contextually arranged and authentic. Most importantly, the topics, feelings and reactions expressed in these songs echo those found in the blues.

Urban is perhaps caught in the same trap of defining the blues by its color, and not its content when he admits that the historical parallel which he draws is "at best, partial." If the definition of the blues is broadened to include the similar social and political constraints under which the average Soviet citizen lived (which both Urban and the Russians whom he interviewed freely admit), we can conclude that Russians had the blues long before they imported and began listening to the English-language versions (5).

Baraka is perhaps the narrowest in his definition of the blues in that he has classified and defined it as primitive, classic, country, city, contemporary, et al., and has definitely limited it in both time and space. Apparently, for him, the farther the music gets away from the original slave hollers and work chants, their original functional



origins, the less they resemble his notion of the blues. “Some blues singers even managed to get into the entertainment world of white America, and many times no more real blues ever left their lips” (167). However, Pearson presents a broader definition of the blues which encapsulates a more general and common theme-based notion: “According to stereotype, hard times, hard work, trouble, danger, mistreatment, and losing at love are core elements in the blues lexicon and credentials for living the blues, having the blues, and having the right to sing the blues” (xvi).

From the conflicting definitions of the blues comes the problem of defining rhythm and blues, and determining at which point on a continuum to place a marker and say that a phenomenon has ceased to be one thing and has completely become another. For rhythm and blues, there can be no clear distinction because, as a form of vocal, folk expression, the genre is inextricably bound with, and arises from, the blues, as is most eloquently stated in an interview by the noted blues singer B.B. King:

The distinction that I hear writers make between blues and rhythm and blues I regard as artificial. ... For instance, James Brown is considered rhythm and blues, Aretha Franklin is considered soul or rhythm and blues—and I am considered blues. .. I personally think it’s all rhythm and blues because it’s blues and it has rhythm (Busnar, 46).

For the basis of my blues comparison, I rely on the tradition of the blues, the historical and societal forces which provided the background against which the blues arose. The different definitions and limitations placed on the blues as a form of folk expression are all a matter of interpretation. The interpretation is first and foremost based

on the point of view and experiences of the interpreter. The Formalists proposed this idea at the turn of the century, with their concern with “the relationship (usually unperceived by the writer) between the writer, the work and the social milieu” (Terras 154). With Pearson’s definition as one support, and the paean by the un-named Soviet prisoner as another support, I consider that Vysotsky can be firmly ranked among blues singers.

### **“WINGED WORDS” AND THE UBIQUITY OF VYSOTSKY’S SONGS**

Vladimir Vysotsky has been praised as one of the most talented bards to write and perform in the former Soviet Union. His music has been adopted by the people as an expression of their lives – the truest depiction of what it meant to live, love and suffer under the communist regime. Vysotsky gave voice to the people: what they could not say, he could sing. In this way, his songs can be seen as a “blues” expression. His songs express the same themes and sounds as their American counterpart: the pain of unrequited love, dead-end jobs, drunken nights, prison suffering, etc.

“Rhythm and Blues” and “rock ‘n’ roll” are popularly believed to spring from the miasma of the post-slavery and Jim Crow periods in the United States. Many of these songs, especially as performed in the 1960s and 1970s, were smoother descendents of the rougher blues which had preceded them (Baraka; Busnar). In a lot of these songs, the singers painted a picture of the darker side of life, or laughed at it as a way of coping with oppression. The sound and rhythm, as well as the lyrics (texts) of these songs were totally different from that which was common in mainstream popular song. The music of the American Negro had often been called “race music” or the Devil’s music (Oakley). When I first heard Vladimir Vysotsky’s songs, they elicited in me this familiar feeling of suffering given voice. Although I barely understood a word of his Russian lyrics, the sound and beat reminded me of B. B. King, with his gravelly, down-home, country voice

or of Howling Wolf, whose stage name reflects the essence of his voice. Vysotsky was also known for the roughness of his voice, for the conversational tone in his songs (shades of Rap, hip hop) and for the common topics about which he sang.

### **SALIENCY OF VYSOTSKY AS CULTURAL ICON**

Bourdieu has decreed that the educational system (and through them, the political system) defines the legitimacy of expression according to the society in which one lives. If an individual has received a higher education, he is accorded latitude in acceptance of “the highly valued ‘extra-curricular’ culture,” whereas someone without the high degrees (high educational capital) would not be accorded the latitude or “derive prestige from their excursions into ... [i]llegitimate extra-curricular culture” (Bourdieu Taste 25). This aspect of culturally determined approbation perhaps explains, in part, the overwhelming acceptance of Vysotsky as real. As an educated Russian and stage and screen actor, Vysotsky had the educational capital to be accepted by the people. According to recorded interviews, Vysotsky explained his ability to capture the imagination of the people based on his abilities as an actor—he consciously performed his songs, his characters, as though he were inside their lives (Terent’ev 149). This legitimacy and authenticity placed him in almost diametrical opposition to the blues performers with whom I compare him, because they were outsiders, not only by virtue of their color, but also lack of education (for the most part), and subculture (Davis).

Although Vysotsky was an educated and prolific writer, his writings at first were no more accepted by the established literary world of the Soviet Union, than the writings of the blues masters are accepted by the Modern Language Association (MLA) in America. The language that both Vysotsky and blues (and R&B) writers used, was not

the approved, “parlor” language which schools and churches taught. The topics were not in accordance with the Protestant Ethic: the men were drinking and not working; the women were two-timing these same men; friends were bailing them out of jail (or coming to visit them); their cars were broke down or dying. Two sides of the ocean, two languages (or more), two different economic systems, but the people and their lives echoed the same basic human reaction to suffering. Vysotsky took the topics of his songs from the life that he observed in post-war Moscow, using, as he stated in an interview, the language of the streets:

*Мои ранние песни можно как угодно называть дворовые, блатные, --но я считаю, что это—традиция городского романса, который существовал у нас, а потом почему-то ушел, был забыт. Ну вот, а когда я начал писать вот в этих традициях—городского романса. То есть это почти всегда—одна точная мысль, песня в очень-очень упрощенной, вернее, не в упрощенной—‘простота хуже воровства’—а в доверительной такой форме разговора, беседы, в форме разговорной речи.*

My early songs can be called whatever one likes—common, criminal—but I think that it’s the tradition of urban ballads, which we used to have, but which then, for some reason disappeared, and were forgotten.. And, then when I started writing, I wrote in that very style—urban ballads. That is, almost always with just one central idea, a very simplified song, or rather, not in a simplified —‘simplicity is worse than larceny’—but, in the form of a kind of trusting, conversation, in the form of colloquial speech” (Korkin 54).

There are, naturally, differences between the topics of Vysotsky's songs and the topics of the American blues songs of the same period; but, these differences, in my mind, do not outweigh the similarities. Because each genre is the product of its own society, it reflects the differences in those societies. Those who wrote the earlier blues songs were, for the most part, uneducated; the language was that of the common man. Part of the earlier refusal of the *литературное общество* ("literary society") to accept the works of Vysotsky was because he used the language of the streets, not the *литературный язык* ("literary language") of the established art form (Lazarski). The sound of the blues was rarely smooth; the voices were often rough and scratchy, transmitting the echoes of their pain and suffering. The creators of a later blues form, the smoother rhythm and blues (R&B) of the mid-20th century, were more educated than their predecessors; this change of status and education was reflected in the language of the songs. This brief period from the early 1960s to the end of his life in early 1980 formed the time frame in which Vysotsky wrote and performed. Although his lyrics and choice of topics frequently reflect his educated background, Vysotsky's gravelly voice expresses the same lack of refinement and pain in his songs, as can be heard in American blues.

The topics of Vysotsky's songs, as with the blues and bardic songs in many countries, repeat themselves through the centuries and across the ocean. One such topic is freedom. Du Bois wrote about "black bards" who recorded the Negro's desire for freedom in the 19th century:

“Through fugitive slaves and irrepressible discussion this desire for freedom seized the black millions still in bondage, and became their one ideal of life. The black bards caught new notes, and sometimes even dared to sing. –

“O Freedom, O Freedom, O Freedom over me!

Before I’ll be a slave

I’ll be buried in my grave,

And go home to my Lord

And be free” (Johnson 345)

In the early 1970’s Joan Baez sang similar words (“Lincoln Freed Me Today [The Slave]”) from the point of view of a freed slave immediately after the Civil War.

Been a slave most all my life,

So’s my kids and so’s my wife

I’ve been working on the Colonel’s farm

Ain’t been mistreated, ain’t done no harm

I’ll be a slave to my grave

No need of me being free (Patton).

In a certain sense, this song is closer to those which Vysotsky created, since the singer Joan Baez is a Native American, and the writer David Patton is Irish-American.

More than a century after slaves in the U.S sang of their desire for freedom, and what they would be willing to do for it, Vysotsky, in a different language still, in 1970, sang about a similar desire for freedom within the confines of Soviet life, and wondered what he would do with it:

*В землю бросайте зёрна, --*

*Может, появятся всходы.*

*Ладно, я буду покорным,*

*Дайте же мне свободу.*

...

*Лили на землю воду --*

*Нету колосьев, чудо!..*

*Мне вчера дали свободу.*

*Что я с ней делать буду?*

Into the ground, scatter some seeds—

Maybe, some shoots will grow.

Alright, I'll be a good man,

Just give me my freedom.

...

They watered the soil—

But no crop came up, what a shock!

Yesterday, they gave me freedom,

What will I do with it? (Lvov and Sumerkin 75)

These short examples reflect similar folk expressions of a yearning for freedom, although only one—the first as quoted by DuBois—would normally be accepted as authentic, if one accepts the narrow criterion of life as a slave as the only basis of authenticity. But Soviet citizens, living within the constraints of internal passports, the KGB, closed cities and the *антисоветский советский союз* (“anti-Soviet Soviet Union”) often did not feel free (Voinovich). Vladimir Voinovich was among many Soviet citizens who emigrated and wrote about the lack of freedom; Vladimir Vysotsky remained and sang about the joys, paradoxes and life within the system.



## Chapter Four: Conclusion

For foreign language teachers, the ultimate context for language learning is the culture which gives rise to the foreign language which they teach. This cultural milieu informs all the contextual choices available to students: which words, how they are used, with whom, pragmatic choices, social networks available, et al. The language, as Vereshchagin and Kostomarov so eloquently stated, reflects and expresses every phenomenon, concept, or product currently active in the culture, and there is nothing in the culture which can not be expressed by the language in use (14). For this reason alone, culture is central to language.

Fortunately for the students of Russian, Vladimir Vysotsky produced hundreds of songs, each a contextually complete discourse, covering many areas of Russian everyday life and culture. As our *зек* (“prisoner”) enthused, Vysotsky told the story of their lives and his songs and poems matured and grew in scope right along with his listeners. As Novikov wrote, *«Ибо говорить о Высоцком—значит неизбежно говорить о нас самих.»* (“For to speak of Vysotsky—means to unavoidably talk about ourselves”) (“Zhivoi” 188). Vysotsky himself explained that, as he grew older and read and experienced more, he began to incorporate more of his personal insight, growth and thoughts into his songs and poems (Terent'ev 155). This wealth of material produced over a period of little more than 20 years (1957-1980) provides a kaleidoscope of Russian life and the people’s reactions to the events of that life, and provides students with examples of the appropriate language for the contexts. (See Appendix Five: Selected Songs By Vysotsky)

As an actor and singer, Vysotsky observed the people and events, recorded these observations, and turned them into poems and songs about the world around him. The role of the singer/songwriter is somehow outside the society, but not fully etic; he must be able to understand, and yet be distant enough to see more clearly. For his genius to be realized, it requires more than an ability to write; the writer must be able to see and interpret actions and words of the culture without the emotional distortion of out-of-control emotions. Vysotsky, with his distance from people as a star (travels abroad, Mercedes-Benz, French actress wife), and yet his reputed foibles and shortcomings (drinking and drugs) which made him seem more like the common folk, occupied a special place in the mind of the people (Bibershtein). At the same time, he was just like them, and yet more free than they were—as though the protagonist of his song «*Oxoma на волков*» (“Wolf Hunt”) had been personified. By simply existing, he gave them hope, that the relative freedom that he enjoyed could also be theirs. Although the line of inquiry is not developed here, the government’s acquiescence in Vysotsky’s somewhat more harmless rebellion, could have served as a safety valve within the system to avert open dissent. This pacifying role of some protest music does not have to be unique to one society, and can provide insights into the role of the music in society and government’s reaction to it and can serve as another affective link for language students.

In the US, the 1960s is depicted as a dynamic, almost revolutionary period in the history of the nation. Although the Soviets did not, at the time, claim similar social upheavals and developments, a connection can be drawn from the collocation in time of the US protest singers and the Soviet bards, who came to prominence in the same period in the Soviet Union. Foremost among these bards was Vysotsky. Émigré Russians often talk about the role which the music of Vysotsky played in their accommodations with the

everyday constraints of life under the Soviet system. His music allowed them to cope, understanding that they were not alone in misery.

## **LIMITATIONS**

Although they are separated by almost half a century, I detect commonalities between the lives and output of today's rapper-actors and Vysotsky, which can also serve as an affective draw for students. The direction of fame is different as is the source of fame and official recognition. However, I do not see these as barriers between two modes of vocal expressions, but rather two sides of the same need. For Vysotsky, the acting was officially sanctioned and culturally accepted, while the initial songs and fame developed almost as though in a parallel track and were *блатные*. For today's rappers, songs are the source of fame and legitimacy in certain subcultures. When the rap and hip-hop songs were adopted outside the confines of so-called lower subcultures, the ensuing fame then propelled them into acting. The life cycles of artistic productive lives are almost mirror images. It may be that within each society (language) the acting and singing (both genres of vocal expression) fulfill the same or similar needs. Building a culture unit based on these cultural similarities, pointing out similarities between Vysotsky, Gil Scott-Heron (sometimes called the "Father of Rap"), Will Smith, Ice T, Snoop Dogg, and others who performed in multiple genres, can be a focus for students to explore more in depth the world inhabited by Vysotsky's characters.

Probably the most controversial interpretation presented here is that of classifying Vysotsky as a blues performer. The role of bard, providing catharsis for the pain and suffering of the people, is quintessentially that of the bluesman in the USA. I have consciously avoided the comparison of Vysotsky with other popular performers like Bob Dylan, Johnny Cash, Tom Waits, et al. Although the topics of blues, country, folk (even

opera) are basically all the same—love, murder, betrayal—I have eliminated from analysis the works of those performers who had more life options.

By virtue of their obvious racial characteristics, Blacks were unable to get an education, change their manner of speech (to hide evidence of social origins), move into another community and simply blend into that community. Nina Simone perhaps paints this quandary most clearly in her song, “Mississippi Goddam,” where she wails,

Yes you lied to me all these years  
You told me to wash and clean my ears  
And talk real fine just like a lady  
And you'd stop calling me Sister Sady. ...  
  
You don't have to live next to me  
Just give me my equality (Simone).

For Blacks in the US, the lack of education and refinement were used as justification for unequal treatment. On the other hand, Whites could acquire education, change speech patterns, and become part of the “melting pot” of America. They could choose to hide their origins, and thus escape the restrictions imposed on members of their group. After generations of miscegenation, there were also Blacks who moved and “passed” as White, but these were a definite minority, and these Blacks did not write the blues because they ceased to be identified with Black society and the sense of racial identity which gave birth to the blues (Rose 47; Myrdal 13; Oliver 97). I have, thus, eliminated from consideration what I term selective, or voluntary alienation, when the individuals can

move and escape the conditions which foster alienation. I am not examining the internal mechanisms of alienation (too much material and too broad a scope), but only the clearly visible signs of membership in an alienated or powerless group.

The Black blues singers—by virtue of their obvious ethnic and racial characteristics—were not free to opt out of membership in the class of the powerless. In a similar way, the constraints of the Soviet-controlled state—with internal passports, constrained movement and life choices—lacked the freedom of their white-skinned counterparts in the USA, who could move down the road and adopt a new identity leaving the old powerless state behind. The origins of the White country singer could be shed volitionally—unlike the skin color of the Black or the Iron Curtain of the Soviet citizen. For this reason, in addition to the need to narrow the scope of inquiry, I have eliminated the products of country and folk music although I admit that similarities exist and are worthy of further study.

I also consciously avoid the higher registers of language or high culture, although the poetry and songs of Vysotsky have been adopted into those realms after his death. But, his language—for all its depth and philosophical complexity—is still conversational; and people forget that Shakespeare's English was conversational, and even at times vulgar, when he wrote his plays (Partridge). The applicability of Vysotsky's lexicon to everyday life is one of the added benefits of using his songs and poems. The story lines are engaging, the lyrics enticing, and mnemonically accessible; these characteristics are the earmarks of language material which students willingly return to on their own, without prodding from teachers. Vysotsky often commented that the seeming simplicity of his lyrics were deceptive because they were not necessarily easy to write, but were intended to be easily memorable and to remain with the listener, and somehow lighten his load:

*Не смотря на кажущуюся простоту, на легко запоминающиеся мелодии (я считаю, что это—отличие авторской песни),--они все-таки должны быть своеобразными для каждой песни, для каждого текста. ... Мне кажется, что она помогает—оттого, что легко запоминается—переносить какие-то невзгоды—всегда ‘влезает в душу’, отвечает на строению.*

In spite of the seeming simplicity, of the easily memorable melodies (I consider this a distinction of bardic songs), they must, nevertheless, be, unique for every song, for every text. ... It seems to me, that it [bardic song] helps—that it is easy to remember—one endure certain misfortunes, that it always “creeps into the soul,” responds to one’s mood (Korkin 36-37).

Blues is considered a black form of expression. In the same way, the songs of Vladimir Vysotsky enjoy a similar status among Russians. Both modes of expression are accorded authenticity based on the people’s acceptance. Once you eliminate the skin color and the language, the human response to unwarranted suffering by the powerless is often to sing. Thus, singers like Gil Scott-Heron, John Anderson and Vladimir Vysotsky answered the same need of a people to be heard. However, to be the voice of a people, one must be part of the organism, or at least be perceived as such.

Authenticity of genre is based on people’s willingness to accept—recognition of, or sense of “Yeah, I’d do that,” or “Yeah, that’s just the way it is!” The reaction of the listeners is to the vocal music, rather than the positioning of the singer within the

society—but, only within limits. Totally *чуждой* (“alien”) would probably not be accepted; e.g., a White trying to sing blues about being Black in the US, or a non-local singing about the experience of living in USSR. In the US, the song “Strange Fruit” (about the lynching of Negroes in the South) acquired legitimacy through acceptance, not through the source. Many Blacks still believe that a Black, specifically Billie Holiday, wrote the song. Holiday was the first to perform and record “Strange Fruit” professionally, but a Jewish schoolteacher, Abel Meeropol, from New York wrote it in response to a photograph of a lynching (Allan). Similarly, Vysotsky’s songs gained legitimacy because the Soviet people accepted them as authentic. He was frequently asked if he had worked as a miner, been a soldier, lived through WWII, etc. The listeners themselves awarded Vysotsky the accolade of authenticity, by assuming that he had experienced the lives he sang about; but he was only creating external dialogues, creating the speech of others.

In a sense, all speech is reported speech. That is because any utterance, when analyzed in depth in its social context,

...reveals to us many half-concealed or completely concealed words of others with varying degrees of foreignness. Therefore, the utterance appears to be furrowed with distant and barely audible echoes of changes of speech subjects and dialogic overtones, greatly weakened boundaries that are completely permeable to the author’s expression (Emerson and Holquist 93).

The use of words in the blues and bardic songs – that sense of legitimacy awarded to the singer have everything to do with dialogue. Bakhtin has basically defined this

characteristic of the word as that words are never monologic, but are always dialogic. In every utterance, there is a conceptualization of the Other as the voice of authority, the assumed collocutor, the adversary, or even the voice of reason. It is to this Other that any utterance is directed, and for whose comprehension the words are chosen. For the most part, people do this unconsciously in their native language; one has only to compare the different ways of speaking to a five-year old and to a policeman. Morris and Emerson further distinguish a second level of Bakhtinian dialogue, which goes beyond the dialogic points of view. This is second a sense of dialogism "...in which the very same words may be spoken but we want the listener to hear them with quotation marks. For example, a speaker may be alluding ironically to what someone else, known to both speaker and listener, might say on the topic" (Morson and Emerson 146). In writing his songs, Vysotsky made use of language in the second sense of Bakhtin's dialogue. The authenticity of his songs comes from the sense that Russians have that they do share these "common acquaintances"—characters from the life, culture, and history of their country—which are brought to life in Vysotsky's songs.

Teacher-speak, that slowed-down language for classroom use, prepares students for a certain register of Russian, but does not prepare them for the speed or use of non-standard language. The texts of Vysotsky's songs, and his frequent monologue introductions, actual conversations with his audience, all combine to provide a kaleidoscope of linguistic material for our students to enjoy.

With the ready availability of lyrics to the songs, students can take charge of their own language competence and verify their comprehension of the songs. I vividly remember my own joy, when I would understand the parts of a song, check the written lyrics and find that I had been correct. Numerous students have also approached me outside of class, after listening to songs by Vysotsky, wanting to verify that their



comprehension was correct. They would actively search out lyrics on the Internet, download copies of Vysotsky songs to their iPods, watch video clips on You-Tube. They took charge of their own learning, and were just as pleased as I had been to know that their listening comprehension was improving. The more they understood, the more they listened. This is not empirical research, and any research in this area would have to be a longitudinal study, the logistics of which are staggering. Since listening is so central to language competence, and considering the interdependence of language skills, any increase in listening ability, which is predicated on increased motivation, which can result in increased Time-on-Task, should be reflected in an overall increase in language competence.

Although some small portion of this work is intended for the language classroom, we must not forget that researchers have already acknowledged that the classroom exposure is not sufficient to produce students who achieve levels much above the ACTFL Intermediate level (Rifkin). Study abroad and Immersion programs can and have filled the gap in providing increased language use. However, in spite of the scholarships and funding opportunities available, not all students can take advantage of them. For many students, the difference between the scholarships and actual costs are prohibitive; for others, work or family responsibilities may not allow them to take advantage of the programs which take them away from their home base. This inability to travel to the foreign country or immerse oneself in an isolated environment should not prevent the motivated students from taking advantage of resources available.

## **ADDITONAL APPLICATIONS**

Although the central focus of this dissertation is on using the music of Vysotsky in and outside the Russian language classroom, this approach can be broadened to include the use of music and film from different artists, genres and cultures. For those teachers and students of Russian who prefer a gentler, smoother sound than that of Vysotsky, there is the bard Bulat Okudzhava, who produced numerous albums. In Russian, since the fall of the Soviet Union, there has been a steady increase in the growth of younger bards who sing in the style, called shanson. This new style is alternately depicted as a descendent of the earlier bardic songs represented by Vysotsky and his generation, or as a new style of hip-hop, more attuned to gangster rap (Gordon; Kishkovsky). There are musical artists representing various sub-groups such as rock, grunge, hip-hop, country, etc., which can almost all be introduced to students to further their involvement with the L2 culture.

These applications can be divided further by language and culture or even by sub-cultures within one specific language. Within each language group are different genres of vocal music which appeal to different students. If we eliminate the need as teachers to control the students and their learning, introduction to the different genres of music in the L2 culture, including the non-sanctioned ones, can lead students to increase their personal involvement in their own learning.

An additional application of popular music in the L2 setting would be more personality-driven. Singers like Jacques Brel could be used for French; Cesaria Evora, for Portuguese language, colonial studies or Diaspora Studies; American anti-war songs from the 1960s to the present could be used in support of classes on the history of protest

or political action. These are only a few of the possible additional uses for authentic vocal music in and outside the foreign-language classroom with the ready availability of electronic resources; the applications are limited only by the teachers' imagination and the students' enthusiasm.

### **IMPLICATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH**

This dissertation is not directed toward designing a course or complete syllabus; the primary focus will be on acquainting students with the cultural dimension of Vysotsky's work. Since the responsibility for achieving the goals of increasing listening and cultural competence remains with the students, very little of the work is to be done in the classroom. The lessons presented here are models (examples) of what can be done with the music of Vysotsky in the classroom. Although, I present only one lesson for each song in this dissertation, there are multiple levels and multiple layers of application in each song. Teachers can select different songs to introduce students to the music of Vysotsky, and students can take charge from there. The objective is not to produce an entire course using the music of Vysotsky as the foundation texts, but to use the breadth of subject matter available in authentic texts as supplementary material in the classroom and as enticements to encourage students to take charge of their own learning.

Listening for gist is frequently presented as the primary purpose of listening tasks in the classroom. For this approach, comprehension of the entire text (poem/song) is not necessarily the goal. Familiarization with the sounds, pronunciation of rapid speech, the distinction of phonological units should be the ultimate goal; but, simple enjoyment and the willingness to be engaged with the language may be sufficient. Except for a few researchers, the focus is still on the speaking side of phonology, with emphasis squarely

placed on oral production, not on the listening side. One overlooked, but omnipresent dimension of listening in the L2 is listening for pleasure.

Since part of the justification for using vocal music in language learning is its effect in lowering affective filters and decreasing the stress levels of students, no evaluative instruments have been directly linked to the music itself. The texts help provide the necessary cultural and linguistic knowledge to help students better understand the context in which linguistic units appear and are used. Different teachers may choose to create evaluative instruments for their own purposes. I use a method of quick, seemingly casual mini-discussions to review songs presented; these discussions should last approximately five minutes, just long enough for rehearsal in STM, but not long enough to become stale. This short time period, without the added pressure to perform in the L2, allows students to review recently acquired knowledge, or as learning tools only, so that students can track their own progress and comprehension. Grades should be associated with other elements of the course syllabus.

Although the major work load for language improvement remains with the student, some introduction to the works of Vysotsky must be provided by the teacher. To that end, Appendix Four contains several lesson plans. These plans run the gamut from metacognitive strategy training, simple pronunciation familiarization, to grammatical structures, cultural, political, historical comparisons. Lesson 1 is a cultural familiarization lesson. It is intended to familiarize students with the concept that cultural knowledge, especially word meaning, is more than surface deep. It can be used at any time, but is intended as a novice-level activity—one which does not rely upon linguistic knowledge of the L2, but raises the students' awareness of non-judgmental cultural differences. Lesson 2 is also a novice-level lesson. This lesson can be divided into two

segments, or presented as a handout with minimal elaboration. The goal of Lesson 2 is to help students distinguish two phonologically similar, but functionally distinct elements in Russian. Lesson 3 is an old-fashioned grammar review lesson set to music, in which students practice recognizing the forms of Dative case nouns, pronouns and adjectives. Lesson 4, which utilizes the song «*Лукоморья больше нет*» (“Lukomor’ia Is Gone”), can be used in support of lessons on fairy tales in Russian, literature and Pushkin, dissent in the Soviet Union, et al. For Lesson 5, I present the song «*Дайте собакам мяса*» (“Give the Dogs Some Meat”) as the basis of a lesson on grammar and Dative case usage. It could as easily be used to start a discussion of serfdom, freedom, or Russian history. Because the song itself is relatively short, the diction clear and slow, it is an excellent choice for students who have little experience listening to authentic Russian.

Long has pointed out one of the major drawbacks of using authentic material:

Both genuine (so-called authentic) texts and the most popular alternative, linguistically simplified ones, suffer from serious disadvantages as data for language learning. Except when used at very advanced levels, genuine texts (originally spoken or written by and for native speakers, not intended for language teaching) impede learning by confronting learners with large amounts of unknown language (new vocabulary, complex syntax, etc.) without compensatory devices to facilitate comprehension. They present too dense a linguistic target, due to the lack of redundancy (130)

Vocal music compensates for this lack of redundancy, and can be enjoyed by students without full comprehension—unlike a two-part conversation which demands

participation. Long advocates the use of elaboration as a remedy for this lack of redundancy in authentic material. Neither Long's elaboration nor Rifkin's call to participation in immersion programs addresses the underlying problems of Time-on-Task and motivation. The students' willingness to listen to music can answer this problem.

With the music, books, films (both artistic and documentary), Internet resources all devoted to or commenting on the life and art of Vladimir Vysotsky, motivated students can carry the Russian-language world around with them. The multimodal sources which invite repetition capture the element of language training which we as teachers have been unable to control. As publicists and advertisers have long known, attractive packaging can sell almost anything. Whether we call it "metacognitive strategy training," "tricks of the trade," a "tool-chest for language learning," or «*Русский язык для чайников*» ("Russian for Dummies"), we as Russian language teachers must package our product for consumers—and convince them to buy in to it. For Russian language learning, the artistic output of Vladimir Vysotsky is a package of contextually and culturally relevant authentic language material. Vysotsky managed to combine both the elements of common and high culture in his songs in packaging suitable and pleasurable for use by motivated language learners.

## Appendix One: Metacognitive Strategy Handout

### Jones' Joggers

1. It ain't all together.

У меня може пальто, как у тебя. [то же]

2. It ain't all separate.

Он попрощался и уехал на всегда. [навсегда]

3. If it don't make sense, they didn't say it.

Он закрепил и больше ни одного слова не говорил. [захрипел]

4. A closed mind = A bad translation

A Gentle Reminder: Don't let yourself get stuck in a rut with the first "meaning" that comes to mind, or the only one in your dual-language dictionary!

## Appendix Two: “Go” What?! (How Many Meanings Can There Be?)

This handout is not for memorization, but is a gentle reminder. When learning a new language, don’t forget the lessons learned from your native language. Don’t let yourself get stuck in a rut with the first “meaning” that comes to mind, or the only one in your dual-language dictionary. As the short and simple word “go” shows, you must be open to other possibilities. That’s the fun of language learning. (Just to tickle your fancy, I’ve included the same word in Russian on the back of this handout.) Enjoy!

**go'** (go) v. **went** (went), **gone** (gon, gon), **go-ing**, **goes** (goz) —*intr.* 1. To move or travel; proceed: *will go by bus; went from door to door.* 2. To move away from a place; depart: *Go before I cry.* 3a. To pursue a certain course: *go through diplomatic channels,* b. To resort to another, as for aid. 4a. To extend between two points or in a certain direction; run: *curtains that go from the ceiling to the floor,* b. To give entry; lead: *a stairway that goes to the attic.* 5. To function properly: *The car won't go.* 6a. To have currency. b. To pass from one person to another; circulate: *Wild rumors were going around the office.* 7. To pass as the result of a sale: *The gold watch went to the highest bidder.* 8. *Informal* Used as an intensifier when joined by *and* to a coordinate verb: *She went and complained.* 9. Used in the progressive tense with an in-finitive to indicate future intent or expectation: *I am going to read.* 10a. To continue to be in a certain condition or continue an activity: *go barefoot,* b. To come to be in a certain condition: *go mad.* c. To continue to be in effect or operation: *a lease with one year to go.* d. To carry out an action to a certain point or extent: *went to great expense.* 11. To be called; be known: *He goes by Billy.* 12a. To be customarily located; to belong: *The fork goes to the left of the plate.* b. To be capable of entering or fitting: *Witt the suitcase go in the trunk?* 13a. To pass into someone's possession: *Her estate went to her niece.* b. To be allotted: *How much of your salary goes for rent?* 14. To be a contributing factor: *It goes to show us how much can be done.* 15a. To have a particular form: *as the saying goes.* b. To be such, by and large: *well behaved, as dogs go.* 16a. To extend in time: *The house goes back to the 1800s.* b. To pass by; elapse. 17a. To be used up. b. To be discarded or abolished: *All luxuries will have to go.* 18a. To become weak; fail: *Hi shearing has started to go.* b. To come apart; break up: *The dam is about to go.* 19. To cease living; die. 20a. To happen or develop; fare: *How are things going?* b. To have a successful outcome. 21. To be suitable or appropriate as an accessory or accompaniment. 22a. To have authority: *Whatever I say, goes.* b. To be valid, acceptable, or adequate. 23. *Informal* To excrete waste from the bladder or bowels. 24. *Informal* To begin an act: *Here goes! ... (Am. Heritage)*

..and it goes on and on.



And, now, for the Russian verb, *idti* (“go”); the same thing goes:

**ИДТИ**, иду, идёшь; шёл, шла, шло; шедший; идя и (разг.) идучи; нсв. 1. Двигаться, передвигаться, ступая ногами. *И. пешком. Конь шёл вслед за хозяином.* 2. Двигаться, перемещаться в пространстве. *Поезд идёт. Груз идёт морем (доставляется по морю).* || Перемещаться массой, потоком, вереницей и т. п. *Облака идут. Идёт косяк рыбы.* 3. Отправляться, направляться куда-л. *И. на прогулку. И. на войну.* || Об отправлении транспортного средства. *Электричка идёт в полдень.* 4. Следовать, двигаться в каком-л. направлении для достижения чего-л. *И. к намеченной цели. Всегда и вперёд. И. по пути технического прогресса. Всё идёт к лучшему.* 5. только 3 л. Перемещаться, двигаться, будучи направленным куда-л., с какой-л. целью. *Письма идут быстро. Документы идут на подпись к директору. В комиссию идут предложения.* || Доставляться, поступать откуда-л., куда-л. *Древесина идёт на фабрики.* 6. (св. пойти) Приступать к каким-л. действиям, вступать куда-л., становиться кем-л. *И. в ученики столяра. И в науку. Решил и. учиться на инженера. И. в институт. И. добровольцем в армию.* 7. Поступать подобно кому-л., следовать кому-л. в чём-л. *И. за своим наставником.* 8. Поступать, действовать каким-л. образом. *И. наперекор воле родителей. И. против течения большинства.* 9. только 3 л. Приближаться, появляться. *Сон не идёт.* || Надвигаться, наступать. *Идёт гроза. Идёт весна. Идёт новая беда—эпидемия.* 10. только 3 л. Быть в действии, действовать, работать (о механизме, машине). *Часы идут точно. Машина шла на холостом ходу.* 11. только 3 л. Падать, лить (об осадках). *Снег, дождь идёт.* 12. только 3л. Иметь место, происходить, совершаться. *Переговоры идут к концу. Идут наступательные бои. Идут вступительные экзамены. Дело идёт к развязке. Речь идёт о новой книге.* || Протекать, проходить. *Время идёт быстро.* || Длиться, продолжаться. *Идёт двухтысячный год.* || Быть в каком-л. возрасте. *Ребёнку шёл пятый год, когда семья переехала в город.* 13. Исполняться, ставиться (о пьесе, спектакле, фильме). *В театре идёт новая пьеса.* 14. только 3 л. Пролегать, быть расположенным ще-л., каким-л. образом; простираться. *Шрам идёт через всю щёку. Дорога идёт полем, вниз к реке ....* || Вести куда-л., выходить (о двери, входе). 15. только 3 л. Выделяться, исходить откуда-л., распространяться. *Из трубы идёт дым. Идут слухи о новых назначениях. ...* || Выделяться, течь. *Из раны идёт кровь.* || Поступать, подаваться. ... *Вода идёт по трубам.* 16. Делать ход в игре (в шахматах, картах). 17. только 3 л. (обычно с обстоят.). Получаться, ладиться, спориться. *Работа не идёт. Репетиции идут тяжело. Торговля идёт хорошо.....(Bol'shoi)*

The American Heritage College Dictionary. 4th ed. Boston, 2002.

Bol'shoi tolkovyi slovar' russkogo iazyka. Saint Petersburg: Norint Publishing, 1998.

### Appendix Three: Some URLs Associated with Vladimir Vysotsky

Listed below are some of the most stable, long-serving sites associated with the creative works of Vladimir Vysotsky. These sites do not include the links which are created through YouTube or other personal sites, the quantity of which are increasing daily.

1. <http://www.visotsky.cea.ru/> --Gosudarstvennyi kul'turnyi tsentr-muzei V. S. Vysotskogo ("The State Cultural Center-Museum of V. S. Vysotsky): The official site of the Vysotsky museum in Moscow. Includes information about conferences, almanacs of past events, contact information for museum, and a summary of their past and current work. In Russian only.
2. <http://www.kulichki.com/vv/> (or <http://www.kulichki.com/vv/eng/>) --The self-proclaimed "official site" is available in both Russian and English versions (toggle). The site includes biography, lyrics, photographs, excerpts from Vysotsky in his signature role as Hamlet, plus "more than 20 hours" of audio.
3. <http://www.museprints.com/vysotsky.html> -- A personal web site of Eugenia Weinstein, containing original Russian lyrics, translations into English of selected songs, and audio fragments of translated songs.
4. <http://launch.groups.yahoo.com/group/vladimirvysotsky/> --an English-language fan group for admirers of Vysotsky. Questions and on-line interaction.
5. <http://vysotsky.km.ru/rus/page/index.html> -- A searchable database, which includes various chat rooms, and answers to the when, where, and who related to the life or art of Vysotsky. In Russian only.
6. [http://zhurnal.lib.ru/a/alec\\_v/vysotsky.shtml](http://zhurnal.lib.ru/a/alec_v/vysotsky.shtml) -- Collection of poems (songs) translated by Alec Vagapov. Unfortunately, no Russian; but a variety of songs, especially useful for those who want to get the sense of the songs they're listening to in Russian.
7. <http://www.ruslania.com/language-1/context-161/entity-6/details-152321.html> -- Commercial site; source of sheet music and songbook.
8. <http://www.ruskniga.com/default.asp> -- Commercial site; source of CDs, DVDs, books.

9. <http://www.ozon.ru/> -- Russian site; since 1998, thirty-four new publications of books on the life and works of Vysotsky are listed on this site; as of Oct 2007, electronic media cannot be shipped to USA.
10. <http://v-vysotsky.narod.ru/> -- Russian site; active since 2000, among Rambler Top 100 sites; articles, reminiscences; indices of recordings, appearances; links to other sites dedicated to Vysotsky on the Internet; photo gallery; forum; lyric and poems

And, just a few general Russian language search sites:

11. <http://www.yandex.ru/> - or <http://www.rambler.ru/> -- Russian search engines similar to Google or Yahoo, with similar capabilities, including access to dual-language dictionaries.
12. <http://www.gramota.ru/> -- \*\*For advanced learners who want to explore and expand their linguistic abilities.

## **Appendix Four: Classroom Applications of Works by Vysotsky**

Included are the following lesson plans:

Lesson 1: Cultural Awareness Lesson

Lesson 2: Pronunciation Practice--(Distinguishing Similar Sounds)

Lesson 3: Grammar-- Dative Plural, Nouns & Adjectives

Lesson 4: Literature-- «Лукоморья больше нет»

Lesson 5: Social Problems-- Imprisonment

## Lesson 1: Cultural Awareness Lesson

### Cultural Literacy, or It Ain't all Clear

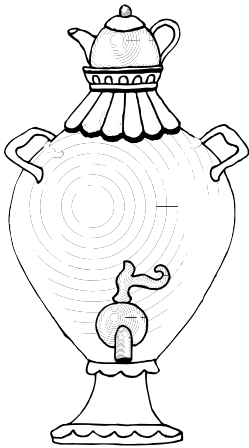


#### Discussion—Part I:

1. Does anyone know what these are?
2. What's wrong with this picture?
3. These are матрёшки / matreshki, the Russian stacking dolls familiar to most. Since the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, there has been a steady increase in the production of matreshki with commercial appeal for people from other countries and other cultures.

Symbols: “Texas Longhorns”; burnt-orange uniforms; “Horns” on the helmet. Numbers on uniforms?

#### Discussion—Part II: Чайник .



1. You know the word чай (“tea”). What about чайник?
2. What if I give you the sentence, “Windows XP for чайники”? Do we still have a teapot?
3. What about, “...чайники on the road”?



URL vehicle picture:

<http://www.forum.wec.ru/uploads/post-14-1176966793.jpg>

URL book:

<http://www.ozon.ru/context/detail/id/2644298/>

## Lesson 2: Pronunciation Practice (Distinguishing Similar Sounds)

Student level: Novice-

### Pronunciation & Pronouns, Genitive/Accusative vs. Dative

*Меня vs мне*

**Pre-listening Activity:** Review of uses of the Accusative and Dative, and pronunciation differences between the pronouns *меня* and *мне*.

**Objectives:** Students will practice listening effectively to distinguish the cluster /mn/ from the syllable /men/ in the speech flow of Russian.

#### Невеста (Vysotsky) Sweetheart

За меня невеста отрыдает честно,

За меня ребята отдадут долги,

За меня другие отпоют все песни,

И, быть может, выпьют за меня враги.

Не дают мне больше интересных книжек,

И моя гитара – без струны.

И нельзя мне выше, и нельзя мне ниже,

И нельзя мне солнца, и нельзя луны.

Мне нельзя на волю – не имею права,

Можно лишь от двери до стены.

Мне нельзя налево, мне нельзя направо,

Можно только неба кусок, можно только сны.

Сны про то, как выйду, как замок мой снимут,

Как мою гитару отдадут,

Как меня там встретят, как меня обнимут,

И какие песни мне споют.

My girl will just cry for me sincerely.

My friends will pay off all my debts,

The others will sing long dirges for me,

And, just possibly, enemies will raise a glass.

They no longer give me interesting books,

And my guitar – it's don't have strings.

And I can't go any higher, and I can't go lower,

And I get no sun, and can't have the moon.

I can't go where I want – I don't have the right,

Can only go from the door to the wall.

I can't go left, and I can't go right,

Maybe, I can have a piece of the sky, or only dreams.

Dreams about how I'll leave, how they'll take away the lock,

How they'll give me back my guitar,

How they'll meet me, how they'll hug me,

And what kind of songs they'll sing for me

#### Glossary

отрыдать	to sob, weep
невеста	sweetheart, fiancé
враг	enemy
отпевать/ отпеть за кого-либо	to read a funeral service, dirge
на волю	into the fresh air
струна	string
сон	dream
песня	song
кусок	piece
небо	sky

### Lesson 3: Grammar: Dative Plural, Nouns & Adjectives

#### **“Дайте собакам мяса” (“Give the Dogs Some Meat”)** (Vysotsky)

Student level: Novice-High to Intermediate-Low

**Pre-listening Activity/ Advance organizers:** Review the forms and usages of the Dative case in Russian, paying special attention to differences and similarities between adjectival and noun endings.

Дайте собакам мяса --  
Пусть они подерутся.  
Дайте похмельным кваса,  
Авось, они перебьются.

Give the dogs some meat  
Let them go on and fight.  
Give the hungover some kvass,  
Perhaps, they'll be all right.

Чтоб не жиреть воронам,  
Ставьте побольше пугал.  
Чтобы любить, влюбленным им,  
Дайте укромный угол.

So that the crows don't get fat,  
Put up a few more scarecrows.  
So that the lovers can love,  
Give them a secluded place.

В землю бросайте зёрна, --  
Может, появятся всходы.  
Ладно, я буду покорным,  
Дайте же мне свободу.

Toss some seeds onto the ground,-  
Maybe, some sprouts will show.  
Alright, I'll be a good man,  
Just give me my freedom.

Псам мясные ошмётки  
Дали, а псы не подрались.  
Дали пьяницам водки,  
А они отказались.

They gave scraps of meat to the dogs,  
But the dogs wouldn't fight.  
They gave the drunkards vodka,  
But they turned it down.

Люди ворон пугают,  
А вороньё не боится.  
Пары соединяются,  
А им бы разъединиться.

People threaten the crows,  
But, the crows aren't scared.  
Couples get together,  
When they'd be better off apart.

Лили на землю воду --  
Нету колосьев, чудо!..  
Мне вчера дали свободу.  
Что я с ней делать буду?!

They poured water on the soil --  
But, there's no crop, what a shock!  
Yesterday, they gave me freedom,  
What will I do with it?!



### Lesson 3: Grammar: Dative Plural, Nouns & Adjectives (cont.)

#### *“Дайте собакам мяса” (“Give the Dogs Some Meat”)*

**Post-Listening Activity:** Listen to the song again and fill in the missing endings for the nouns, adjectives or pronouns which you hear.

Дайте собак \_\_\_\_\_ мяса --  
Пусть они подерутся.  
Дайте похмельн \_\_\_\_\_ кваса,  
Авось, они перебьются.

Чтоб не жиреть ворон \_\_\_\_\_,  
Ставьте побольше пугал.  
Чтобы любить, влюбленн \_\_\_\_\_,  
Дайте укромный угол.

В землю бросайте зёрна, --  
Может, появятся всходы.  
Ладно, я буду покорным,  
Дайте же \_\_\_\_\_ свободу.

Пс \_\_\_\_\_ мясные ошмётки  
Дали, а псы не подрались.  
Дали пьяниц \_\_\_\_\_ водки,  
А они отказались.

Люди ворон пугают,  
А вороньё не боится.  
Пары соединяются,  
А \_\_\_\_\_ бы разъединиться.

Лили на землю воду --  
Нету колосьев, чудо!..  
\_\_\_\_\_ вчера дали свободу.  
Что я с ней делать буду?!

#### Lesson 4: «Лукоморья больше нет» (“The Cove is Gone”)

Student level: Intermediate

##### Pre-listening Activity/ Advance organizers:

1. Give the title of the song—what did «Лукоморье» signify for Pushkin? For his peers?

What does it signify in American culture?

2. Discuss with students their prior knowledge of:

a. fairy tales in Russian literary history, e.g., references in «Руслан и Людмила» by Pushkin;

b. paintings of Pushkin by Айвазовский И. К. (1817-1900) and Репин И. Е. (1844-1930). After discussion, give setting and brief history of the song, «Лукоморья больше нет».

##### Pre-activity vocabulary and review:

лукоморье	cove, inlet, creek
цепь	chain
уняться (уймись!, уймётся, )	to cease, subside, quiet down
тоска	melancholy, depression, yearning;
заводить песнь	[here] to break into song
неведомый	unfamiliar
простыть	to grow cold
жлоб	backwards, undeveloped blockhead (slang term, rude)
присказка	prelude
невиданный	mysterious, strange
сказка	fairy tale, tale, story; fib
дрянь	rubbish, nonsense

**Activity:** Listen to the song, and think about contrasts between Pushkin’s poem and Vysotsky’s «Лукоморье». Discussion to follow listening, with examination of contrasts and basis for contrasts.

Excerpt from Prologue to «Руслан и Людмила» (“Ruslan and Ludmila”) by A. S. Pushkin	Excerpt from «Лукоморья больше нет» V. S. Vysotsky
<p>У лукоморье дуб зелёный; Златая цепь на дубе том: И днём и ночью кот учёный Всё ходит по цепи кругом; Идёт направо—песнь заводит, Налево—сказку говорит.</p> <p>...</p> <p>Там чудеса: там леший бродит, Русалка на ветвях сидит; Там на неведомых дорожках Следы невиданных зверей; Избушка там на курьих ножках Стоит без окон, без дверей;</p> <p>(Bogdanov)</p>	<p>Лукоморья больше нет, От дубов простыл и след. Дуб годится на паркет, — Так ведь нет: Выходили из избы Здоровенные жлобы, Порубили все дубы На гробы!</p> <p>Ты уймись, уймись, тоска У меня в груди! Это только присказка, Сказка впереди!</p> <p>...</p> <p>И невиданных зверей, Дичи всякой. — нету ей: Понаехало за ней Егерей! Так что, значит, не секрет: Лукоморья больше нет. Всё, о чем писал поэт — Это бред!</p> <p>Ты уймись, уймись, тоска. Душу мне не рань... Раз уж это присказка — Значит, сказка — дрянь!</p>

Bogdanov, K. Ten Russian Poets. Trans. V. Korotkii. Moscow: Russian Language Publishers, 1979.

## Lesson 5: Social Problems: Imprisonment

Student level: Intermediate

«Мать моя, давай рыдать» (“Mama mine, let her sob”)

### Pre-listening Activity:

1. Discuss social and cultural place of prison, imprisonment in the cultural fabric of Russia and USA—outcasts, the rebels as well as criminals.
2. Compare similarities of reaction: shifting of blame; the others are worse than I am (“I don’t really belong here.”); but there’s still hope that I’ll get out of here alive.

### Glossary

КПЗ (камера предварительного заключения)	preventive detention, holding cell
послать (пошлю, пошлешь, ... пошлют)	to send, dispatch
бесплатно	free, for no pay
посылка	package
передача	parcel (especially to hospital or prison)
не видать как своих ушей	≈ never get to see X
рыдать	to sob
гадать	to guess, conjecture

### Excerpt #1 -- shifting of blame

They sent me to Cummins, baby, down on Cummins Prison Farm, oh yeah.  
Down there I started thinking.  
I thought I’d tell you some of it in this song, and this is a part of it here.

Всё позади — и КПЗ, и суд,	It’s all behind me now, both detention and the trial,
И прокурор, и даже судьи с адвокатом.	And the Prosecutor, and even the judges and the Defense.
Теперь я жду, теперь я жду,	Now I wait, just keep on waiting,
Куда, куда меня пошлют,	For where they’ll send me,
Куда пошлют меня работать за бесплатно.	Where they’ll send me to work for no pay.

### Excerpt #2 – the others are worse than I am (or, I don’t belong here)

Hadn’t been there but one day, and I learned that you don’t break, no you don’t.  
Hadn’t been down there but one day, and I learned that you don’t break, oh no,  
Or you’ll wake up one morning and find yourself in an unmarked grave,

## Lesson 5: Social Problems: Imprisonment (cont)

До Воркуты идут посылки долго,	Packages take a while to get to Vorkuta,
До Магадана несколько скорей.	To Magadan, just a little bit quicker.
Но там ведь все, но там ведь все	But, oh, the folks who are there,
Такие падлы, суки, волки,	Such scoundrels, bastards, toughs:
Мне передач не видеть, как своих ушей.	I'll never get my hands on a care package.

### Excerpt #3 – there's still hope

I'm begging, I'll be a good man if you only free me from this pen, oh yes I will.  
I said, "Warden, I'll be a good man if you only free me from this pen.  
Said, the Warden looked me in the eye, said,  
"Down here, son, we have a lot of good men."

Мать моя – опять рыдать,	Mama mine – again she sobs,
Опять думать и гадать,	Again she has to ponder and wonder,
Куда, куда меня пошлют.	Where they're gonna send me.
Мать моя – кончай рыдать,	Mama mine – stop your sobbing,
Давай думать и гадать,	Let's ponder and wonder,
Когда меня обратно привезут!	When they're gonna bring me back.

"Cummins Prison Farm"

Performer: Calvin Leavy, from the Time-Life Series, Blues Guitar Masters, 1996.

Songwriter: Cole

«Мать моя, давай рыдать» ("Mama mine, let her sob")

Vysotskii, Vladimir Semenovich (1938-1980). Sobranie Stikhov i pesen v trekh tomakh. eds. Arkady An. Lvov and Alexander Sumerkin. New York: Russica Publishers, Inc., 1988.

### Post-Listening / Supplementary Reading:

If you are not quite ready to jump into the Russian web world of Yandex ([www.yandex.ru](http://www.yandex.ru)) or Rambler ([www.rambler.ru](http://www.rambler.ru)), the following educational institution-based sites can lead you to sources of more valid information on the history of prisons, GULAGs, and the underworld in the Soviet Union and in Russia:

a. Super Russian Resources, Professor Emeritus Jim Becker, UNI

<http://www.uni.edu/becker/Russian2.html>

b. Middlebury College,

<http://community.middlebury.edu/~beyer/RT/frameindex/frame.shtml>

## Lesson 5: Social Problems: Imprisonment (cont)

For more information on the American conditions which gave rise to the song “Cummins Prison Farm,” see: Time Magazine article (Feb 09, 1968) about conditions at Cummins, including torture, murder for hire, et al.

<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,844402,00.html>

### Cummins Prison Farm

I was born in Missouri, yes I was, ‘cross the line to Arkansas, oh yeah.  
I didn’t have any money, so I got in trouble with the law.  
And this is what they did.  
Now listen.

...  
Said they sent me to prison, down at Cummins Prison Farm,  
Oh yes, they did, oh yeah.  
They sent me to Cummins, baby, down on Cummins Prison Farm, oh yeah.  
Down there I started thinking.  
I thought I’d tell you some of it in this song, and this is a part of it here.  
Listen.

Hadn’t been there but one day, and I learned that you don’t break, no you don’t.  
Hadn’t been down there but one day, and I learned that you don’t break, oh no,  
Or you’ll wake up one morning and find yourself in an unmarked grave, oh yes you will.  
I’m gonna tell you about it like this.  
Listen.

...  
Listen.  
I’m begging, I’ll be a good man if you only free me from this pen, oh yes I will.  
I said, “Warden, I’ll be a good man if you only free me from this pen.  
Said, the Warden looked me in the eye, said,  
“Down here, son, we have a lot of good men.”

Performer: Calvin Leavy, from the Time-Life Series, Blues Guitar Masters, 1996.  
Songwriter: Cole

## **Appendix Five: Selected Songs By Vysotsky**

The following songs have been selected by the author and divided into three groups according to rather gross standards to assist teachers or students in selecting songs for an initial introduction to Vysotsky. The songs in each group are progressively more linguistically complex and have greater culture-specific content. The lyrics both require from the listener, and provide the listener with, more knowledge of the culture for full appreciation. However, all the songs in each group can be enjoyed without full comprehension, and still provide exposure to authentic spoken Russian.

Group 1 includes songs which I consider easiest for the beginning listener. Most of these songs are earlier works by Vysotsky; the diction is clear, and there is very little of Vysotsky's noted shouting delivery to distort the words. These songs can be enjoyed on a purely textual basis, although they are not without metaphors. With the aid of a dual-language dictionary for most words, and on-line sources for slang and non-standard lexicon, even beginning language learners can find the meaning and do a rough translation for comprehension—if they desire, but it is not necessary for enjoyment. Because in vocal song lyrics there is always use of repetition and of rhyme, students can acquire the forms and correct pronunciation for essential phrasing in Russian through recursive listening. These songs provide sufficient examples of well-constructed phrases to help students recognize the correct subject-verb agreement, noun-adjective agreement, word- and phrase-level placement of stress.

Group 2 includes songs which contain more figurative usage of language, more cultural allusions, more complex grammatical constructions, and more colloquial usages. This group of songs contains more culture-specific references than those in Group 1 and

complete comprehension of the lyrics requires more than a cursory knowledge of Russian society and history. The songs in Group 2 reflect the increasing importance of philosophical and social topics in the lyrics of Vysotsky although some of these retain the qualities of his earlier works, such as repetition and diction. Many of the phrases in these songs have already become *крылатые слова* (“catch phrases”) and are widely used in mass media as well as in conversations. Acquaintance with such phrases and recognition of the role played by such phrases in understanding the language and culture, and practice through sing-along, may enable students to solve the not so simple problem of producing these forms which are essential to language competence. For example, «Второе ‘Я’» and «Кони привередливые» are self-examinations of the personality of the writer. «Второе ‘Я’» is the alter ego, the dark self of Vysotsky, who must take the blame for all misdeeds, while the enlightened я “reads Schiller without a dictionary.” «Охота на волков» and «Кони привередливые» are two of the most well-known and quintessential reflections of Vysotsky and Russian culture; each song can form the basis for a culture unit.

Group 3 includes songs which rely more heavily on the use of metaphor, literary and historical references. The sound of the songs in this group is more strident, harsher, and not so attuned to the American ear. Group 3 adds a deeper cultural and/or political element to the features present in Groups 1 and 2. These few songs are but a small fraction of the creative output of one of Russia’s favorite bards.

Group 1	Group 2	Group 3
*Банька по чёрному	Антисемиты	Банька по белому
Весёлая покойницкая	Второе «Я»	Большой Каретный
Дайте собакам мяса	Кони привередливые	Братские могилы



Песна о друге	Москва—Одесса	Иноходец
За тех, кто в МУРе	Песня микрофона	Купола
*Лечь на дно	Письмо к другу	Лукоморья больше нет
Мать моя, давай рыдать	Уголовный кодекс	Люди и манекены
Милицейский протокол	Охота на волков	Райские яблоки
Моя цыганская	Смотрины	Поэтам
Я не люблю	Спасите наши души	Чёрное золото
Что случилось в Африке	Слухи	Чужая колея

\* Content complex, but slow clear diction

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