

Courseware Reviews

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Russian HyperTutor: A Complement to Russian for Everybody

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Russian HyperTutor, developed by George Mitrevski, is available from TechKnowledge, P.O. Box 32, Auburn, AL 36831-0032. Telephone: (205) 887-2917. Program requires Macintosh model SE or higher, 2 megabytes of RAM and a hard disk; and HyperCard version 2.0 or higher, or HyperCard Player. It is shipped on 9 high-density diskettes and, when fully installed, occupies almost 11 megabytes. Price: \$50 for individual copy; \$250 for a site license with unlimited number of users. Version tested: 1.5.

Russian HyperTutor (RHT) is a welcome addition to the growing list of foreign language software programs. It combines the innovative aspects of some of the most recent free-standing tutorials, such as Transparent Language, with the easy integration that one expects from a courseware package. Based on the commonly used first-year Russian text, *Russian for Everybody* (American ed. by Robert L. Baker, 1984), *Russian HyperTutor* is an excellent computerized tutorial, containing supplementary explanations and exercises, divided into 35 chapters or lessons. The direct connection with a popular first-year text makes the package extremely attractive and guarantees that users will find a direct correlation between their textbook and the program.

Installation follows the regular Macintosh "drag and drop" procedures, and users who have a basic familiarity with the Macintosh will be able to use the program effectively with very little additional training. Navigation through the program is most effectively done by mouse; and, as with most hypermedia, the program allows the user to move easily through the stacks, jumping from topic to related topic, from the tutorial to reference tables or exercises. The program requires no special training in HyperCard for effective use, although those familiar with HyperCard can easily personalize the stacks, since they are shipped unlocked from TechKnowledge, Inc. This last fact simultaneously presents a potential problem, however, for schools and campuses installing the program on a network, since they will have to take

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measures to assure that legitimate users and hackers do not accidentally or intentionally tamper with the program. Documentation consists of a six-page description of the program with instructions for installation and explanations of RHT's main features. I found the documentation more than adequate, easy to follow, and very candid in warning institutional users as to some security issues.

As mentioned above, *Russian HyperTutor* is based on the text *Russian for Everybody*, and it consists of a HyperCard stack to accompany each of the textbook's five introductory lessons and 30 main chapters. At all points in the lessons the language learner has available a number of on-line resources including: a Russian-English and English-Russian glossary with a complete listing of forms for every Russian lexical item, grammar tables, an electronic notebook, and a "print card/field" resource.

The screen design is quite pleasant, and the cards never seem overcrowded with text. Each card is divided into two parts: the left-hand third of the card is reserved for illustrative graphics and for highlighting special information, such as paradigms and model sentences. The right-hand two-thirds of the card holds the text fields for explanations, exercises, etc. The on-line resources, as well as the navigation tools, are located in rows along the top and bottom of the cards, and are easily accessible. The Russian font included with RHT is clear and easy to read; and the keyboard arrangement of the Russian letters is simple to learn since it mimics the Latin letter arrangement (i.e., Cyrillic *ѣ* is on the same key as the English *f*). If the student gets confused about the location of a Russian letter, s/he can access a Russian keyboard layout (that appears in an external window) through HyperCard's GO menu.

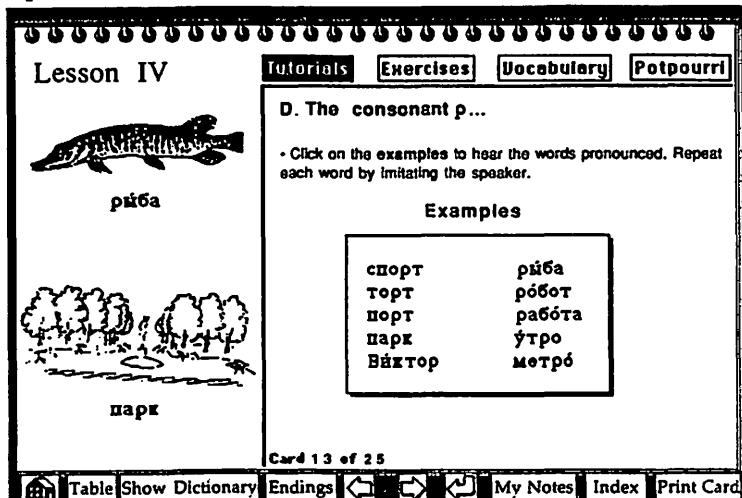


Figure 1.

Structure of the Lessons

The materials in each chapter are divided into four sections: Tutorial, Exercises, Vocabulary, and Potpourri. The Tutorial section highlights certain grammatical and lexical areas introduced in the textbook. The explanations here, while thorough in detail, are meant only to supplement the main text; sometimes the same material is presented, but approached from a different angle. For example, the textbook introduces Russian verb conjugation through the rather technical "one-stem" system; RHT covers the same topic in a simpler, less linguistic manner. The complementary balance between the Tutorial's and the text's grammar explanations works to the users' advantage—they can pick the explanation which best corresponds to their way of processing grammatical information.

At the end of each stage of the Tutorial section, the student can jump to related exercises or to previously covered material. There are a few minor difficulties with some of these branching choices. These "hot spots" are not always very clearly distinguishable from other text. While all the branching choices are in boldface type, not every word in boldface type on a card is a hot spot. The second clue for the user to recognize these hot spots is the change from the I-beam cursor to the browsing hand. This is a rather subtle change, and I suspect that users may wind up not taking full advantage of these dynamic linkages. (This will be even more likely if institutional users, following the advice in the installation instructions, lock all text fields. In HyperCard the normal cursor in locked text fields is the browsing hand; thus users will detect no change in the cursor as they move over the "hot spots.")

Following the Tutorial section (one long chapter contains some 40 cards), the user enters the Exercise section. This section deserves much attention for its breadth, variety, and creative way of "correcting" student input. In terms of breadth and variety, the exercise sections regularly include: cloze exercises on morphology, dehydrated sentences, translations from English to Russian, situational prompts, multiple-choice question and answer, a reading passage with questions, personalized questions and a composition assignment.

Several sets of cloze sentences focusing primarily on morphology usually begin this section. The blank in the sentence is indicated by a bullet (•); users move the cursor to that place, click and type their answer. When finished, users hit the return key, and the correct version of the "complete" sentence appears in a text box just above the exercise window. Users then compare their answer with the one given by the

computer. Thus, RHT's "correction system" provides the correct answer even though it does not check the users' input. Some might find this unsophisticated correction system a serious drawback. I think, however, that until the day a sophisticated parser of Russian becomes available, such a correction system is acceptable, especially since it has two distinct pedagogical advantages. First, it makes the users read a whole sentence every time they want to verify their answers. This means that during these exercises, they are continually being confronted with language at least at the sentence level rather than just at the level of isolated words. The second, and perhaps greater, advantage is that this kind of "correction system" frees the developer from the restriction of including only exercises that are easily machine-correctable. Indeed, Mitrevski exploits this and regularly includes exercises which allow for divergent and unpredictable student input. Instead of attempting to "correct" such input electronically, he invites the students to print out the exercise and bring it to class for correction and discussion. This provides a regular opportunity for the teacher to incorporate the students' work with RHT into the regular classroom activities and to verify the students' attendance in the language laboratory.

Although the exercises vary in format, I was a bit disappointed that they are not more communicatively oriented. The individual exercises consist mostly of unconnected simple sentences, demanding only grammatical accuracy. Without context and purpose, the sentences are rather unnatural, and they fail to train students to use language as a vehicle for meaningful communication. Even those exercises that seem designed to elicit meaningful information from the users (personalized questions, situations, and composition assignments) are not structured in a way conducive for students to express themselves in utterances beyond a phrase or simple sentence. One hopes that in future versions of RHT even the cloze exercises on morphology will at least be contextualized.

Following the Exercise section, the student has an opportunity to review and drill Vocabulary, working either from Russian to English or from English to Russian. One excellent feature of this section is that for the first five phonetics lessons and the first ten grammar lessons all of the vocabulary items have been recorded digitally by native speakers of Russian. When users click on a word in the vocabulary list, they immediately hear it pronounced. Included with the Vocabulary sections for the chapters with sound are dictation exercises. The students hear a digitally recorded word from the chapter's vocabulary list, and write it in a blank text field.

They can choose to replay the word as many times as necessary or click immediately to see the correct answer. For the phonetics lessons and for the introductory chapters, this sound component is very useful for fixing in the learner's mind the correspondence of pronunciation and spelling. I find the recorded vocabulary a very attractive feature of RHT, even though, out of space considerations, it had to be sampled at less than highest quality.

Each lesson closes with a section called **Potpourri**. In theory, this portion of the lesson contains cultural notes and comments on topics related to the grammar and themes of the textbook's lessons. Unfortunately, the Potpourri is undeveloped for a number of chapters. This, however, may be to the individual instructors' advantage, since in this section they have a place where they can easily add their own cultural notes and other materials.

The only real deficiencies that I find in the program are its lack of communicatively-oriented, contextualized exercises and the number of typographical errors. Most of the latter are easily recognizable as such and do not interfere with the author's intended meaning. There is, however, one error in the grammatical reference tables that should be pointed out since it seemingly confirms a commonly-made error. The instrumental case ending for feminine nouns terminating in a soft sign is given as "yu" and not "soft sign + yu (i.e., площадью instead of площадью).

On the whole, *Russian HyperTutor* should be an effective tool for beginning students to master Russian grammar, whether they are studying in a traditional classroom or completely on their own. The stacks give students opportunities for structured linguistic practice, and there is enough variety in the tasks to keep the students relatively engaged in learning the material. The packaging of attractive graphics, some animation, limited sound, clear explanations and a variety of exercises undoubtedly make *Russian HyperTutor* a valuable addition for the language laboratory. I look forward to future versions of the program that will include more graphics, complete, high-quality sound and more communicatively oriented language learning activities. ■

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**Mundraub:
Sausage, Pretzels,
and an Engaging
Story for
Intermediate
German**

**Ursula Williams
University of Notre
Dame**

"It would be very difficult not to become engaged in this story, not to want to know what happens next."

Mundraub is available from Albrecht Educational Software, 845 Roble Avenue, Suite 1, Menlo Park, CA 94025. Telephone: (415) 725-5523, fax: (415) 725-8495, electronic mail: albrecht@leland.stanford.edu. The program requires any Macintosh computer with HyperCard 2.0 or higher, and a Pioneer 4200 laserdisc player (or equivalent), with monitor. Price: \$150 for one program; \$125 each for two or more; \$10 shipping and handling; plus tax where applicable.

My Schöffler-Weis German-English Dictionary translates *Mundraub* as "theft of comestibles." That's close. Understanding the concept of *Mundraub* though, is a little more complicated, and the story on the videodisc with the same title goes a long way toward helping accomplish that, including what is uniquely German about the concept. More about that later, though: there's a story to tell and software to describe.

The opening scene on this videodisc, which is part of an interactive program package developed by Renate Albrecht of Stanford University, shows a department store about to close and a man, clearly with something on his mind, wandering through several departments. He seems to be up to something. It's a strong establishing scene—one that will probably capture students' interest right away. It isn't necessary to introduce the video in any other way except to show this one scene. It would be very difficult *not* to become engaged in this story, *not* to want to know what happens next.

A series of segments follows, which can be controlled by the computer via a HyperCard stack, and the story unfolds. It seems the man's goal is to remain in the store beyond closing time. He succeeds. Meanwhile, the store's night watchman, disappointed with a really thin salami sandwich that his wife has packed for him, makes his way through the "comestibles" section of the store, where he succumbs to the temptation of a sausage and pretzel display. The man seen earlier watches this scene and licks his lips. Unfortunately, he also knocks over a display of canned pineapple. The two men meet. The lurker introduces himself as a detective who has been sent to catch the night watchman in precisely this kind of activity. The night watchman protests that he intended to pay in the morning for the food he is eating, but the other man insists that the night watchman write and sign a confession right away. The viewer begins to wonder whether there isn't more to the story. The night watchman seems like a harmless fellow, and he only took a sausage and a pretzel—where could this possibly lead? The viewer begins to understand what *Mundraub* means.

Segment by segment, the viewer learns that the man lurking in the store is not a detective at all. Some pretty

regular "theft of comestibles" follows, along with an attempted break-in by some real crooks, the arrival of the police, close calls, and a happy ending. A little aside at home with the night watchman and his wife offers insight into the home life of this man, as well as a typical husband-wife conversation. The story remains engaging throughout, and despite some difficulty with rather heavy Berlin accents, most second-year students should be able to understand most of what happens. (American students should not, in any case, have trouble understanding "ick" for *ich*.) Opportunities to notice cultural aspects of Germany abound and these provide a springboard for *same-different* discussions. And there are several excellent opportunities throughout the story for "what could happen next" hypothesizing.

Renate Albrecht has designed the HyperCard stack to be used as one facet of a "unit" in a second-year German class. It is designed to be integrated into several days of class activities, and not as a stand-alone product. The video, a commercial production by a German television station, is to be viewed in segments, with comprehension checks along the way to assure that one segment has been understood before the story moves ahead. (It is possible to work around that plan, however, and see the entire story, if that's what one wants to do.) The stack features a controller to start and stop the videodisc, another controller to view "clips" or portions of segments, a help card to explain what all the buttons are for, several ways to get back to the videodisc (nice!) and the opportunity to move on without being forced to choose the correct answer on any comprehension question. One exercise involves viewing one segment of the video without sound. The viewer is then asked to write a possible dialog between the two characters. Because the scene eventually contains a surprise, students should find the process of discovering the true dialog, which probably differs quite a bit from what they wrote based on the clues available at the time, quite a lot of fun. The exercises aid students in discovering the content of the conversations and in understanding the twists in plot. Comprehension, then, can be taken care of outside of class, and class time can be used for discussion.

Since all the students get a temporary copy of the computer disk, they retain the exercises for the duration of their study of *Mundraub*. These exercises include the one in which students write an anticipated dialog, as well as a dictionary-building exercise, in which each student individually or the class collectively can build a lexicon of new terms. Students are then free to work on their written dialog outside of class,

and to print it so that it can be handed in. The stack facilitates both the classroom introductions to the videodisc and individual students' work with it. Albrecht provides a detailed lesson plan which would be helpful for the novice teacher, and which contains suggestions that can be adopted by the seasoned teacher who might want to develop a lesson plan with other goals in mind. The instructions, as well as the stack itself, are easy to follow and uncomplicated.

One problem this reviewer encountered was that the stack does not recognize the Sony LDP-1450 laserdisc player. A quick trip to Notre Dame's DeBartolo Hall remedied that situation, but there should be no reason why the LDP-1450 could not be added to the list of players.

At the end of the unit one could probably ask students to discuss the crime (the "theft of comestibles"), or write about it, and state how they think it should be handled. It's a crime that presents a dilemma. If someone steals a bit of food, should they be prosecuted because it is theft, or should they be let go because they only took a slice of cheese, or a small sausage, or a glass of wine, and because, in the grand scheme of things, it isn't really very much? Is hunger justifiable cause? Opinions are likely to differ, and that makes for lively discussion.

The *Mundraub* package facilitates what would otherwise be a time-consuming task for the German teacher who wants to incorporate a very engaging story on videodisc into a second-year college German curriculum. It makes showing logical, smaller units of the story convenient, and the comprehension questions are a good starting point for class discussions. For students working on their own, the stack makes it easy, even for students who have hardly any experience with computers or videodiscs, to get to the task at hand, which is viewing and understanding the story. ■

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