



REPORT FORM FOR NETWORK ACTIVITIES

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Confidential

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Present appointment and employing institution

Instructor in Russian, School of Interdisciplinary Area Studies, University of Oxford

Role in activity

Project Leader

2. Activity details

Type and title of activity

Type of activity: Language Project Title: Applying Innovative Methods and Techniques to Teaching Russian at REES: A Cognitive View

Location

School of Interdisciplinary Area Studies (REES), University of Oxford
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Date

From: 01.06.09	To: 30.11.09
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Brief Description of activities carried out (please include or attach a confirmed list of participants)

The project has investigated how current provision for teaching Russian at REES can be enhanced by adapting innovative e-learning and applied cognitive linguistics methods to the teaching of Russian to postgraduate students.
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3. Achievement of stated aims and objectives

Please summarise how the stated aims and objectives of the activities proposed have been achieved and how these have helped to further the aims and objectives of CEELBAS.

This has been achieved by implementing the following tasks:

1. Exploring the updated version of the WebLearn Beta virtual environment (University of Oxford).
2. Exploring applied cognitive linguistics (ACL) findings and methods relevant to teaching Russian at REES. Creating a list of existing Slavic ACL materials and presenting it at the CEELBAS Language Workshop (UCL, June 2009).
3. Developing and designing of the Russian language programme on-line on the basis of the WebLearn Beta website.
4. Developing and designing of three ACL modules (six two-hour sessions) for REES Russian Language Programme: Text Analysis (Mass-Media Texts: Comprehension and Translation).
5. Embedding e-learning and both already existing and newly developed ACL methods and materials into the Russian language programme.
6. Collaborating with other CEELBAS e-learning projects run by the University of Birmingham.
7. Obtaining feedback from the learners through the preparation of the postgraduate students' questionnaires and their analysis.

The project results are presented at the REES WebLearn Russian 1, 2 and 3 sites in the form of incorporated ACL modules, materials and explanations – components of online Russian language programme.

The ACL materials have been designed in such a way that they can complement the existing Mike Berry's "Birmingham University Reading Course in Russian for Social Scientists" on the one hand and on the other hand can be used for more independent teaching/learning sessions within the Russian language "fieldwork" courses at CEELBAS universities.

The ACL materials and explanations embedded in the REES language course have been tested during the normal language classes at the beginners and intermediate levels. The students' feedback has shown that the majority of students found the combination of ACL explanations and materials and more traditional explanations and materials useful for their study of Russian. The 'Text Analysis' explanation and materials were tested during the additional sessions with students of intermediate and advanced levels. All students found these sessions to be very useful and helpful not only for their study of Russian language in general but for doing their research and writing the dissertations. Here are some examples of the obtained feedback:

Student 1 *"All presentations and explanations have been thorough and clear. The use of WebLearn also stands out for commendation. Although I did not attend the 'experimental' classes, the instances in which these innovative methods were used in 'normal' classes convinced me of their promise."*

Student 2 *"Sometimes I find the explanations a bit abstract. I find it easier to work with examples and written explanations than diagrams, but it is good to have both provided (as is the case in the course), because different people understand things in different ways."*

Student 3 *"I think it's an incredibly useful concept [cognitive-based approach to text analysis] that I could benefit from more exposure to. I think it makes translation more interesting as well"*

because you have to think about meaning as well as form. It would be interesting to have a reading list or some resources to consult about how to find out more about specifically Russian cultural networks".

Student 4 "The sessions provided an easy-to-understand introduction to the cognitive and cultural principles underlying the production and comprehension of texts. Analysis of the Russian newspaper articles provided a valuable example of the concepts at work in practice. These sessions will be very useful both for general translation, and for analysis of media articles, a skill which I could use in my thesis. It would be good to incorporate these sessions into the general course, perhaps as one of the qualitative research sessions provided in year 1 of the MPhil."

Student 5 "I particularly like reading the newspaper articles and finding out how they might be interpreted differently in Russian culture. Overall I thought it was both interesting and useful. In fact, I think it is crucial to incorporate these aspects as they are so different from English grammar and language."

Student 6 "It seems directly relevant to my needs in terms of translating primary materials whilst understanding their cultural content/significance. It bridges a gap between some theoretical approaches relevant to my research. I think the examples of textual analysis of newspaper articles, especially the opportunity to see it in the historical context of the Soviet newspaper article, were particularly helpful. Realising my failure to appreciate the cultural significance of these articles from a Western perspective was very revealing. Understanding Russian 'mentality' in more specific cultural context also helps my understanding of the significance of verbal aspect and shades of meaning found."

Student 7 "The sessions are incredible! Any attempt at understanding Russian language texts requires extensive knowledge of culture, linguistic aspects, history, political life, etc., or in other words the premises from which a Russian reader starts going through the text. When in Russia, I myself had to look for these premises before/while reading or translating a text. Many terms have specific meanings in specific contexts, many events present in the news raise memories about events in the past. I was more or less aware of this, but was not able to put my finger on it until these classes. And the information given in the classes is in many ways the things I was looking for."

The Slavic ACL materials list includes: 'The Case Book for Russian' 'The Case Book for Czech', 'The Case Book for Polish' (by Laura Janda and Steven Clancy), Aspect in Russian Media Module <http://hum.uit.no/lajanda/aspect/ainr/>, other materials on the aspect of Russian Verb: e.g. Cluster Types for Russian Verbs <http://hum.uit.no/lajanda/clusterfrontpage.html>..

Through the application of cognitive linguistics findings and means to teaching Russian to postgraduate students at REES, this project has helped to make difficult Russian language phenomena relevant to their learning explainable by pointing out the motivation behind every aspect of language.

The project has shown that not only intermediate and advanced learners but also beginners can profit from cognitive linguistics findings about language. Adopting ACL ways and means to facilitate Russian language learning has complemented the more traditional language instruction and has helped to present connections between language and conceptual structures, constructions of socio-cultural knowledge in a more systematic way. Incorporating cognitive linguistics-inspired learning materials into the online version of the Russian language programme at REES has appeared to be vital as the cognitive approach to explanation often relies on well-presented visual

images, including animation and graphics. Both cognitive and e-learning modes have helped to develop a well-structured and motivating course potentially offering a higher level of learner autonomy.

The proposed project is aimed at applying cognitive linguistics findings and means to teaching Russian to postgraduate students at REES, thus making difficult Russian language phenomena relevant to their learning explainable by pointing out the motivation behind every aspect of language.

Not only intermediate and advanced learners but also absolute beginners and post beginners can profit from cognitive linguistics findings about language. As has been shown often enough in works of linguists, learning by insight is much more effective than mere rote learning. To give one practical example: the Project Leader applied the cognitive approach to teaching Russian grammar, vocabulary and text analysis to undergraduate students at all levels during three years at Edinburgh and has already started to use some Russian ACL materials for teaching REES postgraduate students. It proved to be efficient and well-perceived by students. Getting the students learning Russian as a foreign language to (re-)discover the motivated structures and principles that govern Russian language may also lead to a greater degree of their autonomy. Adopting ACL ways and means to facilitate Russian language learning will complement the more traditional language instruction and will help to present connections between language and conceptual structures, constructions of socio-cultural knowledge in a more systematic way. Incorporating cognitive linguistics-inspired learning materials into the online version of the Russian language programme at REES appears to be vital as the cognitive approach to explanation often relies on well-presented visual images, including animation and graphics. Also both cognitive and e-learning modes help to develop a well-structured and motivating course potentially offering a higher level of learner autonomy.

Ultimately, the materials developed by this project will assist language teachers both at REES and at CEELBAS institutions in delivering the Centre's stated objective of providing highly trained regional experts who have the linguistic capacity needed to play a key role in the study of Central and Eastern Europe.

4. Outcomes

Please indicate the outcomes and 'value for money' of activities carried out.

The project has delivered cognition-based explanations, materials and text analysis modules, which have been tested during language classes and incorporated into the WebLearn Russian 1, Russian 2 and Russian 3 language training courses at REES (Oxford).

Both the information on Slavic ACL materials and the Russian ACL materials developed within this project will be made accessible to the CEELBAS universities through uploading them into the 'language repository' being created within the CEELBAS on-going project at the University of Birmingham.

This project, designed to require a relatively small grant, has benefited many through enhancing the provision for teaching Russian at REES by adapting innovative e-learning and applied cognitive linguistics methods to the teaching of Russian to postgraduate students, making both the language materials and the information about the cognition-based Slavic language materials developed/collected within the project accessible to other CEELBAS universities.

5. Breakdown of total costs for workshops (please attach evidence of expenditure)

<i>Item</i>	<i>Amount</i>
Key speakers (Travel, accommodation and subsistence)	
Postgraduate participation	
Room/equipment hire	
Administration costs	
Printing and publicity (including conference packs)	
Other (please specify	
Total expenditure	
Total contribution invoiced to CEELBAS	

6. Breakdown of total costs for projects (please attach evidence of expenditure)

<i>Item</i>	<i>Amount</i>
Staff costs	3,923.64
Equipment/technical costs	
Administration costs	
Other (please specify Travel & Subsistence Consumables	696.75 284.48
Total expenditure	4,904.87
Total contribution invoiced to CEELBAS	4,904.87

7. Dissemination and further research

Please give details of dissemination of the outcomes of the workshop/project and any further research planned.

Both the information on Slavic ACL materials and the Russian ACL materials developed within this project will be made accessible to the CEELBAS universities through uploading them into the 'language repository' being created within the CEELBAS on-going project at the University of Birmingham.

8. Signature and date

Applicant's signature

Date:

05.03.10

Institutional authorisation (if required)

Position:

Date:

J. HARRIS

ACCOUNTING & DEVELOPMENT MANAGER

10.04.10

Institutional CEELBAS Network Primary Contact

Date:

05.03.10

This form must be accompanied by an invoice from the applicant's institution, supported by receipts or other evidence of the expenditure incurred.

Please send the completed form to: CEELBAS Administrator, SSEES, UCL, Gower Street, London WC1E 6BT and by email to: ceelbas-network@ssees.ucl.ac.uk.

CEELBAS is a consortium of UCL,
University of Oxford and University of Birmingham



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