CHAPTER 17

Russian for Law Enforcement, Intelligence, and Security

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1 Introduction

This proposed Language for Specific Purposes (LSP) course is designed for undergraduate students at any institution where Russian is offered and where learners are interested in pursuing careers that use Russian on the job in federal or local law enforcement contexts (e.g., Federal Bureau of Investigation, Central Intelligence Agency, National Security Agency, Department of State, Department of Defense, the U.S. military, or local law enforcement in areas with large Russian populations). Presently this is the only known course with this specific language focus, and as such there are no known existing materials that are widely accessible to a general audience for learning Russian for the specific purpose of law enforcement.

1.1 Institutional Background

Ferrum College is a small liberal arts college in rural southwestern Virginia with a student population of 1500 students. Students who take Russian tend to be those in the Honors program, those interested in taking a foreign language other than Spanish (the only other language offered at Ferrum currently), or students with interests in using Russian in their future professions. The Criminal Justice program at Ferrum is one of the most highly enrolled programs of study on campus, and the Russian program often attracts Criminal Justice majors who are preparing for careers in local or domestic law enforcement, as well as a small group interested in pursuing federal or military careers. The Criminal Justice major offers two tracks: a B.A., which requires two semesters of a foreign language, and a B.S., which does not require foreign language. Many students therefore choose the B.S. track, as they can avoid having to take a foreign language. This proposed course is designed for these students in particular as a way to provide them with one semester of language that offers enough Russian to work in the field, but not full fluency.

2 Needs Analysis

In order to create cohesion between the Russian course and the objectives of the Criminal Justice program, several fieldwork components—as well as research using primary and secondary sources—in the teaching of Criminal Justice, the preparation of students for federal law enforcement jobs, and the analysis of instruments used by federal agencies for assessing language proficiency will be carried out.

As a first step, interviews with teaching faculty and the coordinator of the Criminal Justice program will be essential for determining if the proposed content of the LSP course is appropriate, fills needs that the faculty see an enhancement to the Criminal Justice program, and
contributes to the program's student learning outcomes (SLOs). Additionally, these interviews will provide clarity on exactly how many students currently are pursuing the B.A. compared to how many are pursuing the B.S., which will further illuminate the necessity of an LSP course. Secondly, the observation of language use in the field by police officers or other law enforcement officials will help to inform this course's content, since the instructor has no direct expertise in this regard. Ideally, the field observation would take place by participating in a ride-along with local law enforcement. It might also be helpful to observe police officers and law enforcement officials in judiciary proceedings open to the public in order to determine the lexical items and non-English information that officers may be expected to contribute to in the cases of Russian-speaking defendants. Also, in order to determine what content might be most important for prospective students in the LSP course, surveys and interviews with current students in the Criminal Justice program, as well as alumni of the program now working in the field, will also be conducted.

Because the Criminal Justice program is career-oriented, the added value of the LSP course for potential employers is especially important. Interviews or surveys of recruiters for law enforcement jobs in local and federal organizations, including military recruiters, will provide useful insights into what language skills employers seek in job and training program candidates. The evaluation of current assessment instruments and procedures for prospective job candidates entering federal agencies and the military for law enforcement positions will assist in developing content in the LSP course that prepares students to be successful on these exams. The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), for example, has its own scale for evaluating job applicant skills in languages other than English. The Russian for Law Enforcement course could potentially
prepare students to meet minimum skill levels according to this instrument, possibly in one semester, although two semesters would be more effective. For students interested in pursuing military careers, the LSP course could prepare them to understand more about the structures of language, since the Defense Language Aptitude Battery (DLAB) that is administered to incoming enlisted candidates as part of the military admission process is not a test on a specific language, but rather, a test of a candidate's ability to quickly adapt and loosely interpret unfamiliar phonological, morphological, and syntactic structures, which, according to the U.S. military, assesses a candidate's language learning aptitude (for more information, see “Fort Hood”, n.d.; ILR, n.d.).

All of the above analysis procedures will help to develop course content, including a list of lexical items, including associated grammatical structures and related colloquial and idiomatic expressions, and also, potentially, instructional materials and/or resources that are already available. In addition to this, some attention must be given to the instruction of cultural awareness, particularly with regard law enforcement systems and practices in Russian-speaking countries that will differ significantly from those of the United States. Such differences will be important for law enforcement officials in the field working with Russian-speaking perpetrators and/or Russian-speaking colleagues in matters that cross international borders. This can be accomplished with help from U.S. federal law enforcement agencies, their websites, and, if possible, fieldwork in Russian-speaking countries.

Finally, one of the most important procedures for needs analysis concerns assessing the temporal suitability of the proposed one-semester course. Because Russian is a difficult
language, requiring three times the contact hours of instruction necessary for basic fluency in comparison to Spanish for English speakers, for example, one semester may not be sufficient. The challenges of reading the Cyrillic alphabet can be significant, particularly for students who have not previously studied a foreign language. This is particularly true in this context, as Ferrum does not require students to have taken a foreign language in order to be admitted to the college, nor does it require them to take a foreign language in order to graduate from the college—although some major areas of study do require two to four semesters of a language.

3 Student Learning Outcomes

The objectives for this LSP course in Russian for law enforcement officials may vary depending on the depth and scope of the course. Russian is spoken in Russia, of course, but it is also spoken in the nations formerly under some degree of Soviet control (e.g., Ukraine, Kazakhstan, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia). Furthermore, many Russian speakers in these regions are often bilingual, as speakers of Russian, but also of national languages (e.g., Ukrainian, Kazakh, Georgian, Kyrgyz, Latvian). Complicating the situation even more is the fact that many of these bilingual speakers may also be trilingual, as speakers of one (or even more than one) minority language (e.g., Tatar, Ingush, Chechen, Svan, Uighur, Kalmyk). These minority languages, as well as many of the national languages are not from the same language family (Slavic), and in many cases, are not even part of the Indo-European language family. It seems important under these circumstances, then, that students in the LSP course learn to distinguish spoken Russian from other Slavic languages and non-Slavic minority languages and that they are able to identify minority languages spoken in Russia that are relevant to U.S. security and intelligence concerns (e.g., Chechen, Ingush, Abkhaz, Tatar). It might be helpful to have some
general understanding of phonological differences among the three primary dialects of Russian as well.

Many of the most important SLOs for the LSP course should involve listening comprehension development. It will be important to provide students with some ability to interpret the tone of conversations in Russian, and to have a collection of key words and phrases to listen for when interpreting such conversations. Recognizing the difference between a friendly conversation and a hostile conversation, for example, or being able to identify when someone is using the imperative, being apologetic, or being threatening can be very important in the field. Therefore, students should be able to identify the tone of conversations in Russian by listening for key words and phrases that may indicate past, present, or premeditated criminal acts.

Similarly, in the development of listening and speaking skills, students should understand basic principles of pragma-linguistic and socio-pragmatic competence in areas of power and solidarity to understand relationships between two Russian speakers, as well as to communicate effectively as an authority. Students should also be able to give basic commands in Russian and to interact with constituents in speech situations associated with law enforcement. Such situations will include speaking and understanding Russian in the contexts of (a) arresting a Russian-speaking suspect, including reading Miranda rights in Russian, (b) fingerprinting and processing, and (c) recording basic identifying information from a suspect (e.g., name, age, address, phone number).
Advanced reading skills are less important for students in the LSP course, but if possible, they should develop some very basic skills in this regard in order to help interpret intelligence, or to gather written evidence or to pick up on potential crime activities. One of the goals of the LSP course should be to have students recognize all of the letters of the Cyrillic alphabet in order to read and interpret very simple written Russian, such as: (a) newspaper headlines; (b) email subject headings; (c) social media comments, statuses, and forums; and (d) criminal tattoos, signs, graffiti, acronyms relevant to criminal justice systems in both the U.S. and Russia.

Cultural instruction, as mentioned earlier, is also important since Russia, although considered throughout the U.S. to be a mostly European nation, is very diverse ethnically, linguistically, and culturally. Russia is neither Western nor Eastern, neither entirely rural nor entirely urban, and neither totally industrial or post-industrial. Russia's leaders perpetuate a majority adherence to Russian Orthodox Christianity, but the country and its autonomous regions are home to practicing Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, as well as large numbers of Russian citizens who do not observe any faith practices. Understanding of Russia's religious diversity is important since most U.S. law enforcement-related interests in Russia concern areas that are largely Muslim-populated or far beyond Moscow or St. Petersburg where populations are more diverse. The cultural diversity and long history of penal camps and largely unsupervised law enforcement in the 19th and 20th centuries have created unique and complicated judicial and prison systems that differ substantially from those of the West, particularly from the United States. Some understanding of these differences can be useful for students planning on careers that involve cooperation with law enforcement institutions in Russian-speaking nations. Additionally, having familiarity with the geography, demography, and topography of the Eurasian landmass will be
especially important for students who plan careers in military intelligence. Therefore, students in the LSP course might be expected to recognize names of regions, nations, features, and ethnicities with regard to geography, demography, and topography in areas of Russian majority as well as those of non-Russian populations (e.g., North Caucasus, Siberia, Crimea).

Another objective of this course, perhaps less important for local law enforcers, but more important for military and federal agents, is the acquisition of lexical items related to fieldwork, likely intelligence-collecting work, involving social media, navigation, maps, Geographic Information Systems (GIS), tactics, and topography. Ferrum College offers a GIS course, and the instructor of that course, who has lived in Russia, has expressed an interest in collaborating with the author on this course by having students create maps in Russian using GIS. The subject matter of these maps could be determined by the student, possibly related to an issue of U.S. national security interests, or providing a map-based presentation of linguistic or ethnic diversity, or a detailed schematic of a specific neighborhood in a major city or a rural village.

Students should also be able to recognize when an unidentified language in a recording or conversation is, in fact, Russian, even if the conversation is not totally understood. To accomplish this, students will need to become familiar with some of the phonological distinctions among the modern East Slavic languages in particular (e.g., Russian, Ukrainian, and Belarusian), but also with the West Slavic (e.g., Polish, Czech, and Slovak) and South Slavic languages (e.g., Bulgarian, Serbian, Croatian, Bosnian, Montenegrin, and Macedonian). Additionally, students should be able to recognize non-Slavic languages that are relevant to security issues in the region such as Albanian, Moldovan, Romanian, Magyar, Chechen, Ingush,
Georgian, Chinese, and Uighur. Again, the goal here is not that students in the LSP course will have total mastery of these languages, but will be able to distinguish them from Russian in recorded conversations so as to contribute to intelligence collection, for example.

Ultimately, in a one-semester course, there is only so much that students can accomplish. In Russian for Law Enforcement, the primary objectives, if students are successful, will only provide them with limited speaking, writing, reading, and listening comprehension ability in Russian, but will acquaint them well with security issues in the region, uniquely Russian cultural aspects of crime and punishment, and sufficient vocabulary, idiomatic expressions, sociopragmatic information, and to carry out tasks related to identification, apprehension and arrest of Russian-speaking suspects, forensics, interrogation, and geographic information systems in the process of intelligence collection in the region.

4 Materials

The first task associated with this LSP course is recognition of and reading in the Cyrillic alphabet. Additionally, within the first weeks of instruction, students should be able to recognize Russian names and nicknames (i.e., Aleksandr–Sasha), the use and formation of the patronymic middle name, and regional and cultural variations in names of non-European Russia and adjacent border areas. In the first weeks of the semester, students should also begin learning cardinal numbers, question words, and pragmatic principles such as the distinction between the informal second-person pronoun (ты), and the formal second-person (вы). The overarching theme of this first unit will be oriented around the law enforcement practice of asking for and interpreting identifying and biographical data.
In terms of culture, students will learn the names and administrative divisions of regions (krai), provinces (oblast'), and autonomous republics (avtonomnaja respublika) in Russia and be able to identify them on a map. In addition to basic identification, it is important that students also learn some basic sociocultural and ethnographic information about the regions. Ideally this will help students to understand that the Russia portrayed by the U.S. media, which primarily focuses on European Russia, especially Moscow, is not representative of the entire nation.

As students progress, the second step will be to engage in speech tasks with specific functions, particularly involving asking questions about what a suspect may have or not have, giving commands, and asking for biographical identification such as age and address. Study of numbers, Russian pragmatics of authority, and the vocabulary of contraband, illegal substances, and weapons will create the thematic tone of this next stage of study. In terms of culture, ideally students will gain some insight into the difference between the Russian criminal justice system in comparison to that in the U.S. in terms of types of criminal acts, judicial processes, punishments, and prison types and sentence lengths.

Ferrum College has a strong forensic science program that is quite popular among Criminal Justice students. To serve the unique LSP needs for these students, some time in this course will be devoted to scientific terms, the collection of fingerprints, investigating a crime scene, and recording and storing evidence. Interrogation of suspects is also central to this set of topics, so some attention should be given to asking questions in Russian about dates, times, and suspects’ whereabouts. In terms of interpretation and comprehension, a course of this type will
focus more on what students can do primarily by understanding context. In the spirit of that exercise, some attention must be given to pejorative language. It is important that law enforcement officers be able to tell when a suspect is being hostile, even if the language spoken is not shared, and just being able to recognize a few pejorative words can assist in this (e.g., when body language may not be as revelatory as anticipated). In terms of culture, students should also gain some understanding of Russian prison tattoos. Russian inmates rely on a unique and symbol-rich system of tattoos that convey their criminal history. In the U.S., law enforcement officers whose suspects are Russian may have such tattoos, and it could be useful for officers to recognize basic symbols and codes embedded in these tattoos. Reading Cyrillic will also help in this task.

5 Assessment and Evaluation

Assessments on the Cyrillic alphabet, Russian and Eurasian geography, country names and capitals in Russian, administrative divisions of the Russian territory in Russian, and regular vocabulary quizzes will contribute to students' overall geopolitical understanding of the region and their lexical fluency. Speaking assignments that involve the performance of situational dialogues will assess students' ability to record biographical information in Russian from a suspect, arrest a suspect in Russian, and participate in basic everyday conversations. Listening assignments will assess students' ability to differentiate Russian from other regional languages and to identify non-Slavic languages as opposed to Slavic languages. Listening assignments will also assess students' capacity to distinguish criminal conversations from everyday conversations. Reading assignments will assess student ability to read basic information in Russian found on street signs, in airports and train stations, and to understand the general tone of a text in terms of
style (e.g., professional, informal, business, legal). In order for students to become more aware of current security concerns in the region, they will be asked as a final project to illustrate a U.S. or U.N. security concern in the region using GIS and Russian terminology.

The effectiveness of the course will be measured primarily by student success in the achievement of geopolitical and basic linguistic flexibility as gauged by the final project and a final comprehensive language exam. Student evaluations of the course and assessment of student learning outcomes by Russian faculty and Criminal Justice faculty at the end of the course will also contribute valuable insight into the effectiveness of the course.

6 Conclusion

The overarching goal of designing a one-semester course on Russian for Law Enforcement with the proposed outcomes may be too ambitious. A two-semester sequence might be more realistic, considering the difficulty of Russian and the amount of content necessary to provide future law enforcers with adequate skills in comprehension, speaking, and reading. A potential obstacle may also reside in student motivation, since many students seem to select the B.S. track in Criminal Justice precisely to avoid the foreign language required for completion of the B.A. However, a two-semester course that caters to Criminal Justice majors' interests and the development of professional skills may be appealing to them—only the completion of needs analysis in the form of interviews and surveys of current students and alumni of the Criminal Justice will provide the necessary data to determine whether or not the course will be viable at Ferrum College.
A significant challenge in the development of this course will be the acquisition of authentic information on the subject of Criminal Justice in Russia and nations where Russian remains a *lingua franca*. Similarly, determining the lexical items that are regularly used by U.S. federal agencies in the interpretation of intelligence from Russia presents difficulty because of the need for security clearance and/or access to classified information not available to the general public.

Despite the challenges, such a course would probably attract students who otherwise would not enroll in a foreign language course. Having the course in the college catalog and on Criminal Justice majors' transcripts could be attractive to prospective employers who need candidates with foreign language skills. More generally, such a course would contribute positively to improving the global awareness of Criminal Justice majors at Ferrum College as they proceed into the world of law enforcement in increasingly diverse communities in locally and nationally that include Russian speakers.