

Introduction to Volume 57

Volume 57 of *Russian Language Journal* presents a distinguished set of U.S. and international research studies and reports reflecting the three major directions of *RLJ*: two significant contributions in the area of the description of contemporary standard Russian; two new works in the area of Russian language policy (one a corpus study, the other a status report); four new empirical studies on the acquisition of Russian as a foreign language by adult English-speaking learners; and two valuable studies — one American, one Russian — on recent changes affecting Russian in the foreign language classroom environment.

The opening study in the present volume, Arto Mustajoki's "From Meaning to Form: An Alternate Model of Functional Syntax," provides arguably the clearest presentation of current European work in functional syntax to date. Mustajoki's new study, supported by examples from both English and Russian, is itself a vital new contribution to Functional Syntax theory and of great potential interest to a wide range of *RLJ* readers. Andrej Zajnul'dinov brings new in-field and cross-cultural thinking to the study of lexical pragmatics, familiar in the works of U.S. scholars (Kecskes, Szolay, Davidson) as well as Karaulov, Ufimceva, A. N. Leont'ev, and others. On the language policy side, the over-arching study by Balykhina, presented originally in October 2007 at the International Forum in Washington, will provide all *RLJ* readers with a much-needed update on the changes that have taken place in contemporary Russian over the past sixteen years, since the fall of the USSR. An entirely new study of the role and functioning of Russian outside Russia is presented in Brown's empirical survey of language utilization (Russian and Belarusian) in different domains and across different regions of the Republic of Belarus.

All four studies on the acquisition of Russian bring useful new data and rigorous analyses to long-standing problem areas in the study and teaching of Russian at the university level. Beginning with the acquisition of the Cyrillic alphabet (Bown), and continuing with the interpretation and comprehension of intertextuality (Vaniushkina), planned-versus-spontaneous spoken discourse (Mikhailova), and language utilization patterns outside the study abroad classroom environment (Bain), all four studies present rigorously implemented research designs to account for differences that emerge in individual student performances (and achievement) at different stages along the language learning

continuum. At every level, there are findings to be shared that have significance not only for the field of adult second language acquisition, but also for the teaching of Russian generally.

Section three of the present volume addresses new trends in western language instruction with important implications for the teaching of Russian today: Comer examines the potential of task-based instruction, providing valuable examples of the approach based on actual Russian teaching and curricular planning practice. Moskvin and Remneva, who have designed and administered the field's most important and longest-standing professional development seminar — the ACTR Summer Language Teachers' Seminar at Moscow State University — share their current observations on best practices and new directions in the Russian teaching field, as seen from Vorob'jevy gory.

RLJ readers are also directed to a remarkable policy statement on the concept of "russkiy mir," as articulated by one of Russia's most authoritative political voices, Dr. V. A. Nikonov, who now serves as director of the recently chartered Russian foundation, "Fond Russkiy Mir." The Foundation will support the study and teaching of Russian language and culture within the Russian Federation, in the nations of the so-called "near abroad," and around the world. As important for the field as the creation of a new foundation may be, Nikonov's definition of the mission of the foundation and of the "russkiy mir" will be of great interest to specialists and teachers alike.

Finally, the editors wish to express their gratitude to Bob Channon, Mary Nicholas, and Bill Rivers for their insightful overview of the Eleventh Congress of the International Association of Teachers of Russian Language and Literature (MAPRIAL), held in mid-September in Varna, Bulgaria. The Congress was attended by more than 1,500 participants from sixty countries; as is the custom in Russia and Eastern Europe, paper presentations were published in advance of the Congress and were circulated to all participants onsite. More information on the Congress can be found on the MAPRIAL website: www.mapryal.org

The September Congress in Varna, the International Forum in Washington in October, and the official opening of "Fond Russkiy Mir" in November have provided major international forums for a dialog on the study and teaching of Russian in this the "Year of the Russian Language."
-Editors