A Case Study of the Acquisition of Narration in Russian: At the Intersection of Foreign Language Education, Applied Linguistics, and Second Language Acquisition[1]

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Introduction

Studies of students' foreign language proficiency—including Carroll (1967), Magnan (1986), and Thompson (1996)—have shown that students in their fourth year of language study typically demonstrate oral proficiency in the intermediate range. Thompson's study found the median score of students' oral proficiency in the fourth year to be at the intermediate high/advanced threshold, but her subjects at this level of instruction were students at Middlebury's summer language program and were tested in the last week of the program. In my own teaching practice, I have found that most of the students majoring in Russian at the University of Wisconsin-Madison graduate with an oral proficiency rating at the intermediate-mid level, sometimes at the intermediate-high level, and very rarely at the advanced level. This usually occurs only with very gifted students who have spent an entire year in Russia. The majority of students in our graduate program who enroll directly upon completing their BAs demonstrate the same range of levels of oral proficiency as those completing their BAs at our university, regardless of their undergraduate institution (excluding from consideration graduate students who are native speakers of Russian or another Slavic language).

Research conducted on the basis of data collected from participants in study abroad programs sponsored by the American Council of Teachers of Russian (ACTR) suggests that most of the students entering into the study abroad program have only intermediate level oral proficiency, and approximately two thirds of them fail to achieve advanced-level oral proficiency

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by the end of their study abroad program. (Brecht, Davidson and Ginsberg: Table 5, p. 10).

This research project began with the question: Given that students can only achieve advanced-level oral proficiency during a study abroad program or in a summer intensive immersion program such as Middlebury's, and given that not all students can achieve advanced-level oral proficiency even in those contexts, what can we do in the non-immersion Russian-language classroom to help prepare students to make that leap? This is a question in the discipline of foreign language education, but its answer must be informed by research not only in foreign language education, but also by the fields of applied linguistics and second language acquisition.

Preliminary Investigation in Applied Linguistics

The ACTFL Oral Proficiency Guidelines (OPG) foreground two language functions, narration and description, as critical or core functions for the advanced level. I selected narration as the function of interest for this research project because it seemed to me that narration, especially past-tense and present-tense narration, emerge in the spontaneous speech of learners of Russian before description. Having selected narration as the function of interest, I then set out to explore the nature of narration in the speech of native speakers of Russian, especially with regard to the frequency of complex sentences in their discourse, an examination within the domain of the discipline of applied linguistics (the study of language in the context of its use). In order to elicit narration, I asked several native speakers to retell the plot of a film or television program they had seen recently or one that had made a great impression on them. I recorded their speech and analyzed it for the balance of complex vs. simple or compound sentences, considering as a complex sentence any sentence with any kind of dependent clause. The results of my analysis are summarized in Table 1 (in which all names are pseudonyms):

Table 1. Native Speaker Narrations

Name	Total Sentences	Complex Sentences	Relative Clauses	Frequency of Relativization	Frequency of Complex Sentences
Zhora	19.0	10.0	4.0	.210	.526
Tania	17.0	6.0	0.0	.000	.353
Lena	12.0	7.0	9.0	.751	.583
Kira	14.0	10.0	10.0	.714	.714
Aliosha	30.0	16.0	14.0	.467	.533
Mean	**18.4**	**9.8**	**7.4**	**.403**	**.533**

As depicted in Table 1, native speakers of Russian provided an average narration of 18.4 sentences in length, of which 9.8 were complex sentences; in other words, roughly slightly more than half of their utterances were complex sentences. Of the 9.8 complex sentences, an average of 7.4 sentences featured relativization; in other words, slightly more than three quarters of the complex sentences or slightly more than 40% of all the utterances in the average narration featured relativization. By relativization, for the purposes of this project, I am referring to a complex sentence featuring a relative clause introduced by the relative pronoun *который*; I recognize that Russian allows for relative clauses introduced by other pronouns, such as *что* or *кто* (Timberlake, 1993), but I restricted the focus of this study just to the use of relative clauses with *который,* because they were by far the most frequent relative clauses in the speech of the native speakers, and in the speech of the students in the control and experimental groups described below. The frequencies of complex sentences and relative clauses in the speech of the native speakers in this experiment's findings are close to those observed by Zemskaia and Kapanadze (1978). Most of the texts recorded and transcribed by Zemskaia and Kapanadze are dialogic in nature, but in those that were monologic and of paragraph-length, 90-93% of the utterances featured complex syntax, but only 20-39% of the utterances featured relative clauses (alternatively, 22-42% of the complex sentences were complex due to the fact that they featured a relative clause).

I then compared the native speakers' narrations with narrations produced by two of the best (i.e., most communicative) students in the fourth-year Russian class of the University of Wisconsin-Madison, as depicted below in Table 2.

Table 2. Student Narrations: Pilot Test Group

Name	Total Sentences	Complex Sentences	Relative Clauses	Frequency of Relativization	Frequency of Complex Sentences
Dina	15.0	2.0	1.0	.067	.133
Rita	9.0	1.0	0.0	.000	.125
Mean	**12.00**	**1.5**	**0.5**	**.034**	**.129**

These two students had intermediate-mid level oral proficiency, so their narrations, of course, could not be expected to compare functionally to the narrations of the native speakers. Nonetheless, I was surprised to find how syntactically weak were their narrations. One of the students had a narration of only nine sentences in length, only one of which was complex; the other student

offered a 15-sentence narration including two complex sentences (one of which had a relative clause.) Clearly, and not at all surprisingly, there was a significant disjuncture between the speech of the native speakers and our students in terms of their control of Russian syntax.

Given the stark contrast between the performance of students in an upper-level Russian course and the performance of native speakers, it was clear that the investigation of a different approach to teaching speaking skills at this level was warranted. The experiment I would design and conduct would need to measure the acquisition of one particular structure, the subset of relative clauses introduced by the relative pronoun *который*, in students' narrations, because the use of *который*-clauses is closely linked to advanced-level oral proficiency in the provisional proficiency guidelines for Russian, and in the interpretation of many ACTFL-certified OPI testers of the generic oral proficiency guidelines for advanced level function. Accordingly, improvement in this aspect of spontaneous speech, while not necessarily in and of itself sufficient for a determination of advanced level proficiency, would be indicative of students' progress towards that goal.

Theoretical Background

In reflecting on the state of the students' speaking skills, I considered recent research in the area of second language acquisition. Second language acquisition research has long focused on the notion of input, in part due to Krashen's work in this area (1982). However, even as early as Wagner-Gough and Hatch's seminal paper in 1975 on the importance of input data, the field began to move toward a careful examination of output as an important variable in second language acquisition. Swain's 1985 study, one that involved a research design with narration tasks based on the retelling of a film, was critical for the understanding of output. In the conclusion of her analysis of a study of French immersion students in Canada, Swain wrote:

> Comprehensible output…is a necessary mechanism of acquisition independent of the role of comprehensible input. Its role is, at minimum, to provide opportunities for contextualized, meaningful use, to test out hypotheses about the target language, and to move the learner from a purely semantic analysis of the language to a syntactic analysis of it. Comprehensible output is, unfortunately, generally missing in typical classroom settings…(Swain, 1985: 252).

Since 1985, some second language acquisition researchers have focused on output (that is, learners' oral discourse) as a means of targeting syntax in the context of classroom instruction. The importance of Swain's argument about comprehensible output is underscored by the fact that it has been examined in numerous studies: Swain (1993); Izumi, Bigelow, Fujiwara and Fearnow (1999); Pica and Doughty (1985); Pica and Doughty (1988); Pica, Holliday, Lewis and Morgenthaler (1989); Ellis (1992) who devotes an entire chapter to this topic; Nobuyoshi and Ellis (1993); Swain and Lapkin (1995); and Nagata (1998). Nobuyoshi and Ellis's study describes the value of "focused communication tasks" and is particularly interesting in that the authors conclude that "pushing learners to improve the accuracy of their production results not only in immediate improved performance, but also in gains in accuracy over time" (Nobuyoshi and Ellis: 208). Gass (1997: 139) notes that the idea that output or language use could be part of the learning mechanism was not seriously contemplated prior to Swain's (1985) important paper, in which she (Swain) introduced the notion of comprehensible or 'pushed' output: "…using the language…may force the learner to move from semantic processing to syntactic processing…. [P]roducing the target language may be the trigger that forces the learner to pay attention to the means of expression needed in order to successfully convey his or her own intended meaning" (Swain, 1985: 249). According to what Ellis calls the output hypothesis, "production will aid acquisition only when the learner is pushed. Opportunities to speak may not in themselves be sufficient" (Ellis, 1990: 118). This suggests that the output-focused classroom cannot merely present opportunities for speech, but must create situations in which learners are compelled to speak, to negotiate meaning, and to achieve communicative goals. The intriguing notion of output focused instruction—the notion of pushing and stretching the students in their production of the target language, a conceptual parallel to Krashen's $i + 1$ (providing students input that is generally comprehensible plus some input for which they must reach and work to understand) that by analogy might be called $o + 1$ – motivated the structure of this experiment.

Design of the Experimental Class: A Project in Foreign Language Education

Elsewhere (Rifkin, 1998; Rifkin, 2000) I have described an advanced-level conversation course for Russian in which I cast task-based learning (based on Murphy, 1993) in a framework with consciousness-raising activities. I wrote that the consciousness-raising activities (student reflections on their own speech) "put

the burden of learning squarely on the shoulders of the learners" (Rifkin, 2000: p. 67) and had a positive correlation with student engagement in the learning process. The experimental class I designed was one based on film, rather than written texts, as the primary source of "input" for the learners. Film and video have long been important in the foreign language classroom. Many scholars have written about the contribution of film and video to foreign language instruction in the context of either listening or speaking or both: Baltova, 1994; Danahy, 1985; Donchin, 1985; Edasawa, Takeuchi and Nishizaki, 1990; Garza, 1991; Liskin-Gasparro and Véguez, 1990; MacWilliam, 1986; Parker, 1976; Rueberg-McCoy, 1990, and Terrell, 1993. Moreover, some scholars have written about criteria for selecting films for use in the foreign language classroom: Joiner, 1990; Mount, Mount and Toplin, 1988; Secules, Herron and Tomasello, 1992; and Voller and Widdows, 1993.

I decided to use the films selected for the course as the basis for pushing learners to communicate in the conversation class. In reviewing the literature on output-focused instruction, I speculated that if I could teach this output-focused conversation class for Russian-language students, a class in which students would be compelled to speak, then the students could practice narration tasks while reflecting on the syntax they were using. I hoped that the students in this course might come closer to the native speaker norms for narration and might approach, if not actually cross the intermediate/advanced threshold according to the OPG. If I were to compare narrations in the speech of students in one or more sections of the experimental class ("experimental group") and students in one or more sections of a conventional conversation class ("control group"), I thought I would be able to see differences in the syntax they used. Accordingly, the research hypothesis for this project can be stated as follows:

Research Hypothesis: Students in an experimental group with output-focused instruction and consciousness-raising activities will, after instruction, use complex syntax more frequently and more accurately in their Russian-language speech and, specifically, in their narration tasks, than peers in a control group with more conventional instruction.

The next steps of the experiment were to design the conversation class, and collect and analyze data from the narrations of students in the experimental and control groups.

The design of a conversation class may seem deceptively easy: it might seem that nothing could be simpler than bringing students together to talk with an instructor. However, as noted by Santoni (1975), the conversation class can be very challenging to design: teachers and students without appropriate preparation can lose track of the purpose that brings them together. In my description described as an advanced-level conversation class (Rifkin, 2000), I argued that film can be used very productively as the basis for learning tasks. To summarize my description of this class (Rifkin, 2000: p. 65-66), students in the experimental group watched a series of films over the course of the semester. Each week they saw a single film, but viewed it twice (both times for homework), with different assignments. After each viewing, they come to class ready to describe the major characters, the settings in which these characters live and work, to retell the plot of the film from the perspective of various characters and various points of time, and to argue and hypothesize about the film from various assigned perspectives.

All of these conversation tasks are derived from the OPG themselves. While completing these conversation tasks in class, the students worked in pairs and triads, talking with one another, trying to make each description and narration longer than the previous one. The students tape-recorded their descriptions and narrations; each student has his or her own audiocassette to tape his or her own monologues. After they had gone through a single set of descriptions and narrations with one partner, they changed partners and taped their next set of descriptions and narrations with a second partner. The students were assigned to help one another make their descriptions and narrations as long and as full as possible, using complex syntax (and the devices of coherence and cohesion, see Appendix A) to do so. The students reflected on their tapes periodically throughout the semester, considering most carefully their use of complex syntax and the devices of coherence and cohesion, and writing a brief self-analysis (in English) about their spoken Russian as evidenced on the tapes they have made of themselves. The students' own reflection on their learning, their analysis of their own tapes, was of critical importance to the success of this course.

Experimental and Control Group Treatments

Students in the experimental and control groups had pre-test and post-test oral proficiency interviews in which they were asked to retell the narrative of a film or television program they had recently seen. These interviews were transcribed and analyzed with regard to the frequency with which the students used relative clauses in narration tasks. Of course, the two groups differed in their instructional treatment. Students in the experimental group were 'pushed or stretched' in their speech performance, because they were constantly asked to narrate and describe, argue and hypothesize, using the list of devices of coherence and cohesion (Appendix A), especially the relative pronoun, in pairs and triads, all semester long. Their in-class oral performance was recorded every day and they were required to reflect on the recordings of their speech and write analyses from time to time.

In the control group, students used the textbook *Let's Talk about Life* (Tall and Vlasikova), read the texts and completed the exercises in several chapters, including those on university life, sexuality, and substance abuse. Students in that class were assigned to see two of the same films viewed by the students in the experimental class, *Malen'kaia Vera* and *Chastnaia zhizn'*. Students in the control group class spent almost all of their class completing the exercises in the textbook and practicing retelling the plot of the two films time in pairs, triads, and small groups. In the pre- and post-test oral proficiency interviews, students were asked to retell the stories of one of the two films.

In the experimental group students were given a list of conjunctions and other 'connecting words and phrases' (Appendix A) and asked to use those words and phrases in their speech as they completed narration, description, argument and hypothesis tasks. This class had 45 contact hours during the semester; 30 of these hours were dedicated to narration and description tasks the students were required to complete in pairs or triads for the duration of most of the class session. A total of 15 of the class sessions were devoted to extended argument and hypothesis, superior level functions according to the oral proficiency guidelines. All student speech was tape-recorded for self-analysis and for analysis for this investigation. The students wrote critiques in English of their speech performance in Russian on a regular basis, thus focusing their attention on the length and complexity of their discourse and the frequency with which they used relativization in their speech. These critiques constitute the 'consciousness raising' component of this experiment. Ellis (1992: 238) argues that "consciousness-raising facilitates the acquisition of grammatical knowledge

needed for communication by means of three processes: noticing, comparing, and integrating." In listening to their own tapes and engaging in self-reflection, students were expected to notice and compare, according to Ellis's terms, and it was hoped that they would then proceed to integrate.

The class from which the control group was drawn had 30 contact hours over the course of the 15-week semester; during those 30 hours, students were asked to complete listening, speaking, reading and writing tasks, but did not spend nearly as much time in extended discourse in the classroom because they were not asked to 'push and stretch' one another in the same way as their peers in the experimental class; they were not asked to focus their attention on complex syntax and were not provided a list of devices to facilitate relativization in their speech. Students in the control group studied the structure of relative clauses and wrote grammar exercises with the relative pronoun, in order to demonstrate conceptual mastery of this syntactical structure, while the students in the experimental group were not required to do any mechanical writing or grammar exercises, although they did write two compositions. Lastly, the students in the control group did not record their speech for self-reflection, and therefore did not reflect on their in-class speech performance to the same degree that their peers in the experimental group did.

An Investigation in Second Language Acquisition
Subjects

The experimental and control groups were composed of students in three distinct heterogeneous classes of students at various stages of the completion of their bachelor's, master's or doctoral degrees. Students in both the experimental and control groups demonstrated intermediate-mid or intermediate-high oral proficiency in oral proficiency interviews conducted before the experiment. The students in the experimental group were enrolled in two different sessions of the course I described earlier. The first of the experimental classes, conducted in the spring of 1997, consisted of seven American-born women, five of whom agreed to participate in the study (identified as Ira, Sveta, Raisa, Sonia, Nina—all pseudonyms—in Table 3). Of these five, one was an undergraduate who had studied in Russia for an entire year while in high school, while the other four were in various stages of graduate studies in Russian literature and other fields at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, and all of them had studied in Russia for at least a semester. The second of the experimental classes, conducted in the

spring of 1999, consisted of eight students, half of whom were native speakers of Russian.

Table 3. Student Narrations: Experimental Group

Name	Pre-Total	Pre-Comp	Pre-Rel	Pre-Comp-Freq	Pre-Rel-Freq	Post-Total	Post-Comp	Post-Rel	Post-Comp-Freq	Post-Rel-Freq
Ira	6.0	4.0	[2]4.0	.667	.667	18.0	16.0	10.0	.556	.889
Sveta	6.0	4.0	0.0	.667	0.0	10.0	8.0	5.0	.500	.800
Raisa	7.0	7.0	5.0	1.00	.714	8.0	6.0	4.0	.500	.750
Sonia	26.0	4.0	2.0	.154	.077	9.0	1.0	0.0	.000	.111
Nina	6.0	3.0	0.0	.500	0.0	10.0	8.0	[3]9.0	.910	.800
Rodia	17.0	4.0	1.0	.235	.059	30.0	15.0	2.0	.066	.500
Ania	16.0	9.0	3.0	.563	.188	22.0	14.0	7.0	.318	.636
Mila	14.0	4.0	0.0	.286	0.0	18.0	6.0	1.0	.055	.333
Kostia	6.0	1.0	0.0	.167	0.0	37.0	21.0	5.0	.135	.568
Mean	11.6	4.4	1.7	.379	.147	18.0	10.6	4.8	.337	.677

Table 4. Student Narrations: Control Group

Name	Pre-Total	Pre-Comp	Pre-Rel	Pre-Comp-Freq	Pre-Rel-Freq	Post-Total	Post-Comp	Post-Rel	Post Comp Freq	Post-Rel Freq
Vadim	3.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	10.0	3.0	[4]3.0	.300	.300
Dima	8.0	2.0	0.0	.250	0.0	25.0	[5]6.0	[6]1.0	.240	.040
Mean	5.5	1.0	0.0	.182	0.0	17.5	4.5	2.0	.257	.114

Of those students who were not native speakers of Russian, three were native speakers of English and one was a native speaker of another European language. All four of these students agreed to participate and they are identified as Rodia, Ania, Mila and Kostia in Table 3. Nine students were enrolled in the control

[2] Includes two errors in the declension of который in an attempt to create relative clauses in this narration.
[3] Includes one error in the declension of который in an attempt to create a relative clause in this narration.
[4] One of the attempts to create relative clauses in this narration resulted in an error in the declension of который.
[5] Includes two errors.
[6] In addition to the one correct relative clause, this speaker failed to use the relative pronoun for relative clauses in which it was required, e.g., Лена встретила, встретила с молодой человек, называется, не называется, зовут Сергей, и она, они влюбились (sic).

class, another conversation class available for undergraduate or graduate credit conducted in the spring of 1997; of these nine, two students agreed to participate in the study. Both were men, and both were graduate students, one in Russian literature, the other in another field. Both had studied in Russia before, one for a summer, the other for a semester, and both were American-born native speakers of English.

Data Analysis and Discussion

While all of the students in both the control and experimental groups demonstrated intermediate-mid or intermediate-high oral proficiency in the pre-test OPI, two of the students in the experimental group demonstrated advanced-level oral proficiency in the post-test OPI. (One of these had a pre-test rating of intermediate-high, but the other had a pre-test rating of intermediate-mid.) These ratings are only advisory, because they were not second-rated by another ACTFL-certified OPI tester. However, the ratings of the students' oral proficiency are, in fact, not the focus of the present analysis. As we look at the data in Tables 3 and 4, we can see that the speech of the students in the experimental group features consistently more frequent and more accurate use of relativization than the speech of the students in the control group.[7] The learners in the experimental group demonstrated frequencies of relativization approaching the range of native speakers in most cases, while the learners in the control group did not. (I will not argue that the sample size in this research project is large enough to warrant the conducting of t-tests to compare the means, but the numbers are interesting in and of themselves as a case study.) While the learners in the experimental group could not, in the course of a mere 45 contact hours, master both speech functions critical to advanced-level oral proficiency (narration and description in paragraph-length discourse in all time frames), the improvement in their control of relativization suggests that they are better positioned to achieve advanced-level oral proficiency in the context of a

[7] I have chosen *not* to present data on T-units, the minimal terminal unit (as introduced by Hunt in 1965) because, as Bardovi-Harlig argues (1992), sentence analysis more accurately reflects learner performance. In examining T-unit calculations for this set of data, as well as coordination indices (a concept introduced by Bardovi-Harlig), neither measurement adequately conveys the information I wish to present here. T-unit analysis reduces measures of complexity, especially with regard to subordinate clauses, while Bardovi-Harlig's coordination index fails to capture the use of subordination (attending primarily to coordination, which can be seen to decline as learners use more subordination in their speech and writing).

semester- or year-long study abroad program than learners with less control of relativization. Arguably, the students in the experimental group would show an increased likelihood of achieving advanced-level oral proficiency after a study-abroad experience due to the nature of the output focused instruction precisely because the output focused instruction improved their control of relativization, a defining characteristic of advanced level speech. The students were very keen observers of their own speech, as evidenced by what they wrote in their critiques (see Appendix B).

Caveats, Constraints and Questions for Further Research

The sample size in this study is, of course, too small to allow us to generalize to the broader population of students of Russian. This is a case study; it is presented here primarily to spark a discussion of approaches to teaching at the advanced level. With only nine students in the experimental group, two in the control group, and five native speakers with whose speech the student discourse is compared, it would be impossible to argue that the findings reported here are anything more than interesting. Moreover, I am mindful of the fact that the students in the control group were all men. Gender may well be a factor in the students' performance, and only a larger study, with mixed-gender groups, would clarify the degree to which gender is related to oral performance in output-focused instruction.

Furthermore, the narrations studied only focused on *пересказ* or retelling tasks based on films the students (and native speakers) had seen in the recent past. It is possible that this task is inherently more complex (or less complex) than other narration tasks for some speakers. It is important to note that students in the experimental class signed up for a more advanced class than those in the control class, as well as for a class whose very name included the word 'film,' while students in the control group signed up for a class required for the major in Russian which did not feature the word film in its title. It is possible that students in the experimental group were simply more interested in film as an art and, therefore, performed better on narration tasks related to film texts. Furthermore, students in the experimental class were required to watch Russian films every week throughout the semester, while students in the control group were required to watch only two films in the semester, but were required to listen to audiotapes every week. Students in the experimental group were not asked to listen to audiotapes, and were not provided audiotapes to which they could listen. However, students were not asked to report whether they had seen

any Russian films in the course of the semester other than those assigned in each class (likely), they were not asked to report whether they had listened to any audiotapes other than those assigned in each class (highly unlikely), and they were not asked to report whether they had engaged in Russian-language conversation in any other contexts, such as with friends, in other classes, at 'Russian Table,' or in other places (quite possible). It is important, therefore, to revisit this project not only with a larger group of participants, but also with a broader range of tasks representative of both advanced-level language functions, narration and description, including also the function of comparison, which can be used in the context of an oral proficiency interview to elicit either narration or description (and is, indeed, sometimes considered the third function at the advanced level, although it is not a 'core' function at this level.)

Despite all these confounding variables, this research project suggests important directions for future study to help move the foreign language profession toward greater success, especially at the intermediate/advanced threshold, a threshold that seems so impenetrable for many of our students. Indeed, not only does our work in this regard affect our students' foreign language education, but their liberal education more generally, as noted by one of the students in the experimental group: "Believe it or not, I actually think that I am speaking better in English due to all this practice in Russian. Listening back through my tapes I have noticed that I am talking more, longer, and in a more ordered manner. Honestly, I think just getting used to hearing myself speak (in any language, let alone Russian) for more than five minutes straight is a feat." In order to verify findings here, it would be useful to consider studies with larger subject pools not only in Russian, but in other Slavic languages (and, indeed, in non-Slavic languages), as well as in other instructional contexts.

Appendix A Devices of Coherence and Cohesion (Rifkin, 2000)

Безусловно
Благодаря тому, что
Ведь
Вместе того, что
Вообще говоря
Во-первых, во-вторых
Всё-таки

В виду того, что
В конце концов
В отличие от чего
В первую очередь
В результате чего
В связи с тем, что
В соответствии с чем
В таком случае

Действительно
Дело в том, что
До сих пор
До тех пор, пока не
До того, как
Если
За – до того, как
Значит

Из-за чего
Кажется, что
Как будто
Как говорится
Как ни
Как оказалось
Когда
Который
Кроме того, что
К сожалению, К счастью
Мало того, что
Между тем
Например
На всякий случай
На самом деле
Несмотря на то, что
Несомненно
Но
Однако
Одним словом
Перед тем, как
Подобен (подобна, подобно, подобны) чему
После того, как
Потому что
По крайней мере
По мере того, как
По следующим причинам
По сравнению с чем
Прежде всего
Прежде чем (+ инфинитив)
Сначала
Согласно чему,
Согласно с чем
Судя по тому, что
С одной стороны.... с другой стороны
С тех пор, как
С точки зрения (кого?)
Таким образом
Так сказать
Так, как (так, что)
Тем более
Тем не менее
То, как (то, что)
Хотя
Через – после того, как
Честно говоря

Appendix B: Excerpts from Student Self-Critiques

Nina: "I think I've improved a lot since the beginning of the course, and I actually feel like my speaking ability is back at the same level as it was when I left Russia last summer, and that in itself is quite an accomplishment.... Sometimes I even feel like I can speak a little better than I could at the end of my year in Russia, because I'm getting used to speaking in paragraphs, ordering my thoughts, and using connecting devices, whereas in Russia I just had conversations and was never required to say more than a few sentences at a time. I did start preparing better after my last tape analysis, and I definitely improved my fluency and use of devices of coherence and cohesion on those days when I was well-prepared….My use of connecting devices has increased since the beginning of the course, and maybe even since my last analysis...I'm using more sophisticated devices like с моей точки зрения, несомненно, с одной стороны/с другой стороны, безусловно, по сравнению с, none of which were in my vocabulary before taking this class. I have started using them even more in my writing..."

Sonia: "I feel like I am doing better with descriptions and narrations when I had prepared a certain amount of time beforehand, however, if I prepared too much, I ended up trying to stick too closely to a prepared script. I found myself wasting time trying to remember words I'd looked up, rather than circumlocuting so I could get on with the topic. I heard myself on tape making a fair amount of mistakes in aspect, but then catching and correcting them. I still seem to be doing a lot of pausing and stammering. I repeated как сказать rather often, but did not use который often enough, and when I did use it, it was sometimes unnecessary, for example, "У нее такое лицо, которое выражает..." instead of simply, "Ее лицо выражает..." In general, I don't think I made as much progress as I wanted to..."

Sveta (whose post-test [unofficial] OPI was rated at the advanced level): "I truly feel that there has been noticeable improvement in my language over the course of the semester. My use of devices of coherence and cohesion has...significantly increased. Furthermore, I feel that I am speaking more comfortably and using more complex sentences. I have grown much more comfortable arguing and debating in Russian, too."

Raisa: "I found I used the word который [relative pronoun required, in Russian to introduce a relative clause] a lot in my discussion today. I was really pleased I could carry out this sort of abstract discussion in Russian. I remember trying to have these sorts of discussions in Russia (debating political questions, etc.) and failing miserably. I spent so much time formulating every sentence that I would lose my train of thought altogether before I could utter two sentences. Here, although in places I am not particularly graceful, I do manage to keep some sort of argument together. Of course, this is due mostly to our favorite words [devices of coherence and cohesion]; while I am trying to work in the words, I necessarily have to structure my speech logically. Believe it or not, I actually think that I am speaking better in English due to all this practice in Russian. Listening back through my tapes I have noticed that I am taking more, longer, and in a more ordered manner. Honestly, I think just getting used to hearing myself speak (in any language, let alone Russian) for more than five minutes straight is a feat."

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