

The road of language goes on forever

Learning Russian can be a daunting task, but never has knowledge of a language been more valuable.

by Frank Ellis

When we learn another language, we acquire another home. I do not know to whom we can attribute this idea, but it is one which I wholeheartedly endorse. The study of a language and literature other than one's own is a journey without end, a watershed in one's life. With regard to Russian, it is a journey fraught with labor and sacrifice, but not without a deep sense of achievement as this frustrating language is slowly mastered.

To what extent is Russian's daunting reputation justified? Let me say from the outset that the alphabet, often cited as an insurmountable obstacle, is not a problem. With its mixture of Latin and Greek characters, the Russian alphabet suggests an esoteric code, an impenetrable mystery. The reality is somewhat different. Within a few days, most students are able to produce accurate

handwriting.

Pronunciation is a problem, but then all languages have their idiosyncrasies. English abounds in them. When a befuddled American tourist asked me to explain why the word Leominster (a town in the West of England) is pronounced "Lemster," I had no answer. In Russian, the problem is of a different nature. Pronunciation is difficult, but consistent. Russian exploits combinations of sounds that we seldom use in English. Greater attention has to be paid to hard and soft consonants, since this directly affects the meaning of a word.

The real difficulty is the grammar, a difficulty compounded by the fact that very few students these days seem to receive comprehensive instruction in the elements of English grammar. Thus, for many, concepts such as case and tense, prepositions and gerunds are first introduced through another language. In modern English, grammar is frequently

ignored. However, in Russian we cannot ignore the rules of grammar which are more rigorously applied. Clearly, a detailed knowledge of English grammar will enable us to avoid replicating the error in Russian.

The real difficulty is the grammar...for many, concepts such as case and tense, prepositions and gerunds are first introduced through another language.

Were that all, then Russian would not justify its reputation for difficulty. Poor knowledge of English grammar impedes the progress of the student of French, German, Italian and Spanish.

Nevertheless, the crux of the problem is still the grammar, both

in its irregularities and in its sheer volume. For many rules there is an exception. Common nouns such as "son," "daughter," "mother" and "friend" appear to go their own way, in what to the disheartened student is an unjustified, inexplicable and perverse flouting of the rules of declension. These exceptions—and there are many—have to be memorized. Understanding comes later. Nor is there a shortcut to learning the large numbers of words and set expressions which one needs for effective communication: it requires a great deal of time and effort. It is this as much as any intrinsic difficulty which makes the first four to five months so demanding.

These aspects of learning Russian are culturally unacceptable too. Ours is an age that craves instant gratification. It is eager for quick results, impatient with rules and unsympathetic toward those who advocate self-discipline and application. Yet, if significant

progress is to be made in Russian, then self-discipline and application are essential.

Mastery of a difficult language brings many rewards. The importance of Russian in the modern world hardly needs to be stressed. Under the leadership of Gorbachev, the Soviet Union has taken the first tentative steps to entering the comity of nations. Despite its apparent internal weakness, the Soviet Union will continue to exert a massive influence on world affairs. Accurate analysis of Soviet politics, sociology, military doctrine—and should the Soviet Union eventually adopt a free market economy—business trends, all require a sound command of the Russian language. Demand for qualified speakers and writers of Russian will continue.

Dr. Ellis is an assistant professor of Russian and German at UNLV

The truth must always be told

As the United States rushes aid to the Kurds, others wonder why the U.S. has turned its back:

by P. Klahn-Gboloh Jarbah

Permit me to call public attention to a hidden agenda item—the plight of the Liberian people.

A brutal civil war broke out in that tiny West African nation of 2.5 million in December 1989.

At the inception of the war, we—Liberians—called upon our friend and long-time ally, the United States, to intervene and halt the conflict. Repeated calls were made only to be told it was not the policy of the U.S. Government to get involved in the internal affairs of other countries. So as a result of the "non-intervention policy," U.S. Marines sat off the coast of Liberia and watched as thousands of people were slaughtered. They were under orders to evacuate Americans and other Western Nationals and not Liberians.

Today, the country is still under seize. Thousands of lives and

properties were destroyed. Many fled their homes to find themselves in refugee camps in neighboring Sierra Leone, Guinea, Ivory Coast, and as far as Nigeria and Ghana. But I see some contradiction in the U.S. non-intervention policy.

If you recall, "when Iraq invaded" Kuwait last August, the United States was "invited" by the Kuwaiti ruling family to fight on their behalf. The United States responded swiftly and favorably to the invitation, leading a campaign to condemn the Baghdad government. The condemnation was followed by a series of actions—imposition of tough sanctions and a military confrontation. In recent weeks, the world has witnessed

yet another contradiction in the U.S. non-intervention policy. The United States invaded and positioned troops in Iraqi territories in the name of humanity—the Kurds' plight.

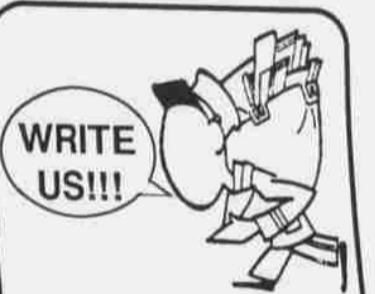
I am not opposed to helping the Kurds. I commend the Bush administration for helping. But the truth must be told. The U.S. policy toward Liberia was inhumane and ungodly. The record shows that the United States and her European allies place more importance on the lives of some than they do others.

In the April 16 issue of *USA Today*, Andrew Natsios, head of the U.S. Agency for International Development Office of Foreign

Disasters, said, "Kurds' plight surpasses Africans." It is a shame and equally disheartening for anyone to suggest that a Kurdish child feels more pain than a Liberian child. It is inhumane for an officer of the U.S. government to suggest that a hungry Kurdish woman feels more hunger than a Liberian woman. *Natsios is in essence saying a Kurdish life is of more value than a Liberian life—or that God made a creative error.*

I understand that we now live in a "new world"—a world wherein humanity is governed by moral and human consciousness. If my understanding of the "new world order" is true, then it is time for the United States of America to show the same level of commitment, consistency and moral imperative to the Liberian plight. Equally, the Liberians are in need of food, clothing, medical supplies and protection. We call upon the United States for help.

It is inhumane for an officer of the U.S. government to suggest that a hungry Kurdish woman feels more hunger than a Liberian woman.



The Yellin' Rebel wants your opinions. Letters should be approximately 300 words, and have name, address, phone number, major and year in school. Send to:

**The Yellin Rebel
c/o Letters to the Editor
MSU 302
4505 Maryland Pkwy.
Las Vegas, NV 89154**

To accommodate as many letters as possible, The Yellin' Rebel reserves the right to edit all letters for space and clarity.

PART 2

There is more to a college education than entrance requirements

by Thomas Rodriguez

Editor's note: Thursday, Rodriguez dismissed the idea of community colleges being a springboard to a four year university as untrue. Rodriguez claims that the university system is already failing minorities, and that to raise enrollment requirements will only make a bad situation worse.

Until there is sufficient documentation to show just how many minority students have and are transferring from Nevada's community colleges into state universities as a priority mission, then the Regents, as elected representatives of all the people of this state, should not act to raise admission requirements.

Furthermore, until we see

a real physical and financial commitment on the part of the university system to open up the system to minorities, both in student enrollment and hiring, then nothing should be done to change the present system; a system that has only recently begun to show marked success in raising the number of minority students.

To illustrate the extent of non-participation by minorities in the university system, the 1989-90 University of Nevada System Affirmative Action Report revealed a total system student enrollment of 59,195 students. Of these, only 8,698 (14.7 percent) were minorities. Comparatively, the minority population in the state of Nevada in 1990 was estimated at 260,954 or 21.8 percent, and was growing at a rate much greater than the white population. Conversely, the Affirmative Action Report showed

only 502 (11.8 percent) minorities employed out of 4,225 professional staff. There were only 211 (9.5 percent) minority faculty members.

The statistics suggest that the University System still has a long way to go before it demonstrates its commitment to the minority residents of Nevada.

The above statistics, objectively, suggest that the university system still has a long way to go before it demonstrates its commitment to the minority residents of Nevada.

Therefore, we would urge the Board of Regents not to act hastily or irresponsibly in adopting new admission requirements and urge them not to make a decision which could undo the positive advances of the last several years.

If the regents really want to improve the quality of education in this state, I suggest that they do so by:

- 1) hiring and retaining competent minority professionals
- 2) increasing salaries
- 3) implementing more programs to help struggling minority students stay in school and improve their grades
- 4) significantly expand scholarships and grants for minority students, without regard to whether they are class valedictorians or straight A students
- 5) start working more with minority students enrolled in junior and senior high schools and intervene more quickly and effectively with students having low grades

6) improve transfer of credits from community colleges to universities

7) establish minority recruitment and retention programs in every college and university in Nevada

When the minority communities of Nevada are assured that the above recommendations will be implemented or proof that they have been implemented, we can assure you that the minority communities of this state will be the first to support the raising of admission requirements.

Rodriguez is a member of the Latin Chamber of Commerce Education Committee