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РУССКИЙ БЕЗ ГРАНИЦ

Part one.

The first part introduces the alphabet – pronunciation and writing. The authors are careful to point out the difference between letters and sounds and stress the fact that one letter may represent more than one sound. This includes the pronunciation of unstressed vowels as well as the devoicing of voiced consonants at the end of words and assimilation (voiceless to voiced before voiced consonants [сделать] and voiced to voiceless before unvoiced consonants [из школы]). The difference between hard and soft consonants is also treated. These principles form the basis for exercises such as words with missing letters and various word games. The authors also include various interesting facts for students and proverbs, sayings, and expressions (съесть пуд соли, каша во рту) which they probably know already. There are also short readings, mainly poetry, from various authors. Internet activities are also included.

Part two.

Part two covers the principles of Russian grammar and is arranged in traditional groupings: nouns, adjectives, pronouns, verbs, verbs of motion, adverbs, participles, gerunds, and orthography. Nouns are presented one case at a time in both singular and plural forms. I found the tables a bit confusing at first and I would suggest that they be redesigned for future editions of the text (the bold endings under each group of nouns took a bit of getting used to – they should be more prominent and should be placed above each group of nouns as headings rather than underneath them). I would also omit terminology such as first, second, third and fourth case – these terms do not explain/indicate the function of each case. There are plenty of exercises, both mechanical and contextualized, for each case. There are also good illustrative materials for each case. The treatment of adjectives and pronouns is done well; there are plenty of exercises for each point presented, and the readings are appropriate for the target audience. Verbs are introduced beginning with the past tense; I would add вести - вёл to the group of verbs that end in 'л' in the past tense. The explanation for second conjugation verbs – all verbs with infinitives ending in ить - is not completely accurate; no mention is made of the monosyllabic verb class бить, пить, etc. and the monosyllabic verb жить – these could be called monosyllabic verbs ending in –ить, and брить could be one of them. The verb стелить, derived from стлать, is, to be sure, a first conjugation verb in the dictionary and in Russia children are taught that брить and стелить are exceptions to the “-ить rule”. But since most Russians with whom I have come in contact write it with second conjugation endings (Google – 24,000 hits for стелят, 22,900 for стелят), I would not include it. Verbs of the бить, пить group are omitted from the main types of verbs on page 118, but they occur later on in the lesson. Плевать is used in an exercise; it should be included in the table. The treatment of participles and verbal adverbs (gerunds) is excellent, especially the exercises that accompany these grammar points. The final section on spelling deals with those problems which most

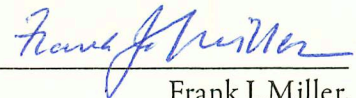
commonly confront heritage speakers of Russian: the spelling of unstressed vowels, the spelling of voiced and unvoiced consonants, when to write *не* or *ни* and the spelling of prefixes. Exercises include numerous texts with misspellings that are common among young native speakers of Russian. A series of review exercises on all points of grammar concludes this part. In this part the authors make extensive use sayings and expressions already known to many Russians to illustrate grammatical points.

Part three

The third part consists of readings and exercises based upon them. There is a pre-reading exercise for each text and post-reading exercises are various types. I especially liked the exercises in which definitions are given for words that the students have to find in the text (exercise 5 page 20) or arranging words into semantic groups (exercise 7 page 26). There is a good selection of writers in this part, both 19th-Century and contemporary writers, but woman writers are underrepresented. Only three female writers (Токаева, Улицкая, Петрушевская) are included in this part, and their work occurs at the end.

Conclusion

This is an excellent textbook with exercises and explanations that are conducive to learning. The design of the explanations is such that teachers who are familiar with Russian grammar will have no problems teaching from the text. The readings are entertaining, and there is a great deal of factual matter that every Russian knows in the text. Students will not be bored with this textbook.



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