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Multimedia Edutainment Projects in Global Media

Master Thesis

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Introduction

In the last 10 years demand for different perspectives on news and current affairs has increased¹. Availability of technology and mobility of people are driving the international news consumption further. While big state-sponsored organizations keep fighting for their influence worldwide, commercial news outlets are stitching holes in their business models, and public service media are trying to integrate innovation in news.

But even in the homogeneous global media market content still matters and has not taken a backseat to technology and communications. Both mature media markets with the strong public broadcasting services like Britain and Germany and emerging markets like Russia face the audience fragmentation, overflow of information and digital disruption. In the densely saturated media environment, foreign-oriented media – multilingual television and radio broadcasters, print publications and online projects – feel the urge to develop a sound content strategy aimed at getting as many people as possible to spend as much time as possible with their journalism.

Relevance of the topic is explained by the following observation: long-term strategic reports of the well-established media show that playing the moral card is not a magic pill anymore, and a more personalized and customizable

¹ PricewaterhouseCoopers. (2016). *The Rise of Cross-Border News: An Independent Research study by PwC UK, Commissioned by RT*. URL: <http://www.pwc.com/gx/en/entertainment-media/publications/assets/cross-border-news.pdf>

approach is needed to create value for media consumers. For international media with a global outreach, strong national identification, multilingual and multimedia sources, edutainment can be one of the targeted media experiences that will help to differentiate the news provider among other media and turn a non-user into a loyal consumer.

Novelty of the research: edutainment and especially language media didactics have been actively embraced by educators as a strategy that facilitates learning experience. In the media and communication studies, however, edutainment seems to have been taken for granted as a combination of two media functions – education and entertainment. Presented from a cross disciplinary and practice-driven perspective, the current work aims to fill a void in the research field and rethink ‘edutainment’ as a media experience that can be addressed to engage media audiences and boost their loyalty.

Another novation concerns Russia’s cross-border news providers as a newly emerged subject of media scientific enquiry and understudied subject of the Russian language media didactics. In the globalization era, international media still exist within the national media systems and follow their guidelines. With multilingualism on the one hand, and English as a lingua franca on the other hand, promotion of other national languages via media is essential.

Object: foreign-oriented international media with the strong national identification, multilingual and multimedia content, present in the mature media markets (Germany’s public broadcaster Deutsche Welle and its online version as a successful model), and in the emerging media markets (Russia’s print publication and multimedia online project Russia Beyond the Headlines – hereinafter RBTH - and as a case study).

Aspect: language-learning component in a content strategy aimed at providing edutainment experience for international audience - German as a

foreign language in the case of Deutsche Welle, and Russian as a foreign language² – hereinafter RFL - for Russia Beyond The Headlines.

Aim of the research is to analyze language-learning initiatives taken by globally oriented media abroad and in Russia - from the Soviet times to the present day, in order to test Russia Beyond The Headlines as a potential provider of Russian as a foreign language.

Tasks:

1. To particularize edutainment as a media experience with the focus on foreign language didactics;
2. To study premises, challenges and opportunities for integrating Russian as a foreign language component into the newly emerged international media based on the experiences of mature media players abroad;
3. To assess the potential of Russia Beyond The Headlines as an online communicator and as a media organization to provide Russian language learning;
4. To propose recommendations for Russia Beyond The Headlines in developing their content strategy for a better audience's engagement.

Chronological framework: the period of testing RBTH.com as a platform for RFL learning started in the fall 2016 with the preliminary survey of twenty one non-Russian speakers and the subsequent launch of the video series 'Russian2Go' on rbth.com/education. The final stage of the research falls on the spring 2017 with interviewing experts and surveying users' preferences related to producing and consuming RFL content.

Literature review. For the purpose of unveiling possible ramifications of media globalization, books and journal articles by McChesney (2001), Robertson

² Russian studies include three main fields of research - Russian as a state language (spoken by native Russians), Russian as a non-native language (commonly spoken by CIS citizens), and Russian as a foreign language (spoken by foreigners and expatriates).

and White (2007), Kellner and Pierce (2007) to name a few were examined. Independent analytical outlook on global media by PwC consulting company (2016) along with the strategic media plans of The New York Times (2014), Deutsche Welle (2014), and The BBC (2015) helped to bring theoretical concepts into practical issues. In the empirical part of the case studies, public reports of Deutsche Welle (2013) and media kits of Russia Beyond the Headlines (2016) allowed to discover their key strengths and weaknesses. Academic foundation of the research regarding media functions is based on the major works by Wright (1959), McLuhan (1967), and McQuail (2010), while national media systems with the focus on Germany and Russia were discussed within comparative media studies by Hallin and Manchini (2004), Kleinsteuber (2004), and Vartanova (2012). Publications by Corona and Cozzarelli (2013), Haber (2014), Tummons and Powell (2014) largely contributed to understanding of edutainment as a learning experience. In the context of edutainment for media engagement, however, studies by Youngman (2010), Calder and Malthouse (2008) with the content strategy insights from Lavine (2015) proved to be more significant. Books and articles by Kelly-Holmes (2013), Proshina and Eddy (2016) conveyed about how media uses multilingualism as media content and/or employs a foreign language for communicating to a broader audience. Theoretical aspects of computer mediated language learning are borrowed from the works by Hoven (1997) and Warschauer (2000), while Onkovich (2013), Bogomolov (2008), Nummikoski (2005), and Arefiev (2012) provided detailed accounts on RFL learning in general and RFL media didactics in particular. Laws and regulations of the Russian Federation – federal laws, presidential decrees, targeted programs - helped to understand the legal framework behind some foreign-oriented media in Russia and explain inconsistencies within the national language policy.

Methodological foundation: the empirical part of the study uses a mixed-methods approach that combines quantitative methods with qualitative methods. Quantitative methods of web-analysis and social media monitoring – Google Analytics and Facebook - were used to measure the actual and potential audience’s demand for learning Russian as a foreign language via online media. Qualitative method of expert interviews were used to understand the challenges and opportunities of Russian media in the field of social forces to produce edutainment content with an emphasis on learning Russian as a foreign language.

Probation of the work: the abstracts ‘Multimedia edutainment projects in global media: cases of BBC, Deutsche Welle, Russia Beyond The Headlines’ were presented at the table talks of the III Scientific and Practical Student Conference ‘Studying Media and Communications: Theory, Practice and Research Perspectives’, February 17 - 18, 2017, at the Faculty of Communications, Media and Design, NRU HSE, Moscow³. The pilot project ‘Russian2Go’ was successfully implemented in cooperation with the central desk for education at Russia Beyond The Headlines.

Structure of the work: the master thesis includes introduction, three chapters, conclusion, bibliography and appendices.

Chapter 1. Global media and edutainment

1.1. Media Globalization

Growth of the Internet use and shifting media consumption patterns have made traditional media more concerned with developing customizable modes of interaction. Radio, television and print press’s monopoly on news is loosening

³ The abstract is available at <https://www.hse.ru/mediaresearch/conferenceprogram2017>

due to the changing standards of verification and the viral nature of social media⁴. That forces globally oriented media to take their online presence more seriously than ever, cutting costs on physical production and investing more efforts into the web development and social media. In parallel, low distribution costs have given a rise to the supply of, and demand for cross-border news. According to an independent study by PwC, where the ten countries were covered, including mature markets like UK, US, Germany, and emerging markets like India, Argentina, and Russia, people's demand for different perspectives on news has increased over the past 10 years⁵. Although US and UK sources dominate among cross-border news consumers, which can be explained by the maturity of the media markets and their natural reporting in English, it is emerging news providers that have shown the biggest growth – with Russian (225%), Asian (258%), and Middle East sources (305%)⁶.

Trying to understand the reasons behind the trend, analytics from PwC defined three primary drivers – availability (technology, number of sources), curiosity (global events, outside perspectives), and mobility (travel, expats and emigrants)⁷. The three perfectly fit the broader concept of globalization, offered by International Monetary Fund in 2000, - a historical process with four general aspects: trade, capital movements, movement of people and spread of knowledge (technology). The term globalization has been a mainstreaming buzzword since the 1980s, and in the last twenty years extensive research has been done on media globalization that varies in positions - from enthusiastic and globophilistic

⁴ Chadwick, A. (2013). *The Hybrid Media System: Politics and Power*. New York: Oxford University Press, p. 54

⁵ Ibid., p.5

⁶ PricewaterhouseCoopers. (2016). *The Rise of Cross-Border News*, p.7.

⁷ Ibid., p.10-17.

Friedman's 'The World is Flat'⁸ to critical and socialistic McChesney's 'The Global Media: The New Missionaries of Corporate Capitalism'⁹. Cultural globalization manifested itself in standardization of cultural experiences around the world, including food, clothing and entertainment¹⁰. Different patterns of standardization led to a myriad of sociological concepts - from Coca-colonization¹¹ and McDonaldization¹² to Disneyfication¹³ and CNNization¹⁴. The latter two are often used as an illustrative example of globalization in media business. In the current study, media globalization is regarded as a framework, in which cross-border media play a key, but controversial role.

Before entering upon the controversy, it is crucial to distinguish between cross-border, foreign-oriented, international and global media and then to provide insights into the key trends of media globalization. Cross-border is the news that media consumers read or watch on a regular basis that is produced outside the country in which they currently live¹⁵. Foreign-oriented media are usually local,

⁸ Friedman, T.L. (2005). *The World is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-First Century*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

⁹ Herman, E., McChesney, R. W. (2001). *Global Media: The New Missionaries of Global Capitalism*. London: Continuum.

¹⁰ Watson, J.L. (2007). Cultural Globalization. *Encyclopedia Britannica*. Last Updated August 1, 2016. URL: <https://global.britannica.com/science/cultural-globalization>

¹¹ Pendergrast, M. (1993, August 15). Viewpoints: A Brief History of Coca-Colonization. *The New York Times*. URL: <http://www.nytimes.com/1993/08/15/business/viewpoints-a-brief-history-of-coca-colonization.html>

¹² Ritzer, G. (2014). *The McDonaldization of Society*. SAGE Publications.

¹³ Kehoe, A. (1991). *Christian Contradictions and the World Revolution*. Dublin: Glendale.

¹⁴ Thussu, D. K. (2003). Live TV and Bloodless Deaths: War, Infotainment and 24/7 News. In D. K. Thussu & D. Freedman (Eds.), *War and The Media: Reporting conflict 24/7* (pp. 117-132). London: SAGE.

¹⁵ PricewaterhouseCoopers. (2016). *The Rise of Cross-Border News: An Independent Research study by PwC UK, Commissioned by RT*. URL: <http://www.pwc.com/gx/en/entertainment-media/publications/assets/cross-border-news.pdf>, p. 3

but cater to English-speaking expats, e.g. The Moscow Times, Moscow-based daily English-language newspaper. 'International' refers to affairs of two or more countries, while the term 'global' deals with issues of the entire world. As for the audience, it is hard to draw a dividing line between cross-border, foreign-oriented, international and global, because the mass media have an inherent potential to be 'global'¹⁶. With regards to media organizations, however, the notions 'international' and 'global' undergo the most conceptual confusions.

Media became globalized due to the market exploitation of digital technology and the process of media conglomeration. Today global media exemplify a few transnational corporations such as Disney, Sony, AOL-Time Warner, News Corporation, and Bertelsmann that are highly commercialized and wield media power to dominate the global market¹⁷. International media usually refer to the media – radio, television, and the Internet, - that communicate to the global audience, are often state-affiliated, serve the public and represent the national prestige. When it comes to the media coverage and target audience, the media under study – Deutsche Welle and Russia Beyond The Headlines, - all claim to be global. They report on global issues in multiple languages and use their online presence to reach out to the people worldwide. However, as long as the media operate within their respective national media systems, their role in the global media system remains debatable.

In the early half of the twentieth century, the BBC, Voice of America, Deutsche Welle and a few other broadcasting services pioneered in using external services for reporting across the borders¹⁸. Today, however, the global market

¹⁶ McQuail, D. (2010). *McQuail's Mass Communication Theory* (6th ed.). SAGE, p. 60

¹⁷ McChesney, R.W. (2001). Global Media, Neoliberalism, and Imperialism. *Monthly Review*. Vol. 52, 10. URL: <http://monthlyreview.org/2001/03/01/global-media-neoliberalism-and-imperialism/>

¹⁸ Herman, E., McChesney, R. W. (2001). *Global Media: The New Missionaries of Global Capitalism*. London: Continuum.

situation has changed for the benefit of multinational media giants. The shift in media influence from international to global entities can be explained, on the one hand, by the developments in the nation-states, including extensive immigration and multiculturalism¹⁹, and on the other hand, by digital revolution, that peaked as the dot-com boom in the late 1990s²⁰. Along with the stunning level of commercialization and media conglomeration, international media outlets – even the most established ones - have been suffering from digital disruption. The New York Times in its Innovation Report (2014) defined ‘digital disruption’ as a competitive landscape in which news start-ups use innovative technology to create cheaper alternatives to products sold by strong incumbents. According to the ‘Timesian’ executives, the disruptors like BuzzFeed, Vox Media, Yahoo News, and Huffington Post come from outside, target new markets and advance their content by an enabling technology²¹. Sandwiched in between big corporations and digital platforms, established media feel the urge to grow their audience and upgrade their newsrooms to the digital-first level. For international broadcasters like Deutsche Welle and print publications like Russia Beyond The Headlines, it has been an advantage, to develop their international presence by multimedia use and their national agenda setting. But even hereupon they risk losing their value in the face of information overload.

In a rapidly growing amount of information, people still have only 1440 minutes in their day. Competition for this precious time is fierce, unless media find a way to get through the clutter and communicate their stories. While global

¹⁹ Robertson, R., White, K.E. (2007). What is Globalization? In G. Ritzer (Ed.), *The Blackwell Companion to Globalization* (pp. 54-66). Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell.

²⁰ Hargreaves, I. (2014). *Journalism: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 108

²¹ The New York Times. (2014). *Innovation Report*, pp. 16-20. URL: http://www.presscouncil.org.au/uploads/52321/ufiles/The_New_York_Times_Innovation_Report_-_March_2014.pdf

media are getting more innovative and crowded, nation-states ceased to act as a singlehanded dominant force in distributing their cultural narratives across the world²². The BBC's director of news, James Harding (2015), claims that disruptive technology created the ever-humming environment, in which there is more noise, than news²³. In order to survive in the digital landscape and carry out 'to inform, educate and entertain', the BBC aims to go beyond broadcasting and rethink the way it keeps people informed nationally and globally. For the BBC World Service - the world's largest international broadcaster, - it means opening new language services 'with an eye to audiences of need' and taking advantage of reporting in English as a global language²⁴.

Deutsche Welle in its Task Plan for 2014-2017 aimed at enhancing the relevance of its programs among global decision makers, increasing the reach of its audience from 101 million up to 150 million people, and becoming a top international broadcaster in the world²⁵. Among the tasks that Deutsche Welle pursued in this four-years period, has been making its English language content the 'flagship' for TV, online and social media, as well as keeping its German online courses a main source for promoting German language²⁶. This kind of strategic planning has become a common practice for established media, especially public service broadcasters, whose primary function has been recently

²² Kellner, D., Pierce, C. (2007). Media and Globalization. In G. Ritzer (Ed.), *The Blackwell Companion to Globalization*, pp. 383-395.

²³ Harding, J. (2015). *The Future of News*. *The BBC*. URL: http://newsimg.bbc.co.uk/1/shared/bsp/hi/pdfs/29_01_15future_of_news.pdf, p. 6.

²⁴ Harding, J. (2015). *The Future of News*. *The BBC*, p. 45.

²⁵ Hoffmann, J. (2014, August 15). Die Aufgabenplanung. *Deutsche Welle*. URL: <http://www.dw.com/de/die-aufgabenplanung/a-15680839>, S. 5.

²⁶ *ibid.*, p. 7.

questioned. It shows that even the most acknowledged media have to rethink their content strategy for audience's engagement to oppose the global oligopoly.

Being essentially multilingual, international broadcasters have been reaching out to global audiences since their nascent stage - long before the Internet began its expansion in the late 1990s. Because to their exclusive control of the short wave radio transmitters and immense state support, the early broadcasters - the BBC, Radio Moscow, and the Voice of America - could afford a passive approach in gaining popularity with their audiences. In the global media system, however, with the cluttered Internet and distracted mobile world, international media need to adopt an active approach, which is not limited to constant supply of content, online presence and digital innovations. The current research explores, how the inherent traits of the international media, i.e. multilingualism, national representation, and multimedia assets, can be used as a strategy for a better audience's engagement. Hence, the international media need to be explored more from experiential rather than functionalistic perspective, where the key functions of media such as education and entertainment cease to be taken for granted and start to be regarded as valuable experiences.

1.2. Educational entertainment: origins and key concepts

In the twentieth century, communication theory focused mainly on three concepts of mass media: power agent, social integrator, and public enlightener. As broadcasting services facilitated the spreading of information across the world in the early 1920s, television and radio programs have become recognized as a valuable contributor to popular education²⁷. Major international broadcasters – the BBC, Voice of America, Deutsche Welle and Radio France Internationale - set

²⁷ McQuail, D. (2010). *McQuail's Mass Communication Theory* (6th ed.). SAGE, p. 50.

a goal, not only to provide news and information, but also to promote a national language - British and American English, German and French respectively. Using radio and television programming, the broadcasters offered their listeners educational content aimed at a foreign language acquisition. The technical advancements opened new possibilities for cooperation between emerging media entities and national governments, keen on ensuring a public education mission for the broadcast field they were regulating²⁸.

Traditionally, education denotes getting knowledge and skills either under the guidance of educators or by learners themselves. In a broader sense, education refers to any experience that has a developmental effect on the way one feels, thinks, and acts. In journalism and media studies, however, education is often regarded as a directly or indirectly exercised media function. Former US Vice President Albert Gore Jr. interpreted the education function of the media as their responsibility to tell people, what is happening and why, explaining the meaning of the event for the future²⁹. Sociologist Charles Wright (1959) drew a distinction between the intended purpose of the media activity and its consequences, and deduced four media functions - information, correlation, continuity and entertainment³⁰. Wright, it bears noting, let the education function lay between the lines, allocating its formative effect to the first three functions and intentionally adding the new one – entertainment.

According to Wright (1959), entertainment is a function of the media that serves to people's amusement, diversion, and social tension reduction. But the

²⁸ Haber, J. (2014). *MOOCs*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, p. 25.

²⁹ Alter, J., Gore A. Jr., & Henry III, W.A. (1997). Journalism as an Act of Education. In E. E. Dennis, R. W. Snyder (Eds.), *Media and Public Life* (pp. 3-4). New Brunswick and London: Transaction Publishers, p. 3.

³⁰ Wright, C.R. (1959). *Mass Communication: A Sociological Perspective*. (3rd ed.). New York: Random House, p. 16.

quantity and quality of entertaining content has been often perceived as problematic³¹. Media critics blame the excessiveness of entertainment on the media commercialization side effects, such as tabloidization of newspapers³² and dramatization of television news³³. In the pursuit of broader audience, cost effectiveness and advertisers, media let entertainment invade other facets, like information, politics and education, generating new media types, - infotainment, politainment and most notably edutainment.

'Edutainment' is a hybrid term, coined from educational entertainment, which describes the use of entertainment media, e.g. television and radio programs, computer software and Internet, in order to exhilarate people for educational purposes³⁴. Although the first known use of the word 'edutainment' occurred in 1973 by Robert Heyman while producing documentaries for the National Geographic Society, the most shared concept of marrying education and entertainment appeared earlier. In the late 1960s, Marshall McLuhan, a sociologist of communication, prophesied edutainment as a form of communication, saying that education must be playful and entertainment must concurrently be educational³⁵. In 1969, American television launched the children's TV series called 'Sesame Street', that used video and music to teach kids math, history, and science, causing 'dumbing down' debates on edutainment.

Some scholars suggested that the core idea of education had been demolished for

³¹ Hargreaves, I. (2014). *Journalism: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

³² Picard, R.G. (2004). Commercialism and Newspaper Quality. *Newspaper Research Journal*, 25 (1), 54–65.

³³ Bird, S.E. (1998). An Audience Perspective on the Tabloidization of News. *The Public*, 5 (3), 33–50.

³⁴ Tummons, J., Powell, S. (2014). *A-Z of Lifelong Learning*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill Education, p. 40.

³⁵ McLuhan, M., Fiore, Q., & Agel, J. (2001) (first published in 1967). *The Medium is the Message*. (9th ed.). Gingko Press, p. 8

the sake of ratings, and the way one learns was more important than what the lesson was about³⁶. Others tended to look on the bright side of edutainment, praising its communicative, educative and mass coverage role in the society^{37 38}.

The media capacity to excite audiences with edutainment content has found its use far beyond the children's programming. In the United States, The Discovery Channel, The History Channel, and The National Geographic Channel have been producing shows for adults with a considerable degree of historical information, framing it in an entertaining way³⁹. In Mexico, India, Peru, Kenya, and China, edutainment formats, like soap operas, have been widely used to tackle serious social issues⁴⁰ and promote health, human rights and social justice⁴¹. When in 1971, the BBC started broadcasting telecourses for students of the Open University - a public distance learning university in the UK - the border between education and entertainment became eventually erased⁴². From now on edutainment media have secured its place both in households and classrooms, facilitating two types of learning experiences - hybrid learning for students and lifelong learning for virtually everyone.

³⁶ Postman, N. (2009). *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*. 20th Anniversary Edition. New York, NY: Penguin Books, p. 144.

³⁷ Gladwell, M. (2000). *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference*. New York: Little, Brown, and Company, p.100

³⁸ Hartley, J. (2011). *Communication, Cultural and Media Studies: The Key Concepts*. London: Routledge, p. 80.

³⁹ Wang, Y., Zuo M. & Li X. (2007). Edutainment Technology - A New Starting Point for Educational Development of China. *37th ASEE/IEEE Frontiers in Education Conference*.

⁴⁰ Perlman, H. (Ed.). (2013). *Edutainment: Using Stories and Media for Social Action and Behaviour Change*. Soul City Institute. Health and Development Communication.

⁴¹ Rosin, H. (2006). Life Lessons: How Soap Operas Can Change the World. *The New Yorker*, June 5, 40 – 45.

⁴² Haber, J. (2014). *MOOCs*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, p. 26.

Edutainment as a learning experience

Up until recently, edutainment has been slightly touched upon either as a media function (education) or as a side effect of media commercialization (entertainment). Even after Marshall McLuhan's prophesy, the earth didn't move, and media scholars continued taking edutainment for granted. Meanwhile, other fields of study, such as pedagogics, social psychology, and computer science, have actively embraced the concept of edutainment that originated from the media. Bearing in mind the interdisciplinary nature of edutainment, it is essential to narrow down the subject to edutainment performed by the media, i.e. in informal settings and for the general audience. In order to avoid further conceptual confusion, one must differentiate edutainment as media experience from other technology-enhanced experiences, such as lifelong learning and e-learning.

New technologies change the way people interact with the media and gain knowledge. American educational theorist, David A. Kolb (1984) labeled knowledge as 'the combination of grasping experience and transforming it'⁴³, applying experiential learning to the whole lifespan of a human being – from cradle to grave. The idea of lifelong learning is premised on two interrelated actualities: as technologies change rapidly, individuals learn, how to use it; at the same time, they use technology in order to enhance their learning.

Lifelong learning involves all learning activity aimed at knowledge and skills improvement and undertaken throughout life. The term 'lifelong learning' is widely used in the contexts beyond traditional schooling, e.g. home schooling, adult education, continuing education, knowledge work, and personal learning

⁴³ Kolb, D. A. (1984). *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development*. Prentice-Hall, p. 41.

environments. Blaschke (2012) explains lifelong learning as ‘individually driven’ type of learning (andragogical) as opposed to ‘instructor-driven’ learning (pedagogical)⁴⁴. This andragogical, or self-determined, approach to learning has become possible largely due to the advancement of digital technologies. One of the prime examples is ‘The Great Courses’ - audio and video lecture series produced by The Teaching Company (USA) on topics ranging from science and mathematics to literature and foreign languages⁴⁵. The programs are designed to give lifelong learners a continuing education with no exams, homework assignments, and prerequisites⁴⁶. In order to provide users with an engaging and immersive learning experience, ‘The Great Courses’ use multimedia and multiplatform, which defines the program as by all means edutaining. However, in this context, edutainment relates to the media experience in the lifelong learning, rather than to its ongoing, voluntary, and self-motivated essence.

‘E-learning’ (or electronic learning) originally refers to the use of digital technology in educational setting, which is frequently embedded in the curriculum and reinforced by a government policy⁴⁷ ⁴⁸. In a broader sense, however, e-learning implies any learning that uses information and computer

⁴⁴ Blaschke, L. M. (2012). Heutagogy and Lifelong Learning: A Review of Heutagogical Practice and Self-Determined Learning. *The International Review of Research in Open and Distance Learning*. Volume 13, No 1. Athabasca University. URL: <http://www.irrodl.org/index.php/irrodl/article/view/1076/2087>

⁴⁵ The Great Courses. URL: <http://www.thegreatcourses.com/>

⁴⁶ Martell, N. (2015, August 31). Before YouTube and Online Classes, There Were the Great Courses. *Washington Post*. URL: https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/magazine/before-youtube-and-online-classes-there-were-the-great-courses/2015/08/31/30947f08-353d-11e5-8e66-07b4603ec92a_story.html

⁴⁷ Corona, F., & Cozzarelli, C. (2013). Information Technology and Edutainment: Education and Entertainment in the Age of Interactivity. *International Journal of Digital Literacy and Digital Competence*, 4(1), 12-18.

⁴⁸ Tummons, J., Powell, S. (2014). *A-Z of Lifelong Learning*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill Education, p. 39.

technology as a delivery tool⁴⁹ and as a specific pedagogy around the use of technology to augment education⁵⁰. It follows that, although e-learning is inherently technology-enhanced learning, it is not necessarily include an entertaining component (fun, game, interaction etc.). Rather on the contrary, edutainment can be explored as a branch of e-learning that promotes leaning through multimedia in a playful and motivating way.

Interdisciplinarity of edutainment makes it difficult to deconstruct. Most scholars classify edutainment by the ‘education-to-entertainment’ ratio: the content with primarily education intentions, with a high degree of both education and entertainment, and with incidental or occasional educational value⁵¹ ⁵². In relation to a mediator’s type, edutainment may arise from personal interaction with an educator, transmitted by TV and radio broadcasters, or occur in computer and robotic environment⁵³. Feuerstacke, Pilz, and Hoffmann (2005) categorize edutainment into five modes by its ultimate learning goal: teach-tale-tainment, tooltainment, skilltainment, simtainment, and infotainment⁵⁴.

⁴⁹ Higher Education Funding Council for England. (2005). *HEFCE Strategy for e-Learning*. URL: http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20100202100434/http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/hefce/2005/05_12/

⁵⁰ Quinsee, S. (2012). E-learning (m-learning). In P. Jarvis, Mary H. Watts (Eds.), *The Routledge International Handbook of Learning* (pp. 246-255). Routledge.

⁵¹ Argan M., Sever N. S. & Argan Tokay M. (2009). Edutainment in Marketing Courses: Findings from Focus Group Studies in Turkey. *Business Research Yearbook: Global Business Perspectives Volume XVI*, 2, 542-548.

⁵² Wang, Y., Zuo M. & Li X. (2007). Edutainment Technology - A New Starting Point for Educational Development of China. *37th ASEE/IEEE Frontiers in Education Conference*.

⁵³ Aksakal, N. (2015). Theoretical View to The Approach of the Edutainment. 5th World Conference on Learning, Teaching and Educational Leadership, WCLTA 2014. *Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 186, 1232-1239.

⁵⁴ Feuerstacke, T., Pilz, N., Hoffmann, D. (2005). *Computerlernspiele für Kinder – Pädagogisch wertvoll?* München: GRIN Verlag.

Within the current research, edutainment is being organized into three sections - content, medium, and formats that jointly deliver an edutainment experience. Content refers to the educational information and experience directed towards an audience⁵⁵. Media embrace different types of old, new, and social media, capable of delivering information in an entertaining way, while formats imply the forms, designs, and arrangements of the content⁵⁶. Drawing from these three definitions, the edutainment media product can look as follows (Table 1):

Table 1

Deconstruction of edutainment

Edutainment content	E d u t a i n m e n t media	Edutainment formats
Subjects: history, geography, math, science, economics	TV and radio broadcasting	Documentaries, soap operas, game shows, reality shows, puppet shows, storytelling events <i>Examples:</i> Discovery Channel programs, Sesame Street, Galileo TV-series, BBC documentaries
General interest: cooking, gardening, sport, music, art	Information and computer technology	Computer software, CD/DVDs, simulators, games <i>Examples:</i> Great Courses DVD-series, Die Zeit Akademie video seminars, Professor Higgins multimedia courses
Languages: speaking, spelling, grammar, listening, pronunciation	Internet and mobile technology	Massive online open courses, mobile applications, social networks <i>Examples:</i> Coursera, edX, Codecademy, TED-videos, Duolingo
Skills: critical thinking,		

⁵⁵ Odden, L. (2013). What is Content? Learn from 40+ Definitions. *TopRank Marketing*. URL: <http://www.toprankblog.com/2013/03/what-is-content/>

⁵⁶ Penn, C. S. (2016). What's the difference between social media and new media? *Christopherspenn.com*. URL: <http://www.christopherspenn.com/2016/10/whats-the-difference-between-social-media-new-media/>

strategy, computer literacy, coding, job skills	Print	Popular fiction magazines, special editions and supplements <i>Examples:</i> Die Zeit Wissen, National Geographic, GEO, Discovery
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Edutainment occurs when educational content is being presented in an entertaining way. But is it appropriate to regard media platforms and formats as “edutaintive”? The blended concept of edutainment along with its broad applicability triggered many speculations on this issue. Is edutainment a media content or a medium itself? Marshall McLuhan in his chapter on education in ‘Medium is the Message’ (1967) argues that it’s not so much content, that matters with mass media, but how people are transfixed by the medium itself⁵⁷. Following McLuhan’s logic, it is communication technology that took up educational matters, put it into an entertaining format and made it accessible for a broader audience. Along with the conceptual duality of edutainment, there are other aspects that make the classification of edutainment media and their comparative analysis even more problematic.

- *Diverse media systems.* The above-proposed table is vastly simplified and based upon the examples drawn from the Western countries, mainly from the US, UK and Germany. It can be explained, on the one hand, by the early development of media systems in those countries, and, on the other hand, by affordances of the national media systems to provide edutainment. For example, Britain and Germany have always had strong public-service broadcasters with an active educational role, whereas

⁵⁷ McLuhan, M., Fiore, Q., & Agel, J. (2001) (first published in 1967). *The Medium is the Message*. (9th ed.). Gingko Press, p. 8

American media are mostly market-oriented and place stronger emphasis on entertainment⁵⁸.

- *Various media landscapes.* Along with the commonly used media typology (old, new and social media), edutainment media may also vary in ownership (state, public, commercial), target audience (demographic, psychographic, behavioral, geographic characteristics), coverage (local, national, international, and global), and media regulation (authorities, laws)⁵⁹.
- *Diffusion.* Many innovative ideas originate in the West, and, due to their success, go beyond national borders⁶⁰. Thus, numerous entertainment formats originated in the United States and then become glocalised in other regions. The BBC, the world's oldest national broadcasting organization, undertook its mission to 'inform, educate and entertain' in 1922 and became a trendsetter in edutainment policy for other international broadcasters.
- *Multi-mediation.* Combining different forms of content such as text, video, audio, images, and interactivity, blurs the line between old and new media. Multimedia is the future⁶¹, and both emerging and well-established media, be it television, radio or print, regard it as a duty to go digital and

⁵⁸ Hallin, D. C., Mancini, P. (2004). *Comparing Media Systems: Three Models of Media and Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 119-142.

⁵⁹ European Journalism Centre. (2017). *Media Landscapes*. URL: http://ejc.net/media_landscapes

⁶⁰ Kleinstüber, H. J. (2004). Comparing Mass Communication Systems: Media Formats, Media Contents and Media Processes. In B. Pfetsch, F. Esser (Eds.), *Comparing Political Communication: Theories, Cases, Challenges* (pp. 64-86). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 71.

⁶¹ Tillmann, P. (2015). *10 Trends für Journalisten von Heute*. Hamburg: NextMedia. URL: http://www.nextmedia-hamburg.de/fileadmin/user_upload/PDFs/10_Trends_fuer_Journalisten_von_heute_-_Pauline_Tillmann.pdf

enhance their online representation with video- and audio streaming, interactive images, social media widgets etc.

Although the above-proposed classification of edutainment appears too general, it suggests a wide range of combinations and enables to narrow down the subject matter to a particular type of content and medium, i.e. foreign language didactics via online media. In order to understand the specificity of this kind of media projects, the key aspects of global media system, national media landscapes, multilingualism and multi-mediation should be addressed further.

Edutainment as a media experience

Edutainment goes hand in hand with electronic and lifelong learning; what began as a fun way to teach children science ('Sesame Street') has evolved into a combination of media, technology, and academics. What is worth special attention here is that while educators actively embrace media and technology to enhance their teaching experience, media and communication studies have little or no room for edutainment as a subject matter. Presented from a practice driven perspective, the current work aims to fill the void in the research field and rethink 'edutainment' as a media experience that can be addressed to engage the media audiences.

Media experiences suggest how people feel, think and act when they consume media content. The collection of experiences creates the audience's engagement with a particular medium, while the media themselves are able to shape those experiences. John Lavine from the Northwestern University's Medill School of Journalism, denotes the three levels at which the process for creating experiences is implemented: message (content), distribution (media, platform),

and strategy⁶². The latter element - media strategy - is common for integrated marketing communications that use multimedia and stay concerned with how to better understand audiences to enhance the impact and value of the media. This interposes content strategy between journalism and marketing, which nowadays is exactly the case, since both commercial and non-profit media organizations have become more than before concerned with expanding their audience⁶³. Another interesting case is that media strategy has been actively used by proponents of edutainment programming, especially when it came to producing social change in the areas like literacy, nutrition, family planning, etc.⁶⁴. It states that the categories of motivation, such as learning and self-education, can help fuel individual intentions to use media.

Both online and offline media provide their users with knowledge through stories, advices, and opinions. However, keeping readers and viewers informed in an entertaining way can engage them more effectively and enhance their understanding of things more deeply. In 2000 – 2010, Peck, Malthouse et al. (2010) from the Media Management Center (Northwestern University, USA) examined multiple audience experiences of print, broadcast, and online media⁶⁵. The Medill studies identified about thirty media experiences, including ‘civic’, ‘inspiration’, ‘high-quality content’, ‘killing time’, and ‘entertainment’ experiences. The results showed that the ‘Makes Me Smarter’ experience is one

⁶² Lavine, J. (2015). The Content Strategy Take Back to Work Toolkit. Online Course: Content Strategy for Professionals: Engaging Audiences. Northwestern University. *Coursera*. URL: <https://www.coursera.org/learn/engagement-strategy>

⁶³ The New York Times. (2014). *Innovation Report*. URL: http://www.presscouncil.org.au/uploads/52321/ufiles/The_New_York_Times_Innovation_Report_-_March_2014.pdf, p. 25.

⁶⁴ Brown, W. J., Singhal, A. (1999). Entertainment-Education Media Strategies for Social Change: Promises and Problems. In D. P. Demers, K. Viswanath (Eds.). *Mass Media, Social Control, and Social Change: A Macrosocial Perspective* (pp. 263-280). Ames: Iowa State University Press.

⁶⁵ Malthouse, E. C. and A. Peck (2010). Medill on Media Engagement: Introduction. In A. Peck and E. C. Malthouse (Eds.), *Medill on Media Engagement* (pp.3-19). New York: Hampton Press.

to the most important dimensions of media engagement and one of the most effective categories in media-and-user relationship. The scholars identified the ‘Makes Me Smarter’ experience with the audience’s statements, such as “I look at it as educational. I am gaining knowledge”, “It updates me on things I try to keep up with”, “It addresses issues or topics of special concern to me” etc.⁶⁶. This aspect prompts an interesting view of educational entertainment as a targeted experience for a better engagement, but requires further clarification. The empirical part of the research is devoted to finding reliable statements among the potential audiences of the international media to validate the edutainment experience.

Studying international media, it is essential to set the engagement fueled by news companies aside from the engagement directed by advertisers, because while the latter concentrate on brand placement, the former focus on news content. According to the PwC report ‘Global Entertainment and Media Outlook 2016-2020’ with 54 countries covered, by 2020 content will still matter for media differentiation and international expansion, despite the homogenization of the global media market⁶⁷. For news organizations, engagement is an important concept. Calder and Malthouse (2008) define media engagement as the collective experiences that the audience have with a medium. Experience, as they put it, is a certain pool of beliefs that readers, viewers, and users have about how the medium fits into their lives⁶⁸. It goes without saying, that people can have many different experiences with a medium. But in order to successfully develop a

⁶⁶ Youngman, O. (2010). The Makes Me Smarter Experience. Chapter 3. In A. Peck and E. C. Malthouse (Eds.), *Medill on Media Engagement*, pp. 33-46. New York: Hampton Press.

⁶⁷ Lederer, C., Brownlow, M. (2016). A World of Differences. *Strategy + Business. Special Report: Global Entertainment and Media Outlook 2016-2020: A World of Differences*, 6-19. New York City: PwC, Strategy&.

⁶⁸ Calder, B. J., Malthouse, E. C. (2008). Media Engagement and Advertising Effectiveness. In B. J. Calder (Ed.), *Kellogg on Media and Advertising* (pp. 1-36). New York: Wiley.

media brand, a news organization should understand, which experiences it intends to create. We contend that such an experiential approach to a media strategy is more active and effective, that referring to the moral media functions, i.e. information, education, entertainment, and persuasion. The purpose of this research is to show that understanding edutainment as a language learning experience enables the global media to create value for their audiences and differentiate their content from others.

1.3. Multilingual media practices and trends in foreign language mediation

Stirring times of the twentieth century, notably World War I, World War II and its aftermath in the Cold War era, ushered the emergence of international broadcasters that were dominated by nation-states and aimed at spreading national culture to other countries⁶⁹. Among the oldest notable networks headquartered in the Western world are Radio Moscow (1929), replaced by the Voice of Russia (1993) and reorganized into Sputnik (2014), BBC World Service (1932), Voice of America (1942), Radio Exterior de España, (1942), Deutsche Welle (1953), and Radio France Internationale (1975). Long before the Internet exploded, the international broadcasters operated to advance a nation's political agenda, keep in touch with emigrants and promote the national prestige. One of the key features that made broadcasting services accessible on a global scale was multilingualism.

Multilingualism generally refers to the use of two or more languages. However, the relations between multilingualism and the media are more complex: the media manage multilingualism and act as discursive sites for debates on language-related issues. But most importantly, media presents and uses

⁶⁹ Kellner, D. (1990). *Television and The Crisis of Democracy*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

multilingualism as media content⁷⁰. The oldest international broadcaster, Radio Moscow (USSR), was broadcasting in over 70 languages using transmitters in the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, and Cuba⁷¹. The BBC World Service launched its first foreign-language services in Arabic and German in 1938. By the end of 1942, the network broadcasted in all major European languages. In November 2016, the BBC announced its biggest expansion since the 1940s with launching new services in 11 languages (spoken in Nigeria, Ethiopia and Eritrea, India and Korea). This reform will make the BBC World Service available in 40 languages, including English, and increase its global outreach⁷². Germany's international broadcaster Deutsche Welle began its radio transmission in English, French, Spanish and Portuguese, a year after the first German-speaking broadcast in 1953. As of March 2017, the DW service is available in 30 languages with global news channels in German, Spanish, Arabic, and English⁷³.

Due to the easy access to information facilitated by the media, individuals get exposed to multiple languages more frequently and feel a need to acquire additional languages. Being multilingual, international public broadcasters do not only insure wider access to news and information, but also maintain a national language. Kelly-Holmes and Pietikäinen (2013) argue that media often function as 'informal language learning contexts' - when people have limited opportunities to learn a foreign language in everyday life or through formal education, media

⁷⁰ Kelly-Holmes, H., Milani, T. M. (2013). Introduction: Thematising Multilingualism in the Media. In H. Kelly-Holmes, T. M. Milani, (Eds.), *Thematising Multilingualism in the Media* (pp. 1-22). Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company.

⁷¹ Wood, J. (2000). *History of International Broadcasting, Volume 2*. London: The Institution of Electrical Engineers, p. 109-112.

⁷² Morgan, C., Rogers, K. (2016, November 16). BBC World Service Announces Biggest Expansion Since 1940s. *The BBC*. URL: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/mediacentre/latestnews/2016/world-service-expansion>

⁷³Krieger, J. (2015, June 22). Deutsche Welle Launches Global News Channel. *Broadbandtvnews.com*. URL: <http://www.broadbandtvnews.com/2015/06/22/deutsche-welle-launches-global-news-channel/>

can support them via attractive programming⁷⁴. In the global environment, where English has taken on the role of lingua franca, the didactical aim of media in constructing the ‘proper’ way of speaking a language is vitally important.

Major broadcasters, as early as their nascent stage, augmented their programming with educational content and integrated national language didactics into their goals. BBC Learning English, as part of the BBC World Service, has been teaching English to global audiences since 1942, offering free audio, video and text materials⁷⁵. Voice of America launched Special English newscasts and features in 1959. Recently its repertoire was expanded to include more English teaching materials; the service was renamed as Learning English in 2014⁷⁶. German broadcaster, Deutsche Welle developed its first language course ‘*Lernt Deutsch bei der Deutsche Welle*’ in 1956, followed by the successful cooperation with Goethe Institut - Radio series ‘*Familie Baumann*’ in the 1970s and ‘*Deutsch - warum nicht?*’ in the 1990s⁷⁷. Radio French Internationale has been teaching French language on the air, offering bilingual series for beginners and radio shows for dedicated francophones - ‘*Les mots de l’actualité*’ and ‘*la Danse des mots*’, as well as digital materials ‘Learn and teach French’ on the Rfi Savoirs website⁷⁸. Radio Exterior de España promotes Spanish language and Spanish literature along with Castilian and Latin American cultures via its online programming ‘*Un idioma sin fronteras*’ with grammar and vocabulary

⁷⁴ Kelly-Holmes, H. and Pietikäinen, S. (2013). Multilingualism and Media. In C. Chapelle (Ed.) *The Encyclopedia of Applied Linguistics* (pp. 3926 – 3933). London: Wiley.

⁷⁵ BBC Learning English. *About BBC Learning English*. URL: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/learningenglish/english/hygiene>

⁷⁶ VOA Learning English. *About Us*. URL: <http://learningenglish.voanews.com/p/5373.html>

⁷⁷ Deutsche Welle. *Kleine Geschichte der DW-Sprachkurse*. URL: <http://www.dw.com/de/kleine-geschichte-der-dw-sprachkurse/a-1633231>

⁷⁸ Rfi Savoirs. URL: <https://savoirs.rfi.fr/en>

materials⁷⁹. The overview of the aforementioned media projects shows that despite offering different languages, they have several features in common:

- Use of quality journalism as the context for language acquisition
- Culturally specific content drawn from national and world newscasts and features
- Wide range of topics: business, politics, science, lifestyle, culture, sports etc.
- Common level range: beginner, lower intermediate, intermediate, advanced
- Skillset: listening and reading comprehension, grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation
- Didactical materials: script, subtitles, glossary, quizzes, gap-fill exercises
- Multimedia toolkit: video, audio, podcasts, texts
- Responsive design, adaptive interface for desktop computers, mobiles, and tablets
- Expertise of language teaching specialists and/or educational bodies
- Affiliation with non-profit organizations that promote the study of a national language abroad, e.g. Goethe-Institut, Instituto Cervantes, Organisation internationale de la Francophonie.

As the world has become more global, international public broadcasters started to lose their ground not only in the news reporting, but also in the informal language teaching. First of all, people took advantage from their newfound mobility and went abroad for the full foreign language immersion. Secondly, media and technological evolution deprived TV and radio services of their dominant position and made public service broadcasters look to their World Wide Web presence. And finally, educational domain saw the rapid explosion of other

⁷⁹ Radio Exterior de España. *Un Idioma sin Fronteras*. URL: <http://www.rtve.es/alcarta/audios/un-idioma-sin-fronteras/>

CALL sources. CALL - computer-assisted language learning - refers to the use of computer technologies that promote educational learning, including guided practice, drill, simulation, game, multimedia CD-ROM and Internet applications⁸⁰. Warschauer (2000) identified three historical types of the CALL:

- Structural CALL: 1970s to 1980s, based on behaviorist theory of learning, marked by the advent of the microcomputer and focus on reinforcement, habit-formation and imitation.
- Communication CALL: 1980s to 1990s, marked by the introduction of Personal Computer and focused on interactive learning and using the language in context.
- Integrative CALL: 2000 onwards, enhanced by development of the Internet applications, such as podcasting, video sharing, audio tools, blogs, social networking, and focused on communication and reflective participation⁸¹.

Modern online courses offered by the international broadcasters are attributable to the integrative CALL, which, on the one hand, opened new possibilities for media to diversify their content, and on the other hand, made them to compete. Since the late 1990s, hybridization of the media and the dot-com bubble has been saturating the market with unlimited recourses for language learning: educational institutions started to offer online courses together with training simulators and multimedia CDs. Major publishers, like Oxford University Press, Macmillan Publisher and Hueber Verlag, made their textbooks and audios available online to buy or download for free.

⁸⁰ Torut, B. (2000). Computer Assisted Language Learning: An Overview. In *Computer-Assisted Language Learning: A guide for English language teachers*. Bangkok: TASEAP. URL: <https://web.warwick.ac.uk/CELTE/tr/ovCALL/taseapCALL.pdf>

⁸¹ Warschauer M. (2000). *CALL for the 21st Century*. IATEFL and ESADE Conference, 2 July 2000, Barcelona, Spain.

Numerous social networks for learning languages materialized, e.g. Busuu, English, baby!, Livemocha, Italki, along with learning software, e-learning platforms, and mobile applications, like Babbel, Duolingo, Smigin, and LinguaLeo. Concurrently, digital media conglomerates - Google, Apple, Facebook, YouTube, and Amazon - started to experiment with language learning services, offering their platforms to generate blogs, podcasts, subtitled videos, dictionaries, and social communities. In such a competitive market, public broadcasters were constrained to reconsider their advantages, and contextualization turned out to be their strongest suit in terms of the foreign language mediation.

Designers of any CALL software, be it social network like Busuu or public broadcaster's web-site like Deutsche Welle – Deutsch Lernen, have been constantly struggling with the same question: how to create an effective environment for a learner, when computer is a machine, while language is an essentially human means of communication. Hoven (1997) argues that ideal model for language-learning software should consider two principles: 1) language occurs in actual context and 2) is intertwined with communication and culture⁸². In short, putting national language items into a real context makes language learning more meaningful and culturally valid. The principles of contextualization and acculturation are well defined in the statements of the major public service broadcasters.

BBC World Service:

⁸² Hoven, D. (1997). Instructional Design for Multimedia: Towards a Learner-Centred CELL (Computer-Enhanced Language Learning) Model. In: Murphy-Judy, K. & Sanders, R. (Eds.) *NEXUS Monograph*, 98-111. Nth. Carolina: CALICO. URL: <http://hdl.handle.net/2149/1681>

Exploiting a wealth of BBC material, our content is media rich and focuses on presenting authentic, up-to-date, real English needed by learners to progress in their English studies.⁸³

Voice of America:

VOA Learning English maintains a loyal following among learners, teachers and educational publishers worldwide by using journalism to engage people's interests. Learners absorb American English through content drawn from world news, business, science, U.S. life, popular culture and other topics.⁸⁴

Deutsche Welle:

Teachers and advanced learners appreciate the opportunity to follow the hard news right during the course of studying. The value is easily revealed to them; besides the content is way more interesting and diverse than many artificially contrived learning situations.⁸⁵

Radio France Internationale:

For people keen to improve their French or get to grips with current events, the 'Journal en français facile' is a real news bulletin that uses simple vocabulary to explain the latest news. For those who want to familiarize themselves with French, RFI produces bilingual series in its foreign language programs designed to raise awareness of and perfect the French language. All of these series are based on original concepts that skillfully combine teaching with the constraints of radio.⁸⁶

Contextualization of media content with regard to location and culture has always been a critical task for news organizations. But for the media users who intend to learn foreign language via media, the journalism content needs to be not just contextualized, but also didacticised. Didacticising means choosing and

⁸³ BBC Learning English. *About BBC Learning English*. URL: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/learningenglish/english/hygiene>

⁸⁴ VOA Learning English. *About Us*. URL: <http://learningenglish.voanews.com/p/5373.html>

⁸⁵ Deutsche Welle. (2013). *Deutsche Welle Evaluationsbericht 2010-2013*. URL: <http://www.dw.com/de/der-evaluationsbericht/a-16910881>, p. 134-143.

⁸⁶ Rfi Savoirs. *Our Mission: To Promote French Learning and Teaching*. URL: <https://savoirs.rfi.fr/en/our-mission-to-promote-french-learning-and-teaching>

preparing material, arranging the information to make it accessible, applicable and useful. Didactics helps to turn passive media consumers into active language learners. Due to the elements of self-checking, like quizzes and multiple choice questions, didactics assures that educational objectives are fulfilled. On top of that, tailoring and didacticising journalism content in a target language allows an international broadcaster to mediate its agenda to global audience. This factor not only makes the media stand out among other providers, but also gives them the edge over the emerging media conglomerates.

It is worth noting, however, that the media didactics has never been a prerogative of news organizations. Foreign language teachers have used authentic media materials in their classrooms independently from the international broadcasters long before the online courses emerged⁸⁷. Here, the case of the Russian media is especially relevant, since the Russian media system has no public service broadcasters as such or any media entitled to the mission of promoting the Russian language abroad. Nevertheless, the journalistic methodical approach to teaching Russian as a foreign language has its history, dating back to the Soviet times. Onkovich (2013) links the emergence of the Russian media didactics to the use of the Soviet press in the 1960-70s, when journalistic materials from the newspapers like 'Pravda' were employed for developing local knowledge, expanding vocabulary, enhancing verbal and grammar skills⁸⁸. In the 1970-80s, the educational technology of teledidactics emerged as a brand new

⁸⁷ Wolgast, K. (2007). *Authenticity and New Media in Foreign Language Teaching: Chances, Problems, and Perspectives*. Munich, Ravensburg: GRIN Verlag, pp. 3-5.

⁸⁸ Onkovich, A. V. (2013). Media didactics and Teaching Russian as a Foreign Language: History and Contemporaneity. In: Verbickaja, L.A., Ljumin', L., Yurkov, E.E. (Eds.). *XII Congress of International Association of Teachers of Russian Language and Literature 'Russian Language and Literature in Time and Space'*, Vol. 3. Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press, pp. 562-568.

method for improving visual and listening comprehension of the Russian language⁸⁹.

As the electronic media advanced, new practices of teaching Russian as a foreign language arose, - from occasional use of online media materials in a classroom to creating a proper virtual environment such as the website ‘e-Learning Russian through Media Materials’, authored by Andrei Bogomolov, PhD, Lomonosov Moscow State University⁹⁰. One should not believe, however, that the Russian language didactics has never had a place in the Russian broadcasting history. In fact, the earliest edutainment programs were broadcasted for the foreign audience before the BBC and Deutsche Welle created their offerings.

Russian language didactics in Soviet and Russian media

Russian foreign service broadcasting went on air on October 29, 1929 with Radio Moscow, also known as Radio Moscow International, first in German, then in English and French. In 1930, Radio Moscow enriched its agenda with literary programs, led by famous Soviet artists with a good command of foreign languages. The soviet authorities quickly realized the importance of broadcasting in other languages - nearly a decade before Britain and the USA. By 1941, when propaganda broadcasting in Europe had become a fact of life with Britain, Germany, Italy and the USSR as the four stakeholders, the latter was broadcasting

⁸⁹ Krylova, N. Y. (2006). Peculiarities of Using Videorecords of The ‘News’ TV Programs in Teaching The Language of Mass Media At Stage 1. In: V. P. Sinyachkin (Ed.). *Bulletin of People’s Friendship University of Russia. Series: Problems of Education: Languages and Specialty. Issue 1.* (pp. 126 – 130). Moscow: People’s Friendship University of Russia (RUDN).

⁹⁰ Bogomolov, A. N. (2008). Virtual Language Learning Environment 'E-Learning Russian Through Mass Media': Structure and Content. In V. P. Sinyachkin (Ed.). *Bulletin of People’s Friendship University of Russia. Series: Problems of Education: Languages and Specialty, 4.* (pp. 28 – 31). Moscow: People’s Friendship University of Russia (RUDN).

to the world in 21 languages. During the World War II, Radio Moscow got to grips with Nazis' propaganda and unleashed an active ideological campaign targeted at the Russian speaking community leaving beyond the USSR. After the war, Radio Moscow was sustained by the government as a tool for propaganda against Western imperialism in the cold war⁹¹. Shortly after the collapse of communism, in 1993, Radio Moscow was reorganized by the presidential decree with a new name – The Voice of Russia⁹².

The Voice of Russia covers national and international news in multimedia formats and presents itself as 'a convenient and democratic channel to obtain information about Russia'⁹³. The VOR network broadcasts to 160 countries in 38 languages and provides online multimedia content in 33 languages. According to a survey led by International Media Help (Switzerland), the Voice of Russia is one of the top-five most listened to international radio stations in the world, along with the BBC World Service, Voice of America, Deutsche Welle, and Radio France Internationale⁹⁴. Despite its international availability, multilingual and multimedia content, the Voice of Russia does not have a strongly pronounced mission of promoting Russian language - its primary focus is on 'shaping Russia's image worldwide, introducing Russia to the world and highlighting its opinions on global events'⁹⁵.

⁹¹ Proshina, Z. G., Eddy, A. A. (2016). *Russian English: History, Functions, and Features*, p. 165. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

⁹² The President of Russia. (1993). *Decree of the President of Russia as of December, 22, 1993, №2258 'On Creating The Holding Company 'Russian State Television and Radio broadcasting Center 'Efir' and The Russian State Radio Broadcasting Company 'Voice of Russia'*. URL: <http://www.kremlin.ru/acts/bank/5119>

⁹³ The Voice of Russia. *About Us*. URL: <https://sputniknews.com/voiceofrussia/about/>

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Proshina, Z. G., Eddy, A. A. (2016). *Russian English: History, Functions, and Features*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 165.

Nevertheless, some steps in the field of teaching Russian to native and non-native radio listeners were taken in 2007, when the Voice of Russia launched its project *Russkij ustnyj* ('Spoken Russian') on its subsidiary radio station Russian International Radio. Yulia Safonova, author and the host of the radio show, reveals the idea behind the project – 'to present the Russian world, its people and the language environment they are living in, via culturally relevant content'⁹⁶. Along with the linguistic elements of the show, Safonova emphasizes its cultural value and historical meaning, e.g. the episodes featuring hallmark phrases used by Vladimir Putin, Michael Gorbachev, and Boris Yeltsin⁹⁷. But for all that, the project produced content independently from the VOR agenda, out of media context and with no didactical support such as online exercises. Since the program started in 2007, the project *Russkij ustnyj* has been available online and as an archived audio dictionary⁹⁸.

In 2014, The Voice of Russia was replaced by Sputnik, a news agency, radio service broadcaster and multimedia platform, established by the international news agency '*Rossiia Segodnya*', which is wholly owned by the Government of Russia as a unitary enterprise⁹⁹. Although '*Rossiia Segodnya*' directly translates from Russian into English as 'Russia Today', the news agency should not be confused with the TV network RT (formerly Russia Today). RT operates television channels in English, Spanish, Arabic, and multimedia online platforms in English, Russian, German, French, Arabic, and Spanish. The RT

⁹⁶ Safonova, Y. A. (2008). *The Russian Voice of Russia. Russian Language on the Radio Station 'The Voice of Russia'*. Moscow: Center for International Education MSU.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Gramota.Ru. *Audio dictionary 'Spoken Russian'*. URL: <http://www.gramota.ru/slovari/radiosafonova/>

⁹⁹ The Voice of Russia. *About Us*. URL: <https://sputniknews.com/voiceofrussia/about/>

international network is owned by ‘TV-Novosti’, an autonomous non-profit organization, and funded by the budget of Russia¹⁰⁰.

The trend of constant reorganizations – from Radio Moscow International to the Voice of Russia to Sputnik – and mergers, but always with the state as the main owner, invites two valuable assumptions: first, the role of the Russian state in the international broadcasting services has been and remained dominant; second, the lifetime cycle of emerging media projects is by default relatively short. For example, in March 2012, the RT network launched the online multimedia project ‘Learn Russian’ that included lessons with interactive exercises, short videos on YouTube, podcasts, and social media campaigns on Facebook, Twitter, and GooglePlus¹⁰¹. The project operated no journalism materials of the RT and contained mostly conversational topics (greetings, numbers, telling the time) and general grammar for daily life situations at the beginner’s, elementary and pre-intermediate levels¹⁰². Despite more than 250 000 users visited the website learnrussianrt.com in six months, the project ceased to exist in October 2012, leaving its website archived and no longer updated¹⁰³.

A brief overview of the on-and-off attempts, made by the leading Russia’s international broadcasters in promoting RFL, demonstrates a lack of clear media policy in this field. In order to understand potential reasons for such a detached attitude towards RFL media didactics, the following questions should be addressed: what function the global media (analog as well as digital platforms)

¹⁰⁰ RT.com. *About Us*. URL: <https://www.rt.com/about-us/>

¹⁰¹ Learn Russian. RT. URL: <http://learnrussian.rt.com/>

¹⁰² Rubleva, E.V. (2012). About Multimedia Project ‘LearnRussian’. *Bulletin of Centre for International Education, Lomonosov State University*, 2, 50-54. Moscow: CIE MSU.

¹⁰³ Learn Russian. RT. (2012, October 1). *Hello and Привет!* Post on Facebook. URL: <https://www.facebook.com/LearnRussian.RT/posts/418159038244247>

exercise within the Russian media system; how the national government prioritizes the promotion of RFL both legislatively and executively, and last but not least, what premises and opportunities the Russia-based media have to offer RFL services.

Although Russia's international broadcasters have been ranking among the most popular networks in the world – along with the BBC, Deutsche Welle, and the Voice of America, - they still operate in a very peculiar, different from the Anglo-Saxon and European tradition, way. Russia inherited many of its media operation practices from the past, i.e. the international broadcasting rooted in traditions of the Soviet Union¹⁰⁴. On the other hand, completely new formats and routines have been adopted from the Western counterparts. Vartanova (2012) names this mixture of the old and the new a distinctive feature of the Russian media¹⁰⁵. Within the framework of globalization, post-Soviet media system has been remodeled into the developing media industry, but still experienced increasing nationalism¹⁰⁶.

After the first stage of privatization of the media market in the early 1990s, and the second stage of struggle between political and business elites over the media in the mid 1990s, the third stage of evolution of the Russian media system began with Vladimir Putin's presidency in the 2000s¹⁰⁷. At that time several state agencies took control over a large proportion of the press and electronic media

¹⁰⁴ Rantanen, T. (2002). *The Global and the National. Media and Communications in Post-Communist Russia*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.

¹⁰⁵ Vartanova, E. (2012). The Russian Media Model in the Context of Post-Soviet Dynamics. In Hallin, D., Manchini, P. (Eds.). *Comparing Media Systems Beyond the Western World* (pp. 119-142). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

¹⁰⁶ Rantanen, T., Vartanova, E. (2004). Empire and Communications: Centrifugal and Centripetal Media in Contemporary Russia. In Couldry, N., Curran, J. (Eds.). *Contesting Media Power. Alternative Media in a Networked World* (pp. 147–162). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

¹⁰⁷ Khvostunova, O. (2013, December 6). A Brief History of the Russian Media. *The Interpreter*. URL: <http://www.interpretermag.com/a-brief-history-of-the-russian-media/>

outlets. Simultaneously, a series of new English-language media emerged in Russia with the purpose of creating an adequate image of the country, debunking the myths about Russians and providing international readers with timely coverage. The list includes the RT television network (2005), multimedia project *Russia Beyond The Headlines* (2007) – the web site and newspaper formerly sponsored by *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* and currently owned by ANO TV-Novosti; Moscow’s first 24-hour English radio station, Moscow FM 105.2 (2012), and radio broadcaster Sputnik, reorganized from the Voice of Russia (2014)¹⁰⁸. ‘The Moscow Times’ newspaper has been enjoying its popularity among English-speaking readers since 1993, while its counterpart ‘The St. Petersburg Times’ was shut down in 2014 due to the economic crisis¹⁰⁹. Another English-speaking publication ‘Russia Direct’ focused on Russian foreign policy and U.S.-Russia relations stopped getting financial support from *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* in March 2017¹¹⁰.

Altschull’s ‘second law of journalism’ (1984) states: ‘the contents of the media always reflect the interests of those who finance them’¹¹¹. In 2013, as the Russian government reformed a news agency RIA Novosti into a brand new international agency *Rossiya Segonya*, Sergei Ivanov, the Kremlin chief of staff, commented on the mission of the latter: ‘It is important to tell the world, that Russia pursues its interdependent policy and strongly defends its national

¹⁰⁸ Proshina, Z. G., Eddy, A. A. (2016). *Russian English: History, Functions, and Features*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 165-166.

¹⁰⁹ Interfax. (2014, December 22). St. Pete’s Main English-language Newspaper Suspends Operation. *Russia Beyond The Headlines*. URL: http://rbth.com/news/2014/12/22/st_petes_main_english-language_newspaper_suspends_operation_42461.html

¹¹⁰ Koshkin, P. (2017, March 26). Editor’s Note: Russia Direct Stops Updating Its Website. *Russia Direct*. URL: <http://www.russia-direct.org/company-news/editors-note-russia-direct-stops-updating-its-website>

¹¹¹ Altschull cited in McQuail, D. (2010). *McQuail’s Mass Communication Theory* (6th ed.). SAGE, p. 192.

interests. We need to tell the truth and make it available to as many people as possible'¹¹². It seems, though, that the authorities and state-controlled international media hardly considered the Russian language promotion as a priority for editorial policy. But is it the case for the national policy?

According to the Article 4 of the Federal Law about the state language of the Russian Federation, the federal government contributes - among other things and within the limits of its competence - to studying Russian outside the country for the purpose of preserving and supporting the state language of the Russian Federation¹¹³. For example, in 2007, the President of the Russian Federation, Vladimir Putin signed a decree on establishing the *Russkiy Mir* Foundation as a nonprofit organization, aimed at promoting the Russian language and supporting Russian language teaching programs abroad¹¹⁴. The Foundation boasts of its own Russian language magazine, online TV channel and Internet-radio channel, accompanied by a list of online learning programs¹¹⁵. The *Russkiy Mir* media are first and foremost oriented towards ethnic Russians, native Russian speakers, living across the globe and wishing to reconnect themselves with their homeland through cultural programs. However, Russian language learners worldwide also comprise a substantial part of the Russian world.

The ultimate expansion of the Russian language abroad occurred in the second half of the twentieth century. After the 1917 revolution and the World War

¹¹² Echo of Moscow. (2013, December 9). *Kremlin Announced the Dissolution of One of the Biggest and Oldest Mass Media*. URL: <http://echo.msk.ru/news/1214427-echo.html>

¹¹³ Federal Law of the Russian Federation of June 1, 2005 No. 53-FZ. About The State Language of The Russian Federation. *ConsultantPlus*. URL: http://www.consultant.ru/document/cons_doc_LAW_53749/

¹¹⁴ Decree of The President of The Russian Federation on The Establishment of the *Russkiy Mir* Foundation as of June 21, 2007, No 796. *Russkiy Mir Foundation*. URL: <http://www.russkiymir.ru/en/fund/decreephp>

¹¹⁵ *Russkiy Mir* Foundation. URL: <http://www.russkiymir.ru/en/>

II, the wave of emigration, technological advances and celebrated educational system became a mark of pride for the Soviets and largely contributed to the popularity of the Russian language beyond the country¹¹⁶. In 1960-1991, various Russian speaking universities, schools, and language study centers were opened in the soviet allied countries. In 1967, International Association of Teachers of Russian Language and Literature, also known as MAPRYAL, was established at Sorbonne University in Paris (currently headquartered in Saint Petersburg, Russia)¹¹⁷. In 1973, Pushkin State Russian Language Institute was established in Moscow as a leading tertiary institution for teachers specialized in Russian as a foreign language¹¹⁸.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia lost her former economic, technological and geopolitical dominance in the world. As a result, Russian has become the only language out of the 10-12 leading world languages that has lost its ground in every single region of the world including the former Soviet Union states¹¹⁹. In comparison with 1990, when Russian was the fourth most spoken language in the world by total number of speakers (312 million), in 2017, the language moved down to the eighth position with circa 268 million people¹²⁰. Between 1990 and 2004, number of secondary school, college and university students speaking Russian as a language of study or as a foreign language

¹¹⁶ Arefiev, A.L. (2012). *Russian Language Between 20th and 21th Centuries*, p. 225 [Арефьев, А. Л. Русский язык на рубеже XX и XXI веков.] Moscow: Center for Sociological Research of the Russian Ministry of Education and Science.

¹¹⁷ International Association of Teachers of Russian Language and Literature (MAPRYAL). URL: <http://ru.mapryal.org/international-association-of-teachers-of-russian-language-and-literature-mapryal/>

¹¹⁸ Pushkin State Russian Language Institute. URL: <http://www.pushkin.institute/en/>

¹¹⁹ Arefiev, A.L. (2012). *Russian Language Between 20th and 21th Centuries*. Moscow: Center for Sociological Research of the Russian Ministry of Education and Science, p. 6.

¹²⁰ Simons, G. F., Fennig, C. D. (Eds). (2017). *Ethnologue: Languages of the World, Twentieth Edition*. Dallas, Texas: SIL International. URL: <https://www.ethnologue.com>.

dropped by 34 million worldwide¹²¹. Today only 3% students in general upper secondary education in EU Member States study Russian as a foreign language (cf. English - 94%, French – 23%, Spanish and German – 19% each)¹²².

Even with all negative things considered, Russian remains to be one of the six official languages of the United Nations and the second most widespread language on the Internet after English (6.5% of all the websites are in Russian)¹²³. Moreover, in 2017, Russia was ranked sixth in the Study.EU Country Ranking by attractiveness to international students¹²⁴. Those are a few out of many other reasons to study Russian as a foreign language. Speculating on the question, what Russia and Russian language can offer to people from different countries, Arefiev states that the position of Russia as a key supplier of oil products and weapons can not contribute to the rise of the Russian language¹²⁵. Along with promotion of Russian study tours, development of professional training for RFL teachers, and opening new Russian Centers for Science and Culture abroad, an important part of the government policy in the language campaign still falls on the shoulders of the mass media and the Internet.

According to the 2016-2020 Federal Targeted Program for the Russian language, active information policy and media promotion of Russian as a foreign

¹²¹ Arefiev, A.L. (2012). *Russian Language Between 20th and 21th Centuries*, p. 395

¹²² Eurostat. (2016). *Foreign Language Learning Statistics*. URL: http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Foreign_language_learning_statistics

¹²³ W3Techs. (2017). *Usage of Content Languages for Websites*. URL: https://w3techs.com/technologies/overview/content_language/all

¹²⁴ Study.EU. (2017). *The Study.EU Country Ranking 2017 for International Students*. URL: <http://www.study.eu/article/the-study-eu-country-ranking-2017-for-international-students>

¹²⁵ Arefiev, A.L. (2012). *Russian Language Between 20th and 21th Centuries*, p. 411

language is planned¹²⁶. That costs 415 million rubles (355 million from the state budget and 60 million raised from non-government sources), and implies creating content for television and radio programs as well as modernizing content for online learning. However, the program does not specify the type of media organizations (regional, national, or international) that can be eligible for the state subsidies. It hints at the visible discrepancies between the government policy in promoting Russian studies and the media policy of the staff-affiliated media to represent Russia as a world power without referring to its language and culture. Potential reason for that is the perception of Russia's foreign-oriented media as a source for information and persuasion, or even 'soft power' and 'propaganda machine'¹²⁷, rather than an agent for public education and cultural entertainment. How this situation differs from other European practices, what makes Russian language challenging as didacticised media content and how edutainment approach can be used for audience's engagement are the questions to be looked further in the empirical part of the research.

¹²⁶ The 2016-2020 Federal Targeted Program 'Russian language'. (2015). Approved by the RF Government on May 20, 2015. URL: <http://government.ru/media/files/UdArRuNmg2Hdm3MwRUwmdE9N3ohepzpQ.pdf>

¹²⁷ Van Herpen, M. H. (2015). *Putin's Propaganda Machine: Soft Power and Russian Foreign Policy*. Lanham, Boulder: Rowman & Littlefield, pp. 27-29.

Chapter 2. Case studies of Deutsche Welle and Russia Beyond the Headlines

2.1. From cross-border news providers to language learning mediators

In order to assess the potential of a Russia-based foreign-oriented media to offer the Russian language didactics, it is vital to rationalize the choice of Deutsche Welle and Russia Beyond The Headlines as the two objects of comparison - with DW online section 'Learn German' as a media, successful and experienced enough to provide a set of categories for the comparative analysis, and RBTH 'Education' section as a potential language learning mediator under study.

Deutsche Welle (DW) has been Germany's public international broadcaster since 1953, headquartered in Bonn/Berlin and owned by ARD. DW's television service includes channels in German, English, Spanish, and Arabic, with radio and online content available in 30 languages¹²⁸. According to the Deutsche Welle Act, the broadcaster's stated goals are 'to convey the image of Germany as a cultural state in the European tradition and as a free democratic constitutional state, ...to provide a forum... for German (and other) points of view on important topics... with the aim of promoting understanding and the exchange of ideas... In

¹²⁸ Deutsche Welle. *Über Uns*. URL: <http://www.dw.com/de/unternehmen/profil/s-30626>

so doing Deutsche Welle shall, in particular, promote the German language'¹²⁹. This explicit requirement for German language promotion has been in effect since as early as 1956, when the first language course '*Lernt Deutsch bei der Deutschen Welle*' came out on the radio.

In 1994, Deutsche Welle became the first public service broadcaster in Germany with an online presence. Today 'DW - Learn German' is the most popular section in the whole Deutsche Welle online environment. The web-site dw.com/deutschlernen has over 7 million page views per month¹³⁰ and provides German language courses in 30 languages for different levels of German proficiency – from A1 to C2 according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages¹³¹. At different times, the online courses of Deutsche Welle have won various awards for its commitment to innovative use of media in education, e.g. MEDEA Awards, D-ELINA – German E-Learning Innovation and Young Academics Award, Comenius EduMedia Award and others¹³².

Russia Beyond The Headlines is an international multimedia and publishing project about Russia, launched by *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* in 2007 and since January 2017 run by Autonomous Nonprofit Organization 'TV-Novosti'¹³³.

The mission of this project is 'to help understand Russia better in order to

¹²⁹ Deutsche Welle. (2005). *Deutsche Welle Act*. URL: <http://www.dw.com/downloads/36383966/dwgesetzen.pdf>

¹³⁰ Bley, U. (2015, October 28). Interview mit André Moeller, Leiter der DW Bildungsprogramme. *EAZ Eifel-Zeitung*. URL: <http://www.eifelzeitung.de/redaktion/interviews/interview-mit-andre-moeller-leiter-der-dw-bildungsprogramme-113395/>

¹³¹ Council of Europe: Modern Languages Division, Strasbourg. (2001). *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 23.

¹³² Deutsche Welle. *German To Go: Learn German for Free with DW*. URL: <http://www.dw.com/downloads/27605321/german-to-go-webversion.pdf>

¹³³ Papandina, A. (2017, January 9). Russia Beyond The Headlines Handed Over to The RT channel's Managing Company. *RBC*. URL: http://www.rbc.ru/technology_and_media/09/01/2017/587399da9a7947c7cccd70f3

explain, educate and entertain its readers'¹³⁴. The education part of RBTH has been exercised via the 'Education' section both online and in print. The web-site rbth.com/education is focused on Russian universities and studying Russian language. In the case study, the 'Education' section is being assessed as a potential platform for RFL online courses and compared to the section 'Learn German' on dw.com.

The challenge for comparative analysis lies in the functional differences between the analog media of Deutsche Welle and Russia Beyond The Headlines. While the former is a television and radio broadcaster that communicates to its global audience via satellite television and shortwave transmitters, the latter distributes its print publications as supplements in the leading international media outlets such as The Wall Street Journal, The New York Times, The Daily Telegraph, Handelsblatt, and Le Figaro¹³⁵. In the Internet, however, Deutsche Welle and Russia Beyond The Headlines do have a common ground – they use the top-level domain *.com* as an open communication-information multimedia space, where the process of foreign language acquisition can be facilitated by multilingualism, multimedia, and multimodality.

Multilingualism provides an access to a wider range of users and enables customization of the content in one click. Multimedia helps pushing back the limits of a single medium, so that radio and television broadcasters would benefit from posting texts and images, while formerly print and newly electronic newspapers could promote their audiovisual content. And finally, multimodality of online media allows using a number of different platforms (desktop, web, mobile applications) to connect to their audience. Another important

¹³⁴ Russia Beyond The Headlines (2016). *Media Kit*. URL: https://cdn.rbth.com/static/docs/media_kit_12-2016.pdf

¹³⁵ The full list of RBTH partners is available at https://www.rbth.com/about_us/partners

commonalities include edutainment capacity to teach a national language (German and Russian) that is different from the lingua franca – English, and clear national identification within the media brand, i.e. *Deutsche Welle* and *Russia Beyond The Headlines*.

The web site RBTH.com and its ‘Education’ section (rbth.com/education) are similar to Deutsche Welle and its section ‘Deutsch Lernen’ (dw.com/deutschlernen) in their structures, purposes, and formats. Both web sites have a common navigation with the hot topics in the upper area (politics, business, science, culture, sports), clear national identification with a articulated agenda and educational mission, and multimedia formats (video, texts, audio), available via different platforms – desktop, mobile, and tablets (Appendix 1).

Although Deutsche Welle and Russia Beyond The Headlines resemble from a perspective of a media consumer, they have some major differences from the communicators’ point of view that inevitably influence their capacity to promote the national language. It would be shortsighted to simply adopt the programming of Deutsche Welle for the online project of Russia Beyond The Headlines, changing its language settings from German to Russian. The model of Deutsche Welle-Deutsch Lernen is indeed being used as a successful case, but only for establishing a set of categories – topics, levels, media, formats, and platforms – that will be used further for a preliminary analysis of RBTH as an online language learning media. For a more complex analysis, Deutsche Welle and RBTH must be compared as two media organizations in a field of social forces with the language-learning potential as a key variable.

2.2. Deutsche Welle and Russia Beyond The Headlines in the field of social forces

No matter, how free, independent and limitless the Internet may seem, when it comes to the online media – especially registered and state-affiliated media – they all function within their national media systems. According to Hallin and Mancini, a media system includes media markets, political parties, state governments, regulatory bodies, media organizations and individual journalists¹³⁶. This conceptual framework developed in 2004, has been constantly facing some criticism, mainly for their total exclusion of online media¹³⁷ and entertainment media¹³⁸. Thus, in order to compare Deutsche Welle and Russia Beyond The Headlines as online media, but with a brick-and-mortar organizational environment, a model of competitive pressures were used.

Media live in a climate of intense internal and external power roles. Gerbner¹³⁹ classify these pressures as personal, social, institutional, and situational. McQuail¹⁴⁰ enhanced the system, and outlined the field of social forces that influences the processes of content production and content consumption. In the current study, the media organizations Deutsche Welle and Russia Beyond The Headlines will be examined from the communicator's point of view and with regard to social, political, economic and other pressures (Figure 1).

¹³⁶ Hallin, D. C., Mancini, P. (2004). *Comparing Media Systems: Three Models of Media and Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 22-44.

¹³⁷ Jakubowicz, K. (2010). Introduction: Media Systems Research – An Overview. In B. Dobek-Ostrowska, M. Glowacki, K. Jakubowicz & M. Sükösd (Eds.). *Comparative Media Systems: European and Global Perspectives*, pp. 1-21. Budapest: CEU Press, p. 10.

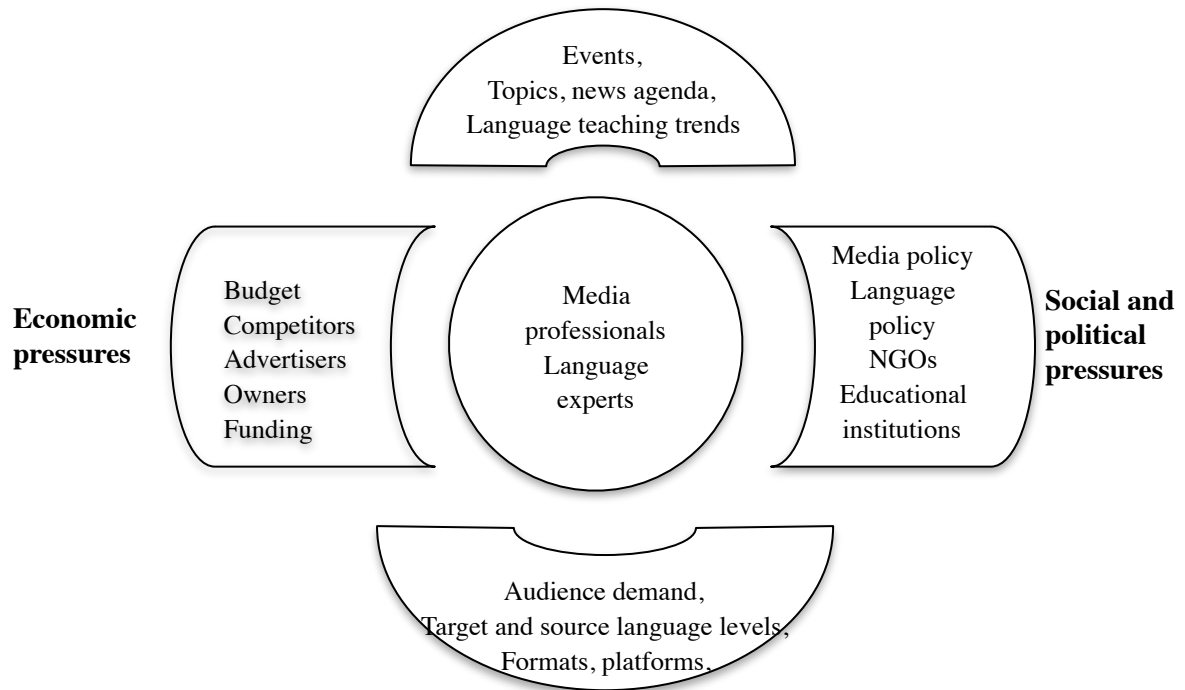
¹³⁸ Hardy, J. (2008). *Western Media Systems*. London: Routledge, p. 20.

¹³⁹ Gerbner, G. (1969). Institutional Pressures Upon Mass Communicators. In P. Halmos (Ed.). *The Sociology of Mass Media Communicators* (pp. 205-248). Keele: University of Keele, p. 243.

¹⁴⁰ McQuail, D. (2010). *McQuail's Mass Communication Theory* (6th ed.). SAGE. p. 237.

Figure 1

Media organization in a field of social forces through the lens of a language teaching



Social and political environment

In the field of comparative media systems research, Germany and Russia belong to downright different models of media and politics: Germany relates to the Democratic Corporatist model¹⁴¹, and Russia to ‘statist commercialized’ model¹⁴². The differences between two models can be observed within each dimension (newspaper industry, political parallelism, professionalization, and role of the state), but for the purpose of this study, a special notice should be given to the type of ownership. Major globally oriented media in Russia - RT television network, Sputnik radio station, and Russia Beyond The Headlines - are based on

¹⁴¹ Hallin, D. C., Mancini, P. (2004). *Comparing Media Systems: Three Models of Media and Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 68.

¹⁴² Vartanova, E. (2012). The Russian Media Model in the Context of Post-Soviet Dynamics. In Hallin, D., Mancini, P. (Eds.). *Comparing Media Systems Beyond the Western World* (pp. 119-142). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 142.

direct (state-funded) or indirect (commercial) state participation, where the government acts both as media investor and agenda setter. In particular, Russia Beyond The Headlines used to be a part of the state-funded newspaper *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, but early 2017 passed into the ownership of Autonomous Nonprofit Organization ‘*TV-Novosti*’, which is in turn sponsored by the government of Russia¹⁴³. Germany’s public service broadcaster Deutsche Welle is on the contrary financed through public fees and by definition aim at serving the public interest¹⁴⁴.

Deutsche Welle cooperates with non-profit organizations like the Goethe Institute, Der Pädagogischer Austauschdienst (PAD) and Die Zentralstelle für das Auslandsschulwesen (Zfa) to improve and distribute its language courses¹⁴⁵. In Russia, the similar function of promoting Russian language learning via media could be performed by the recently emerged Pushkin Institute partnership with representatives in the UK, US, the Netherlands, Poland, Turkey and other countries¹⁴⁶, by Rossotrudnichestvo (the Russian federal agency for CIS issues, compatriots living abroad, and international humanitarian cooperation)¹⁴⁷, and The Russkiy Mir Foundation¹⁴⁸. The prospects for such collaborations will be explored further in the expert interviews, while here special attention is given to the national language support policy in Germany and Russia after World War II.

¹⁴³ Papandina, A. (2017, January 9). Russia Beyond The Headlines Handed Over to The RT channel’s Managing Company. *RBC*. URL: http://www.rbc.ru/technology_and_media/09/01/2017/587399da9a7947c7cccd70f3

¹⁴⁴ Deutsche Welle. (2005). *Deutsche Welle Act*. URL: <http://www.dw.com/downloads/36383966/dwgesetzen.pdf>

¹⁴⁵ Hoffmann, J. (2014, August 15). Die Aufgabenplanung. *Deutsche Welle*. URL: <http://www.dw.com/de/die-aufgabenplanung/a-15680839>, S.25.

¹⁴⁶ Pushkin Institute Partnership. URL: <https://partner.pushkininstitute.ru/>

¹⁴⁷ Rossotrudnichestvo. URL: <http://rs.gov.ru/en>

¹⁴⁸ Russkiy Mir Foundation. URL: <http://www.russkiymir.ru/en/>

National migration and language policy

According to the United Nations International migration wallchart 2015, Germany and the Russian Federation host the second and third largest numbers of migrants worldwide (12 million each), after the United States of America with 47 million of international migrants¹⁴⁹. Establishing the Goethe-Institute in 1951¹⁵⁰ and launching the first German radio courses by Deutsche Welle in 1956 fell on the beginning of the Germany's post-World War II immigration history, when providing a wider access to the German language became a crucial point for cultural integration. The history of immigration to Germany embraces the period after World War II until reunification (1945-1980), 1980-1993, 1993 until present. Since 2012, the number of immigrants has increased due to Germany's implementation of the European Union's Directive on Highly Qualified Workers that eases immigration regulations for highly skilled workers from non-EU countries¹⁵¹. The OECD report 'Recruiting immigrant workers: Germany' revealed that the lack of German language skills among the candidates from abroad was one of the key reasons why German employers hesitated to hire immigrant workers¹⁵². Interestingly enough, the Task Plan of Deutsche Welle for

¹⁴⁹ United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division. (2015). *International Migration Wallchart*. URL: <http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/publications/wallchart/docs/MigrationWallChart2015.pdf>

¹⁵⁰ Goethe-Institut. *Zur Geschichte des Goethe-Instituts*. URL: <https://www.goethe.de/de/uun/org/ges.html>

¹⁵¹ Council of the European Union. (2009). Council Directive 2009/50/EC of 25 May 2009 on the Conditions of Entry and Residence of Third-country Nationals for the Purposes of Highly Qualified Employment. *Official Journal of the European Union, L 155, Vol. 52*. June 18, 2009. URL: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=OJ:L:2009:155:TOC>

¹⁵² Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). (2013). *Recruiting Immigrant Workers: Germany*. OECD Publishing. URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264189034-en>

2014-2017 seems to have addressed this need by proposing to increase the proportion of videos and interactive elements on the web-site dw.com/deutschlernen as well as to develop a brand new course ‘Business German’¹⁵³. However, the initiative had to be suspended when Germany and other European countries faced the migrant crisis.

Oezcan (2004) indicates two parallel flows of immigrants to Germany: ethnic Germans (‘Aussiedlers’) returning from abroad and foreigners with no German ancestry¹⁵⁴. Since more than a million refugees had arrived in Germany in 2015, Deutsche Welle has significantly augmented its German language portfolio with the multimedia courses tailored specifically to refugees’ needs¹⁵⁵, e.g. the project ‘*Mach dein Herz auf*’ (‘Open Your Heart’) that helps asylum seekers make their first steps in Germany and advises volunteers on their efforts to teach German¹⁵⁶. This shift in the audience’s orientation reflects the connection between the state integration policy and the media agenda of the leading public service broadcaster.

In general, the public educational initiatives in Germany have been offering their teaching services to all immigrant groups: those with no German background can learn German as a foreign language at any level, while ethnic Germans with a variety of German dialects can upgrade their knowledge of the standard German (*Hochdeutsch*). Despite many regional varieties of the German

¹⁵³ Hoffmann, J. (2014, August 15). Die Aufgabenplanung. *Deutsche Welle*. URL: <http://www.dw.com/de/die-aufgabenplanung/a-15680839>, S. 25.

¹⁵⁴ Oezcan, V. (2004, July 1). Germany: Immigration in Transition. *Migration Information Source*. Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute. URL: <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/germany-immigration-transition>

¹⁵⁵ Bley, U. (2017, April 12). Deutsch Lernen mit der Deutschen Welle. *EAZ Eifel-Zeitung*. URL: <http://www.eifelzeitung.de/allgemein/tagesthemen/deutsch-lernen-mit-der-deutschen-welle-113393/>

¹⁵⁶ Mach Dein Herz Auf. *Deutsche Welle*. URL: <http://www.dw.com/de/deutsch-lernen/mach-dein-herz-auf/s-32876>

language (pluracentricity), Germany has always stuck to its single language, while the Russian Federation has inherited its Soviet multilingual background with Russian as lingua franca.

Today the number of ethnic Russians living outside the bounds of the Russian Federation amounts to circa 30 million people with the largest communities settled in the former Soviet Union, the United States, Israel and Germany¹⁵⁷. Emigration from the USSR began after the October Revolution of 1917 and Civil War of 1917-1922, followed by the second wave during World War II, the third wave in the 1970s and the dramatic period of the 1990s, with an upsurge of international migrants from the former Soviet republics and the overwhelming number of Russian emigrants going abroad¹⁵⁸. In 1990, when the Soviets eased the emigration restrictions, the brain drain led hundreds of top-flight Russian specialists to the US colleges and universities¹⁵⁹. The phenomenon happened again in 2013-2015, triggered by the Russia's international isolation over its actions in Ukraine and the country's weakening economy hit by Western sanctions over the annexation of Crimea¹⁶⁰. The growing number of Russian citizens relocating to the US, Canada, and Europe has made it a priority to maintain Russian language knowledge among those who speak it as a native language.

¹⁵⁷ Oliker, O., Crane, K. et al. (2009). *Russian Foreign Policy: Sources and Implications*. Santa Monica, CA: Rand Corporation, p. 38.

¹⁵⁸ Iontsev, V., Ivakhnyuk, I., Soboleva, S. (2010). Russia: Immigration to Russia. In U.A. Segal, D. Elliott, N.S. Mayadas (Eds.), *Immigration Worldwide: Policies, Practices, and Trends* (pp.47-62). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

¹⁵⁹ Barnathan, J. (1991, November 4). The Soviet Brain Drain is The U.S. Brain Gain. *Bloomberg*. URL: <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/1991-11-03/the-soviet-brain-drain-is-the-u-dot-s-dot-brain-gain>

¹⁶⁰ Panda, A. (2014, July 25). Russian Emigration Spikes in 2013-2014. *The Diplomat*. URL: <http://thediplomat.com/2014/07/russian-emigration-spikes-in-2013-2014/>

In the meantime, the increasing flow of migrants from Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Azerbaijan, Moldova, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Armenia, and Belarus in the last twenty years has made teaching Russian as a non-native language a crucial point for the successful integration of labor migrants and refugees in the host country. Thus, maintaining the Russian language among native speakers abroad and teaching Russian as a non-native language to migrants has pushed back the task of promoting Russian as a foreign language worldwide. The non-profit organizations like the Russkiy Mir Foundation and Rossotrudnichestvo as well as the state-funded media like Radio Sputnik have been actively promoting the Russian language to the native speakers abroad, while educational institutions keep on teaching Russian as a foreign language. However, the foreign-oriented media initiatives in this field are still miniscule. Russia Beyond The Headlines has been promoting international activities of the leading Russian universities (Saint Petersburg State University, People's Friendship University, Siberian Federal University and others) as a partner-generated content within its Education section. But any cooperation projects with non-profit or government organizations in the field of Russian language learning have not yet been initiated.

Economic pressures

The annual budget for Deutsche Welle service comes from the tax revenues and amounts to 270 Million Euro, about 1,5 million of which are invested into developing German language courses¹⁶¹. Along with the state funding, Deutsche Welle initiates various cooperation opportunities for its language partners in the

¹⁶¹ Bley, U. (2015, October 28). Interview mit André Moeller, Leiter der DW Bildungsprogramme. *EAZ Eifel-Zeitung*. URL: <http://www.eifelzeitung.de/redaktion/interviews/interview-mit-andre-moeller-leiter-der-dw-bildungsprogramme-113395/>

form of content feeds, newsletters, print and online projects, advertising campaigns, banner- and link exchanges¹⁶². The list of long-term partners of Deutsche Welle includes the Goethe-Institute, DaF WEBKOM (the web-conference for German teachers), Internationaler Deutschlehrerverband (The International German Teachers' Association), LingoFox, Deutsche Auslandsgesellschaft, and Universität Bonn¹⁶³.

Russia Beyond The Headlines is currently sponsored by ANO 'TV-Novosti', the state-funded organization that also sponsors the RT television network. The budget allocated to the Education section of the website rbth.com has not been disclosed, however, it is known, that apart from the indirect state funds, RBTH raises its revenues from online and print advertising as well as from sponsored content placements and special projects¹⁶⁴. This circumstance opens a wide range of opportunities for a potential cooperation between RBTH, language schools and other educational projects.

As for the competitive landscape, Deutsche Welle holds an exceptional position as the Germany's leading international broadcaster. In the field of German language teaching, however, DW does locate a few competitors, in particular the Goethe-Institute, the world largest German language provider¹⁶⁵, the BBC aggregator of language sources¹⁶⁶ as well as the online language portals

¹⁶² Deutsche Welle. *Deutsche Welle – Ein Starker Partner. Deutschkurseangebote und Kooperationsformen*. URL: <http://www.dw.com/downloads/26168634/deutsch-lernen-mit-der-deutschen-welle.pdf>

¹⁶³ Deutsche Welle. *Unsere Partner*. URL: <http://www.dw.com/de/deutsch-lernen/unsere-partner/s-31880>

¹⁶⁴ Russia Beyond The Headlines. (2016). *Media Kit*. URL: https://cdn.rbth.com/static/docs/media_kit_12-2016.pdf

¹⁶⁵ Goethe-Institut. *Deutschkurse*. URL: <https://www.goethe.de/de/spr/kup/kur.html>

¹⁶⁶ BBC Languages. URL: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/languages/>

like *Bab.la*, *Busuu*, *Livemocha* and *Babbel*¹⁶⁷. The same multilingual online sources can create competition to Russia Beyond The Headlines as a potential Russian language mediator, while other English-language media such as RT television network, Sputnik radio station, The Moscow Times newspaper, and the Capital Moscow radio station act as competitors at the cross-border news media market. These foreign-oriented media will be tested further in the online survey regarding the consumers' awareness of the media and their attitudes towards learning Russian as a foreign language through the online media.

Media organization and language teaching expertise

The organization structure of Deutsche Welle is headed by the Director General and includes programming department (with editorial desks for different regions and topics), distribution, marketing and technology department, administration department and DW Akademie with a special department responsible for production and distribution of the online German courses¹⁶⁸. The education team creates German web-series, didacticises the original news content, develops the multimedia products on different platforms and curates the online community of German learners and teachers¹⁶⁹. Russia Beyond The Headlines' team consists of the central desk with editors for major departments (politics, business, defense, culture etc.), global English and regional teams (Western Europe, South America, Southern Europe, Asia) with a wide international

¹⁶⁷ Deutsche Welle. (2013). *Deutsche Welle Evaluationsbericht 2010-2013*. URL: <http://www.dw.com/de/der-evaluationsbericht/a-16910881>, S. 135.

¹⁶⁸ Deutsche Welle. *The Structure of DW. Organization Chart*. URL: <http://www.dw.com/downloads/38218776/organigrammdw.pdf>

¹⁶⁹ Deutsche Welle. *Das Team*. URL: <http://www.dw.com/de/das-team/a-1633210>

network of representatives, plus multimedia and information department along with special projects and social media group¹⁷⁰.

Despite the similar organization structure, the major discrepancy between the content management operations at DW and RBTH deals with the target language: for Deutsche Welle, German has been one of the official languages, while Russia Beyond The Headlines does not operate in Russian language and focuses solely on the international audience (or Russian native speakers with a good command of foreign languages). At RBTH, Russian is being used only as a source language for creating domestic materials that will be selected by the regional desks, translated into the 17 other languages and adapted in the relevant target markets¹⁷¹. No Russian language materials are publicly available at the RBTH web sites, which means that the approach of didacticising the journalistic content for the purpose of language learning (like in the case with Deutsche Welle - Deutsch Lernen) cannot be simply applied for Russia Beyond the Headlines. But as long as the media professionals and language experts at RBTH have an access to the source materials in Russian, they can retrieve and recycle them whenever the need arise.

Understanding the audience

Deutsche Welle reaches out to international audience, amounted to over 135 million people every week. The website dw.com/deuschlernen has more than

¹⁷⁰ Russia Beyond The Headlines. *Team*. URL: <https://www.rbth.com/team>

¹⁷¹ Russia Beyond The Headlines. *Products*. URL: <https://syndicate.rbth.com/products>

7 million page views every month¹⁷². André Moeller, head of the DW educational programming, describes the target audience of *DW - Deutsch Lernen* as ‘people, who are interested in Germany, German language and culture; the community amounts to 15,4 million German learners worldwide and roughly one million new settlers in the FRG, who want to learn the language. Besides, German language teachers use the DW materials in their classes across the globe’¹⁷³.

The global audience of *Russia Beyond The Headlines* amounts to 10,2 million users. The audience is principally male (82%), 35+ years old (72%) with above than average level of annual personal income (75%). Out of 21 web sites in 17 languages the biggest monthly traffic – 650 000 visits - goes to the English versions at rbth.com and rbth.co.uk. Users geography encompasses Europe (41%), USA (17%), Asia (25%) and other regions (17%)¹⁷⁴. According to the RBTH websites’ audience research (Google Analytics, Q2 2016), the section ‘Education’ (rbth.com/education) has only 8000 unique page views per month, which is almost twice as little as ‘Literature’ and thrice as little as ‘Russian Kitchen’ section¹⁷⁵.

The example of Deutsche Welle – *Deutsch Lernen* demonstrates that the language-learning component can positively affect the online users statistics and increase the number of page views. This assumption will be tested in the

¹⁷² Tellmann, V. (2015, October 8). DW Increases Audience Reach. *Deutsche Welle*. URL: <http://www.dw.com/en/dw-increases-audience-reach-118-million-people-watch-listen-to-or-use-dw-programs-and-services-on-a-weekly-basis/a-18768576>

¹⁷³ Moeller cited in Bley, U. (2015, October 28). Interview mit André Moeller, Leiter der DW Bildungsprogramme. *EAZ Eifel-Zeitung*. URL: <http://www.eifelzeitung.de/redaktion/interviews/interview-mit-andre-moeller-leiter-der-dw-bildungsprogramme-113395/>

¹⁷⁴ *Russia Beyond The Headlines*. (2016). Media Kit. URL: https://cdn.rbth.com/static/docs/media_kit_12-2016.pdf

¹⁷⁵ *Russia Beyond The Headlines*. (2016). Media Kit. URL: https://cdn.rbth.com/static/docs/media_kit_12-2016.pdf

empirical part of the research by monitoring the edutainment video prototypes on the website rbth.com/education.

Content

Deutsche Welle offers free online German courses for every skill levels – from A1 to C2. Users can choose a course in their native language, at a particular level of proficiency and with a set of desirable materials (audio, video, worksheets) in the Course Finder section – dw.com/learngerman/coursefinder. In order to find out, which courses would best suits them, the users can take Placement Test on dw.com/learngerman/placementtest and check their grammar, vocabulary, reading and listening comprehension¹⁷⁶.

The modern repertoire of *DW - Deutsch Lernen* (www.dw.com/de/deutsch-lernen/) includes four sections¹⁷⁷:

- Self-contained curricular language courses for beginners (*Deutschkurse*)
- Ongoing didactically prepared content for advanced learners (*Deutsch XXL*)
- Community and service, including newsletter, social media, podcasts (*Community D*)
- Materials for German language teachers (*Deutsch Unterrichten*)

The unit *Deutsch XXL* with tailored and didacticised content includes five sections: *Deutsch Aktuell*, *Deutsch im Focus*, *Telenovela*, *Bandtagebuch*, *Landeskunde*. The section *Deutsch Aktuell* is the one with didactically arranged journalistic materials – *Top-Thema*, *Video-Thema*, *Nachrichten*, and *Glossar* -

¹⁷⁶ Deutsche Welle. *Deutsch Lernen. Service*. URL: <http://www.dw.com/de/deutsch-lernen/service/s-9032>

¹⁷⁷ Deutsche Welle. (2013). *Deutsche Welle Evaluationsbericht 2010-2013*. URL: <http://www.dw.com/de/der-evaluationsbericht/a-16910881>, S. 136.

that allow advanced learners to both experience authentic German language and catch on the current events. All the materials are accompanied by multimedia - video or audio, downloadable script, quizzes, gap-fill exercises and printable pdf sheets¹⁷⁸ (Appendix 2).

RBTH Education online project currently includes three sections - University rankings, Learn Russian and Study in Russia¹⁷⁹. Until recently the ‘Learn Russian’ subsection featured only grammar tests for certificate levels; the capacity of the web site, however, allows for more diverse content. The empirical part of the research includes the development and production of the video series ‘Russian2Go’ on the web-site rbth.com/education as a pilot project for examining the audience’s feedback.

Platforms and social media

As of April 1, 2017, the ‘DW – Learn German’ Facebook page has over 900 thousand followers¹⁸⁰; its Twitter account has over 66 thousand followers¹⁸¹. Although the most-used platform for learning German with Deutsche Welle is desktop, the service constantly enhances its mobile presence¹⁸². For German learners on every level, Deutsche Welle offers podcasts related to its main programs. A portfolio of newsletters includes German courses with the answers to

¹⁷⁸ Deutsche Welle. *German To Go: Learn German for Free with DW*. URL: <http://www.dw.com/downloads/27605321/german-to-go-webversion.pdf>

¹⁷⁹ Russia Beyond The Headlines. *Education*. URL: <https://www.rbth.com/education>

¹⁸⁰ Deutsche Welle – Deutsch Lernen. *Facebook*. URL: <https://www.facebook.com/dw.learngerman>

¹⁸¹ Deutsche Welle – Deutsche Lernen. *Twitter*. URL: https://twitter.com/dw_learngerman

¹⁸² Moeller cited in Bley, U. (2015, October 28). Interview mit André Moeller, Leiter der DW Bildungsprogramme. *EAZ Eifel-Zeitung*. URL: <http://www.eifelzeitung.de/redaktion/interviews/interview-mit-andre-moeller-leiter-der-dw-bildungsprogramme-113395/>

the tasks of the week, German as a foreign language, German in Focus, and newsletter for German teachers.

Russia Beyond The Headlines has totally over 1 300 million followers in social media (each country's web-site has its own local account in social networks)¹⁸³. As of April 1, 2017, RBTH.com has over 280 thousand followers on Facebook¹⁸⁴, and over 16 thousand followers on Twitter¹⁸⁵. Accounts allocated exclusively to rbth.com/education are not available, and all the updates related to 'Education' are posted in the general accounts. Every RBTH website provides an option to subscribe to the weekly newsletter in its language. According to Google Analytics, in September-November, 2016, the audience of RBTH e-mail newsletters amounted to 72 thousand subscribers. The web-site audience research indicated that 50% users open RBTH websites on their desktops, while 44% go mobile, and only 6% use tablets¹⁸⁶. For mobile and tablet users RBTH suggest RBTH Daily – mobile application with a digest of Top-10 RBTH articles in English. RBTH application for iPad provides digital version of printed editions as well as online materials.

The comparative analysis of Deutsche Welle and Russia Beyond The Headlines as online communicators and media organizations led to the following research enquiry.

¹⁸³ Russia Beyond The Headlines. (2016). *Media Kit*. URL: https://cdn.rbth.com/static/docs/media_kit_12-2016.pdf

¹⁸⁴ Russia Beyond The Headlines. *Facebook*. URL: <https://www.facebook.com/russiabeyond/>

¹⁸⁵ Russia Beyond The Headlines. *Twitter*. URL: <https://twitter.com/russiabeyond>

¹⁸⁶ Russia Beyond The Headlines. (2016). *Media Kit*. URL: https://cdn.rbth.com/static/docs/media_kit_12-2016.pdf

Research question: is it plausible for a Russia-based international media to adopt an edutainment content strategy and become a language-learning content provider?

Here plausibility concerns Russia's international policy (whether the promotion of Russian as a foreign language is actually a priority), Russian media system (whether the media see the language promotion technically, financially, ideologically and professionally viable), the current state of the Russian media didactics (its complexity, popularity, and relevance) and the foreign-speaking audience's demand for such content.

Hypothesis 1: Russia's global media can include a RFL learning section in its functional set, provided the source is multilingual, multimedia, multiplatform and culturally relevant, and its mission statement already implies an edutainment component.

Hypothesis 2: Potential RFL learners would consider Russia-related media – namely Russia Beyond the Headline (rbth.com) - as an alternative source for informal language learning provided its content and technological relevance.

In order to answer the research question, Russia Beyond The Headlines as a case will be studied closely in the empirical part of the research at the two levels:

1) Russia Beyond The Headlines as an online communicator:

- Structure, purpose, formats of the web site: technical and conceptual relevance of edutainment for rbth.com.
- Content management: web and social media strategy - from creator, editor, publisher, and administrator to consumer.
- Pilot project production according to the categories deduced from the successful case of Deutsche Welle - Deutsch Lernen: topics, levels, source languages, formats, multimedia, and platforms.

2) Russia Beyond The Headlines as a media organization in the field of social forces

- Russia's international outlook and RFL policy.
- Russian media system: media concentration, degree of independence in the editorial policy.
- Current trends in the Russian language didactics: approaches to teaching RFL via media and grading the language proficiency, professional competencies.
- Foreign-speaking audience's demand for RFL online learning resources, their preferences and media usage practices.

Chapter 3. Empirical study

Theoretical overview of the Russia-based international media and their on-and-off attempts to provide language learning service indicates that the problem of producing and consuming edutainment content has not been studied clearly in the field of media research. Therefore, in the empirical part of the study, exploratory research techniques such as pilot study, in-depth expert interviews and online survey¹⁸⁷ were chosen to investigate the phenomenon of learning Russian as a foreign language via online media at two different levels – online media as a communicator via web-site and social media and media organization in the field of social forces (policy, ownership, audience, events) through the lens of teaching Russian as a foreign language.

¹⁸⁷ Shields, P., Rangarjan, N. (2013). *A Playbook for Research Methods: Integrating Conceptual Frameworks and Project Management*. Stillwater, OK: New Forums Press, p. 109.

The empirical research has been accomplished in two stages. The preliminary stage includes the pilot study to test the feasibility of the web site RBTH.com and its social media accounts to provide edutainment content. The pilot study consists in 1) analyzing the popularity of the RFL-related content at rbth.com/education and defining some key characteristics of the RBTH.com audience; 2) identifying the needs of randomly selected non-Russian speakers in learning RFL; 3) producing a RFL working prototype for Russia Beyond The Headlines and examining its ratings.

The main stage of the empirical study includes 1) interviews with experts in teaching RFL and managing edutainment projects and 2) the extended online survey of the target audience - non-Russian speaking adults – about their language competencies and media usage practices. The final part is devoted to the discussion and further recommendations for Russia Beyond The Headlines in communicating their edutainment to the target audience. Before embarking upon the preliminary stage, a short overview of the used research methods is needed.

3.1. Research methodology

Online media are the prime focus of the research. In order to understand the online users' goals, attitudes, and behaviors, both quantitative and qualitative methods can be used. As Mulder and Yaar (2006) put it, 'quantitative research is better at telling you what is happening, and qualitative research is better at telling you why it's happening'¹⁸⁸. Website traffic metrics and online surveys are the examples of the quantitative approach, when something is being tested with a comparatively large sample size. Expert interviews fall into the category of the

¹⁸⁸ Mulder, S., Yaar, Z. (2006). *The User is Always Right: A Practical Guide to Creating and Using Personas for the Web*. Berkeley, CA: New Riders, p. 37.

qualitative research as they imply interacting with a small number of people to reveal new insights. The current study uses a mixed-methods approach that combines quantitative methods with qualitative methods.

In the pilot study, the quantitative techniques of web analytics, social media monitoring and online surveys were employed to analyze the data behind the actual and potential audience's demand for edutainment in the media in general and on RBTH.com in particular. Web analytics is one of the most popular activities to obtain quantitative website data to gauge popularity trends for the purpose of optimizing web usage. It reveals three types of metrics: visit count (pageviews, number of visits and unique visitors), visit duration (time on site and on page), exit rate and bounce rate¹⁸⁹. There are many types of web analysis that enables to relate web traffic to organizational goals. Zheng and Peltsverger (2015) distinguish trend analysis, distribution analysis, user activity or behavior analysis (engagement, clickstream, visitor attention), performance analysis and conversion analysis¹⁹⁰. For the purposes of the pilot study, trend analysis was chosen to understand the total visits of the web-page rbth.com/education over the period of February 1, 2016 to October 27, 2016, gauge the social media buttons reactions and indicate the trending topics among the most viewed pages.

At the latter stage of the pilot study, a quantitative method of social media monitoring has been used. The social network Facebook has been chosen as a main source for monitoring the RBTH followers' activity (as of April 1, 2017, RBTH.com has over 280 thousand followers on Facebook, compared to over 16 thousand followers on Twitter). Khan (2015) emphasizes the seven layers of

¹⁸⁹ Kaushik, A. (2009). *Web Analytics 2.0: The Art of Online Accountability and Science of Customer Centricity* (1st ed.). Indianapolis, IN: John Wiley & Sons, p. 38.

¹⁹⁰ Zheng, J.G., Peltsverger, S. (2015). Web Analytics Overview. In M. Khosrow-Pour (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of Information Science and Technology* (3rd ed.) (pp. 7674 – 7683). Hershey PA: IGI Global, p. 7680.

social media data – text, networks, actions, hyperlinks, apps, location and search engines, - and encourages decision makers to convert the data into meaningful business insights¹⁹¹. The RBTH Facebook page¹⁹² has been monitored at the level of actions - likes, dislikes, shares, mentions, comments - performed by the social media users. The quantitative method of social media analytics enables to understand users' sentiments and compare them to the results of other research procedures, i.e. online surveys and expert interviews.

Online survey is an increasingly popular research method. According to Couper and Miller (2008), online surveys have become a hot topic in the social research right after Internet Explorer was released in 1995¹⁹³. Although since then many people have gained access to the Internet, the main objection to online surveys remains to be representativeness. Not everyone can be reached via Internet or be tech-savvy enough to participate in surveys – especially when it comes to the poor and the elderly. Wilson (1999) argues that market research for online companies should be conducted online¹⁹⁴. This statement is especially relevant for the current study since it concerns surveying online media consumers and potential online learners.

There were two online surveys conducted in the study (Appendix 8). The first form is a brief questionnaire for a small sample of non-Russian speakers (21 respondents), aimed at revealing their attitudes, competencies and individual preferences in learning Russian as a foreign language. The survey was meant to

¹⁹¹ Khan, G. F. (2015). *Seven Layers of Social Media Analytics: Mining Business Insights from Social Media Text, Actions, Networks, Hyperlinks, Apps, Search Engine, and Location Data*. Charleston, South Carolina: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, pp. 6-7.

¹⁹² Russia Beyond The Headlines. *Facebook*. URL: <https://www.facebook.com/russiabeyond/>

¹⁹³ Couper, M. P., Miller, P. V. (2008). Web Survey Methods: Introduction. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 72 (5), 831-835.

¹⁹⁴ Wilson cited in Babbie, E. (2013). *The Practice of Social Research* (13th ed.). China: Wadsworth, Cengage Learning, p. 259.

provide initial quantitative data that would describe the potential audience and help to develop a pilot edutainment project for *Russia Beyond The Headlines*. The second survey represents a more extended inquiry with a bigger sample of respondents (42), conducted to find out their individual attitudes towards learning RFL, assess their language competencies and uncover their media awareness and usage practices. Both surveys were constructed through the online software Typeform and contained mostly closed-ended questions, including general questions like gender, age, and place of origin, and more specific questions with an optional field 'Other' to fill-in. Both forms required no ID number or a password to be typed and were accessed at any platform - desktop, smartphone or tablet. Both online questionnaires were available through the separate links and shared via social media and online messengers. The obvious advantages of the online survey are privacy, anonymity, economy and lack of interviewer bias.

At the main stage of the empirical study, Skype interviews were conducted with five experts (Appendix 9). An expert interview is a qualitative research method in which the interviewer directs the conversation and initiates the discussion on a specific topic with an expert doing 95% of the talking¹⁹⁵. A list of interviewees was compiled based on their credibility and credentials, i.e. educational and professional background in teaching Russian as a foreign language, vocational experience in developing and managing edutainment media projects, network recommendations and RFL-related publications. A general plan of the interview is based on a set of topics to be discussed in depth, i.e. Russian media landscape, trends in teaching RFL, approaches to selecting levels, topics, formats and platforms suitable for online language learners. An average length of each interview is 60 minutes. The method of expert interviews helped to discover

¹⁹⁵ Babbie, E. (2013). *The Practice of Social Research* (13th ed.). China: Wadsworth, Cengage Learning, p. 317.

some challenges and opportunities behind edutainment in the media and to scope out a bigger picture of international media in the field of economic, political, and social forces.

3.2. Preliminary stage

The pilot study took off in late October 2016, when Russia Beyond The Headlines provided its Google Analysis data for the web site RBTH.com covering the period of January 1, 2016 – October 27, 2016. According to the metrics, the users' demographic body represents mostly the age groups of 18-24 (18%), 25-34 (29%), and 35-44 (20%). The male-female ratio is 66,9%:33,1%. Main locations of RBTH.com users are the US, Russia, UK, India, Canada, Australia, Germany, France, Netherlands, Italy (Appendix 5). According to the analysis of the pageviews at rbth.com/education in the same timespan, 4 out of 10 most viewed articles are devoted to non-native Russian speakers learning or promoting Russian as foreign language (Appendix 3). An average rating of these pages totals 2 684 pageviews within the measured time period. If one compares it to the overall statistics of the 'Education' section (8000 unique views per month) and to the viewership of the whole web-site RBTH.com (655 000 views per month)¹⁹⁶, one can notice 1) a relatively low activity in the 'Education' section; 2) a lack of RFL-related content at rbth.com/education, but 3) a relatively high viewership of the RFL-related articles.

For the purpose of identifying potential audience's preferences in learning Russian as a foreign language, a brief online survey was conducted in October 15, 2016 – October 17, 2016 (Appendix 6). The survey was created through the

¹⁹⁶ Russia Beyond The Headlines (2016). *Media Kit*. URL: https://cdn.rbth.com/static/docs/media_kit_12-2016.pdf

online software Typeform and contained 11 questions with an average time to complete - 4 min 43 sec. The survey was disseminated randomly via social media to non-Russian speaking adults who have had or would like to have an experience in learning Russian as a foreign language. The online form received 21 responses within the random sampling and delivered the following results: the two major age groups are 25-34 (57%) and 18-24 (43%). The male-female ratio is 29%: 71%. The main regions of the respondents' origin include Europe and North America with a small cohort originating from Middle East, Africa, and Asia. In general, the sampling of the survey is comparable to the demographic characteristics of the RBTH.com users and is therefore treated as a focus group for developing a pilot project.

According to the brief survey, 3/4 respondents speak Russian as a foreign language at the A1-B2 levels and rate their speaking, listening, reading and writing skills at the average 3 out of 5 points. Majority of the respondents reportedly learn RFL for career (67%) and/or academic purposes (62%); almost half of the sample (48%) learn RFL for everyday life in Russia and/or out of curiosity. When asked 'Have you ever used Russian news media for learning Russian', 52% respondents answered 'Yes' and mentioned among others the BBC, Bumaga (paperpaper.ru), Meduza, Russkiy Reporter, Pervyi Kanal (Channel One Russia), TASS, and Radio Echo of Moscow.

It is worth noting, however, that none of the aforementioned media offer Russian language courses or any RFL-related edutainment. Their media content is produced for fluent Russian speakers and not didacticised for self-learning. The respondents also chose video with subtitles as the most preferred media format for RFL learning (81%), followed by interactive quiz (43%), podcasts (38%), and news features in plain Russian (24%). The most interesting topics for RFL learning, according to the survey, are politics, business, culture, literature, sport,

art, and history (57%), with some people interested in conversational topics (24%) and Russian slang (19%).

The brief survey along with the web analytics proved that there is a certain demand for RFL-related topics and a vacant market niche for the online learning resources in the Russia's foreign-oriented media. Based on the RBTH.com web analysis and the survey outcome, subtitled video was chosen as a media format for the pilot project aimed at testing the online platform rbth.com to assess its potential as an edutainment media.

Pilot project

The content production started in November 2016 and resulted in the video series called 'Russian2Go' co-authored by Yulia Shimf and Catherine Barney. The video series includes three episodes – 'Kakie ljudi'¹⁹⁷, 'Davai'¹⁹⁸, and 'What do Russians mean when they say yes, no, maybe' all at the same time?'¹⁹⁹. Each video episode was published on the website rbth.com/education on due date with the link shared by RBTH.com in its social media accounts on Facebook and Twitter.

The content strategy behind the video production implied creating short video episodes in English as a source language to teach conversational phrases from spoken Russian to non-Russian speakers at the levels from beginner to

¹⁹⁷ Shimf, Y., Proshina, E., Inzhelevsky, P. (Producers). (2016, November 25). Russian2Go. Episode 1. Kakie Ljudi. *Russia Beyond The Headlines*. URL: http://rbth.com/education/2016/11/25/russian2go-episode-1-kakie-ljudi_651163

¹⁹⁸ Id. (2016, December 26). Russian2Go. Episode 2. Davai. *Russia Beyond The Headlines*. URL: http://rbth.com/education/2016/12/23/russian2go-episode-2-davaj_667046

¹⁹⁹ Id. (2017, March 16). What Do Russians Mean When They Say 'Yes, No, Maybe' All at the Same Time? *Russia Beyond The Headlines*. URL: http://rbth.com/education/2017/03/14/what-do-russians-mean-when-they-say-yes-no-maybe-all-at-the-same-time_719488

intermediate. The production team consists of two freelance authors and hosts - a native Russian speaker as a teacher (Shimf) and an American expat as an RFL learner (Barney), not affiliated with Russia Beyond The Headlines, - and two RBTH staff members - a central desk editor for Education (Elena Proshina) and a video editor (Pavel Inzhelevsky). The content management team involves website editors, multimedia editors and social media editors. It is worth noting, however, that none of the team members have educational or vocational experience in teaching Russian as a foreign language. All the topics, voice and presentation style of the video series has been adopted randomly and based entirely on the hosts' personal experience with Russian and non-Russian speakers. The hosts were not introduced to the code of conduct or the style guide at Russia Beyond The Headlines. The video series 'Russian2Go' has not been formally influenced by the editorial policy at Russia Beyond The Headlines, nor has it reflected the agenda set by either RBTH print publication or the online multimedia project.

The distribution strategy of the project 'Russian2Go' included posting videos on the website rbth.com and in its other language versions (with subtitles), scalable for desktop and mobile devices, with the social media widgets. None of the videos, however, made their way into the mobile digest 'RBTH daily' or the iPad version 'Experience The Real Russia'. Although both applications are free and contain news, stories, and videos about Russia, they fail to provide an educational component, be it 'Russian2Go' or any other RFL-related content.

In order to assess the feasibility of the pilot project 'Russian2Go', a detailed analysis of the three specially produced videos was conducted (Appendix 3). The Google Analytics report shows that the latter episode 'What do Russians mean when they say 'yes, no, maybe' all at the same time?' got more pageviews (2889) and more Facebook widget reactions (619) than the two previous videos combined (2677 pageviews and 204 Facebook button clicks) - even though it was

published most recently. Such a big difference in the pageviews and Facebook reactions is likely to be explained by the different headlining. The central desk editor for Education at Russia Beyond the Headlines acknowledged²⁰⁰ that a native English speaker was deliberately invited to the project for making up a headline for the third episode in accordance with the native English reasoning and the SEO strategy. As a result, the headline ‘What do Russians mean when they say ‘yes, no, maybe’ all at the same time?’ contains the frequently searched keyword phrase ‘What do Russians mean’ which makes the page relevant to a wide variety of search queries and increases traffic. This observation makes it clear that online edutainment - just as any other type of online media content, be it hard news or soft features - should follow the common principles of the online media logic, i.e. SEO-friendly headlines, link building, tagging, social sharing buttons etc.

Another striking difference in the video viewership is that the second episode ‘*Davai*’ got much fewer pageviews (878) and Facebook button reactions (74) than the other two - even compared to the first episode, headlined by the same logic – ‘Russian2Go. Episode #’. A closer look at the RBTH.com reveals that the possible explanation is hidden in the publication date – December 26, 2016. According to the history of news publications on rbth.com, on the day before that, December 25, 2016, the Tu-154 plane crashed in Sochi²⁰¹. The event got an extensive coverage by Russia Beyond The Headlines and presumably drew the most web traffic. The overlapping of the two contrasting publications points out the importance of a smart publication schedule and coordinated teamwork between content producers, content managers and editorial body of Russia

²⁰⁰ Proshina, E., personal communication, April 7, 2017.

²⁰¹ Litovkin, N. (2016, December 25). No Survivors in the Military Plane Crash near Sochi. *Russia Beyond The Headlines*. URL: http://rbth.com/politics_and_society/2016/12/25/tu-154-en-route-to-syria-crashes-into-black-sea_667781

Beyond The Headlines. Media management is an important aspect of any international media organization. With only two video editors responsible for all video productions on RBTH.com, the planning and operating processes are hard to manage and coordinate. It means that the team structure and areas of responsibility influence not only the quality of content, but also the media brand awareness – including the web traffic and social media reactions, - and media product perceptions – from totally inappropriate to timely and valuable.

Five months later after the pilot project ‘Russian2G0’ took off on the web-site rbth.com, central desk for Education at Russia Beyond the Headlines decided to reformat the premier video episode ‘Kakie ljudi’ and post it in the video section of the RBTH account on Facebook in a reduced size of a shortened length²⁰². In just a week, the Facebook video earned over 10 thousand views, 325 positive reactions and 21 comments²⁰³. The decision to put the video into the Facebook video section a few months later after the premiere has reportedly been made to generate a separate organic traffic - independent from the RBTH web site - to the Facebook video page, to measure the video viewership in order to understand, how the episode contributes to the RBTH reach and engagement. Having uploaded the video directly to its social media account, Russia Beyond The Headlines has immediately taken advantage of the beneficial autoplay and view counting. According to the Facebook media practices, videos start playing silently as people scroll down their feed. On the one hand, the function takes a lot of focus on catchy imagery from the first frame, but on the other hand, it immediately generates viewership and makes the whole process more engaging for a media consumer and more effective for a media producer. In the cross-media

²⁰² Russia Beyond The Headlines. *Facebook Videos*. URL: <https://www.facebook.com/pg/russiabeyond/videos/>

²⁰³ Russia Beyond The Headlines. *Facebook Videos*. Russian2Go – 1 episode. URL: <https://www.facebook.com/russiabeyond/videos/10155110935678529/>

and cross-platform environment, the content management of RBTH needs to develop separate video strategies with due regard to the web logic and social media logic.

3.3. Main stage

In order to assess the potential of a media organization practicing edutainment in the field of political, social and economic forces, a series of in-depth qualitative interviews with RFL experts was conducted. The list of experts includes Yulia Safonova, PhD, ‘Spoken Russian’ (*Russkiy Ustniy*) radio host on radio Sputnik, Ekaterina Rubleva, PhD, author of the online project ‘LearnRussian’, RT television network, Natalia Brovchuk, ‘LearnRussian’ project manager at RT, Marita Nummikoski (University of Texas at San Antonio), PhD, co-author of the book ‘News from Russia: Language, Life, and the Russian Media’, and Alexander Korotyshev, director of Headquarters at MAPRYAL (International Association of Teachers of Russian Language and Literature) (Appendix 4).

It is worth noting that all experts agreed that the main reason behind the lack of Russian language edutainment in the media is a huge variety of online learning sources (both professional and amateur) such as PushkinOnline²⁰⁴ and ‘Time to Speak Russian’²⁰⁵. Among other reasons, the experts give professional, institutional and political explanations.

Professional reasons: due to a short history of edutainment in the Russia-based media, media professionals know little or nothing about RFL programs and

²⁰⁴ Pushkin Online [Образование на русском]. URL: <https://pushkininstitute.ru/>

²⁰⁵ Center for International Education (2007-2012). *Time To Speak Russian*. URL: http://speak-russian.cie.ru/time_new/

struggle to cooperate with RFL experts. RFL teachers, in turn, represent a very closed community and are much less networked on a global scale than, for example, English and German teachers.

Institutional reasons: after the information agency ‘RIA Novosti’ and the radio Sputnik merged to organize the state-funded international media holding ‘Rossiya Segonya’ in 2013, and Russia Beyond The Headlines passed into the hands of the state-funded ANO TV Novosti in 2017, which also sponsors RT television network, the Russia’s globally-oriented media became highly concentrated in state hands. The series of reorganizations and privatizations left no media organization aside that would be self-sustainable and independent enough to promote edutainment without the prior approval by the owner.

Political reasons: it has been jointly confirmed by the experts that the idea of promoting Russian as a foreign language via media has not yet manifested itself among the decision makers. There is a lack of discussion about why foreign people actually need to learn Russian. The modern language policy in Russia’s media is primarily focus on maintaining the language knowledge among those with the Russian language background – native Russian speaking expatriates and migrants from the former Soviet Union, speaking Russian as a second language. A wider media audience of RFL speakers seems to stay on the sidelines with a lower priority.

Some of the experts assume that education is not a trend in the media and should be promoted separately by alternative bodies like businesses and non-profit organizations because the government is not in a position to synthesize RFL policy and media policy, since two separate authorities – Ministry of Education and Federal Agency for Press and Mass Communications – have their own areas of responsibility. The central question here is a degree of independence and accountability of the editorial decision makers that allow media to initiate

edutainment projects on their own account. The case of RT television network and its project 'LearnRussian' clearly demonstrates that, on the one hand, much depends on the political agenda, but on the other hand, the media management aspects like ratings, viewership, and social media activity, cannot be dismissed.

The expertise in developing and managing edutainment projects in the media have shown that time- and investment-consuming initiatives are soon to be shut down due to the high ROI expectations (return on investment/innovation) among the businesses and piles of paperwork in non-profit organizations, namely NGOs and educational institutions. Therefore, the technical aspect of fundraising can affect the quality of the final project and its viability. Nevertheless, the experts put a lot of emphasis on the possible cooperation between media, businesses and the government, especially when it comes to setting the agenda for trigger events such as Olympic games, Victory Day Anniversary, and FIFA World Cup.

Online language courses tend to lack face-to-face communication and therefore cannot provide a truly comprehensive learning experience. But still, the experts positively assess the potential of RFL-related online media projects. Those with a first-hand experience in edutainment projects - like 'LearnRussian' (RT) and 'Spoken Russian' (Sputnik) - give a lot of credit to media organizations as content producers. The media have second-to-none facilities, provide a full access to international staff of RFL speakers and approach the process of content production professionally. In contrast with amateur learning sources like blogs, YouTube videos and podcasts, media outlets are more competent in structuring their content and delivering it in adequate proportions. In terms of the language, media also have an upper hand. Even though, the experts point out to the general grammatical decline among Russian native speakers and Russian media, the language used by the media is still the

most updated. Relevant, timely and non-academic content is the key strengths of the media with the RFL-related project in mind.

Edutainment content management is challenging not only from the media perspective, but also from the viewpoint of Russian language didactics. The Russian alphabet uses letters from the Cyrillic script, which complicates the process of reading and writing. Russian grammar and vocabulary is very specific by contrast with other modern languages and hard to be learned online without a tutor's help. High speaking rate is another hallmark of the Russian media, which calls for the content adaptation and customization. According to the experts in teaching RFL, the most challenging aspect in online learning is a huge variety of learners' individual needs, goals, native language backgrounds and target language levels. Frequency of the media use, availability and flexibility of the content providers can boost the learners' motivation and make their edutainment more effective.

Target audience's preferences have a huge impact on the plausibility of a potential media project. In order to find out, whether the RFL-related media projects can be in demand, the extended online survey was conducted among non-native Russian speakers and received 42 responses (Appendix 7). The majority of the respondents (68%) relate to the age category of 25 – 34 years old. There were also a few younger participants aged 18-24 years old (29%) and only two respondents aged 35+. Half of the surveyed learn Russian for their career prospects and daily life in Russia. Almost a third noted that their academic purposes (29%) and linguistic inquisitiveness (26%) encourage them to learn Russian. The age and learning objectives of the audience also explain, why Email-newsletters (60%) and Facebook notifications (36%) were chosen as the most-preferred channels for getting Russian learning updates. With 72 000 subscribers and over 280 000 Facebook followers, Russia Beyond The Headlines

can use these media as strategic social channels for updating its users on their RFL learning activity.

By comparison, the experts described the target audience of a potential RFL media source as business people or diplomats, aged 25 and older, with an upper-scale income and a few minutes a day to surf the Internet. Interestingly enough, these characteristics coincide with the survey results and align with the demographics of the RBTH.com users. Besides, all the respondents reportedly speak at least one of the 17 official RBTH languages – either as a native language or as a source language (English and German are the most popular). It means that Russia Beyond The Headlines is linguistically equipped for developing the RFL-related content. Translation and editorial teams of Russia Beyond The Headlines can be actively engaged for producing the content for all RBTH web sites. What is even more important is that, according to the expertise, business people aged 25+ represent an unoccupied niche in the media market for the online RFL learning sources – compared to an extensive supply of the web-sites and mobile applications tailored for kids, teenagers, and students.

The RFL experts use the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages as the standard for grading an individual's Russian language proficiency. According to the Common European Framework, basic user is graded at the levels A1 (beginner) and A2 (elementary), followed by independent user with the levels B1 (intermediate) and B2 (upper intermediate). The highest stage of language proficiency is proficient user, graded at the levels C1 (advanced) and C2 (proficiency). Teachers of Russian as a foreign language are at one in thinking that for A1-B1 levels, prepared Russian materials and spoken Russian from daily life situations are the best sources for online learning. Starting from the levels B1-B2 and higher, authentic media reports on current events and social issues can be introduced. The audience's survey shows that the respondents speak Russian as a

foreign language at the whole scale of language levels – mostly at A1-B1 (73%) and some at B2-C2 (27%). It means that the content producers should consider whole range of RFL competencies and decide, whether to customize the media materials for a particular level – like RT did with its ‘LearnRussian’ for beginners – or to provide a more inclusive portfolio of programs for each level – like the BBC-Learning English and Deutsche Welle - Deutsch Lernen do.

A major competitive edge of the media that plan to initiate edutainment projects is their facility to use their news content for educational purposes. Indeed, 83% of the respondents with different language levels preferred actual topics from the media agenda - politics, business, culture, sports etc. - to slang (74%) and survivor’s guide - café, shops, travel, services etc. (40%). Despite the common opinion that any topic can be adapted to a particular level, some of the experts supported teaching Russian via the media agenda - including some national peculiarities (holidays, localities), but excluding taboo topics like crime, sex, and religion.

Due to the high concentration of the Russia’s international media in the state hands (RT television network, radio Sputnik, Russia Beyond The Headlines are directly or indirectly sponsored by the Russian government), ideology are at the heart of the discussion about media production and editorial decision making. The experts seem to split over the ideological implications in the media didactics. Some say that, while didacticising authentic media reports, content developers should avoid any ideological dimensions, keeping the bare facts, but using political accounts as a hook. Others claim that any national language and culture come laden with the national ideology, especially when it comes to Russian as ‘higher-context culture’²⁰⁶. Still others call for keeping the ideology for

²⁰⁶ Hall, E. T. (1976). *Beyond Culture*. New York, London: Anchor Books/Doubleday.

educational purposes, e.g. to fuel critical thinking of the audience, or for the sake of keeping up with the editorial policy.

Every media outlet aims at turning a non-user into a local consumer. But is it possible for a media to employ edutainment and transform a Russia-watcher into a Russian language learner, and vice versa? Overview of different language learning projects indicates that there are two possible approaches to creating an edutainment online project – 1) to open a section on the official web site like Deutsche Welle did; 2) to create a separate edutainment web-site with a media logo and a link to the official web-site - like RT did with its project ‘LearnRussian’. The bare fact that Deutsche Welle has been more successful in its language projects than RT does not mean that the second approach is doomed to fail. The major issue here has to do with the web-site interface, click-through traffic expectations and media targeting.

The experts differ in opinion, if media users and language learners can be a united audience or they comprise two separate cohorts. In order to find this out, the respondents of the online survey were asked about their awareness and attitude toward the five Russia-based foreign-oriented media – RT television, Russia Beyond The Headlines, Sputnik, The Moscow Times, and radio Capital Moscow FM - as news providers and as potential RFL mediators. Among the listed media, The Moscow Times, daily English-language newspaper, enjoys the most popularity – 50% respondents use it (often or sometimes) and only 17% reported they do not know about it. Another local media, Capital Moscow FM, English-language radio station, on the contrary, is the most unknown media by 76% respondents.

Almost a half of the surveyed claimed that they do not use RT television network (48%) and radio Sputnik (45%), even though they are fully aware of the media. Yet still, over 30% respondents would consider using Sputnik and RT, if

those offered Russian language learning services. As for the audience's attitudes toward Russia Beyond The Headlines, the responses split almost in equal thirds – 33% do not know about it, 38% use it, and 29% know about RBTH, but do not use it. However, if Russia Beyond The Headlines provided RFL learning component, 57% respondents would consider using it. The data show quite a mixed public attitude toward RBTH as a news provider, but denote its more positive disposition to RBTH as a RFL mediator. The general willingness of the surveyed (83%) to turn to the listed media for RFL learning indicates that, first, there is a demand for language learning via media, and second, the foreign-oriented online media can use edutainment to broaden its audience.

In the preliminary study, the respondents chose video as the most-preferred media for learning Russian as a foreign language. The pilot project 'Russian2Go' was launched as a video series and resonated with the RBTH audience – both on the web site and on Facebook. The extended survey confirmed this consideration – 62% respondents preferred subtitled videos, followed by interactive games (55%), news feature in plain Russian (52), and podcasts (48%). Despite a common assumption, that balance is a key, the interviewed experts also opted for subtitled video with pre-listening and post listening exercise as the most effective media for language learning. In this sense, media can take an advantage and use their own video reports for further didacticization – like Deutsche Welle did with their program *Video-Thema*²⁰⁷.

In the age of media fragmentation, developing scalable and adaptive online interface for potential edutainment projects would be the proper solution. However, the experts in teaching Russian as a foreign language argue that tablets would better fit the learning practices of the business audience, while smartphone

²⁰⁷ Deutsche Welle – Deutsch Lernen. *Video-Thema*. URL: <http://www.dw.com/de/deutsch-lernen/video-thema/s-12165>

are the user-friendliest for students and young adults – even though they are awkward for reading long texts. According to the actual RBTH website audience research (Google Analytics, 2016), 55% RBTH users reach the web-site on their PC, 39% use mobile devices, and 6% use tablets. The data is comparable to the online survey's results, where more than a half of the respondents opted for PC (67%) and mobile devices (60%), leaving behind tablets (29%) as the least preferred platform. For the emerging market of Russia's international media, the multi-platform usage is still in the experimental stage. Thus, Russia Beyond The Headlines has had a mobile version of its main web page for a long time, but launched its iPad application only in June 2015, its mobile application – RBTH Daily digest – as recently as October 2016. Although both apps give their users a short overview of the latest news and serves as a digested version of the web site, they do not provide an access to the pilot project 'Russian2Go'. Should Russia Beyond The Headlines augment its Education section with more RFL-related programs, it has to develop a more comprehensive content strategy and consider launching new applications specifically for RFL learners.

Discussion and recommendations

The two-step empirical analysis shows that Russia Beyond The Headlines is capable of providing RFL-related edutainment under certain conditions and within certain limitations. As an online communicator, Russia Beyond The Headlines use 21 web sites in 17 languages, with the most viewed page - RBTH.com in English. The portal already includes 'Education' section, aimed at promoting Russian studies, and enjoys high viewership for the pages with RFL-related content.

According to the web analysis and online surveys, the actual audience of RBTH.com resembles the potential audience of RFL sources in terms of demographics, location and linguistic background. Those are adults 25+, speaking English as a native or a source language, learning Russian for career prospects and/or daily life in Russia. They speak Russian as a foreign language at the beginner-intermediate level, feel interested in learning Russian via media agenda, and prefer getting their course updates via e-mail newsletters and Facebook notifications. Technical capacity of the RBTH online allows for a potential edutainment project to be multimedia, with great deal of subtitled videos and quizzes, available on various platforms (desktop, mobile, tablet) and operating systems (iOS, Android).

Recommendations for RBTH in developing its online edutainment content strategy include:

- Following the principles of online media logic and social media logic – such as tagging, SEO, headlining, social sharing buttons, link building – in order to boost the page viewership,
- Improving the content management system in terms of planning, production and publication schedule,
- Finding better cross-platform solutions for a potential edutainment project, e.g. a customized mobile application for learning RFL.

Russia Beyond The Headlines is up-and-coming cross-border news provider in Russia, and any edutainment projects would give it a big edge in the national media market. Unlike other global media, like RT television channel and Sputnik International, Russia Beyond The Headlines states its mission as ‘to help understand Russian better in order to explain, educate and entertain our readers’, which already implies an edutainment component. In contrast to some local English-language media, like The Moscow Times and radio Capital Moscow,

RBTH is a truly global and multilingual project. In the market for RFL online learning sources, RBTH can get an upper hand over multiple blogs, YouTube videos, and amateur podcasts due to its media specifics - structured and well-proportioned supply of content, professional approach to content production, and international team of non-native Russian speakers.

Opportunities for RBTH in providing Russian as a foreign language courses include:

- Serving the public by performing the media functions of education and entertainment along with information and persuasion,
- Engaging the audience by carrying an added value with the quality content,
- Constant supply of content, due to the relevance of didacticised topics,
- Getting acknowledged in other industries, especially in education industry,
- Diversification of product & branding: getting new advertisers, starting new partnerships and special projects.

In the field of social forces, however, Russia Beyond The Headlines face more challenges, then opportunities. As an indirectly state-funded media, RBTH editorial policy is influenced to a certain extent by the state. As long as the promotion of Russian as a foreign language is not a priority for the national (media or language) policy, all the efforts in providing language learning fall on the shoulders of the media itself. The key issue here is a degree of independence that the RBTH central desk for Education has in developing and implementing its content strategy. Another unavoidable question is financial viability of edutainment projects and technical aspects of fund raising. Underdeveloped social entrepreneurship in Russia, a series of reorganizations in the media industry, top-

heavy educational institutions and the overall lack of cooperation between media, state authorities and NGOs make the media to look for sponsors and advertisers. For Russia Beyond The Headlines, it often means making up for a shortage of state by doing special projects with sponsored materials.

Human resources are an integral part of any project. Even though the pilot video series ‘Russian2Go’, created by freelance and inexperienced content producers, turned out to be successful, it does not mean that Russia Beyond The Headlines can keep on doing it without any RFL expertise. Engaging professional RFL teachers into the content management routine would increase the credibility of the project and make it stand out in the online environment. Another problem here is a lack of tech-savvy RFL content developers with vocational experience in edutainment, distant learning and online media didactics. Besides, many intricacies of the Russian language, i.e. Cyrillic alphabet, high rate of speaking, advanced grammar and vocabulary, make RFL teachers take a skeptical approach to online language teaching. Andragogical (individually driven) type of RFL learning is yet to be embraced by the experts, whose traditional methods to teaching often contradict with the idea of learning a language without any face-to-face communication. To avoid any possible misunderstandings between RFL experts and the media, at least three key aspects of an edutainment project should be defined: language level of the target audience (proficiency in native and source language), its learning objectives and motivations. Besides, any type of professional cooperation with the global media requires language experts to be aware of the current international agenda, keep up with the editorial policy and be familiar with the key journalistic principles of reporting facts and opinions.

In addition to the above, success and failure of any potential edutainment project largely depends on what exactly the media intends when it creates an edutainment experience – what feelings, thoughts and actions of the consumers

the media targets in order to engage the audience. Further recommendations for Russia Beyond The Headlines would be to formulate the statements that would describe Russian as a foreign language learning as a specific media product.

Conclusion

Media development in the age of globalization presents new challenges and opportunities. As the use of computer technology and Internet exploded in the 1990s, cross-border news providers became, on the one hand, threatened by big corporations, such as AOL-Time and Disney, and digital disruptors like Facebook and BuzzFeed. On the other hand, they expanded their outreach within the World Wide Web and enhanced their online presence in the dot-com domain.

While the amount of information is rapidly rising, and the media audience is getting more and more fragmented, established media players develop their long-term strategies and wrestle with a question – how to get as many people as possible to spend as much time as possible with their journalism²⁰⁸. Negative trends of media commercialization, homogenization and low advertising revenues undermine the value of international broadcasters²⁰⁹. Yet, over the past 10 years, mobility of people, availability of technology, and curiosity for outside perspectives has driven up the audience’s demand for multiple views on the global events²¹⁰. This trend gives both mature media markets like Britain and Germany, and emerging media players like Russia, a competitive edge over the highly commercialized media giants.

In the densely saturated media environment, cross-border news providers with the global outreach, strong national identification, and multilingual capacity, have an upper hand in delivering their domestic viewpoints. Strategic reports of the leading public service broadcasters – the BBC²¹¹ and Deutsche Welle²¹² – distinctly reveal the importance of reporting in English as a lingua franca, launching new world services in other languages, and promoting their national language as an agent of cultural influence across the globe. Major international

²⁰⁸ The New York Times. (2014). *Innovation Report*, pp. 16-20. URL: http://www.presscouncil.org.au/uploads/52321/ufiles/The_New_York_Times_Innovation_Report_-_March_2014.pdf

²⁰⁹ Kellner, D., Pierce, C. (2007). Media and Globalization. In G. Ritzer (Ed.), *The Blackwell Companion to Globalization*, pp. 383-395.

²¹⁰ PricewaterhouseCoopers. (2016). *The Rise of Cross-Border News: An Independent Research study by PwC UK, Commissioned by RT*. URL: <http://www.pwc.com/gx/en/entertainment-media/publications/assets/cross-border-news.pdf>

²¹¹ Harding, J. (2015). *The Future of News. The BBC*. URL: http://newsimg.bbc.co.uk/1/shared/bsp/hi/pdfs/29_01_15future_of_news.pdf.

²¹² Hoffmann, J. (2014, August 15). Die Aufgabenplanung. *Deutsche Welle*. URL: <http://www.dw.com/de/die-aufgabenplanung/a-15680839>.

broadcasters – the BBC, Deutsche Welle, Voice of America, Radio France Internationale, and Radio Exterior de España - have been delivering their language-learning programs since their very inception in 1950-1970s. Over the years, formerly homogeneous educational programs have morphed into full-fledged edutainment content, equipped with interactive elements and foreign language didactics. Public service broadcasters have become a substantial part in the integrative CALL system (computer-assisted language learning)²¹³, along with mobile applications, social networks and e-learning software. In order to compete with multilingual providers, they kept on using their own journalism content in a national language as a dominant force. Thus, the edutainment content has become a core element of the media agenda and an integral part of their mission.

Edutainment (or educational entertainment) refers to the use of media – radio, television, print, ICT, Internet and mobile technology - for educational purposes²¹⁴, be it massive online open courses like Coursera, video seminars like Die Zeit Akademie, or television programs like ‘Sesame Street’ and ‘Galileo’. Despite the wide use of educational elements in the media, edutainment has rarely been a subject of inquiry in the field of media research. While educators, psychologists and computer scientists actively embraced the topic, media scholars kept on taking edutainment for granted as a combination of key media functions – education and entertainment, along with information and persuasion. The current work was meant to rethink ‘edutainment’ as a media experience – a set of

²¹³ Warschauer M. (2000). *CALL for the 21st Century*. IATEFL and ESADE Conference, 2 July 2000, Barcelona, Spain.

²¹⁴ Tummons, J., Powell, S. (2014). *A-Z of Lifelong Learning*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill Education, p. 40.

thoughts, actions, and believes that people have about a media brand²¹⁵ - that can be enhanced for a better audience's engagement.

The aim of the research was to analyze various endeavors made by foreign and Russia's global media in supplying edutainment content with language-learning didactics. Presented from a practice-driven perspective, the study is focused on the cases of Deutsche Welle and its online section 'Deutsch Lernen'²¹⁶ as a successful example, and Russia Beyond The Headlines and its online section 'Education'²¹⁷ - as a pilot project. The practical implementation of the research consists in assessing the potential of Russia Beyond The Headlines (RBTH) to provide online courses for learning Russian as a foreign language (RFL).

The overview of multilingual practices in the earliest international broadcasters – the BBC, Deutsche Welle, Voice of America – showed that 1) the media integrated promotion of their national language (for English-language media, it is popularization of the 'proper' English) into their mission statements, and 2) the media used principles of contextualization and acculturation, putting their national language into a real context, thus making edutainment experience more meaningful. Even though Russian foreign service broadcasting – Radio Moscow International - emerged earlier than all of the aforementioned international broadcasters – in 1929, the history of RFL learning initiatives taken by Soviet and Russian media is extremely short.

After a series of reorganizations – from Radio Moscow to The Voice of Russia in 1993 and eventually to Sputnik International in 2014 – the major Russia's international broadcaster has had no RFL resource, except for the

²¹⁵ Calder, B. J., Malthouse, E. C. (2008). Media Engagement and Advertising Effectiveness. In B. J. Calder (Ed.), *Kellogg on Media and Advertising* (pp. 1-36). New York: Wiley.

²¹⁶ Deutsche Welle – Deutsch Lernen. URL: <http://www.dw.com/de/deutsch-lernen/s-2055>

²¹⁷ Russia Beyond The Headlines. URL: <https://www.rbth.com/education>

program ‘*Russkiy ustnyi*’²¹⁸, launched in 2007 for the Russian speaking audience living within the former Soviet Union and beyond. Another venture was made in 2012 by RT television network, when it launched its online project ‘LearnRussian’ with interactive exercises, social networks and YouTube videos. In six months, however, the project got shut down and archived. The reasons behind the failed edutainment practices in the Russia’s foreign-oriented media may lie in the uniqueness of the post-Soviet media system and high concentration of the major cross-border news providers in the state hands²¹⁹. Russia’s foreign policy has also undermined several edutainment initiatives, authorizing media for the exclusive function of political influence and protection of the national interests.

For a better understanding of the challenges and opportunities that Russia-based global media face in providing RFL component, comparative analysis of Deutsche Welle and Russia Beyond The Headlines was conducted. The framework was developed at the two levels – online and offline. Despite initially different analog forms - DW as a public service broadcaster, and RBTH as a print publication - the media resemble from the viewpoint of an online media user. They share the top-level domain *.com*, have a common structure of the web site, report in multiple languages, use multimedia formats on different platforms (desktop, mobile, tablets) and are active in the social media. Besides, both Deutsche Welle and Russia Beyond The Headlines included the edutainment component in their mission statements and allocated a separate section for the

²¹⁸ Safonova, Y. A. (2008). *The Russian Voice of Russia. Russian Language on the Radio Station ‘The Voice of Russia’*. Moscow: Center for International Education MSU.

²¹⁹ Echo of Moscow. (2013, December 9). *Kremlin Announced the Dissolution of One of the Biggest and Oldest Mass Media*. URL: <http://echo.msk.ru/news/1214427-echo.html>

language learning promotion on their web sites – ‘Deutsch Lernen’ on dw.com and ‘Education’ on rbth.com.

At the same time, despite the structural, purposeful, and formal similarities of their online representations, Deutsche Welle and Russia Beyond The Headlines are very different media organizations within their respective national media systems. In order to paint a bigger picture, a more comprehensive framework was constructed to compare the media in the field of political, economic and social forces²²⁰. In this context, DW and RBTH belong to downright different models of media and politics in terms of ownership and role of the state. Being a public service broadcaster, Deutsche Welle is funded from the tax revenues and very active in cooperation with non-profit organizations, like Goethe-Institut and Internationaler Deutschlehrerverband (The International German Teachers’ Association). Russia Beyond The Headlines is on the contrary indirectly sponsored by the state and raises its revenues from sponsored content placements. Migration policy as well as the language policy in Germany and Russia went their separate ways after the World War II, making Germany focus on cultural integration of the ethnic Germans and foreigners with no German ancestry, and Russia – on its outreach to migrants from the former Soviet Union and ethnic Russians living abroad.

Deutsche Welle – Deutsch Lernen cater for the vast audience – primarily those interested in the German culture and language, as well as German language teachers. The section ‘Learn German’ is the most clicked page on the web-site dw.com with over 7 million pageviews per month. The section offers free online German courses for A1-C2 levels, including self-contained language courses, didactically prepared journalistic content, community sources and materials for

²²⁰ Gerbner, G. (1969). Institutional Pressures Upon Mass Communicators. In P. Halmos (Ed.). *The Sociology of Mass Media Communicators* (pp. 205-248). Keele: University of Keele, p. 243.

German language teachers. In terms of content, Russia Beyond The Headlines is way behind Deutsche Welle – its ‘Education’ section provides mostly university rankings, FAQ about studying in Russia, Russian grammar tests for certificate levels and promotion materials for learning Russian as a foreign language. For now, it is one of the least popular sections on the web site, although the RFL-related articles are among the top clicked pages in the ‘Education’ section. In order to understand, if it is plausible for Russia Beyond The Headlines to provide RFL learning content, its capacity as an online communicator and as a media organization was assessed in the empirical part of the study.

The empirical research was conducted in two stages. The preliminary study of Russia Beyond The Headlines as an online edutainment media proved that, even though the RFL-related content is still rare on RBTH.com, its current and potential audience actively embraces this type of content. For that purpose, quantitative methods of research – web-analysis, social media monitoring, and online survey – were used. The pilot project ‘Russian2Go’, designed for Russia Beyond The Headlines, helped to understand that if managed the content (team, publication schedule) and followed the online media logic properly (smart headlining, SEO, tagging etc.), educational programs at RBTH.com can generate competitive traffic and positive reactions.

The main stage of the empirical study was meant to give more insights into the potential of RBTH as a media organization to deliver RFL-related content. The study was based on the qualitative interview with the experts in teaching Russian as a foreign language and included the extended online survey of the potential RFL online learners. The experts agreed that the lack of Russian language edutainment in the media could be explained by a huge supply of other online learning sources and current political agenda in the country. The expertise also stated that education is not such a newsworthy subject for the modern

Russia's media and the idea of promoting RFL via media has not yet manifested itself. Among other challenges that the Russia-based international media can face are the professional gap in the RFL teachers' community (age, digital literacy, edutainment experience) and multiple intricacies of teaching Russian as a foreign language online (Cyrillic alphabet, advanced grammar, vocabulary etc.).

The survey of the potential audience, i.e. non-Russian speaking adults, who learn or wish to learn Russian as a foreign language, revealed that 1) the key characteristics of the respondents (age, place of origin, native language) coincide with the demographics of the current RBTH online users – English speaking adults, aged 25-34; 2) learning objectives of the respondents (career prospects and daily life in Russia) and their level of RFL proficiency (beginner-intermediate) comprise a target audience – business-oriented people, 25+, - that represent an unoccupied niche in the media market for the online RFL learning sources; and 3) the most preferred topics for RFL learning are those from the actual media agenda (politics, business, culture, sports) that can be fully covered by Russia Beyond The Headlines, given that the RFL experts' team can get an access to the originally produced media content in Russian. Both qualitative interviews and quantitative surveys proved that technical capacity of the media must enable multimedia content (with videos as the most preferred media) scalable for different platforms (desktop, mobile, tablets).

The research shows that the target audience of a potential RFL-related content can become the actual audience of Russia Beyond The Headlines, provided that the media remains to be multilingual, multimedia, and multiplatform, while its online and social media logics are properly followed. In general, Russia-based global media are capable of providing RFL-related edutainment under certain limitations – such as the role of the state as a key agenda setter and the language policy maker, a degree of independence in the

editorial decision-making, as well as technical, financial and professional assets of the media organization and its audience's needs. For a better audience's engagement, edutainment content strategy must be targeted in order to turn a non-user into the loyal consumer of the media brand.

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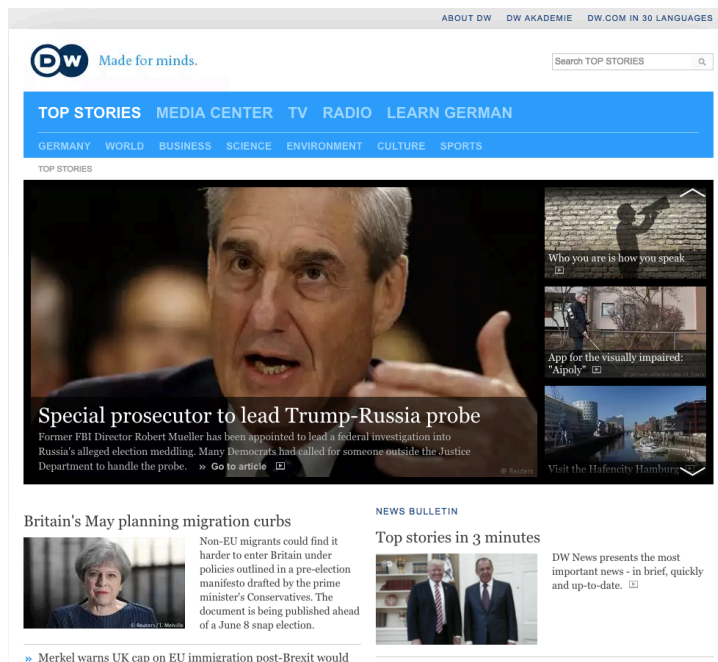
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Appendices

Appendix 1

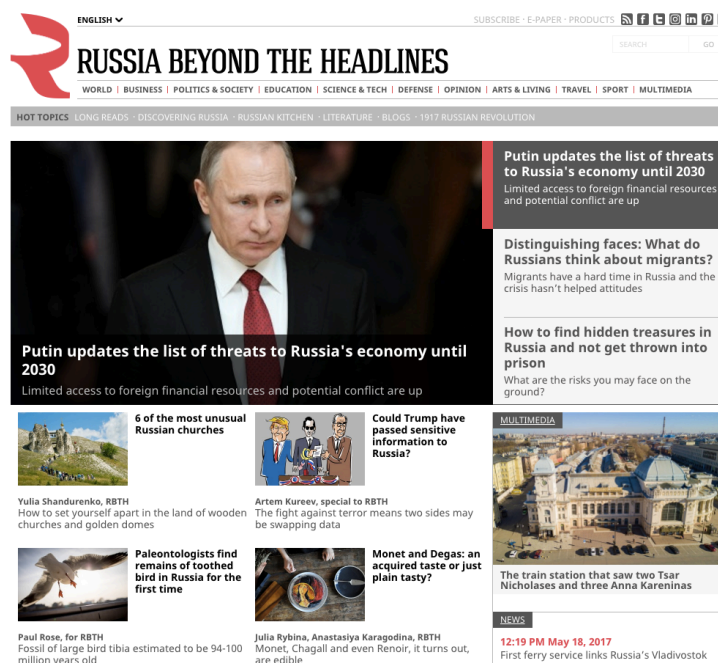
Online interfaces of DW.com and RBTH.com

Picture 1. Screenshot of the main page – Deutsche Welle



Source: Deutsche Welle. (May 18, 2017). URL: <http://www.dw.com/en/>

Picture 2. Screenshot of the main page – Russia Beyond The Headlines



Source: Russia Beyond The Headlines. (May 18, 2017). URL: <https://www.rbth.com>

Appendix 2

German courses portfolio of Deutsche Welle – Deutsch Lernen

Table 2. Overview of the German courses offered by Deutsche Welle at *dw.com/deutschlernen*

Self-contained curricular language courses (for beginners)	Ongoing didactically prepared content (for advanced learners)	Materials for German language teachers	Community and service
<p>Deutsch Interactive (online course) Multimedia course with 30 lessons. Accompanying material: interactive exercises, dictionaries, grammar aids, learning tips and worksheets. Level: A1-B1</p>	<p>Video-Thema (video) Authentic DW videos. Accompanying material: written scripts, vocabulary aids, exercises and a news glossary Level: B2-C1</p>	<p>Deutschlehre r-Info Weekly updates on effective strategies for teaching</p>	<p>Facebook Regular updates with news, vocabulary, brain teasers and competitions. Level: A1-C2</p>
<p>Mission Europe (audio course) Mystery-adventure with 26 thrilling episodes. Accompanying material: radio scripts, printable exercise book. Level: A1</p>	<p>Top-Thema (audio) Reports on politics, culture, science, and business. Accompanying material: written scripts, vocabulary aids, exercises and a news glossary Level: B1</p>	<p>Unterrichtsr eihen Fully prepared lesson plans on different topics for German language teachers</p>	<p>Twitter German question and answers, video links, words of the week, daily vocabulary and more. Level: A1-C2</p>
<p>Radio D (audio course) The exciting lives of radio reporters. Two series of 26 episodes each. Accompanying material: written scripts and a printable exercise book. Level: A1-A2</p>	<p>Langsam gesprochene Nachrichten (audio course) Slowly-spoken news. Accompanying material: written scripts Level: B2-C1</p>	<p>DW im Unterricht Worksheets and lesson tips for teachers to use in the DW courses</p>	<p>YouTube News reports, a soap opera, music videos along with links to exercises and teaching materials Level: A1-C2</p>

<p>Deutsch – warum night? (audio course) The classic audio course in multiple languages. Accompanying material: written scripts and a printable exercise book. Level: A1-B1</p>	<p>Wort der Woche (audio) Colorful German words updated every week. Level: B2</p>		<p>Das Porträt Spotlight on German teachers and students around the world. Level: A1-C2</p>
<p>Audiotrainer (audio course) 100 audio lessons to build your vocabulary. Accompanying material: worksheets and a workbook. Level: A1-A2</p>	<p>Sprachbar (audio) Articles and audio programs for German connoisseurs. Level: C1-C2</p>		
<p>Harry – gefangen in der Zeit A multimedia German course for beginners with 100 episodes. Accompanying material: written scripts, worksheets and lesson tips for teachers. Level: A1-B1</p>	<p>Das sagt man so (audio) German idioms and sayings with explanations of the context they are used. Level: B1-B2</p>		
<p>Das Deutschlandlabor (video) The video series is a journey of discovery across Germany. Accompanying material: interactive exercises, written scripts with vocabulary aids, worksheets and lesson tips for teachers. Level: A2</p>	<p>Alltagsdeutsch (audio) Introduction into colloquial speech and the German way of life. Level: C1-C2</p>		
	<p>Jojo sucht das Glück (video) The websoap for learning German Accompanying material: interactive exercises, written scripts with glossaries, worksheets and lesson tips for teachers. Level: B1-B2</p>		

	Das Bandtagebuch mit EINSHOCH6 (video) Learn German with hip-hop music. Accompanying material: interactive exercises, written scripts with glossaries, worksheets and lesson tips for teachers. Level: B1-B2		
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Source: Deutsche Welle. (2013). Deutsche Welle Evaluationsbericht 2010-2013, S. 136.

Appendix 3

Web-analytics and social media data - RBTH 'Education' section

Table 3. Web-analytics of the web-page *rbth.com/education*

Title	URL	Pageviews
5 steps to enroll in a Russian university for free	http://rbth.com/education/2016/03/06/5-steps-to-enroll-in-a-russian-university-for-free_573515	6 690
How Russian is taught as a foreign language	http://rbth.com/education/2016/04/13/how-russian-is-taught-as-a-foreign-language_584299	3 628
Italian polyglot: 'To understand Russians you must speak Russian'	http://rbth.com/education/2016/09/14/italian-polyglot-to-understand-russians-you-must-speak-russian_629889	3 624
Just 5 Russian Universities make it to Europe top 200 rankings	http://rbth.com/education/2016/03/11/just-5-russian-universities-make-it-to-europe-top-200-rankings_574667	2 287
7 key factors in choosing a Russian university	http://rbth.com/education/2016/03/14/7-key-factors-in-choosing-a-russian-university_575293	1 936
Want to learn Russian? Enroll in a university outside Moscow or St. Pete?	http://rbth.com/education/2016/02/29/want-to-learn-russian-enroll-in-a-university-outside-moscow-or-st-pete_571565	1 866
How to become a student of the St. Petersburg State University	http://rbth.com/education/2016/06/14/how-to-become-a-student-of-the-st-petersburg-university_601893	1 767
How-to coubs: 5 ways to tell a girl you love her	http://rbth.com/education/2016/03/03/how-to-coubs-5-ways-to-tell-a-girl-you-love-her_572719	1 619

Siberian Federal University seeks international PhD students	http://rbth.com/education/study_in_russia/2016/06/03/siberian-federal-university-seeks-international-phd-students_599929	1 609
3 Russian universities make it to THE's World Reputation Rankings	http://rbth.com/education/2016/05/04/3-russian-universities-make-it-to-these-world-reputation-rankings_590159	1 607

Source: Google Analytics, RBTH.com. February 1, 2016 – October 27, 2016.

Table 4. Pilot project 'Russian2Go' – video pageviews statistics and Facebook reactions.

Video title	URL	Date of publication on rbth.com	Pages views on rbth.com	Facebook widget reactions	Comments on the webpage	Link to the Facebook video	Date of publication on Facebook Video	Views on Facebook	Reactions	Comments
Russian2Go. Episode 1. 'Kakie ljudi'	http://rbth.com/education/2016/11/25/russian2go-episode-1-kakie-ljudi_651163	November 25, 2016	1799	130	1	https://www.facebook.com/russiabeyond/videos/10155110935678529/	April 22, 2016	10000 (as of April 29, 2017)	325	21
Russian2Go. Episode 2. 'Davai'	http://rbth.com/education/2016/12/23/russian2go-episode-2-davaj_667046	December 26, 2016	878	74	0	https://www.facebook.com/russiabeyond/videos/10155111066688529/	April 30, 2016	8400 (as of May 7, 2017)	247	10

What do Russians mean when they say 'yes, no, maybe' all at the same time?	http://rbth.com/education/2017/03/14/what-do-russians-mean-when-they-say-yes-no-maybe-all-at-the-same-time_719488	March 16, 2017	2889	619	1	https://www.facebook.com/russiabeyond/videos/10155154055543529/	May 14, 2016	8800 (as of May 20, 2017)	161	22
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Source: Google Analytics. RBTH.com. (November 25, 2016 – April 6, 2017), Facebook Video (April 22, 2017-May 20, 2017).

Appendix 4

Expert interviews data (April 7-24, 2017)

Table 5. Qualitative data, broken down into topical categories

Categories	Statements	Expert identification				
		A	E	M	Y	
Reasons behind the lack of Russian language edutainment in the media	A lot of other RFL online learning sources	A	E	M	Y	
	Distant language learning without face-to-face communication is useless	A	N			
	A lack of discussion on why foreign people actually need to learn Russian	A				
	Lack of RFL experience among media professionals - they don't know what to do with RFL	E				
	The idea has not come yet	E	Y			
	Political agenda is different now	N				
	Education and culture is not a trend in the Russian media	N				
	High media concentration (<i>Rossiya Segonya</i> is the only international media holding)	N				
	Disconnectedness between the authorities in terms of media policy and Russian language policy (Ministry of Education and Federal Agency for Press and Mass Communications)	Y				
Prerequisites for RFL in the media	Cooperation with businesses, because the government already does a lot	A				
	Trigger events can help (Olympic Games, Victory Day Anniversary, Football World Cup)	E				
	Government is the one to make the decision and set the priority for RFL in the state-funded media	N				
Challenges in learning RFL via online media	Motivation management (self-motivation, flexibility, user-friendly interface and format)	A				
	Regularity	E				
	Different levels of RFL proficiency	E	M			
	Different goals in learning the language	E				

	In written form - grammar, vocabulary, Cyrillic alphabet, in audio form - high speaking rate	M	N				
	Lack of face-to-face communication	A	N				
Approaches to grading the levels of RFL proficiency and appropriate topics for the levels	A1-A2 - daily life situations, prepared materials, B1-B2 - media and authentic materials	A	E				
	Elementary to intermediate - daily life, tailored materials, upper intermediate - advanced - current events and social problems	M					
	Any topic can be adopted to the level	N					
Topics selection, their relevance	Modern Russia: migration, economic culture, cultural expansion	A					
	No taboo, any topic can be interpreted correctly, in simple language	A	A				
	Weather, local topics, holidays	E					
	Taboo: crime, religion, sex	E					
	Actual topics from the media agenda	A	E				
Audience characteristics and demand	Business people and diplomats	A					
	Anyone, but clear targeting and positioning is a key	E					
	Adults, 25+	N					
Non-media user - loyal media consumer transformation, Russian language learner-Russia's news consumer	Media consumer and language learner are initially two different audiences (separate web-sites, separate traffic)	A	N				
	RFL learners as agents of influence, cross-border news consumers can become Russian language learners, language lovers can become Russia lovers	A	E	Y			
	Transformation is not necessary and not always possible, when it comes to being loyal to just one media	N	M				
Ideological implication in the content	No need to negate the ideology	A					
	It depends on how strict the editorial policy is	E	Y				
	Keep ideology to fuel critical thinking	M	N				
	Avoid ideology, use politics as a hook, but focus of the language	Y	E				
Strengths and opportunities of the international	Media content is updated, media language is relevant and not academic	A					
	Professional content developers, not amateurs from blogs, YouTube, apps	E					
	Second-to-none facilities and technology	E	Y	N			

media to provide RFL	International team of RFL speakers as a source of inspiration and content probation	E		N		
	Well-structured content delivered in adequate proportions	E				
Challenges in developing the RFL projects in the media	High ROI expectations	A	N	E		
	Time- and investment-consuming projects	A	E			
	Red tape: bureaucracy in public and state-funded contractors	N				
Multimedia formats, effective for RFL learning	Video with pre-listening and post-listening exercises, subtitles, based on news reports	A	E	M		
	Balance is the key	N				
Platforms	Tablet is the best for business people, smartphone is not good for reading	A				
	Smartphone and tables are the best for students	E				
	Desktop or tablet, no mobile phone	M				
	Scalable and adaptive version	A	N			
Trends in teaching RFL	RFL teachers community is isolated and less networked (unlike global English and German teachers' communities)	N	Y			
	Methodologists' generation gap, digital illiteracy	Y	E			
	No need to clean the language, it's a living system	Y	A	N		
	Chest-thumping, marketing of the Russian culture, ideological clichés	Y	A			
	Discrepancies between the RFL course books language and the real life language	Y	E			
Russian language policy and media policy	Teaching Russian for expatriates and migrants (people with Russian language background) is a priority	Y	A			
	It's up for an individual media to decide; government is not supposed to promote RFL via media	E				

Source: 5 expert interviews (April 7-24, 2017).

Appendix 5**Demographics of RBTH.com users**

Figure 2. Gender

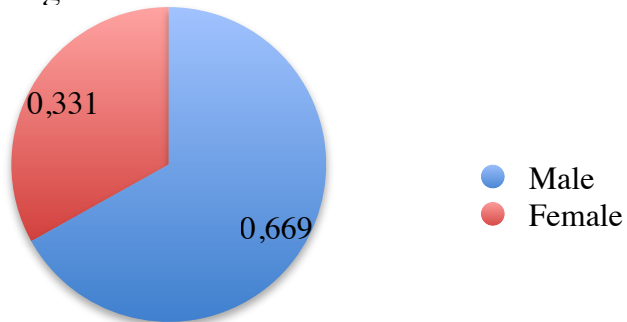


Figure 2.1. Age groups

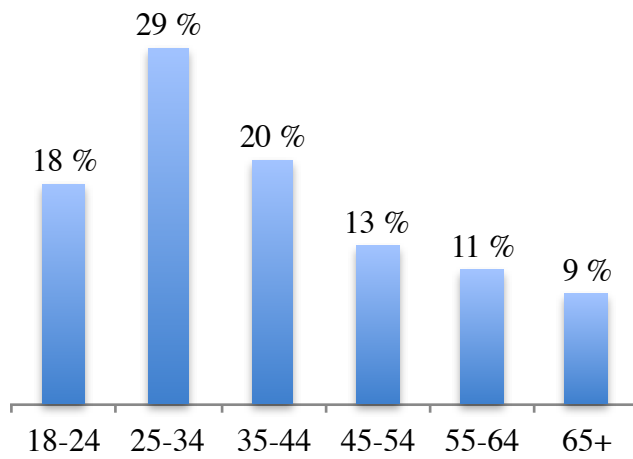
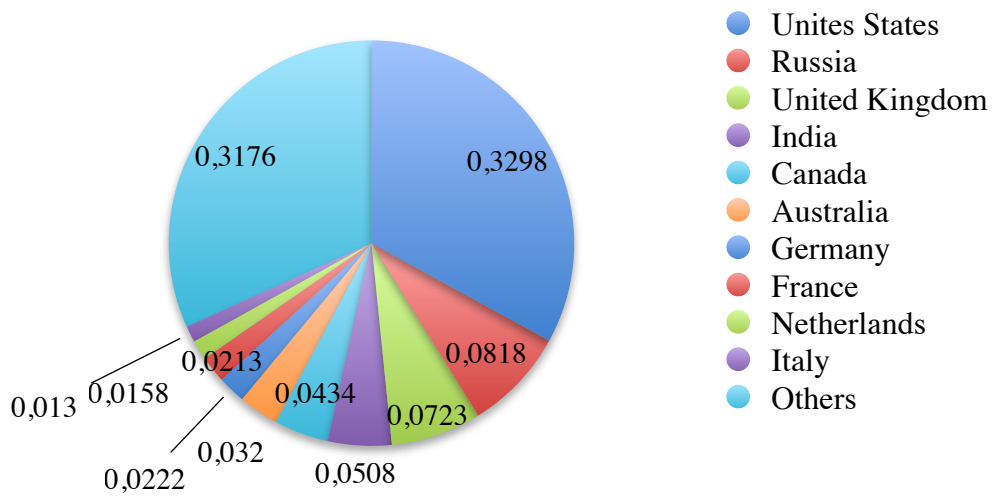


Figure 2.2. Geography



Source: Google Analytics. RBTH.com. January 1, 2016 – October 27, 2016.

Appendix 6

Data from the preliminary online survey (October 15 – 17, 2016)

Figure 3. Gender

Figure 3.1. Age groups.

Figure 3.2. Place of origin

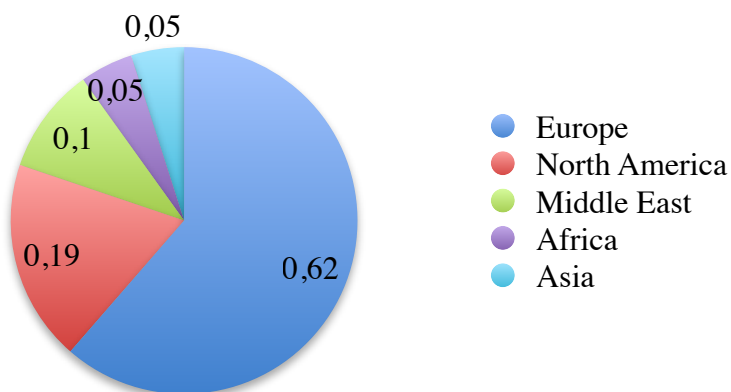


Figure 3.3. Level of speaking Russian as a foreign language

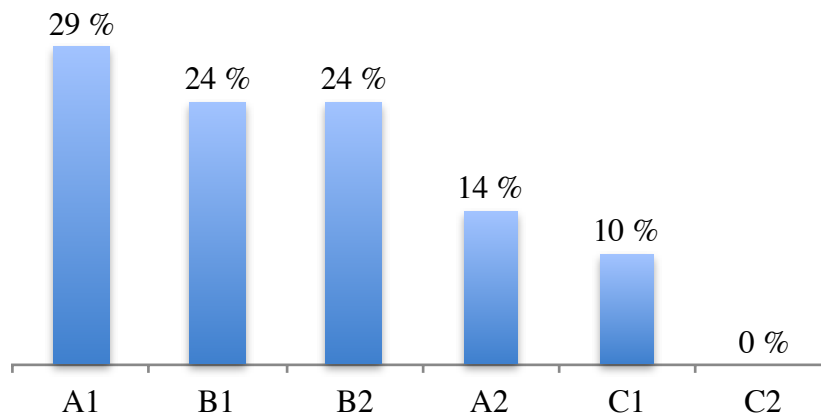


Figure 3.4. Average rating of Russian language proficiency

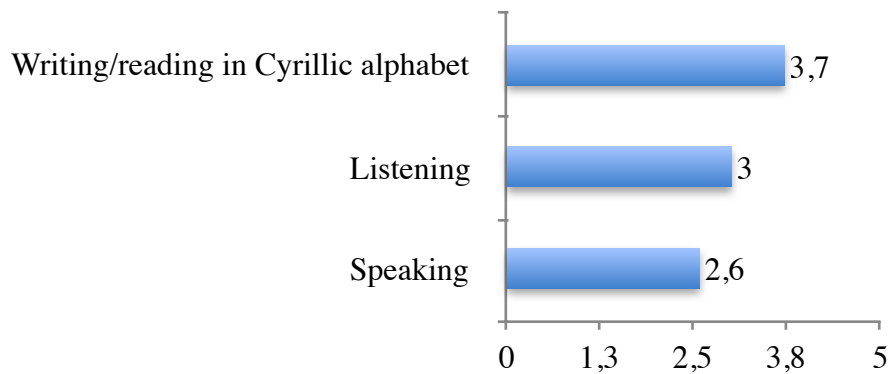


Figure 3.5. Russian as a foreign language learning objectives

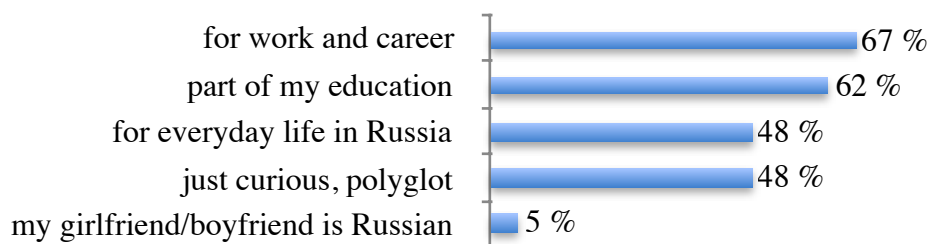


Figure 3.6. Multimedia format for learning Russian as a foreign language

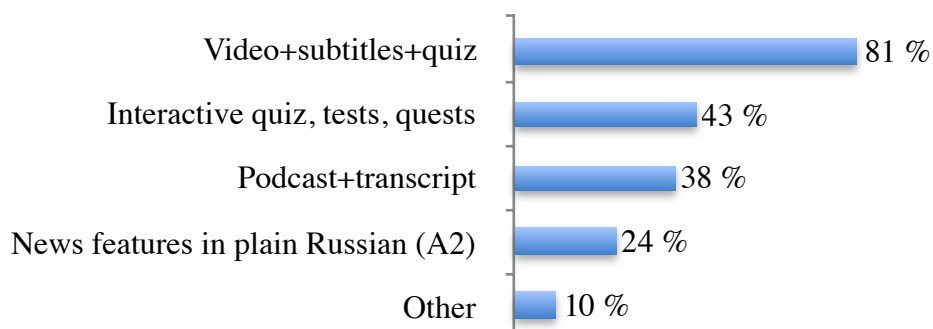
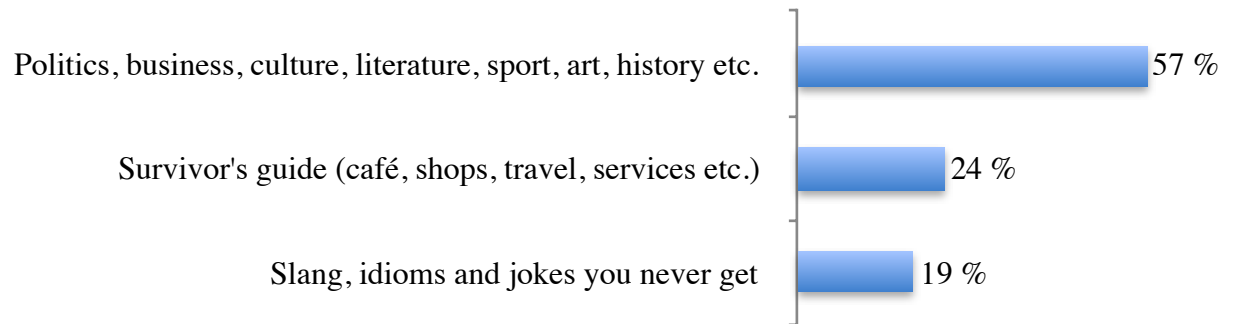


Figure 3.7. Topics for learning Russian as a foreign language



Appendix 7

Data from the extended online survey (April 7 – 26, 2017)

Figure 4. Gender

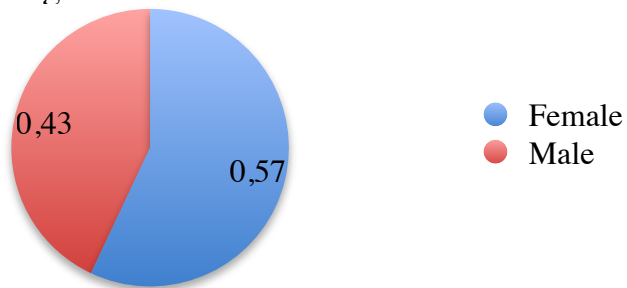


Figure 4.1. Age groups

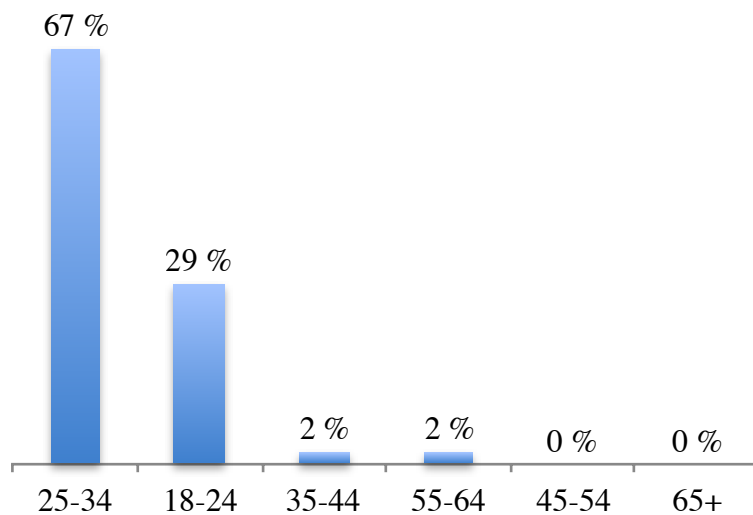


Figure 4.2. Place of origin

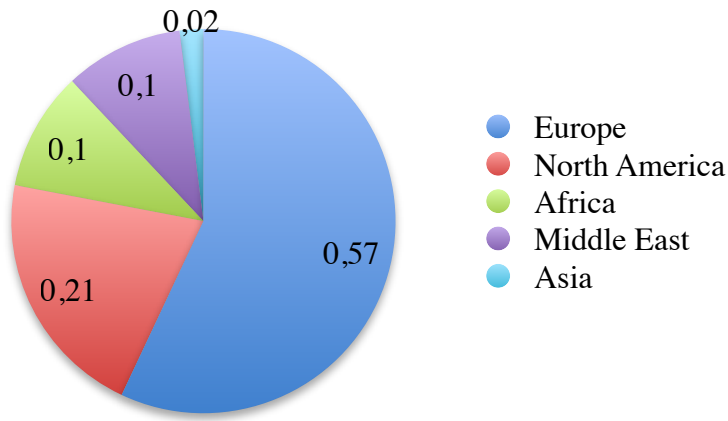


Figure 4.3. Native language

Figure 4.4. Source language

Figure 4.5. Level of speaking Russian as a foreign language

Figure 4.6. Average rating of the Russian language proficiency

Figure 4.7. Russian as a foreign language learning objectives



Figure 4.8. Degree of media awareness – RT television network

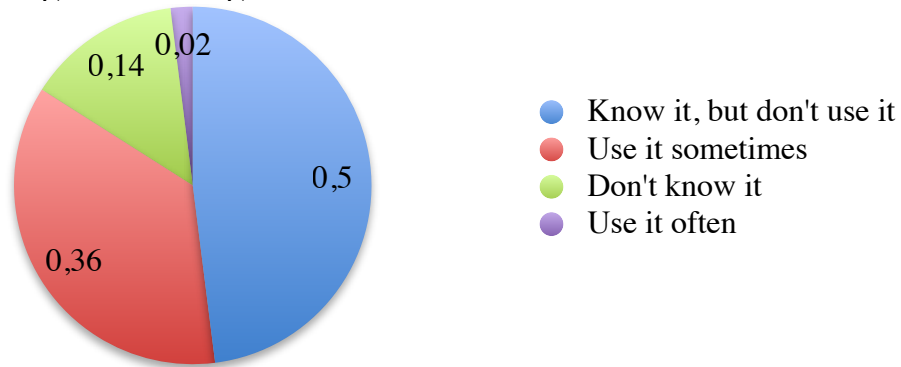


Figure 4.9. Degree of media awareness – Russia Beyond The Headlines

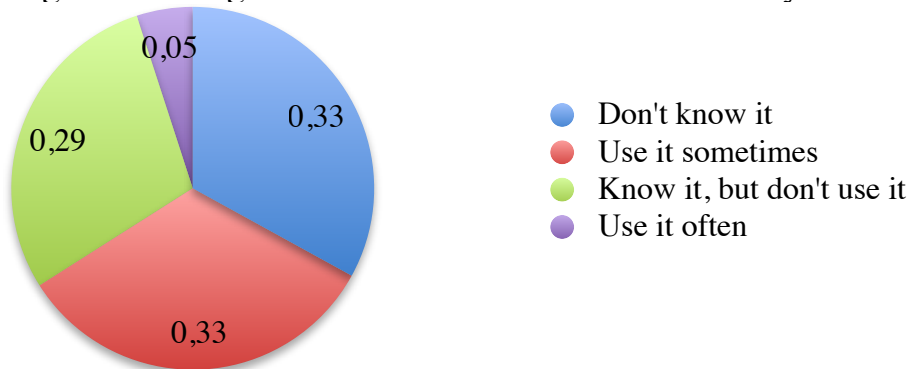


Figure 4.10. Degree of media awareness – Sputnik International

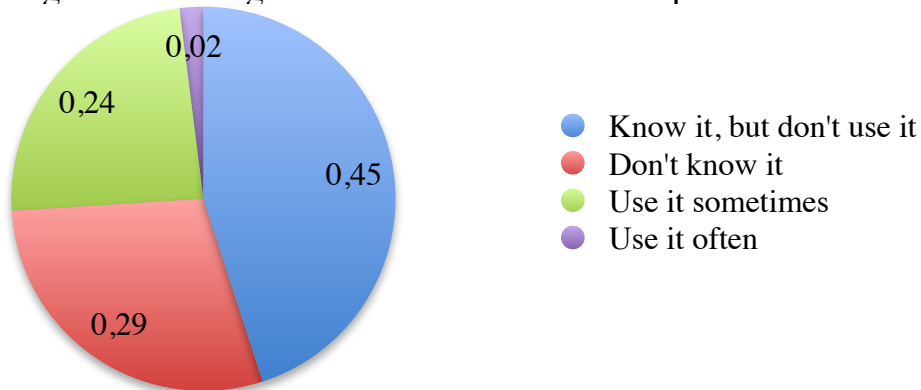


Figure 4.11. Degree of media awareness – The Moscow Times

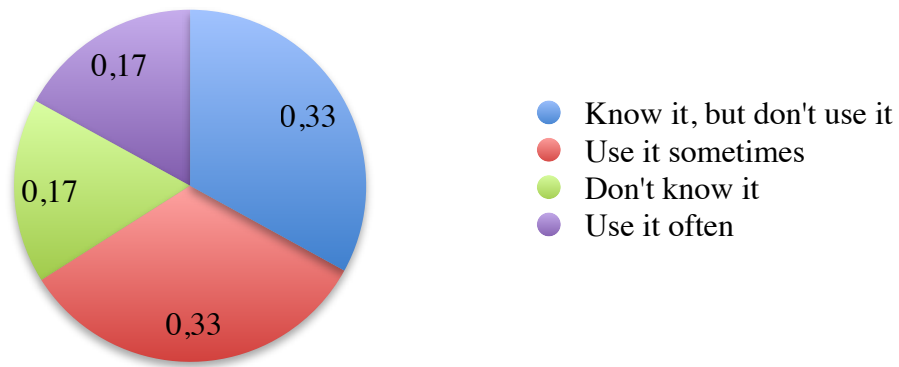


Figure 4.12. Degree of media awareness – Capital Moscow FM

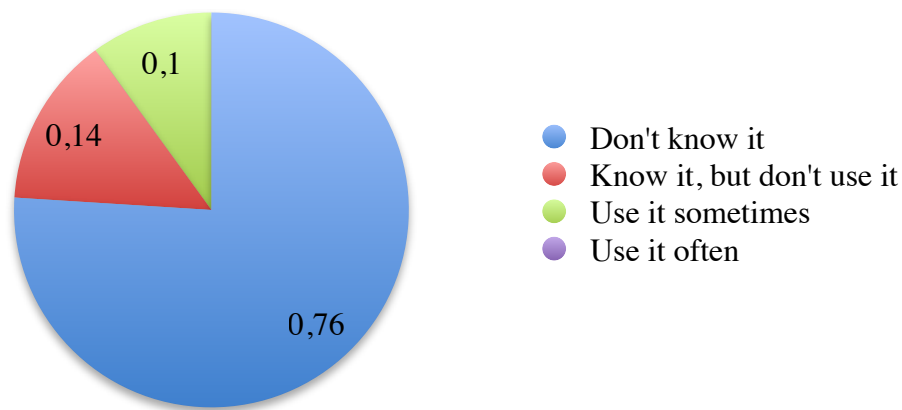


Figure 4.13. User preferences regarding learning RFL via media

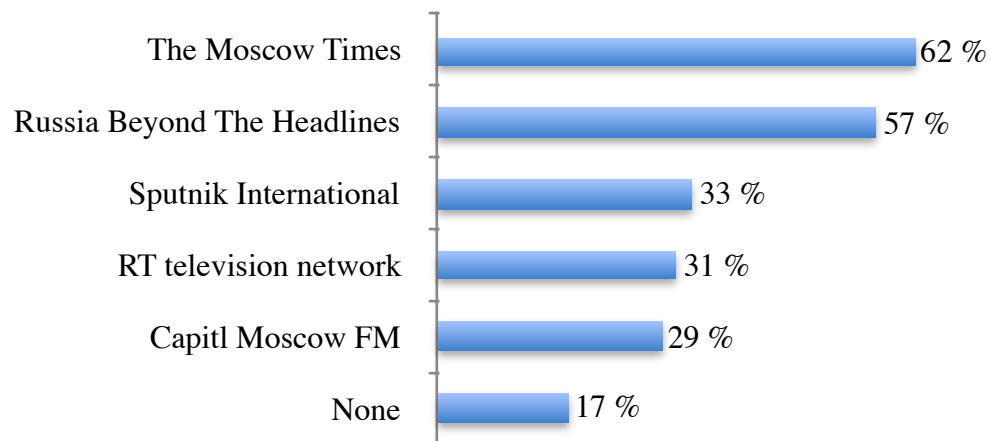


Figure 4.14. Multimedia format for learning Russian as a foreign language

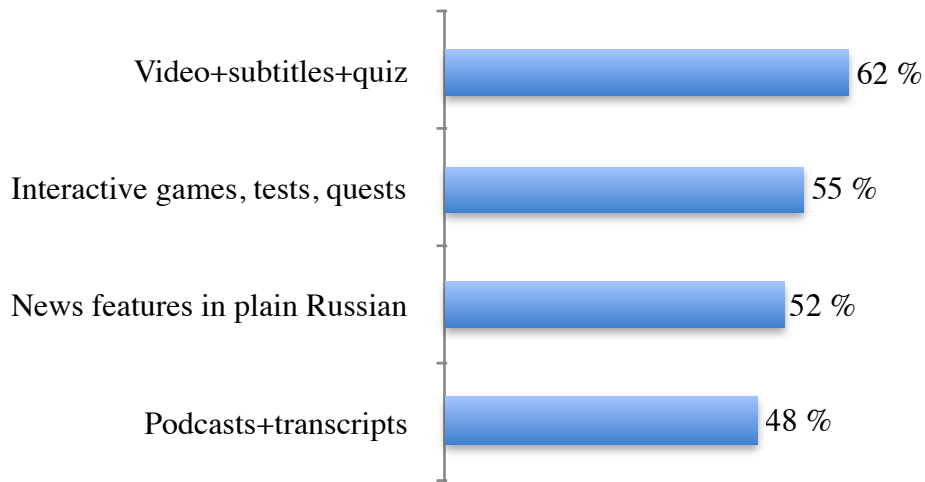


Figure 4.15. Topics for learning Russian as a foreign language

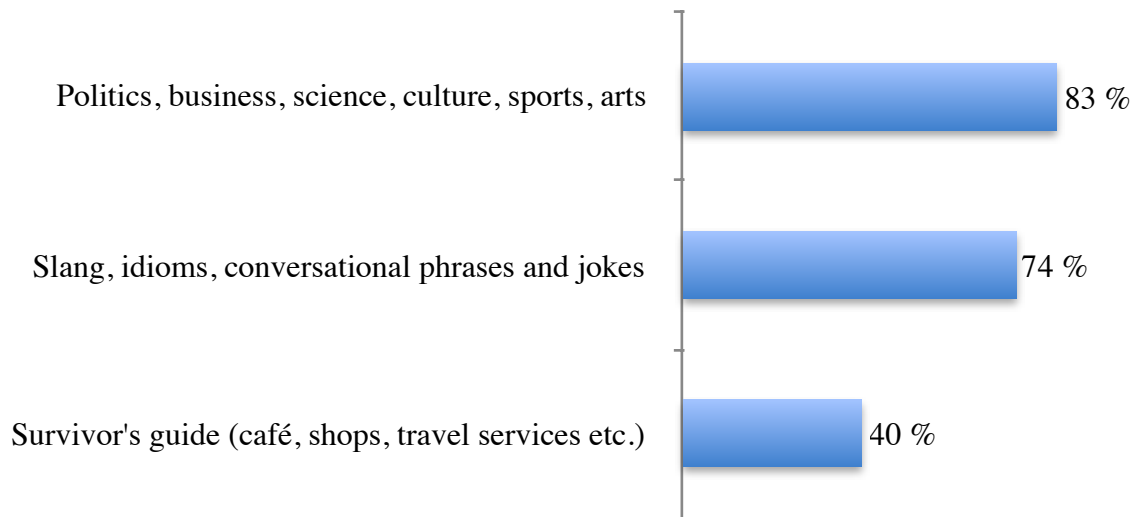


Figure 4.16. Scope of the topics for learning Russian as a foreign language



Figure 4.17. Platform for learning Russian as a foreign language

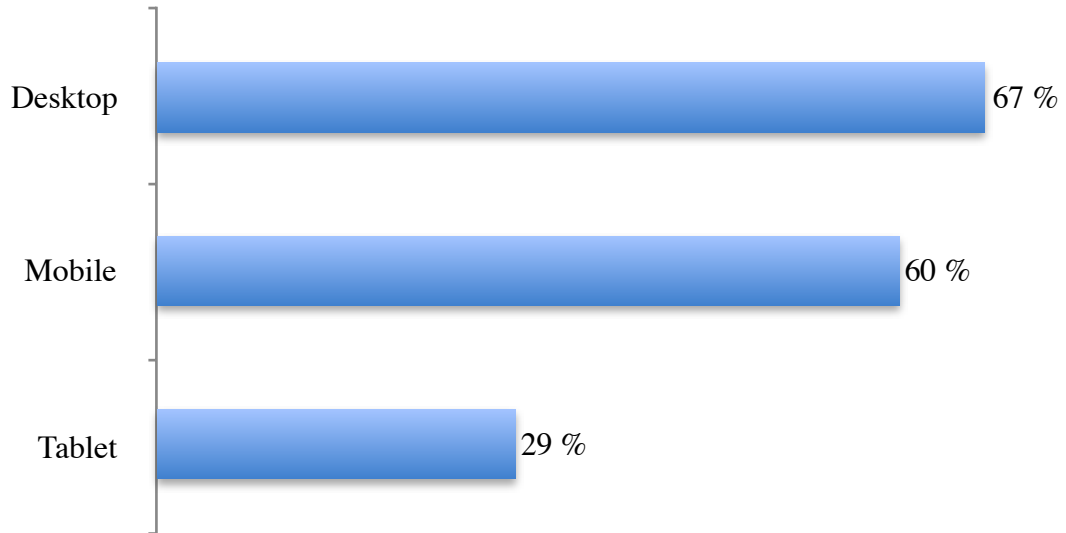
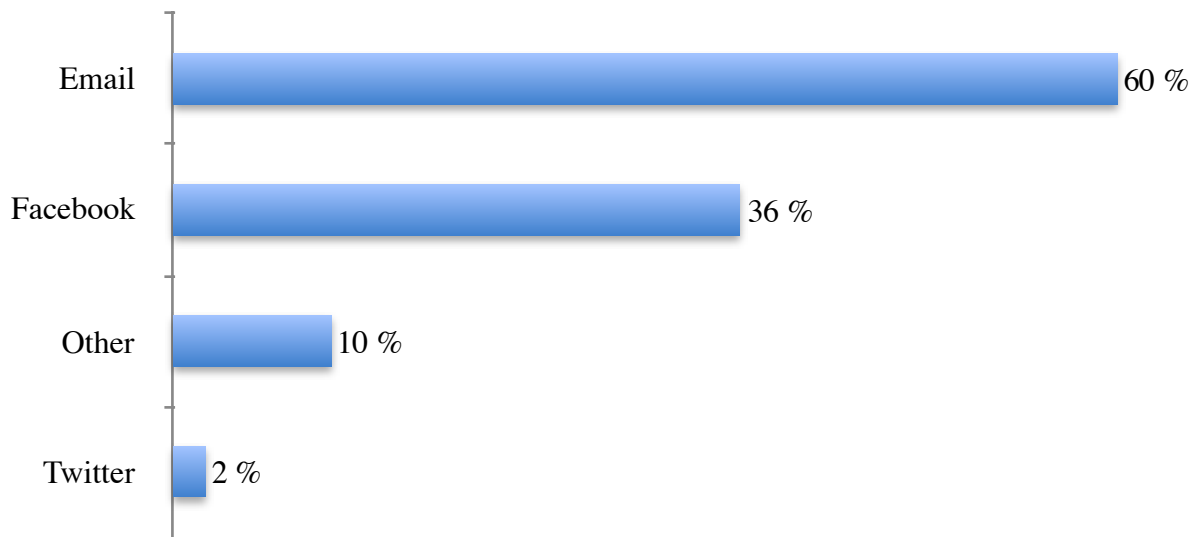


Figure 4.18. Social media channel for getting language-learning updates.



Questions for the surveys

Questionnaire 1. Preliminary online survey (21 respondents)

1. Gender

Male

Female

2. Age

18-24

25-34

35-44

45-54

55-64

65+

3. Where are you from?

Africa

Asia

Central America

Europe

Middle East

North America

Oceania

South America

The Caribbean

4. Level of Russian language proficiency

A1

A2

B1

B2

C1

C2

5. Rate your speaking skills

1

2

3

4

5

6. Rate your listening skills

1

2

3

4

5

7. Rate your reading/writing skills (in Cyrillic alphabet)

1

2

3

4

5

8. Why do you learn Russian?

a) Just curious, I'm a polyglot

- b) For everyday life in Russia
- c) My girlfriend/boyfriend is Russian
- d) Part of my education
- e) For work and career
- f) Other

9. Have you ever used Russian news media for learning Russian?

Yes

No

10. What media format would you choose for Russian language learning?

- a) Video + subtitles + quiz
- b) Interactive quiz, tests, quests
- c) Podcast + transcript
- d) News features in plain Russian (A2)
- e) Other

11. Topics you are interested in for learning Russian as a foreign language

- a) Politics, business, culture, literature, sport, art, history etc.
- b) Survivor's guide (café, shops, travel, services etc.)
- c) Slang, idioms and jokes you never get

Source: Typeform.com. October 15-17, 2016.

Questionnaire 2. Extended online survey (42 respondents)

1. Gender

Male

Female

2. Age

18-24

25-34

35-44

45-54

55-64

65+

3. Where are you from?

Africa

Asia

Central America

Europe

Middle East

North America

Oceania

South America

The Caribbean

4. Native language (pick one)

English

German

French

Italian

Spanish

Portuguese

Chinese

Japanese

Korean

Serbian

Croatian

Bulgarian

Macedonia

Indonesian

Indian

Slovenian

Other

n

5. Source language (the language to learn other languages) (pick one)

English	German	French	Italian	Spanish	Portuguese
Chinese	Japanese	Korean	Serbian	Croatian	Bulgarian
Macedonia	Indonesian	Indian	Slovenian	Other	

6. Level of Russian language proficiency

A1	A2	B1	B2	C1	C2
----	----	----	----	----	----

7. Rate your speaking skills

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

8. Rate your listening skills

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

9. Rate your reading/writing skills (in Cyrillic alphabet)

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

10. Why do you learn Russian?

- a) For my job and career prospects
- b) For academic purposes (part of my education)
- c) For everyday use in Russia
- d) Out of curiosity, I'm a polyglot
- e) I have a native Russian speaking friend/partner
- f) Other

11. Have you know or used any of these Russia-based foreign-oriented media?

a) RT television network

Don't know it	Use it sometimes
Know it, but don't use it	Use it often

b) Russia Beyond The Headlines (multimedia project, print publication)

Don't know it	Use it sometimes
Know it, but don't use it	Use it often

c) Sputnik International (radio broadcasting news agency)

Don't know it	Use it sometimes
Know it, but don't use it	Use it often

d) The Moscow Times (English-language daily newspaper, online)

Don't know it	Use it sometimes
Know it, but don't use it	Use it often

e) Capital Moscow FM (English-language radio station)

Don't know it	Use it sometimes
Know it, but don't use it	Use it often

12. Would you consider using any of these media if they offered Russian language learning online? Choose as many as you like.

RT television network	Russia Beyond The Headlines
Sputnik International	The Moscow Times
Capital Moscow FM	None
Other	

13. What media format would you prefer for learning Russian as a foreign language?

- a) Video + subtitles + quiz
- b) Interactive quiz, tests, quests

- c) News features in plain Russian (A2-B1 levels)
- d) Podcasts + transcripts

12. Topics you are interested in for learning Russian as a foreign language

- a) Politics, business, science, culture, sports, arts
- b) Slang, idioms, conversational phrases and jokes
- c) Survivor's guide (café, shops, travel, services etc.)

13. What Russia-related issues do you find the most interesting

- a) National (made in Russia, Russian people, 'Russianness')
- b) Local (urban life and communities)
- c) International (Russia in the world)

14. What platform would you preferably use for learning Russian online?

Desktop

Mobile

Tablet

15. How would you like to get your Russian learning updates?

- a) Email
- b) Facebook
- c) Twitter
- d) Pinterest
- e) Other

Source: Typeform.com. April 7-26, 2017.

Questionnaire 3. Expert interview

First name, last name:

Expertise for the current research:

Education: (scientific degree, university, research interest)

Professional background: (occupation, organization, project)

Date of the interview:

Length:

Mode of conversation:

1. Why do Russian foreign-oriented news outlets (such as RT, Russia Beyond The Headlines, The Moscow Times, Sputnik, Voice of Russia) lack edutainment features like learning Russian as a foreign language? Some have had it only for a short time.
2. Your experience in working with Russian media in terms of media didactics (what media have you used or collaborated with?).
3. What is the main challenge in learning Russian as a foreign language via media? What amount of didacticised content is appropriate for one-time perception?
4. Learning Russian via source language (native or foreign), through prepared materials, and through authentic materials.
 - Which of these approaches are suitable for which level?

- What approaches are there for grading levels of proficiency and preparing materials for those levels?
5. Russian phrasebook VS Russian in the cultural context – what are pros and contras of each method?
 6. What topics in the media are more relevant for learning Russian as a foreign language?
 7. How to prepare media content for RFL learners without ideological implications? How to select topics and news? What competencies are required for RFL experts?
 8. Which multimedia formats and for which purposes are preferable in the online learning environment? How important are the interactive features?
 9. What modern trends in RFL is to be considered to develop quality and likeable content for international media with a RFL component?
 10. Is it possible for edutainment feature to turn a non-user into a loyal media consumer? How to make it possible?
 11. What media format is more suitable for learning Russian as a foreign language?
 - Video + subtitles + quiz
 - Interactive games, tests, quests
 - Podcasts + transcripts
 - News features in plain Russian (texts for A2-B1 levels)
 12. What topics are more suitable for learning Russian as a foreign language?
 - Politics, business, culture, sport, art, cuisine, literature, history
 - Survivor's guide (café, shops, travel, services etc.)
 - Slang, idioms, conversational phrases and jokes
 13. What Russia-related issues can RFL learners be interested in?
 - Local (urban life and communities)

- National (made in Russia, Russian people, *Russianness*)
 - International (Russia in the world)
14. What platform do you find the most usable for Russian learning online?
- Desktop
 - Mobile
 - Tablet

Appendix 9

Interview scripts

Interview 1. Alexander Korotyshev

Director of Headquarters, MAPRYAL (International Association of Teachers of Russian Language and Literature) (Saint Petersburg, Russia)

Education: specialist diploma in International Journalism, Saint Petersburg State University; extended educational program ‘Russian as a foreign language’, Saint Petersburg State University; currently - postgraduate philology student at Saint Petersburg State University.

Professional background: teacher of Russian as a foreign language at the Institute of Russian Language and Culture at Saint Petersburg State University. Director of Headquarters, MAPRYAL (International Association of Teachers of Russian Language and Literature)

Date of the interview: April 24, 2017.

Length: 52 min 04 sec.

Mode of conversation: Skype

Why do Russian foreign-oriented news outlets (such as RT, Russia Beyond The Headlines, The Moscow Times, Sputnik, Voice of Russia) lack edutainment features like learning Russian as a foreign language? Some have had it only for a short time.

I think, this is because there are so many others distant learning resources in this field. First of all, I’m talking about the websites of the leading Russian language

universities in the country – Lomonosov Moscow State University, Peoples' Friendship University, and Pushkin State Russian Language Institute. Second of all, in the area of Russian language teaching methodology, it is widely thought that any distant learning course is useless unless it's supported by face-to-face language practice. It's necessary to combine distant learning with the traditional forms of studies. Distant learning courses are often used as a marketing ploy for attracting individuals to the space where the language is taught - be it Russia or elsewhere.

How to promote Russian language courses to those, who don't study Russian for academic purposes, but just want to comprehend the language in an entertaining and informal way?

There must be a clear positioning with the focus on why people should learn the language and what exactly they will achieve in the end. Currently we can see a lack of discussion about why foreign people actually need to know Russian. It is always good to say, that learning Russian will help you to read original books by Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Prilepin or Pelevin, but by saying this, we would narrow down the profile of potential Russian language learners. Economic situation in Russia is very interesting now, and if we say that learning Russian will help you to bring your business to the new market, we will give the people a big advantage. We at MAPRYAL cooperate with businesses on-and-off, because they need it. The emergence of such a clearly targeted learning channel would deliver its benefits.

What would encourage a media outlet to feel the need in RFL courses and launch it?

In my personal opinion, the media should experiment more with the businesses. Maybe they should come up with some sort of a proposal for RFL schools that would offer them an online course with an access to the website, where users could go and consume the content for a small fee. It is clear that everything that's free is always perceived as something more entertaining, rather than educating. If the online course provided its content on the fee-paying basis and could demonstrate some success stories, then it would work. Otherwise – Russia offers a lot of government initiatives aimed at promoting Russian as a foreign language, i.e. universities, Pushkin Institute Online, the Russkiy Mir Foundation, Rossotrudnichestvo, embassies, where professional language teachers do their job. But such a high diversity of channels needs to be coordinated by a united center and here we need to work strategically with businesses.

What is the main challenge in learning Russian as a foreign language via media?

The main challenge is to make people use the materials on the regular basis. Since the business people have an extremely packed schedule, unlike students, they are more inclined to use the content that is user-friendly, be it a mobile application or a highly flexible Skype tutor. Online forums don't work any more, we need to have a live conversation.

Learning Russian via source language (native or foreign), through prepared materials, and through authentic materials.

- ***Which of these approaches are suitable for which level?***
- ***What approaches are there for grading levels of proficiency and preparing materials for those levels?***

Although Russian as a foreign language is being taught according to the Russia-produced methodology, the system is highly integrated into the European association of the linguistic testers. We use the same six-levels system – from A1 to C2 - with a set of tests developed for each level. All the information should be introduced step by step – from prepared to authentic materials. It would be bluffing to say, ‘let’s use authentic media content right now’, - nobody’s going to do that. At the A1 level, everyday life situations work better than political and social topics. From the A2 level, prepared materials can be introduced in the form of separate phrases and word collocations. At the level between A2 and B1, we can start working with the media-imitated texts, and at the B1-B2 levels we can introduce authentic materials, but anyway we need to adapt them.

If you were offered to develop a RFL project for a media outlet, how would you define your audience and how would you select topics?

It does make sense to work with entrepreneurs and diplomats. Talking about the level, I’d start with giving the ropes at the A1-B1 levels. Then I’d complement the range with higher competences, so the users would comprehend the learning pathway – from their starting point to their final outcome. If we are talking about the content, I’d like to use the information about the modern Russia, its social reality. All the texts must be authentic and regularly updated.

Russian phrasebook VS Russian in the cultural context – what are pros and contras of each method?

The first method is very much used - there are so many course books, online applications - so it’s a beaten track. But from the viewpoint of motivation, it needs some new attractive features. The second method is much more complicated, and here the selection of topics and materials are very important, so it would meet the expectations of an average educated individual.

What topics in the media are more relevant for learning Russian as a foreign language?

Migration, world economic crisis, cultural expansion. What language should the country speak to the world in – the language of commerce, culture or defense industry? History, cinema, eternal issues, - those are highly philosophical topics, but they can be explained in a simple language whether it's an everyday conversation or an expert discussion.

Are there any taboo topics you wouldn't take?

I wouldn't say that any topics are taboo, but their interpretations should not cause humiliation or propaganda. We must get rid of the propagandistic narratives.

How to prepare media content for RFL learners without ideological implications? How to select topics and news? What competencies are required for RFL experts?

The idea of getting away from ideological implications is contradictory in itself, because the more we try to convince people that the media is independent, the more we prove the negative. We need to focus on the final outcome, because people who start learning Russian are disposed to Russia in the first place. It is obvious that Russia-bashing critics would hardly start learning the language via the Russia-based media. As for the competencies required for the RFL experts, I'd highlight the linguistic and methodological competencies as well as the higher awareness of social and political reality in the country. If we're talking about the media-based RFL course, we should focus on the media component, otherwise it'll be just another language course. The key word is motivation. One needs to learn how to manage the audience's motivation and how to let people feel their progress. Any online course is primitive, unfortunately. With downloadable mobile applications, you are very quick to hit the ceiling. A user must foresee the whole pathway, that's why any online course is investments-consuming.

Would the online media with a RFL component stand out among other online sources?

Yes, the media would stand out due to its ability to get updated. If the media updates its content regularly, it will offer something unique. Besides, the media-based online course doesn't have to be academic, but should aspire to attract an interest group. Eventually, as the user completes the online course, he or she is more likely to go to a brick-and-mortar institution, like a university or a language center in Russia.

Is it possible for edutainment feature to turn a non-user into a loyal media consumer? How to make it possible?

I'm skeptical. I think the course would aim primarily at those who already consume the media.

Would you divide the media audience into two groups – those who consume the news and those who learn the language via the media?

Yes, I would.

What media format would you choose for Russian language learning?

- Video+subtitles+quiz
- Interactive games, tests, quests
- Podcasts + transcripts
- News features in plain Russian (texts for A2-B1 levels)

YouTube channels are very popular today. I would also add some downloadable and reviewable presentations. For the lower levels of language proficiency, visual media such as video with subtitles are very effective. The higher the level, the more textual information can be, so a learner could practice different reading strategies – scanning, analytical, critical reading etc.

What modern trends in RFL is to be considered to develop quality and likeable content for international media with a RFL component?

The concept of student-centered education that came into use for teaching RFL in the late 1980s – early 1990s is still in. Interconnected educational approach is also relevant, since people develop their language skills (reading, listening, writing, speaking) in reference to each other. It means that a reading exercise should always lead to a better speaking while writing a letter should support video comprehension. Motivation management is also important, just as the integration of the learning content into the media agenda. If we're talking about the trends in the language itself, then the studies show that the Russian language doesn't appropriate as many incoming words as it used to do, back in the times of post-perestroika. Yes, the Russian language gets highly Americanized, and the level of speech culture in Russia is unfortunately going down. But the language is a living system that takes and gets rid of the stuff. An advantage of a media-based online course would be its language relevance.

What topics do you find the most effective for learning Russian as a foreign language?

- Politics, business, culture, sport, art, cuisine, literature, history
- Survivor's guide (café, shops, travel, services etc.)
- Slang, idioms, conversational phrases and jokes

I think the media agenda would be interesting for both those who want to learn Russian and those who consume the news via the media. A survivor's guide would attract only a tiny part of the audience, and the slang would appeal to even fewer users. Anecdotes and idioms would be of interest for linguists and professionals.

So, if the audience is more interested in the media topics, and they are more complicated then, let's say, survivor's guide or slang, how to prepare them?

The key moment here is the right proportioning of the content and sparking the interest among the media users. If we begin with teaching Russian slang, we'll just distract our audience. As I said, working with adult learners, we must appreciate their time and focus their attention only on those things that really matter. If you google 'Russian slang', you'll face multiple web sites and social media communities created by amateurs. But in order to get the idea about the language system, you can just skip the slang part.

What Russia-related issues are Russian learners generally more interested in?

- Local (urban life and communities)
- National (made in Russia, Russian people, *Russianness*)
- International (Russia in the world)

Some say that our society has rolled back to the Cold War stereotypes. We can witness the bipolar world and the East-West divide, but the topics of an average Joe's everyday life - like how much the children's education costs or what the Russian food basket contains - is still relevant. Through these problems we can see the international issues, like the sanctions and the economic recession. How do Russian people feel about their country? Many Russians think that even though the sanctions made their life more complicated, Russia has turned into a more powerful player on the global stage. On the other hand, although the President Putin's foreign policy is seen positive, it has negatively affected the economic situation. Some say that we should care more about our domestic affairs and less about the situation in Ukraine and Syria. Those two viewpoints can be very well juxtaposed. Another issue is how those viewpoints correspond with the editorial policy of a medium and how courageous the course developers are to go beyond the editorial policy. But I think that there's a lot to be discussed even within these frames. Russia is a country very much integrated into the European space. There are many touch points, and we need to fight the ideological clichés.

What platform do you find the most usable for Russian learning online?

- Desktop
- Mobile
- Tablet

I'd pick tablet, because it's more usable for business people who are steady on business trips. I'm not so sure about smartphones, because they are not very good for long reads. The better way to go would be to create an adaptive online version that is scalable for both desktops and mobile devices. Mobile applications are also great when there's no Wi-Fi and one can use the downloaded content.

Would you define the target audience of the media-based online courses as business adults, aged 35 and older, upscale market?

Yes, I would target the product for those people, because now I see no applications or programs created specifically for them. There are many courses for students and young professionals aged 25-30, but only a few sites for adults.

Would you agree that the state language policy in promoting Russian is primarily directed towards the native speaking expatriates across the globe, secondarily towards the migrants coming from the former Soviet Union, and at the very end of the line comes the initiatives directed at a wider reach of potential RFL learners?

Yes, today's major discussions are devoted to the adaptation of people with the Russian speaking background, i.e. expatriates and those living in the CIS. For Russia's language policy is also a priority. Would I get to change the policy if I had a chance? I guess so, because we should fight for those foreigners who have nothing to do with the Russian speaking background. And if we manage to explain our outlook to other people, we will make ourselves clear and we'll meet them halfway.

Where would you go to raise funds?

I would go and cooperate with businesses, finding my way to motivate the decision makers. There's always a chance to combine the funds from both the non-profit organizations like the Russkiy Mir Foundation (it has a very transparent grant program) and the companies. Yes, the Russian businesses are very impatient in terms of the ROI, however their social initiatives are not meant to be for-profit, they generate the publicity capital. Here we don't need to think about the ROI, but about the company's brand representation in the media.

Interview 2. Ekaterina Rubleva

Author of the online project 'LearnRussian', RT television network

Education: Pushkin State Russian Language Institute (Moscow, Russia), PhD in Philology.

Professional background: tester and coordinator of the distance learning programs at the Center for training and testing of foreign citizens in the Russian language at the Lomonosov Moscow State University. In December 2008 – October 2012, author of the online project 'LearnRussian' at ANO 'TV Novosti'.

Date of the interview: April 19, 2017

Length: 1 hour 3 min 31 sec.

Mode of Conversation: Skype

How did you get to work on the project 'LearnRussian'?

When I was working at the language school 'Liden&Denz', I got to know Natalia Brovchuk, who went to work for the RT editorial office. She told me that RT wanted to launch a foreign-oriented project that would promote Russian as a foreign language. In 2008, we met, created a concept and drew a global project, that would not only include the website learnrussian.rt.com, but also act as a sound educational portal. We had had three years to develop and launch the project, but then it was aborted for reasons beyond our control. Now, having monitored different online media, I realize that back then, in 2012 we created something unique, which is still second to none.

Why do Russian foreign-oriented news outlets (such as RT, Russia Beyond The Headlines, The Moscow Times, Sputnik, Voice of Russia) lack edutainment features like learning Russian as a foreign language? Some have had it only for a short time.

RIA Novosti (the Russian News Agency) tried to make something like this in 2010, but it didn't work out. First, if we look at it professionally, the reason might be the lack of experience in teaching RFL among content managers and media producers. Usually, journalists rely on their own expertise or invite Russian teachers, and this is a huge mistake, because Russian and RFL are two different languages. Only a few people realize that. The good thing about RT is that our duties within the team were clearly differentiated and even the biggest boss in the office never told me my business, because he realized that he knew nothing about RFL. I didn't meddle in matters of the software, but we did work pretty closely with the educational designers. Secondly, some media professionals have trouble

picturing, what they could do with RFL. Everybody wants to make something entertaining, but has no clue, how to do it. Usually, everything boils down to some juicy facts about the Russian language or to transcription of ‘matryoshka’ and ‘balalaika’. Only a few people realize that they need to engage with professionals. Besides, now many professions converge, and not every RFL teacher knows the specifics of working with online content like hypertexts etc. Here we face a problem of RFL teachers’ digital literacy. And last, but not least – for any content to be successful, it should become regular, and regularity is not the strongest suit of our media. Nobody is going to invest in a project with a one-year period of getting a success. Educational projects, even the for-profit ones, tend to get successful after a year or year and a half. Not to mention the return of investments, I’m speaking of the brand awareness. In Russia, nobody wants to do the work for the long run.

How did you define the audience of the project ‘LearnRussian’? Why did you decide to create an interactive course for beginners without didacticising the content of RT?

‘Learn Russian’ became successful without any extra promotion mainly because we were very specific in defining our audience: an average American programmer aged 27-35, who has a few minutes a day to surf the Net. We imagined a person making a choice, to go on a website about let’s say fishing or to use the online course. We also assumed that it must have been the content, easy enough to be self-learned, without any tutor’s help, giving the ropes of the Russian language. So, we picked English as a source language, because it’s a lingua franca, and the materials that are different from the traditional basic dictionary. Our assumption was that a user would be able to do something on ones own. Authentic media materials are commonly used starting from the B1 level. We thought that if the user do all the exercises on our website regularly, he or she will be able to achieve this lexico-grammatical level in a long run. That’s why some authentic texts are available only at the very end of the course (the lessons 80-90). They are social, not journalism, but still. Anyway, journalism materials are very hard to use for self-tuition.

Is the audience of ‘Learn Russian’ any different from the audience of RT website?

They may overlap, but I would say that the audience of RT is the people with an upper-secondary education, who think and read. We didn’t count on the highly educated people. We assumed that our source would get users to know Russian and help them realize that the language is not as terrible as it’s painted.

Why did RT feel the need in such kind of content at that moment?

It was a target project, because we were also preparing a resource for the Olympic games 2014, but it didn't happen. Besides, at that time RT was actively developing its educational online projects, and the English speaking editorial office decided to put emphasis on the projects like Russiopedia (Russiopedia.rt.com), Victory Day (9may.rt.com) and some others that eventually got archived.

What is the main challenge in learning Russian as a foreign language via online media?

The main challenge is the level of Russian proficiency. If a user speaks Russian at a basic level, he won't be able to use media for learning purposes, because every word has to be translated. If we talk about self-learning, then the level must be not lower than B1. Besides, the self-learning via media requires a great amount of self-motivation, because there are so many idioms and participial phrases in the media texts that are very hard to carve out by foreigners themselves.

Russian phrasebook VS Russian in the cultural context – what are pros and contras of each method?

This is how we approached the project. Since we had a lot of expats working in the RT editorial office, we could easily check, if they are interested in the topic or not. We would usually come to the open space and talk to the guys in order to get their feedback, whether the topic is relevant or artificial. It was a moment's work. Another important aspect is the goal of learning the language. I always appeal to my students (aspiring RFL teachers) – you've got two things: the goal and the level of your audience. If a person wants to comprehend what he or she is being told in a street, in a store, in a salon, - all the basic spoken topics are more than enough. But if the learner wants to read Chekhov without a dictionary, that is another story.

In our business there is a dilemma – the course book 'Let's Go! Poekhali!' (by S. Chernyshov) versus the course book 'Doroga v Rossiiu' ('Road to Russia' by V. Antonova). The course books that follow the relevant conversational topics and contain everyday vocabulary are frowned upon by the conservative part of the teachers' community. It's like physics VS lyrics, but in the RFL area, those who aim to teach the language of Dostoevsky and Tolstoy opposed those who aim to teach the spoken language. In the 'LearnRussian' we wanted to show that there are two languages – from the everyday life and from the books, - but since the language level of our audience was not high enough for reading the books, we skipped this part.

What topics in the media are more relevant for learning Russian as a foreign language?

Weather. From the viewpoint of methodology, discussing the weather helps to learn Russian numerals, adjectives, adverbs, and all the temporal constructions. Nature and other neutral topics can generate positive emotions. If a person live and study in the target language country, he or she might be interested in the local topic, e.g. exhibition opening or a new restaurant opening in Saint Petersburg. Among the taboo topics are crimes, political and religious conflicts, when it concerns terror acts in a temple or a mosque. But when it has something to do with the big religious and cultural celebrations, like Christmas, Easter, Kurban Bayram or Chinese New Year, we can cover that in a lesson.

How to prepare media content for RFL learners without ideological implications? How to select topics and news? What competencies are required for RFL experts?

If we take Putin's visit to another country, for example, it is OK to cover the factual information of the event: the President Putin arrived, discussed, met with someone, conclude some agreements, and went to the theatre. But we shouldn't cover the attitude of the host country's media toward the event. If I worked for the media and got assigned to didacticise an article with a clear pro-government message, I would take the whole ideology out of it, live the bare facts and equip the material with phrases according to the target language level. If I realized that there was no way to avoid any judgments, I would try to introduce the phrases that would indicate them, e.g. 'in the author's opinion' or 'the journalists claims'. This way I would make the content perfect and make myself, a content developer, safe from any accusations.

There is a great book called 'Job description of an RFL teacher' by V. Molchanovsky. It contains a great deal of competences that an RFL teacher must have, including his moral principles. But if we talk about ideology in general, then any language course book contains the ideology of the language and its culture. Teaching and learning Russian as a foreign language is a unique process, because Russian is very different from other European languages, including English, German, French, and Italian. Russian is highly culturalised, so it's impossible to teach Russian outside its cultural context. An RFL teacher can't help but communicating the ideology along with the language, and there's nothing wrong with it. If I worked for a media, I would follow the editorial policy, because any media is agenda-driven. It's a question to be addressed to a

content developer: if you agree to work for the media, it means that you accept your employer's ideology.

Would you agree that if the state-run foreign-oriented media don't offer the RFL learning component, it means that the government is not interested in promoting RFL via media?

I think that the Russian government has a clear view of the promotion of the Russian language in the world. The ideas are reflected in the Federal target program on the Russian language, represented by Rossotrudnichestvo, the Russkiy Mir Foundation, MAPRYAL and others. But the media promotion of RFL is a local issue and the preserve of the chief editors. Our government invests a lot of money into the language programs, but I really doubt that the Minister of Education is the one who outlines the concept of media activities in this field. I think that the media should develop these kinds of projects by themselves, like the RT television channel used to do it: when the English editorial office felt the need, they found the money and launched the project. If RIA Novosti got to work on the RFL project, they would succeed. Maybe the media people don't have a clear idea of how to do it.

When the Russian government realized that it would be useful to teach and promote the Russian language online, the web-portal PushkinOnline (pushkinginstitute.ru) emerged, but it's educational, not the news media. So, the idea of teaching RFL via cross-border news media has not yet been thought through. If RT, RIA Novosti or Sputnik were assigned to the task, I think they would complete it.

Can these projects serve as another way to attract users to the website and generate the traffic?

I think that any theme-based content would work. We have the FIFA Confederations Cup and the World Cup coming up, so why don't we create something like 'Learning Russian through Football' for tourists. It would attract people, but it requires a clear concept and takes more than one month to create something valuable.

Is it possible for edutainment feature to turn a non-user into a loyal media consumer? How to make it possible?

It is possible, because a rule of thumb states that anyone who learned the Russian alphabet becomes the agent of the Russian language, like it or not. That's what we call 'the soft power'. It happens 99% of the time. Russian is a unique language and people who get to learn it become its agents of influence. The Russian

language leave nobody unmoved, usually it makes people positive and non-indifferent.

What modern trends in RFL is to be considered to develop quality and likeable content for international media with a RFL component?

One of the trends is the shift toward the online activity, and everything that has something to do with the Web 2.0 technology – podcasts, online presentations, infographics. Users don't read long texts anymore.

Would the online media with a RFL component stand out among other online sources?

I think, with a sound targeting, positioning and professional team, the media would stand out, because all these blogs and podcasts are not worth a professional opinion. I personally can mention only a few online resources that deserve attention of an RFL expert: the iconic web-site 'Time to speak Russian' (speak-russian.cie.ru), the highly professional 'LearnRussian' (learnrussian.rt.com), the distance learning course 'News From Russia' by A.N. Bogomolov (dist-learn.ru), and the online portal Pushkininstitute.ru, which by the way is now a registered media outlet. And that's it, because all those YouTube videos and audio podcasts are made mostly by amateurs.

What media format would you choose for Russian language learning?

- Video+subtitles+quiz
- Interactive games, tests, quests
- Podcasts + transcripts
- News features in plain Russian (texts for A2-B1 levels)

I personally love podcasts. In 2012, my colleagues and I started the website <http://artdragon.ru/lr/videonews.html> with video news podcasts, but as we made it on our own budget, we had to put it on hold. Audio and video podcasts are perfect for the language learning via media, because they are based on news reports. Besides, for the young audience, podcasts would work better than hypertexts.

Being a content developer myself, I'd prefer video with subtitles and quiz. Interactive games are too costly to create, and nobody is going to produce them unless it's a for-profit project. News reports would be better perceived as video podcasts.

What topics are the most interesting for learning Russian as a foreign language?

- Politics, business, culture, sport, art, cuisine, literature, history
- Survivor's guide (café, shops, travel, services etc.)
- Slang, idioms, conversational phrases and jokes

I'd pick out the culture, art, cuisine, and survivor's guide. I'd never pick out the slang, because I strongly believe, that you can't start using slang until you speak the language at the B1 level or higher. Idioms would work, but anecdotes – rather no than yes.

What Russia-related issues are the learners generally more interested in?

- Local (urban life and communities)
- National (made in Russia, Russian people, *Russianness*)
- International (Russia in the world)

I'd take national and international issues.

What platform do you find the most usable for Russian learning online?

- Desktop
- Mobile
- Tablet

Smartphone and tablet are the best platforms. If I were a student, I'd hardly use the desktop, but unfortunately teachers still prefer desktops. By the way, you should take into account, that only a few teachers are tech savvy in terms of mobile technology.

Interview 3. Marita Nummikoski

Author of the books 'Troika: A Communicative Approach to Russian Language, Life, and Culture', 'News from Russia: Language, Life, and the Russian Media'.

Education: M.A. in English Philology (Helsinki University), M.A. in Russian Language and Literature (Helsinki University), Ph.D. in Foreign Language Education (University of Texas at Austin)

Professional background: Associate Professor of Russian, Director of Undergraduate Language Programs, University of Texas at San Antonio

Date of the interview: April 17, 2017.

Length: 40 min 20 sec.

Mode of conversation: Skype

Why do Russian foreign-oriented news outlets (such as RT, Russia Beyond The Headlines, The Moscow Times, Sputnik, Voice of Russia) lack edutainment

features like learning Russian as a foreign language? Some have had it only for a short time.

I don't know, and it may not be necessary, even. It would really depend on the kind of program. There are already so many 'educational' websites available.

Your experience in working with Russian media in terms of media didactics (what media have you used or collaborated with?)

I use a number of websites, such as newspapers and TV stations, as well as news agency websites, and hundreds of YouTube videos. There are so many to choose from that it is sometimes hard to pick the most appropriate ones (snob.ru, lenta.ru, kp.ru, 1tv.ru, tnt.ru, etc.).

What is the main challenge in learning Russian as a foreign language via media? What amount of didacticised content is appropriate for one-time perception?

As they always say, tailor the task, not the material. Therefore, Russian websites can be introduced even in beginning levels, but if the goal is to understand more than just the main points of a media clip, then we are talking about intermediate level students minimum.

In written media content, the key difficulty is the level of vocabulary, which is typically way beyond the students' active vocabulary. The syntactic structure of Russian is another serious problem, especially the word order (finding the grammatical subject of the sentence when it is not at the beginning).

In video clips, the speed of speaking adds yet another element to the problem. This is actually the only thing that needs some addressing. I wish there were news broadcasters, for instance, that would not talk so fast that even for me it is difficult to process the information even if I understand every word. But like I said, it is the processing (comprehension, understanding) that is not taking place when there is too much information at a high speed.

Learning Russian via source language (native or foreign), through prepared materials, and through authentic materials. Which of these approaches are suitable for which level?

Introductory and intermediate level students need material tailored specifically for them.

What approaches are there for grading levels of proficiency and preparing materials for those levels?

It is difficult, because for every task you create, there will be students in the same class for whom the level is appropriate, and those for whom it is too difficult or too easy.

Russian phrasebook VS Russian in the cultural context – what are pros and contras of each method?

Language can be learned using any method. Everything depends on the student's age, location, aptitude, and motivation.

What topics in the media are more relevant for learning Russian as a foreign language?

Depends on the level of the student, starting from daily life topics (elementary) to current events and social problems (advanced).

How to prepare media content for RFL learners without ideological implications? How to select topics and news? What competencies are required for RFL experts?

Why shouldn't there be ideological implications? Any authentic material inherently contains the opinion of the writer/publisher, etc. It is up to the teacher to help students understand the underlying subtext. We stress critical thinking in all classes. Students are taught to evaluate everything they hear and see with a critical eye. It is part of teaching for cultural differences, intercultural competence, and acceptance of different points of view. So, to answer your question about 'how', my answer is that I specifically pick material that is full of ideological implications. But, that's why a 'native Russian' is not always the best person to teach the language, because s/he may not see the ideological markedness of a text.

Which multimedia formats and for which purposes are preferable in the online learning environment? How important are the interactive features?

Videos are always good, because they can be viewed over and over. Interactive features are not typically available in authentic news media. If you are asking about specific learning material prepared by experts, then obviously any types of pre-listening and post-listening exercises.

What modern trends in RFL is to be considered to develop quality and likeable content for international media with a RFL component?

Hard to say. Anything of interest to the audience. I recently 'marathon-viewed' the entire first season of «Как я стал русским» and found that to be highly relevant as far as cultural materials go. For students, though, the language is still a bit too difficult, but it is highly entertaining. I understand that this is not really your idea of media, but it beats the daily news as far as interest goes.

Is it possible for edutainment feature to turn a non-user into a loyal media consumer? How to make it possible?

Loyal? If you mean loyal to one site, then probably no.

What media format would you choose for Russian language learning?

- Video+subtitles+quiz
- Interactive games, tests, quests
- Podcasts + transcripts
- News features in plain Russian (texts for A2-B1 levels)

Absolutely all of them!

What topics you are interested in for learning Russian as a foreign language?

- Politics, business, culture, sport, art, cuisine, literature, history
- Survivor's guide (café, shops, travel, services etc.)
- Slang, idioms, conversational phrases and jokes

All of the above.

What Russia-related issues are you generally more interested in?

- Local (urban life and communities)
- National (made in Russia, Russian people, *Russianness*)
- International (Russia in the world)

All of them.

What platform do you find the most usable for Russian learning online?

- Desktop
- Mobile
- Tablet

Desktop or tablet. No mobile phone.

Interview 4. Natalia Brovchuk

'LearnRussian' project manager, RT television network

Education: specialist degree in philosophy at Lomonosov Moscow State University, professional training in teaching Russian as a foreign language at the Institute of Russian language and culture, Lomonosov Moscow State University.

Professional background: currently PR-manager at the ROSMAN publishing house, previously – ‘LearnRussian’ online project manager at Russia Today.

Date of the interview: April 7, 2017.

Length: 1 hour 12 min 39 sec.

Mode of conversation: Skype

Why do Russian foreign-oriented news outlets (such as RT, Russia Beyond The Headlines, The Moscow Times, Sputnik, Voice of Russia) lack edutainment features like learning Russian as a foreign language? Some have had it only for a short time.

The project ‘LearnRussian’ was launched in the spring 2012 to communicate the Russia’s cultural agenda through educational initiatives to the foreign audience. In the fall 2012, some political changes occurred in Russia and the project was shut down. Although we did show pretty good ratings for a start, but the political decision was to dissolve the team. We had been working actively for half of the year, but the team was dismissed and the project was frozen. So to answer your question, why Russia-based foreign-oriented media don’t have an edutainment content like RFL – the political agenda is different now.

Why don’t the media have such a goal? Why does the function of information and persuasion rank higher than education and entertainment?

This is a rhetorical question. It all depends on the political will. All foreign-oriented media are progovernment one way or another, and it’s the government who sets the agenda. If there’s a political decision to activate the cultural agenda, it’ll be in abundance. Besides, in Russia there’s a whole new generation of tech-savvy people who are aware of the modern educational technologies and capable of creating such kind of edutainment content. Five years ago, the situation was different.

What kind of value can edutainment give to the media?

It all depends on the media. I think the cultural component constitutes a minimal part of the modern mass media. The media with a broad coverage are entirely based on political and economic content, on communicating a particular viewpoint, and there’s no time and space for culture. There’s a demand for growing the audience, and journalists get evaluation based on their click-through rates. The more clicks they generate, the more money they get. Culture and education are not able to produce the headlines with such a high click-through rate.

How would you explain the popularity of Deutsche Welle – Deutsch lernen?

It's a brand, just like the BBC Learning English. But in general, the community of English and German teachers are more active online. They are not afraid to share their information, but we still have a different mentality. If a RFL teacher creates a course, he or she will hold it and never give it away, to make sure that no other teacher steals it. But the fact that any course costs nothing without an author's methodology is unclear to some people. However the situation is changing.

As far as I can see from the 'LearnRussian' social media accounts, there is a public interest in learning Russian. It's worth mentioning, though, that in 2012, nobody believed that this interest would pick up. It's all about the Russian mentality - Russian investors are looking for the fastest ROI. We want to spend one ruble and earn a thousand as soon as possible. We don't want to wait. German entrepreneurs and investors wait patiently. It's like, why-autobahns-are-better-than-Russian-highways all over again. This was determined by history. To keep the interest high, people need to have a brand to get back to from time to time. Russian language has the same perspectives as any other language. It just ought to be employed.

After the project 'LearnRussian' got shut down, we were trying to find an investor who would buy the project. But we failed. For a project to be for-profit, it must get monetized sooner or later. Back then we didn't think about it as a nonprofit initiative, but now I think it would be possible to raise some funds.

What features did the project 'LearnRussian' include?

Video episodes on YouTube, the website learnrussian.rt.com and social media. The social media used a separate content, and YouTube videos were based on the web search queries. Basically, they were SEO texts. For example, people requested 'how to say 'happy birthday' in Russian?' So, we would compose a text about it and make a video. It enabled not only to improve the traffic to the website, but also to give users some added value.

We also had the idea of creating audio and video podcasts since there were a lot of expats working for RT and we could have used them as much as we wanted. We also had a film production and record studios at our disposal, which was very handy.

What was a major goal of this project?

The goal was to produce some free online lessons for learning Russian as a foreign language. In 2012, there were quite a few websites that would sell Russian courses or Skype lessons with Russian native speakers. We wanted to make something different - a course for beginners (up to A2 level), a website for those, who want to get to know Russian. The mission was to teach people Russian.

Why didn't the project use a didacticised content from the RT?

We just didn't think about it. And besides, the website was launched for the beginners. It offers very first lessons that explain grammar. Plus, at the time, the RT didn't have a Russian version; it emerged later in 2012, right after we got shut. So we couldn't use their texts. We could have written some special texts, but anyway, media texts are being used for learning purposes at the A2 level and higher. Russian learners first need to pass this elementary stage, when they are trying to understand how to use cases and verbs of motion. First the ropes should be learned, and then the users might get ready to read texts. We used communicative approach that focuses on teaching basic phrases that people use in their everyday life.

Is the audience of the project 'LearnRussian' any different from the audience of RT?

I cannot say for sure, but the website has still been generating traffic. If people are interested in the Russian language and Russia as a country, they might also be interested in the news from Russia. The audience is mostly adults, 25+. My colleagues, RFL teachers, are still using the website, because it contains dialogs, alphabet, exercises and tests.

How many people were there in the team?

Ekaterina Rubleva and I were working exclusively on the project, but we also engaged people who would create texts, assist in social media, proofread the English part, designers, programmers, sound producers, an illustrator. It was quite a strong team.

Have you used any sources as a role model for your project?

We had been monitoring the BBC Learning English, but at that moment it was not yet interactive. It was vitally important for us to employ the methods of game playing; we were the first who started edutainment. Now it is quite popular, but back then it was pretty new.

What is the main challenge in learning Russian as a foreign language via media? What amount of didacticised content is appropriate for one-time perception?

The main challenging for learning any language is a lack of face-to-face communication with a teacher. There is a huge amount of nonverbal information that people get offline. Even Skype conversations cannot make up for it. Besides, for any non-native Russian speaker, the Cyrillic alphabet is pain in the neck. I used to work with German speaking students, and their awareness about cases and verbs of motion that the two languages share, really helped them. But since

we were trying to teach without any source language, it was all mimic and gestures. Anyway, German students were very quick to grasp, while Chinese were learning by rote.

Learning Russian via source language (native or foreign), through prepared materials, and through authentic materials. Which of these approaches are suitable for which level?

For beginners, customized content with carefully chosen words and phrases works perfectly. As soon as a user learned the ropes, he or she can move on to the easy prepared texts at the A2 level and higher. On learnrussian.rt.com, we used English as a source language, because there was no teacher available online who could have explained the words. The website is aimed first and foremost to teach speaking and listening skills. However, for a better learning of every aspect of a language, all communication media must be employed.

How to develop an online content?

An online project is not an end in itself. Even though the Internet offers multiple opportunities, they are limited. In the long run, an online project is just an advanced course book. It is more attractive and engaging than a printed book, but still. We did understand that, and that's why we went further and developed the social media accounts, so the users could go beyond. With everything that MOOCs (massive open online courses) have to offer, they are different from face-to-face interaction.

Russian phrasebook VS Russian in the cultural context – what are pros and contras of each method?

There might be challenges. At some point, at the B1-B2 level, different styles of written and oral Russian should be introduced. It helps differentiating spoken language from academic.

What topics in the media are more relevant for learning Russian as a foreign language?

Any. It all depends on individual interests. The language is really hard to frame. It's a living thing. When you aim to give some relevant information via adopting it at a more accessible level, it's absolutely doable.

How to prepare media content for RFL learners without ideological implications? How to select topics and news? What competencies are required for RFL experts?

There's no way and no point in avoiding ideology. I think, an ideological context is one of the most interesting aspects for advanced Russian learners. Especially when it comes to adult learners who know what political and progovernment

media stand for. There's no need to try to avoid it. A teacher pursues a different goal.

RT has had both critics and fans. But at the time, while our project was alive, I could not find a single negative comment towards RT in the social media. I don't know, how repelling the RT logo on the learnrussian.rt.com looked for the RT haters, but they remained curious. In our case, as we have had a separate website – not a section on rt.com – we must have broaden the audience, which includes by the RT critics. For me, the separation of the websites was definitely a plus. But if I would have been an rt.com manager, I would be more interested in generating the traffic to the main page.

Is it possible for edutainment feature to turn a non-user into a loyal media consumer? How to make it possible?

The question is how much we need those consumers. We are not evangelists; we just teach Russian to those who are interested in the language, and engage those who can potentially become interested. By doing that, we want to show that Russia is not about saber-rattling and iron curtain, it's also about people doing good stuff. So there was no such a goal as turning non-user into a loyal consumer. I think, in the beginning, it might have been meant to use our project to channel users to the main website, but since we didn't reach the planned figures, the decision was made to close the project. On the other hand, why Russian learners would go to the website with bloody dead bodies on the main page. I see no point. At some point we just split over the ideology and that's it. The audiences were completely different.

How independent those two (a news website and an online learning project) should be within a single media?

I believe that in today's world, educational projects should stay aside as independent non-profit initiatives. Back than, in 2008-2010, 2012, it was a logical step to launch a RFL learning website within the major media aimed at communicating positive image of Russia and Russians during the reset period. But then two projects have gone their separate ways. Today I cannot imagine any media that could serve as a foundation for the 'LearnRussian' project. They are just worlds apart.

When we were trying to find an investor for our project, we were more inclined to apply to some big IT-corporations, like Yandex, Google or Facebook, then to some media, because today media are completely disinterested in edutainment. Besides, as all the major media had emerged into a single news agency – Rossiya Segonya, there's not a single big foreign-oriented media left.

Even if there are some left, like Russia Beyond the Headlines, the question remains, how they would approach such kind of projects. When we were at the initial stage, we started to look for a contractor who could have developed the lessons. Typically it goes like this: you go to the main organization that deals with teaching RFL, like Rossotrudnichestvo (Federal agency for the Commonwealth of the Independent States, Compatriots leaving abroad and for the international humanitarian cooperation). The agency has representatives all over the world, receives money from the government budget, but does nothing at all. We also tried to collaborate with the Pushkin State Russian Language Institute. But those are all top-heavy structures and overadministered institutions, so in the long run, the contractor who gets to create the lessons, receive a tiny fraction of the grant money. So, even the technical aspect of the project affects the content.

What challenges are there in managing the project?

Just like in any project – communication, technical specifications, deadlines, business skills like planning and pitching.

What media format would you choose for Russian language learning?

Audio format helps to improve listening comprehension, video episodes works for better speaking and listening skills, texts are meant for improving reading abilities, while games and quizzes are good entertainers. A balance has to be struck. It's silly to put only texts or only podcasts on a website. It won't keep your audience's attention.

What Russia-related issues are generally more attractive to RFL leaners?

A little bit of everything.

What platform do you find the most usable for Russian learning online?

Scalable and adaptive design that works both for desktops and mobile devices is the best. We've had a lot of negative responses about our website, because it was not scalable for mobile devices. We just didn't have enough time to complete the layout. In today's online environment, when the traffic is shared equally, some items must be available for download (like audio files), tests should be used online and games can be used as applications.

What modern trends in RFL is to be considered to develop quality and likeable content for international media with a RFL component?

It all depends on the audience. But what should definitely be avoided are one-sided projects. If the whole content boils down to a gaps-filling game, it won't work. Diverse media must be embraced. For the users who are constantly busy, email-newsletters is a good way to go. There is a constantly rising overflow of

information, and in this flood, media should demonstrate not only the uniqueness of the content, but also the empathy of its communication mode.

Is there a demand for edutainment media content?

I guess so, because people use the news, one way or another. If handled properly, the demand is forthcoming. In contrast with other RFL providers, media can have an upper hand because they structure their content and supply their information in adequate proportions.

Interview 5. Yulia Safonova

‘Spoken Russian’ radio host, Radio Sputnik

Education: Orenburg State Pedagogical University, teacher of Russian language and Russian literature. PhD in philology, associate professor, expert in lexicography and Russian as a foreign language.

Professional background: editorial team member of Gramota.ru, host of the radio show *Gramotey* (‘Grammar Stickler’) at Radio Mayak since 2002, host of the radio show *Russkiy ustniy* (‘Spoken Russian’) at Radio Sputnik (formerly the Voice of Russia).

Date of the interview: April 10, 2017

Length: 1 hour 32 min 15 sec.

Mode of Conversation: Skype

Tell us more about your collaboration with the Voice of Russia and Radio Sputnik.

In 2003, one of the founding members of the radio Echo of Moscow, Sergey Korzun, invited me to host the radio show ‘*Russkiy ustniy*’ (‘Spoken Russian’) at the International Russian Radio, which was a division of the Voice of Russia. The Voice of Russia was broadcasting in the Soviet times in multiple languages, except for Russian, because its mission was different. The collapse of the Soviet Union made it necessary to support Russian diaspora abroad, because many people turned out to live in a non-Russian speaking environment. That is one of the reasons why the International Russian Radio emerged. My mission as a radio

host was to promote Russian language to those, who got isolated from the Russian-speaking environment. After a while, the audience became bigger, because people living in the Asian regions of the former Soviet Union (Uzbekistan, Kirghizia, Tadjikistan), and those living in Europe comprise two completely different audiences. My goal was to provide listeners with the so-called ‘tram language’, so they could understand the language if they ever want to visit Russia. And the title ‘Spoken Russian’ implies this conversational component.

I also had to decide, if it is ok to talk about politics. In the first years, I used a lot of good examples from political speeches (or ‘memes’ as they are now called). I remember the show when I cited Putin’s toiling ‘*kak rab na galerah*’ (like a galley slave). The word ‘galley’ was also mentioned in Alexander Pushkin’s ‘The Tale of Tsar Saltan’, and my idea was to attract people’s attention to the Russian classics, showing that even the President uses this phrase. So, the name of Putin popped up only as a hook. Then we’ve covered a popular phrase ‘*oborotni v pogonah*’ (literally ‘werewolves in uniforms’, rogue cops). I must admit that I’ve never experienced any censorship and always worked as a freelance artist on this project. In the beginning, the show aired on weekdays in 7 min long bits and was repeated on weekends as a one whole set. That allowed me to thematize a one-week set with each bit connected to one another.

Despite the administrations turnover, I’d never felt censored until a young lady took over the project. She didn’t like me mentioning Putin. I easily omitted the name, so it wouldn’t affect the content. But I’m still convinced that at some level of the language proficiency, it is crucial to introduce political speeches for a better learning, but avoiding any political implications. No matter how you feel about Putin, he is by all means a fascinating and original public speaker. I tried my best not to raise any political issues. First of all, because I’ve been working for the radio station, whose primary goal is to promote the government policy from a very specific angle, and it is understandable. The government sponsors the media and if you don’t like it, you can always tune in to another radio station. So, I tried to keep my show away from the politics, using political personalities to highlight their language. Since the Voice of Russia got reorganized into Radio Sputnik, the show has been airing daily in the format of 3 min interludes.

There is another interesting moment: if you want to teach how to place the correct accent in Russian words, the number of episodes is limited, because there are not so many Russian words with a tricky accent. But if you want to show the richness of the Russian vocabulary and the Russian classics, the amount of potential episodes is unlimited. I’ve chosen the second path. I don’t care if a person with the Russian language background in Uzbekistan or Germany pronounces ‘zvOnit’

instead of 'zvonIt' (call). I won't think any bad of him. But if he says 'pokommuniziruem' (let's communicate), it will be interference. So, the accent is not so important. I believe that the Russian language doesn't need any cleanup, the idea of cleaning the language seems aggressive to me. We need to love the Russian language and teach people how to retrieve the correct information from dictionaries and now from the Internet.

Radio Sputnik provides broadcasting services in many languages in different countries, so the editorial offices worldwide can take the show and include it into their program list. As far as I know, people from Georgia, Armenia, and Kirgizia like tuning in to the show. I used to receive letters from the RFL teachers living in China and Japan. They asked me to send them my audio transcripts for their advanced learners.

Why don't Russia-based foreign-oriented media offer such an edutainment component as Russian as a foreign language?

I don't know why. Maybe they are just not there yet. For the news agency *Rossiya Segodnya* this task is not relevant now. It is a question of time. Another reasons might be the disconnectedness of the Ministry of Education that curates the Russian language studies and the Federal Agency for Press and Mass Communications. There are so many online sources for learning Russian, but they are still not the mass media. There must be somebody who will say – we can do this and we'd better do this.

I think if *Rossiya Segodnya* created such kind of a program, the quality would be very high. You might disagree with their editorial policy, but their facilities, formats and media products are fascinating. The working conditions are second to none.

Would you agree that for Russia's international media, promoting the national identity is more important than cultural integration (compared to the German media)?

Ten years ago Russia encountered the problem of assimilating the migrants coming from the former Soviet Union republics. Particularly with regard to those living in the Asian regions where the state schools don't offer the Russian language classes anymore. In the Soviet Union, Russian as a non-native language was a compulsory subject for all schools, but not anymore. So, a lot of migrants came to work in Russia having no Russian speaking skills whatsoever. And as you know, now all foreign citizens have to pass the RFL test in order to get a labor permit in Russia, so the demand for learning courses is rising. Today there are many different courses and course books for migrants who wish to learn Russian.

Going back to your question, I must admit, that today it would be easier to create a media project than before, because Deutsche Welle and the BBC have it. It is also important to put together a team of both young and experienced professionals.

What are the key challenges in didacticising journalistic materials for learning RFL?

One must avoid reinforcing the image of Russia as the greatest country in the world. Instead, we need to present the facts, stories, and situations that would clearly prove that Russian culture is genuinely international. The key challenge is to select the materials and avoid stereotypes. When people can't stop saying 'Pushkin is the one who made us who we are', it starts to sound ironic. We need to look for a completely different approach. There are two methods of learning a foreign language. The first one is the so-called 'pillow method', when a young adult visits a new country, gets a girlfriend or boyfriend, and picks up a basic vocabulary to understand each other. The second method is learning a language as a part of the world culture. I must admit that some course books are chest-thumping because they promote Russia as the greatest culture in the world. I don't like marketing of the Russian culture as if it's a commodity and universal remedy. Besides, there are many discrepancies between what stands in the course books and what Russian natives actually say in their everyday life. I think we've inherited this from the Soviet past. Media content for Russian learners should be built on short conversational phrases, because today even Russian natives don't understand long and too formal expressions. For instance, all course books advice learners to ask '*Skolko stoit*' (How much is it?) by shopping, but not the shorter and popular question '*Pochjom*' (How much?). And what if a person doesn't want to read Dostoevsky, but want to come to Russia and food shop? That's our Soviet background, when everything should have been said correctly, and that's why we need younger professionals, who are not restrained by this background.

Another problem is that the spoken Russian had not been a subject of research up until the middle of the 20th century. And when there's no scientific foundation, there won't be any practical applications. We need to take a more systematic approach that would indicate the clear signs of the spoken language such as compressions, omissions of the predicate, different usage of cases etc. Scholars got to study them properly only after the 1990s. The generational change of RFL scholars is also a critical issue. Yes, there are plenty of RFL teachers out there, but they are not interested in developing courses. Don't forget about a project manager, who can gather a team and make it work.

How to find a RFL expert for a media, how to formulate a project task for him and pick out the topics?

I wouldn't start the whole course at one blow. For a start, I'd emphasize the language part in a news message and complement it with a sound or a picture that would illustrate the simple phrase in Russian. After a few episodes, I'd ask the users, 'did you remember the phrase', and would introduce the new course. And I'd grow along with the audience.

Where to find an expert? It's not a problem. The problem is methodological - we don't even know, what kind of course books people use across the globe to teach and study RFL. We need to collect all the course books and analyze their content, because a learner visiting Russia and a learner living abroad may have completely different needs. The course books used in the central part of Russia are very academic. We need to understand what the audience wants. Some want to have fun and learn up to ten phrases to say 'I love you', 'Russia is the great country', 'You guys are weird', 'You can't understand Russia with your mind'. Other want to go on business, but again, no business will work without the spoken vocabulary.

How would the online media with a RFL component stand out among other online sources?

I think the media would stand out, and the new media format would attract the young audience. Humanitarian component is beneficial for any media outlet. Take, for example, RT, who is being heavily criticized by the West for being such a propaganda machine. But if they had a RFL component, they could say: yes, we're all different, we speak different languages, so maybe we should speak these languages to better understand each other.

Can the media edutainment component such as RFL turn a non-user into a loyal consumer?

The media can turn a non-user into a user who starts to think critically, whether if it's true or not what is being said. A cultural feature can make somebody a more loyal person, if you tell him or her that we're not so far from each other, and there's a historical fact that proves that we used to have a lot in common.