

TEACHING THE PRAGMATICS OF RUSSIAN CONVERSATION USING A CORPUS-REFERRED WEBSITE

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Pragmatic competence is essential for oral fluency and listening comprehension, allowing speakers to use and interpret language appropriately in varied contexts. The use of technological applications for teaching pragmatics is on the rise (Taguchi & Sykes, 2013), in part because they are well-suited to the types of awareness-raising tasks which support Schmidt's (1993; 2001) noticing hypothesis. However, the effectiveness of computer-assisted language learning (CALL) applications in the teaching of routine formulas—phrases with pragmatic functions—has yet to be examined. This paper reports on the impact of an awareness-raising, corpus-referred instructional website on L1 English learners' acquisition of nine Russian routine formulas. Intermediate and advanced learners of Russian were recruited and assigned to either the experimental (n = 18) or control (n = 16) group. All participants completed an oral proficiency assessment, a background questionnaire, and a pre-test, post-test (two weeks after the pre-test) and delayed post-test (four weeks after the post-test) that assessed comprehension, use, and aural recognition of the routine formulas. Experimental group participants completed the web-based modules and responded to a feedback form. Results indicate that the intervention had a durable effect on learners' awareness of the targeted routine formulas and lowered aural recognition of nonce formulas.

Language(s) Learned in this study: Russian

Keywords: Corpus, Speaking, Pragmatics, Less Commonly Taught Languages

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INTRODUCTION

One growing area within the field of interlanguage pragmatics (ILP) focuses on the use of technology in promoting pragmatic competence among L2 learners, both in and out of the classroom. Pragmatic competence is essential to oral fluency and listening comprehension, as it allows speakers to use and interpret language appropriately in varied contexts. Applications of technology to improving speaking proficiency have been addressed over the years in *Language Learning & Technology*, most notably in a [special issue](#) on technology and oral language development (Nunan, 2005). However, these studies have not focused on the role of pragmatic competence in oral language proficiency. This article examines the effectiveness of a computer-assisted language learning (CALL) application in the instruction of a specific area of pragmatics—*routine formulas*—in Russian.

The use of technological applications for teaching pragmatics is on the rise (Taguchi & Sykes, 2013), in part because they are well suited to the types of awareness-raising tasks which support Schmidt's (1993; 2001) noticing hypothesis. While there is a growing body of research on the use of CALL programs in ILP, particularly on speech acts (Ishihara, 2007; Li, 2013; Russell & Vasquez, 2011; Sykes & Cohen, 2008; Waugh, 2013), there are no studies on routine formulas—formulaic phrases with pragmatic functions—in particular. Furthermore, acquisition of routine formulas by learners of Russian has yet to be studied; this is likely due to Russian's status in the US as a less commonly taught language (LCTL).

In an article on the current state of CALL, Garrett (2009) listed several pressing issues of concern to researchers and practitioners. She described the need for applications devoted to the teaching of LCTLs, as technology can make instructional materials for these languages accessible to a wide audience. There is a logical place for pedagogically sound resources that can assist learners in acquiring language that may be neglected in the classroom. While the great potential for technological applications within the field of Russian language teaching has been noted (Robin, 2006), there is a need for more empirically validated research on CALL materials and other technological interventions in Russian language instruction. Additionally, although corpus linguistics has long been a presence in the field of applied linguistics, its impact has been felt predominantly within English language teaching and materials development. This study addresses these research gaps by investigating the effectiveness of a corpus-referred online instructional tool for learning Russian routine formulas. While the tool itself only targets the skill of speaking indirectly by raising awareness of these formulas, it is argued that this awareness is necessary for oral proficiency and will lead to improved speaking ability.

LITERATURE REVIEW

ILP and Instructional Pragmatics

Kasper and Schmidt (1996) defined ILP as “the study of the development and use of strategies for linguistic action by nonnative speakers” (p. 150). The field of ILP has been in existence since the late 1970s, and has seen an influx of research in the past two decades (for an overview, see Barron, 2012). One of the central constructs in ILP is that of pragmatic competence, which entails selecting “the form/function composites required for particular circumstances” (Nattinger & DeCarrico, 1992, p. 11). As Barron and Wurga (2007) reminded, there has long been a need for more longitudinal research—particularly that which includes pedagogical interventions (Takahashi, 2010)—into the nature of the acquisition of pragmatic competence, especially for L2s other than English.

Instructional pragmatics refers to the pedagogically-oriented subfield of ILP (Ishihara, 2010). Research has shown that pragmatics is amenable to instruction (Rose, 2005). According to Kasper (1997), there are two kinds of activities useful for the teaching of pragmatics: those “aiming at raising students' pragmatic *awareness*, and activities offering opportunities for communicative *practice*” (L2 classrooms as impoverished learning environments section, para. 5). Studies on instructional pragmatics predominantly focus on speech acts (Ishihara & Cohen, 2010); however, routine formulas are also an essential component of pragmatic competence and deserve scholarly attention.

Routine Formulas

Coulmas (1979) coined the term *routine formulae*, which are “expressions whose occurrence is closely tied to types of recurrent social situations” (p. 239). Within ILP research many terms for these types of expressions are used; this study uses *routine formulas* as a general term for any recurring word or phrase with a pragmatic function (e.g., expressing surprise or uncertainty) in interaction. These phrases, according to Bardovi-Harlig (2012), exhibit three key characteristics: “the form as a recurrent sequence, its occurrence in specific social contexts, and the idea of the social contract which extends to members of a particular speech community” (p. 207). Knowledge of routine formulas aids users in behaving fluently and appropriately in a given communicative situation through the use of sequences of language that are conventionalized and therefore expected (Roever, 2012). Routine formulas share features with *pragmatic markers*: they have both discourse-connecting and interpersonal functions and can be multifunctional, depending on context (Aijmer & Fetzer, 2014). This multifunctionality makes these formulas difficult to pin down; it is necessary to examine them in use in order to catalog their various functions or meanings. Acquiring routine formulas presents a huge challenge to learners, but it is critical to the development of pragmatic competence as deep knowledge of the routines associated with particular contexts and functions facilitates effective communication. An essential step in this process of acquisition is noticing.

Noticing Hypothesis

Schmidt's (1990, 1993, 2001) noticing hypothesis is the theoretical framework used in the current study; it is also the most commonly used framework in ILP research (Taguchi, 2011). According to Schmidt (1993), the noticing hypothesis entails that "what must be attended to and noticed is not just the input in a global sense but whatever features of the input are relevant for the target system" (p. 209). Thus, learners must attend to both *pragmalinguistic* forms and *sociopragmatic* elements in order to acquire pragmatic knowledge. Pragmalinguistics refers to the linguistic means used to perform a pragmatic function in a given communicative context. Sociopragmatics refers to the contextual features (e.g., relationship between speaker and hearer) that influence the selection of pragmalinguistic form, or the decision to perform a particular speech act at all. Language users must pay attention to "the action that is being accomplished, the linguistic, paralinguistic, and nonverbal forms by which the action is implemented, its immediate interactional or textual context, and the dimensions of the situational context that are indexed by linguistic and pragmatic choices" (Kasper & Roever, 2005, p. 318).

Studies in ILP have tested the noticing hypothesis with interventions in which the form–function relationship of the targeted feature is brought to learners' attention through various techniques. Overall, the results of these studies have shown explicit instruction (where metapragmatic information is provided) to be most effective in the teaching of pragmatics (Ishihara, 2010). In a study by Bardovi-Harlig and Vellenga (2012), expressions with pragmatic functions were taught to learners using tasks containing contextualized input that focused on increasing metapragmatic noticing. They found some improvement in both recognition and production, even though their instructional intervention did not include output-focused activities. Narita (2012) found that the use of pragmatic consciousness-raising activities resulted in gains on measures of metapragmatic knowledge and production of pragmatic markers in Japanese. The noticing hypothesis has been substantiated in studies on pragmatics instruction generally, but more research is needed on teaching routine formulas.

Teaching Routine Formulas with Technology

Usó-Juan (2008) contended that "the acquisition of pragmatic competence through textbooks or other instructional material is quite unlikely" (p. 224). Pragmatic information in materials is rarely grounded in research and has been criticized for its demonstrated lack of representativeness, insufficient contextual information, and inaccuracy (Ishihara & Cohen, 2010). This is likely due to the way that pragmatics has been addressed generally in language teaching: as peripheral to grammar and vocabulary. However, speaking proficiency requires not only grammatical and lexical knowledge, but pragmatic knowledge as well. Technological innovations provide a possible solution to the inadequacy of materials on the pragmatics of conversation.

Speech acts are a common target of technological interventions. For instance, Ishihara (2007) developed a web-based curriculum on speech acts in Japanese that consisted of awareness-raising activities (focused on grammar, lexicon, and prosodic features), audio dialogue samples, opportunities for linguistic analysis, metapragmatic information grounded in research, output practice, and feedback. She used the noticing hypothesis to inform the curriculum by providing learners with opportunities to pay attention to both pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic features of the speech acts in question.

Sykes and Cohen (2008) also developed a series of online modules on speech acts, but in Spanish and using a strategy-based approach. The modules consist of videos of the speech acts being performed, with transcripts and accompanying short-answer, multiple-choice (MC), and listening exercises. Empirical evidence served as the basis for the material on speech acts contained in the website. Learners completed pre- and post-tests consisting of discourse completion tasks (DCTs) and role-plays using situations similar to those found in the instructional website. The researchers concluded that students were interested in improving their pragmatic competence, and found the materials motivating. Russell and Vasquez (2011) created a similar tutorial that, they maintained, "makes better use of the capabilities of the Web-based

format, has a more appealing user interface design, and has greater interactivity for users” (p. 29) than the modules developed by Sykes and Cohen (2008). This is due to their added feature of a video-response DCT.

Speech acts in English have also been the object of technological interventions. Waugh (2013) authored a set of online units devoted to speech acts and *conversational gambits* (similar to routine formulas) as part of an *English in the Workplace* program. These units incorporated analysis of native speaker interactions, explicit instruction of strategies, synchronous role-play activities, and cross-linguistic comparisons of speech acts. Pre- and post-tests, consisting of oral and written DCTs, showed improvement in learners' ability to respond in a pragmatically appropriate manner.

In a study on the use of a CALL application in the explicit instruction of requests in Chinese, Li (2013) found that, in comparison with a control group, participants in two experimental groups (one that did input-based practice activities—grammaticality judgment and dialogue reading tasks—and one that did output-based practice activities—sentence translations and DCTs) saw an increase in speed and accuracy in both recognizing and producing the target request forms.

Technological interventions have also been shown to be beneficial in the instruction of related language with pragmatic functions. Utashiro and Kawai (2009) created a web application to teach *reactive tokens* (i.e., back channels) in Japanese in a blended learning environment. The application incorporated videos of conversations between native speakers and awareness-raising, analysis, and production exercises. The researchers emphasized the importance of cooperation between CALL and ILP, stating that findings from ILP should be integrated into CALL applications “in order to identify important target pragmatic features and develop CALL instructional materials accordingly” (Utashiro & Kawai, 2009, p. 278). Results indicated that explicit instruction via the Web application was effective, as students showed some improvement in their production of the reactive tokens. While research specifically addressing the effectiveness of CALL for pragmatics instruction is limited, the studies cited here provide evidence for the potential of technology in this area.

Corpus-Referred Materials

Although pedagogical applications of corpus methodologies and data are still not widespread (for an overview, see Römer, 2011 and for a special issue of *ReCALL* documenting recent uses, see Boulton & Pérez-Paredes, 2014.), they have potential for enhancing the instruction of pragmatics as they allow for investigations of contextualized language in use. Flowerdew (2012) divided pedagogical corpus applications into two categories: indirect and direct. Indirect applications include the use of corpus data to inform the language teaching syllabus and materials, while direct applications refer to hands-on use of corpora in the classroom, by both teacher and student. The current study was informed primarily by previous research on indirect applications (although the instructional intervention contains direct applications as well). For instance, Möllering (2001) analyzed modal particles in German corpus data, then presented instructional worksheets on the basis of this analysis. Belz and Vyatkina (2005) also used corpus methodologies in the teaching of German modal particles, incorporating activities based on contrastive analyses of learner and native speaker corpus data. Participants used modal particles more frequently as a result of the intervention; their metapragmatic awareness also increased. Corpus methodologies can be used to determine the frequency and typical contexts of use for words, phrases, and grammatical constructions, and can thus inform language textbook design, resulting in materials that more accurately reflect usage.

Insights from corpus linguistics have impacted English language materials (McCarten & McCarthy, 2010); however, the trend has not carried over to Russian language textbooks and references. It would be wise to follow the lead of English language textbook publishers (for recommendations, see Furniss, 2013). Although there are fewer corpora of Russian, researchers nonetheless have access to one extremely well-designed one—the [Russian National Corpus](#).

Research Questions

As the review of the literature has demonstrated, there is a need for empirical research on the effects of CALL applications on the acquisition of routine formulas by learners of Russian, and the general effects of corpus-referred materials on language acquisition. This study addresses the following research questions:

1. Does the corpus-referred instructional website increase users' understanding and use of routine formulas, as measured by pre-, post-, and delayed post-tests?
2. How did experimental group participants respond to the corpus-referred instructional website?

A pre-, post-, and delayed post-test design was used in order to compare the acquisition of nine routine formulas, selected with reference to spoken corpus data, in experimental and control group participants. The experimental group completed a series of interactive web-based modules, supplemented with excerpts from the spoken subcorpus of the Russian National Corpus that illustrate authentic usage of the selected formulas; the control group underwent no intervention. All participants completed an oral proficiency assessment; a background questionnaire; and the pre-, post-, and delayed post-test at predetermined intervals. Additionally, experimental group participants completed a post-intervention feedback form.

METHODOLOGY

Participants

34 learners of Russian were recruited for the study via e-mail, listservs, and social networking sites between June and September of 2014. Participants included students enrolled in language programs both in the US and abroad, independent learners of Russian, and people working in Russia. Takahashi (2010) encouraged the study of a single pragmatic intervention with learners of varying proficiencies in order to better understand the relationship between proficiency and pragmatic learnability, as the majority of studies focus on learners of the same level. Thus, the study was open to learners with intermediate and advanced oral proficiency, as measured by the Computer Assisted Screening Tool (CAST). Since the pre-, post-, and delayed post-tests as well as the instructional website contained unedited language drawn directly from corpus data that would likely be incomprehensible to beginners, novice learners of Russian were excluded from participation. [Table 1](#) gives information on the makeup of the control ($n = 16$) and experimental ($n = 18$) group participants. Within the control group, learners were enrolled in regular (6) or intensive (1) university classes, a domestic summer immersion program (5), or were not enrolled in Russian language classes at all (4). Among the experimental group, participants were enrolled in regular university classes (2), a domestic summer immersion program (10), a study abroad program (1), or were not enrolled in Russian language classes at all (5).

The results of the post-test were not recorded correctly for one of the experimental group participants; thus, this participant was excluded from the quantitative analysis. However, this participant's feedback on the website has been included in the discussion of the second research question.

Table 1. Participant Information

	Control Group (<i>n</i> = 16)	Experimental Group (<i>n</i> = 18)
Gender (male:female)	5:11	9:9
Average age (range)	23.8 (19–32)	25.5 (19–38)
Time studying Russian	4.35 years	3.98 years
Age study of Russian began	18.1	18.9
Oral proficiency rating	8 advanced; 8 not advanced	6 advanced; 12 not advanced
Native language(s)	14 English; 1 Vietnamese & English; 1 Ukrainian & Russian*	16 English; 2 Spanish & English
Total intensity of engagement score	11.94	10.72

Note. * This participant was born in Ukraine and studied Russian from age 6 to age 11, when her family immigrated to Canada. She was enrolled in a second-year Russian course while participating in this study. Inclusion of this participant was justified by an inspection of the boxplots for control group scores on each test, which confirmed that she was not an outlier.

Procedure

Participants electronically signed a consent form informing them of the nature of the study and the compensation offered (an online gift card). It was predicted that not all volunteers for the study might have enough time to dedicate to the lengthier experimental group tasks, so participants were also asked to indicate how much time they would be able to commit to the study: approximately 1.5–2 hours (time required of the control group), or approximately 6.5 hours (time required of the experimental group). When assigning participants to the experimental and control groups, the preference of participants who could only commit to a smaller amount of time was honored. Those participants who volunteered for a larger time commitment were placed where needed for balance.

Instructional Website

Experimental participants were given two weeks to complete the instructional modules after completing the pre-test. The website was designed in a way that would allow for users to notice the functions of a set of routine formulas in authentic usage situations. Selection was based on the principles of a corpus-referred approach to materials development. According to Timmis (2013), this approach “allows an honourable place for intuition, experience, local need, cultural appropriacy and pedagogical convenience in determining syllabus content and the order in which items are taught” (p. 470). A list of the nine routine formulas with their approximate English idiomatic translations is given in Table 2.

Selection was informed in part by an analysis of a small corpus of Soviet and Russian film subtitles, the rationale being that film is reflective of authentic conversation. Films have been used often in instructional pragmatics interventions (for an overview, see Ishihara & Cohen, 2010). The computer program AntConc (Anthony, 2014) was used to retrieve the most frequent bigrams and trigrams in those texts. Strings with potential instructional value as pragmatic routines were isolated. Next, popular beginning and intermediate textbooks of Russian were examined in order to exclude any routine formulas commonly addressed in teaching materials, thus better ensuring that participants were being exposed to them in an instructional setting for the first time. Finally, the researcher's intuition as both an advanced learner and an instructor of Russian guided the selection of routines that are frequent in informal Russian conversation but difficult to acquire. Nine targeted formulas were selected in order to provide learners with a manageable amount of material. Additionally, the targeted phrases, while multifunctional, have only one or two main functions.

Table 2. Targeted Routine Formulas with English Translations

Routine formula	English translation
В чём дело?	What's the problem?
Да нет!	Nah!
Да ты что!	You're kidding!
Надо же!	You don't say!
Ничего себе!	Wow!
Ничего страшного.	No big deal.
Ну и как?	So how was it?
Ну и что?	So what?
...что ли?	...is it?

The website builder [Weebly](#) was used to create the instructional site, called [Надо же!](#) The website contains nine modules (one for each formula), a review page, and a feedback page. Each module contains 4–6 exercises that users complete by filling out embedded submission forms. Corpus excerpts were used throughout each module in both instructional presentations and interactive exercises. In order to obtain excerpts featuring the formulas under instruction, the oral and multimedia subcorpora of the Russian National Corpus were queried. Excerpts were chosen according to their comprehensibility, pedagogical usefulness, and prototypicality, in terms of the function of the contained routine formula under study. Non-essential turns were removed, turns were formatted to be more distinct, and speaker information was deleted. Video excerpts from the multimedia subcorpus were selected on the basis of their potential to engage learners, and by their representativeness of popular Russian and Soviet films. Source information accompanied each excerpt included on the website, as per Russian National Corpus [guidelines](#).

Judd (1999) proposed a model for teaching pragmatic competence that consists of the following components: “(1) teacher analysis of speech acts, (2) cognitive awareness skills, (3) receptive/integrative skills, (4) controlled productive skills, and (5) free, integrated practice” (p. 162). He was referring to speech acts in particular, but the model is applicable to routine formulas as well. The instructional website contained a variety of exercises addressing all of these components:

- background knowledge activation (e.g., “Have you heard the phrase *Ну и как?* before? What do you think is the function of *Ну и как?*?”)
- dictionary definitions and descriptions from reference materials
- translation activities
- data-driven learning with the microblogging site Twitter (e.g., “Click here to look at the latest tweets on Twitter featuring the phrase **Ничего себе!** Find a tweet you understand and think about what emotion is being expressed. Copy and paste the tweet and the emotion being expressed in the box below.”)
- description of the formula's function(s) with illustrative examples of usage from the Russian National Corpus (see [Appendix A](#) for a sample with translation)
- cloze activities
- dialogue turn matching activities
- film excerpts with partial transcript (for practice imitating prosodic features)
- dialogue writing

The functional descriptions of each formula were based on the researcher's analysis of corpus excerpts, with a particular focus on form, function, prosodic features, and typical contexts. Per Judd's (1999) recommendation, natural media—in this case, film clips—were included to assist students in

understanding the formulas. The modules integrate both implicit instruction, in which “the pragmatic feature is included in contexts of use and practised in various activities,” and explicit instruction, in which “the targeted pragmatic feature is made the object of metapragmatic treatment through description, explanation, or discussion” (Kasper, 2001, p. 515). The goal was to include a variety of exercise types that would appeal to a range of user preferences.

The instructional website was tested for functionality by the researcher, and examined for accuracy by a native speaker and instructor of Russian.

Computer Assisted Screening Tool (CAST)

After returning their consent forms, participants completed the [CAST](#), a free Web-based assessment of spoken language proficiency developed for a range of languages by the San Diego State University Language Acquisition Resource Center. The test is used to estimate performance on an official oral proficiency interview (OPI). It was selected for the current study in order to ascertain the spoken abilities of participants and thus determine whether the effectiveness of the instructional intervention might be mitigated by spoken proficiency level.

Test-takers selected their predicted level of performance (intermediate or advanced), then responded to five prompts similar to questions and scenarios used in OPIs. Results were rated by two independent raters (the author and a native speaker instructor of Russian) and participants were funneled into two categories: Advanced (those who received a rating of *pass* on the Advanced CAST), and Not Advanced (those who received *not pass* or *approaching* on the Advanced CAST, or any rating on the Intermediate CAST). Interrater reliability was 0.90, calculated with Cronbach’s alpha.

Background Questionnaire

Upon completing the CAST, participants filled out a background questionnaire, created with Google Forms. The questionnaire was developed in order to elicit demographic data from participants as well as information about their experience learning and using Russian. The final question addressed engagement with the language (e.g., watching television or reading in Russian) in order to gauge each participant’s “intensity of engagement” and thus investigate whether participants’ exposure (or lack thereof) to the routine formulas under analysis could be attributed to their level of experience with certain activities. In their study of the acquisition of *conventional expressions* (similar to routine formulas), Bardovi-Harlig and Bastos (2011) distributed a background questionnaire addressing contact variables, such as time spent watching TV in the target language. This was done in order to examine the effects of patterns of contact on learners’ acquisition of the conventional expressions under study. Using a matrix-style question type, respondents in the present study were given a choice of how much time they engaged in a list of activities in Russian: *not at all* (0 points); *less than 1 hour per week* (1 points); *1-2 hours per week* (2 points); *2-4 hours per week* (3 points); *4-6 hours per week* (4 points); *more than 6 hours per week* (5 points). Each category was awarded points in order to enable the researcher to compare sums across participants. The average intensity of engagement score for the control group and the experimental group is included in [Table 1](#). Intensity of engagement was also correlated with Learner Recognition Scores (LRS), discussed in the Results section.

Pre-, Post-, and Delayed Post-test

A test of comprehension and production of the targeted routine formulas, distributed via Survey Monkey, was developed for use as a pre-, post-, and delayed post-test data collection instrument ([Appendix B](#)). The test was evaluated by three native speakers of Russian, who completed the test, pointed out problems, and gave suggestions on improving the instrument; their feedback was incorporated into the final version. The delayed post-test was included in order to obtain data on the durability of the instructional intervention. Takahashi (2010) recommended this measure be included in studies on pragmatic learnability in order to obtain more robust results on the effectiveness of an intervention.

The instrument developed by Bardovi-Harlig and Bastos (2011) in their study of the recognition and production of conventional expressions by ESL learners was used as a model for portions of the current study's test, which consists of four sections assessing comprehension and production of the targeted routine formulas. A range of tasks was used in order to assess participants' ability to produce (albeit in written, not spoken form) and choose from several options a routine formula pragmatically appropriate to a given conversation, aurally recognize targeted formulas, and determine a formula's function. In order to minimize fatigue and increase the likelihood that participants would complete the tests, not every targeted formula was tested in each task, and two of the targeted formulas were not tested at all.

The first section contains two DCTs in which test takers type in the missing phrase from corpus dialogues retrieved from the Russian National Corpus. The corpus excerpts were selected on the basis of their intelligibility and the relative simplicity of their grammatical and lexical elements. This represents a different approach to the traditional DCT; by using authentic language extracted from corpus data, respondents are forced to select from a narrow range of possible responses. Thus, the DCT endeavors to elicit a word or phrase appropriate to that very specific situation. It requires the ability to infer pragmatic meaning from context and to choose from one's pragmalinguistic resources the most appropriate response. Due to insufficient technological resources, this task does not assess oral production, but rather simulates spoken ability. Since the routine formulas being targeted in these DCTs appeared in the other sections, test-takers were presented with this section first to prevent exposure to potential responses.

The next section contains an aural recognition task. Participants listened to eighteen phrases, recorded by a native speaker of Russian, and rated their familiarity with each phrase. This section was ordered before the two MC DCT tasks in order to prevent aural recognition of the routine formulas after exposure to their written forms. The phrases included the nine routine formulas addressed in the instructional module, as well as nine distractors/nonce phrases ([Appendix C](#)). As in the Bardovi-Harlig and Bastos (2011) study, the distractors were modified versions of the formulas in which a lexical or grammatical element was altered, resulting in a phrase without pragmatic meaning.

After listening to a phrase, respondents chose from one of three options, following Bardovi-Harlig and Bastos (2011): *I often hear this* (2 points), *I sometimes hear this* (1 point), *I never hear this* (0 points). Points were given for responses in order to calculate the LRS, which was used to ascertain whether or not the instructional website resulted in gains in familiarity of targeted routine formulas.

In the next section, participants completed four MC DCTs similar to the two in the first section. Each of the dialogues in this section was followed by four options that included the formula that originally appeared in the corpus excerpt, along with three pragmatically inappropriate formulas. In the final section of the test, learners read two intact corpus excerpts, selecting the emotion that the speaker is expressing with the underlined routine formula. Results on the first, third, and fourth sections were combined to determine the test score, as those tasks required participants to demonstrate their comprehension and production of the routine formulas being tested, while responses to the second section were used to calculate the LRS and were not included in the overall test score.

The pre-test was sent to participants after they had completed the background questionnaire. Two weeks after taking the pre-test, they were sent the post-test; four weeks after completing the post-test, they were sent the delayed post-test. There was no time limit for taking the test.

Feedback Form

Experimental group participants completed [a feedback form](#) on the instructional website. It addresses technical difficulties and the usefulness of the website's components, and provides the opportunity to suggest improvements and give comments on the formulas themselves (when and how learners heard and used them, and in what contexts). This form was used to inform the qualitative analysis, as well as to gather data on the website's functionality. A summary of responses to the open-ended questions on the

feedback form is presented in the Results section.

RESULTS

RQ 1: Does the corpus-referred instructional website increase users' understanding and use of routine formulas, as measured by pre-, post-, and delayed post-tests?

Comprehension and Use of Routine Formulas

Table 3 shows the means and standard deviations for the test scores of the experimental and control groups; the graph in Figure 1 displays the mean scores for each test, separated by treatment group. The maximum possible points were 10 (one point each for six MC questions; two points each for two DCTs).

Table 3. Pre-, Post-, and Delayed Post-Test Scores

Group	Pre-Test		Post-Test		Delayed Post-Test	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Experimental ($n = 17$)	6.71	1.45	7.35	2.15	7.94	1.82
Control ($n = 16$)	6.06	1.48	5.88	1.45	6.38	1.67

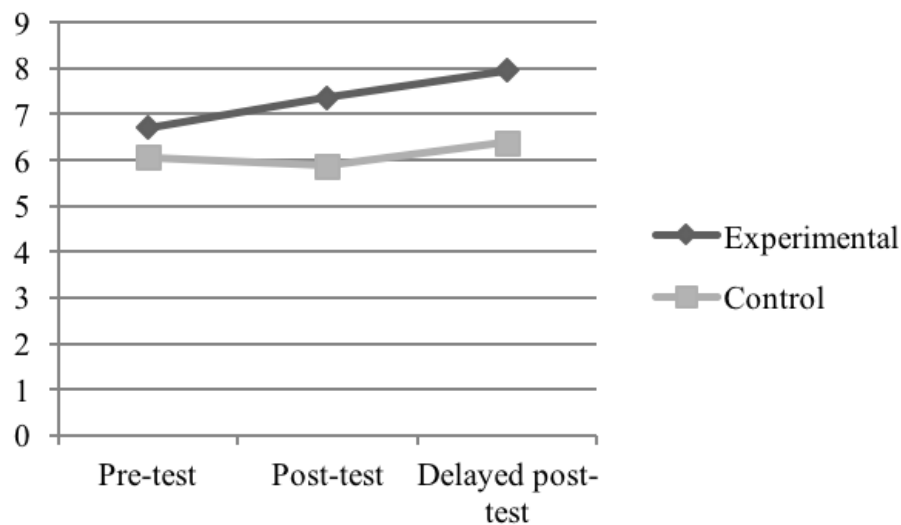


Figure 1. Mean test scores

Responses on the two open-ended questions were randomized and rated by two independent raters using the scale in Table 4, based on Taguchi (2013). Interrater reliability was 0.84, calculated using Cronbach's alpha.

Normality assumptions were met for the scores on the pre-test for both the control and experimental groups. However, distribution of experimental group scores on the post- and delayed post-tests was skewed, necessitating the use of non-parametric statistics to analyze the difference between those tests. An independent samples t-test was performed on the pre-test; it was found that there was not a statistically significant difference between the experimental and control groups ($p = 0.22$). A Mann-Whitney U test showed a significant difference between groups on both the post- ($U = 70.5, p = 0.02$) and delayed post-tests ($U = 63, p = 0.01$). An independent samples t-test was done in order to determine if there was any difference on the pre-test between participants who were classified as Advanced or Not

Advanced, according to the CAST results. The results showed no significant difference between those two groups ($p = 0.70$), indicating that proficiency was not related to performance on the pre-test.

Table 4. *DCT Rating Scale*

Rating	Description
2 = Pragmatically appropriate & native-like	The utterance is pragmatically appropriate. This is what a native speaker would usually say in the situation.
1 = Pragmatically appropriate & not native-like	The utterance is pragmatically appropriate. However, it is not native-like.
0 = Pragmatically inappropriate	The utterance is not appropriate for the context, or it is unintelligible.

In order to determine whether or not the difference between control group performance on pre-, post-, and delayed post-tests was significant, a Friedman test was used. The difference was not significant (chi-square = 2.22, $df = 2$, $p = 0.33$). This eliminates the possibility of a practice effect. A Friedman test was also performed on the experimental group test scores; there was a significant difference between tests (chi-square = 8.63, $df = 2$, $p = 0.01$). A Wilcoxon signed rank test showed that the differences between pre- and post-test, and between post- and delayed post-test were not significant. However, the improvement from pre- to delayed post-test was statistically significant ($Z = -2.21$, $p = 0.03$). Cohen's d was 0.75, indicating a medium effect size.

Recognition of Routine Formulas

Aural comprehension ratings are shown in [Table 5](#); mean total LRS is given for all routine formulas and all nonce phrases. The graph in [Figure 2](#) displays the mean total LRS for each test, separated by treatment group and type of phrase (routine formulas and nonce phrases).

Table 5. *Learner Recognition Score*

Group	Pre-Test		Post-Test		Delayed Post-Test	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Experimental: Routine Formulas	12.00	4.61	12.88	5.35	13.35	3.95
Control: Routine Formulas	13.06	4.57	13.75	4.17	13.69	4.08
Experimental: Nonce Phrases	7.53	2.63	5.65	2.69	6.59	4.00
Control: Nonce Phrases	6.75	2.91	7.31	4.85	6.38	4.08

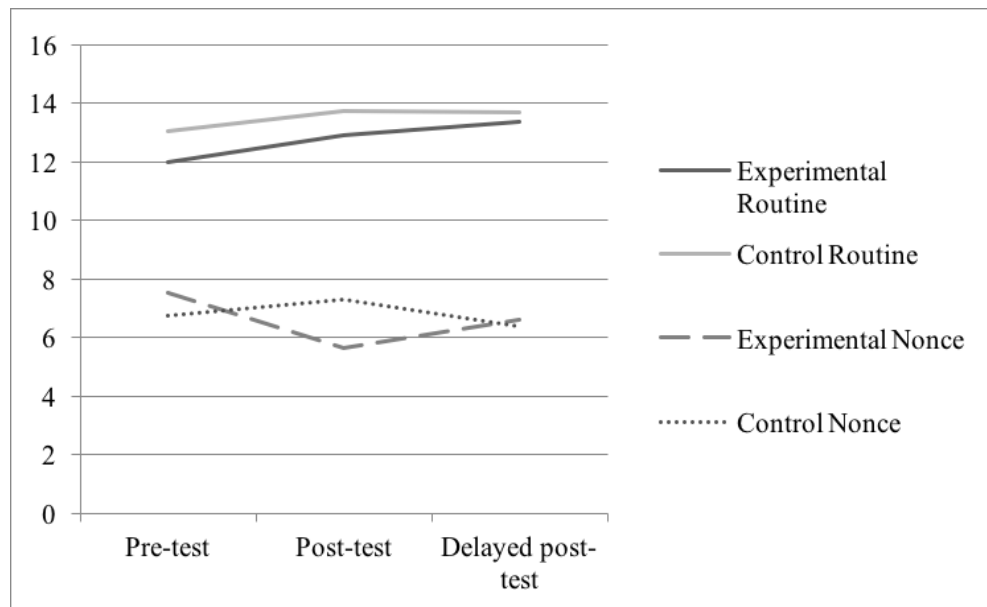


Figure 2. Learner recognition score

Familiarity with routine formulas on the pre-test was positively correlated with intensity of engagement ($r = 0.45$, $p < 0.01$); it was also positively correlated with the amount of time the participant had studied Russian ($r = 0.6$, $p = 0.00$). Independent samples t-tests were performed on pre-, post-, and delayed post-test scores for both formulas and nonce phrases; the results indicated there was not a significant difference between the experimental and control groups. Friedman tests showed no significant difference between tests for recognition of formulas in the experimental group (chi-square = 4.84, $df = 2$, $p = 0.09$), and in the control group (chi-square = 2.95, $df = 2$, $p = 0.23$). However, a Friedman test did find a significant difference between LRS of nonce phrases in the experimental group (chi-square = 6.35, $df = 2$, $p = 0.04$). The Wilcoxon test showed that the difference lay between the pre- and post-tests ($Z = -2.76$, $p < 0.01$), meaning that the decrease in the experimental group from pre- to post-test for the nonce phrase LRS was statistically significant. A Cohen's d of 0.71 indicates a medium effect size.

RQ 2: How did experimental group participants respond to the corpus-referred instructional website?

17 of the 18 experimental group participants filled out the post-intervention feedback form. Due to space limitations, only responses to the open-ended feedback form questions are summarized here.

Comments on the Website

Participants were asked to include any comments (suggestions for improvement, complaints, etc.) about the website. One praised the interactivity; another, the Twitter exercises:

“I can't emphasize enough how useful I found Twitter, since it was totally natural, colloquial Russian - which is something that is so hard to come by as part of language learning classes.”

There were criticisms about the modules being too short, repetitive, and lacking variety; occasionally being overwhelming because too many functions were included for a particular phrase; and having too many dictionary examples. One respondent suggested that a glossary for difficult words in the usage examples be included. Two users found the order of activities in each module deficient. Another mentioned that the instructions were unclear (but that this lack of specificity makes the modules more

appealing to self-study learners). Some of the descriptions were found to be inadequate:

“For some reason, maybe because I've encountered this particular phrase decidedly less often in conversational situations, I found the explanation of the phrase 'надо же' somewhat lacking. I still don't feel like I have a full command of it.”

Finally, users indicated that they wanted feedback on their answers, although they seemed to find the website useful regardless:

“Feedback would, of course, be helpful, but not strictly necessary. I can imagine these modules being a fine resource for self-study or review (they were in my case!), though they might also be easily adapted to an academic setting by enabling feedback, etc.”

Using the Routine Formulas

Users were asked to comment on the way using the routine formulas made them feel. Five respondents mentioned that they felt awkward or strange using them, as they were still unsure of their meanings. However, five respondents said they felt more fluent or natural when using the phrases in their spoken Russian:

“More fluent, but at times I wasn't sure if I was using them correctly. Regardless, I have been more aware of them when other speakers say them, which in turn makes me understand the appropriate contexts in which these phrases can be used.”

Another participant commented on the value of learning the routine formulas:

“I think these types of phrases are really important in everyday speech. It would be frustrating to not understand them in English, and once I learned them I realized how much I needed them. I don't know why these aren't a big part of learning Russian in college.”

One participant reported not using the phrases because they are too difficult to use and because he or she feels uncomfortable when using them; another because he or she felt they can communicate well enough without them.

Experience with Routine Formulas in Other Contexts

11 of the participants responded to an open-ended question about where they had encountered the phrases from the website. Five wrote that they heard them frequently in conversation with Russian speakers; four mentioned they had come across the routine formulas on the Internet (Twitter, YouTube comments). Respondents also noted they encountered the phrases in movies, in the target country, and from instructors.

“I tend to hear Ничего себе и Ничего страшного frequently in conversations and in colloquial online forums, Twitter, etc. By frequently I mean literally all the time. They are very heavily used and I think that the modules really helped me to feel comfortable with these phrases.”

One user recounted how he or she maintains colloquial Russian with the help of the phrases:

“I am a mentor for prospective study abroad students at [my university]. Since beginning this module, I have been corresponding with a former mentoree via email in Russian. We have both been using many of the phrases covered in this module since our aim is to teach each other (not explicitly, but through context) the slang expressions used in the different regions of Eastern

Europe where we studied abroad. All the expressions covered in this module are common and relevant!”

DISCUSSION

Results indicate that the instructional intervention improved learners' awareness of the targeted routine formulas, and resulted in lower LRS for nonce phrases. Both the experimental and control groups were comparable at the outset. However, only the experimental group showed significant improvement in their test scores. Interestingly, there was not a significant difference on pre-test scores between groups based on oral proficiency ratings. This indicates that general speaking ability is not correlated with routine formula awareness, thereby confirming the need for explicit instruction of this element of pragmatic competence at all levels of proficiency.

Since one form was used for all three assessments, there was a possibility that improvement in test-takers' scores over time was due to a practice effect. In designing the experiment, this effect was hoped to be minimal as test administration was separated by several weeks. Furthermore, if there were a practice effect, the control group would have shown significant improvement over time, which they did not.

The statistical analysis only showed a significant change between the experimental group's pre- and delayed post-test scores, indicating that participants' learning matured over time. This could be attributable to their increased awareness of the routine formulas as they encountered them after completing the modules. As noted in their feedback form responses, experimental group members came across the phrases in conversation and on the Internet.

Control group participants had a higher average LRS for formulas in the pre-test than experimental group members, but this difference was not found to be statistically significant. Intensity of engagement and length of time spent studying Russian were both correlated with increased aural familiarity with the routine formulas at the outset, which would be expected, as more extensive contact with the language would allow learners to encounter such phrases more frequently. However, neither the experimental nor the control group showed a statistically significant increase in recognition of formulas. This might be an effect of the wording of the ratings on that portion of the instrument—while learners might recognize a phrase as formulaic, they may rarely encounter it and rate it *I never hear this*. Regarding the nonce phrases, the LRS were much lower on average than for the formulas, which would be expected. The intervention appears to have had an effect on these scores, as experimental group participants rated the nonce phrases significantly lower on the post-test than on the pre-test, while the control group did not. However, this effect was not durable.

Responses to the website within the experimental group were overall very positive. Users found the material useful and fun, and agreed that it helped to raise their awareness of the functions of the targeted formulas. Many participants noted the importance of such language in successful and fluent spoken communication.

Limitations

One of the major limitations of the current study is the small sample size. Although many learners of Russian responded to the researcher's call for participants, attrition was rampant. This is likely due to the fact that experiment administration was done completely virtually, via e-mail. Participation required completing many tasks over approximately two months. Even though compensation was provided and the actual time commitment was small, many volunteers dropped out early on in the study (before being given the instructional website). While the sample used in the current study represents a fairly diverse range of learners, larger numbers of participants could be acquired using convenience samples (e.g., students in classes taught by the researcher). This would ensure timely and thorough completion of the tasks as well. Furthermore, because the population tested here was self-selected, it is possible that they are

more motivated than the average learner, given their willingness to complete the tasks for only a small monetary reward. However, even though the sample size was small, effect sizes indicate a medium effect of the intervention.

Another limitation concerns the design of the website itself. The modules did not require users to produce any spoken output; activities focused on awareness-raising, comprehension of transcribed conversations, and written output. Since the targeted formulas are essential to conversation, practice in real contexts with live interlocutors, perhaps in the form of role-plays, would likely be valuable. Also, sociopragmatic considerations were not integrated into the website, as the routine formulas, while colloquial, are still fairly neutral and can be used appropriately in most informal contexts. Additionally, the targeted formulas represent only a small selection of useful conversational phrases. Future development of similar materials could include a more rigorous selection process that relies on extensive corpus research and the recommendations of instructors, learners, and native speakers of Russian.

Oral production exercises were not included due to the investment of time necessary for rating and the provision of feedback. Feedback in general was not integrated, as the primary goal of the website was to promote noticing among learners. While the website appears to succeed in this goal to some extent, it would likely be improved by the inclusion of mechanisms for providing feedback. In the feedback form, the majority of users indicated that the website would be best used in a Russian language class, where an instructor would be able to provide individualized feedback on students' performance. However, for self-study purposes, feedback would be helpful, as several respondents noted that even after completing the modules they were still unclear on whether or not they were using the routine formulas appropriately. Since the tests administered to all participants did not measure their actual oral production, experimental group members may have only increased their metapragmatic knowledge without a corresponding improvement in spoken production. The assessment instrument represents another limitation in the study as not all the targeted formulas were included in the test, and each section tested only a fraction of the selected formulas. Additional items and overall fine-tuning would result in a more robust data collection instrument that could reliably measure different types of pragmatic knowledge (e.g., awareness, comprehension, production).

Finally, a more intensive and time-consuming intervention might result in larger gains in pragmatic competence. Experimental group participants spent, on average, two hours and fifteen minutes using the website over the course of two weeks. On one hand, this indicates that even minimal instruction on routine formulas is beneficial; on the other hand, the benefits may not be durable beyond the delayed post-test, or improvement may solely be on metapragmatic knowledge. Future studies in this area could investigate the effects of more intensive interventions that incorporate feedback and oral production activities, including role-plays.

CONCLUSION

This study provides further evidence to support the noticing hypothesis, as the experimental group displayed improved awareness of the routine formulas they were encouraged to notice in the instructional intervention. Furthermore, it has demonstrated that CALL applications have potential for teaching L2 pragmatics. Technology holds great promise in the instruction of LCTLs like Russian, as there are limited pedagogical resources for these languages. Blyth (2013) and Godwin-Jones (2013) addressed the special significance of technology for LCTLs: since the market for commercially produced textbooks and references is much smaller for these languages, there are fewer high-quality resources for specific skills and for advanced proficiency learners. Technological innovations provide a low-cost and accessible solution to this problem, particularly in areas that are typically poorly integrated in foreign language curricula, such as pragmatics (Roever, 2009). Taguchi (2011) recognized that technology is well suited to “cultural comparisons, explicit pragmatic information, awareness-raising of pragmalinguistic forms and their situational variations, focused practice, and feedback” (p. 297). It allows for learners to engage with

pragmatics autonomously, in accordance with their own learning style and at their own pace. Still, more research in ILP on LCTLs is needed in order to ensure that materials and CALL programs are accurate and pedagogically sound. Corpus research can shed light on the pragmatic elements of authentic conversation; these insights, as well as excerpts from spoken corpora, can be harnessed in the creation of instructional interventions. Direct corpus applications (e.g., learners' use of Twitter to investigate routine formulas in the present study) can also be an effective element of these interventions.

The body of scholarship on CALL and pragmatics instruction has been slowly growing over the past decade. However, further research is needed on a diversity of technological tools, on a variety of L2s, and for a greater range of types of pragmatic competence. Investigating the effectiveness of technology within ILP will lead to higher quality resources for learners, thus better preparing them for successful communication in their L2.

APPENDIX A. Sample Usage Description with Corpus Extract

... **что ли** occurs frequently at the end of a question as a tag that the speaker uses to emphasize that s/he is asking a question:

О магнитофоне

— **Дай посмотреть!**

— **Только не выключай!**

— **Записываешь что ли?**

— **Да.**

Праздний разговор молодых людей, Московская область // практиканты, 2005

About a tape player

— **Let me see it!**

— **Just don't turn it off!**

— **You're recording что ли?**

— **Yes.**

Holiday conversation between young people, Moscow region // trainees, 2005

APPENDIX B. Pre-/Post-/Delayed Post-Test

Please fill in the blanks in the following authentic Russian conversations. Your response may be a single word or a phrase. More than one correct response is possible.

You may use a dictionary to look up any unfamiliar words in the conversations.

Click this link for an on-screen Cyrillic keyboard, if you need it.

Fill in the blank.

Саша: А где праздновать будете?

Sasha: Where are you going to celebrate?

Таня: У Олега дома.

Tania: At Oleg's house.

Саша: Сколько народу будет?

Sasha: How many people are gonna be there?

Таня: Двенадцать человек.

Tania: Twelve people.

Саша: _____! А как вы

Sasha: _____! How will you all

поместитесь?

Таня: А у Олега особняк, места много. Не хочешь с нами?

_____ [Ничего себе! Nichego sebe!]

fit?

Tania: Oh, Oleg has a house, there's a lot of room. Wanna come with?

Fill in the blank.

Олеся: Как субботу провела?

Таня: Отлично, мы с девочками в клуб ходили.

Олеся: _____?

Таня: Здорово было, знакомых много встретила.

Олеся: Ясно.

_____ [Ну и как? Nu i kak?]

Olesya: How was your Saturday?

Tania: Excellent, the girls and I went to a club.

Olesia: _____?

Tania: It was great, I saw a lot of friends.

Olesia: Gotcha.

Click each link to hear the phrase, then check the box corresponding to your familiarity with each phrase.

	I often hear this	I sometimes hear this	I never hear this
Phrase 1	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Phrase 2	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Phrase 3	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Phrase 4	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Phrase 5	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Phrase 6	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Phrase 7	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Phrase 8	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Phrase 9	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Phrase 10	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Phrase 11	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Phrase 12	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Phrase 13	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Phrase 14	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Phrase 15	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Phrase 16	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Phrase 17	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Phrase 18	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please select the best-sounding response for the blanks in the following authentic Russian conversations.

5. Choose the best phrase to fill in the blank.

Мама: Ты сегодня поможешь, а то я устала очень...

Дочь: Я не хочу сегодня!!

Мама: Мало ли что ты не хочешь, я вот тоже не хочу работать, а работаю.

Дочь: _____! Я не буду тебе помогать вообще, если сегодня не пойду гулять!

Мать: И не надо, неблагодарная!

Mom: You'll help me today, I'm really tired...

Daughter: I don't want to today!

Mom: It doesn't matter if you don't want to, I also don't want to work but I do.

Daughter: _____! If I don't go out today I'm not going to help you at all!

Mom: Then don't, you ungrateful girl!

- К чёрту [*Go to hell*]
- Да ты что [*Da ty chto*]
- Ну и что [*Nu i chto*]
- Очень жаль [*Too bad*]

6.

Сергей: (рассматривает подарок) А чё такие тяжёлые? Серебряные _____?

Вера: Не знаю.

Sergei: (looking at the gift) Why are they so heavy? Silver _____?

Vera: I don't know.

- конечно [*of course*]
- вот это да [*wow*]
- может быть [*maybe*]
- что ли [*chto li*]

7.

Даша: А у тебя какой размер?

Алена: Сорок два.

Даша: _____?

Алена: Да, я вообще похудела.

Dasha: What size are you?

Alyona: Forty-two.

Dasha: _____?

Alyona: Yeah, I definitely lost weight.

- А как же [*Of course*]
- Что такое [*What is it*]
- В чём дело [*V chem delo*]

Да ты что [*Da ty chto*]

8.

Вадим: Я творческий человек по натуре. Я пишу музыку, играю в нескольких группах.

Vadim: I'm a creative person by nature. I write music, play in a few bands.

Лия: В нескольких?! _____!

Liya: In a few?! _____!

Да нет [*Da net*]

Честное слово [*Honest*]

Надо же [*Nado zhe*]

Что ли [*Chto li*]

Please select the emotion that the speaker is expressing with the underlined word/phrase in the following authentic Russian conversations.

9.

А.: Общий какой-то ужин, он подарил ей перед этим шубу.

A.: Some kind of public dinner, he gave her a fur coat right before it.

Д.: Ничего себе!

D.: *Nichego sebe!*

А.: И она говорит «холодно». «Холодно», говорит она, «принеси шубу».

A.: And she says "it's cold." "It's cold" she says, "bring the fur coat."

delight

surprise

disapproval

embarrassment

10.

Саша: Привет! Идешь сегодня в «Пятое»?

Sasha: Hi! Are you going to "The Fifth" today?

Максим: Да нет. А ты собрался, что ли?

Maksim: *Da net*. Were you planning to?

Саша: Конечно!

Sasha: Of course!

uncertainty

surprise

disgust

□ strong agreement

APPENDIX C. Phrases in Aural Comprehension Section of Pre-, Post-, Delayed Post-test

Routine formula	Nonce phrases
В чём дело?	В каком деле?
Да нет!	Не да!
Да ты что!	А ты как!
Надо же!	Нужно же!
Ничего себе!	Чего себе!
Ничего страшного.	Ничего странного.
Ну и как?	Ну и какой?
Ну и что?	Вот и что?
...что ли?	... как ли?

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