

Intermediate Ukrainian

Reviewed by

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PRODUCT AT A GLANCE

Product Type:

Interactive language learning software

Language(s):

Ukrainian

Level:

Intermediate

Activities:

Dialogues/video/audio/reading comprehension, fill-in-the blank, multiple choice, pronunciation, listening dictation, and flashcard exercises

Media Format:

DVD-ROM

Operating system(s):

Windows 2000, XP, Vista or 7

Hardware Requirements:

Screen resolution of 1024x768 or greater; sound card compatible with Windows 2000/7/XP/Vista; Speakers/headphones, and microphone for recording; PC users must always insert the disk to use the product

Supplementary Software:

Internet Explorer 5.5 or greater; Windows Media Player 7 or greater (disk runs on a PC and will not play on a standard DVD movie player)

Documentation:

A one-page reference guide and video tutorials with detailed explanations of menu choices, button functionality, and handy shortcuts; product description and video tutorials are also available at <http://clp.arizona.edu/cls/ukr2/default.htm>

Price:

Single User: \$79.95; 30% discount available for purchases of 10 or more copies from University of Arizona Press (800.426.3797) or email: orders@uapress.arizona.edu. At the time of this review no site licenses are available for this program

GENERAL DESCRIPTION

The *Intermediate Ukrainian* program is a multimedia DVD-ROM which was developed at the University of Arizona as part of their Critical Languages Program for less commonly taught languages. Other multimedia CD and DVD-ROMs in this series include Brazilian, Portuguese, Cantonese, Chinese, Kazakh, Korean, Kurmanji Kurdish, and Turkish.

Intermediate Ukrainian, a continuation course of *Beginning Ukrainian* (CLS, University of Arizona, 2005), is a multimedia courseware packet for intermediate level learners of Ukrainian. It was developed by Oksana Sachyk in collaboration with the Critical Languages Program (CLP) at the University of Arizona, Tucson, in cooperation with the National Association of Self-Instructional Language Programs (NASILP), the U.S. Department of Education (NSEP), the National Security Education Programs (NSEP), and the University of Arizona College of Humanities.

The *Intermediate Ukrainian* course is a video-based instructional package. Through the study of thematically organized materials connected by a storyline that involves two characters, learners develop listening comprehension, speaking, reading, writing, and cultural knowledge about Ukraine. The program introduces a broad range of themes/topics, from travel to education, to holiday traditions.

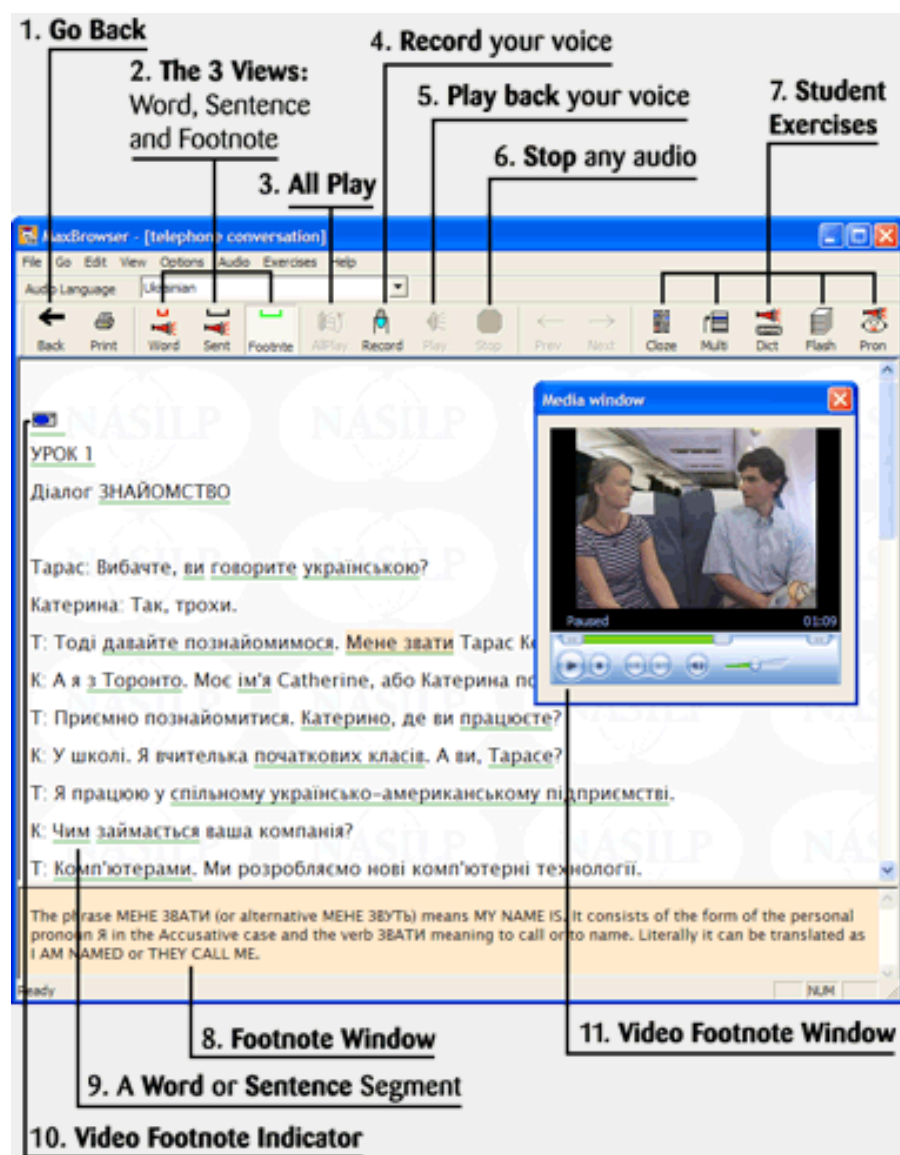
The *Intermediate Ukrainian* DVD-ROM consists of 20 lessons (11 dialogues and 9 readings). The packet is comparable to a textbook and workbook accompanied by audio and video and is considered an equivalent of a one-year college course. The DVD-ROM is intended for speakers of English and can be used either by independent learners or by students in a traditional classroom setting. *Intermediate Ukrainian* may be used as a sequel to *Beginning Ukrainian* (CLS, University of Arizona, 2005) or as a continuation course to any other introductory level course in Ukrainian. The DVD-ROM is a useful resource for users who are able to communicate in Ukrainian at an everyday/survival level. According to its author, the packet is "intended to expand knowledge of Ukrainian grammar and practical vocabulary" (Sachyk, 2009) and may be used as the primary text or as a supplement for a traditional undergraduate curriculum in intermediate Ukrainian, as well as a self-teaching program for independent language learners. Its predecessor, *Beginning Ukrainian* (Sachyk, 2007) has received a highly positive review by Stauffer (2007) who praises: "The makers of *Beginning Ukrainian* are to be commended, not only for their vision in the creation of a user-friendly electronic resource that may be used either independently or in the language classroom, but also for the modern curriculum, which is in line with the goal of communicative competence, and the efficiency with which the program runs" (p. 656). No reviews of the *Intermediate Ukrainian* program are currently available.

The *Intermediate Ukrainian* DVD-ROM is accompanied by a brief reference guide and detailed video tutorials which can be accessed from the Main Menu screen of the DVD-ROM. In addition, online guides and video tutorials are available on the distributor's website.

Like courseware for other languages in the CLP series, this DVD-ROM was produced using MaxAuthor™, the authoring software that has been developed at the University of Arizona and is currently available free of charge to authors who wish to create their own instructional units in various languages for non-commercial use.

As shown in Figure 1, the DVD-ROM packet utilizes MaxBrowser™ which allows users to perform a variety of learning activities.

Figure 1
MaxBrowser™ Student Interface



Each of the 20 lessons in the packet contain a text that comes with a video and an audio recording, and is also accompanied by vocabulary and grammar sections, footnotes with brief grammatical and cultural clarifications, and practice exercises. The length of video episodes ranges from 2 to approximately 4 minutes.

As shown in Figure 1, the program allows users to display dialogue text and a small video window side-by-side on the same screen; it also provides an option to maximize the video window to a full-screen size. Learners may either watch a video episode in its entirety (#3), or replay individual words or sentences (in Ukrainian or in English) by simply clicking on them (#9).

When selecting English as the language of the audio, or right-clicking on specific words or sentences, users can listen to the English translation of their selection. To read the footnotes with ancillary grammar and cultural information, students can simply click on the "Footnote" button. In addition, learners can record their own verbal statements and compare them to native-speakers' pronunciation (#4 and #5).

EVALUATION

Technological Features

The *Intermediate Ukrainian* packet is delivered on a DVD-ROM which is very easy to install. The installation is simple and smooth and takes less than one minute. When installed, the program occupies only 0.8 MB of hard disk space. The software offers an option to create a shortcut to the Desktop and immediately takes the user to the Main Menu screen of the program. Users always need to use the DVD-ROM to run the program.

The Main Menu screen is well designed and is easy to use. It includes a list of lesson topics in Ukrainian complemented by small font size subscripts in English. In addition, on the top right of the screen, there are links to "Introduction," "Instructions," "Tutorial Videos," "Grammar Index," and "Credits." The author's introduction and the brief instructions are well written and provide guidance on how to complete the lessons. Of particular value are "Video Tutorials" which provide scrupulous instructions on how to use every technological nuance, including navigation, button functionality, recording the audio, and scoring, among others.

The program runs on the PC platform only and was tested on different computers with Windows 2000/XP and Vista. No difference in performance was found across the operating systems. The software is reliable in operation: video and sound files load instantaneously; no delays, crashes or stalls were observed.

The interface of the program is simple, well designed, and user friendly. Navigation is intuitive and flexible and allows users to explore the content at their own pace and in ways that best fit their learning styles. For example, learners can choose a lesson, an exercise, replay video, watch video with and without dialogue text, slow down audio input, look up English translations, and much more. Video, sound, and graphics are all of excellent quality. Videotext in the packet is simulated authentic discourse, which is produced by native speakers for educational purposes. Speech rate in videotext is normal; speech rate of audio recordings is slower than normal and is intended to facilitate comprehension of the aural input.

Activities (Procedure)

Pedagogically, the program is very well designed; it progresses from relatively simple topics to more complex discussions. The content is logically organized and reflects Ukraine's rich cultural tradition as well as recent changes which occurred after the collapse of the Soviet regime. The program offers a wealth of cultural information which is integrated with the study of new lexicon, idioms, and grammatical complexities. In addition to the study of lexis, the linguistic focus is on morphology, spelling and pronunciation. The program is particularly useful for the development of receptive skills of listening and reading comprehension.

The courseware offers a variety of activities designed to enhance recall, recognition and application of linguistic, grammatical, and cultural information. In each of the 20 lessons students can complete five types of exercises: Fill-in-the-Blank, Multiple Choice, Listening Dictation,

Flashcard, and Pronunciation.

Figure 2
Sample Fill-in-the-Blank Exercise

УРОК 1
Діалог ЗНАЙОМСТВО

Тарас: Вибачте, ви українською?
 Катерина: Так, трохи.
 Т: Тоді давайте познайомимося. звати Тарас Коваль, я
 бізнесмен з .

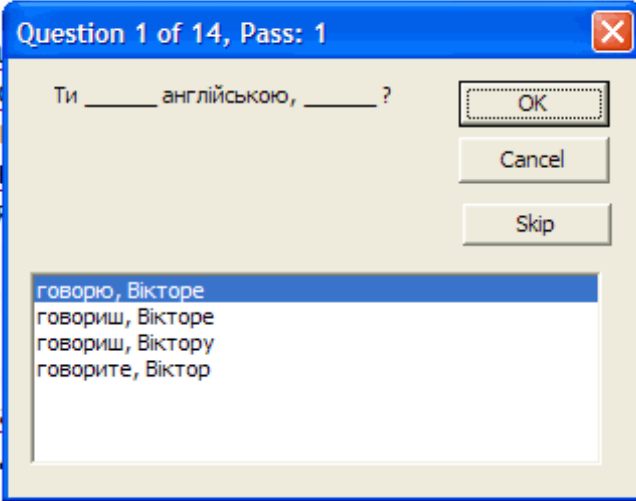
К: А я з Торонто. ім'я Catherine, або Катерина
. Дуже приємно.
 Т: Приємно познайомитися. Катерино, де ви ?
 К: У школі. Я вчителька початкових класів. А ви, Тарасе?
 Т: Я у спільному українсько-американському
 підприємстві.
 К: Чим займається компанія?
 Т: Комп'ютерами. Ми розробляємо нові комп'ютерні технології.
 К: Ви часто подорожуєте?
 Т: Так, мені подорожувати.
 К: У є сім'я?

The Fill-in-the-Blank (cloze) activity is perhaps best described as a 'vocabulary recall' exercise which users complete either by typing in an answer or by selecting one from a dropdown menu (see Figure 2). The blanks may be words or simply a few characters. To make the correct selection, users have to recall the context of the entire passage. Once users have completed this activity, they can click the "Grade my Answers" button. The software highlights correct answers in blue and marks incorrect answers with a red strike through, placing the correct answers next to them. Empty answers are marked by a red strike through.

Although this activity enhances recall of the lexicon, the discourse in many cloze exercises contains sentences taken verbatim from the lesson text; therefore, learners may do well by simply memorizing the text. Another problematic feature in the design of this activity is the absence of immediate feedback for any given item; thus, users have to complete the entire exercise to assess their progress.

Figure 3
Sample Multiple Choice Exercise

Тарас: Вибачте, ви говорите українською?
 Катерина: Так, трохи.
 Т: Тоді давайте познайомимося. Мене звати Тарас Коваль, я бізнесмен з Києва.
 К: А я з Торонто. Моє ім'я Catherine, або Катерина по-українськи. Дуже приємно.
 Т: Приємно познайомитися. Ка
 К: У школі. Я вчителька початк
 Т: Я працюю у спільному украї
 К: Чим займається ваша компан
 Т: Комп'ютерами. Ми розробля
 К: Ви часто подорожуєте?
 Т: Так, мені подобається подо
 К: У вас є сім'я?
 Т: Ні, я не одружений. А ви?
 К: Я теж не заміжня. Але мої б
 Т: До речі, Катерино, ви дуже вивчали українську мову?
 К: О, дякую. Моя мама українка, і вдома вона часто говорить з нами по-українському.



In the Multiple Choice exercise, learners are asked questions related to the highlighted portion of the lesson text (see Figure 3). This activity is an 'application' exercise. When working on the Multiple Choice exercise, users are asked to apply their knowledge of vocabulary and grammatical concepts in a context different from that of the actual lesson text. They receive immediate feedback for each individual item in the exercise. The program scores student responses, indicating how well they are doing. Once they have completed all items, users are offered another opportunity to correctly answer the questions they initially missed. Students are encouraged to continue the process until they are able to produce all of the correct answers. The program is flexible in permitting learners either to "Begin Over," or to "Quit" the exercise. Students can also print out a transcription of their answers for further review.

Figure 4
Sample Listening Dictation Exercise

Sentence: 1 of 10

Type your answer here:

Grade Me

Cancel

Play Again

Play Word by Word

Play Slowly word by word

Stop Audio

Points off for relistening: 0

Sentence Score: 10/10

Show Keyboard

Keyboard Layout id 1033 (0x409) 00000409

During the Listening Dictation activity students are asked to play an audio clip and transcribe it in Ukrainian using a built-in Cyrillic font (see Figure 4). This activity is of particular value as it develops student spelling skills (application) while simultaneously enhancing their listening comprehension (recognition/recall of the vocabulary). Once they type in the answer, users click the "Grade Me" button to receive a score. Correct answers are awarded 10 points. Answers with mistakes have points deducted and show indicators where the mistakes occurred.

While working on this exercise students have an opportunity to replay the audio input as many times as they wish (not without a penalty, though). They may also choose to listen "Word by Word" or "Slowly Word by Word." If users wish to hear the audio input again, 1 point is deducted. If they choose to replay the audio word by word, 2 points are deducted. By selecting replay "Slowly Word by Word," learners lose 3 points. Users receive no points for random answers. Similar to other activities in a lesson, when finished with the exercise students can see a transcript of responses as well as the correct answers for each audio input; the transcript can be used for later reviews or sent to the instructor.

Figure 5
Sample Flashcard Exercise

| | | |
|----------------------------|-------------|---------------|
| Play Word | 0 Discarded | 126 Remaining |
| Discard | | |
| NextWord | | |
| ShowExample | | |
| Sentence | | |
| SentenceTranslation | | |
| Translation | | |

Приємно

Т: **Приємно** познайомитися. Катерино, де ви працюєте?

К: У школі. Я вчителька початкових класів. А ви, Тарасе?

Т: Я працюю у спільному українсько-американському підприємстві.

К: Чим займається ваша компанія?

Context-based audio Flashcard exercises allow users to practice and improve their knowledge of the lexicon (see Figure 5). Throughout the entire packet, every word in the lesson discourse is available as an audio flashcard. Students complete this exercise by recalling the meaning of each word in a lesson text. A variety of options are available to enhance the recall of vocabulary and to reduce the likelihood of decontextualized vocabulary memorization. For example, learners may click on a word to hear it; they can hear that word used in context or hear its English translation. An additional value of this exercise is that it is designed as a self-evaluative activity. As each word from the lesson is shown and played, users are asked to think of its meaning. When they feel they know the word well enough, the flashcard can be 'discarded;' thus, the word is removed from the deck. The "Remaining" and "Discarded" decks are shown graphically, indicating one's progress.

Figure 6
Sample Pronunciation Exercise

Мене звати Тарас Коваль, я бізнесмен з Києва.

Sentence 6 of 35,
8 words in sentence

Click the record button to:

- 1) Play the native voice then record yourself for each word, then the entire sentence.
- 2) Play back your voice and the native voice.

Pronunciation exercises for each lesson allow users to practice and improve their pronunciation by listening to Ukrainian words and/or sentences spoken by a native speaker. Learners can also record their own voices and compare their own pronunciation to that of a native speaker of Ukrainian. Like the Flashcard exercise, this activity is self-evaluative: learners can repeat this activity as many times as they like until they are satisfied with their own pronunciation (see Figure 6).

This exercise is designed as an apprenticeship activity. First, learners listen to the native speaker's voice; next, they are prompted to say the same thing while the appropriate text is displayed and highlighted. Further, users are prompted to record each word sequentially. Finally, they have to record the whole sentence. When the recordings are completed, the native speaker's voice and the user's voice are played "back-to-back" for comparison. The length of time of student recording is automatically determined by the length of the native speaker's recording.

Similar to other Slavic languages, Ukrainian is a highly inflectional language which presents a challenge for English speakers. The *Intermediate Ukrainian* program incorporates a broad range of grammatical topics, summarized in numerous tables and footnotes, which are primarily organized by parts of speech and focus on morphology. The limitation of the courseware is that grammatical concepts, although clearly summarized in tables, are insufficiently illustrated by examples of use. Adding more examples would help users avoid memorization

of endings and help them understand how to use grammar in context.

Teacher Fit (Approach)

The *Intermediate Ukrainian* developers should be commended for their impeccable linguistic accuracy, authenticity of content, and up-to-date cultural information. The audio is recorded by native speakers of Ukrainian who speak the language with flawless pronunciation. The program does not generate stereotypical representations of Ukraine and its people. Instructors may choose whether to use the packet as the primary text or as a complement to their traditional curriculum.

The design of *Intermediate Ukrainian* is consistent with the communicative approach to language learning. As to theoretical underpinnings of student activities, the courseware appears eclectic since it combines teaching methodologies associated with a number of theories accepted in the field. For example, it conforms to comprehension-based methodologies for communicative language instruction which bring listening comprehension to the front with regard to its importance to the overall process of language acquisition (Krashen, 1985; VanPatten & Cadierno, 1993). In addition, it makes use of cognitive-theoretical views which emphasize that L2 acquisition occurs most effectively with high degrees of conscious learner involvement (O'Malley & Chamot, 1993). Finally, it draws on the sociocultural approach which advocates building cognitive understanding in authentic contexts (Warschauer, 1997).

The courseware is most useful for the development of receptive skills of listening and reading comprehension. Ever since Richards (1983) suggested manipulation of variables (input and tasks) as a means to develop listening micro-skills, his approach has been widely accepted in the field (Rubin, 1994). Drawing on this approach, the *Intermediate Ukrainian* program employs manipulation of both variables as a teaching tool. The input (i.e., the language which the learner hears) is manipulated via controlled features such as rate of delivery, choice of the lexicon, and grammatical complexity. The tasks are manipulated via five types of exercises included in each lesson. In all exercises the tasks necessitate either a 'meaningful' or a 'communicative' response. The Fill-in-the-Blank exercise in the program is an example of a low-production meaningful task which requires the user to comprehend the input, but does not require any creative ability. In contrast, the Multiple Choice exercise is an example of a task that asks the learner to create a suitable response on the basis of what she/he understood from the lesson text, but requires adaptation and addition of new information.

The authors of *Intermediate Ukrainian* successfully implement several effective cognitive apprenticeship strategies (Collins, Brown, & Newman, 1989), including modeling, scaffolding (providing all sorts of help to enhance comprehension), and directing user attention to specific aspects of the text, all of which is handled by the program very well. Reflection strategy is implemented via Pronunciation exercises where students can compare their own pronunciation to that of a native speaker. Listening comprehension activities and the exercises that are well handled by the courseware seem best suited for independent practice in the lab or at home.

However, tasks related to articulation and exploration strategies (for example, asking questions, retelling a story, writing a summary, and writing new stories) require instructor's guidance and feedback. Such creative and analytical tasks appear best suited for traditional classroom settings.

There are two obvious setbacks in the videos which take away from the quality of the sociocultural representations. Both actors shy away from using paralinguistic features of the language in a natural manner, including gesture, mimic, and eye contact. They do not use ex-

pected intonation to express emotions (for example, excitement in the scene at the theater). Their speech is not characterized by normal pauses or hesitations and therefore sounds like memorized text. The same problem, albeit to a greater extent, is present in the package's texts (video monologues). Although the texts contain a wealth of cultural information, they are delivered as memorized or read (behind the camera) passages. Yet another problem with these texts is that contrary to common sense, Katerina, who according to the story line lives in Toronto and visits Ukraine for the first time in her life, shares with the learners detailed stories about this country and its cultural traditions. It seems such content should have been introduced by Taras, who is a native of Ukraine and resides in Kiev.

Even though the DVD-ROM incorporates some authentic images, for the most part the background in the videos is still and quiet and depicts an empty theater, an airport with no passengers, and a university campus with no students. It becomes obvious that the videos were filmed in Arizona, not in Kiev. While filming videos in the country where the target language is spoken is a costly enterprise, perhaps just adding some signs written in Ukrainian would enhance the sense of authenticity of the program.

When using the *Intermediate Ukrainian* as the primary text in traditional classroom settings, instructors who strive to integrate truly authentic materials should consider complementing this course with documentaries, excerpts from films, and online resources. Similarly, motivated independent users interested in the examination of authentic materials in Ukrainian may complement the package by Dish Network TV programming, SCOLA newscasts, and Ukrainian Internet sites.

Learner Fit (Design)

The program offers the user a simulated authentic environment for learning the Ukrainian language beyond the basic level and may be of interest to learners of a variety of ages, from high school students to adults. The content and the language of the course are appropriate for intermediate level learners. By using the software, students will further develop receptive skills of listening and reading comprehension, practice pronunciation, expand their vocabulary, study more sophisticated grammar, and gain knowledge of useful cultural information.

The thematic organization of the material is fitting for students in traditional classroom settings as well as for independent learners. Since the material tends to become more complex as the lessons progress, the users will benefit from studying the units in the order they are listed in the program.

The combination of audio-visual materials and text in the courseware stimulates users' multiple senses and serves well for learners with different learning styles (e.g., visual and auditory). Through the use of authentic speech, genuine images, and a wealth of cultural information students experience the language in ways not possible by just using a textbook. In this sense, the program performs the role of a guide and an expert in apprenticing students into discourse and social practices of native-speakers (Warschauer, 1997). Motivated learners, particularly those who are interested in the development of their receptive skills, can benefit from using the program independently; however, to use *Intermediate Ukrainian* effectively, most students will need the guidance of and feedback from an instructor.

Learners will enjoy the flexibility and user control allowed by the MaxBrowser™. Students can listen to the audio and read the text as many times as they need and also practice pronunciation and spelling. They can explore all texts word-by-word and sentence-by-sentence and check their understanding by using the English translation. Users can complete the interactive

exercises in the order of their choice and at their own pace and receive feedback regarding the correctness of their responses. Because users are exposed to a broad range of linguistic stimuli and because they are given control regarding the order and tempo in which they would like to process the content of each unit, students are likely to become more motivated and independent learners. In this sense, the program is consistent with student-centered pedagogy (Hoven, 2006).

In the Dictation exercise learners are asked to listen to a statement in Ukrainian and then type it in the space provided for their response. The courseware uses a built-in Cyrillic keyboard which is not phonetic/mnemonic (i.e., does not correspond to the US standard keyboard layout). The "Show Keyboard" button in the Dictation exercise illustrates the correspondence of keys to Ukrainian characters. This menu also allows students to use Windows' Ukrainian keyboard instead of the built-in Ukrainian keyboard.

Students can use various references such as grammar notes and bilingual vocabulary lists. It is not exactly accurate to describe the *Intermediate Ukrainian's* approach to the teaching of grammar as 'deductive.' What the courseware offers the user with regard to grammar is perhaps best described as brief grammatical references. While major grammatical points are presented in summary tables which are organized by parts of speech, the tables focus primarily on the right endings. There is very little explanation of grammatical concepts and very few examples of contextualized use of the rules. To better understand and effectively apply the grammar summarized in such tables, most learners will need instructor guidance and extensive practice with feedback. Similarly, most users will not be able to expand their vocabulary through the use of supplementary vocabulary lists without an instructor's help.

SUMMARY

Intermediate Ukrainian is a user-friendly multimedia DVD-ROM for the expansion of listening comprehension and communicative skills beyond the elementary level. It also helps learners develop cultural awareness, improve pronunciation, and practice typing skills. The course pack is well designed and is linguistically and pedagogically sound. While listening comprehension activities seem best suited for independent practice, exercises suggested for further vocabulary development, clarification of grammar and communicative practice may require an instructor's guidance and feedback. The list price for this software of \$79.95 is reasonable since it is comparable to the price of traditional student materials such as textbook/workbook combination. The program is a cost-effective tool for the study of intermediate Ukrainian.

SCALED RATING (1 is low; 5 is high)

Implementation possibilities: 5
Pedagogical features: 4.5
Sociolinguistic accuracy: 4.5
Use of Computer Capabilities: 4.5
Ease of use: 5
Overall evaluation: 4.5
Value for money: 4.5

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REVIEWER'S BIODATA

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