

*Learning Russian

Abigail B. Calkin

In 1972, I read some of Anna Akhmatova's poetry in translation and thought, 'If it's that beautiful in translation, what must the original be like?' I bought a Russian grammar book and procrastinated until 1987. With a trip to the then Soviet Union coming up, I began to learn Russian and in 11 weeks covered the equivalent of first semester, using one minute timings. A year later I began to take Russian at a university and studied it there for two and a half years using one minute timings to learn vocabulary.

Subsequently, I came across the poetry of Marina Tsvetaeva which I also greatly admired. One of my goals became to learn to read Tsvetaeva in the original and to translate some of her poetry with high translation and English quality.

I renewed my study of Russian shortly before I retired. Currently, I do timings on eight pinpoints and two weekly timings. I also use, untimed, the Pimsleur System (1995) titled *Speak, Read, & Think Essential Russian*.

The Practices

The Charts for April and May were SAFMEDS in this case, (Say All Facts a Minute Each Day Shuffled) only--reading in Russian and translating to English. The timings were one per day, and the accelerations ranged from $\times 1.15$ to $\times 1.5$ on corrects and $\times 1.5$ to $\div 2.3$ on errors. Once school was out and, as of mid-June, I was retired and able to study an hour to an hour and a half per day; I increased the number of pinpoints to nine. Daily, I first do the set of vocabulary SAFMEDS--see/say Russian, see /trans-late Russian to English, and see/translate English to Russian. I use the commercially made Vis-Ed cards (1989) and their blank cards also. The cards are 2"x3 1/2" and very easy to handle. The aim on reading

Russian SAFMEDS is 90 because I can read English SAFMEDS at that frequency. As of October 29th, I had not reached that aim, but I like it dangling in front of me. The aim on translation is 60 per minute. A phase change to another set of cards is done at the same time on all three pinpoints.

The second set of three timings I do each day is declining nouns and adjectives and conjugating verbs. The aim for declining nouns was 80 until one time I forgot to mark the aim on the Chart and reached 100 per minute; my declension aim is now 100 correct per minute. The adjective declension aim has always been 100 correct. Verb conjugation aim is 90 correct because the verbs I've used usually have more syllables than the nouns and adjectives and, therefore, take longer to say.

The third set of timings is pronouncing, reading, and speaking. I use VocabuLearn's (1989) Russian pronunciation tapes. The Russian speaker is native, and the word is said once in English followed by a pause and the Russian word. My aim is 100 corrects per minute. The reading passage I selected from Khavronina's (1989), *Russian As We Speak It*. The beginning of this book the professor used for grammar and syntax review as we began our third year of Russian studies. Each chapter begins with a reading passage. I am currently on Chapter 5, with an aim of 140 words per minute until my Russian speech is far more fluent, at which time I shall increase my aim to that of my speech. I started a "speak" Chart, found that counting the words as I spoke slowed me down and began to record my speaking to count the words later. Still, the acceleration, $\times 1.25$, was not close to what I wanted; I dropped this pinpoint and will resume it when I acquire more Russian.

In personal communication, July 24, 1996, with Ogden Lindsley, he mentioned the Pimsleur system. The Pimsleur System is a set of 16 tapes designed for use for 32 days to teach speaking the language. The tapes have an English and two Russian speakers. The system is based on two principles: "...the *Principle of Anticipation* and the scientific principle of memory that [Pimsleur] called *Graduated Interval Recall* " (p.viii). It most effectively employs the principles of operant learning, using primarily controlled operants. When asking a question in Russian, the learner has about five seconds in which to respond before one of the Russians says the correct response.

Since childhood, I have had a problem speaking a foreign language. My mother was fluent in French with accentless pronunciation, yet she spoke to me in a very reserved manner and with an American accent. Although she was proficient in Spanish and had taught that as well, she refused to speak Spanish in Spain and made me do it--I know no Spanish, so she rehearsed me. From her I learned to be incredibly shy when speaking a foreign language, such that I usually become totally silent, blush and smile. Determined to overcome the shyness that inhibits my conversation and learning when speaking a foreign language, I called SyberVision and ordered the Russian tapes. This takes one half hour per day for 32 days, but I do not count correct and error frequencies. (I practice with these tapes fairly consistently but not every day. When I finish, I plan to do them again since Level 2 is not yet available.) This increases my daily Russian learning time to at least two to two and a half hours per day.

Immediately after doing each timing, I chart it on the daily Chart. Initially, I used Elizabeth Haughton's (1992) stacking--placing the frequencies on the same day line. On return from the International Precision Teaching Conference in Seattle, October 1996, I began to use the Timings Chart (Tpmin-3EC) for some of the pinpoints. Before using the Timings Chart and now, the timing charted on the daily Chart is that which has the highest correct frequency.

I study Russian the first thing in the morning while all is quiet, and the danger of interruption is most minimal. I use the same desk every day,

a different one from where I write. I listen to the Pimsleur tapes either during or right after lunch.

On Sundays, I also use a weekly summary Chart to be sure I do some review of the vocabulary cards (Russian to English and English to Russian) on which I have reached my aim. These are the only timed weekly reviews.

Results

SAFMEDS

Accelerations for reading Russian SAFMEDS (Chart 1) ranged from x1.2 to x1.7 with the middle being x1.6. As I continue through the same set of cards, the number of timings per day increases. Accelerations for Russian to English SAFMEDS (Chart 2), corrects, ranged from x1.2 to x2.6, with the middle being x1.3. For errors, the range was +2.6 to +15, with a middle of +3.5.

English to Russian SAFMEDS (Chart 3), the acceleration range for corrects was x1.3 to 2.3, with a middle of x1.5, and for the errors the range was +3.5 to +10, with a middle acceleration of +8. Again, on both of these pinpoints, I increased the number of timings per day before I reached my goal.

Charts 4 and 7 show my first uses of the timings Chart. I am not able to follow Morningside Academy's rule of "two below the x2 line, ask for help."

Six times I had an interruption within the series of timings. On the following timing (same pinpoint), three times the corrects increased, three times the corrects decreased.

Declining and conjugating

Russian has six cases. There are three different declensions for masculine, four each for feminine and neuter nouns. The singular is different from the plural. There are, of course, the exceptions too. I have learned from conversing with Russians (in Russian) that if I use the wrong form, they look at me as if I made a social faux pas. or, if the person knows me well, I am immediately corrected.

The range of celeration for corrects on declining nouns (Chart 5) was $x1.4$ to $x4.3$, with a middle of $x1.9$. The range of celerations when declining adjectives (Chart 6) was $x1.25$ to $x5.5$, with a middle of $x1.5$.

The range of celerations for corrects when conjugating verbs (Chart 8) was $x1.5$ to $x2.2$, with a middle of $x1.8$. During the fourth phase on Chart 8, I was going to slice back again to first conjugation verbs only during the first week, but I had a conversation with Lindsley (personal communication, July 24, 1996) about component and composite skills in general and decided not to slice back. Good thing! That turned out to be my best celeration on that Chart-- $x2.2$.

I stopped the see/say infinitive to gerund on the timings Chart (Chart 7) because the learning was not fast enough to please me. I did it in the first place because I have noticed in my reading of Russian poetry that the Russian gerund is used frequently and it is sometimes not related in spelling to the infinitive and, therefore, impossible to find in the dictionary. My brief timings on gerunds were sufficient, so that I now identify them readily in poems.

Two things sometimes slow my learning. Apparent from the daily Charts, if I miss several days in a row, the celeration slows. Being away from home for six weeks definitely caused me to skip doing the timings for many days at a time on all the pinpoints. The other is the sometimes detrimental effect of interruption seen on the timings Charts. Once I am within a timings set, if my husband speaks to me, what he says to me stays in my mind during the next timing, in the same way that the Russian words and phrases run through my mind. Thus, if he asks, "Where's the dog?," that runs through my mind with at least the same power as the Russian words. I also notice if I stop during the series on one pinpoint to refill my teacup, my learning is affected. Thus, interfering behavior can be counterproductive to my learning. From now on, I intend to note what the interruption is.

(I am reminded of listening to an NPR program about Gregorian chanting and how monks who chant six to eight hours per day need only about three hours of sleep a night. I have been told by some that when I do the timings, I sound as if I am chanting. We don't *know* why the one min-

ute timing is so effective in learning, but I wonder if it may be because the timing forbids the entry of stray thoughts, and the information learned goes more quickly to long term memory.)

Pronunciation, reading and speaking

The pronunciation Chart, Chart 9, shows low celerations except for the first phase. Corrects are usually high; errors quickly decelerate to zero. My errors are usually emphasizing the wrong syllable. While I am learning the correct pronunciation, I am often learning the word for the first time. Someone says the word in English, and I say it as often as I can in Russian. While I am saying it, a Russian pronounces it correctly. It becomes a game to see how many times I can say it, and if I can say it at exactly the same time as does the Russian, then I have a "hear" stimulus at the same time as I say the word.

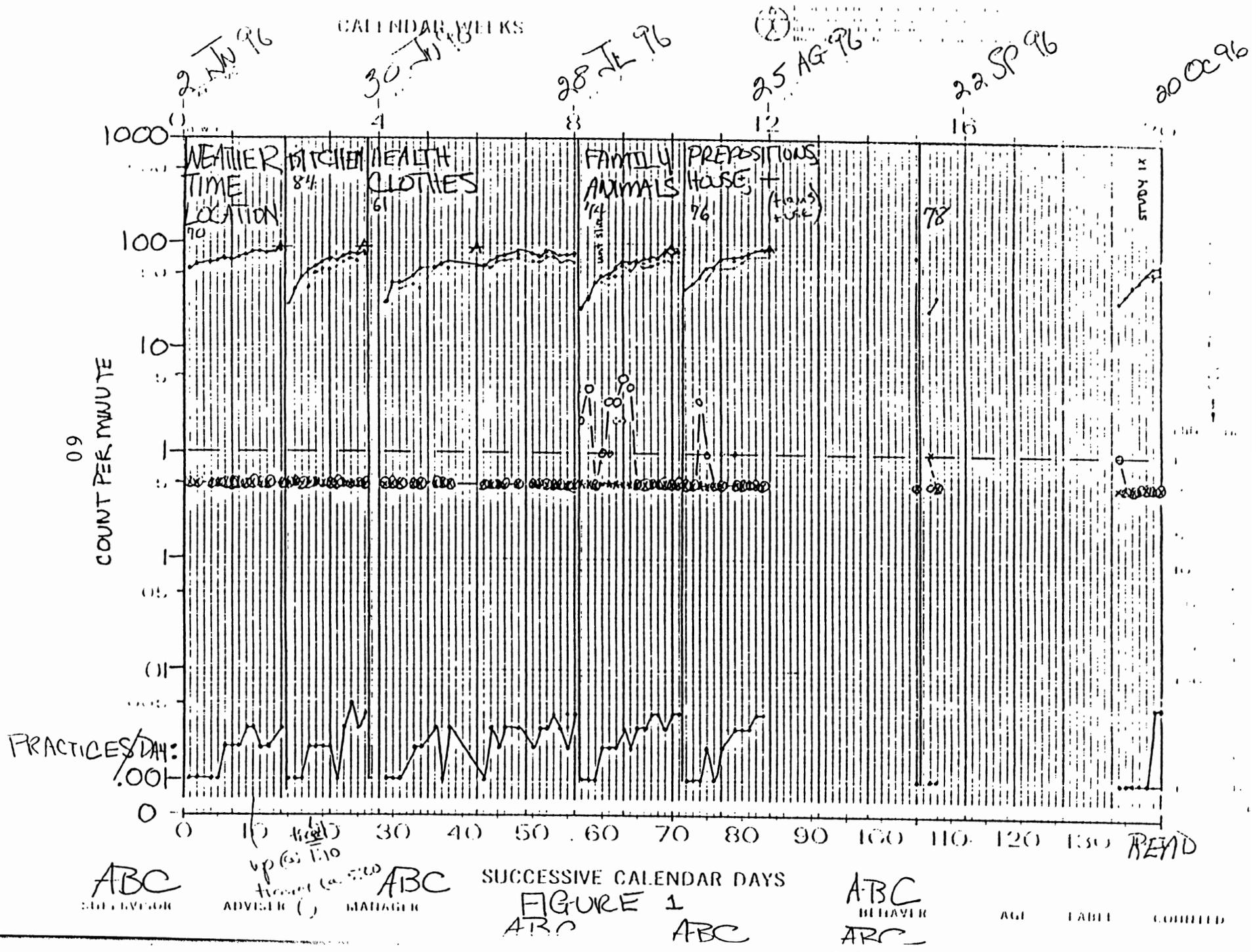
Chart 10 shows the data for reading text. The celerations for corrects range from $x1.2$ to $x155$. My present aim in reading text is 140 words per minute. Once I become more proficient, I shall increase that to 200 or 250.

Think/say Russian in conversation (Chart 11) had a celeration of $x1.25$ for corrects and a jump-up in errors when I began to record the speaking, probably an error in counting. The deceleration of errors was $+1.2$. I noticed that I often said "uh" because I didn't know what to say next or couldn't think of the word I wanted. While I decelerated that at a $+1.7$, it did not increase the corrects nor decrease the errors by anything close to $x1.7$ or $+1.7$. I stopped this timing because I realized that speech at 50 words per minute is too slow, and that I needed more component skills before again timing this large but desirable composite.

Next Steps

General

- I have long been curious about what gives the one-minute timing its power. A part of this is: What is the effect of an interruption on learning during or between timings?



4157

ABC

ARC

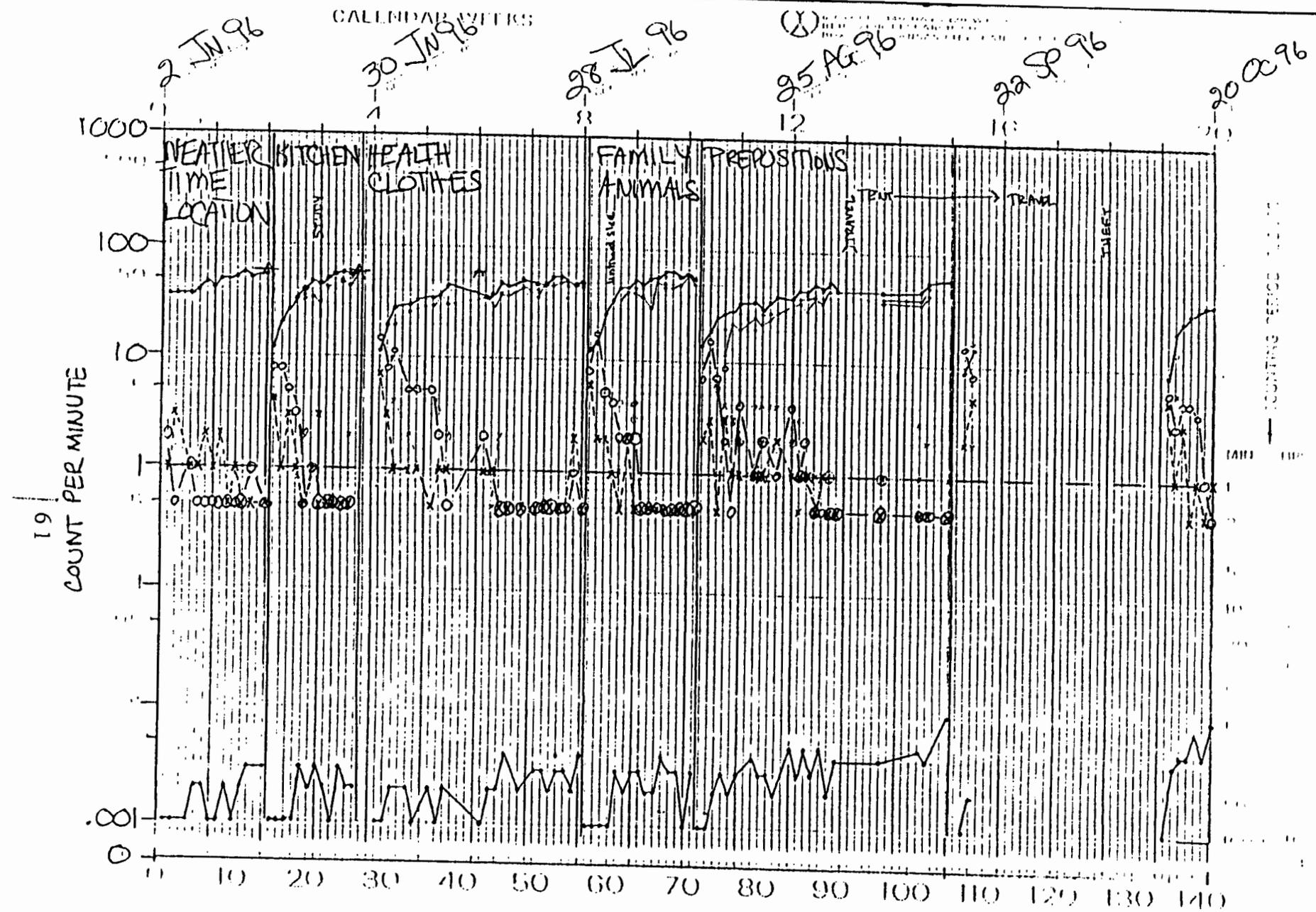


FIGURE 2

TRANSLATE

SUPERVISOR ADVISER MANAGER BEHAVIOR AGE LABEL COUNTER

DESCRIPTOR AGENT TIMER CHAPTER

62

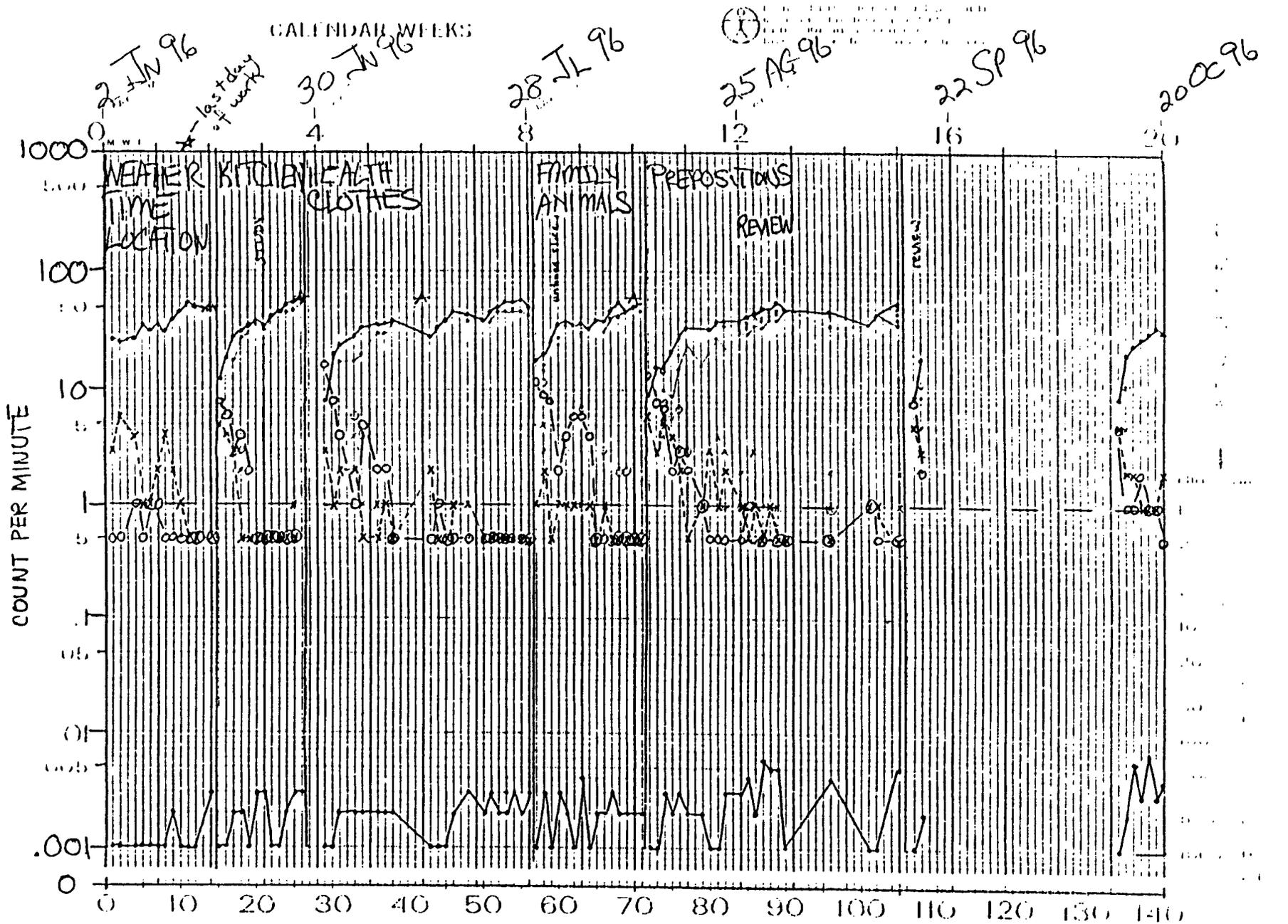


FIGURE 3

ABC
BEHAVIOR

TRANSLATE

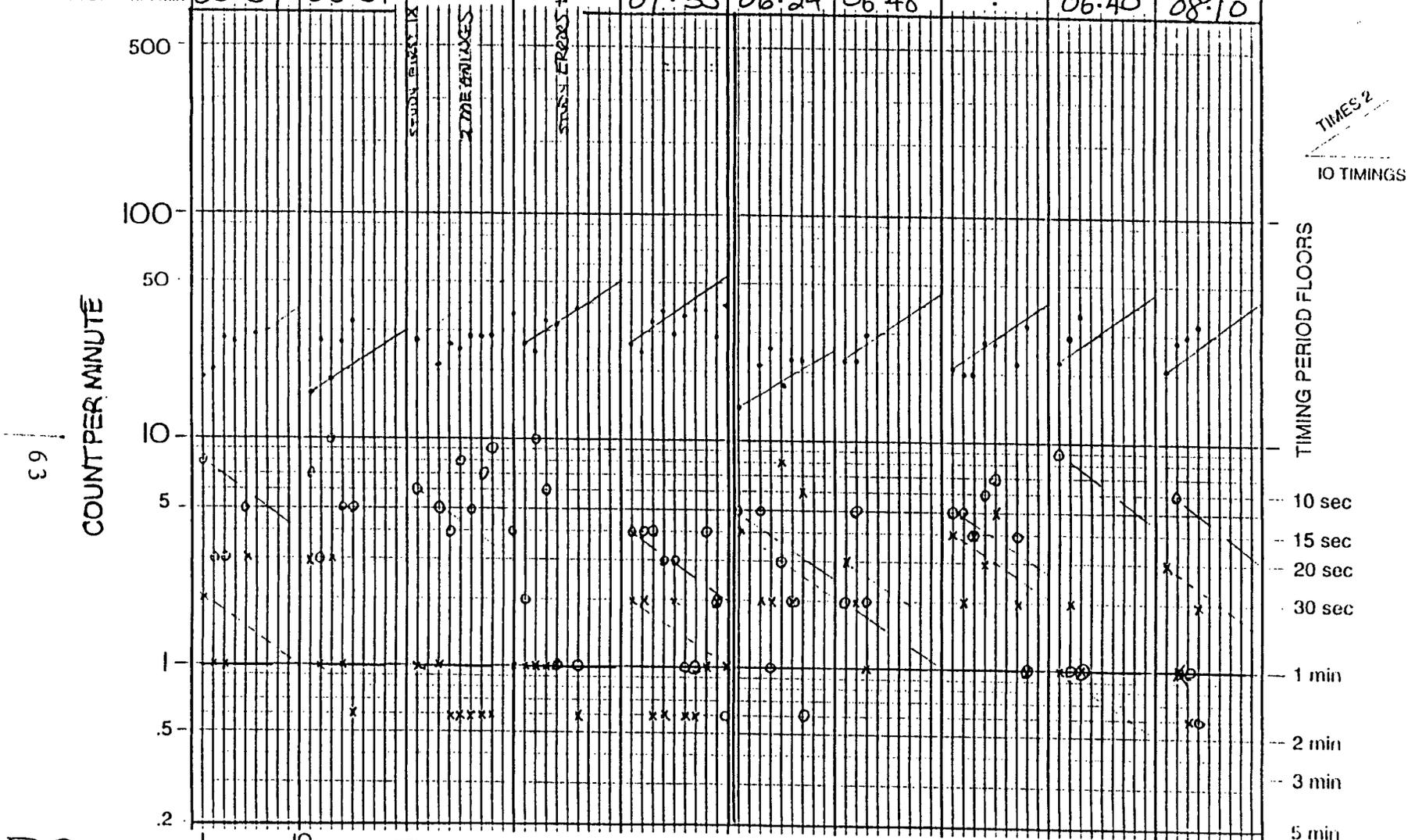
SUPERVISOR ADVISER MANAGER

AGE LABEL COURTED
FLASHCARDS RUSSIAN ← EX

TIMINGS CHART - T_{pmin}-3E_u

© 1996 BEHAVIOR RESEARCH CO. FAX 913 362 5900
 BOX 3351 KANSAS CITY KS 66103-3351

| MONTH / DAY | 16 Oc | 17 Oc | 18 Oc | 19 Oc | 20 Oc | 16 Oc | 17 Oc | 18 Oc | 19 Oc | 20 Oc | YEAR |
|----------------|-----------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-----------|-------|-------|-------|-------|------|
| SLICE / LESSON | RUS → ENG | | | | | ENG → RUS | | | | | 1996 |
| START hr : min | 05:39 | 06:19 | 07:37 | 05:54 | 07:26 | 06:00 | : | : | : | 07:54 | |
| STOP hr : min | 05:59 | 06:34 | ... | ... | 07:53 | 06:24 | 06:48 | : | 06:40 | 08:10 | |



ABC SUPERVISOR

ABC MANAGER

SUCCESSIVE TIMINGS

ABC PERFORMER

10 SAFMEDS COUNTED

FIGURE 4
ABC TARGET

ABC COUNTER

ABC COUNTER

ORGANIZATION

DIVISION

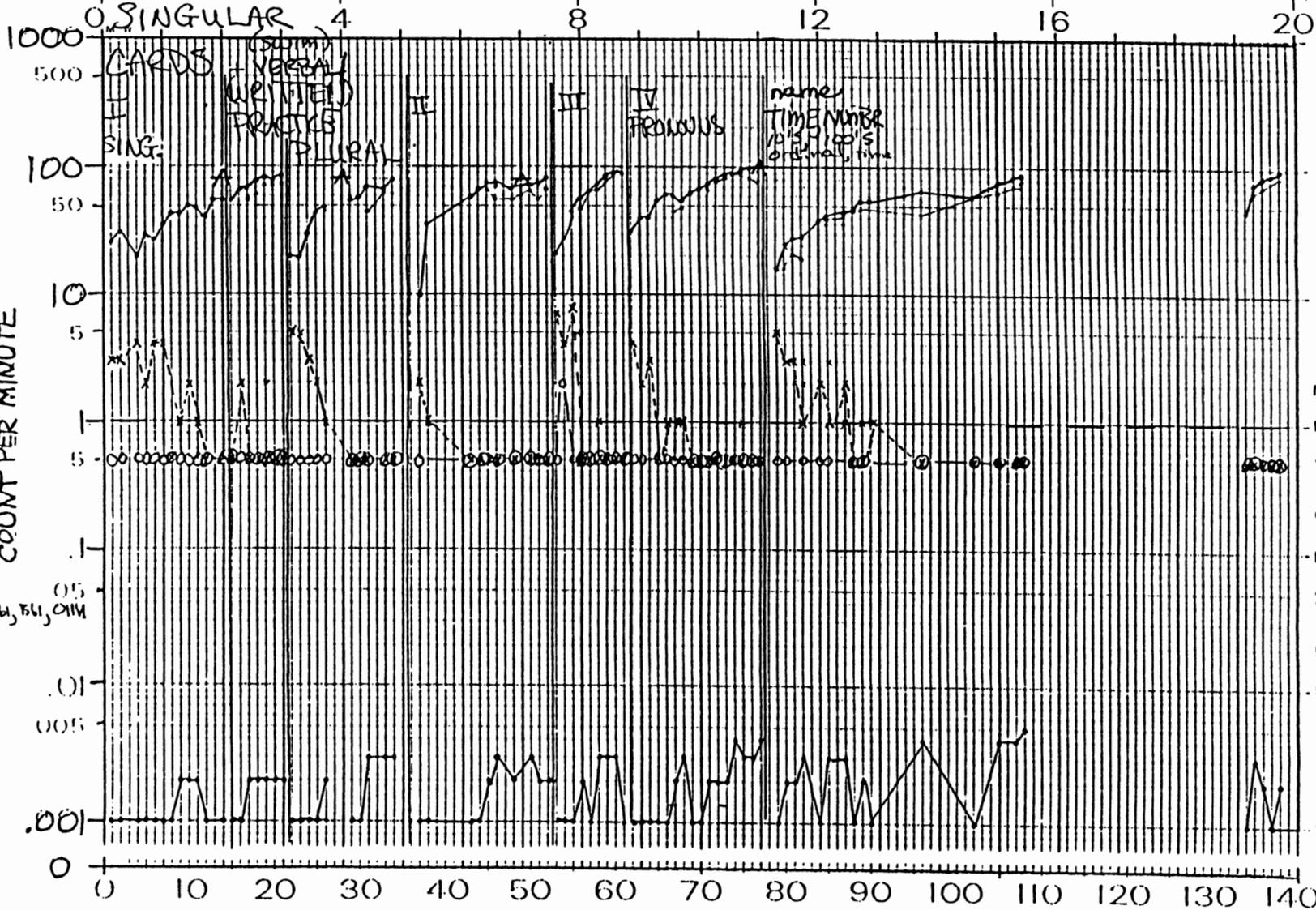
FLOOR

CALENDAR WEEKS



DAILY BEHAVIOR CHART (DR #11)
 8 CYCLES 140 DAYS (20 WFS)
 BEHAVIOR RESEARCH CO
 BOX 300 KANSAS CITY, KANS. 64101

2 JUN 96
 30 JUN 96
 28 JUL 96
 25 AG 96
 22 SP 96
 20 OC 96



ЛЮБА
 толе
 элание
 зрания
 вартира
 леделя
 амилля
 керь
 лвол
 рамвай
 втомобиль

Братъ
 подо

шун
 сын
 прыг

III
 Я, Ты, он, мы, вы, они
 кто
 что
 никто
 ничто

IV
 седа
 весь
 никто
 ничто
 два
 три
 четыре
 оии

COUNT PER MINUTE

COUNTING PERIOD FLOORS

MIN 100
 10
 1
 .1
 .01
 .001
 0

SUCCESSIVE CALENDAR DAYS
 FIGURE 5

ABC
 BEHAVIOR

SUPERVISOR ADVISER MANAGER AGE TABLE COUNTED

DECLINE

CALENDAR WEEKS

2 Jul 96 4 30 Jul 96 8 28 Jul 96 12 25 Aug 96 16 22 Sep 96 20 2000 96

PHASE BEHAVIOR LOCATED BY
 6 CYCLE 140 DAYS (20 WKS.)
 BEHAVIOR RESEARCH CO.
 BOX 1200 KANSAS CITY, MO, 64101

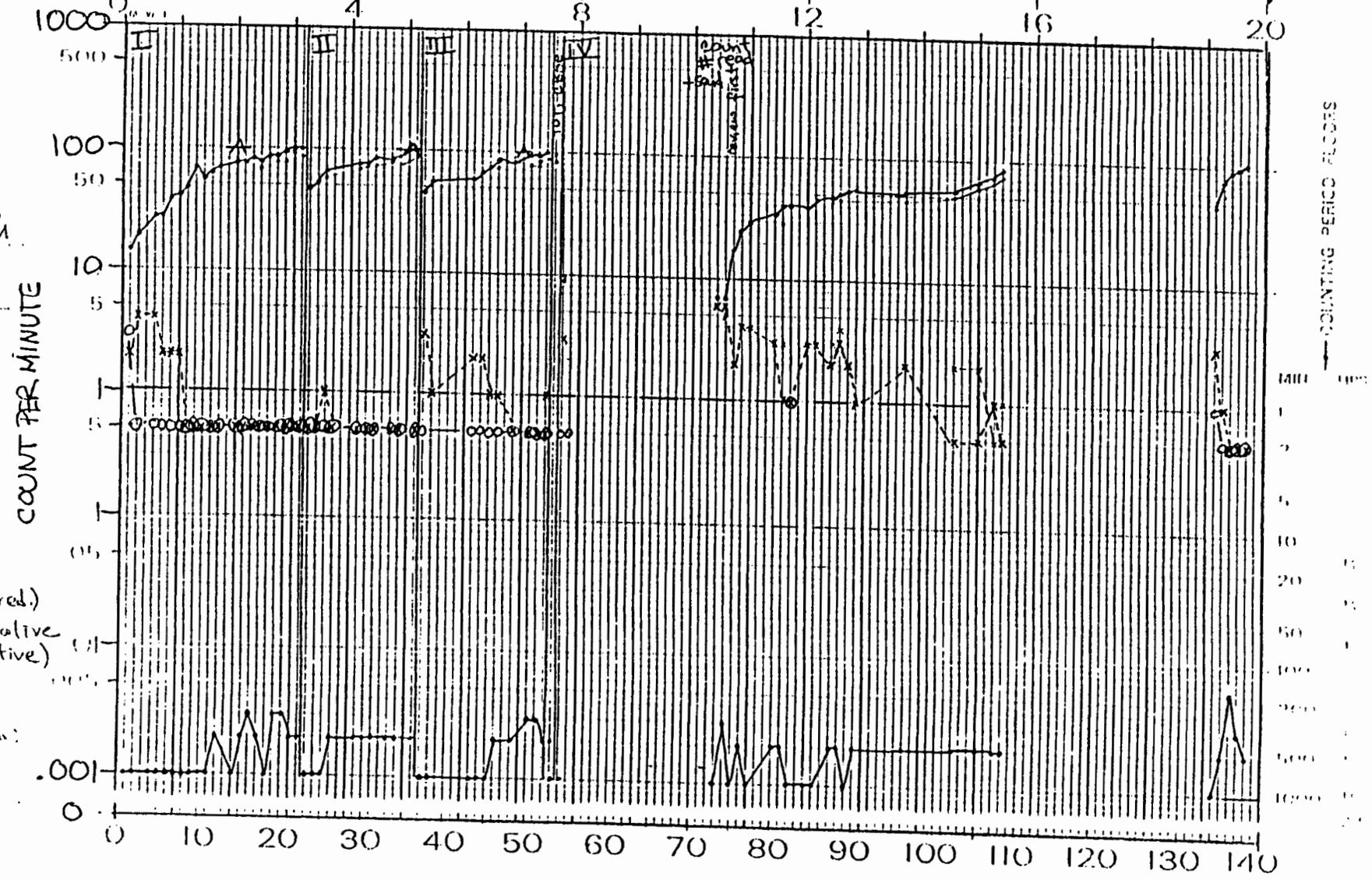
I
 Новый
 русский,
 большой
 огромный
 зиний

II
 зиний,
 палний,
 соседний
 предний
 ранний

IV
 FOF,
 CBOT
 (attrib/pred.)

→ Comparative
 (supellative)

III
 Мой (26m)
 Наш
 Этот
 Тот,
 Свой



SUCCESSIVE CALENDAR DAYS
 FIGURE 6

TIMINGS CHART - T_pmin-3E_v

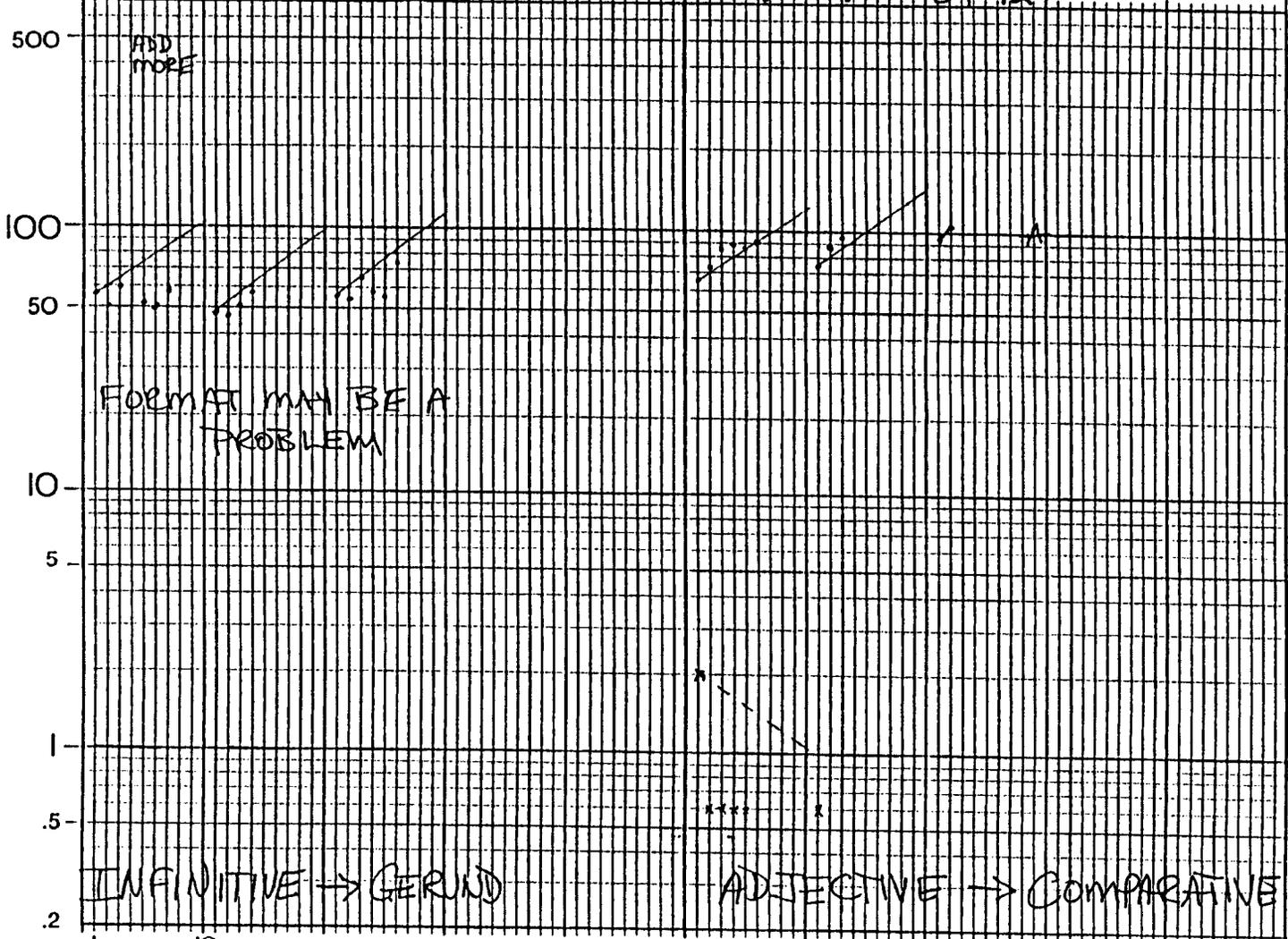
© 1996 BEHAVIOR RESEARCH CO. FAX 913 362 5900
BOX 3351 KANSAS CITY KS 66103-3351

YEAR 1996

| MONTH / DAY | 16.0c | 17.0c | 18.0c | | | 16.0c | 17.0c | 18.0c | | |
|----------------|---------|-------|-------|---|---|-------------|------------|-------|---|---|
| SLICE / LESSON | GERUNDS | | | | | COMPARATIVE | ADJECTIVES | | | |
| START hr: min | 06:49 | : : ? | 08:50 | : | : | 07:21 | 07:49 | 09:08 | : | : |
| STOP hr: min | 07:21 | 07:45 | 09:21 | : | : | : : ? | : : ? | 09:12 | : | : |

COUNT PER MINUTE

99



TIMES 2
10 TIMINGS

TIMING PERIOD FLOORS

10 sec
15 sec
20 sec
30 sec
1 min
2 min
3 min
5 min

ABC
SUPERVISOR

ADVISER

ABC
MANAGER

SUCCESSIVE TIMINGS

FIGURE 7
ABC

TIMER

ABC

COUNTER

ABIGAIL
PERFORMER

ABC

CHARTER

SEE/SAY
COUNTED
RUSSIAN

ORGANIZATION

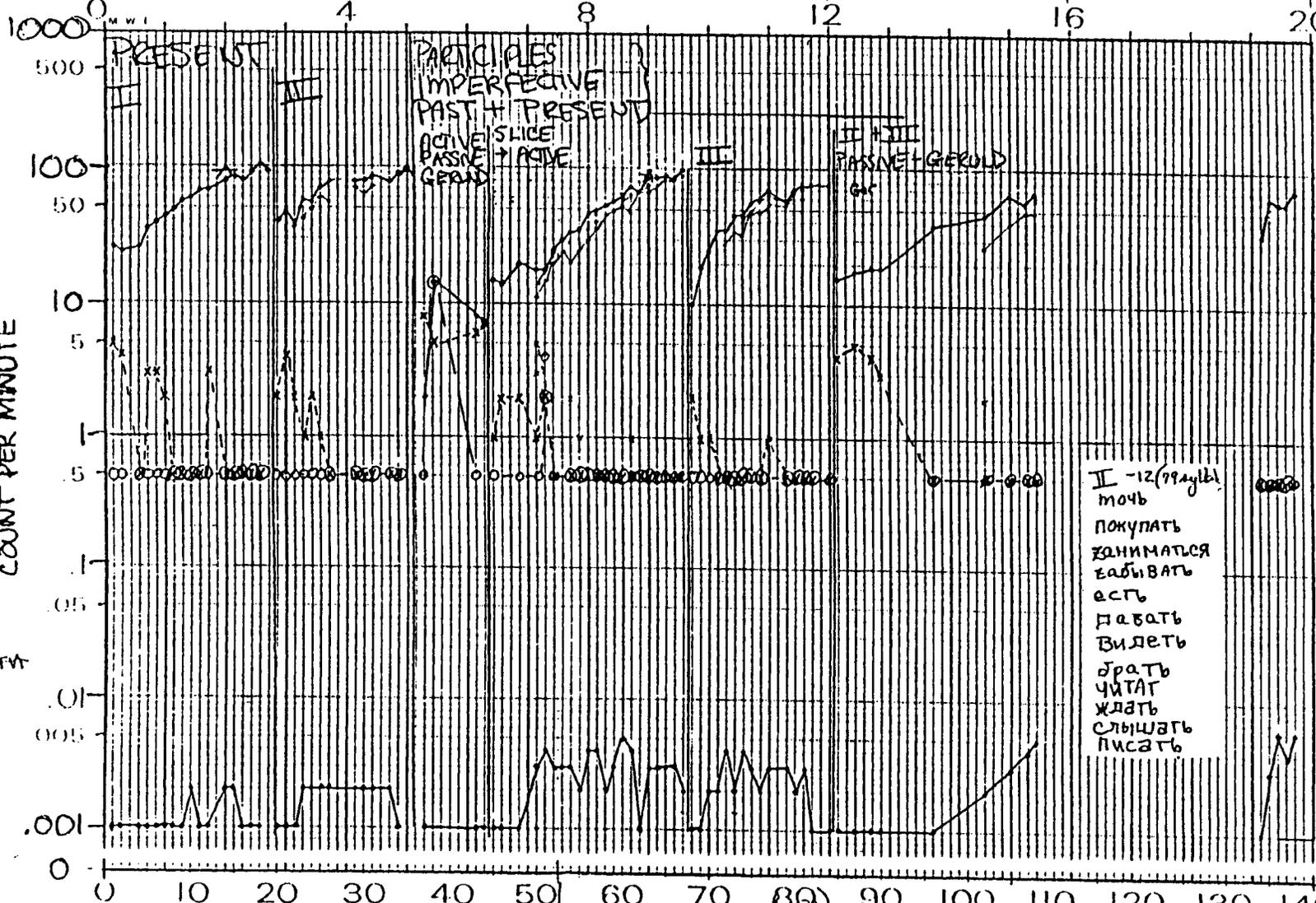
DIVISION

ROOM

CALENDAR WEEKS

CALENDAR WEEKS

2 Jul 96
 30 Jul 96
 28 Jul 96
 25 Aug 96
 22 Sep 96
 20 Oct 96



ИТАТЬ
 ИТЬ
 СЛАТЬ
 ИСАТЬ
 ВЗОРИТЬ
 ИИШАТЬ
 ОСИТЬ
 ЮБИТЬ

69
 COUNT PER MINUTE

ПОСИТЬ ИЕЕТИ
 ПИТЬ
 КЛЮСТЬ
 ЗАКРИТЬ
 ПОСЕЩАТЬ
 ВСТРЕЧАТЬ
 ВСТАВАТЬ
 СВЯЗИТЬСЯ
 СНАТЬ
 БОЯТЬСЯ
 ГОЛОВАТЬ
 УЧИТЬ
 СМЕШАТЬ

COUNTING PERIOD FLOORS
 MIN
 HRS

I - 12 (99 Aug 96)
 МОЧЬ
 ПОКУПАТЬ
 ЗАНИМАТЬСЯ
 ЕАБИВАТЬ
 ЕСТЬ
 ДАВАТЬ
 ВИДЕТЬ
 БРАТЬ
 ЧИТАТЬ
 ЖДАТЬ
 СЛЫШАТЬ
 ПИСАТЬ

was going to slice to 131 and
 but talked to Orlan re
 component composite + stick
 in general + decided not
 to. C = x1.2 Wed, 24 Jul

ABC

LABEL COUNTEGATE

SUPERVISOR ADVISER MANAGER

DEPOSITOR AGENCY

FIGURE 8 COUNTER

BEHAVIOR

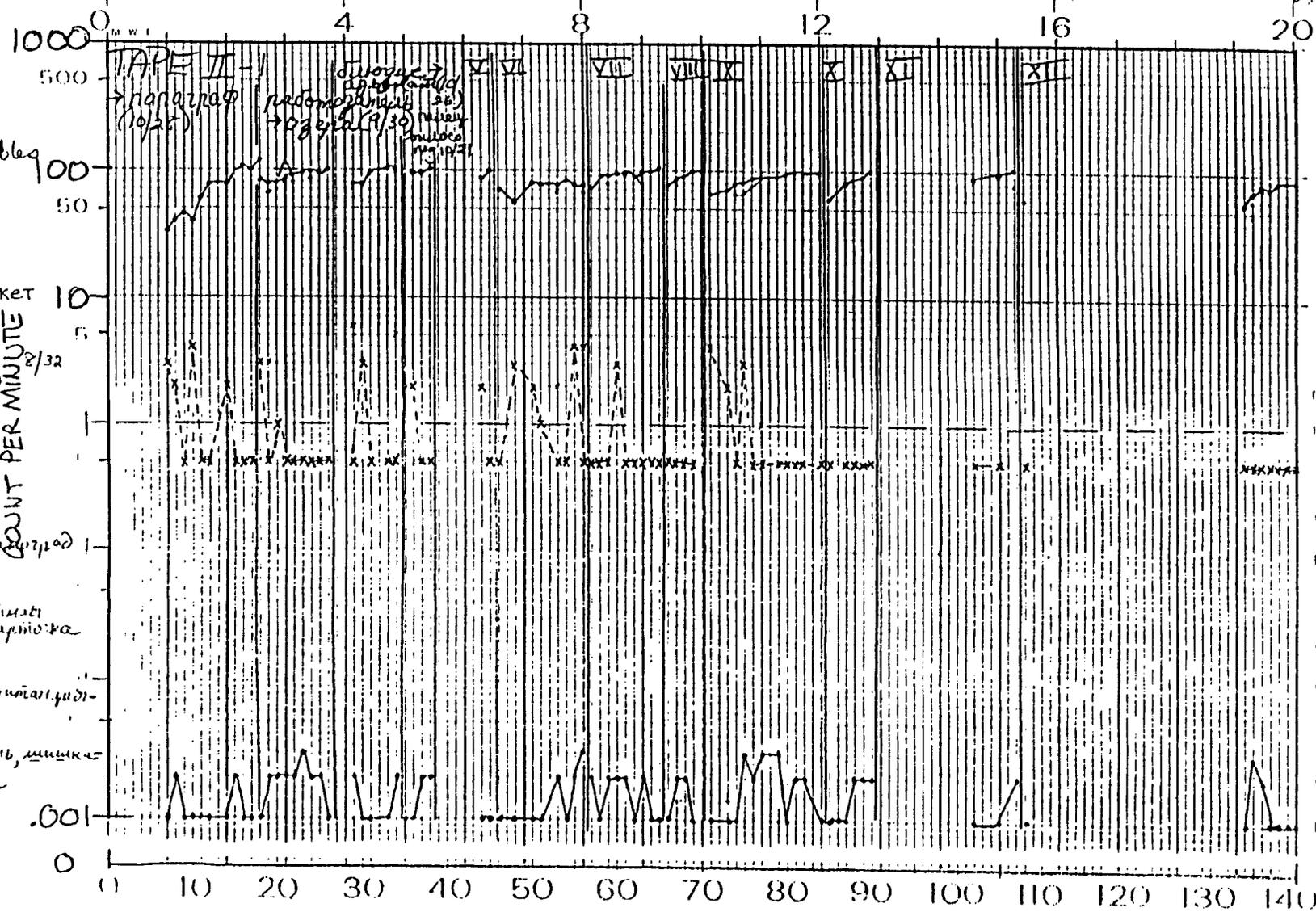
AGE

CHARTER

RUSSIAN

CALENDAR WEEKS

DAVE'S BEHAVIOR CHART (1996)
6 C.C.F. 140 DAYS (20 WKS)
RESEARCH IN SEARCH CO.
1001 KANSAS CITY, MO 64104



SUCCESSIVE CALENDAR DAYS

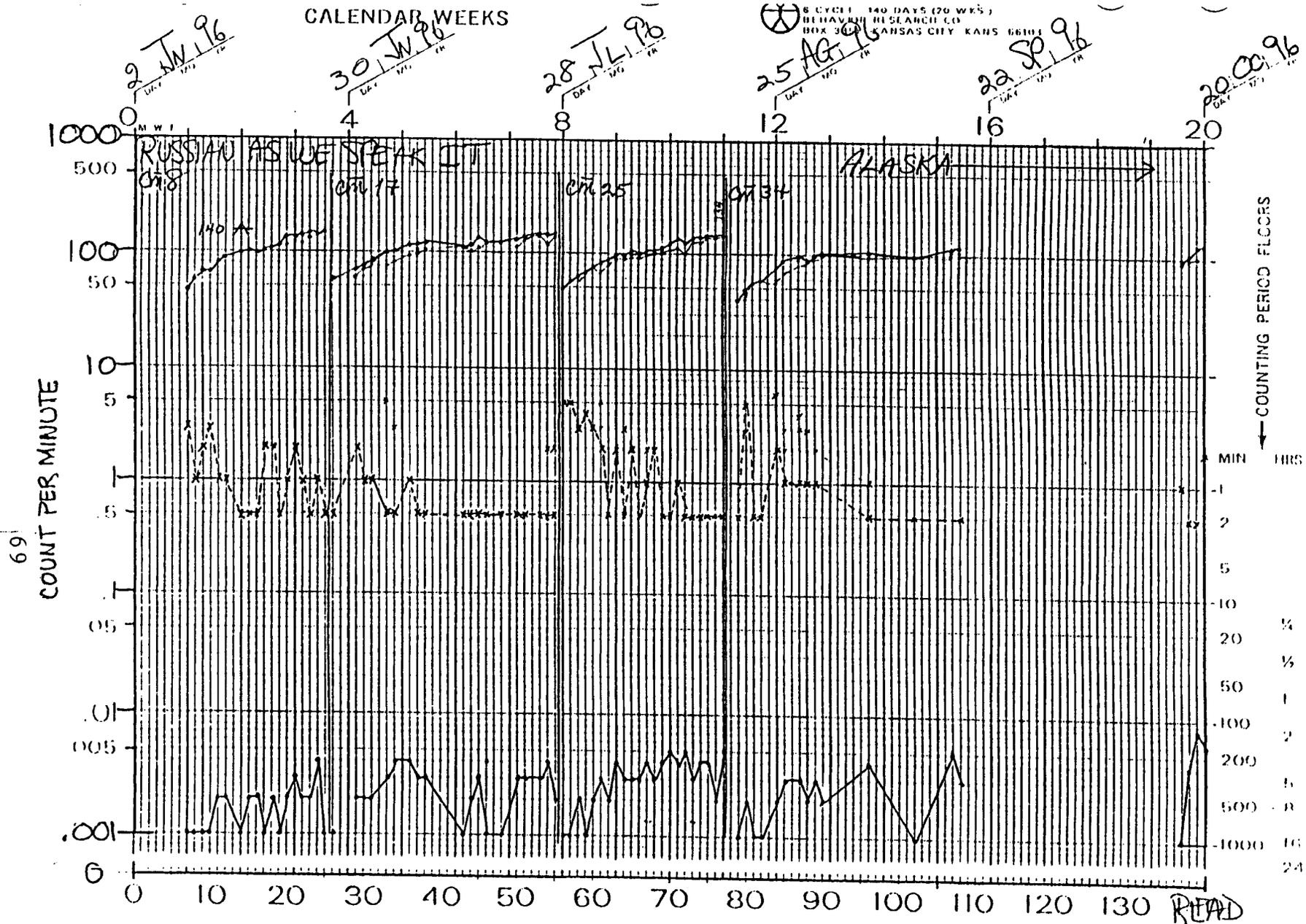
FIGURE 9

ABC
BEHAVIOR

PRONOUNCE
CORRECT

HEAR/SAY

CALENDAR WEEKS



SUCCESSIVE CALENDAR DAYS

FIGURE 10

SUPERVISOR ADVISER MANAGER

DEPOTIOR AGENCY

TIMER COUNTER

ABC
BEHAVIOR

CHARTER

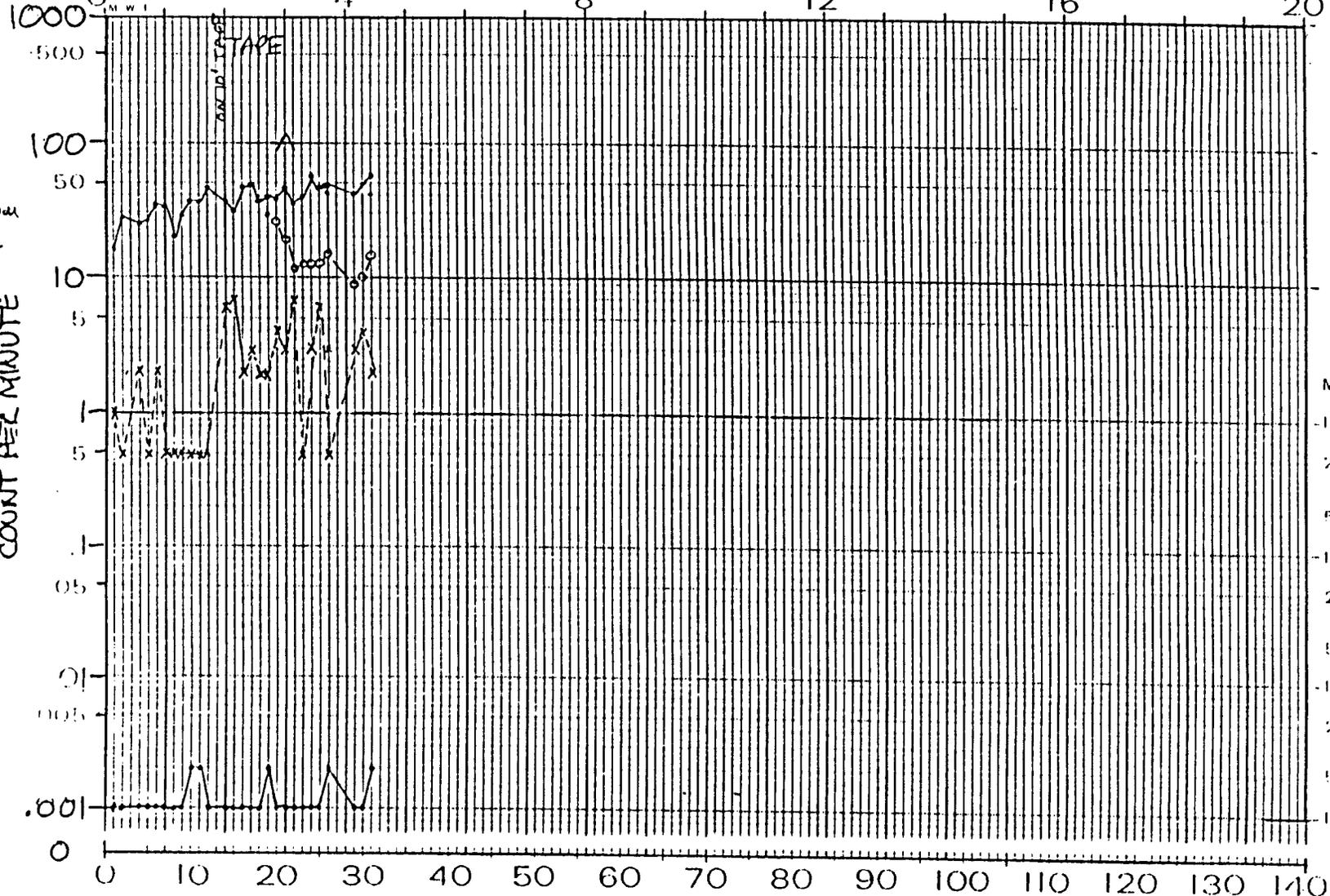
Errors: repeat
mispronounce
slip

AGF LABEL COUNTED

RUSSIAN

CALENDAR WEEKS

DAIRY BEHAVIOR CHART (DR. P. H. R.)
 6 CYCLE 140 DAYS (20 WKS.)
 BEHAVIOR RESEARCH CO.
 BOX 30 KANSAS CITY, KANS. 64101



iii
 61 с мухомор
 и тминыа
 m
 адвизамб
 m
 и адвизамб
 0.7

MIN HRS
 1
 2
 5
 10
 15
 20
 50
 100
 200
 500
 1000
 24

SUCCESSIVE CALENDAR DAYS

FIGURE 11

ABC
 BEHAVIOR

SUPERVISOR ADVISER MANAGER DEPOSITOR AGENCY TIMER COUNTER BEHAVIOR AGE LABEL COUNTED

- Have others used the same or very similar format for teaching oneself a foreign language?

Personal

Changes I plan to make:

- I shall do Pimsleur each day until I complete it, including review. When it is released, I shall buy the second level of Russian. (This program is also currently available in French, Spanish, German, Japanese.)

•One of Tsvetaeva's books is in four line stanzas. I plan to translate one stanza per morning. While the poetry will not, of course, correspond to the words and grammar timings I am doing, these elements will come up and be examples of applications. Further, it will fulfill one of the purposes of my learning Russian, and it will keep pressure on me to keep learning.

•To maintain doing my timings when away from home, I shall set a specific location and routine in advance. I also shall decrease the number of timings initially until the habit is established, and I can expand to the full set. Occasionally, I shall also vary the location at home.

References

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