

Ileana Oana Macari, *Româna pentru cei mai buni. Limbă și civilizație română pentru studenți străini, nivel C1*, Casa Editorială Demiurg, Iași, 2013, 200 p.Roxana Vieru   **Faculty of Letters, "Alexandru Ioan Cuza" University, Bd. Carol I 11, 700506 Iași, Romania*

In 1780, Samuil Micu and Gheorghe Șincai wrote their revolutionary piece of work that initiated a series of changes in the aspect of Romanian, contributing to the modernisation of the language, by creating the appropriate framework for a consensus on a literary norm. That first printed grammar was not only a very useful instrument for language standardization, but also a handbook and a conversation guide for those who wanted to learn Romanian. The book is not just a (simple) grammar; it starts with some phonetic rules concerning writing and pronunciation, then it goes on with two grammar chapters where the reader gets instructions on how to form verbal paradigms or the plural of nouns (among other things) and ends up with vocabulary (words clustered in semantic fields and most frequently used phrases in daily communication). We can admit that the primacy of Romanian language textbooks for foreigners might be attributed to *Elementa linguae dacoro-manae sive Valachicae*.

The 19th century also left us books designed to help foreigners acquire some knowledge on the Romanian language and culture (such as T. Blajevici's book, printed in 1855, or S. Barcianu-Popovici's, published in 1858).

Inherently, as time passed by, more and more books and articles were written on this subject, and nowadays people interested in learning Romanian as a foreign language can choose from nearly 200 grammars, phonetics coursebooks, phrasebooks, textbooks, workbooks and collections of texts designed as teaching-learning materials by (sometimes famous) Romanian linguists and academics such as Marius Sala, Mioara Avram, Boris Cazacu, Clara-Georgeta Chiosa, Matilda Caragiu-Marioțeanu, Valeria Guțu-Romalo, Maria Iliescu, Elena Platon, Daniela Kohn, Ana Vraciu, Iolanda Sterpu etc., but also by foreign authors like Charles

Tagliavini or James Augerot. Such materials have quite a large distribution due to their release by publishing houses from around the globe (Romanian, but also international, from Sofia, Budapest, Skopje, Wien, Heidelberg, Berlin, Strasbourg, Sorbonne, London, Oxford, Milan, Ohio, Seattle and so on). The spread of language course materials has been recently enabled by the newest technologies: we can read ebooks or listen to native speakers online or on CDs.

When starting to learn a new language, one is primarily interested in the phonetic and grammatical structure, the two components that form its "bone structure", followed by the lexicon. For a beginner, everything should be explained from the ABC down to the most minute detail; and there are coursebooks for that, with explanations in English, French, German, Spanish, Italian, Hungarian, Russian, and Macedonian. But for those who have got some expertise on the matter, the main focus could be on just a few aspects that they are not proficient in. For the latter kind of seekers, there are other types of studies, where they can discover about verbal paradigms (Elena Berea-Găgeanu, Ion Cionca, Alexandra Danciu, Karen Fischer, Liviu Țeghuiu, Michael Teutsch, Ioan Baciu, Lucia Uricaru, Mircea Goga, Doina Braeșter, Gheorghe Doca etc.), noun case distinctions (Gheorghe Doca), articles (Melania Florea, Ana Cristureanu, Dinuța Marin, Neonila Horneț), personal and reflexive pronouns in the dative and the accusative (Dan Petre, Ioan Lucian) and so on.

Since the reasons for studying any new language are diverse, the targeted vocabulary one can learn from these materials is sometimes general (for everyday use and for the public at large), while in other instances it is specialized (so that such materials come in handy for those who are interested in the

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medical, agronomic, engineering, economic, legal, social or/and sports fields).

Most of the Romanian language coursebooks for foreigners are dedicated to beginners, or take the learner through all the three levels, but some are precisely for intermediate and advanced students. Ileana Oana Macari was, for almost two decades, one of the instructors involved in the *Romanian Language and Civilization Summer Courses* where she taught the advanced level students. As a result of her expertise, she wrote a handbook targeted at C1 level students who want guidance in their learning process and – why not? – to translators and other professionals who need to have a keen sense of language and can improve their Romanian: *Româna pentru cei mai buni. Limbă și civilizație română pentru studenți străini, nivel C1*.

According to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, four types of competences should be evaluated in the oral and written communication: reading and listening comprehension, speaking and writing production. Ileana Oana Macari's book relates to all of them.

To practice the reading skills, students are invited to work on multiple choice exercises based on authentic texts. The texts are carefully selected, exhibiting the diachronic variety of Romanian, as well as the wide range of its styles. The excerpts are extracted from the works of relatively recent authors (such as Mircea Eliade and Mihail Sadoveanu) and of long-gone chroniclers (Miron Costin and Grigore Ureche), from well-known writers along with anonymous authors (anecdotes or sketches found on the internet, proverbs etc.). The fragments contain lots of idioms, puns, regionalisms, archaic words and phrases, namely the ones that can challenge and put a nonnative Romanian speaker to the test. Two exercises are worth noting for having a high level of difficulty; in them the author relies on an experiment, done on multiple subjects, which concludes that nobody reads a text letter by letter, but word by word (on the surface) and in order to have a text (more or less) easily understood by a proficient reader, its creator simply needs to write the words with all their components and the first and last letters in their right position (the others can be scrambled).

The handbook could have been accompanied by a CD (some other courses have that) with recorded dialogues between people coming from distinct

Romanian regions, so the learner could have been exposed to some or all the Romanian subdialects; also, practice could have been made on formal and informal language, so that they would become skilled in understanding all types of oral styles. A couple of exercises should have followed: answering some questions on the topic, filling in empty spaces with idioms handled in the conversation(s) they had heard and so on.

There are certain topics given as a starting point and students are requested to work in pairs and debate on the matter freely or led by guiding questions. The most interesting and challenging topics, for one of the expected outcomes of the book, are the ones that require complex comparisons between cultures, or literatures, or leading figures in science or art.

The ability to produce written language is built essentially on vocabulary and less on grammar. And so it should be, since an aspiring C1 student is already expected to know the “bone structure” of language.

The grammatical component often starts from structures included in the selected excerpts, then the theory is explained (in the inductive approach), and last come the exercises. The targeted theoretical aspects deal with direct and indirect speech, different values (and behaviors) of the verbs *a fi* (“to be”) and *a avea* (“to have”), to the irregular verb *a da* (“to give”), the subjunctive, past forms of the verb, the possessive article, the pronoun of politeness, the conditional and concessive clauses.

The vocabulary part focuses on lexical families (also to the derivative process), semantic fields, synonymy, common and figurative meanings, mono- and polysemantic words, regionalisms, pleonasm. Some of the most exciting activities concern folk etymology (when forms or concepts are overlapped and mixed), the use of homonyms (since they can sometimes lead to ambiguities) and of words that look almost the same (which can be mistaken for their pair by persons with a lesser linguistic exercise). Idioms, collocations and phrasal verbs (formed around *a fi* “to be”, *a pune* “to put”, *a face* “to do / to make”, *a avea* “to have”, *a da* “to give”, *a trage* “to pull”) and double meaning structures are also used in different circumstances as part of the activities (the appendices at the end of the book are very useful, as they contain these structures with explanations).

The author offers her students a large variety of exercises: fill in, matching, multiple choice, short

answer items. Long compositions are also requested and the most interesting and complex are the ones based on students' gathering information on the Romanian culture followed by the presentation of their findings.

Although language coursebooks tend to be dull and repetitive sometimes, Ileana Oana Macari's book fend off boredom through exercises built around

texts of cultural interest alternating with lots of fragments in which humor, irony, parody and witty play on words are involved.

Româna pentru cei mai buni. Limbă și civilizație română pentru studenți străini, nivel C1 written by Ileana Oana Macari is an extremely challenging and engaging material for those interested in learning Romanian.