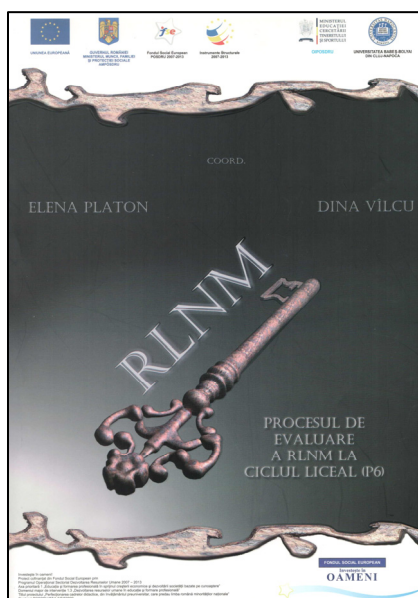


BOOK REVIEW

***RLNM – Procesul de evaluare a RLNM la ciclul liceal (P6) (Romanian as Second Language - The Evaluation Process of RSL During the High School);* Coord.: Elena Platon and Dina Vâlcu; Editura Casa Cărții de Știință, Cluj-Napoca, 2011. 434p.**

After writing five chapters from the novel *Accidentul* (*The Accident*), Mihail Sebastian lost his manuscript or it was stolen from him. This is the most frequently invoked metaphor-episode from the Romanian culture when it comes to the fragility of writing or rather of the scriptural support, maybe also as a result of the depressing confessions made by the journalist Sebastian about the episode. *Mutatis mutandis*, something similar happened with the volume we are dealing with: it is not about literature or about an actual loss, but about a reduced and incoherent reception of a revolutionary work for the present domain of Romanian language teaching, mainly owed to a weak diffusion of the book. As a rule, in the teaching process there is more attention given to teaching than to evaluating, which makes the book already interesting through the chosen topic. However, the related data, Romanian as a foreign language and the alignment of its evaluation with the *Common European*



Framework for Languages, turn the 434 pages into a stepping stone for the field. This is the reason why I considered that the volume still deserves to be promoted, even though more than five years have passed since its publishing.

Before justifying its inherent value, we consider that some information about the context of its creation is useful. The title references back to a national project, whose acronym – RSL (RLNM) – summarises its target: Romanian as a second language. Taking place during 2010-2013, this was a mammoth project, with over 1500 individuals being involved, who were trainers and trained professors. The premise was built on the idea that tens of thousands of students who belong to national minorities are annually learning and are being evaluated in Romanian according to the same standards and textbooks as native speakers, which leads to an inequitable imbalance. The team from the *Depart-*

ment of Romanian language, culture and civilization from the Faculty of Letters from Babeş-Bolyai University have proposed, based on their experience in teaching/evaluating Romanian to foreign students, a rethinking of the field, according to a new paradigm that combine the accessible with the useful. Each teaching cycle – primary school, middle school and high school – was represented by a training programme for teaching and evaluating. As result, the volume in question is the last one of the series (P6) and represents the course material for evaluating the RSL in high school.

The absolute novelty consists in approaching an important pre-university subject from positions that are different from the ones that have been used so far. It is known that, in high school, Romanian language and literature is in fact almost exclusively literature. Yet, for both non-native and native speakers possessing a high language level should prevail baring in mind the formed competences that will be useful throughout one's life. In the P6 volume, the evaluation of literature does not receive more space than the evaluation of the other competences: receiving an oral message, receiving a written message, producing an oral message, producing a written message. Moreover, the same scale is maintained in the model-test proposal for 12th grade, in the presentation of the types of exercises and in the exemplification of writing items.

The structure of the volume is a type of *mise-en-abîme* of the object of interest itself, of the textbooks for Romanian language and literature, not of how they are at present but of how the authors of the project wish them to be. The three units reflect in a fractal manner not only

the contents that are to be evaluated but especially the interactive drawing and the active implication of the student in what is presented to him/her. Each subunit has numerous exercises, topics for reflection and concentrated revisions of the 'retain' type. Furthermore, the sections of the units are preceded by operational objectives that can be found, in an individualised form, in the 'ideas to take home' at the end. Last but not least, the tests at the end of the sections represent another chance for students to remember, to systematize and affix the freshly covered contents. From the point of view of the information that is presented in the three units, the exhaustive theory about the evaluation of Romanian as a second language is happily complemented by the practical part, namely by the analysis and construction of the evaluation activities.

The first unit, as we have mentioned, brings, from a starting point, a detailed theoretical picture of the methods, the types of evaluation and of the impact methods in RSL. Then, each communicative competence, namely the competence of receiving a literary text / of producing the text of literary analysis, is presented through the same understanding grid: the models and the approaches from the present bibliography, the descriptors corresponding to the CEFL – which, according to the authors, during high school correspond to the C1-C2 levels – the cognitive processes involved in receiving or producing, according to the targeted age, types of texts / messages that are adequate to the evaluation of the given competence, the difference between the first and the second language, the variables that affect the evaluation. Almost without exceptions, there are clarifying examples given,

some negative, which are consistently represented in the educational environment, some innovative by filling in gaps. This is, for instance, the case of the exercises for oral comprehension, which do not exist in the accredited textbooks or tests, but which are useful and necessary in learning Romanian by non-natives. The second unit offers a large space to the process of producing texts, with all its stages, from establishing the purpose, going through the methodology of writing items and ending with the testing *per se*, the dissemination and the (self) evaluation of the tests. The exhaustive list of exercises from here is useful not only as a bank of ideas, but also as a model of diversity in evaluating the same contents. In addition, in the second unit, there is a series of analyses that are applied and argued on the types of evaluation activities from the textbooks that most often encountered during high school, in classrooms of both native and non-native speakers. At the end of the critical analysis there is a test proposal that appears and that could verify, at the end of the 12th grade, all of the five competences. The third unit, which is shorter, deals with the evaluation criteria for oral and written production, where problems regarding subjectivity and disagreement between evaluators can arise. The presentation of the models of grids and scales underlines the idea that external criteria of evaluation are not compulsory, they can be individualised as long as they verify their functionality. However, it is clear that one cannot accept the lack of a standardised grid that offers the evaluator sufficient objectivity and strong arguments in defending a grade. The third unit, as well as the volume, concludes with a plea for the appli-

cation of the benchmarking process, which is useful in evaluating groups, whether we are talking about a classroom or an entire community of non-native speakers of Romanian.

It is easy to observe the model of deconstruction-deconstruction adopted by the authors in creating the units. There is an active dynamic between the analysis of what the textbooks offer, namely the standardised national tests, and the manner in which the evaluation based on competences, of the CEFR type, would be directly and immediately adapted to the needs of non-native students who are learning Romanian language and literature in high school. Since the percentage of functional illiteracy is quite high in Romania, and not only with non-native speakers, since the results from international tests such as PISA and PIRLS are poor, the alternative proposed by the authors of RSL P6 are worth taking into account. Even though the literary contents can be maintained, the comprehension exercises could be constructed differently, with visual schemes, with diagrams or circuits of the cause-effect-cause type, which will not turn entire generations into literary critics but will certainly allow a more correct closeness to the received or produced message.

Beside the need to align with the European teaching-evaluating standards, the team of the project has the legitimacy to propose to the Ministry of Education the change in approach in the field through the legitimacy that is given by their full-fledged member status within ALTE (Association of Language Testers in Europe), probably the most important body from the continent in the field of language testing. In the same train of thought, although in the above descrip-

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tion of the structure of the book there is an evident inclination toward the practical examples of the authors, the theoretical construct on which they build their ideas is one accurately created, by relating to the most current and credible theoretical sources that exist presently in the field of language testing. Names such as Buck, Bachman, Palmer, Hughes, Weir are invoked in each section of the volume.

At the end, we reaffirm what we stated in the first lines: such a book, which is rich in information, models and ideas that can change mentalities, de-

serves a better publishing fate. Maybe the ten writers will decide to republish the book, even if not in graphic conditions that are as impressive, but with a better diffusion. The evaluation methods proposed on competences not only allow for an increased degree of objectivity, but are also closer to the present European language policies, while for the students that these are applied to, it represent a more authentic and present-day contact with one's mother tongue or second language.

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