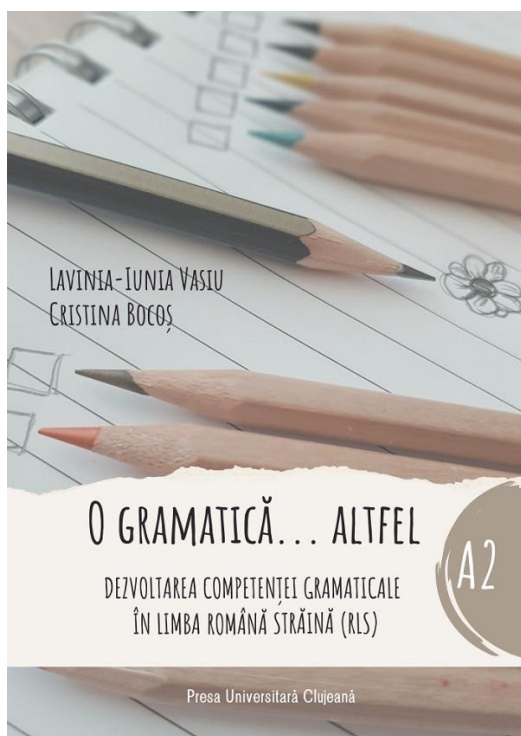


BOOKS

Lavinia-Iunia VasIU, Cristina Bocoș, *O gramatică... altfel. Dezvoltarea competenței gramaticale în limba română ca limbă străină (RLS). Nivelul A2*, Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2023, 240 p.



The publication of Lavinia VasIU and Cristina Bocoș is an original book in the field of Romanian as a foreign language (RFL) / Romanian as a second language (RSL): on one hand, because, as the title says, it is *Grammar... in a new way*, which doesn't include grammar lessons with theoretical descriptions of grammar content, alongside the classic structural exercises. Instead, it involves *acquiring grammar skills* through vocabulary and grammar exercises, through written reception activities, through oral and written interaction, through intercultural and mediation activities. On the other hand, because at the basis of developing all exercises and activities lies on authentic style and the motivation of the students.

The book tackles one of the most difficult aspects of grammar in Romanian language (both for non-native speakers in their learning process, as well as for teachers of RFL / RSL in their teaching process), such as the

subjunctive mood, the personal pronouns in the accusative case, the nouns and the adjectives in the genitive case etc., specific to language level A2.

As the authors state in the *Introduction*, the book is especially meant for “people who study Romanian as a foreign language in an institution (universities, schools [...]), under the guidance of teachers, however it can prove itself useful to self-learners” (p. 17). Therefore, it can be used by foreign college students that are learning RFL, as well as by highschool students that are learning RSL.



At the same time, the study can be used successfully by teachers of RFL / RSL, especially during teaching and explaining grammar concepts, due to schemes and tables of accessible and friendly nature, during exercise and retention, due to the exercises and communicative activities suggested, during actualization / summary steps, during several activities of learning through play etc. as well as, in our opinion, during the design of exercises and knowledge testing activities.

Also, we suggest that the current book could be useful to speakers of Romanian as inherited language, meaning people who belong to diaspora, who learned and use Romanian language at home, with their families, but they didn't study it or studied it very little within an institutional framework. For these people who wish to develop their communication skills in Romanian or those who wish to get a certificate of competency in Romanian language, studying *Grammar...in a new way* would be, we believe, a successful encounter with their own inherited (Romanian) language.

Although the study is meant for non-native Romanian speakers, we believe that it could also be used by native speakers, due to its functional-communicative character and its interaction, mediation and intercultural activities that follow each grammar content explained.

The book opens with a table of contents, in which each grammar content is associated with a lexical sphere, with certain communicative functions and different intercultural aspects. For instance, the subjunctive mood includes, from a grammar point of view, "the subjunctive mood, present tense, particularly the IIIrd person singular and plural; verb 1 + the subjunctive mood, impersonal verbal expressions with "to be" verb + the subjunctive mood; "to have" verb + noun + the subjunctive mood, etc. It is associated with several lexical spheres, such as "holidays; professions; wishes; hobbies and leisure activities; problems and solutions" etc. Its use in context involves activating several communicative functions, such as "expressing interdiction / permission; expressing preference; talking about qualities and skills; making a recommendation/suggestion" etc. Also, it is associated with different intercultural aspects, such as: "specific wishes for certain occasions (birthdays, New Year etc.); interdictions / unwritten rules in different societies / cultures; cultural shocks; traditional food; old folk remedies" (p. 9).

The book is comprised of six chapters, each meant for a specific grammar content for A2 level, presented in a progressive teaching-learning order (from simple to complex): Compound perfect, Subjunctive mood, Comparison, Ordinal number, Genitive mood, Accusative mood.

Each chapter begins with a table of contents and is comprised of two parts (associated, we believe, to the stages of a lesson/ unit for language skill development): *Discovering* and *Practicing*.

In the first part, *Discovering*, the grammar contents are explained progressively, through some schemes and logical tables that are accessible, as comprehensive as they can be at this level and very friendly. The authors suggest the term "micro-metalanguage" for these simplified explanations of grammar structure, without using abstract definitions. Thus, the student is not overwhelmed by a lot of theoretical information, but encouraged to observe and understand the use of grammar content. Furthermore, the mistakes in the structures presented in terms of oral and written expression are marked and corrected,

the correct phrasing and punctuation are highlighted and there are some *useful expressions* suggested with the respective grammar structures. The absolute novelty consists of inserting in this section some cultural anecdotes – beliefs and old folk sayings, songs for special occasions, traditional food, slang etc. – in which the grammar structures explained in the book are used. An example of a humorous cultural anecdote, we would assert, is the following: “*Some romanians believe that, if you leave the door and the window open, you can get sick, because «you catch a drift»: My head hurts. I think I caught a drift.*” (p. 75). (Author’s note: In Romanian language, the literal translation of this saying is: “The drift catches you”).

At the same time, the authors offer suggestions of songs, vlogs, reading material in which the grammar content explained is used and offer the students links and QR codes which, once accessed / scanned with the mobile phone, refer to the (online) material recommended. Thus, beside the fact that the students observe the functionality of grammar structures in contexts as authentic as possible, they become motivated to learn how to use them in their own interactions, because they prove themselves useful (also) outside class. Furthermore, they are presented with the opportunity to use technology for educational purposes and, through its use, the grammar content is brought closer to their reality.

The second part of each chapter, *Practicing*, presents, we believe, the progressive stages of practice from a lesson / unit for language skill development. The first stage is represented by structural exercises which, although today might seem obsolete and in disagreement with the functional-communicative model, are meant to set the grammar content, through repetition, in the short term memory of the student. These types of exercises are more focused on practicing the grammar form and less focused on the semantic content. It is precisely at this point that the current book sets itself apart through originality, because the authors manage to design structural exercises *in a new way*, not boring at all; on the contrary, appealing, exercises that spark the interest and enthusiasm of students to become actively involved in solving the tasks. Also, some of them are meant for team work, competition and stimulating creativity. In other words, these tasks stimulate students to think inside the language, without appealing to translation method (from the mother tongue or from a contact language in Romanian language and the other way around).

The playful aspect of the tasks creates an emotional space fruitful for learning, stimulates memory, attracts and maintains the interest of students and creates a positive attitude towards learned content (in this case, RFL / RSL).

The most important stage, from our point of view, as well as the most original, which confirms the purpose of this book, namely the development of grammar skills (not just memorizing some grammar and content form), is the introduction of several written reception activities, followed by production, oral and written interaction (starting from a written message or not) and mediation. The texts chosen for communicative activities are authentic, adapted to A2 Level, suitable from a subject, lexical and functional point of view and they also have equally authentic images. Because the “perception of students relative to the relevance of the task for their individual needs remains the most important factor in their motivation”, the authors chose to integrate explanations and exercises in “communicative situations as close as possible to real communication settings

in which the student would partake outside of class”, but also to select the most frequent contexts of using grammar content (p.15). Through these dynamic communicative activities, the student becomes the main actor in the process of learning the language, instead of a passive spectator (a common role he finds himself in when it is asked of him to simply solve the classical structural exercises to fill in the gaps, for instance).

Another very relevant aspect is the fact that, even within the exercises, the authors respect the principle of grammar progression and the order of exercises and activities from simple to complex.

We believe that, in the exercises part, the most important element is the integration of grammar skills into the other components that form general communication skills, according to the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFR). Thus, the authors consider, beside the language skills (grammar, orthography etc.), the sociolinguistic skills (through expressing politeness, through examples of spoken language), the pragmatic skills (related to function, through exercising some communicative functions such as asking for / offering information / recommendations / help, expressing preference/dislikes, making an invitation etc. and related to discourse, through some discourse markers), competencies and general knowledge (through activities such as *Did you know...?*, through general knowledge quizzes), intercultural competency (through cultural anecdotes), strategies and communicative activities.

The book comprises three appendixes as well. The first one relays a descriptive scheme from CEFR, which shows the place of grammar skill between all other skills and underlines the importance of acknowledging and connecting all aspects of general communication skills, as follows: general knowledge and skills (savoir, savoir-faire, savoir-etre, savoir-apprendre), linguistic communication knowledge and skills (linguistic: lexical, grammar, semantics, phonology, orthography, orthoepy; sociolinguistic and pragmatic: discourse, functional) and communication strategies (reception, writing, interaction and mediation) (p. 237).

The second appendix shows two scales from CEFR related to grammar skills at A2 level: one scale for the general linguistic range and one for grammar accuracy. These scales are extremely important in teaching, as well as evaluation (and self-evaluation), because it shows us what a non-native speaker can do in a communication setting if they have A2 level knowledge and grammar skills. For instance, “uses a couple of simple structures, but still makes basic, systematic mistakes, such as: mixing tenses, not using the verb or adjective agreement” (p. 238).

The third appendix presents an excerpt from *Minimal description of Romanian language*, which focuses on the grammar content that should be taught, learned, evaluated at A2 level.

The red thread of this volume is represented, as the authors say, by “the relational approach of grammar skill, not in isolation, as a separate concept from all the other components of general communication skill, but in close connection to all other skills, strategies and activities”, by “the increased attention towards the elements that could contribute to boosting the motivation of students” (p. 13) and, we would add, by the grammar progression.

BOOKS

A particularly useful instrument included in this book, especially for teachers of RFL / RSL, is the *Bibliography*, which includes framework-documents, studies and foreign language teaching books and books for teaching Romanian as a foreign language, handbooks and guidelines, both from Romania, as well as from foreign sources.

Finally, we cannot overlook the design of this book, which is very modern, very accessible and user-friendly (due to the careful structure of information through colors, images, schemes, drawings).

The need for this type of work in the field of RFL / RSL is indisputable, because it brings forward a new vision on developing grammar skills, attuned to the European documents and practices on teaching-learning a foreign/non-native language, namely the interdependence between grammar skills and other aspects of general communication skills and it underlines the motivation of the students and their individual needs, which are the factors that contribute most to the learning process.

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