

**Andreja Markovič, Danuša Škapin, Katarina Rigler Šilc, Špela Kajič Kmetič.** *Slovenska beseda v živo: učbenik za začetni tečaj slovenščine kot drugega/tujega jezika.* Third edition. Ljubljana: Center za slovenščino kot drugi/tuji jezik pri Oddelku za slovenistiko Filozofske fakultete, 2002 [3<sup>rd</sup> edition]. 211 pp., €29.53 [= \$38.46] (paper). ISBN: 961-6200-80-1.

**Andreja Markovič, Vesna Halužan, Mateja Pezdirc Bartol, Danuša Škapin, Gita Vuga.** *S slovenščino nimam težav: učbenik za kratke tečaje slovenščine: nadaljevalna stopnja.* Second edition. Ljubljana: Center za slovenščino kot drugi/tuji jezik pri Oddelku za slovenistiko Filozofske fakultete, 2003 [2<sup>nd</sup> edition]. 77 pp. + 36 pp. worksheets, €23.75 [= \$30.93] (paper). ISBN: 961-237-012-5.

**Nataša Pirih Svetina, Andreja Ponikvar.** *A, B, C ... 1, 2, 3, gremo ... Učbenik za začetnike na kratkih tečajih slovenščine kot drugega/tujega jezika.* Ljubljana: Center za slovenščino kot drugi/tuji jezik pri Oddelku za slovenistiko Filozofske fakultete, 2003. 77 pp. + CD, €33.38 [= \$43.48] (paper). ISBN: 961-237-012-5.

**Andreja Markovič, Danuša Škapin, Mihaela Knez, Nina Šoba.** *Slovenska beseda v živo 2. Učbenik za nadaljevalni tečaj slovenščine kot drugega/tujega jezika.* Ljubljana: Center za slovenščino kot drugi/tuji jezik pri Oddelku za slovenistiko Filozofske fakultete, 2004. 151 pp. + CD, €31.46 [= \$40.98] (paper). ISBN: 961-237-095-8.

Learning as well as teaching Slovene as a second language has become much easier and more interesting in the last decade, in large part thanks to a wealth of new teaching materials published by the Center for Slovene as a Second/Foreign Language at the Faculty of Arts in Ljubljana.<sup>1</sup> The textbooks chosen for this review are representative of the Center's publications and are related by their concept, execution, and, at least in part, by their authors. One immediately notices their creative titles, which, as it turns out, are indicative of both what lies between the covers as well as the authors' approach to learning and teaching language. *Slovenska beseda v živo* (henceforth: *Slovenska beseda*, 'Slovene in Real Life') suggests that the user will learn the living language as it is spoken here and now and used in real everyday situations. *S slovenščino nimam težav* (henceforth: *S slovenščino*, 'Slovene is no Problem for Me') arms the learner with a fresh, motivating outlook on learning a language that is traditionally viewed as

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<sup>1</sup> In addition to textbooks for various levels of instruction and courses of different length, from 1997 to 2001 the Center annually published a volume of papers titled *Skripta* dealing with various theoretical and practical aspects of teaching Slovene as a second language.

difficult (on top of cases, it has the dreaded dual!). A similarly energetic, encouraging attitude is implied in the title *A, B, C . . . 1, 2, 3, gremo . . .* (henceforth: *A, B, C . . .* ‘*A, B, C . . . 1, 2, 3, Let’s Go . . .*’).<sup>2</sup> These works should be much more attractive and exciting to learners than the uninspiring titles of textbooks from the past, which almost inevitably included the words *learn*, *speak*, or *foreigner*.

The four textbooks are similar, although not identical in their physical size and shape, graphic design, and arrangement of content. With the exception of *A, B, C . . .*, which includes an English translation of the introduction and instructions for the exercises, they are entirely monolingual. Consequently, they are all intended for adult learners (with no particular language background in mind) in a classroom environment, with *A, B, C . . .* suggesting optional use for self-study. They each fill their own niche: *Slovenska beseda* is intended for long (200+ hours) and *A, B, C . . .* for short (40–80 hours) beginning courses; *Slovenska beseda 2* is intended for long and *S slovenščino* for short intermediate courses. In at least one edition they all include audio material on a CD.<sup>3</sup> The visual material (cartoons, illustrations, icons, maps, and photographs) used in the textbooks is not only pleasing to the eye, because it livens them up, but it is an important addition to the textual part. This provides necessary support for a beginning learner, and the photographs also add to the authenticity of the material and are of particular value to learners using the textbooks in an environment outside Slovenia.

The textbooks employ a communicative approach and are proficiency-oriented; that is, they aim to develop learners’ basic skills and, at the intermediate level, more advanced communicative skills in speaking, writing, listening, and reading as well as their cultural knowledge. Their emphasis is on authentic texts and activities that will help the learner acquire communicative abilities. All four textbooks are very generous in providing a sufficient amount of good input using model texts. The beginning-level textbooks include several authentic-sounding short dialogues in each unit related to the chosen topic (e.g., short conversations for several situations connected with a birthday celebration, such as making

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<sup>2</sup> The most recently published textbook—not in the scope of this review—Ina Ferbežar’s and Nataša Domadenik’s *Jezikovod: učbenik za izpopolnjevalce na tečajih slovenščine kot drugega/tujega jezika* (Ljubljana: Center za slovenščino kot drugi/tuji jezik pri Oddelku za slovenistiko Filozofske fakultete, 2005), continues the trend of creative textbook titles, i.e., its title employs a made-up word, following the derivational model of *vodovod*.

<sup>3</sup> Except for *Slovenska beseda 2*, all the textbooks have appeared in several editions or printings; *A, B, C . . .* had a revised edition in 2006, accompanied by a teacher’s handbook (*A, B, C — 1, 2, 3, gremo. Priročnik za učitelje k drugi, prenovljeni izdaji*, 71 pp.).

a cake, choosing a present, and going to a birthday party) and a considerable amount of authentic reading material. Particularly for learners studying Slovene outside Slovenia, it is a special bonus that the textbooks reproduce these texts in an authentic format – for example, on pictures of objects that they would appear on in reality, such as signs, forms, postcards, programs, and so on. As the longer beginning course, *Slovenska beseda* also has more room to introduce the learner to longer texts, even literary ones. Although the authors found several level-appropriate literary texts, which is quite difficult to do for this level, at least in one instance the chosen text seems to exceed the abilities of a beginning learner, particularly because it appears mid-way through the course (the description of a person in Kosmač's *Pomladni dan*, p. 74).

The intermediate-level textbooks move away from the dialogue format in simulated authentic texts towards texts (albeit adapted) from authentic sources, maintaining a good balance between reading and listening. The texts are uniformly interesting, witty, culturally relevant, and informative. They are not only excellent models of discourse on the topics the learner should be able to handle at this level, but also a truly rich source of information about contemporary life in Slovenia, Slovenes, their values and tastes, and to some extent Slovene geography, history, and literature – that is to say, they impart crucial knowledge about Slovene culture (and Culture). In writing, the emphasis is on developing writing skills for everyday personal and official communication, such as applications, personal bios, complaints, invitations, or agendas. The textbooks include a wealth of creative activities along with the texts, practicing not only pertinent vocabulary and structures, but also level-appropriate discourse forms, which means moving from short statements, descriptions, questions, and replies to commentary, argumentation, explanation, expression of opinion, or advice-giving.

The textbooks present and organize the vocabulary and grammar in somewhat different manners. *Slovenska beseda* is the only one with an index at the end that includes the vocabulary from the simulated dialogues and exercises, although not from the reading materials. All lexical items are accented and contain grammatical information. The other three textbooks have lists of topical vocabulary with each unit. At the intermediate level, these lists are open-ended because the student is encouraged to keep adding to them. In addition, these three textbooks include lists of useful phrases or “communicative patterns” for common communicative situations/needs (e.g., invitation, advice, and (dis)satisfaction). At the intermediate level, a student is systematically introduced to Slovene proverbs and set phrases, so that *Slovenska beseda 2* includes “words in disguise” with every unit.

Grammar paradigms are clearly presented in charts with no or minimal explanation. These attempt to teach through example. This is

appropriate, considering learners' very limited abilities to understand linguistic explanations in Slovene; if learners acquire some limited grammar terminology, they will be able to navigate the charts. Perhaps counter-intuitively for the authors, the Slovene custom of marking case forms with numbers instead of names (in all textbooks except *A, B, C . . .*, which uses both) can confuse students because this is not customary in many grammar traditions. Grammar is appropriately treated as a building block and a means to language proficiency. In all but one textbook (*Slovenska beseda*), the ample vocabulary and grammar practice is separate from communicative activities – that is, it is contained in a separate workbook (*Slovenska beseda 2*),<sup>4</sup> on separate worksheets (*S slovenščino*), or in a separate part of the book, as in *A, B, C . . .*, where it follows the communicative part. An overview of basic grammar paradigms at the end of each book except *Slovenska beseda 2* is very helpful for quick reference or review. At no level is the material accented or do the textbooks treat Slovene phonology and stress explicitly, which is offset by the fact that *Slovenska beseda* comes with recordings of all dialogues. *A, B, C . . .* also includes recordings of vocabulary lists, phrases, and even communicative practice that does not require listening. Learners will have to use these recordings in their practice judiciously; for example, on page 52, where learners are supposed to write down the times pictured on the clocks, they will use the recordings to check their answers rather than to solve the assignment, or to practice pronunciation of the answers. The intermediate-level textbooks include recordings of texts for listening activities and their transcription at the end of the book. The recordings are clear and for the most part the speakers demonstrate good standard pronunciation and natural intonation.

Although the progression of content and grammar topics generally follows the principle that simpler concepts are introduced before more complex ones, there is occasionally a questionable arrangement of grammar topics. For example, is it pedagogically sound to introduce the future and past tense in the same lesson (*A, B, C . . .*, lesson 4), or is it necessary to cover reported speech in a short beginning course? The beginning courses introduce elements of grammar as the communicative topics demand, rather than covering entire or partial paradigms all at once. This will be more effective for learners without a linguistic background, who often suffer from “grammar overload” if presented with entire paradigms all at once. Learners that are more linguistically inclined or are used to acquiring morphology in patterns rather than piecemeal can always jump ahead to the grammar overviews at the end. There is a seamless continuity between the two *Slovenska beseda* textbooks, with the second book covering elements of

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<sup>4</sup> *Slovenska beseda v živo 2. Delovni zvezek*. (Ljubljana: Center za slovenščino kot drugi/tuji jezik pri Oddelku za slovenistiko Filozofske fakultete, 2004, 111 pp.).

basic grammar not introduced in the beginning book before proceeding to more complex topics. *S slovenščino* does not directly continue the beginning textbooks, but it is possible to use following either of the two, or some other course of study. Instead of adding the “missing parts” of the paradigms, it recaps the basic paradigms (e.g., for case forms and tenses), while also introducing more complex concepts, albeit more selectively than *Slovenska beseda 2*.

The intermediate-level textbooks in particular are open to teacher’s creativity: the abundance and diversity of materials allow selection, and the structure of the textbooks makes provisions for addition or deletion, depending on the goals, needs, background, and capabilities of students. Although the textbooks were developed primarily from experience and for use in Slovenia, with some creativity they can also be very effective in a Slovene classroom abroad. Their material delights and excites students, just as their titles intrigue them at first, and supports teachers’ efforts to simulate the natural language environment to the greatest extent possible. Compared to the materials that immediately preceded them,<sup>5</sup> these textbooks show a significant step forward in the development of modern Slovene language materials. Compared to what was previously available, they herald a sea change and usher in a new era in Slovene language learning.

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<sup>5</sup> Similar underlying principles (e.g., communicativeness, proficiency orientation, a basis in authentic material) can be observed in certain textbooks from the 1990s; cf. the intermediate-level textbook by Andreja Markovič, *Učimo se slovenščino II* (Ljubljana: Celoletna šola slovenskega jezika na Filozofski fakulteti, 1995) and the advanced-level textbook by Mojca Schlamberger Brezar, *Učimo se slovenščino III* (Ljubljana: Celoletna šola slovenskega jezika na Filozofski fakulteti, 1994).