

Sherwood, Peter. Rounds, Carol H. and Erika Sólyom, *Colloquial Hungarian. The Complete Course for Beginners*. London and New York: Routledge. 2011. xvii+370 pp. AHEA: E-journal of the American Hungarian Educators Association, Volume 5 (2012): <http://ahea.net/e-journal/volume-5-2012>

Rounds, Carol H. and Erika Sólyom, *Colloquial Hungarian. The Complete Course for Beginners*. London and New York: Routledge. 2011. xvii+370 pp. CDs/MP3s available.

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While a number of multi-volume courses for learning Hungarian are available from Hungarian sources, written mainly by Hungarians for use in the Hungarian environment, there are very few single-volume, all-purpose courses that can be easily picked up from the average bookshop in the UK or the USA. And even fewer that can be wholeheartedly recommended. This is the second -- somewhat revised, updated and expanded (by 53 pages) -- edition of the volume by these authors under this title published in 2002 (see my notice in *Slavonic and East European Review* 82, 2; 2004: 315-316). On the verso of the title page the publishers make the claim that the first edition of this work was published in 1988, but that refers to a completely different and quite out-of-date volume, written by Jerry Payne, which browsers in used book stores and on the net would be well advised to avoid.

I am very glad to be able to say at once that I still think, as I did in 2004, that this (= CH2) is the best current beginner package for those wishing to learn Hungarian and starting out from English; indeed, the new edition contains many improvements, which I shall highlight here, even if I still have some, generally minor, criticisms. I still think it a tremendous feat to pack in nearly all the complexities of (especially) Hungarian morphology into a single work in a relatively easily digestible form.

My comments are organized under the following headings: general points, grammar, vocabulary, pragmatics/culture, practice materials, minor points, and final thoughts. All comparisons are with the 2002 edition (= CH1) or points made about CH1 in my notice of it, cited above. Numbers refer to page numbers in this volume, CH2.

The 15 sections are now explicitly labeled 'units' and on the surface it looks as if only two have new titles, the first and second, which now focus on 'Families' and 'The university and the students', rather than 'Acquaintances' and 'The flight'; also, the order of units 7 and 8 has been reversed. However, a number of dialogues have been replaced, notably one with desultory references to a garage, while three are now concerned with the purchase of high-tech equipment, especially computers and, as well as some minor but badly-needed repairs in CH1's early dialogues, there are also useful short new exchanges and texts about, for example, families and the inside of apartments (with useful, if rather bleached-out, black-and-white photographs). The prices of goods have been adjusted for inflation and the presentation of the various parts of each unit has been made clearer. The excellent proportions of CH1's units have been retained, with a judicious balance between dialogue/text, vocabulary, 'language points', exercises, and the splendidly wide and interesting range of CH1's 'cultural notes' (there is a topic index on the final, unnumbered page of the book, which includes with delightful nonchalance "love, 249", an important thread running through the course). It is a pity, however, that neither the authors nor the publisher address the difference between British and US English usage, no doubt to ensure maximum sales in both these major markets. Spellings, for instance, are British, but the vocabulary is generally US: *doctor's office, movie, used book store* -- but not

always: a plane's *mosdó* is translated as *WC* on 27 but as *rest room* on the very next page. (Actually, in my experience it is generally *toilet*, even on US planes). This makes for a jerky and sometimes distracting ride, not really desirable, and not a little ironic, in a language textbook.

The careful phasing-in of the grammar remains an outstanding feature. The basic presentation of the grammar is in some areas clearer than in CH1, especially in the all-important early units. Examples include a new section on consonantal voice assimilation, the source of (especially heritage) learners' most common spelling problems, and a new chart, on 55-56, detailing all the non-verbal sentence permutations up to that point will also be very helpful, though it may look a little intimidating. It is very sensible to bring forward 'nominal possession' to unit 8, even if (or perhaps: precisely because) it is one of the most difficult points of Hungarian grammar. My reservations on some grammatical points remain, notably the still-inadequate presentation of vowel harmony and the still-flawed discussion of co-verbs ("verbal prefixes"), as well as what I regard as the misleading characterization of, particularly, the adessive (*-nál/-nél*) case as being to do with 'nearness' (124-125), rather than the *point* where an entity is located; its possible translations into English are an important and related, but different, matter. This is an important pedagogical issue: in the attempt to avoid jargon, something that is on the whole to be welcomed in a general textbook of this kind, such issues -- of what the cases, for example, actually mean -- are skated over in favor of their 'translations' into English. Elsewhere, too, some sloppiness in formulation sometimes creeps in: sentences like 'Although this use of the definite article corresponds to nothing in English, it cannot be left out of Hungarian' (55), or the statement that items like *ide/itt/innen* are 'irregular in the case system' (126) may not matter when there is a teacher present to clarify, but certainly need to be tightened up in print, especially as many users will be on their own. I will conclude this section by mentioning a couple of smaller points from the earliest units which may confuse attentive beginners. They will soon find that collocability with animates is not enough to distinguish between the two Hungarian words for 'old', as claimed on 23 and 24: much better to say that *régi* means 'not new' and *öreg* 'not young', as e.g. *régi barát* 'old friend = friend of long standing', for instance, is fine and frequent. And the treatment of disjunctive *pedig* is inadequate. It has two distinguishable uses in Hungarian: (1) in *second position* in the clause forming a single topic and intonational unit with the preceding word (as already on 8: *Az ott fűzet, ez pedig könyv*) in the sense 'while by contrast (with what precedes)', and (2) on its own as topic at the *head* of the clause (as on 41: *Nagyon jól beszél magyarul, pedig a magyar nyelv nagyon nehéz*), when it means something like 'yet' or 'despite (the fact that)', referring to what follows. Nor does its gloss 'but, though, and' (343, in the glossary) help very much. Such comments may seem perfectionist but (a) it is vital to get everything right in the early units, as this is when students tend to give up, and (b) ignoring differences in the simplest kinds of compound sentence does not provide a solid foundation for Hungarian syntax. In spite of the language's fearsome morphological reputation, the learner will soon find that this part of the grammar is mostly quite regular and what is more difficult about learning Hungarian, from the very start, is indeed its non-Indo-European sentence structure.

But what is also difficult about learning Hungarian is much of its non-Indo-European vocabulary. In this respect CH2 is similar to CH1, providing all the beginner

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needs -- and more (e.g. *mormota* 'marmot' in an amusing idiom in the final unit). The glossaries, which contain only the cumulated word-lists (i.e. there is much more vocabulary in the book overall), have been made much more useful by now keying the words to their first occurrence in the units and the addition of some grammatical information. However, this last has not been consistently done: in spite of the promise on 14, items with only phonetically front vowels that take back vowel suffixes are not indicated, either in the word-lists or the glossary, while not a single noun in *-alom/-elem* in the glossary is marked as both 'fleeting' and 'low-vowel' (as the terminology of the book has it), to mention only two kinds of inconsistency. The translations for *könyörül* and *szemfedő*, though fine in the texts, are spectacularly wrong in the glossaries (339, 345), as is (still) the translation of *virágba borulnék* in the lyric on 273.

As already mentioned, the cultural-pragmatic material is excellent, ranging widely over every sphere of daily life and with many notes on Hungarian history, too. However, it is shocking to read, here of all places, of Hungary's 'former Soviet regime' (59). I am not sure what the inclusion of some bang-up-to-date items, such as *Túró Rudi automata* and *romkocsmá*, although adding color, actually says about contemporary Hungarian culture; also, these may prove more ephemeral than the authors think. As for telephones, the ubiquitous cell (mobile) phones are now rightly mentioned but, on the other hand, perhaps as a consequence, it is some time since I saw anyone use a Hungarian phone-card (in dialogue and illustrated on 100). And I still think a bigger and better map of Budapest would be a good idea (133). On the plus side, the revised note on the constantly-changing forms of address (39-40) is judicious, a model of concision and accuracy.

The practice materials include exercises that are more varied and innovative than in the earlier edition (note, e.g., the new type on 95) and there seem to be more of them overall, too. This is most welcome. Yet, it may be an idea to follow some other publishers by providing a website with even more practice materials, as experience suggests still more are needed. The two CDs cover the dialogues, texts, and exercises of the first 13 units and are probably a worthwhile investment for serious students, particularly those working on their own.

CH2 has thankfully been much more carefully proofread than was CH1, and relatively few printer's errors remain, though these are unfortunately concentrated in the reproductions of some of the most interesting *realia*: the airplane ticket on 33, the menu on 166, and the TV and film programs on 181-182. Others include **öccsük* for admittedly tricky *öccsük* 'their kid brother' (115), four misspellings of *Szindbád* within six lines (181), and (rather more than a typo) 'at your place' for *nálunk* 'at our place' (202). It is odd (as it was in CH1) to give *jajj* for standard *jaj* (81, 82). There are quite a few brand-new typos in the glossaries, too.

Despite these points, it should be reiterated that this is a very good course which can be recommended to a wide range of students: business, holiday or adventure travelers, job- or roots-seekers, and those just curious about a fascinating language quite unrelated to those that geographically surround it. Things do get tougher for the solo learner, as at least one Amazon reviewer has noted, from about unit 8 onwards, so it is best used in a class with a qualified teacher, but the more experienced language-learner may just about be able to navigate the book on his/her own. And, of course, even a very good course can be improved.