
Review


The author, whose goal is a 1500-word minimum vocabulary for students of Albanian, bases his approach on similar works for commonly taught modern and classical languages. Words are listed alphabetically by part of speech: nouns, verbs, adjectives, and a miscellany of adverbs, prepositions, and conjunctions. The choice of lexical items is good, although the section on prepositions lacks an entry for (from) (Albanian nga, nga), and there is some organizational inconsistency; for example, “aircraft” is followed by the adverbial expression “in the open air.” Under “good,” two idioms expressing “good at”? “not good at” are given in phrases, but such additions are infrequent. Also idiosyncratic is the entry “n’est-ce pas!” glossed with Albanian vitéstë, literally “truly?” A better gloss would be apo jo, literally “no, not,” since vitéstë is closer in meaning to “really?”

A more serious question is the presentation of grammatical information. The two key issues here are how much information to give and which norm to follow. In his section entitled “Explanations,” Young gives some rules for plural formation, the basic principles of gender predictability, and a brief note on stress. He indicates that items following these rules will not be marked in the vocabulary, but in some entries he marks plurals that are predictable by his rules. He also leaves out plurals that should be indicated, e.g., for mish “meat” he omits the plural mishër.

Young gives no other morphological rules and is inconsistent in indicating irregularities. For example, there are only five seriously irregular adjectives in Albanian: “bad,” “young,” “big,” “small,” and “black.” Young gives the necessary forms in the entries for only the first two of these. Verbs are given in the first singular participle, but there is no indication of irregularities not predictable from these two forms.

Young does not always follow the literary Albanian norm. For example, the adverb meaning “still, yet” is skënd and not ne. The plural of “airplane” is only aeropël; the suffixes -ë and -ë have been excluded.

Another problem is that of semantic differentiation. At times Young makes different meanings clear, e.g., the second entry under “light” is followed by the needed gloss “color,” but the three entries under “right” are presented without clarifying that one of them refers to direction. Even more of a problem are the two entries for “oil” (uaj and uajë); not only is it unclear that the first is the generic while the second is limited to petroleum products, but their separation by a comma rather than a semi-colon, given the conventions Young is using, would lead the reader to think that uajë is the plural of uaj rather than a separate entry.

Although the book is not without flaws, it is clearly of potential use in the foreign language classroom. It can be recommended to the student as well as the instructor for both vocabulary building and exercise planning.

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This text is one of the more successful efforts to approach teaching Arabic in a relatively low-key, lively and non-technical way. The language used in the text and on the accompanying two tapes is Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), the literary language, but it is introduced in such a way as to minimize its differences from spoken forms of Arabic (i.e., issues such as case and mood inflection are deliberately marginalized). The text consists of two teaching units, three of which are review chapters (termed “revisions”). There are four brief appendixes, a section with answers to all the exercises, and an English-Arabic glossary.

The book is designed to be used by “anyone working alone or within a group” (p. xiii), starting with Arabic script and introducing useful everyday vocabulary (such as family and job terms) in the early lessons. The script system takes eight lessons to introduce, but that means a substantial exposure to vocabulary and structure has been provided as well. This is done in a much more interesting way than in most Arabic textbooks, making use of drawings, photos, headlines, illustrations, ads, and photographed