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Review: *Da!: A Practical Guide to Russian Grammar*

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Filosofova, Tatiana. 2020. *Da!: A Practical Guide to Russian Grammar*. 2nd ed. Routledge Concise Grammars. New York: Routledge. 322 pages.

The Russian contribution to the Routledge Concise Grammars series is *Da!: A Practical Guide to Russian Grammar* by Tatiana Filosofova. Different from the reference grammars more-advanced students and scholars of Russian may turn to, this book's intended audience is the less-experienced language learner. Those familiar with the first edition know that within each of the book's thirty-one chapters, the author suggests the relevance of each chapter's content according to three levels of proficiency: elementary (referred to as level one), lower intermediate (level two), and upper intermediate (level three). Each level is given a description based on approximate equivalents with and expectations from the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, the Common European Framework, and Moscow State University. Sections labeled as level one introduce the student to a concept and discuss form and basic function(s) with examples. Sections labeled as level three provide advanced functions and exceptions, offer interesting colloquial alternatives, or cover more complicated grammar. Sections labeled as level two generally overlap in content with levels one and three. The author states that the book can be used as a supplement to other textbooks and course materials or for self-directed learning.

The chapters of *Da!: A Practical Guide to Russian Grammar* are divided according to grammatical categories, rather than communicative topics, and cover the equivalent of a typical second-year textbook (or higher) in that there are discussions on participles, verbal adverbs, and impersonal sentences. The book also contains a Russian-English glossary of grammatical terms and a brief introduction to the Russian language. Each grammar chapter is organized in a similar fashion, making it very easy for the learner to use. At the beginning of most chapters is a bullet-point overview of the contents, with each bullet point accompanied by an icon that refers the learner to a section in the chapter for more information. Learners of all levels are recommended to study the sections referred to in each overview, but the more in-depth discussions in the textbook include a recommendation to review one or more of the referred sections in each level. The book features an abundance of charts and examples, from a wide array of authentic sources including literature and the internet, to help

illustrate the author's points. Exercises, which address the grammar of a particular chapter, are also divided according to levels. These exercises are mostly fill-in-the-blank and translation-type exercises that focus on form. An answer key is included at the end of the book. In theory, this innovative approach would enable a student to use this book in multiple iterations in both self-directed learning and formal language learning contexts.

Inasmuch as this book targets the language learner, some of the grammatical explanations are sometimes simplistic and, unfortunately, inadequate, especially for learners defined as level one. For example, omitting an organizing model beyond first and second conjugation, such as the one-stem system, renders the chapter on verb conjugation overly generalized and complicates the later discussions on the formation of the imperative, participles, and verbal adverbs. Learners with little to no experience (level one) will find these discussions and the few suggested exercises challenging. On the other hand, the nine chapters covering nouns and the case system are smartly organized and generally offer sufficient explanations. Each case chapter (beyond the nominative and prepositional cases) divides the discussion according to usage with or without a preposition. In contrast to many other reference grammars, time expressions are not treated separately in this book, but rather each time expression is given attention according to the particular grammatical case and whether it is used with (or without) a preposition. The remaining chapters, devoted to adjectives, adverbs, numbers, pronouns, and prepositions, are not completely without their issues and typos, but they do their job, especially if the learner is using this book as a supplement to course materials.

A few things should be mentioned regarding the book's exercises, which appear primarily at the end of each chapter. There are too few of them, especially for learners at level one, where there tends to be only one short exercise to reinforce a concept. Moreover, some of the exercises at this elementary level require more instruction and information than what is given. It will be quite difficult, for example, for level one learners to successfully complete a sentence with the correct form of a verb when given only infinitives and no information regarding conjugation type or to complete a Russian sentence when given only a preposition and no clear idea of what the sentence is supposed to mean. Some chapters do not include exercises for level one learners at all, despite including them in

the discussion section. Finally, there are several places where the level of vocabulary in a particular exercise does not match the learner level. This incongruity is especially true for exercises labeled as level two. Learners at this level will undoubtedly need a dictionary to complete even some of the fill-in-the-blank exercises. With all of this in mind, many of the exercises are very well done, especially at the more advanced levels. Instructors of Russian could even make use of them in the classroom as supplemental drill-type exercises.

Ultimately, this book is more approachable for learners of Russian than some of the other reference grammars on the market. Its innovative approach and the attempt to cater to learners at multiple levels is commendable. Learners with enough experience to start at level two, instead of those just beginning their Russian language adventures, will benefit more from the additional grammatical explanations and summative exercises. The same can be said for learners at level three. The book would be more effective as a supplement to more traditional learning materials and methods and should be used as such.

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Parker, Natalia V. 2020. *Russian in Plain English: A Very Basic Russian Starter for Complete Beginners*. New York: Routledge. 300 pages.

Natalia Parker's *Russian in Plain English: A Very Basic Russian Starter for Complete Beginners* is designed for beginning students and independent learners who are not familiar with the Cyrillic alphabet. The textbook's primary aim is to help students develop skills in reading aloud in Russian with correct pronunciation. The textbook is divided into ten units. Each unit centers on particular letters and sounds rather than on a specific theme. Every unit includes an objective (with the title "What's the Plan"), information on Russian letters and the sounds they denote, reading exercises, speaking activities that can be used individually or in groups, some basic grammar material, and cultural information. In addition, after every unit, there is a review chapter ("Something Old, Something New") with questions, exercises, and group activities aimed to consolidate students' learning.