Buletinul Ştiinţific al Universităţii Politehnica Timişoara
Seria Limbi moderne

Scientific Bulletin of the Politehnica University of Timişoara
Transactions on Modern Languages

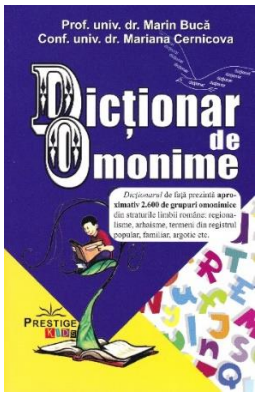
Vol. 25, Special Issue: Lexicography, Terminology, and Specialized Knowledge: Tradition, Innovation, and Professional Practice, 2026

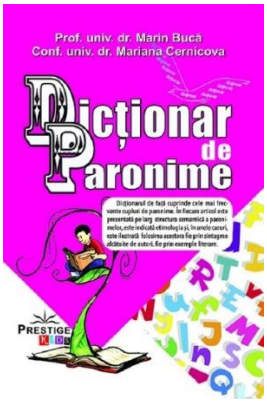
Marin Bucă, Mariana Cernicova. 2019. *Dicționar de omonime*. București: Prestige Kids. ISBN 9786068863436. 283 p.

Marin Bucă, Mariana Cernicova. 2020. *Dicționar de paronime al limbii române*. București: Prestige Kids. ISBN 9786069651353. 303 p.

Book review

Anamaria FILIMON-BENEA*





Prof. Phd. Marin Bucă and Assoc. Prof. Phd. Mariana Cernicova have published two companion volumes with Prestige Kids Publishing House: a Dictionary of homonyms (Dicționar de omonime 2019, 283 pages, roughly 2,600 homonymic groups) and a Dictionary of paronyms (Dicționar de paronime al limbii române 2020, 303 pages). Both grew out of the same publishing house; Prestige Kids has built its reputation on books for children and students, and these two dictionaries carry that same pedagogical DNA. They read less like reference tomes and more like teaching tools, meant to be opened by a student trying to sort out a tricky word rather than a scholar chasing a footnote.

* Associate Professor, Department of Communication Studies, West University of Timisoara, email: anamaria.filimon@e-uvt.ro

BUPT

It is worth pausing on that pairing, because their pairing is not an accident. Homonymy and paronymy sit close together in how Romanian grammar textbooks usually introduce them. Both fall under the broader heading of lexical ambiguity, both trip up roughly the same age group of learners, and both are the kind of thing a teacher ends up explaining on the fly when a student misuses a word in an essay. Publishing the two dictionaries a year apart, under the same imprint and clearly with the same editorial hand, means a school library or a family bookshelf can treat them as a set rather than as two unrelated acquisitions.

The authors are not newcomers to Romanian lexicography. Prof. Phd. Marin Bucă was a reputed philologist, man of culture and exceptional lexicographer. Assoc. Prof. Phd. Mariana Cernicova has an extensive experience in communication sciences as a journalist, public communicator and researcher. So both authors have built careers around teaching and researching the Romanian language, and that background is the quiet engine behind these two dictionaries. It shows up less in any single flashy feature and more in the accumulation of small choices: which words made the cut, how an example sentence is phrased, where a definition stops rather than spiraling into technical vocabulary a twelve-year-old would not recognise. Academics who have spent years in front of a classroom tend to develop an ear for exactly where a student's understanding breaks down, and that ear is audible throughout both books. „Professor Marin Bucă's prodigious linguistic body of work culminated in the Great Dictionary of Romanian Expressions published in 2011, a work of broad ethnological and social scope. By quoting Lazăr Șăineanu in the Preface, Professor Marin Bucă implicitly reveals his own credo regarding the language and culture of Romanian people: "Nothing can better highlight a people's distinctive character than a study of its metaphorical expressions. The entire genius of a language resides in these creations..." (Drincu 2021, p. 117)

This matters because dictionaries aimed at young readers are easy to get wrong in either direction. Too much simplification and the book becomes useless the moment a student needs precision; too much rigor and it turns into exactly the kind of dense reference work that a struggling reader closes after two pages. The authors mostly land in the middle, and the fact that both authors have spent real time in classrooms is almost certainly why.

Romanian lexicography has never been short of attempts to untangle synonymy, antonymy, homonymy and paronymy, and plenty of dictionaries already cover this ground (Onofraș 2020; Zgardan-Crudu 2023). What sets these volumes apart is who they are written for. Both authors have spent years teaching and researching Romanian language and linguistics, and that experience is visible in how the entries are chosen and phrased: plain definitions, examples a student would actually encounter, and an alphabetical layout that does not require any special training to use.

Most of the existing Romanian dictionaries dealing with homonymy and paronymy were written primarily for other linguists, or folded into larger explanatory dictionaries where the relevant entries are buried among thousand of others with no particular didactic framing. A student trying to look up why *breton* and a thousand of

BUPT

other words behave the way they do in a homonym exercise does not want to wade through an academic apparatus built for graduate seminars. These two dictionaries close that gap specifically: they are standalone, purpose-built references that a twelve- or fifteen-year-old can open, search, and understand without a teacher standing over their shoulder.

The Dictionary of homonyms tackles a genuinely confusing corner of the language: words that look and sound identical but mean entirely different things. With around 2,600 groups catalogued, it is one of the larger homonym inventories to appear in recent Romanian lexicography, and the entries stick to short definitions paired with example sentences rather than long discussions, in line with longstanding calls in Romanian lexicography for a more systematic treatment of homonyms across dictionaries (Băcilă 2006; Forăscu 2000).

What stands out about the homonym volume in particular is its sheer coverage. Compiling 2,600 homonymic groups is not a trivial undertaking. It requires combing through the lexicon systematically rather than relying on the handful of textbook examples that tend to get recycled from one grammar manual to the next (the usual suspects: *leu* the currency versus *leu* the animal, *poartă* the noun versus *poartă* the verb). Because the dictionary goes well beyond those familiar cases, it becomes genuinely useful as a reference rather than a confirmation of what a student already half-knew.

The Dictionary of Paronyms takes on a quieter but no less tricky problem: words similar enough in form to be mixed up, even though their meanings diverge (cf. Zugun 2000; Felecan 2004, for the standard Romanian linguistic definition). Paronymy tends to get less attention than homonymy in everyday teaching, yet it is a common source of the kind of small errors that stick out in writing, a neglect Theodor Hristea was already flagging half a century ago in an article specifically about the place of paronymy in Romanian-language teaching (Hristea, 1972). A more recent piece of scholarship still treats paronymy as a lower theoretical priority than homonymy or synonymy (Minuț, 2006). Here too the authors favour concise definitions and telling examples over exhaustive analysis.

That relative neglect of paronymy in the classroom is precisely why this second volume earns its place. Teachers tend to spend far more instructional time on homonyms (they make for easier quizzes and more memorable examples), while paronymic confusions (*emigrant* versus *imigrant*, or the classic mix-ups around prefixed verb pairs) get corrected one red pen mark at a time rather than taught systematically. A dedicated 303-page reference changes that dynamic. It gives paronymy the same structured treatment homonymy has long enjoyed, and it does so without turning the subject into an intimidating linguistic monograph.

Running through both books is the same approach: sort out which form goes with which meaning, flag the confusions before they happen, and keep each entry short enough that a reader is not wading through theory to find an answer. That restraint is deliberate rather than a shortcut. The books aim for foundational clarity, not an exhaustive linguistic study, and they are honest about that scope.

BUPT

Neither dictionary tries to reinvent how a reference book should be organised, and that is very much to their credit. Entries run alphabetically and the definitions are short and very clearly formulated. For a student flipping through the book under exam pressure, that predictability matters more than any amount of scholarly nuance would. A dictionary that makes a reader hunt for the logic of its own organisation has already lost half its usefulness before the content even comes into play.

A bare definition of a paronym pair tells a reader that two words differ; it does not tell them how that difference plays out in an actual sentence, which is where the error usually happens in the first place. By pairing each entry with usage in context, the dictionaries do the harder, more useful work: showing rather than just stating the distinction. It is a small structural choice, but it is the kind of choice that separates a dictionary a student actually uses from one that sits on a shelf.

Judged against what they are trying to do, both dictionaries succeed. The language stays accessible, the structure is easy to navigate, and the emphasis throughout is on practical use rather than theoretical completeness, very much in the spirit of Larousse's pedagogical dictionaries, which built their reputation on the same combination of brevity and clarity. There is also a family resemblance to Longman's Learners Dictionary, which likewise prioritises helping readers tell forms and meanings apart rather than cataloguing every nuance (cf. Kernerman, 2000, on the development of pedagogical, learner-oriented lexicography). That puts Prof. Bucă and Assoc. Prof. Cernicova's work in good company internationally, not just within Romanian lexicography.

The Larousse comparison is worth dwelling on for a moment. What Larousse's pedagogical line does well, and what these two Romanian dictionaries also do well, is resist the temptation to be comprehensive for its own sake. A reference book aimed at young readers succeeds or fails on how quickly it answers the question a student actually had, not on how many footnotes it can cram into a definition. Both volumes clearly understand that trade-off and choose the reader's patience over academic completeness every time.

One thing the print format does particularly well is context. A quick online search usually hands back an isolated definition and nothing more. These dictionaries, by contrast, place entries next to related words and let a reader see how meanings connect, something that is easy to lose when one is just typing a word into a search bar.

There is also a broader point buried in that observation about print versus digital. Online dictionaries and search engines have trained a generation of students to expect an instant, isolated answer: type the word, get the definition, move on. That habit is efficient, but it also strips away the kind of incidental learning that happens when a reader's eye drifts to the neighbouring entry and picks up a related word almost by accident. A printed, alphabetically organised dictionary preserves that kind of browsing in a way that a single search result never will. Empirical work on dictionary use bears this out: printed dictionaries have been shown to support word retention better than quick electronic look-ups, even when the latter are faster and more popular with students (Chiu & Liu, 2013). The volumes we are talking about lean into that advantage

BUPT

rather than trying to compete with the speed of a search engine, which is the right call for what they're trying to do.

Both dictionaries slot naturally into the existing body of Romanian lexicographic work on lexical ambiguity, and they do so with a clear set of priorities: put the user first, keep navigation intuitive, avoid semantic confusion, and stay close to how words are actually used. Coming out at a moment when so much word-lookup happens on a phone, they also make a quiet case for what a printed dictionary still offers that a quick search does not: the chance to browse, compare, and linger over related entries rather than grab a single definition and move on.

Positioned alongside other recent Romanian reference works for students, these two dictionaries occupy a fairly specific niche: narrow enough in scope to stay usable, broad enough in coverage to be genuinely comprehensive within that scope. That is a harder balance to strike than it sounds, and it is the main reason these volumes are likely to end up recommended by teachers rather than merely stocked on a shelf and forgotten.

Different readers will use these dictionaries differently, and it is worth spelling that out rather than treating 'students' as a single undifferentiated audience. For younger students, the appeal is mostly remedial: a place to check a word before an error becomes a habit. For older students preparing for national exams, the value shifts toward review and self-testing, flipping through entries to spot gaps in what they already know. Teachers, meanwhile, are likely to use the books less as something students read cover to cover and more as a source of ready-made examples and exercises, since compiling that material from scratch is exactly the kind of time-consuming task these dictionaries do instead.

Parents should not be left out of that list either. A dictionary this accessible is one a parent without a linguistics background can actually use to help with homework, rather than one that requires translating the explanation into simpler terms before it is of any use at home. That accessibility is easy to undervalue in a review focused on pedagogy, but represents a real, practical strength.

The real value of these two books shows up in the classroom. Telling apart similar forms and different meanings is a basic skill for reading and writing well, and it is one that rapid digital communication tends to erode rather than reinforce. Autocorrect and casual texting do not exactly reward precision. Teachers can lean on these dictionaries as ready-made material for vocabulary lessons; students get an accessible way to clear up exactly the kind of confusion that trips them up in essays and exams.

There is also a cultural dimension worth naming. Romanian, like most languages with a rich inflectional system, produces homonyms and paronyms fairly readily, and getting them wrong is one of the more visible ways a piece of writing reads as careless rather than considered. A dictionary that helps a young writer avoid those errors is not just teaching vocabulary in the abstract: it is shaping how confidently and how credibly that writer will come across on the page for years afterward. That is a bigger contribution than the modest page counts of these two volumes might suggest.

BUPT

Between them, the Dictionary of homonyms and the Dictionary of paronyms make a solid contribution to Romanian pedagogical lexicography. They are clear, well organised, and clearly built with the learner in mind: children, students, and the teachers guiding them. They do not try to be the last word on homonymy or paronymy, and they do not need to be; what they offer instead is a reliable first stop for sorting out lexical confusion, in keeping with Prestige Kids Publishing House's broader mission of helping young readers use language with more precision and confidence.

Taken together, the two volumes are best understood not as isolated reference books but as a small, coherent project: give Romanian students a clear, approachable way into two areas of the language that are usually taught in passing, if at all. On that measure, Prof. Phd Marin Bucă and Assoc. Prof. Phd. Mariana Cernicova have delivered exactly what the project set out to do, and the books are likely to earn a steady place on classroom shelves rather than a one-time mention in a reading list.

References

Băcilă, Florica-Maria. 2006. "Observații privind tratarea omonimelor în dicționare." *Analele Universității de Vest din Timișoara. Seria Științe Filologice* 44: 45–57.

Băcilă, Florica-Maria. 2007. *Omonimia în limba română: Privire monografică*. Timișoara: Excelsior Art.

Bucă, Marin, and Mariana Cernicova. 2019. *Dicționar de omonime*. București: Prestige Kids.

Bucă, Marin, and Mariana Cernicova. 2020. *Dicționar de paronime al limbii române*. București: Prestige Kids.

Chiu, Li-Ling, and Gwo-Jen Liu. 2013. "Effects of Printed, Pocket Electronic, and Online Dictionaries on High School Students' English Vocabulary Retention." *The Asia-Pacific Education Researcher* 22 (4): 619–34. https://doi.org/10.1007/s40299-013-0065-1.

Drincu, Sorin. 2021. "Necrolog: Marin Bucă." *Philologica Banatica* 2: 115–17. https://philologica-banatica.ro/temp_volume_pdf/Philologica_Banatica_(2021-II).pdf.

Felecan, Nicolae. 2004. *Dicționar de paronime*. 3rd ed. Cluj-Napoca: Vox Cart.

Forăscu, Narcisa. 2000. "Omonimia." *Limba și Literatura Română* 29 (1): 5–12.

Hristea, Theodor. 1972. "Paronimia și importanța ei în procesul de predare a limbii române." *Revista de Pedagogie* 2.

Kernerman, Lionel. 2000. "Pedagogic Lexicography: Some Recent Advances and Some Questions about the Future." In *Proceedings of the Ninth EURALEX International Congress*, 2000. Stuttgart: EURALEX.

Minuț, Ana-Maria. 2006. "Aspecte controversate ale paronimiei." *Analele Universității „Alexandru Ioan Cuza" din Iași. Secțiunea IIIe. Lingvistică* 52: 125–31.

Onofraș, Maria. 2020. Review of *Dicționar de paronime (cu exemple)*, by L. Vrabie and A. Vulpe. *Philologia* 62 (1–2): 185–86.

Zgardan-Crudu, Ala. 2023. Review of *Dicționar explicativ al limbii române actuale: cu sinonime, antonime, paronime, exemple*. *Philologia* 65 (1–2): 126.

Zugun, Petru. 2000. *Lexicologia limbii române. Prelegeri*. Iași: Tehnopress.

BUPT