

Cristina Varga

**SPECIALISED COMMUNICATION AND TRANSMISSION
OF KNOWLEDGE IN ROMANIAN WEB FORUMS**

Discourse analysis and terminology of an Internet subgenre

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1. Introduction

Since the beginning of the Internet, its features have been used to communicate knowledge between researchers in different universities or scientific laboratories, and later, with the increasing growth of the World Wide Web, knowledge became a collective good shared by its users. Long before becoming a place for commerce, advertising and entertainment, the Internet was a social virtual place where people around the world shared knowledge and information.

One of the first testimonies about the life of a virtual community is presented by Howard Rheingold in his book *The Virtual Community. Homesteading on the electronic frontier* (1993, 2000). In its introduction, the author affirms that in the virtual community of whom he was member, he found three important collective goods the other members shared with one another and which maintained the virtual community of the WELL united. The three collective goods were: *social network capital*, *knowledge capital*, and *communion*. The author describes his experience in sharing knowledge on the Internet as:

Knowledge capital is what I found in the WELL when I asked questions of the community as an online brain trust representing a highly varied accumulation of expertise (Rheingold, 2000, p.xviii).

Later in his book the author recounts a personal situation when knowledge transmission through cyberspace had been essential to solving a health problem:

In the summer of 1986, my then-two-year-old daughter picked up a tick [...], and we weren't quite sure how to go about getting it off. My wife, Judy, called the pediatrician. It was eleven o'clock in the evening. I logged onto the WELL. I got my answer online within minutes [...] I had removed the tick by the time Judy got the callback from the pediatrician's office. (Rheingold, 2000, p.1)

The author expresses his astonishment concerning the new features of communicating and learning the virtual environment provided to its users. He was surprised to observe that Internet wasn't only about meeting new people and spending time with them talking about hobbies and general topics.

The Internet was a place where one could learn and share knowledge through communicational interaction with the other members of the virtual community. A new way of learning was about to emerge and the author describes its uniqueness as follows:

What amazed me wasn't just the speed with which we obtained precisely the information we needed to know, right when we needed to know it. It was also the immense inner sense of security that comes with discovering that real people – most of them parents, some of them nurses, doctors, and midwives – are available, around the clock, if you need them. (Rheingold, 2000, p.1)

Since the golden days of the beginning of the virtual communities, when the Internet users experimented for the first time how useful virtual communication could be, many other systems of knowledge transmission have been created. Today, learning through Internet is no more surprising, formal and informal learning being habitual activities in the actual life of the virtual communities.

A plethora of neologisms describe now the complexity of the learning phenomenon in the cyberspace: distance learning, e-learning, online learning, v-learning, virtual collaborative learning, computer based training, Internet based training, computer supported collaborative learning, social learning, technology enhanced learning, mobile learning, ubiquitous learning, lifelong learning, and the list continues. Sometimes it is difficult to distinguish between the different methods of learning on the Internet, and sometimes complicated terms turn out to be mere synonyms. Nevertheless, as one can observe learning on the Internet has become a complicated matter. A very rich bibliography describes the new implemented methods of e-learning, and today many schools and universities present a diversified offer of online/distance learning curricula in addition to the traditional curricula. Nowadays, universities are striving to implement AI-based learning in classrooms, with students being taught by a virtual teacher in some cases.

The majority of the terms mentioned above refer to forms of learning developed by educational institutions (formal learning based on curricula), while the genuine form of learning existing on the Internet since its beginnings seems to have been marginalised or even forgotten. Only few works mention the professional web forums and their importance to the transmission of specialised knowledge between its members and the Internet users.

But is *e-learning* on a professional web forum different from *e-learning* in school? Do the professional web forum members talk differently when they learn on the professional web forum than when they are in the classroom? If they speak and relate differently on the Internet, how exactly do they speak? In what way is the communicational relation they establish on the Internet different from face-to-face conversation? What language features precisely do the interlocutors use in order to communicate knowledge?

Since the discourse(s) of the Internet have gained recently growing attention from the discourse analysts and many scholars have already described some interesting features of the Internet communication, we, too, will try to focus on this domain and investigate a particular web genre.

1.1. Motivation of the Investigation

The motivation of our choice consists in the fact that professional web forums are a less studied form of computer mediated communication. Considering the main web genres: *the email*, *the chat*, and, *the web forum*, the first two present a richer bibliography of studies than the web forum. Which means that researchers have a greater interest in analyzing the discourse of these web genres.

The importance of the web forum consists in being the unique form of interactive knowledge transmission in informal learning situations that can be easily studied¹. Being public, it can be studied without any issue of copyright infringement, since the participants in the discussion assume that their texts are publicly accessed by anyone in the web. The web forum presents a rich thematic diversity: entertainment, news, shopping, professions, etc. Another advantage would be the fact that it is the most durable and challenging of the web genres. The previously mentioned The WELL (well.com), a multiuser system especially known for its forums, began its activity back in 1985 and is still functioning to this day, being regarded as one of the oldest

¹ Knowledge transmission can also be performed by *email* or by *chat*. The problem is that email is a private web genre, since it is meant to communicate information between two or a determined group of persons, which makes it very difficult to study how knowledge is transmitted. *Chat* can be private or public, depending on the choice of the participants in the discussion, but the conversation is meant to disappear when the discussion ends, which is an inconvenient for a systematic study. The *web forum* contains texts produced by a determined group of persons whose reception is public since everyone on the Internet can read them.

systems of Internet communication. Such durability allows the researcher to access a very rich linguistic content chronologically and thematically organised.

Besides the complexity and the diversity of the linguistic material displayed by the web forums, another aspect that has motivated us in choosing this subject consists in the fact that there are very few descriptions of web forums. All of them are very general and tend to describe the web forums as a homogeneous form of communication. Or, it is obvious that people communicate differently on a forum of opinions, on a forum of rumours and gossip, or on a professional web forum.

So far there has been no reliable classification of the forum types, and the web forum seems to have multiple forms of communication. A description of the web forums must take into account the variety of forms of this genre. Since our interest is focused on knowledge transmission in web forums, we have decided to describe in the present work the professional web forum as a subgenre of the web forum.

Our choice is also motivated by the fact that one of the most important aspects of the Internet is represented by the interactive transmission and communication of knowledge, the main purpose of the Internet since it was implemented and became public.

1.2. Hypotheses

We set off on our investigation with the following hypotheses of research:

- a) *Web forums* are a modality to transmit knowledge that has been used since the first implementations of the interactive systems of communication on the Internet. Like *emails* and *chats*, the *web forums* present a rich variety of themes, one of which is the transmission of knowledge. The web forums dedicated to the transmission of knowledge on the Internet are known as *professional web forums* and it is on this topic we will focus our attention in the present work.
- b) Since the majority of web genres are described as *a hybrid between written and oral discourse*, we assume, based on the bibliography, that the communicational interaction on the *professional web forum* is structured very similarly to a *written conversation*.
- c) Due to the form of written conversation of the professional web forums, the transmission of knowledge is realised interactively through negotiation between two or more parties. Consequently, knowledge is constructed collectively, collaboratively, and interactively.

- d) We assume that within the web forum genre there are different types of web forums, each developing a different type of discourse adapted to the objectives of the communication, the theme and the participants involved in the communication. We also assume that the communication of knowledge on the professional web forums presents special features that distinguish its discourse from that of other types of web forums.
- e) We assume that knowledge communication on the professional web forums is realised through explanation. Since the explanation has turned out to be a complex phenomenon, we assume that different types of explanations and explanatory strategies may be used on the professional web forums. The prevailing presence of the explanation in the text of the web forum determines a specific discursive configuration.
- f) A further hypothesis we wish to explore in this study is that LLM-based GenAI such as ChatGPT might be used as a research tool in discourse analysis. Starting from this initial hypothesis, our aim is to examine the capabilities and limitations of these chatbots in analysing web forums discourse written in Romanian.

During our investigation we will procure the evidence to confirm or infirm these hypotheses in order to obtain a relevant description of the professional web forum as a web subgenre.

1.3. Purpose of the Investigation

The current investigation has three main objectives:

1. to describe the professional web forum as a discursive subgenre of the web forum,
2. to illustrate the mechanism of knowledge transmission on the professional web forums, and
3. to observe the terminological features of discourse within professional web forum as a subgenre of the knowledge transmission process.

Different secondary objectives derive from the main objectives. In order to describe the professional forum as a subgenre we shall proceed to:

- a) demonstrate that the professional web forum is a type of electronic discourse (CMC);
- b) illustrate that the professional web forum discussions emerge in the social interactions between the members of a virtual community;

- c) determine what are the conditions of the discursive production of the professional web forum genre;
- d) determine what is the objective of the communication;
- e) determine who communicates;
- f) determine how the interlocutors communicate.

In order to describe the mechanism of knowledge transmission on the professional web forums, we shall:

- a) determine that knowledge transmission is one of the objectives of social interaction in Internet and it is transmitted through genres;
- b) determine that the main discursive mechanism of knowledge transmission in professional web forums is the *explanation*;
- c) identify the different types of explanations used on the professional web forum in order to transmit knowledge;
- d) describe the explanatory occurrences on professional web forums;
- e) compare the observed features of the professional web forum explanations with the literature in order to create a specific explanatory profile;
- f) observe the construction of explanation in interaction;
- g) explore the use of terminology within professional web forums;
- h) determine if GenAI (ChatGPT) can be used as a tool for discourse analysis.

In order to observe the construction of explanation in the professional web forum as subgenre of the knowledge transmission process in Romanian, we shall:

- a. determine the parameters of genre variation;
- b. create a specific profile of knowledge communication on professional web forums in Romanian.

The focus of our analysis is the linguistics insight and we intend to analyse the recurrent discursive patterns of the professional web forum discussion in a Romanian corpus. The present investigation will be developed in the theoretical framework created by different text linguistics, conversation and discourse analysis trends developed mostly in France.

1.4. Phases of the Investigation

The description of the *professional web forum* as a web subgenre involved in the transmission of knowledge in the social networks entails not only an interdisciplinary approach to the topic but also a strict methodology to be

applied in the analysis of the facts. In what concerns the present investigation, our research on this complex phenomenon will follow the next steps:

- a) establish the hypotheses and the objectives of the current investigation;
- b) establish the basic bibliography of the investigation;
- c) creation and implementation of the corpus:
 1. reference books in corpus creation;
 2. comparison with different existing corpora;
 3. list of candidates for professional web forums;
- d) establishing the definitive list of professional web forums.
- e) analysis of a corpus sample;
- f) establishing the theoretical framework of the investigation:
 1. e-discourse and virtual communities;
 2. knowledge and knowledge transmission;
 3. discourse analysis and terminology theoretical framework;
- g) methodology and protocol of analysis;
- h) discursive and terminological analysis of the corpus;
- i) test the capabilities of GenAI (ChatGPT 5.0) as a discourse analysis tool;
- j) conclusions.

1.5. Outline of the Investigation

The first chapter represents a justification of the research and contains a general introduction to the context of our investigation, *knowledge transmission in cyberspace*, the motivation of the research, the hypotheses and the objectives to through the research.

The 2nd chapter describes the cyberspace as communicational environment and defines the electronic discourse (CMC). The description of the *e-discourse* is realised from different perspectives: *definition*, *categorisation* and *evolution*. The evolution of the e-discourse is presented as part of the process of the evolution of the Internet. Every device, every online service represents a potentially new form of e-discourse. In this chapter we pointed out chronologically the emergence of the main e-discourse categories. The second part of this chapter deals with the notion of *virtual community* presenting a definition and different classifications of the *virtual communities* by different criteria.

The 3rd chapter distinguishes between *skills*, *know-how* and *expertise*, as types of communicated knowledge on the Internet. The explanation is considered to be the main mechanism of knowledge transmission on the *professional web*

forums, and consequently, a substantial portion of the chapter is dedicated to the description and the definition of this category.

Since the explanation represents the main strategy for introducing knowledge on the professional web forums, different studies of the explanatory forms and categories were taken into consideration in order to identify the main forms of the explanation involved in the learning process. The forms we took into consideration were: the definition, the description of actions (procedures), and the prototypical explanation (the regular explanation).

The fourth chapter describes different insights into the problem of the genre description. Our first approach has been the presentation of the study of the web genres following the theory of Biber (the traditional approach to the study of the web genre), after which we changed perspectives focusing on different genre insights such as Charaudeau's, Jean-Michel Adam's, Catherine Kerbrat-Orecchioni's, Veronique Traverso's. In our study we will follow the model of genres description proposed by Patrick Charaudeau.

The fifth chapter contains the description of the corpus for analysis, general issues in corpus creation, protocol and methodology of implementation. The main part of this chapter is represented by the quantitative analysis of the Romanian corpus of web forums conversations.

The next chapter contains the methodology and the protocol of analysis. The methodology we followed initially describes the professional web forum as a discourse genre taking into consideration the theoretical framework created by Patrick Charaudeau. The professional web forum is analysed as a *situation of communication* regulated by certain parameters identified for the subgenre: *identities, objectives of enunciation, theme, and discursive device*. The *objectives of enunciation* and the *identities* were analysed within the same theoretical framework established by Charaudeau. An important part of the analysis of the professional web forum consists in the analysis of the explanatory sequence regarded as the main mechanism of knowledge transmission. Knowledge transmission is analysed in two instances: as *explanatory sequence* and *explanatory text (series of explanatory sequences)*, and the *explanation as interaction*. For the first instance, we used the theoretical framework of text linguistics (Jean-Michel Adam). In what concerns the second instance, the *explanation as interaction* was analysed within the theoretical framework of the conversation analysis (Catherine Kerbrat Orecchioni, Veronique Traverso).

Chapter seven represents the analytic part of the present work. The first part of the chapter is a general description of the professional web forum as a discursive subgenre within the framework described by Patrick Charaudeau.

The second part of the chapter represents the analysis of the discursive representations of identities. The focus is on the representations of the self as *novice*, the initiator of the knowledge transmission on the professional web forums. We examined the representations of the self in Romanian. Since the focus on the identities involved in the situation takes into account the novice as active agent, we denominated this part *Discourses of Ignorance* in order to illustrate that dealing with ignorance makes the *novice* an *intentional learner* causing him/her to establish his/her goals in the learning process. The 3rd part of the chapter focused on the *Discourses of Experience*, that is, the complementary discourse developed by the *expert* who participates in the situation. As we have already mentioned, we consider the explanatory sequence to be essential for knowledge transmission in the cyberspace. Consequently, this section of the Chapter 7 presents the analysis of the explanatory sequences encountered in the corpus. The last section of the chapter represents the analysis of the explanation as interaction, a discursive construction specific, in our opinion, only to the professional web forum interactions.

In Chapter 8, we look at the titles users pick for the posts they post on Professional Web Forums, as a way to draw attention and request knowledge transfer through discourse.

Changes in knowledge transmission within discourse are examined in Chapter 9, which revisits the web forums discourse at a distance of 15 years following the initial analysis. It highlights changes in discourse and parameters of knowledge transmission over time. Knowledge communication issues are analysed in Chapter 10, where terminological diversity is highlighted with a contrastive analysis of the terms most frequently used.

Chapter 11, *Evaluation of the use of AI chatbots based on LLMs in discourse analysis*, examines the potential of ChatGPT to become a valuable tool that can assist researchers in the field of discourse analysis.

Chapter 12 presents the conclusions to the present work.

2. Discursive Field of Computer Mediated Communication

2.1. The Cyberspace as a Communicational Environment

Created by William Gibson in his novel *Neuromancer*, the word *cyberspace* is the metaphor of a virtual space, currently used to describe the amount of information resources available through the computer networks which form the Internet.

Since its materialisation, the cyberspace has created a real revolution in communication. If the first studies of computer mediated communication used to highlight the rupture between the *communication before Internet* and the *communication after Internet*, at present, we are constantly amazed at the way the new technologies and their continuous evolution change the way we communicate.

It is remarkable to observe how communication has changed and how ways of communication considered revolutionary in the last decade have become outdated. Suffice it to mention the evolution of chat rooms from the early '90s, when communication was limited to text², to the mid '90s marked by the release of the revolutionary chat program mIRC³ which produced at the time a user-friendly interface, allowing the user to see the other members connected, and it's useless to say that today only the specialists of the field still know what mIRC means. It became part of the history of computer mediated communication alongside different other programs that have contributed to the modelling of electronic discourse, such as ICQ, AIM, ALO Instant Messenger. They provided new features to online communication and contributed to the development of the synchronous electronic communication. While it may seem that electronic discourse has reached its maximum development as chat

² In the case of the first IRC clients' computer mediated communication was literally reduced to text. The members of the forum used to work on a very simple interface formed by a black background where the locutors contributions were written in white. No other interface element was present.

³ mIRC, an IRC client created by Microsoft for its operating system in 1995, was the most popular chat program at the time.

involving multimodal communication, this is a mere impression. Afterwards, using *Skype* or *Google Talk* or *YahooMessenger* in order to communicate with family, friends, and colleagues has become common practice, yet as the evolution of chat discourse has already demonstrated, humans will find new ways of upgrading this way of communicating in cyberspace. Nowadays, on-line communication has skyrocketed, with numerous social networks allowing multiple forms and levels of emergent communicative interaction, using different electronic devices and applications such as *Instagram*, *WhatsApp*, *TikTok*, *Telegram*, and so on.

We consider that every approach to computer mediated communication must take into consideration the extremely rapid changes of the discourse under the influence of the development of the communicational devices, which has an impact on the discursive behaviour of the Internet users. Thus, the investigator must be aware of the fact that every approach to the discursive dimension of the cyberspace is a synchronic study and the results of the investigation will reflect the situation of the moment. Nevertheless, differences in the development of computer-mediated communication can be contrasted, as will be proposed in the current work.

An illustrative argument supporting this idea is represented by the situation of one of the fundamental books about Internet, text, and hypertext. In 1992, George Landow published the book *Hypertext and Multivocality*, which became an important reference for all linguists studying Internet communication. In 1997, only five years after the first edition, the author published a new version⁴ of his book, *Hypertext 2.0*:

[...] el motivo era obvio: los últimos desarrollos en hardware y software desde la aparición de la primera versión del libro me llevaron a eliminar la mayor parte de las referencias a Intermedia, reemplazándolas por reflexiones acerca de la World Wide Web y otros sistemas de hipermedia [...]. (Landow, 2009, p.13)

In 2006 the same author had to actualise yet again his research and consequently published the third version of the book: *Hypertext 3.0*⁵. Once again, the author justifies the necessity for revising his theory: “Desde la

⁴ It is important to notice that a “new version” means basically that the book further discusses the same topic, actualising the author’s observations on the same phenomenon.

⁵ For the entire quotation, see the Spanish translation of the book published in 2009, Barcelona, Paidós Ibérica.

aparición de Hypertext 2.0 se han producido numerosos avances que exigen una nueva versión” (Landow, 2009, p.13)⁶.

As one can notice, it is impossible to figure out now how the Internet will evolve in the next decade and how its evolution will influence the social and communicational behaviour of its users.

The pairs *communication – electronic communication*, *text – electronic text (e-text)*, *discourse – electronic discourse (e-discourse)* and the differences they entail are part of the more extended phenomenon of the digitalisation of our world. As one can see for oneself, for now, we live in a society divided between the *analogue* and the *digital* whose evolution presents a strong tendency of progress towards the digital dimension. Books, press, radio, phones, and television, all means of expression present now this double aspect (*analogue* and *digital*), adapting their traditional/original format under the pressure of the newly emergent electronic technology.

Actually, every social activity in the real world has a virtual double in the virtual dimension of the Internet. Thus, there is: art and *digital* art, music and *digital* music, radio and *Internet* radio, photo and *digital* photo, shopping and *e-shopping*, learning and *e-learning*, and the list goes on. These continuously emergent ways of life and communication influence the behaviour of the members of the virtual society, because different situations produce different discourses as modelled under the pressure of the finality of the Internet user and the technical features of the communicational device.

Recurrent communicational pattern can be easily recognised on the Internet and the huge amounts of electronic texts promote them rapidly to the status of web genres. Their structure, dynamics and evolution have given rise, lately, to some innovative discourse analysis approaches to the web genres.

2.2. Electronic Discourse: An Overview

Since the beginning of the Internet, its users have noticed that the emergent communicational medium influences the language and the behaviour of the participants. The Internet has been offering its users the possibility to talk and interact in various ways never imagined before. In a world where

⁶ In Spain a similar situation is reflected by the book *Ciberpragmática. El uso del lenguaje en Internet*, written by Francisco Yus, whose first version published in 2001 has been recently updated by an actualised version: *Ciberpragmática 2.0. Nuevos usos del lenguaje en Internet*, Ariel, Barcelona, published in 2010.

the *letter*, the *telegraph*, and the *telephone* were the usual means to communicate at distance, with the Internet there, suddenly came out a rich variety of communicational devices. The early studies on the Internet and its infinite possibilities of connecting people are impregnated with enthusiasm and utopia. For the first time, the Internet users had the possibility to connect with unknown people and to talk openly with no need to respect conventions as was the case with written or face-to-face conversation. It is this enthusiasm that generated the impressive popularity of the Internet and contributed to the development and diversification of its communicational devices. Likewise, virtual communities appeared as motivated by the incessantly changing new media offering ever new modalities of communication.

A realistic presentation of the atmosphere of the beginnings of the Internet communication and of the virtual communities is the book by Howard Rheingold, *The Virtual Community: Homesteading on the Electronic Frontier* (1993). The author gives a personal account of how “virtual life” was in the early '90s. However, the subsequent development of the Internet technologies has made the study outdated, especially through the changes in the dynamics of the virtual communities.

In time, the routine of virtual communication has resulted in the creation of various discursive forms and patterns specific to the Internet. This is the moment when researchers from different areas (sociology, linguistics, philosophy, and others) began showing an interest in the study of the new ways of communication.

One of the most relevant early studies about the Internet language is the volume edited by Herring (1996), in which the author presents one of the first definitions of the electronic discourse and identifies the main perspectives for the study of computer mediated communication (CMC): social, political and linguistic. This was followed by a plethora of linguistics studies, from among which we will mention just a few: Boyd and Brewer (1997), Baron (1998), Cherny (1999), Thurlow (2001), Crystal (2001, 2006). All focus on the newly emergent concept of *electronic discourse* (aka *e-discourse*).

2.2.1. What is E-Discourse?

It is obvious for every Internet user that, when we are connected to the Internet and we interact with other users, we do it differently than if we would over the phone or in face-to-face conversation. A recurrent topic in the linguistic studies of Internet communication consists in answering the

questions: *What is the language of the Internet?* and *How is it different from other types of communication?*

Since the early empiric observations of the linguistic phenomenon on the Internet, one has noticed the constant tendency to set apart the *Internet language* from the other known types of communication: *written* and *oral*.

Different names have been coined for this new form of virtual communication. 'Computer Mediated Communication' (Herring, 1996), 'Netlish', 'Weblish', 'Internet language', 'cyberspeak', 'netling' (Thurlow, 2001), 'netspeak' (Thurlow, 2001; Crystal, 2006), 'electronic discourse' (Davis&Brewer, 1997; Panckhurst, 2006), 'electronic language' (Collot, 1996), 'interactive written discourse' (Werry, 1996), are just some of the terms in use, to which we can add that of 'cyberlanguage' (MacFadyen et al, 2004) and 'virtual language' (Pop, 2008). By describing communicational interaction in the virtual space, they actually join two concepts: the *medium* (net, web, Internet, cyber-, electronic, virtual) and the *communication* (speak, -lish⁷, language, and discourse). Their degree of specialisation and the field of use may also differ. These denominations reflect the heterogeneous nature of this discourse, considered by many scholars as a hybrid between the *written* and *oral* discourses. Many of them, with the intent of describing/defining the electronic discourse (Baron, 1998, Herring, 1996, Crystal, 2006 etc.) start their argumentation presenting literacy and orality as the main general profiles of discourse and then determine the specific profile of the electronic discourse as resulting from the comparison between the *oralelectronic* and *written-electronic* aspects. Other insights (Macfayden et al, 2004, pp. 19-22) study *cyberlanguage* under three different categories: as *digital text*, as *semiotic system*, and as *discourse*.

One of the clearest definitions of the *electronic discourse* comes from Herring. In his opinion *computer mediated communication* (CMC) is: "...communication that takes place between human beings via the instrumentality of computer" (1996, p.1). The author distinguishes between different modes of CMC and defines:

[...] text-based CMC, in which participants interact by means of the written word, e.g., by typing a message on the keyboard of one computer which is read by others on their computer screens, either immediately (synchronous CMC) or at a later point in time (asynchronous CMC). (op. cit., p.1)

⁷ Explained in Crystal (2006) as created from the combination of the words "net" and "English". In other words, Netlish.

We consider Herring's definition to be partial only, since the author takes into consideration mainly the material conditions of its CMC production.

In their study of the electronic discourse, Boyd Davis and Jeutonne Brewer point out that "*electronic discourse* is not a surrogate for language [...] but just a different context of its use" (1997, p.1). Their intention is to observe the characteristics of the electronic discourse in order to individualise and classify it as the genre or register of a language. The authors distinguish between *electronic discourse* and CMC, because they claim that *electronic discourse* "emphasises our focus on language above the sentence – language as utterances, whether written or spoken" (1997, p.2).

The most important insight into the systematic description of CMC is represented by C. Thurlow's study *The Internet and Language*. The author describes CMC as: "language and communication in different channels (of niches) of the Internet (on net) ..." (2001, p.287). He considers CMC in its context of production pointing out five essential aspects: *multilingualism, language change, conversation/discourse, stylistic diffusion, and metalanguage and folklinguistics*. Thurlow is the first author to suggest that the Internet texts have to be studied from the point of view of genre description. In his study Thurlow states that language and communication on the Internet can be studied under such contextual factors as: *format and type of channel, participants, length and nature of the relationship, topic and purpose, and synchronous and asynchronous* aspects of the communication.

On the other hand, David Crystal prefers instead to use the more general concept of *variety of language* and avoid the difficulties of defining electronic discourse. By defining CMC as a *variety of language*, the author sets it under the linguistic point of view: language as used on the Internet:

In a setting where linguistic differences are likely to loom large, the concept of a language variety will be helpful. A variety of language is a system of linguistic expression whose use is governed by situational factors. (2006, p.6)

*Electronic discourse*⁸ has been described by different authors, the most important of which are Baron (1998), Thurlow (2001), and Crystal (2006). All scholars agree that the electronic discourse has special features which

⁸ We will use the terms CMC and *electronic discourse* in our investigation for the language on the Internet. We will make an exception when we cite the work of an author who used a different term to refer this concept. In this case the term used by the author in the cited work will be maintained.

individualise it. A general presentation of its most common linguistic patterns would include:

- a) Orthography: *neography, acronyms, typing errors, misspelling*
- b) Punctuation: *reduction of punctuation, capitalisation, and hyphenation*
- c) Lexis: *special lexis, lexical compounds, blends*
- d) Discourse organisation: *reduction or less use of openings and closures*
- e) Extra-linguistic marks: *emoticons*

It is important to mention that these linguistic patterns describe the features of *textual electronic discourse*. Electronic discourse is not homogeneous and it displays a rich variety of styles. Since our work focuses on the *written asynchronous electronic discourse* we have decided to point out these characteristics of e-discourse.

Other features of the electronic discourse can be influenced or limited by the electronic devices and, as many scholars have already mentioned, with a view to the analysis of the electronic discourse it is important to separate the role of the medium and the contribution of its users.

2.2.2. Categories of E-Discourse

Electronic discourse is heterogeneous, consequently it lends itself to classifications and categorisations. One of the first to remark on the diversity of the electronic discourse is Herring (1996, pp.1-6). The author distinguishes between different electronic discourses based on different criteria such as: *type of interaction* (synchronous–asynchronous), *area* (local–global), and *theme* (academic–recreational).

Most scholars – Davis&Brewer (1997), Thurlow (2001), Yus (2001), Crystal (2006), among others – classify the electronic discourse between *synchronous* and *asynchronous*. They also discuss the language features of the different categories of electronic discourse as the result of the hybridisation between two modes⁹: *written* and *oral*.

A more complete panorama of the electronic discourse categories is presented by Chun (in Magnan, 2008, p.17-18). The author takes for her starting point the traditional perspective of the two primary modes of the *electronic discourse*¹⁰

⁹ Some of the authors use the term *style*, after Biber's (1998) terminology.

¹⁰ The author uses the term CMC (computer mediated communication). For more details on the various denominations of the *electronic discourse* see the present work 2.2.1, Crystal (2001; 2006), or Thurlow (2001).

and denominates ACMC (asynchronous computer mediated communication) and SCMC (synchronous computer mediated communication). The innovation of her study consists in the fact that the author continues the classification diachronically starting from the text-based *electronic discourse* and mentioning the 1st and the 2nd generations of CMC. She identifies as categories of ACMC text-based emails, bulletin boards, newsgroups, forums, blogs, and wikis. The audio and video modes consist in asynchronous audio and video clips. The SCMC modes include: text-based instant messaging, Internet Relay Chat (IRC), multiuser virtual realities (MUDs – Multi User Dungeons and MOOs – MUD Object Oriented)¹¹. Chun also mentions as a novelty the possibility to access audio and video-based programs. Since the publishing of the study in 2008, video and audio conferencing have become a common occurrence of CMC and new integrated solutions of CMC are now promoted on the market.

In order to have a clear image of the variety of CMC modes and identify the exact place of the CMC mode within the framework of typology of electronic discourse we propose to analyse in the present work we present the following table based on Chun (2008, p.18).

Computer Mediated Communication			
Asynchronous CMC		Synchronic CMC	
Text-based	Audiovisual-based	Text-based	Audiovisual-based
1 st generation (email, bulletin boards, forums)	1 st generation (audioboards)	1 st generation (Instant messages, chat, MUD, MOO)	1 st generation (Videoconferencing, CU See Me)
2 nd generation (blogs, wikis)	2 nd generation (social websites for sharing, videoclips)	2 nd generation (chatbots)	2 nd generation (internet phones, audio video conferencing)

The modes of Computer Mediated Communication (Chun, 2008, p.18)

This classification will permit us to follow the diachronic perspective of the emergence and development of the *electronic discourse* in Internet.

¹¹ This classification is based on the one elaborated by Chun (2008: 17).

2.2.3. Emergence and Development

The evolution of the Internet has been closely followed by the commencing and the development of the Web genres. The difficulty in presenting a diachronic insight into the evolution of the various forms of online communication consists in the complexity of the Internet phenomenon:

To write about the possibilities and the problems which the Web poses for any form of research, it is necessary to cope with its chameleon-like nature. From the point of view of the media analyst, the Web is just as complex and enigmatic [...] for it can be regarded as a kind of postal service, or as a town hall meeting, or even an electronic Hyde Park Speaker's Corner. It is at once a newspaper, a bookstore, a library, a museum, a shopping mall and so forth. (Burnett & Marshall, 2003:2)

The continuous change that seems to be the inherent nature of the Internet and its forms of communication makes it fascinating for the researcher. All the changes and its many features have been baffling the user and the specialist alike. Even if today the Internet is a usual and necessary environment for working and communicating, it still surprises us with new activities, services, and innovative forms of communication.

In what follows, we will try to outline the most important moments in the development of the Internet in order to point out the emergence of the different discursive genres of the web. CMC, as we have already pointed out in the previous section, consists in three main elements: the *Internet* – technical support, *communication* – human activity, and *discourse* – materialisation of *communication* as human activity. It is impossible to separate these three elements, since the evolution of the technical support has modelled the *forms of communication* due to the limitations of the electronic channel, which in turn have influenced the *electronic discourse*. The process evolves in a spiral because keeping together the members of a virtual community is accomplished by providing ever new features and modern ways of communicating and interacting, while each new technical innovation will modify the way we communicate on the web.

*

The beginnings of the Internet are uncertain given its military origins. Many scholars comment on this aspect and usually underline how a device initially designed for a military purpose ended by revolutionising the society, communication and the way people relate to each other. Actually, the origins

of the Internet are not an issue nowadays and the majority of studies point out the importance of its current applications for the society rather than the initial goal of its creation:

[...] if we look at the history of the Web it developed from very specific but intricate institutional connections. [...] Its original US military origins as a system that would have no centre so that communication could be maintained despite the most apocalyptic nuclear attack on any individual centre allowed for the development of the multiple nodes of CERN and ARPAnet. The network of networks structure of the Internet has built from these origins but advances in its applications as a research network that became wedded to university research. (Burnett & Marshall, 2003, p.11)

It is important to observe how the initial military goal of the Internet was for it to be a research communication environment, and this is precisely the point where there begins for us an “*extraordinary human adventure*”¹² (Castells, 2001, p.9). This initial change of the purpose of the Internet from the specifically military designed activities to more liberal and peaceable ones was the first step on its way to popularity:

Informal networks of researchers then used the Internet for these exchanges of information. This kind of university culture with its accessible libraries, its general direction of dissemination of information and knowledge is fundamentally different from the military’s desire for control and regulation of the flows of information for usually highly specific and often classified, national security reasons. (Burnett & Marshall, 2003, pp.11-12)

The free development of the Internet in the *Ἀκαδημία* allowed the new electronic environment to escape from the rules and restrictions of the military perspective and to develop in a new way in a research milieu. Young researchers and students have dedicated their time to investigating and thinking about the development of the new virtual environment. UCLA, NCSA and MIT have been the centres where most of today’s legends such as Vinton Cerf, the “father of the Internet”, Marc Andreessen or Eric Bina have had the opportunity to study, work with, and develop the new communication

¹² All the competence these scientists displayed in their project, they could never have commanded the level of resources that was Castells observes that the development of the Internet under military auspices has been significant: “For all the vision and necessary to build a computer network and to design all the appropriate technologies” (2001, 20).

technology. At the time the Internet belonged to the specialists. Few researchers worked with this high-level technology and the Internet was confined to the campus limits due to the lack of infrastructure and because its complexity made it very difficult for everyone to understand it without high knowledge of mathematics and computer science.

The next step in the early evolution of the Internet was taken when the new technology went beyond the university grounds. This is the beginning of what M. Castells calls the *network society*, when the Internet moved on from a being a mere communication tool to a massphenomenon. Gradually it became a heterogeneous socio-cultural space, the result of the different activities performed by its users and the finalities they give it. For Castells (2003), the Internet is the result of the convergence of three main elements: university culture, hacker culture, and commercial culture. Each cultural segment was involved in a specific way in the configuration of what we now know as the Internet. To this model we added a 4th element: Communities culture, very which are currently experiencing unprecedented growth, especially on social media. They contributed to the construction of the Internet in terms of *technical development, members and activities* as follows:

	Technical development	Members	Activities
University culture	Creation of the Internet Technical design Infrastructures Hardware Software Virtual communities Communities of practice Online learning communities	Intellectual elites: researchers, professors, students, experts, technicians, etc.	Programming: standards, protocols, programs, routines, etc. Scientific: research, sharing information, e-publishing, e-reviews, e-books Educational: e-learning, e-manuals, e-tutorials, e-lessons
Communities culture	Life-long learning communities	citizens, hobbyists, enthusiasts	global aulas, learning communities, lifelong learning etc.

	Technical development	Members	Activities
Hacker¹³ culture	Virtual communities Communities of practice	computer geeks non-professionals hackers e-delinquents	Programming: Non-commercial, Free, Open source, GNU Sharing knowledge: web forums, e-manuals, e-tutorials Hacking: virus, sniffers, Trojan horses, worms, etc.
Commercial culture	Commercial software Commercial electronic environments Web shops DotComs Legal aspects of the Internet transactions Virtual communities	Business men Managers Financial directors etc.	Commercial: e-shopping, e-advertising, e-management, shopping virtual communities (eBay.com)

A similar structure of the Internet is also described by Vinton Cerf in his *A Brief History of the Internet*¹⁴. The author distinguishes between the following aspects that have influenced the structure of the Internet today: *technological evolution of the communication devices*¹⁵, *operation and management of the operational infrastructure*, *social interaction*¹⁶, and *commercial interaction*. This is what gives the Internet the very complex heterogeneous structure depicted as a “chameleon-like nature” (Burnett & Marshall, 2003), mosaic structure, or a world of *coincidencia oppositorum*.

¹³ The term *hacker* is used with its original meaning: computer specialist.

¹⁴ Even if this resource consists in a short Internet published document, its importance as a documentary source on the evolution of the Internet consists in the fact that the author, Vinton Cerf, is known as “the father of the Internet”, for as a computer expert he substantially contributed to the development of the Internet.

¹⁵ Early research on packet switching and the ARPANET, infrastructure developing, functionality.

¹⁶ Internet community interested in creating and developing technology.

How did communication develop diachronically on the Internet? and Which are the discursive forms the users employ in e-communication? are the questions which we will try to answer in what follows.

*

Within the political and social context of its emergence, the Internet was conceived as a “communicating medium that allows, for the first time, the communication of many to many, in chosen time, on a global scale” (Castells, 2003, p.2).

In 1962, the main objective of an innovating project, stated for the first time as a theoretical model by J.C.R. Licklider, was to describe social interactions enabled through computers connected in networks. Licklider’s “Galactic Network” described a communicational environment based on computers connected to each other, which made possible the quick accessing of data and programs everywhere. This revolutionary idea of communication was the initial step towards the creation and the design of the Internet.

Its evolution was gradual and it is generally represented as a series of chronologic moments representing important discoveries that contributed to the Internet evolution. These moments marked: *political events that influenced the evolution of the Internet, hardware and software discoveries that changed the face of the Internet, and communicational aspects of the Internet*, especially the appearance of different web genres.

The first decade in the history of the Internet represents a preliminary development period. The early years constituted a research and investigative period. Theoretical models describing the abstract representation of computer networks were developed, and based on these models there began the first attempts at designing and implementing a functional network.

Back then *online communication* was an abstract concept, as was the rest of the Internet project. By the end of the first decade, according to Hobbes’ timeline¹⁷, all conditions to make possible online communication had been brought together. The basic structure of a network connection (hardware and software components) was established and operational. The first attempt at online communication through the new created network was also recorded:

1969 - First packets sent by Charley Kline at UCLA as he tried logging into SRI. The first attempt resulted in the system crashing as the letter

¹⁷ Hobbes' Abridged Internet Timeline *electronic resource* at <https://www.cs.utexas.edu/~mitral/honors/timeline.html> (last accessed on 18.09.2025).

G of LOGIN was entered. (October 29) [Log entry] Univ. of Michigan, Michigan State and Wayne State Univ. establish X.25-based Merit network for students, faculty, alumni. (Hobbes, 1993-2006)

The second decade in the Internet history is marked by a series of revolutionary discoveries which led to the emergence of computer mediated communication. If in the late '60s "communication" was understood in terms of computer-to-computer communication: sending packets of information online and interacting with a remote server, there came a time when creating the appropriate software in order to simplify the exchange of online messages could no longer be postponed. This invention allowed users to communicate with other online users and thus marked the beginning of CMC:

1971 - Ray Tomlinson of BBN invents email program to send messages across a distributed network. The original program was derived from two others: an intra-machine email program (SENDMSG) and an experimental file transfer program (CPYNET). (Hobbes, 1993-2006)

The invention of the email client marked the first type of *electronic text* that is still being used: *the email*. The following year, 1972, the same programmer modified the email client and adapted it for use in ARPANET where it becomes a very popular service. Ray Tomlinson chooses the sign @ to be used in *email addresses*. Its meaning is "at". The email functions are developed by another programmer, Larry Roberts. He writes the first email management program (RD) to list, selectively read, file, forward, and respond to messages. The email client has exchange messages features and file management functions and is similar to nowadays email clients.

After CMC through email, different other types of online communication were developed, such as chat:

1972 - First computer-to-computer chat takes place at UCLA, and is repeated during ICCC, as psychotic PARRY (at Stanford) discusses its problems with the Doctor (at BBN). (Hobbes, 1993-2006)

Chat introduces a new form of electronic discourse and a new form of communicational interaction between the participants in a situation. Synchronous communication through chat becomes one of the most popular forms of online communication and still is to this day. The new communicative features of the Internet increase its popularity. A 1972 ARPA study about the information traffic in the entire ARPANET shows that 75% of the network traffic is generated by *email* exchange.

The year 1975 marks another landmark in the development of CMC: the new invention by Steve Walker, the *mailing list*. This consists in a list of e-mail addresses identified by a single name, such as *maillist@yahoo.com*. If an e-mail message is sent to the mailing list, it is automatically forwarded to all email addresses assigned to the list, which is an easy way to create a *discussion group*. It was named *MsgGroup* and, according to Hobbe's timeline, the first Internet moderator was Einar Stefferud.

The diversity of CMC (*email, chat, newsgroups, and mailing lists*) and its increasing popularity influenced the linguistic profile of online communication. In 1979, Kevin MacKenzie, an internet user, suggested the adding of some conventional marks to indicate *emotions, extralinguistic, semiotic, and/or supra-segmental* information in the electronic discourse. This suggestion resulted in the creation of the *emoticons*, considered today a distinctive characteristic of CMC.

The '80s represent the period of the Internet's geographical expansion. Its popularity motivates more and more countries to create their own national networks and interconnect them. This is the decade when Internet becomes a connected set of networks: *The network of networks*. In what concerns CMC, the *newsgroups* are in expansion. They become widely popular when introduced on USENET. In 1988, Jarkko Oikarinen creates the *Internet Relay Chat (IRC)*, or chat as we know it today. This invention marks the beginning of *synchronous online communication* and the beginning of the development of one of the most popular forms of online communication of all times.

During the 3rd decade of the evolution of the Internet there begins the so-called *DotCom age*. Suddenly, beginning with 1990, the corporations start showing an interest in developing *e-business* and investing in digital technology. This is the moment when Internet goes commercial and becomes a business.

The first companies providing Internet connection as public service, similar to the phone, go on the market¹⁸. Besides online communication, one of the most important activities on the Web was information search and recovery. The systems that permit the finding and classification of information on servers, like Gopher (1991) or Veronica (1992) are released. During the same year, the revolutionary World-Wide Web (WWW) developed by Tim Berners-Lee becomes functional and imposes a new form of online

¹⁸ Hobbe's Internet timeline, "*world.std.com* is the first commercial provider of Internet dial-up access".

communication, best described by the term "surfing the Internet"¹⁹. The use of the new opportunity to get informed by surfing the net and browsing its web pages becomes widely popular within a very short time. *Mosaic*, one of the first popular Web browsers facilitated the spreading and use of knowledge across the world. Other browsers, like *Erwise*, *ViolaWWW*, *Midas*, and *Cello*, were in use too. The creation of WWW is the beginning of a new age for the new media: online journalism, online radio and television. The first cyber station is created and broadcasts during this period²⁰ due to the RealAudio streaming technology that permits near real-time data transmission. The emergence of all these brand-new technologies resulted in new *discursive forms of CMC* such as: web pages and e-news²¹.

The commercial aspect seems to have been essential for the development of the Internet in this decade. Internet is a business and business can be done through Internet. This perception of the Internet determined shopping malls in 1994 to announce their presence on the Web. The services offered to the clients go online and since then it has been possible to order pizza, buy clothes, and book holiday trips through the Internet. All these commercial activities resulted in the emergence of a new web genre: *junk mail*. The widely spread phenomenon known as *spam* is now documented for the first time. Another aspect of the growth of commercial activities is the use of *commercial banners* (another CMC genre) on the web pages. The first *banner ads* appear online on the site *hotwired.com* in 1994²². WWW becomes the most popular online service accessed by the net users during this decade. The competition between browser owners becomes very strong. One of the incidents, designated as the "browser war", put together two browsers: Netscape Navigator and Microsoft Internet Explorer and led to their respective software development at a tremendous pace. New functions are added to the basic configuration of this software, such as: html editor, multimedia browsing capabilities, browsing of the interactive web pages, a dynamic object management and others. This event caused important changes to the multimodal construction of the web pages.

¹⁹ The term is coined by Jean Armour Polly. A similar term was used by Brendan Kehoe – "net-surfing" – in a USENET post in 1991.

²⁰ First cyberstation, RT-FM, broadcasts from Interop in Las Vegas.

²¹ In this period of the Internet evolution online-radio and online-television were simply new technologies used for transmitting the same content. Multimodal communication comes later in the evolution of CMC.

²² The banners were advertising Zima (a beverage) and AT&T.

The last decade we will talk about begins with 2000 and is marked by innovative multimedia technologies, commercial development of the Internet, growth of multilingual and usability support for web pages, increased interest for legal issues in Internet and multimodal interaction between net users.

The technical aspect of the net in this period is marked by the creation of sharing files programs and by the reaction of multimedia producers (music, films, etc.) considering this phenomenon a copyright law infringement. The first popular program in this area, Napster, starts the new practice of sharing multimedia files (this practice can be considered the beginning of multimodal CMC). Web pages containing huge collections of short movies and providing free access to this material became hugely popular. Anyone can create today multimedia material with a minimum of technological support. All television sites display records of their programs and there are televisions emitting online. On the other hand, watching TV through an Internet connection and using as device a computer is a common practice today.

Important issues on CMC are the newly emerging electronic discourse forms: *the blog*, *the wiki*, and *the social networks*, alongside which *e-learning* as an innovative method of obtaining, transmitting, and acquiring knowledge can be considered the most complex concept in online educational communication.

The process of the evolution of the Internet seems to be unstoppable. New technologies, such as *e-tablets (iPad)*, *netbooks*, *smart phones (iPhone)*, *ebooks*, *game machines*, and *GPS devices* challenge the user to develop new discursive forms. Social networking allows people to interact in many different ways: *Facebook*, *Twitter*, or *YouTube* represent only the beginning of a novel kind of *multimodal CMC*.

For a better understanding of the periods of CMC development, we present a diachronic view of its evolution:

Decade	Web type	Type of communication	Discourse modalities
60	-	Project	Non-existent
70	Web 1.0 – static Web	Mail	Written text – asynchronous
80		Mail, BBS, Mailing lists, IRC	Written text – asynchronous and/or synchronous
90		Mail, BBS, Mailing lists, IRC, WWW	Written text – asynchronous and/or synchronous – audio, image, animation

Decade	Web type	Type of communication	Discourse modalities
2000	Web 2.0 – participative Web	Radio, Video, Multimedia, HdTV, Blog, Press, Wiki, Social Networks, elearning, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, social networks	Written text, oral text, multimodal text asynchronous/synchronous
2010 – 2025	Web 3.0 – AI-based Web	multimedia communication prevails on social networks (Instagram, WhatsApp, TikTok, WeChat, Telegram)	Written text, oral text, multimodal text asynchronous/synchronous
to come	Web 4.0 – symbiotic Web	does not yet exist, involve and build connections between humans and machines in an interconnected online ecosystem	Written text, oral text, multimodal text asynchronous/synchronous

2.3. The Virtual Communities

As we have noted from the evolution of the Internet and the *electronic discourse*, the most popular and attention-grabbing aspect of the Internet concerns its interactive features. Accessing virtual places (web pages, social network pages, channels, etc.), interacting with people, or sharing ideas and information has become a routine for most of us. Modern life is shared between the real and the virtual space, one can have a social life with friends to meet, events to participate in, or activities to carry out (professional working, e-business, e-learning, artistic creation) in either of them. The “global village”, the utopia of the ‘60s (McLuhan, 1962, 1964) has become a reality and today it is used as an Internet metaphor.

A more precise image of the virtual communities and their role in the social organisation of the Internet was portrayed by J.C.R. Licklider, one of the Internet pioneers. The virtual communities were considered a logical development of the “Galactic Network” described by Licklider.

2.3.1. What is a Virtual Community?

Virtual community, e-community or online community is difficult to explain. The first description of this concept realised from the ‘inside’ was provided

by Howard Rheingold (1993)²³ with an enthusiastic insight into the life and activities of the e-communities. The first important reference about the *daily life of a virtual community*, the book by Rheingold, testifies to the friendship, empathy, and newness shared, back in 1985, by the members of one of the most ancient virtual communities, the WELL²⁴ and to how problems from real life found a solution through collaboration and information sharing in the virtual world. Written with wit and charm, the book portrays the beginning of the virtual society and has some of the fascination of *the age of innocence*. Here's the author's definition of the *virtual communities*:

“*Virtual communities* are social aggregations that emerge from the Net when enough people carry on those public discussions long enough, with sufficient human feeling, to form webs of personal relationships in cyberspace” (Rheingold, 2000, p.xx).

Rheingold's definition of a virtual community focuses on two key concepts: *public discussions* and *human feeling*, which explain the author's experience of how communities emerge and dwell in cyberspace. The virtual community the author describes is defined in terms of *space* (virtual space), *time* (the span of time the members are logged in), and *communication* (topics of interest). From the coincidence of these factors there emerge the feeling of common shared values and the friendship of its members. The virtual community has also to do with the newness of the interactive communication in Internet. It was demonstrated that the Internet became more popular after the development of the social networks than ever before, when the user of the web had only the traditional Internet services consisting in *searching for information, email, and discussion lists*, a set of activities that involved little human interaction.

Depending on the insight one has into the phenomenon (social, humanities, technology, commerce, entertaining, etc.), the *virtual community* can be understood in a number of ways. The term can refer to:

²³ Rheingold (1993) represents the 1st edition of the book. For this work we consulted the following editions: 1993, 2000, and the electronic version at <http://www.rheingold.com/vc/book/> (last accessed on 29.12.2010). All editions were cited in the bibliography.

²⁴ According to *Britannica Encyclopedia*: “**The WELL**, long-standing Internet community that features message-board-style discussions on a wide variety of topics. Founded by Americans Stewart Brand and Larry Brilliant, The WELL's origins trace back to 1985, when it began as a dial-up bulletin board system (BBS) located in San Francisco. Since then it has become one of the most respected discussion forums online.” (<https://www.britannica.com/topic/The-WELL-Internet-community>) – last accessed on 18.09.2025).

- 1) a group of people who associate themselves over time with a computer-mediated environment, with emphasis on the social behaviour of the group;
- 2) the phenomenon of online group formation, typically in light of the historical and theoretical implications of the terms 'virtual' and 'community';
- 3) the technological environment – e.g., listserv, chat room, webbased environment – that facilitates and potentially shapes the formation and activity of online groups (Herring, 2008, p.920).

The study of the Internet from a social and communicational perspective commenced after the publication, in 1978, of the book of Hiltz&Turoff: *The Network Nation*. The early studies of the virtual communities focused mainly on how the new media was about to change the social and communicational relations and how the virtual communities were constructed. The bases for the social studies of the Internet were created during this period by the works of Jones (1995, 1998), Ludlow (1996), Oldenburg (1989), Wellman (1999), Wellman&Gulia (1999), Turkle (1996), and Smith (1992).

Jones (1995, 1998) considers the emergent forms of interactive CMC (*newsgroups* and *bulletin boards*) to be the basis of the virtual communities. The author notes that the virtual community structure is very different from the traditional definition of the term 'community' in the social sciences and tries to apply Effrat's (1974)²⁵ model of a traditional community to the new virtual communities. The author considers that all these features have appeared in CMC, and consequently, they are characteristic of the virtual communities. Jones introduces the term of *spatiality*, a social constructed space of CMC, different from the physical space²⁶. As for Rheingold (1993) and Oldenburg (1989), the virtual communities in Jones's conception are communities of individuals that share the same interests and goals.

Another approach to the virtual communities is developed by Ludlow (1996, pp. xiii-xvi) who highlights the fact that computer technology caused the disappearance of the traditional community and tries to analyse if it is possible to reconstruct a new concept adapted to the new realities, where the community may not be bound to the idea of space and geography. The author critically analyses the idea of "communities of interest" and that of "virtual

²⁵ Effrat (1974) describes the traditional community as a three main elements structure formed by: solidarity institutions; primary interaction; institutional groups.

²⁶ Space and its conceptualisation seems to be an issue in the social definition of the virtual communities, at least in the early studies.

community” contrasting them with the traditional “geographic communities”. The author tries to understand how the new “virtual communities” fit in our society and what would be the reaction of the social system (political and legal). The insight of the author is critical and he doubts whether the virtual communities deserve in truth to be considered so.

The analysis of virtual communities is re-examined in Turkle (1996) starting with a comparison with Oldenburg’s (1989) perspective. Two virtual communities (MUD) are contrasted and severely criticised. The virtual community is assimilated with an alienating activity that can confound its members and make them asocial in the real society. The author’s arguments consist basically in two study cases of MUD members that seem to prefer virtual life to real life. The aspects the author is concerned about are the loss of reality (the digital model of the world is not reality), the isolation, the emergence of a new type of violence in the virtual communities, and the escape from the real-life problems and responsibilities.

Wellman (1999) criticises what he qualifies as “apocalyptic speculation” in the debate on the WWW and the Internet implications in the modern society. He considers that the Internet phenomenon is not isolated and can’t be studied out of the general context of people’s lives. Instead of the naive enthusiasm or of the pessimist insights, he recommends an analytic perspective of the *network community* in the more general context of the online interactions in the “global village”. This desiderate for a contextual analysis is reiterated later (Wellman, Mok, Carrasco, 2009²⁷). The conclusions of the study demonstrate that the importance accorded by the social science researcher to “distance” as the definitory factor for the existence of a community in the ‘90s, is only the result of an interpretation of the data out of their context. Further works of the same author on the description of the structure and the evolution of the *virtual communities* are Wellman&Gulia (1999) and Wellman (2004).

A social study that points out the communicational impact of the CMC represents the first observations on the Internet language (Smith, 1992). The author identifies essential aspects that impact the communicational interactions in the virtual communities. The author creates a profile of the *virtual interaction*, which in his conception is *aspatial* (the distance doesn’t influence the interaction), *asynchronous* (the interactions are different than face-to-face conversation),

²⁷ Wellman, Barry, Mok, Diana, Carrasco, Juan-Antonio – the forthcoming article can be accessed on Wellman’s publication’s web page at: http://homes.chass.utoronto.ca/~wellman/publications/has_distance_died/Distance.htm (last access 29.12.2010).

textual (the interactions are very similar to written conversations), the participants aren't co-present during the interaction, the quantity of information is limited by the capacity of the technical devices that intermediate the communication, and *anonymous* (complete or partial).

In the present work we will adopt the sociological point of view and consider the virtual community as a group of people that share values, beliefs and activities and that interact constantly with one another through CMC. Based on human interaction, the virtual communities made it possible through CMC for the emergence of new forms of knowledge and information sharing and facilitated new forms of democratic participation in society (Flew, 2005, p.62). Their diversification is based on a combination of three factors: *technologies* (formats and modes of communication), *activities* (purpose), and *theme*. These factors determine the typology of virtual communities and consequently their specific type of discourse and form a basis for the study of the web genres.

2.3.2. Categories of Virtual Communities

As one can notice from the previous section of the current work, an important part of the users' activities on the Internet consist in the participation in social networks and in virtual communities. The rich variety of forms the social interaction adopts in the *virtual life* is difficult to describe and categorise. Even if the categorisation of the virtual communities would be a very useful tool in the study of the field, there are not many studies regulating this complicated aspect of the virtual life. The existing classifications of virtual communities are somewhat problematic. Some are out of date, partial or not descriptive enough. In this section we propose to survey some of the existing classifications of the virtual communities and the criteria used to organise them. The finality of such presentation is to establish the place occupied by the virtual communities formed on the professional web forums in the panorama of Internet virtual communities, their general features and categorisation in order to proceed in the next chapters of this work to a further analysis of this type of community.

The virtual communities are generally classified on the basis of their content or on the revenue they produce. Since our focus is on knowledge transmission in cyberspace through professional web forums, in what follows we will limit our discussion on the classification of the virtual communities to the *content-based classifications* and we will present some of the most important models.

One of the first approaches to the classification of the *virtual communities* belongs to Armstrong and Hagel (1996). They distinguish between four categories: *communities of transaction*, *communities of interest*, *communities of fantasy*, and *communities of relationship*, and they concentrate in more detail on the *transaction communities* in their description.

Lazar et al. (1998) propose a schema of classification following four main features of the virtual communities, presenting a *technical*, *psychological*, and *sociological* insight into this topic. The four features are: *attributes*, *supporting software*, *relationship to physical communities*, and *boundedness*²⁸. Following this model of classification, the authors identified the following categories of virtual communities:

Attributes:

1. The reason of being of a virtual community (goals, common values and beliefs, interests, etc);
2. Shared activities and resources;
3. Strong interactions and emotional ties;
4. Support between community members.

Supporting software:

1. newsgroup, bulletin board, Internet Relay Chat (IRC), or Multi-User Dungeon (MUD).

Relationship to physical communities:

1. Based on physical communities;
2. Somewhat based on physical communities; Not related to any physical community

Boundedness:

1. Work communities;
2. Intranet;
3. Specific geographic area;
4. Specific segment of population.

Nevertheless, the criteria of classification are, in some cases, too general and can't constitute an effective means of distinguishing between different

²⁸ *Boundedness* is a sociological concept, which relates to how many social relationships remain within the defined population of a group or community. In a tightly bounded community, a majority of the social relationships, and therefore the communication, take place among the members of that community. In a loosely bounded community, community members have more social ties with people who are outside of the defined community (Wellman, 1997).

classes of virtual communities. This work is important because it discussed the need of criteria to help the specialist recognise and categorise the different types of virtual communities. The final goal of the study was to apply these criteria in the design and implementation of new virtual communities.

A different model of classification of the virtual communities was proposed by Komito (1998). The author takes into account a more subjective point of view on the virtual communities. He describes four types of communities based on the way the members of a community interact: if they are supportive and friendly, if there is a community feeling (in the sense mentioned by Rheingold 2000, p.5) between persons that never see each other in real life. Komito classifies the virtual communities as follows: *moral communities*, *normative communities*, *proximate communities*, and *fluid communities*.

The author considers as *moral communities* the communities where the members share the same moral and social values, a united community with a strong feeling of solidarity. We will associate this description with the description of the virtual communities in the beginning of the electronic era. The *normative communities* group people that share the same experiences or frameworks of understandings. In this category the author introduces the *communities of practice* and the *communities of interests*, the essential element of this community being the topic of the discussion which makes its participants to actively involve in interactions and share the virtual space. The *proximate communities* are communities that involve the idea of space. In *virtual communities* like MUD and MOOs, the interactions take place in virtual spaces (public or private). The author seems to consider the conceptualisation of the space as the distinctive category of the *proximate communities*. The *fluid communities* are generally described through a metaphor that refers to the life in the ancient societies and represents a very subjective point of view on their description.

One of the most comprehensible classifications of the virtual communities was presented in Stanoevska-Slabeva&Schmid (2001) and in Stanoevska-Slabeva (2002). The authors distinguish among the following categories of virtual communities: *discussion communities*, *task/goal-oriented communities*, *virtual worlds*, and *hybrid communities*.

As noted by Porter (2004), the classification operated by Stanoevska-Slabeva (2002) takes into consideration only one variable in the organisation of the virtual communities. The categorisation proposed by Porter is much more complex and in the following section we will use it especially in order to identify the category of the *professional web forum* (see 2.4). Porter (2004) establishes a two-level model of the virtual communities (*establishment* and

relationship orientation). Within the category of *establishment*, the author distinguishes two categories: *member-initiated communities* and *organisation-sponsored communities*. In the *relationship orientation* category fall: *discussion communities* and *task/goal-oriented communities*, which are *member-initiated communities*. *Organisation-sponsored virtual communities* consist of: *virtual worlds* and *hybrid communities*.

This two-level typology is completed with a characterisation of the virtual communities consisting in five attributes, named by the author 'the five Ps': *purpose (content of interaction)*, *place (extent of technology mediation of interaction)*, *platform (design of interaction)*, *population interaction structure (pattern of interaction)*, and *profit model (revenue generation)*.

Other authors that one can take into account in what concerns the categorisation of the virtual communities are Jones&Rafaeli (2000), Bagozzi & Dholakia (2002), or Wu Song (2010).

2.4. Professional Web Forum: A Virtual Community

As a conclusion to this presentation chapter we consider that, after the general overview of the e-discourse (CMC) and virtual communities we can answer a series of essential questions concerning the object of our analysis in the present work: *the professional web forum*.

These questions are meant to describe the professional web forum from a scientific and objective point of view. We consider that it is important to relate the object of our analysis to different essential CMC concepts, for the different insights we have already found in literature are *partial*, too *descriptive*, or focus on other domains.

The first aspect we want to clarify is: *are the professional web forum interactions a form of e-discourse (CMC)*? If we take into account, as we have already commented on (see 2.2.1), the definition of Herring (1996, p.1), one can observe that the professional web forum is a form of ediscourse: a) it is the result of "text-based CMC"; b) the text that forms the interactions is written "... using a keyboard of one computer"; c) the collocutors receive and "... read the message on their computer screens...".

The next step in the definition of CMC on the professional web forum consists in determining *what category of e-discourse (CMC) professional web forum interactions belong to*? In order to answer this question, we must refer to the e-discourse categories (see 2.2.2). According to the scheme of the CMC

modes (Chun, 2008, p.18) the *communication on professional web forums* belongs to the 1st generation of asynchronous, text-based CMC. Here, if we take into account the tradition established by Biber's studies, we can state that the *professional web forum* is a hybridised discursive mode that has the aspect of a *written conversation*. If we point out the nature of the *professional web forum* under thematic aspect (Herring, 1996, pp.1-6), we may also observe that the *CMC on professional web forums* concerns specialised topics.

Another aspect of the description of the CMC on professional web forums concerns the moment of its creation: *when did CMC appear on the Internet professional web forums?* Based on the information presented in 2.2.3, the emergence of primitive forms of *web forums* (*newsgroups* and *mailinglists*) was recorded in the late '70s. According to Rheingold (1993; 2000) the WELL was very active in 1985. The WELL is one of the most durable virtual communities and was best known for its *web forums*.

Since it seems that a form of CMC has been produced as a result of communicational interactions on professional web forums, the next question we have to answer is: *can professional web forums be defined as a virtual community?*

The answer to this question is affirmative. The *professional web forum* is a virtual community since its members form "a group of people who associate themselves over time with a computer-mediated environment" (Herring, 2008, see 2.3.1)

The answer to the last question will further clarify our assertion: *what category of community is the professional web forum?* Based on Porter's (2004) typology the professional web forum is a *member initiated virtual community* (in terms of establishment) and a *task/goal-oriented community* (in terms of relationship orientation). Supplementary descriptions of the professional web forum can be obtained from the five descriptive attributes of the virtual communities' typology. Based on these attributes, the *professional web forum* has: a *specialised purpose* (e.g. computer problems assistance); a sense of the *virtual space* where the participants share values, beliefs, and information; the platform of the professional web forum is represented by the asynchronous design of interaction, and there is no profit model since the participants in the web forum don't generate income.

As a conclusion to this chapter, we think that we have already demonstrated that we can talk about the *professional web forums interactions* as a particular form of e-discourse (CMC), as resulting from the communicational activity of the members of a professional web forum.

3. Knowledge Transmission on the Internet

As we have illustrated in the previous chapter, a *professional web forum* represents a virtual community that transmits specialised content through *computer mediated communication*. In this chapter we will try to demonstrate that the specialised content communicated between the members of a professional web forum represents *knowledge*.

Knowledge and *knowledge transmission* may cause surprise and confusion at the beginning. The first term is the main concept used by multiple disciplines; the second is a fairly recent term related to the theory of communication in general, and the theory of technological communication in particular. Both terms are complex to outline, each for different reasons. *Knowledge* as a concept has many interpretations in different domains, disciplines and theories from Antiquity to the present, whereas *knowledge transmission* represents a relatively new notion with a rich yet rather vague terminology.

For example, some of the terms describing knowledge transmission are: knowledge communication, knowledge sharing, knowledge transfer, knowledge dialogue, knowledge intermediation, and so on. Basically, each describes the same process of knowledge transmission and all may be used interchangeably as synonyms. Their use is not accurate in general, as one can observe in the Encyclopedia of Knowledge Management (Schwartz, 2006, p.493)²⁹.

On the other hand, *knowledge* is, too, a complex term because of its interdisciplinarity. The term is central to different disciplines such as: *Philosophy, Logic, Epistemology, Cognitive Sciences, Didactics, Pedagogy, Psychology, Sociology*, and, more recently, to the *Theory of Communication, Artificial Intelligence, Knowledge Management, and ELearning*. Depending on the insight, *knowledge* is the object of different descriptions and classifications.

In this chapter, we will illustrate different knowledge and knowledge transmission/communication/learning theories in order to answer the following questions: *What is knowledge? How is knowledge organised? How is knowledge expressed? How is knowledge transmitted? What explanatory forms are used in knowledge transmission?*

²⁹ An illustrative example of the imprecision of these terms can be observed in the definition of *knowledge sharing* and *knowledge transfer*.

3.1. What is Knowledge?

Since *knowledge transmission* is the main focus of professional web forums communication, it is important to establish what this notion means. The problem in defining *knowledge* consists in the fact that it has represented the object of one of the main debates in philosophy during the last two millennia and that the discussion is still open.

The early approaches to *knowledge* have a rationalist basis and come from Plato (*Meno*) and Aristotle (*Organon*), each having a different insight into this topic. Both philosophers tried to define knowledge as universals and intended to provide a complete cognitive system. Furthermore, Aristotle considered that the metaphor is a powerful cognitive mechanism that facilitates the understanding and the codification of new cognitive content. The discussion about the nature of *knowledge* evolved in two main directions: *rationalism*³⁰, as espoused by St. Augustine, Saint Thomas Aquinas, René Descartes, G.W. Leibniz, and *empiricism*, John Locke, David Hume, and Bertrand Russell. With each new contribution, the discussion about the nature of knowledge would change. In 20th century philosophy, the impossibility of a universal definition of knowledge seems to have been generally accepted. Partial or domain-oriented definitions of *knowledge*, created to be operational within very specific domains, are the current approach, as noted by Pears (1972), Alavi & Leidner (2001), Stenmark (2002). This has led to the emergence of various definitions of knowledge in multiple domains. Today, *knowledge* represents an extremely heterogeneous notion (Zagzebski, 2004, pp.92-116).

Due to the heterogeneity of the studies on *knowledge*, in the current work we will rely on one of the several existing *theories of knowledge* and we will try to describe *knowledge*, its diversity, and its structure in the *professional web forum* by using its conceptual structure. Consequently, we have chosen the theory of Michael Polanyi, now a classical 20th century study about *knowledge* which constitutes the theoretical basis for a novel discipline known as *Knowledge Management*.

a. Polanyi and knowledge theory

Discovered relatively late by the modern philosophers, the works of M. Polanyi had an important contribution to the development of Khun's (1962) subsequent theory. Later, both were quoted in Nonaka (1994) and

³⁰ For more details on empiricism and rationalism, see Solomon & Higgins (2010).

Nonaka & Takeuchi (1995) with a slight difference of interpretation³¹. The influence played by Polanyi's theory of knowledge on the early studies of *Knowledge Management* led to the acknowledgement of his works as an essential part of the framework of this discipline.

In what concerns our study, the decision to adopt Polanyi's perspective on the *nature of knowledge* is motivated by important reasons. First of all, Polanyi's works are under the strong influence of classic *rationalism*, the author continuing coherently a long tradition in the study of cognition and knowledge, to which we subscribe too³². The Aristotelian insights of his works concern essential some aspects such as the relation *knowledge-verbal communication* and *knowledge-language-metaphor* (Polanyi, 1975), which are important for the conceptual framework of our present investigation. Another argument pro Polanyi's perspective consists in the compatibility of his theory with *cognitivism*, which may allow us to relate concepts and terms from knowledge theory to other domains such as: learning, e-learning and to the communication theories. Polanyi's theory is also compatible with *discourse analysis*, especially in what concerns his view on knowledge as a social act, as he established the existence of an essential relation between *knowledge* and speech (implicitly, discourse).

Finally, the last of our arguments points to the relation between Polanyi's theory with the domain of *Knowledge Management (KM)*, which is essential for the description of knowledge communication between individuals, groups, and companies using CMC and IT innovations. This will allow us to observe and adapt one of the communicational models in the description of *knowledge transmission* in the professional web forum communication. *

b. Polanyi and the tacit dimension

The definition given by Polanyi to *knowledge* describes three of its essential aspects: a) true discovery cannot be explained through rules and/or algorithms, b) knowledge is public and at the same time personal, as it involves emotions and "passion", and c) all knowledge is tacit.

By assuming this definition, the author distinguishes between two complementary types of knowledge: *focal knowledge* and *tacit knowledge*. *Focal knowledge* represents the knowledge about an object/concept/event/phenomenon

³¹ Basically, the difference consists in the use of Polanyi's terminology in a way that some scholars seem to regard as a misinterpretation (see Stenmark, 2002, p.5). ³² For example, concepts like "personal knowledge" and "tacit knowledge", central to Polanyi's research on *knowledge* and *cognition*, are coherent with Ancient Greek philosophy, particularly Aristotle's.

one centres his attention on, and *tacit knowledge* represents the knowledge used to manage *focal knowledge*. For example, when someone plays a videogame, pressing the keys so that an action on the screen may be accomplished represents the *tacit knowledge*. The player's attention focused on the goal of the game (to perform different actions depending on the videogame) represents the *focal knowledge*.

The most important of the two is *tacit knowledge*. It has a changing nature, as it varies depending on the situation.

In Polanyi's opinion, knowledge is static and dynamic and man uses it permanently. Every moment of someone's life consists in a continuous switching between *tacit* and *focal knowledge*. The assimilation of new knowledge is explained by man's basic ability to blend known concepts with new ones.

c. Knowledge and expression

According to Polanyi's ideas, man has the capacity to express *tacit knowledge*. The tacit knowledge expressed through speech is called *explicit knowledge*.

The author affirms that man learns the meaning of words by basic experience and practice (similarly to how animals come to know things) from other people that have used them before and which designate a specific experience. The function of knowledge articulation in language is to materialise tacit knowledge in order to examine it (analyse, categorise, and criticise). In other words, it is a way of increasing cognition.

Since not all tacit knowledge can be articulated (see Polanyi's example about knowledge involved in bike riding – Polanyi, 1975, p.41; Collins, 2010, p.99), it results that *tacit knowledge* is more extended than *explicit knowledge*. In other words, it seems that we know more than we can express by words. The author affirms that the articulation of knowledge is not sufficient to make knowledge explicit, that knowledge exists in one's mind because it was constructed there through words. Thus, the use of language (e.g. specialised terminology) is not mandatory once the knowledge has been acquired. For instance, in the computer field, one can install an operative system even if he/she has forgotten the use of computer terminology.

d. Functional aspect of knowledge

The functions of knowledge, according to Polanyi, consist in supporting actions/decisions and acquiring new knowledge. The author makes no distinction

between practical knowledge and theoretical knowledge. He claims that craftsmen use, acquire, and transmit knowledge in the same way that scientists and researchers do. He states there is a unique process-of-knowing.

e. An active conception of knowing

Polanyi figures the act-of-knowing as an action. For the author *to know* means *to do* as in the case of a geek, for example, whose skills are an *act of doing* as well as an *act of knowing*. Depending on the type of action they are involved in, *physical* or *intellectual*, the author distinguishes different types of: *tools*, *rules*, and *agents*.

The intellectual tools are distinct from the physical tools, because they are used in a social context. One must know a certain social context in order to use intellectual tools. Scientists and researchers use intellectual tools and rules in a similar fashion. The intellectual tools and rules are involved in information processing. The author also mentions the distinctive characteristics of the intellectual and physical tools by remarking that while craftsmen can easily detach from their tools and activities, scientists can't.

The author abolishes the difference between people that "do" things and people that "think" things. Both activities, in his opinion, are different forms of *doing*, different materialisations of the process of knowing. Consequently, he proposes the terms of *intellective doing* and *agentive doing*.

In conclusion, Polanyi's theory of *knowledge* defines this concept as static (*knowledge*) and dynamic (*process-of-knowing*). Knowledge can be *tacit* and *focal*, both of which are considered by the author as dimensions of *knowledge* rather than two categories of the same concept. Some of the tacit knowledge can be articulated, therefore transmitted.

3.2. Knowledge Structures

As we have already seen in 3.1, *knowledge* is not an amorphous and indefinite notion but a heterogeneous one. In other words, even if, apparently it seems chaotic, it can be categorised and ordered. In this section we will illustrate and comment on some of the categorisations of knowledge with the intent to establish which would be most appropriate to operate with in the analysis of the structure of knowledge on the professional web forums. The insights we have taken into account come from *epistemology* and *knowledge management*.

A general accepted and basic classification of knowledge comes from philosophy and states the existence of three categories of knowledge: *personal knowledge*³², *procedural knowledge*, and *propositional knowledge*. The first category, also known as *knowledge by acquaintance*, represents the knowledge of an *object*, *phenomenon*, or *concept*³³. *Procedural knowledge* represents the ability/capability of doing something (e.g. install an operating system, create a web page, drive a car, fix a hard drive, etc.). Lastly, *propositional knowledge*, the main cognitive aspect epistemology is interested in, represents the knowledge one “believes or knows (propositionally) that he knows personally”³⁵. *Personal* and *propositional knowledge* are involved in science, each in a different way. Personal knowledge represents knowledge acquired through personal experience (what classic Greek philosophers and cognitivists understand by “sensorial perception”). Propositional experience is a *deduction*, *interpretation*, *justified belief* that one obtains on the basis of one’s personal experience. *Propositional knowledge* represents an evaluation and a rationalisation of a primary personal experience.

An epistemological point of view on the classification of knowledge is proposed by Pollock & Cruz (1999, pp.15-22). The authors don’t categorise directly knowledge but areas of knowledge. They distinguish the following six areas: *perceptual knowledge*, *a priori knowledge*, *moral knowledge*, *knowledge of other minds*, *memory*, and *induction*. This classification is very general and slightly heterogeneous. I would say that this is a list of general themes of discussions about knowledge rather than a classification of knowledge. Due to the various criteria it is based on, this classification is not operational for our purpose.

Another epistemological paradigm of knowledge hierarchy, based on various authors³⁴, is presented by Sveiby (1999, p.24). The author proposes a three-level hierarchy of knowledge consisting in: *skill*, *kno-how*, and *competence/expertise*. The criterion for this classification is the manner of following rules. Consequently, *skill* represents a primary level of knowledge, where knowledge is the action that takes place in a context controlled by the self (basically, actions of the self with no interaction with the social environment). Skills are represented by practical abilities such as using the keyboard and the mouse

³² This concept has nothing to do with the definition of *personal knowledge* in Polanyi’s knowledge theory.

³³ It can also signify that one knows the existence of an *object*, *phenomenon*, or *concept*. ³⁵ For more information on this classification of the types of knowledge, please consult Villoro (1998: 224-291).

³⁴ Especially Polanyi, but not only.

when writing an email or searching for a web page. One is able to appreciate if the result of the action is positive or not.

Know-how represents a superior level that includes the *skill*. It is a category of knowledge that acts in social contexts or, sometimes, involves problem solving capabilities. It is the result of the performance that is important (Ryle, 1949). Polanyi does not include *know-how* in his classification, probably, as Sveiby (1999) appreciates, because his arguments go against Ryle's.

Sveiby considers *expertise/competence* (Polanyi, 1958) as the most important category of knowledge. It incorporates *know-how* and consists in the ability to submit to, to influence, and modify the rules by reflection. The rules can pertain to a specialised field or can be determined by tradition. The *expertise* is formalised as the relation between individuals and a social system of rules (Polanyi, 1958). The expert's action in a specialised context where his/her expertise is needed is guided by reason and he/she will do what he/she knows/believes he has to do in that context and not by impulsivity or subjectivity.

Somehow outside of the classification of knowledge, Sveiby also considers the situation of the absence of knowledge, of *incompetence*, a category discussed by Polanyi (1958). The latter distinguishes between *scientific guesses* (mistaken guesses) and *unscientific guesses* (*false* and *incompetent guesses*). The quality of *incompetent* in the perspective of Polanyi is socially determined by a context and a role a person assumes. Due to the fact that Sveiby describes a paradigm where knowledge is classified by levels of competences and that he also takes into consideration the phenomenon of *incompetence*, we consider this classification as the most accurate for the description of knowledge transmitted through Internet.

Another interesting point of view in the classification of knowledge is variably presented in a number of widely read books. Knowledge is articulated as a hierarchy of elements known as "knowledge hierarchy", "information hierarchy", "DIKW hierarchy", and "knowledge pyramid" (Rowley, 2007). Some of the most important scholars that have developed hierarchic structures of knowledge are: Cleveland (1982), Ackoff (1988), Bellinger (1997), and Tuomi (1999). According to these authors, *knowledge* is just a level in a hierarchic structure that commences with *data* and finishes with *wisdom*. The DIKW hierarchy presents different structures from several authors, where the definitions of their components and the relation between them are differently described³⁵. The components of the hierarchy are usually

³⁵ For complete information on the DIKW please see (Rowley, 2007).

defined in terms of other elements of the same hierarchy (e.g. *information* is defined in terms of *data*; *knowledge* is defined in terms of *information*, and so on). The hierarchies proposed are the following:

- Cleveland (1982): facts/ideas, information, knowledge, wisdom;
- Ackoff (1988): data, information, knowledge, understanding, wisdom;
- Tuomi (1999): data, information, knowledge.

The hierarchisation of knowledge has its origins in the work of one of the exponents of American philosophy, Mortimer Adler, and marks the transition to the new discipline known as *knowledge management (KM)*, where some of these hierarchies were implemented. Nevertheless, KM has provided a different insight into knowledge classification, as Stenmark (2002, p.4) observes. Some of the examples of the classification of knowledge in KM structure knowledge as follows:

- Nonaka (1994): tacit and explicit knowledge;
- Boisot (1995): proprietary, public, personal, and commonsense knowledge;
- Choo (2000): tacit, explicit, and cultural knowledge;
- Spender (1998): explicit, implicit, individual, and collective knowledge;
- Polanyi (1966/1997): tacit, focal³⁶ knowledge.

Other classifications of knowledge can also be contemplated in *pedagogy*, *e-learning*, or *artificial intelligence*. As one can observe, every domain/discipline has developed knowledge classifications and hierarchies appropriate to their activities and goals. In what concerns knowledge transmission on *professional web forums*, we take the classification proposed by Sveiby (1999, p. 24) to be the most convenient, especially because it also comprises *incompetence* as an aspect related to *knowledge*, and thus it is more attuned to the structure of the professional web forum discussion, which involves both aspects: *knowledge* and *ignorance*.

3.3. Discursive Forms of Knowledge

The answer to the question *how knowledge is expressed* entails a double perspective: philosophical and linguistic. The philosophical point of view describes the relation knowledge – articulation of knowledge in speech, and the linguistic point of view describes the textual organisation of the discourses encoding knowledge. In this section we will illustrate, firstly, the philosophical

³⁶ All the information above is cited from Stenmark (2002: 4).

point of view in order to identify the logic relation between *knowledge*, *speech* and *text*.

The first mention of a direct relation between *knowledge* and *text* comes from Plato (*Theaetetus*³⁷):

Socrates: And there might be given other proofs of this belief, if I'm not mistaken. But do not let us in looking for them lose sight of the question before us, *which is the meaning of the statement, that right opinion with rational definition or explanation is the most perfect form of knowledge.* (Plato, *Theaetetus*, <http://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/p/plato/p71th/theaetetus.html>)

As we can observe in the fragment above, Plato considers that knowledge³⁸ as “the right opinion” supported by a “definition” or an “explanation” is the way to express knowledge. We lay emphasis on the concept’s “definition” and “explanation” as the two ways of constructing knowledge, because we consider this statement as essential for our analysis of the transmission of knowledge on the professional web forums.

Other early mentions of explanations in philosophy describe the *functional or teleological explanation* (Aristotle, *Physics*, <https://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/physics.html>): a type of explanation which provides the function or the goal of an event. Since then, different philosophical theories of explanations were developed and they were classified into different categories, such as the *causal explanation* (David Lewis, 1986; Ruben, 1993) – a type of explanation which gives information about the chronological evolution of an event, and the *probabilistic explanation*, considered to be a key element in the philosophy of science.

Important contributions to the description of the explanatory mechanism are those of Carl Hempel (1965 p. 336)³⁹ according to whom the explanation is an *argument*. The author distinguishes between two types of explanations, both having the same structure: DN (deductivenomological explanation) and IS (inductive-statistical explanation). According to Hempel’s model, an explanation contains different *premises* and a *conclusion*. The author considers that there are two types of premises: *statements*, describing the *initial conditions*

³⁷ Plato’s dialogue that presents opinions on the *nature of knowledge*. The main character Socrates and his collocutor Theaetetus analyse three insights about knowledge: *knowledge as perception*, *knowledge as true belief*, and *knowledge as true belief supported by account*.

³⁸ Conceptualised here as “true belief”.

³⁹ C. G. Hempel was one of the most important logical empiricist philosophers. His work on *explanation theory* is significant in current thought.

which lead to the production of the explanation and *generalisations*, rules/laws on which the explanation is based. The *conclusion* of the explanation is the event to be explained.

The DN explanation is considered to be a *universal generalisation*, while the IS is more of a *statistical generalisation*. For example, a DN explanation is:

Premises:	Initial conditions (C):	Mary is a girl that has the same biological parents as I.
	Generalisations (L):	All girls that have the same biological parents as I, are my sisters.
Conclusion (E):		Mary is my sister.

An example of IS explanation is:

Premises:	Initial conditions (C):	A man is under water for more than 5 minutes.
	Generalisations (L):	Almost anyone who stays under water more than 5 minutes drowns.
Conclusion (E):		The man has drowned.

Even if Hempel’s theory was the first in providing a solid theoretical basis in the description and understanding of the mechanism of the explanation, this model has its limitations as highlighted by posterior critics of this theory⁴⁰.

*

It is generally accepted that the modern explanation theory is modelled by five traditional directions (Mayes, 2005), as follows: *Causal Realism* (Scriven, 1959; Salmon, 1984, 1990), *Constructive Empiricism* (Fraassen, 1980), *Ordinary Language Philosophy*, mainly the illocutionary theory of explanation (Achinstein, 1983), *Cognitive Science* (Holland et al., 1986), and *Naturalism and Scientific Realism* (Sellars, 1962; Harman, Lehrer, Thagad, Kitcher, 1986). We will not insist any further on this, because our intention is only to underline the fact that some of the models proposed by the philosophical explanation theory have been developed later rather as language-oriented theories, as we will discuss later in this chapter.

⁴⁰ For a concise presentation of the criticism of Hepel’s theory of explanation see *The Internet Encyclopaedia of Philosophy* (<http://www.iep.utm.edu/explanat/#H1>). For more details, see Wesley Salmon (1984) on the problem of relevance and Sylvain Bromberger (1966) on the problem of asymmetry.

We consider the *Pragmatic theory of the explanation* elaborated by Fraassen to be a very important aspect in the study of explanation in discourse. The author defines the explanation as “...an answer to a *why-question*”, and consequently, “... a *theory of the explanation must be a why-question theory*”. (Fraassen, 1980, p. 138)

Fraassen oversteps the philosophical point of view and tries to describe the explanation at a textual level from a pragmatic point of view. In order to observe the pragmatic dimension of the explanation, he first evaluates the explanation in its communicational context, and only then goes on to a definition and classification of the *questions* as the element which triggers an explanation. On this basis he, then, articulates the theory of the *why-questions*, and concludes with the evaluation of the answers to *why-questions* (the *explanation*) and their relevance.

*

Fraassen (1980) points out that the explanation can be realised only through communication and underlines that all communication is context-dependent, and so is the explanation. The context is described in terms of time (now), space (here), “speaker” (as referent of “I”), addressee (as referent of “you”), and person discussed (as referent for “he/she”). The entire context is perceived in the conception of Fraassen (1980, p. 138) as an “idealization” of the real/physical context.

The Questions: An important component of Fraassen’s theory of the explanation is the *question*, defined by the author in the following terms:

A question is an abstract entity; it is expressed by an interrogative (a piece of language) in the same sense that a proposition is expressed by a declarative sentence. (Fraassen, 1980, p. 140)

The author states that the mechanism of a question involves the existence of a response, but he underlines that not every response can be regarded as an *answer*. This statement is used as the basis to the classification of answers depending on their degree of relevance. Taking as example a simple question, Fraassen (1980, p. 140) analyses the answers and creates a basic typology of its possible answers: *direct answer*⁴¹, *code*⁴², and two types of *partial*

⁴¹ A complete answer which gives complete information to the question asked without any supplementary details.

⁴² An elliptic *Yes/No* answer, which must be interpreted in the communicational context in order to be correctly understood.

answers⁴³. He also observes (Fraassen 1980, p. 142) that the classification of the answers has to be open because they are context-dependent and they must differ in structure depending on the situation of communication.

The Formal Pragmatics of Why-Questions: The author considers that a theory of explanation is essentially a theory of why-questions, and in order to provide a functional model of the explanation he describes the mechanism of why-questions as a first step, followed by the evaluation of the answers, implicitly explanations.

The *Why-Questions* describe a reality and ask for the reason for the existence of the phenomena observed in the described reality. According to Fraassen⁴⁴, the why-questions present the following structure:

1. **Topic**: A proposition describing the reality and asking for the reason of it, having the following structure: *Why <subject> <fact>?* As for example the famous English riddle: *Why did the chicken cross the road?*
2. **Contrast Class**: A collection of propositions together with the topic of the question representing a set of alternatives in opposition with the why-question. For example:
 - a. *Why did the chicken cross the road?* – Possible alternatives to “the chicken” could be every element which enters in opposition with the subject of the proposition such as: *the duck, the hen, the eagle, and so on.*
 - b. *Why did the chicken cross the road?* – Possible alternatives to “cross” as it appears in some of the versions of this riddle: *Why the chicken didn't cross the road?*
 - c. *Why did the chicken cross the road?* – Possible alternatives to “the road” could be every element which enters in opposition with it: *the bridge, the street, the alley.*
3. **Relevance Relation**: refers to the reason for asking the why-question. In the case of the why-question: *Why did the chicken cross the road?* the humour of this riddle resides in the lack of relevance between the why-question and the explanatory answer. For example: *Whether the chicken crossed the street or the street moved beneath the chicken depends on your mark of reference.*

⁴³ The main type of *partial answer* is that which gives more information than the information requested in the question. The second type of *partial answer* gives less information.

⁴⁴ Fraassen uses the terminology of Henry Leonard

The author also proposes a formal model of the explanation where if the why-question can be formalised as $Q = \langle P_k, X, R \rangle$ ⁴⁵, then *the answer/the explanation* has the following form: (*) P_k in contrast to (the rest of) X , because A (Fraassen, 1980, p. 144).

This formalism expresses a proposition. Its contents depend on the context of the Q (*why-question*). As well, the explanation mechanism claims that P_k is true and the alternatives of the X class are not true, the A preceded by *because* claims that A is true and is basically the reason for the *why-question*.

This model of the explanation is criticised by Salmon&Kitcher (1987), who argue that Van Fraassen's theory of explanation is too general and does not impose enough constraints on the relevance relation.

*

The *explanation theory* presents different insights and different points of view in *linguistics*. Here the *explanation* represents a key concept in the *functionalist* and in the *generative* (Chomskian) *linguistics* approach, with special focus on the syntax. The main focus is on the internal structural principles of language regarded as explanatory constructs independent of meaning (Newmeyer 1998, pp.476-477). An important aspect of the perspective on the explanation and the language universals is the typology of explanation which is operational at the textual/discursive level too. Thus, the four types of explanation described by the functionalist grammar can make us understand that explanations can be structured in different manners, which is a good approach to the study of the explanatory sequence at a discursive level. Consequently, the functionalist distinction between the *teleological explanation*⁴⁶, the *generalizing explanation*⁴⁷, the *historical explanation*⁴⁸, and the *generalizing-historical explanation*⁴⁹ can help us with the classification of the explanatory sequences at the discursive level.

⁴⁵ Q stands for the why-question, P_k stands for the topic of the why-question, X for the contrast-class, and R for the relevance relation.

⁴⁶ It refers to the *motivation of an action*. E.g. Q: *Why did you shut down the TV?* A: *So he could do his homework.*

⁴⁷ It refers to a phenomenon regarded as an instantiation of a more general phenomenon. e.g. Q: *Why do we have no classes today?* R: *Today is San Jordi. (a holiday in Catalunya).*

⁴⁸ It refers to phenomena which chronologically lead to a certain situation: e.g. Q: *Why don't we need a visa to travel to EU?* A: *Because Romania was admitted to the EU in 2006.*

⁴⁹ It refers to phenomena that are the result of generally historical constraints. E.g. Q: *Why the bats haven't eyes?* A: *Because they have developed a different orientation system based on ultrasound which is better adapted to their environment than the visual orientation.*

*

Other linguistic perspectives on the explanatory discourse as *informative and explanatory communication* describe the *explanation* within the theoretical frame of the studies presented by such scholars as Austin, Grice, or Searle.

In his book *A Theory of Discourse. The Aims of Discourse* (1971), Kinneavy develops his *discourse theory* based on the classic rhetorical, poetic, and linguistic tradition⁵⁰. The author synthesises several theories and perspectives, from the classical Greek tradition to the modern theories of rhetoric, into a theory oriented to the *aims of the communication*. His is considered to be the most important contribution to the development of the domain of *informative and explanatory communication*.

In the last four chapters of his book, the author classifies *communication* based on the locutor's aims. These aims are deeply rooted in the approaches of the Ancient philosophers and rhetoricians, such as Isocrates, Aristotle or Cicero⁵¹. He distinguishes, defines and describes four discourses with four different aims: *referential discourse*, *persuasive discourse*, *literary discourse*, and *expressive discourse*. This distinction represents a modern perspective on the uses of the modes of discourse (description, narration, definition/classification, and evaluation). In Kinneavy's theory of communication the modes of discourse are subordinated to the aims of the discourse⁵². Even if his theory was criticised from different perspectives (Fulkerson, 1984), it is still considered an important reference in didactics, especially in the composition textbooks pointing out the essence of Kinneavy's theory, the purposes for writing (assimilated with the *aims*) and the modes (ways to construct/develop the *aims*).

Even if Kinneavy's theory is not fundamental for the description of the explanatory sequence, it represents the starting point of the American *theory of the informative and explanatory communication* (Rowan, 2008, pp. 403-438). After an estimation of the main problems of the informative and explanatory communication and after presenting a few examples on how the lack of good informative and explanatory communication can affect the reception of the message one is transmitting at a certain moment, the author takes into

⁵⁰ The communication theory of James Kinneavy is especially based on Aristotle's communication triangle and on the re-discussion of the Platonic concept of *kairos*.

⁵¹ Actually, just three of the four aims are rooted in Ancient philosophy and rhetoric: reference, persuasive and literary. The expressive aim is rooted in the 17th century approaches.

⁵² Kinneavy distinguishes the aims of communication starting from Alexander Bain's forms and modes of discourse: narration, description, exposition, argumentation, persuasion, and poetry.

consideration different aim-oriented communication theories. She begins with the ancient Greek tradition and, after an overview of the “beliefs” on readability, she shifts her focus onto informative communication and visits the 20th century theories from the perspective of the language use and goals, the most important scholars being, in the author’s opinion, Austin, Grice, and Searle. She also points out that from among the different researches done in this domain, the most effective is Kinneavy’s theory.

Based on this theory she creates a schema from which, on account of the different aims of communication, there result different categories of *informational and explanatory discourse*. Rowan (2008, p. 409) starts with the *discursive aims* and distinguishes in her classification different *elements* and *goals*. Rooted into these elements and goals, she distinguishes between the following types of reference: *self-expressive, persuasive, reference, and literary*. From these types, only the *reference* presents a rich variety of discourses: *exploratory, informative, scientific, and representative* (Rowan, 2008, p. 410). The informative discourse is considered to be a representation of reality and it shares characteristics with the *scientific discourse* and *exploratory discourse*⁵³. Rowan quoting Kinneavy distinguishes two different categories of *informative discourse: explanatory and informatory discourse*. In what follows, we will reproduce Rowan’s classification of texts:

EXPLANATORY DISCOURSE (efforts to deepen understanding)	INFORMATORY DISCOURSE (efforts to create awareness)
Textbooks	Instructions
Briefings	Recipes
Lectures	Online help
Glossaries	Indexes
Dictionary definitions of “stock”	Stock quotes
Encyclopaedia entry on “baseball”	Baseball scores
Explanatory news features	Brief news stories

As one can observe, the explanation can represent an entire discourse, as in *glossary, dictionary, and encyclopaedia entries*, or it can represent features of another discourse, like in *explanatory news features*.

⁵³ For more details on the description of discourses, please see Rowan (2008: 409-414).

We consider that, in what concerns the professional web forum, the explanation represents a major feature of a communicational interaction (professional web forums), a discourse designed to represent reality and determined by the goal to make specialised knowledge more accessible to the lay people.

In what follows, we will distinguish between the *explanation* as a *type of text* presenting a specific discursive organisation and being oriented to a specific goal (*explain, specify, point out something*), and the *explanatory strategies*, different types of texts, used in a discourse with the intention to *explain, specify, point out something*.

3.4. Transmission of Knowledge

If questions like nature, type, and scope of knowledge belong to the domain of epistemological research, the question about *how knowledge is transmitted* represents a different focus on the problem⁵⁴ and belongs to a different area of study. Different disciplines present their particular insights into the process. They are mostly educational disciplines such as: *e-learning, v-learning, life-long learning, mLearning, AI-based learning, knowledge management*, and so on. They describe different approaches to the knowledge communication process. The way the process is viewed varies with every discipline. We, thus, distinguish two main perceptions of the knowledge communication process: *knowledge communication as learning process* (e-learning, v-learning, life-long learning, mLearning, AI-based learning and all other forms of institutional learning existing on the Internet) and *knowledge communication as sharing process between individuals* (online informal learning and knowledge management). Each of these insights has its specific approaches to the process of knowledge transmission and its specific models that illustrate how different the process of knowledge transmission is in either case. In what follows, we will comment on two important models representing both orientations in order to highlight the specifics of knowledge transfer on the professional web forums.

The first model represents *knowledge communication as learning process* and describes the e-learning process as a series of 5 levels of *e-tivities* the *e-student* has to go through in order to achieve a specific educational goal (Salmon, 2002, p. 11). The process is cumulative and gradual. Three types of

⁵⁴ Knowledge transmission focuses on the process, methods, and on the participants involved in the transmission of knowledge. *Knowledge* is not the main element of the problem.

interactions can be identified: *e-student–technical support*, *estudent–e-moderator*, and *e-student–e-student(s)*. The transmission of knowledge is realised through controlled/assisted activities and the amount of interactivity grows with every stage. It is important to observe that the motivation didn't exist before entering the system, so the student must be motivated to socialise, communicate and construct knowledge. One main aspect of the e-learning process as described by Gilly Salmon (2002) is that the motivation seems not to exist outside the learning process. It is created during the five stages of e-learning and is oriented towards “engagement and mobilisation of learning”⁵⁵ and represents an essential aspect of the knowledge transmission process especially because the motivation depends on the level of the active involvement of the e-student in the process of e-learning.

The knowledge transmission process is conceived as a social act, where the e-student interacts with other e-students. One of the first levels of knowledge transmission is conceptualised as *information exchange* and is the result of the performance of specific tasks and the assimilation of knowledge from learning materials. *Knowledge construction* is the superior level of knowledge transmission and supposes the existence of a united group of e-students that have their own group dynamics. The knowledge is constructed dynamically through online interaction, each student assuming different roles in the process.

The last stage of the process shows an independent e-student that can evaluate, criticise, and appreciate the information and cognitive contents he needs and has all the necessary skills, technical and social. Gilly Salmon describes practically an *independent e-learner* that has no more need of assistance and mediation in order to acquire new knowledge.

It is important to observe that the description of the skills acquired after the entire process described in the *E-tivities*, the e-student is able to assume the condition of *independent e-learner*, the same condition a *novice* assumes when he/she opens a thread on a professional web forum. From this perspective, the *professional web forum user* has, at the beginning of the *knowledge transmission process*, the same skills as an student after he/she has passed through the entire *e-tivities* process. Thus, we consider that the e-learning model is not compatible with the knowledge transmission process, since the e-student is not considered an *independent learner* during his/her training, and consequently,

⁵⁵ See the comments of Gilly Salmon on the Five stage model, section *Access and Motivation* (Salmon, 2002, p. 12)

the activities he/she develops are different from the activities that a professional web forum user performs in order to acquire knowledge.

The second model of *knowledge transmission* comes from knowledge management (KM) and describes *knowledge sharing between individuals*. It is based on the *mathematical model of communication* developed by Shannon&Weaver (1949), later developed by Berlo (1960), and is largely applied in the description of specialised knowledge transmission through CMC in companies, corporations, and research projects (Jacobson, 2006, p. 508-514):

The model consists of: *source, message, channel, receiver* and *feedback*. Knowledge transmission is conceived as a communicative process that takes place in a social context, between individuals, groups, or companies. The *source* is an individual whose function is to transmit the knowledge he/she possesses, intentionally or unintentionally⁵⁶. It is important to observe that this model insists on the necessity to motivate the individuals in a company to share their knowledge, whereas the receiver *is* self-motivated to learn. The *message* is the component where the knowledge is encoded. The author mentions that the model she discusses is based on the knowledge structure proposed by Nonaka&Takeuchi (1995) following the classification proposed by Polanyi (1958), who describes knowledge as a continuum between tacit and explicit knowledge. Explicit knowledge represents the part of tacit knowledge that can be articulated in formal language and transmitted through CMC as files. Tacit knowledge can't be articulated through language and is more difficult to transmit. The knowledge that is transmitted between individuals in a company can be tacit and/or explicit. The message also encodes the goal and the nature of the tasks to be carried out.

The *receiver* of the knowledge is characterised by *motivation* and *absorptive capacity* (Jacobson, 2006, p. 510). The receiver is self-motivated, and his/her motivation can be affected by different factors such as the competition between employees in a company or the competition between companies. This usually affects the degree of acceptance of the knowledge that comes from a person or a company perceived as competitors. The absorptive capacity of the *receiver* has to do with his/her ability to evaluate and recognise the value of the knowledge transmitted, his/her capacity to assimilate and apply it.

The *communication channel* by means of which knowledge is transmitted is multimodal (it involves video, audio, and text) in the case of CMC on the

⁵⁶ Unintentional knowledge transmission is realised when, for example, one can learn to perform a series of instructions by imitation, that is, watching how another person does it.

professional web forums. In a company the channels are formal or/and informal and present different hierarchic degrees.

The last component, the *feedback*, represents the reaction of the receiver of the message. From this reaction one can check if the message was received, understood and if the result of the knowledge transmission is as expected. The feedback on a professional web forum discussion can be a verbal confirmation or information. The response of the receiver affects the flux of knowledge communication. Depending on the type of response, positive or negative, the source of the knowledge can better select and organise the cognitive content to be transmitted.

This model of knowledge communication is similar to the way the users transmit knowledge on the professional web forums. Actually, knowledge management models of communication originated in the early Internet communication forms (email, BBS, forum, and chat). While assuming this similarity, we have, nevertheless, to observe some slight differences in the way knowledge is transmitted on professional web forums. These differences are present at different levels and concern all the components of the communicational model (*source, message, channel, receiver, and feedback*). In what concerns the *source*, the difference between corporatist and informal knowledge communication consists in the self-motivation of the *source* and in the fact that no reward is involved in the process of sharing knowledge. In what concerns the *message*, in the informal knowledge transmission the *scope of the knowledge* is personal (and not collective as in the case of corporatist CMC), for every individual asks for information for himself/herself and is not money-oriented as in the corporatist CMC.

In the case of the professional forum discussions, the *receiver* is self-motivated and his/her goals are personal. The motivation of the receiver is not influenced by competition with other individuals. Contrary to what one may think, the receiver uses his/her social skills in order to communicate with the other members of the forum in order to obtain their collaboration/assistance in the knowledge transmission process. In addition, the *channel*⁵⁷ is differently configured: it is *informal*. And last, the *feedback* is not mandatory in the professional web forum communication. Generally, a positive feedback marks that the receiver has acquired the knowledge transmitted by the source and closes the channel of communication because the goal of the

⁵⁷ We refer here to the *channel* as a component of the knowledge communication scheme.

communication has been fulfilled. A continuation of the discussion means a negative feedback.

As one can observe, there are two main models of knowledge transmission that involve CMC: *e-learning* and *corporatist CMC*. As we have already noted, the first model is completely different from knowledge communication on professional web forums, even if, apparently, they do share some characteristics. Knowledge transmission on professional web forums is realised in the same way as in corporatist CMC, since it is the same process of knowledge sharing between individuals. Even if the models are identical, communication in either case has specific features, as we will detail at the end of this chapter.

3.5. Explanatory Strategies Used in Knowledge Transmission

If we contemplate Plato's dialogue *Theaetetus*, we will observe that the most appreciated form of knowledge consists in two elements: the one is the right opinion (see the previous sections on the epistemological point of view on knowledge as true belief), and the other is a definition or an explanation as supporting element:

Socrates: And there might be given other proofs of this belief, if I'm not mistaken. But do not let us in looking for them lose sight of the question before us, which is the meaning of the statement, that right opinion with rational definition or explanation is the most perfect form of knowledge. (Plato, *Theaetetus*, <http://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/p/plato/p71th/theaetetus.html>)

We will begin our discussion about *explanations* and *explanatory strategies* with this quotation where one can clearly observe that Plato mentions two explanatory strategies materialised as different textual forms: *definition* and *explanation*. We will take into account, for now, these texts as granted explanatory strategies (*Plato dixit*) and we will observe that both encode a specific cognitive content. The *definition* encodes an object/concept-oriented knowledge (*know-what*), while the *explanation* encodes a reason-oriented (*know-why*) cognitive content. In order to cover all the cognitive aspects of the explanation we will also take into account the procedural texts (instructions) that encode action-oriented knowledge (*know-how*). In what follows, we will elaborate a general presentation of these three types of texts in the literature.

3.5.1. Definition

One of the most complete insights into definition descriptions is represented by Robinson's manual *Definition* (1954). In this book, the author presents a monograph of *definition* and its considerations in philosophy beginning with Greek Antiquity until the 20th century. Robinson's study on definition begins as a contrastive study of the responses the most important philosophers gave to questions such as: *What is definition? Should a definition be brief? Is definition a useful procedure or not? What are the species of Definition?* and so on.

The contrastive presentation of the definitions of 'definition' represents a panoramic view of the state of art of the study and of the main topics on this subject. The divergences one can observe between the opinions of so many philosophers (Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, Milton, Spinoza, Locke, Kant, J.S. Mill, Whitehead, Russell, Wittgenstein, and Carnap) are illustrative for the rich variety of insights on definition. Nevertheless, this contrastive display of definitions ends with:

Definition is indefinable (This may be defended on the ground that 'you cannot define anything until you already understand defining').
(Robinson, 1954, p. 2)

This last insight can also be considered a sort of conclusion suggesting the fact that the discussion on *what definition is?* is far from being closed.

In what concerns our perspective on definition, we will take into account only the Platonic definitions of 'definition' (Plato, *Theaetetus*). Then we will observe the basic rules of the construction of definitions and, we will end by contemplating the types of definitions, especially those mentioned in Robinson (1954).

a. Definition

As one can observe from the list of definitions contrasted by Richard Robinson, those of classical philosophy seem to be the most representative, especially the Platonic point of view (three definitions):

- (a) Revealing one's thoughts by means of speech;
- (b) When someone asks you what a thing is, being able to answer him by means of the elements of the thing;
- (c) Being able to give some mark by which the thing asked about differs from all things.

Our choice of the classical point of view on definition is motivated by the fact that Plato's three definitions illustrate the way the definition as explanatory strategy is perceived in professional web forum communication. In (a), for example, the philosopher makes clear the connection between *thoughts* (tacit knowledge, cognitive content) and *speech* (explicit knowledge). In (b), (a) is completed because the author adds the interactive component (*when someone asks you... answer him*), which makes it coherent with the contemporary theories of explanation (see 3.4) as the answer to a certain kind of question. And finally, (c) refers to the capacity of analysis of the features of the definiendum. As one can observe, the other definitions of 'definition' are less complex. Only Locke, Mill, Wittgenstein, and Carnap suggest there is a relation between knowledge and speech (words, discourse, language) in the case of definitions.

b. Definition rules

As pointed out by Copi & Cohen (1994), there are five important rules that structure a definition as follows:

- **Focus on essential features:** not all the distinctive properties of a *definiendum* indicate its true nature. One has to focus on essential attributes.
- **Avoid circular definitions:** the *definiendum* cannot be used in the *definiens*. It is supposed that a definition brings new information on the *definiendum* which is not the case in circular definitions. They are useless exactly because they don't bring any new information.
- **Keep the extension of definitions:** The definition must not add or eliminate features of the *definiendum*. A definition ideally must say only what the object is no more, no less.
- **Avoid figurative or vague language:** Since the definition explains what an object/concept/event is, it has to be simple, concise and clear.
- **Avoid definition by negation as possible:** Since the nature of definition is "explain what an object/concept/event is" it is pointless to define "what an object/concept/event is not". First of all, under a logical perspective the definition by negation is ineffective. An object/concept/event can be defined once by its essential features or defined many times in an imprecise manner by negation. An object/concept/event can "not to be" an infinity of things.

c. Types of definitions:

As we have already observed (Robinson, 2003, p. 7) there are many types of definitions: real definition (general classification), nominal definition

(general classification), extensive definition (Keynes, 1923), ostensive definition (Johnson, 1921), analytic definition (Johnson, 1921), equational definition (Pepper, 1946), descriptive definition (Pepper, 1946), operational definition (Bridgman, 1945), genetic definition (Creighton, 1909), definition in use (Whitehead&Russell, 1910), denotative definition (Levi&Frye, 1941), connotative definition (Levi, Frye), implicit definition (Gergonne), coordinating definition (Reichenbach, 1932), persuasive definition (Stevenson, 1938), successive definition (Lenzen, 1959), definition by description (Lewis, 1918). All these definitions are meant to illustrate the diversity of the classifications and the lack of systematicity and order in the classification of definitions.

A general accepted classification of definitions distinguishes between two main classes of definitions: *real* and *nominal definitions*⁵⁸. The *nominal definitions* (specify the meaning of the *definiendum*) can be realised through *synonymy* (sameness of meaning) or through *etymology* (meaning explained by the original word – *etymon*).

The *real definitions* (specify the nature of the *definiendum*) include the following types of definitions:

- essential definition: definition realised through *genus proximus* and *diferentiae*
- descriptive / lexical definition: distinctive characteristic unique for an object's class
- enumerative definition: highlights the meaning of an object/concept/event by mentioning some non-essential attributes.
- genetic definition: explains the process of creation of an object
- causal definition: mentions the causes that have as result the creation of the *definiendum*
- operational definition: portrays the procedures of manipulating the *definiendum*
- recursive (inductive) definition: the *definiendum* is in a certain relation with a class of elements in an ordered string (x comes from y)

Many other topics related with the definition are discussed in the literature but, in what concerns the observation of the texts that transmit knowledge on the professional web forums the general outline of the definition forms and varieties we have presented above may be sufficient.

⁵⁸ It seems that Robinson (2003) has a different opinion in what concerns this classification. He only comments on the nominal definition and criticises the real definition.

3.5.2. Procedures/Instructions

As essential elements in the professional web forum communication, the procedures and instructions present a special situation in what concerns their classification. Rowan (2008) introduces them in the category of *informatory texts* (see 3.4), while Werlich (1975), Longacre (1982), Vigner (1990), and even Adam (1992) in his early writings, regarde them as “des représentants probables d’un type de séquentialité spécifique” (Adam, 1992, p. 95). The last author on our list changes his opinion and, in *Les textes: types et prototypes* (1992), criticises the “séquentialité spécifique” of Werlich (1975), Longacre (1982) and Vigner (1990) but also criticises the description of the procedural texts as “variantes du récit” offered by Greimas (1983) and Bouchard (1991). Adam introduces the procedural texts in the general category of *descriptive texts*, which he tries to illustrate with the analysis of a recipe (Adam, 1992, p. 94-97).

The topic is discussed again in Adam&Revaz (1996) and Adam&LORDA (1999) where the authors point out the presence in narrative texts of procedural sequences they designate as “description d’actions” or “relation d’actions”.

Description of an action represents a type of sequence whose goal is to describe a global action. This global action is described by a chronological series of *micro-actions* (Adam&Revaz, 1996, p. 40). The *narration of actions* represents a description of an event through a series of actions.

In the professional web forums communication, the procedural texts, especially the communication of instructions, represent an important aspect. Of the two categories proposed by Adam&Revaz (1996), the first one, *description of actions*, is better represented in the online forums discussions.

We distinguish within the category of *description of actions* the following subcategories that can be frequently observed in the professional communication of knowledge on the Internet: *list of actions* and *enumeration of actions*. We consider the first a sub-category of the *description of actions* that consists in a series of actions expressed by verbs or verbal constructions that are inserted on a list, each element on a different line, and that all together explain the sequential order of a procedure. We will call it *list* because the arrangement of the text as *list* is the only element of textual cohesion, since discursive markers are not used.

In the same sub-category of description of an action we will also distinguish the *enumeration of actions*, whose structure is similar with that

of a *list of actions*, the only difference being that the verbs and the verbal expression that describe the global action form an *enumeration*.

Without entering the debate about the nature of the procedural texts, that is, whether they are informative (Rowan, 2008), a special category of sequences (Werlich, 1975; Longacre, 1982; Vigner, 1990), or parts of a narration/description (Greimas, 1983; Bouchard, 1991; Adam&Revaz, 1996; and Adam & Lorda, 1999), we will use the description of actions as *explanatory strategies* involved in the transmission of specialised knowledge on the professional web forums.

3.5.3. Prototypical Explanation

One of the descriptions of the explanatory sequence comes from Jean-Michel Adam, who in his work *Les textes: types et prototypes. Récit, description, argumentation, explication et dialogue* (1992) presents five prototypical texts.

In what concerns the *explanatory sequence*, the author commences his exposition with a contemplation of the previous works on genres and texts typology. He observes that the explanation was studied mainly from the semiologic and didactic perspectives. He also observes that the majority of the studies on *explanation* examine this communicational aspect as discourse and not as text, which is Adam's (1992) own perspective.

Adam describes the *explanation* as a textual prototype sequence with a specific structure and texture. He grounds his observations on explanation on a previous study by J.B. Grize (1991) with whom and in whom, while having a different insight into the issue, the author shares opinions and finds confirmations of his own hypothesis (Adam, 1992, p. 132).

Adam uses Grize's work (1990) on logic as a starting point for creating his own model of the explanatory sequence. He borrows from Grize the general *structure of the explanatory sequence* (1990, p. 107), the concept of *operator* (*pourquoi* and *comment*) that modulate the complex organisation of the text in sequences. These sequences correspond to different stages of a cognitive-mental process, according to the author quoting the work of Coltier (1986), respectively: *phase de questionnement*, *phase résolutive*, and *phase conclusive*.

The prototype of the explanatory sequence in Adam's (1992: 132) view has the following structure:

0		Macro-proposition explicative 0:	schématisation initiale
1	Pourquoi X? (Comment X?)	Macro-proposition explicative 1:	Problème (question)
2	Parce que	Macro-proposition explicative 2:	Explication (réponse)
3		Macro-proposition explicative 3:	Conclusion-évaluation

J-M. Adam (1992: 132). Prototype of the explanatory sequence

As one can observe, the sequence consists in four macropropositions, where *macro-proposition 0* represents an introduction that describes the general context of *macro-proposition 1*. *Macro-proposition 1* represents the *problematisation* stage and is followed by *macroproposition 2*, which we consider the essential aspect of the entire sequence. The conclusion-evaluation stage refers to the initial stage, since the explanation is evaluated in the general context previously presented in *macro-proposition 0*.

It is also important to observe that explanatory sequences vary in form and complexity. Especially in face-to-face conversation and in CMC, the structure of an explanatory sequence can easily change. We consider that the most stable element in the structure described by JeanMichel Adam that encodes the distinctive characteristic of the prototype is *macro-proposition 2*. As we will see in the analytical part of the present work, an explanation can consist only in one explicit macroproposition (*macro-proposition 2*), the others being implicitly encoded in the situation. This reduced form of the explanatory sequence will be considered as the *minimal unit of analysis* in what concerns the analysis of the prototypical explanation in this work.

3.6. Knowledge Transmission on the Professional Web Forums

As one can observe, the description of the knowledge transmission process is complex and interdisciplinary. In conclusion of this chapter we can present the profile of the knowledge transmission process on the *professional web forums* as it results from the presentation above.

The *professional web forum knowledge transmission* is a *cognitive continuum* formed by *focal* and *tacit knowledge* switching incessantly depending on the

knowledge transmitted. This is *personal knowledge* articulated as *text* and published on the web forum's web page. It is mostly *practical knowledge* or, if theoretical, the knowledge is intended to explain the theoretical aspect of a practical procedure or an application. All knowledge (practical or theoretical) on the professional web forum is transmitted with the intention that it should be *applied* to a specific context.

The types of knowledge one asks for on a professional web forum are skill, know-how, and expertise/competence. The type of knowledge communicated determines the level of specialisation of the discourse. It also differentiates the degrees of expertise of the forum members where hierarchy is constructed only on a cognitive basis. It is also important to observe that the lack of expertise is a recurrent topic on the professional web forums. In fact, the reason for the existence of the professional web forums is the lack of skills, know-how, or expertise of some members of the virtual community.

On a professional web forum knowledge is transmitted from a source (*expert(s)*) to a receiver (*novice(s)*) by an *informal communicational channel*. The message transmitted by the *source* encodes *explicit knowledge* (articulated as *text*) and *tacit knowledge* (multimodal content – audio, video, image) transmitted voluntarily. The participants involved in the process of knowledge transmission on the professional web forum are self-motivated (both *source* and *receiver*) and regard knowledge transmission as a social act perceived as *dialogue, collaboration, assistance*. The internal rules of communication on professional web forums don't encourage competition among the participants. The only competition there may be has to do with the process of knowledge transfer, where the most proficient is considered the best. The knowledge communication is regulated by the interaction of the *source* and the *receiver* of the knowledge, the feedback having a very important role in maintaining open the communicational channel until the needed knowledge is transmitted and the wanted result obtained. The feedback is also a manner of evaluating the effectiveness and proficiency of the *source*.

On the professional web forum knowledge is expressed basically through *explanatory strategies* materialised as *definitions, descriptions of actions, and prototypical explanations*.

4. Approaches in Discourse Analysis

In this chapter we will establish the theoretical framework necessary to describe the genre professional web forum. We will propose to begin with a general overview of discourse and discourse analysis, and then we will focus on three main insights into discourse analysis, all belonging to the *école française*. These insights will provide us with the necessary tools to describe the professional web forum, highlighting aspects such as enunciation, discursive strategies, and communicational interactions.

4.1. The Complex Notion of Discourse

The heterogeneous theories of discourse have for their main object of study the linguistic and communicative aspects of *the utterance (énoncé)*, *the text*, and *the discourse*, starting from their conditions of production. Many studies on discourse analysis (DA) point out the complexity of views on, definitions, and interpretations of these concepts and the relations between them. Referring to the diversity of opinions in defining *discourse*, J. Renkema (2004, p. 54), states that "... there are so many definitions as there are textbooks".

One of the first definitions that influenced the modern approaches to discourse analysis states that a study of the discourse takes into consideration the: "mise en fonctionnement de la langue par un acte individuel d'énonciation" (Benveniste, 1974, p. 80). The author underlined in his works the necessity for a discourse linguistics whose object is not the utterance but the strategies of enunciation. The author places at the center of all linguistic concerns the discourse. A continuation of Benveniste's theoretical framework from the perspective of the enunciation and its strategies is realised by Culioli, who takes a step forward and affirms that each locutor is implicitly a receiver and each receiver is a virtual locutor. His perspective on the enunciation is that of an interactive process, and consequently, he refers to it as coenunciation (Culioli, 1973, p. 83). The co-enunciators as participants in a dialogue modulate their discourse: "...l'énoncé n'a pas de sens sans une double intention de signification chez les énonciateurs respectifs." (Culioli, 1973, p. 86).

Another step forward in the development of the modern perception of discourse is represented by the contribution of Bakhtin and Ducrot, who

introduced in the theory of discourse the idea that the locutor can't be conceived as one entity. The polyphony in language is expressed as follows:

Dans le parler courant de tout homme vivant en société, la moitié au moins des paroles qu'il prononce sont celles d'autrui (reconnues comme telles), transmises à tout les degrés possibles d'exactitude ... (Bakhtin, 1978, p. 158)

Bakhtin's contribution is fundamental to the further development of modern discourse analysis, and for *l'école française* in particular the subjectivity of language opens new ways of research in discourse analysis. In Bakhtin's conception discourse has a double dimension: *individual* and *social*, and is essentially polyphonic. The author establishes polyphony as the main aspect of discourse. This has led him to proclaim the "dialogic" character of the discourse, which will form a solid theoretical framework for its typology (genres and styles).

Ducrot considers that polyphony is implicit in language and that it is a constitutive element of the enunciation. His position is more theoretical in what concerns polyphony. The polyphonic conception of language is continued by the works of Anscombe&Ducrot (1976, pp. 14-15), who present the utterance as a polyphonic unit invested with "force argumentative":

Signifier, pour un énoncé, c'est orienter. de sorte que la langue, dans la mesure où elle contribue en premier lieu à déterminer le sens des énoncés, est un des lieux privilégiés où s'élabore l'argumentation. (Anscombe&Ducrot, 1976, pp. 14-15)

In the same line of studies, that is, developing the conception of an utterance in possession of an *argumentative force*, Moeschler (1985) introduces the pragmatic analysis of the argumentative discourse insisting that any analysis should be based on a corpus of reliable texts used in real situations of communication. The author considers that:

"L'analyse du discours conversationnel aura donc pour objectif de mettre à jour les coactions et argumentations qui interviennent dans les interactions verbales" Moeschler (1985, p. 18).

Beginning with the '70s, the interest in discourse analysis has been growing constantly. The main focus is no longer the enunciation but the discourse. More complex theories are proposed on the basis of the previous theoretical frameworks that have defined the *utterance*, *the enunciation* and

the discourse. Many different approaches focusing on discourse are proposed, such as: *conversation analysis*, *text pragmatics*, *text linguistics*, *discourse analysis*. We will present a brief survey of these approaches in the next section.

As one can notice, the definition of discourse is a complex matter. In what concerns the present investigation, we will take into account the definition of discourse as *language in use* and we will completely assume Bakhtin's perspective on the subjectivity of the speech acts.

4.2. Approaches to Discourse Analysis

Discourse analysis as a discipline displays a multifaceted structure and very different trends. Much intellectual effort was put into making clear the heterogeneity of the approaches to discourse analysis. One of the important works in this domain is represented by Deborah Schiffrin's *Approaches to Discourse*. At the beginning of her book the author states that:

My aim is not to reduce the vastness of discourse analysis: I believe that at relatively early stages of an endeavour, reduction just for the sake of simplification can too drastically limit the range of interesting questions that can and should be asked. (Schiffrin, 1994, p. 5)

Schiffrin underlines the fact that one of the main difficulties one encounters when approaching discourse studies is the complexity and the heterogeneity of perspectives and directions. Facing this reality of the domain, the author states that there is no point in simplifying the discourse analysis problems, but a clarification and ordering of the multitude of approaches would be in order. The complexity and the vastness of the domain is exactly what make it interesting and challenging. Trying to clarify the aims of discourse analysis, Schiffrin (1994) identifies six main approaches to discourse analysis she considers essential. They are: the theory of the *speech acts* (John Austin, 1962; and John Searle, 1969), *interactional sociolinguistics* (John Gumperz, 1982, and Erving Goffman 1974, 1979), *the ethnography of communication* (Dell Hymes, 1974), *the pragmatic approach* (H.P. Grice, 1957, 1968), *the conversation analysis* (Harold Garfinkel, 1967, 1974; Harvey Sacks, 1974; Emmanuel Schegloff, 1972, 1979; and Gail Jefferson, 1987), and last, the *variationist approach* (William Labov, 1972). The author presents discourse analysis as a complex discipline that allows transitions from one approach to the other and which tries to assimilate everything the approaches mentioned above can offer for the analysis of utterances.

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A different perspective on how the concept of *discourse analysis* can be understood is presented by Juan Herrero Cecilia (2006, pp.145-150), who pinpoints five different ways the word *discourse* is perceived. The author matches the different perceptions of *discourse* with different approaches to discourse analysis as follows:

- Discourse1:** equivalent to what Saussure denominates *parole*, discourse represents the most general meaning of the word and integrates all types of discourse (written, oral).
- Discourse2:** the second meaning is understood as *the way the utterance is structured*. The author attributes this meaning to the theory of Benveniste and the complementary concepts of *plan énonciatif du discours* and *plan énonciatif de l'histoire*, where the former is considered to be an element that organises the meaning of the utterance in relation to the "I – You – Here – Now" deixis (*embrayage énonciatif*), while the latter (*débrayage énonciatif*) organises the meaning of the utterance by separation from the context of enunciation.
- Discourse3:** corresponds to the concept of *text* perceived as a verbal message (written or oral) produced by a locutor in a communicational act. This notion of *discourse* is equivalent to the text linguistic perspective. The text=discourse is perceived as a series of propositions that form a global semantic unit (thematic macrostructure). This thematic macrostructure is organised following a determined sequential organisation pattern and forms a *type of text*. The structure of a *type of text* is determined by the genre's *compositional scheme*.
- Discourse4:** illustrates the concept of the term in Anglo-Saxon linguistics, where the author points out some conceptual differences of meaning. He highlights that *discourse* is a term designating the interactive dimension of the conversational interactions. Thus, the proper meaning of *discourse analysis* in this context may be *conversation analysis*.
- Discourse5:** the last conception of *discourse* corresponds to the definition of discourse given by *l'école française*. Here the author identifies two different approaches: *the analytic tendency* (M. Pêcheux, 1969, Authier-Revuz, 1995) and *the integrative tendency* (F. Rastier, 1989).

The author's intention to bring order to such a complex domain has been fruitful, since he has been able to highlight, like Schiffrin (1994), the main tendencies in discourse analysis starting from the way the different trends approached the concept of *discourse*. The limits of the presentation dwell in the fact that the author doesn't go into detail. He designates the general trends without evaluating the commentaries or its historical evolution.

*

A different effort to establish order in the discourse analysis approaches has been carried out by Angermüller (2007, p. 9). The author limits the area of his investigation to Europe and proposes a diachronic overview of the emergence and evolution of different discourse analysis trends. The author affirms that in the beginning, discourse analysis was developed in different countries in quite a uniform manner and he identifies three major trends: French, Anglo-Saxon, and German. The development and diversification of discourse analysis makes it impossible to identify today these initial trends. They continue to exist as "clusters", identified by the author as: *l'école française*, the poststructuralist discourse theory, the critical discourse analysis, and the interpretative discourse analysis. Apparently, the *trends* seem to be the initial moment in the emergence of discourse analysis in the '60s, while the *clusters* represent the current discourse analysis trends.

Each trend is briefly described. For example, the *French formalism*, a heterogeneous trend based on linguistics (Saussure), psychoanalysis (Lacan) and ideology (Althusser), was subsequently abandoned when the French linguistics focused on *enunciation*.

The *Anglo-Saxon pragmatism* combines American pragmatism with analytic philosophy, and is especially known for the speech act theory (Austin, Searle) and for creating the theoretical foundation for the actual conversation analysis by analysing the rules that organise interactions (Brown & Yule).

German hermeneutics is based on the works of Jürgen Habermas and emerged under the influence of the Anglo-Saxon pragmatism. The main area of application for this theory was the social sciences and political discourse. The author observes that the German trend in discourse analysis was not quite developed as a domain of investigation and was abandoned in the '90s, the *discourse* becoming the object of study of another discipline: the *sociology of knowledge*. Angermüller (2007) mentions cursorily the Russian semiotic trend (Bakhtin and Lotman).

The *discourse analysis trends* correspond to an early stage of the development of discourse analysis in Europe and none of the initial perspectives

has lasted to the present. Actually, in the '70s *discourse analysis* was developed by different researchers in different countries. The common basis is not the territory but the theoretical framework of the varied studies.

The author identifies the following clusters: *l'école française* of discourse analysis, the poststructuralist discourse theory, the critical discourse analysis (CDA), and the interpretative discourse analysis. It seems that the most cohesive discourse analysis core is represented by *l'école française*, which still constitutes a national tradition in this domain.

Different other intents to regulate, simplify, sort, arrange, or only present the vast and multifaceted field of discourse analysis were carried out by scholars such as: Phillips & Hardy (2002), Georgakopoulou & Goutsos (2004), Paltridge (2006), Jørgensen & Phillips (2004), Johnstone (2002), Calsamiglia & Tusón (2007), or Bhatia (2006).

In what concerns the present investigation, this overview of the discourse analysis trends helps us to situate our theoretical framework. Thus, to begin with, we will ground our investigation on the perception of discourse as *language in use*. We place our investigation within the framework defined by "*l'école française*" of *discourse analysis*, and within this trend we will use the theoretical approaches provided by three theories we will apply to the different aspects of the corpus analysis (see Chapter 6, section 6.2.1). These theories are: the communicative and semiodiscursive conception of discourse (Charaudeau, 1992), the text linguistics theory (Adam, 1992), and the conversational model (Orecchioni, 1996, Traverso, 2004).

In what follows, we will proceed to a brief presentation of each of these theories insisting on the aspects we have deemed important for our investigation.

4.3. A Social-Communicational Model of Discourse

Patrick Charaudeau⁵⁹ contemplates *discourse* in the general context of communication:

Il faut se représenter l'acte de communication comme un dispositif au cœur duquel se trouve le sujet parlant (le locuteur, qu'il parle ou écrive), en relation avec un autre partenaire (l'interlocuteur). (1992, p. 634)

⁵⁹ The evolution of the model created by Patrick Charaudeau and presented in this chapter was observed in the author's publications from 1984 to 2007. All the titles can be consulted in the chapter *References*.

The author identifies the following essential components of discourse: a) *la situation de communication*, b) *les modes d'organisation du discours*, c) *la langue*, and d) *le texte*. These components are defined as follows:

- a) The *situation of communication* represents a psycho-social dimension and represents the setting of the *contract of communication* that the participants establish during the communicational interaction. The setting also depends on the constraints of each situation.
- b) *The modes of discursive organisation*: represent the way the locutor chooses to organise his/her discourse depending on the finality of the communication.
- c) *The language*: represents the semiotic system the locutor uses in order to construct his/her discourse.
- d) *The text*: is the final result of the speech act. It is a heterogeneous construct formed by the semiotic system (language) organised in a specific manner by the *discursive modes*. The author marks the difference between *text* and *discourse*. The text represents a category that depends on the "projet de parole" of the locutor and on the *contract of communication*. The *text* is also a subordinate category of the discourse, since texts emerge from discourses.

The *situation of communication* represents the central concept of Charaudeau's theory and when defining it, the author underlines that it must not be understood as 'context' of communication or 'domaine de la pratique sociale'. The *situation of communication* represents a general setting where the participants (two or more persons) interact by means of communication and come to establish a certain degree of intercomprehension. The meaning they create through communicational interaction results, in part, from the general conditions in which communication takes place.

The author states that the description of what the situation of communication is can simply result from the answer to four questions, as follows: Which is the aim of the communication?, Who communicates with whom?, What is the topic of communication?, and Which are the circumstances of communication?

The answers to these questions determine the discursive finality of the speech acts, the identities involved in the communication, the theme of the verbal interaction, and the physical settings of the communication that the author denominates *dispositif énonciatif*. One can notice that, in time, Charaudeau's theory became more complex and the things that in the early stages of the

elaboration were subject to interpretation became clearly defined. Beginning with his varied early works (1984, 1991, 1993, 1994) and up to the last titles (2005, 2006, 2007), the author gradually developed the concept of *contract of communication* established between the participants in a situation as determined by two main factors: *contraintes situationelles* and *contraintes discursives*. The author establishes a relation between the *contraintes situationelles* and the *situation of communication* as the external space of the discourse, and another relation between the *contraintes discursives* and the *contract of communication* perceived as the internal space of the discourse. Both are related, for the first type of *contraintes* determines the discursive production of the locutor by means of the second type of *contraintes*.

In short, *communication* is represented as a doubly articulated space:

[...]Un espacio externo, lugar de la construcción de las identidades psicosociales de los sujetos, de su finalidad de influencia y de las circunstancias materiales de la comunicación; un espacio interno, lugar de la construcción de las identidades discursivas de los sujetos y de la finalidad enunciativa a través de la puesta en escena lingüística, que resulta, por una parte de las instrucciones dadas por la situación de comunicación y por la otra, de los proyectos de habla específicos de los sujetos interlocutores. (Charaudeau, 2006, p. 43)

Discourse is the result of this set of constraints and is manifested by the discursive strategies used by the interlocutors. These strategies constitute the object of our study.

The genre, in this theoretical approach, is determined by three parameters: *the discursive identities*, *the objectives of the verbal exchange*, and *the enunciative device*. These elements are closely related to the social communication rituals, and consequently, to the discursive genres:

La communication est un phénomène général de la société humaine qui englobe divers types et genres de discours, toujours dans une intentionnalité d'intercompréhension et d'influence. (Charaudeau, 2007, p. 5)

In what follows, we propose to take a close look at these three parameters which will allow us, firstly, to study in more detail the discursive device of the professional web forum subgenre, and secondly, to establish our methodology of analysis (see chapter 6).

4.3.1. Discursive Identities

In the interior space of communication determined by the contract, the locutor constructs his/her own identity. Patrick Charaudeau insists that the identities constructed within the contract of communication are not personal, social, or cultural but *discursive identities*. In other words:

[...] on parle (ou écrit) en organisant son discours en fonction de sa propre identité, de l'image que l'on a de son interlocuteur, et de ce qui a été déjà dit. (Charaudeau, 1992, p. 643)

The locutor constructs a discursive identity corresponding to the *self*, an image that the locutor assumes for a concrete situation of communication and that can change if the communicational parameters change. Other identities are also constructed linguistically by the locutor and these identities are *the addressee* and the *audience*. Independently of the psycho-social identity of the *addressee*, when the locutor tries to establish a communicational relation, he also assigns to the *addressee* a discursive identity defining the type of communicational relation the locutor intends to establish.

The author observes the existence of different types of relations that can be established between locutors. They are relations of association, relations of authority, relations of inclusion or exclusion, relations of indulgence or relations of objection. These relations establish which of the two identities is stronger and the role each participant in the contract of communication assumes.

In other words, if someone asks for *help*, for *assistance*, or for *collaboration* the identities involved in the different contracts of communication these verbs determine are different. In the first case, the verb *help* involves two discursive identities, the one of a person in need for help, the other of a *helper*. The identity of the *helper* is discursively constructed as a person that *knows how to help*, *wants to help*, and *can help* somebody; the complementary identity, the *helped*, is the person who *asks for help*, *wants to be helped*, and *accepts to be helped*. Between the two identities involved in the relation imposed by the verb *to help* one can notice a difference of positioning, with the *helper* placed in a position of authority as compared with the *helped*.

In Charaudeau's model (1992, p. 644) the identities are denominated *les protagonistes* of the utterance and the author mentions that they are defined only by their discursive behaviour. He distinguishes between the identities involved in the discourse *locuteur-énonciateur* – the identity who expresses

the discursive intentions of the locutor –, and *l'interlocuteur-déstinataire*, who has been assigned a particular place by the locutor in his/her discourse.

In the present work we will use the terms Locutor and Addressee to designate the *locuteur-énonciateur* and *l'interlocuteur-déstinataire* respectively.

4.3.2. Objectives of the Verbal Exchange

Every enunciation emerges in a context and has a motivation. Without motivation the communication doesn't exist. When we establish a communicational relation with somebody it is because we have an objective that we assume and that makes us enter in contact with the others through communication.

In this stage of the communication the locutor has to perform to justify his/her right to speak. The intentionality of the message has to fit in the situation if the locutor wants it to be recognised by the addressee, and consequently, establish a verbal interaction with the other. The validity of the message consists in the fact that the speech act corresponds to the finality of the communicator, which allows the collocutor to interpret and understand it. For that, the participants in a situation of communication may have the proficiency to *know* not only what they want to tell but also *how* they may articulate and adapt a message in order that it should be recognised as the locutor intended it to. In order to make it clearer, we will give the example of a Latin American locutor who, looking for directions in Barcelona, asked a Spaniard: "Señor, ¿me puede ayudar, por favor?" The utterance based on the *proficiency (savoir)* of the locutor is one of the current introductory expressions by which a person formulates a polite request for information (a question in our case) in order to establish a communicational relation with an unknown person he/she meets on the street. The utterance of the locutor, however, was differently interpreted by the addressee who possessed a different *savoir*. The reaction of the *addressee* was that, instead of waiting for the other to ask him a question, he took a coin from his pocket and gave it to him. This resulted in a series of intention clarifying verbal interaction between both participants in the situation in order to establish the communicational relationship the locutor originally intended.

4.3.3. Discursive Device

The *discursive device* represents the material manifestation of the discursive production of the participants in a situation of communication. There are

different parameters that regulate the discursive production in a situation of communication. It is important, for example, if the participants in a situation are present and see each other, or not, at the moment of the exchange. Another important parameter is represented by the channel of communication and the mode of communication through this channel. Generally, we talk about written and oral communication, but most recently, with the development of the new technologies, more and more authors talk about multimodal communication. Another important aspect of the communicational device is represented by whether the exchange between participants is allowed (*permis*) or not.

In his model of discursive analysis, Charaudeau states that different combinations of the parameters mentioned above will determine a different discursive production:

[...] telle ou telle combinaison sur le comportement langagier des interlocuteurs, et donc sur l'organisation de la configuration verbale.
(Charaudeau, 1992, p. 639)

In order to better explain his point, Charaudeau distinguishes between two main types of situations: *interlocutive* and *monolocutive*, and gives some examples demonstrating how the situation of communication determines the configuration of the discourse.

In what concerns the limitations imposed by the situation of communication to the professional web forum discussion, one can observe the following regulator parameters: the professional web forum is a *monolocutive situation*, since the participants involved in the exchange are not co-present in a certain location. The channel of communication is, basically, written. Depending on the situation and on the locutor's intentions or the technical implementation of the channel, it can also display some extended features in order to permit multimodal communication (text, text-image, or even text-video). The locutor can't perceive the reactions of the interlocutor. On the professional web forums, as in all computer mediated communication, the channel allows the participants to express their feelings by the use of *emoticons*. The problem of their interpretation is culturally related, consequently, we agree with Charaudeau that in the case of the monolocutive situation the locutor can only imagine the reactions of his/her discussion partner. Sometimes the partners have to explain to one another the significance of the *emoticons* they use in order to express gestures, feelings, and mimics. Since the locutor is not conditioned by the immediate reactions of his/her partner, s/he can organise his/her discourse in a logical and progressive manner.

In the following chapters of the present work we will analyse the verbal configuration of the professional web forum grounding our analysis on this configuration of the discursive device.

4.4. Text Linguistics and Discourse Analysis

As one can notice in sub-chapter 4.2, the socio-communicational model presented studies discourse starting from the situation of communication and the conditions of production. Within this frame the social aspects are highlighted.

The socio-communicational model, however, doesn't go into more details in what concerns the detailed organisation of produced texts, therefore we need a complementary point of view in order to reach the objective of the thesis, which is the description of the professional web forum as an Internet sub-genre.

A more detailed point of view on discursive organisations is provided by text linguistics, a textual pragmatic discipline. This discipline focuses mainly on the contemplation of the internal structure of an utterance produced in a specific situation of communication by means of a specific study of the sequences' organisation.

Jean-Michel Adam, whose theoretical framework⁶⁰ will be used in order to carry out this investigation, also presents his perspective on the relations that exist between texts, genres and discourses⁶¹. The author distinguishes between *text linguistics* and *discourse analysis* as complementary disciplines that study texts, genres, and discourse(s) from different perspectives. In *Linguistique textuelle. Des genres de discours aux textes* (1999, p.35) the author defines *text linguistics* and *discourse analysis* complementarily. He distinguishes between the *principes ascendants* and the *principes descendants* that rule the *text*. Adam states that text linguistics has as objective the identification and description of the ascendant principles that order complex propositions in a unit he designates as TEXT. *Discourse analysis* has as object of study the description of the descendant principles that the situations of communication, the language, or the genres impose to the TEXT. Jean-Michel Adam (1990, p.21) constructs a system that relates *text linguistics* to *discourse analysis*.

⁶⁰ We ground our presentation of the explanatory sequence on the different studies J.-M. Adam published between 1990 and 2007.

⁶¹ The author affirms that the use of the term *discourses* is more fitting than *discourse* since it corresponds better to the linguistic reality.

In Adam (1992, p.17) the system is modified in order to better express the ascendant and descendant principles that rule the TEXT and are responsible for its variation. The views of the text, especially regarding the aspects concerning the *ascendant principles*, are centralised and focus on the genre, the terminology, too, is more precise. The author details the levels of the textual organisation in the following terms:

Pour la linguistique textuelle que je développe depuis une dizaine d'années, un texte est formé par la combinaison-composition d'unités élémentaires et il s'agit de décrire et de théoriser une compositionnalité qui doit être approchée par niveaux d'organisation et de complexité [...]. Une compositionnalité de bas niveau assure la mise en paquets des compositions. Nous nommerons ces paquets : périodes et séquences. (Adam, 1999, p. 18)

The internal structure of the TEXT is specified in Adam (1992, p. 30), where the author intends to present a unified insight into the sequential structure of the texts. It results that the text is a hierarchic structure formed by *propositions*, *macro-propositions*, and *sequences*, where the propositions are the constituents of a macro-proposition and the macro-proposition is a constituent of the sequence:

 [# T # [Séquence(s) [macro-propositions [proposition(s)]]]]

On this basis, the author establishes the theoretical framework of the sequential prototypes:

Mon hypothèse est la suivante : les « types relativement stable d'énoncés » et les régularités compositionnelles dont parle Bakhtin sont à la base, en fait, des régularités séquentielles. Les séquences élémentaires semblent se réduire à quelques types élémentaires d'articulation des propositions. Dans l'état actuel de la réflexion, il me paraît nécessaire de retenir les séquences prototypiques suivantes : *narrative*, *descriptive*, *argumentative*, *explicative*, et *dialogale*. (Adam, 1992, p. 30)

As one can notice, the heterogeneity of the discourse is reduced to some prototypical sequences that regulate its construction. In what concerns the present investigation, as already shown in section 3.5, the dominant sequence that seems to rule the discursive organisation of the professional web forum is the *explanatory sequence*.

In what follows we will focus on the description of this prototypical construction in order to contemplate it in detail for further use in the methodology of analysis of the present work (see Chapter 6).

4.4.1. Explanatory, Expository, and Informative Texts

According to J.-M. Adam, every approach to the explanatory sequence should be preceded by a clarification of the concept *explanatory*. Similar to other scholars⁶², Adam (1992, p. 127) underlines the multiple interpretations the term *explanation* has undergone in the literature. He also observes that the term has to be contrasted with the other interpretations in use, and discusses the notion of *explanatory text* in contrast with that of *expository text* and *informative text*. On the other hand, the author also discusses the opposition *explanatory vs. argumentative*.

Both approaches are sustainable because all texts are to some degree informative:

Le type de texte qui nous intéresse ici doit maintenir un délicat équilibre entre ce qui est supposé être plus ou moins connu du lecteur, le stock de connaissances préalables à la réception, et l'apport de renseignements qui constitue la fonction même du texte informatif. Le 'dosage' est réalisé dans tous le types de texte, mais se trouve au centre même de la problématique du texte informatif : c'est toute la question de la 'cible' et de sa délimitation correcte. (Combettes&Tomassone, 1988, p. 9)

Moreover, many explanatory texts are also expository (Werlich, 1975) and display definition-like structures. It seems that in the literature, due to the contributions of Combettes&Tomassone (1988), the distinction *expository-explanatory-informative* is generally accepted. The term 'informative' is considered too general and, since it can determine all types of texts, it is not operational. Consequently, the authors seem to prefer the term *expository* as more specialised. Another distinction that the authors operate is that between the *informative-expository* and the *argumentative* types. The authors affirm that the argumentative discourse aims to produce a transformation in the receiver. This modification affects the beliefs and the representations (cognitive or not) of the receiver. They claim that the argumentative sequence is not knowledge transmission-oriented but is intended to modify opinions, impressions; it is intended to convince that a fact is real.

Jean-Michel Adam establishes the following difference between *expository* and *explanatory*: "la distinction à opérer entre exposition et explication passé par la différence entre POURQUOI? et COMMENT? La plupart des séquences

⁶² See E. Werlich (1975), Combettes & Tomassone (1988), Moirand (1999), Herrero Cecilia (2006).

en COMMENT en sont pas explicatives” (1992, p. 129). The author considers that the latter sequences don't fall in the category of prototypical explanatory sequences.

The author argues that as linguistic activity the explanation improves, augments, specifies a certain cognitive content for the addressee. It involves a logical progression and it is based on objectivity and distance.

Another distinction the author introduces is *explanation-justification*. Quoting J.-B. Grize (1981), Adam affirms that the explanation is constructed as an answer that clarifies things/facts/events (Adam, 1992, p. 130), while the *justification* is oriented to the clarification of words.

The explanation is a very vast phenomenon and can be encountered in all domains of life. It also appears in a very rich variety of texts organised in *genres* and *subgenres*. The specificity of these genres is that they are generally related to situations or activities in which the main aspect consists in the transmission or improvement of knowledge.

4.4.2. Parameters of the Explanation

In the same line of studies with the publications of Adam, Herrero Cecilia (2006, p. 131) states that the explanatory texts present specific aspects and he distinguishes the following: *enunciative*, *discursive*, and *lexico-semantic*. It is important to observe that the description of these characteristics refers to the prototypical explanatory sequence described by Adam and may slightly differ from other types of explanations⁶³.

Following the description of Herrero (2006), the *enunciation* in the explanatory texts is characterised by the use of the *present tense*, the presence of the deixis with *endoforic* function, the constant use of impersonal expressions. The locutor is frequently referred to by “we”, and Herrero also mentions the temporal and spatial discursive marks that refer to a text.

The explanatory text is also characterised by different text modalities that indicate the attitude of the locutor concerning the topic of discussion. The specific modalities one can notice in an explanatory text are: *logic modalities* and *epistemic modalities*. They are used as verbal forms or adverbial forms in order to express *possibility*, *probability*, *impossibility* (logic modality) or certainty,

⁶³ We refer here to the web genres where the explanatory sequence can be encountered but has different structures and is realised through different discursive strategies (see section 7.2.6).

uncertainty, opinion, recommendation (epistemic modality). The author underlines the fact that, due to the nature of the prototypical explanatory sequence, the affective modalities and subjectivity marks are not compatible with this genre.

The *lexico-semantic* aspect of the explanatory texts is represented mostly by terminology and the use of adjectives with descriptive and evaluative functions. In what concerns the *terminology*, it consists of *specialised vocabulary*, *professional jargon*, *neology*, and *loanwords*. It is also characterised by the use of *nominalisation* and *apposition* with explanatory aims.

The author also distinguishes between the following discursive strategies that a locutor uses in order to construct an explanatory discourse: *definition*, *classification*, *rephrasing*, *exemplification*, *analogy*, and *quotation*. It is also important to mention that this inventory of discursive strategies is not complete; other explanatory strategies can also be observed, especially in the genres less studied, such as the genres of the Internet.

The author mentions the function of each of the strategies used in the explanatory genres. The *definition*, for example, is considered a discursive strategy used for focusing on a topic to clarify it. The *classification* represents a way of distinguishing and organising by certain criteria an apparently chaotic class of objects/concepts in order to observe and know them better. The *reformulation* is a good strategy used as an alternative to an initial statement. In specialised communication it is frequently used when the collocutor doesn't understand the terminology of a specialised field. It has the function to make things simpler and clearer. The *analogy* is a discursive strategy that creates a relation between a complex and abstract concept and a more familiar one. Finally, the *quotation* represents a reference to a third person's opinion in order to gain support and authority for a cognitive content.

These strategies correspond to the prototypical explanatory sequence. In the case of other explanatory genres, several other discursive strategies can also be encountered.

4.5. Conversation and Verbal Interactions

In sub-chapter 3.5.3 we have presented the structure of the prototypical explanation according the descriptions of text linguistics (Grice, Adam). One of the aspects all the scholars seem to agree with consists in the fact that the explanation is constructed as an answer to a question. The question can be

one of the following types: *What?*, *Why?*, and *How?*, and depending on the question the explanation answers, the answer may be a *definition*, a *prototypical explanation*, or a *description of actions*. The questions can be implicit or explicit, and can be organised discursively as monological or dialogical. In professional web forums discussions, the discursive organisation is dialogical. Thus, the explanatory sequence is developed by the communicational interaction of at least two persons. This means that the explanatory sequence can be contemplated at an interactive-conversational level⁶⁴ too.

In order to analyse the interactive construction of the explanation, we need to adopt a different theoretical framework that will allow us to operate with the proper instruments of discourse analysis in the social interactional context.

The first question the investigator may ask is what interactional theory would be adequate to operate with in the context of the analysis of the explanation in the professional web forums discussions. The answer resides in the investigation we have already carried out in sub-chapters 2.2.1 and 2.2.2, where we explained that the theoretical approaches to ediscourse concord with the fact that it represents a hybrid discursive structure that displays oral and written features. In 2.2.2 we mentioned that the web forum is generally considered as having the features of a written conversation. Consequently, we appreciate that the theoretical framework of conversation analysis may be adequate for the analysis of this type of e-discourse, especially because it is written conversation and many of the oral features that make face-to-face conversation so difficult to analyse are absent in the professional web forums interactions.

Conversation analysis is a theoretical framework that has its origins in the ethnomethodologist approach to oral interactions. It was developed by the group of researchers known as *École de Genève*. Their theory of conversation is based on different studies of pragmatics (Bakhtin, Searle, Austin, Goffman, Labov, Ducrot, and others) and proposes a hierarchic model of conversation. This model was developed in France in the '90s by Catherine Kerbrat-Orecchioni, who adds to the Geneva School model some operative concepts from the ethnomethodologist model. This model was later developed by Traverso (2004).

Kerbrat-Orecchioni states that there are two levels, one superficial and the other more profound, of the organisation of conversations. The first level

⁶⁴ In sections 4.2 and 4.3 we developed the theoretical framework necessary to analyse the explanation as text and as discursive strategy.

contains the turn taking aspect of the face-to-face conversations, while the other consists in a conversational grammar consisting in the principles of internal coherence that determine the syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic construction of conversation. According to the author, the conversation can be hierarchically structured in monological and dialogical units, each category displaying distinct subcategories. The participants in the conversation can establish different relations, identified by Kerbrat-Orecchioni as horizontal and/or vertical, and finally, the author considers politeness “un phénomène linguistiquement pertinent” (Kerbrat-Orecchioni, 1996, p. 50), a very important dimension of conversation:

La notion de « politesse » est ici entendue au sens large, comme recouvrant tous les aspects du discours qui sont régis par des règles, et dont la fonction est de préserver le caractère harmonieux de la relation interpersonnelle. (Kerbrat-Orecchioni, 1996, p. 5051)

Here the author distinguishes the concept of *linguistic politeness* perceived as “art de la conversation” in opposition with other aspects of politeness, such as good manners and social behaviour, or the way one adapts his/her outfit to a situation.

This theory was developed by a former student of Kerbrat Orecchioni’s, Veronique Traverso, who establishes the following structures of conversation analysis: *the construction of the interaction, the organisation of the actions within an interaction and the thematic construction of an interaction*. In the present work we will take into consideration the model developed by Kerbrat-Orecchioni (1996) and Traverso (2004) as conversational framework.

4.5.1. The Construction of Interactions

Kerbrat-Orecchioni and Traverso agree that the lack of organisation in conversations is just a superficial impression, for interactions *are* organised structures. The two authors distinguish between *a local organisation* and *a global organisation of the interactions*.

The local organisation comports turn taking (tours de parole), the rules of alternation of turns (allocation des tours), the speech turn composition (composition des tours de parole), and the regulation of turns (la regulation). Following local organisation, the conversation is structured by the alternation of the locutors, who obey certain rules: one person speaks at a time (sequentially organised), the others wait for their turn, and the locutor can select explicitly/

implicitly the addressee. If the locutor doesn't select an addressee, each participant in the conversation will negotiate his/her turn and his/her positioning. If nobody participates in the interaction, the initial locutor has to continue to develop different discursive strategies in order to obtain attention from the audience. The turns of speech consist in the turn and the transition points which mark the end of a turn and the beginning of another. The transition points are not mandatory, but they are usually present in the conversation. A transition point can be realised discursively or by the means of the channel, as in the case of CMC where the communicational channel presents video and audio transition points⁶⁵. In the case of the professional web forums one can observe only "full turns" (*tours pleins*), for the channel of communication is not designed to allow interruptions.

The *global organisation* of conversation establishes that each conversation consists of three important moments: *the opening*, *the body*, and *the closing*⁶⁶. The *opening* represents the initial part of the conversation where the locutor opens the channel and establishes contact with the addressee; it is the moment where linguistic politeness and communicational routines are noticeable in conversation. *The body* of the conversation contains the sequences⁶⁷ that organise the internal structure of the conversation. *The closing* represents the end of the conversation, when the locutor closes the channel and performs the discursive routines/rituals of closure.

It is important to notice that the main part of the conversation is represented by the *body* and that the *openings* and *closings* depend on the situation, locutor, and other factors that regulate the discursive production.

4.5.2. The Organisation of Actions within Interactions

The organisation of the actions within interactions represents the hierarchical model of the organisation of conversations proposed by Kerbrat-Orecchioni (1996). The author distinguishes between *monological* and *dialogical*

⁶⁵ An example of a video transition point can be observed on the web forums where the intervention of each participant in the situation is inserted in a table cell which graphically delimitates the extension of a turn. In Internet chats, chat programs such as *YahooMessenger* or *Skype* emit a sound every time a participant in the conversation introduces his/her intervention in order to indicate to the user that a new intervention to the conversation was added.

⁶⁶ Here we use the terminology of Traverso (2004).

⁶⁷ Here we use the terminology of Kerbrat-Orecchioni and Traverso, which is different from the terminology of Adam.

units. The monological units comport: the speech act (the minimal unit of a conversation) and the intervention (consisting in one or more speech acts). The monological units interact in a conversation and consequently they form the *dialogical units* of conversational discursive organisation. They are: *the exchange*, *the sequence* and *the interaction*.

The *exchanges* are interrelated series of interventions. They can form groups of one intervention, when the locutor initiates a conversation but no other participant assumes the role of the addressee, groups of two interventions consisting of the *initiative intervention* and the *reactive intervention*. There are also groups formed by three interventions consisting of an *initiative intervention*, followed by a *reactive intervention*, and closed by an *evaluative intervention*. The exchanges counting more than three interventions are considered *extended exchanges*. The *sequence* consists of several exchanges thematically/pragmatically related. The most complex structure is the *interaction* that consists in a conversational act, such as: *shopping*, *asking for directions*, or a *phone call*.

4.5.3. Thematic Progression

Veronique Traverso (2004) considers that their thematic construction is an important aspect of interactions. In the present work this aspect is essential, since the interactive construction of knowledge is realised thematically, so that one whole section of the present investigation (see 7.3) has been devoted to this aspect in particular. Furthermore, a model of knowledge construction based on the thematic analysis has been elaborated for the corpus.

The thematic dimension of communication is generally constructed through *semantic cohesion*, *anaphora*, and *cataphora*. In what concerns the thematic construction, two main aspects are important: the *thematic continuity* and the *thematic discontinuity*. The thematic discontinuity can adopt forms such as: closure of theme (implicit/explicit), thematic rupture, and proposal of a theme (implicit/explicit). They represent moments in the conversation when the interlocutors operate a certain change in the topic of their conversation. The ruptures can be related with the beginning, the end of the conversation, a digression, or an interruption.

The thematic continuity is the aspect that contributes most to the thematic progression and has an important role in the interactive construction of knowledge. It consists in two main elements: the *ratification of the theme* (implicit/explicit) and *the elaboration of the theme*, depending on the different modes of thematic elaboration.

The ratification of the theme consists in the response of the addressee to a previous *proposal of a theme*. The locutor opens the channel of communication and when establishing the communicational relation, he also defines thematically the interchange. The addressee, when accepting to enter in the communicational relation with the previous speaker, not only assumes the identity the locutor assigns to him/her but also *ratifies the theme*. In other words, in order to establish a communicational relation, from the thematic point of view the addressee has to agree to talk about the theme proposed by the locutor. After the *ratification of the theme*, there follows the *elaboration of the theme* which means that the conversation enters in a phase of thematic progression. Different modes are involved in the thematic elaboration, such as: descriptive-commentative, explanatory, narrative, argumentative, and *échanges à batôns rompus* (Traverso, 2004, p. 44).

*

As one can notice, in the presentation of these three discourse analysis theories we have mentioned the possibility of operating transmissions from a theoretical framework to another, exactly as Schiffrin (1994) stated in her book (see 4.2). In the current investigation we will use the different theoretical approaches presented, in order to observe the main characteristics of the professional web forum and describe this subgenre in Romanian. With this purpose in mind, we will first describe the communicational device in Chapter 6, exploring the conditions of the production of web forums, and presenting our corpus.

Our discursive analysis (chapter 7) will focus on the main aspects that characterise the web forum, as we have explained in chapter 6. These aspects are the identities and the explanatory sequence in the web forums. Next, we will consider these *explanatory texts* as *interventions*, in other words we will consider them as part of a conversation. At this level we will observe how the explanation is constructed interactively and how knowledge is structured discursively through semantic cohesion, anaphoric/cataphoric relations, and different modes of theme elaboration. To this purpose, we will use the conversationalist approaches presented above. The concrete model of analysis we will apply in this investigation in order to describe the Internet subgenre we have denominated *professional web forum* will be detailed in chapter 6.

5. Computer Web Forums Corpus Description

The creation of a corpus, the design criteria, and its structure represent essential aspects in a descriptive study such as the present work. In this chapter, we will first outline some important theoretical approaches on corpus design and implementation. Then we will move on to the presentation of the methodology applied in the building of the corpus, and we will end with a basic quantitative evaluation of the linguistic content of the corpus. The importance of this analysis consists in the fact that it will provide the first evaluation of the linguistic profile of knowledge communication discourse on Romanian web forums. Our hypothesis is that the quantitative observations provided by the statistics of the Romanian corpus are coherent with the analysis of the discourse we will operate within the analytic part of the current work.

The *Romanian Computer Web Forums Corpus* (Varga, 2026), as we decided to call it, consists of authentic electronic texts extracted from different computer-based web forums. It is a *monolingual* corpus which comprises texts in *Romanian*. The corpus is *monotextual*, since it contains texts all belonging to one genre of the electronic discourse: *web forum interaction*. It is also partly *multimodal*, for the discussions on the web forums involve textual and visual communication.

The *Romanian Computer Web Forums Corpus* was created as part of the present investigation beginning with 2007 and it represents an essential source of information for the present work, which aims at describing specific discursive mechanisms of knowledge communication on the specialised web forums. This was subsequently enriched with a series of texts from the Softpedia discussion forum (<https://forum.softpedia.com/>) published on the forum between 2021 and 2025. The purpose of this approach is to explore the evolution of communication in discussion forums in Romania.

5.1. Issues in Corpus Creation

A corpus is more than a simple “collection of texts”, and it represents more than an indefinite data source for linguistic research or a huge amount of discursive production that can’t be easily processed. As Sinclair observes:

A corpus is a collection of pieces of language text in electronic form, selected according to external criteria to represent, as far as possible, a language or language variety as a source of data for linguistic research. (Sinclair, 2005)⁶⁸

Depending on the finality of the linguistic research on the corpora, the *external criteria* applied to build them may differ. In *corpus linguistics* there are different descriptions of corpus design principles such as Sinclair (2005), L'Homme (2004) for the description of specialised corpora, McEnery&Hardie (2011), McEnery (2019) and so on.

În the present work, in what follows the following corpus creation principles will be taken into consideration in the building of the *Romanian Computer Web Forums Corpus*⁶⁹.

An essential set of criteria systematically structured, explaining the main aspects in the construction of a corpus, is presented by John Sinclair. The author develops and discusses his model on different occasions (Sinclair, 1991⁷⁴, 1996, 2004, and 2005). Taking as point of reference some documented corpora such as those created by Renouf (1984), Kucera&Francis (1967), and Johansson (1980), John Sinclair describes the basic principles of corpus building as an extrapolation of the principles used in the creation of the *Brown Corpus*, which were considered for a long time *the* standard to follow. These principles describe the basic structure of a corpus, and represent the essential design protocol recommended to follow in any research involving corpus exploration. They allow the researcher to optimally adapt the corpus to the finality of the study. According to Sinclair⁷⁰ (1996), a general corpus may be implemented by taking into account the following principles:

- 1) Corpus' dimensions: as large as possible;
- 2) Representativeness: a corpus must be representative for the aspect of language studied;
- 3) Organisation/classification: Inside a general corpus the different texts should be classified;

⁶⁸ A previous definition of the corpus can be found in Sinclair (1996): "A collection of pieces of language that are selected and ordered according to explicit linguistic criteria in order to be used as a sample of the language".

⁶⁹ For a complete Corpus linguistics' state of art, see Baker Paul (2010): *Sociolinguistics and Corpus Linguistics*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press (pp. 5-15). ⁷⁴ John Sinclair (1991): *Corpus, concordance, collocation*. Oxford: University Press, pp. 13-27.

⁷⁰ In the same work the author defines also the default values of a corpus: quantity, quality, simplicity and documented.

- 4) Sampling: sample sizes should be even;
- 5) Authority: The texts in the corpus should be documented.

A slightly different focus concerning the design of the corpora is presented by Biber and al. (1998), who recommend the following principles in building corpora: *representativeness, sampling, diversity, size, and copyright*. From the perspective of Biber and al. (1998), the most important aspect of the corpora design seems to be the *representativeness*, since this criterion is directly related with the finality of the research. On the one hand, the authors underline that the main point the researcher has to take into account when he/she creates a corpus is that the corpus has to represent a language, a variety of a language, or a language phenomenon. On the other hand, they observe that representing a language through a collection of texts is a very complicated mission. Thus, they state that the perfect corpus under the aspect of representativeness doesn't exist, but only more representative or less representative corpora.

The *size* of the corpus represents another important concern for the authors. Unlike Sinclair, who doesn't go into details on the *size* aspect of the corpora, Biber (1990) proposed a *minimum reference size* corpus consisting of 1000 words for a text and 10 texts for each category that composes the corpus. The author appreciates that a more reduced corpus may not correspond to a reliable source of information and can't be representative for a linguistic phenomenon.

Depending on the finality of the corpus, the researcher has to decide what kind of texts may be selected (*sampling*). Since the speakers are characterised by different patterns of language use (dialects and registers), which they control in terms of the finality of the communication, *diversity* should also count as a significant parameter in the construction of corpora. The aspects concerning the *copyright* are also important. Thus, since the majority of the web genres are considered to be *public communication*, the copyright doesn't represent a decisive factor and has no impact on corpus implementation.

A variety of other works considered essential to corpora design have provided the theoretical framework for the creation of the *Computer Web Forums Corpus*, such as: McEnery&Wilson (1996), Kennedy (1998), Biber (1998, 2008), and Kilgarriff (2008).

The fundamental corpus linguistics theory has been completed with other web corpora studies such as: Fletcher (2010), Hundt et al. (2007), Ferraresi (2009), Baroni&Kilgarriff (2006), Maroccia (2004), and Mourlhon-Dallies (2004).

a. Corpora typology

Based on typological linguistic criteria, the corpora may fall into different categories (Sinclair, 1996). The author distinguishes between internal and external criteria⁷¹. These criteria contribute to the creation of a corpora typology consisting of: spoken corpora⁷², samples corpora⁷³, special corpora⁷⁴, reference corpora, monitor corpora, parallel corpora, and comparable corpora.

According to this classification, the *Computer Web Forums Corpus* falls in the category of monolingual specialised corpora. The structure of a monolingual corpus (Sinclair, 1996) presents heterogeneous content consisting of texts presenting common features in one language. The texts in the corpus should be produced in similar circumstances of communication without being translated from another language (a translation involves an interpretation/adaptation process).

b. Corpora and threads

The corpora, as huge amounts of texts, may present a specific internal structure, which allows the researcher to analyse them systematically:

A corpus can be divided into *subcorpora*. A *subcorpus* has all the properties of a corpus but happens to be part of a larger corpus. Corpora are divided into *components*. A *component* is not necessarily an adequate sample of a language, it is a collection of pieces of language that are selected and ordered according to a set of linguistic criteria that serve to characterise its linguistic homogeneity. (Sinclair, 1996)

The description of the internal structure of a corpus and the distinctions the author operates between its components plays an essential role in the analysis of the corpus.

c. Building a corpus

The building of a corpus is generally described as a two-stage process involving *design* and *implementation* (Sinclair, 2005). The *design process* represents

⁷¹ The *external criteria* refer to the social setting of the situation of communication (participants, occasion, communicative goals, etc.). The *internal criteria* refer to language patterns.

⁷² The author distinguishes between speech corpus and spoken corpus (transcription of oral speech). For more details, see Sinclair (1996)

<http://www.ilc.cnr.it/EAGLES96/corpusstyp/node15.html#SECTION00050000000000000000>

⁷³ The author distinguishes between *text corpora/whole text corpora* and *samples corpora* (Sinclair: 1996).

⁷⁴ They contain *sublanguage* material.

the first stage of the corpus building, in which the researcher makes decisions about how to build the corpus in view of the finalities of his/her research.

In the case of web corpora, Sinclair observes that hypertext documents are very different from the recommended.txt format of the corpora. As a result, they are more difficult to explore and quantify, for they are not linear and the communication is multimodal.

A corpus expects documents (including transcripts) to be discrete, text to be linear and separable from non-text, and it expects documents to fall into recognisable sizings, similar to hard-copy documents. A normal corpus has no provision for hypertext, far less flashing text and animations. (Sinclair, 2005)

The second observation on the web corpora made by Sinclair concerns the preservation of the Internet texts. Sinclair observes that the creation of a web corpus supposes the extraction of the web texts from their "natural" environment and that it is very difficult to preserve a complete web document:

[...] is relevant here; the documents in their original format should be carefully preserved; it is up to the corpus managers how far hypertext links are preserved as well in a "family" of documents, but, like all the other texts in a corpus, the Web document is ultimately removed from the environment of its natural occurrence." (Sinclair, 2005)

As one can observe, the design of the *Computer Web Forums Corpus* consists basically in the unification of the classic principles of corpus creation with principles imposed by the new directions of web corpus design. As it will be illustrated in the following sections of this chapter, we have tried to use the advantages offered by both directions in order to design and implement an optimal corpus for our research.

5.2. Design and Implementation

In this section, following the theoretical framework established by Sinclair (see 4.2.) we will describe the protocol, the methodology and the parameters of the *monolingual Romanian corpus* representing the material analysed in the present work.

5.2.1. Protocol

The *Romanian Computer Web Forums* corpus consists of texts extracted from a single specialised Romanian web forum Softpedia (<http://www.softpedia.ro>,

later become <https://forum.softpedia.com/>). The initial corpus has dimensions estimated at 200 A4 pages, formed by complete texts (web forum threads). A further 150 A4 pages were added in 2025, in order to study the evolution of communication in Romanian web forums. Because of the technical differences in the implementation of the web forums, which lend variability and imprecision to the evaluation of the dimensions of the texts belonging to different threads, we have established as reference measure the “standard page” used by professional publishers to evaluate manuscripts with different formats. This value is established at 250 words per page⁷⁵. In 5.2.3 the description of the Romanian corpus counts as a standard page evaluation.

The forums have been selected following very strict criteria, such as: *durability, popularity, dimensions, authority, type, and topic*. By *durability* we mean the period of continuous activity on the web forum. In the case of the web forum selected for the *Romanian Computer Web Forums Corpus* has a long history, spanning 24 years. The criterion of *popularity* of the forum consists in the number of the members authenticated and active on the forum. The forum selected has a total number of 493,056 participants. The *activity* criterion stipulates that the forums must be currently active and must have daily posts. The *type* of web forums selected is knowledge communication/technical support web forums, focusing on a specific *topic*. We have established as general topic *the computer* and *the Internet*, specified as *software* and *operating systems*, and within the *operating system* category we focused on the theme *Windows Operating System*.

The texts were copied from their original location, from the Internet and saved in different MsWord files (format.docx). Each file including comports an initial page of *Contents*. The original location (URL) of the web forum is also referred to on this first page.

Since the *Computer Web Forums* corpus consists in texts obtained from the Internet, as written by their authors, there was no need for transcription. The texts retain a form close to the original in what concerns their textual and visual structures. In order to preserve the multimodal structure of the texts, we have decided to save the texts in MsWord 2024 format, on various USB memories and SSD drives. The corpus has been published (Varga, 2026) and can be consulted online at <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18889405>.

⁷⁵ Estrada, Rita Clay, Gallagher, Rita (1999): *You Can Write a Romance*, Writer’s Digest Books, Ohio, p. 41.

5.2.2. Methodology

The implementation of the corpus has observed the following parameters:

- the genre (web forum interactions)
- type of texts (definitions, instructions, explanations)
- the language of the production of the texts Romanian
- the topic (Computer > Software > Operating System > Windows)

A series of steps were followed in order to build the *Romanian Computer Web Forums* corpus, following the protocol based on the theoretical framework described by Sinclair (see 4.2):

- a) *Identification of the texts on the Internet*: The texts were identified and selected within the web forum *Softpedia*. After the evaluation of the criteria mentioned above, the most complex threads were selected (the *threads* consisting in a high number of *posts* or the *threads* consisting in large amounts of text).
- b) *Creation of the Romanian corpus*: Once identified, the texts were copied in a MsWord file named *romanian_corpus.docx*. In this first version (which we consider the original version of the corpus) the entire content of the web forum texts was preserved as copied from the Internet, without any intervention by the researcher. The visual content (emoji, images) of the original version was also preserved.
- c) *Back-up copy of the original text*: This version of the corpus can be consulted on different USB and SSD drives.
- d) *Text processing*: After creating a back-up copy of the genuine linguistic material, we processed the text in order to restore its aspect to the original web page. For this purpose, we had to reduce the font size of the corpus to 7pt. Every *thread* was isolated by hard page breaks and the titles of the threads were marked in order to be included in the *Contents* page. The lines of the corpus were numbered automatically in order to identify the different sequences analysed in the present work. Different elements of the web page navigation structure (buttons and arrows), double spaces and different graphic elements (horizontal lines, publicity, etc.), irrelevant for the discursive content of the web forum were also deleted, wherever possible. The double paragraph marks remained where they represented the separator of the posts. In the formatted corpus we have preserved the original font colour, the use of capitals, the use of bold or italics. We have also preserved such marks (orthography, punctuation, and orality) as were specific to the authors of the posts: typing errors, Internet

orthography, suprasegmental marks. All references in our analysis consider the final edited version of the *Romanian Computer Web Forum Corpus*.

- e) *Id assignation*: A simple alphabetical code was assigned to the corpus: Ro (Romanian). The exact position of the examples analysed in the corpus can be identified in the corpus by the code that precedes them, which consists in square brackets, the alphabetical Id of the corpus followed by the number of the line of the sequence. For sequences larger than one line, we marked the interval of lines where the sequence can be encountered (for example, [Ro: 33-37]).

With this method we have obtained a *monolingual corpus* comprising 350 A4 pages grouped in 856 posts that form 127 threads. The final dimension of the corpus is of 168,561 words.

5.2.3. Parameters of the Romanian Computer Web Forums Corpus

In this sub-section we intend to present a complete description of the *Romanian Computer Web Forums* corpus. When the data weren't quantifiable, if we had evidence of their presence in the corpus, we marked this fact by the word "Yes".

Forum characteristics:	
Forum's name	Forum Softpedia
Forum's location (URL)	http://www.softpedia.ro https://forum.softpedia.com/
Forum's duration	2001-2025
Corpus period	2006-2009, 2021-2025
Last accessed on	20.09.2025
Textual Content:	
Corpus dimension (words/tokens)	27,592 (2006-2009) 26,286 (2021-2025)
Number of threads	24 (2006-2009) 3 (2021-2025)
Number of posts	410 (2006-2009) 446 (2021-2025)

Number of lines	7,060 (2006-2009) 3,489 (2021-2025)
Number of pages (initial text)	202 (2006-2009) 151 (2021-2025)
Number of standard pages (250 words/page)	110,36 (2006-2009) 105,14 (2021-2025)
Number of edited pages (final corpus)	139 (2006-2009) 102 (2021-2025)
Number of participants	137 (2006-2009) 99 (2021-2025)
Visual content:	
Total number of images	143 (2006-2009) 0 (2021-2025)
ID avatar	Yes
Signature	0
Emoticons	28 (2006-2009) 48 (2021-2025)
happy emoticons	41 (2021-2025)
sad emoticons	7 (2021-2025)
Screen Captures	0 6 (2021-2025)
Attached images	36 (2006-2009) 0 (2021-2025)

5.3. Web Forum Communication Profile

The parameters of the Romanian Computer Web Forums corpus can form the basis for some general observations concerning communication on the web forums as accounted for by the statistical data. These observations, if correct, may concord with the qualitative analysis of the textual sequences.

The main parameters of a statistic analysis should be: the text as the discursive product, the locutor as text producer and the modalities of the discourse (textual and visual).

To begin with, we will make some simple statements on the amount of text in Romanian in order to deduce the actual textual production on the web forums. These data can be observed only through statistics, which will give us important information about the *text density* on a web forum.

Secondly, we will focus on the locutor as the producer of the text. The number of the participants in the web forum interactions will represent a serious basis for the evaluation of the *interaction density*. At the same time, the number of *posts* on a web forum can illustrate the *discursive extension* of the web forum communication in a language. The quantitative analysis of the visual communication on the web forums completes the analysis. A communicative profile can be drawn up starting from these parameters.

In the following sections of this chapter we will consider the textual, interactive, extensional and visual aspects of the discourse of the Romanian web forums and we will try to trace the specific profile of this type of communication. In order to do this, we will propose a protocol of analysis in which we will distinguish between *textual communication*, *interactive communication*, *extended communication* and *visual communication*. We assume that the web forum communication can be characterised by these parameters in different degrees. In order to evaluate these degrees, we have established three values for every parameter:

Textual communication	Interactive communication	Extended communication	Visual communication
High textual	High Interactive	High extended	High visual
Textual	Interactive	Extended	Visual
Low textual	Low interactive	Low extended	Low visual

The different values a parameter can take are assigned by comparison between the 2006-2009 and 2021-2025 sub-corpora. The maximum value and the minimum value in the corpus will represent the high or the low degree of the profile evaluation.

5.4. Statistics of Web Forums Communication

As one can notice, the communication has similar values in the cases of the Romanian web forums corpora created in 2006-2009 (110,36 pages) and 2021-2025 (105,14 pages). This means that the *textual communication* is very

strong in the web forums in Romanian and the visual aspect of the communication is less represented.

The discursive contribution to the web forum communication can be measured by the number of the locutors discursively active on the forum. A large number of participants in the web forum communication can lead to the interpretation of the forum as highly interactive. The number of participants in the corpus is quite even with 137 participants between 2006-2009 and 99 participants (2021-2025), which demonstrates that the analysed web forum exhibits a high level of communicative interactivity.

The extension of the discursive production in the web forum discussions can be evaluated by the number of posts published in time. As one can notice, the most extended discursive productions are in the corpus created between 2021-2025 with 446 posts and with only 410 posts between 2006-2009. This means that the recent communicative interactions between the forum's users are shorter.

With regard to the visual component of the communicative interactions, a high visual forum communication can be observed between 2006-2009 with 143 images presents in the posts. The Romanian web forum is evolving towards less visual communication, with directly displayed images disappearing completely in favor of links that display images separately from the text message in discussions published between 20021 and 2025.

With regard to the emoticons so distinctive to electronic discourse, it can be observed that between 2006-2009 (28) and 2021-2025 (48) their density increases. It should also be noted that cheerful emoticons are more prevalent in communication on web forums between 2021-2025 (41) than in the period 2006-2009 (7). This points to the fact that communication on professional web forums in Romanian is mostly friendly and positive among speakers.

In conclusion, we may state that we have identified the two profiles for the Romanian web forum communication:

1. *Between 2006-2009 the Romanian corpus* is: high textual, high interactive, low extended and high visual.
2. *Between 2021-2025 the Romanian corpus* is: high textual, interactive, high extended and low visual.

Statistics show that, over different time periods, discursive interaction within the same language can change its features, pointing to a shift in the communicative behavior of speakers of that language, in our case Romanian.

6. Methodology of Analysis

In what follows we will present the model of analysis which will be applied in order to describe the professional web forum as genre. In this section we distinguish between *conceptual aspects* of the methodology (theoretical approaches, concept and terminology) and *phases of analysis*, where the order of actions and the manners of working with the corpus will be described.

6.1. Conceptual Aspects

In order to describe the genre *professional web forum*, we will take into consideration three discourse analysis approaches presented in sections 4.2, 4.3, and 4.4. These approaches are: *the communicational model of discourse analysis* (Charaudeau), *textual linguistics* (Adam), and *conversation analysis* (Orecchioni, Traverso). We consider that these three approaches may offer the effective conceptual tools necessary for the discursive analysis of the *Romanian computer web forums corpus*.

Each of the three approaches can provide effective support in the study of the different discursive aspects of this genre, and together they can facilitate a complete description of the enunciative mechanism and discursive organisation of the professional web forum. Consequently, we have distinguished three essential levels of the genre description: *the enunciative level*, *the sequential level*, and *the interactional level*. Since a different approach to discourse analysis can provide the theoretical support for our research, we have elaborated a three-level model of analysis in order to observe the features of the genre we are investigating.

The 1st level of analysis, the most general, is the *discourse level*. Here we will use the communicational model of Patrick Charaudeau and the theoretical concepts he proposes: *contract of communication*, *discursive project*, and *discursive strategies*. In the theoretical framework outlined by the concept *contract of communication* we will also use the main elements that determine and constrain the genre in a specific situation of social communication: *the objectives of the enunciation*, *the discursive identities*, and *the discursive device* or *discursive "mise en scène"*.

We consider that the features of the professional web forum as genre consist in a specific way of representation of identities and in a complex construction of the interactive device. Both aspects will be analysed, described, and commented on in the present work.

In what concerns the representation of identities, we will take into account the discursive identities and we will focus especially on *deixis* and *positioning* as the essential strategies that organise the verbal production of each participant in a situation of communication. We regard *deixis* as important explicit evidence of how the locutor represents himself/herself and how he/she represents the other(s), the *addressee* and the *audience* respectively. *Positioning* is also considered an essential clue in establishing a communicative contract between the enunciative "I" and the addressee "You". The *objectives of enunciation* also emerge from the first contact between participants, and we have established that these represent a unique theme, *the knowledge communication* which, too, determines the contract of communication.

At this first level the *discursive device* is very complex, so that we have decided to probe deeper into the subject and introduce the *2nd level of analysis*. At this level we will use the concepts and terminology of textual linguistics (see section 4.2) and we will assume that the text of each locutor's intervention is formed by a series of sequences. We will also assume that these sequences are explanatory (see chapter 3, especially section 3.5). As pointed out by different authors (see section 4.2), the explanatory sequences are expressed through different *discursive strategies*, respectively *explanatory discursive strategies*. For the moment we will assume three main explanatory strategies: *definition*, *description of actions*, and *prototypical explanation*, with their subcategories (see 6.3 protocol of analysis). If different categories of discursive strategies will be encountered during the analysis, they will be highlighted in the analysis and in the partial conclusions of the corresponding chapter.

In line with textual linguistics theory, besides the sequences we will take into account the *textual* dimension of the communication and we will point out how the *explanatory text* is constructed through a series of explanatory sequences on the professional web forum. We consider that this double perspective on the explanatory construction of the discourse on the professional web forum as *sequence* and as *text* will provide a complete panorama of the discursive phenomena involved in knowledge transmission on the Internet.

The 3rd level of our analysis will focus on the interactional dimension of the explanation. In order to analyse this aspect, we will use the conversationalist

hierarchical model of interactions. We will align our investigation with the studies defined by Orecchioni and Traverso (see section 4.3). At this level of the analysis we will consider the professional web forum as communicational interaction. This idea is supported by the fact that e-discourse and CMC are generally considered hybrids between the written and oral discourses (see chapter 2, especially sections 2.1, 2.2.1 and 2.2.2), which structures the professional web forum into an asynchronic written dialogue, making it fit into the theory of communicational interactions.

In line with this theory we will consider that the professional web forum discussions display the following hierarchical structure: *monological units* and *dialogical units*. We will use in this work the term *intervention* for the *monological* units and *exchanges* for the *dialogical* units. We have also taken into account the different dialogical pairs (see 6.3 protocol of analysis). A *series of exchanges* was considered, a *sequence*, and at this level the *sequence* will be conceived of in conversationalist terms, which will distinguish it from the sequence in textual linguistics analysis. We used the term sequence firstly in line with Jean Michel Adam's theory, and subsequently in line with the conversationalist theory, because the two treat different conceptual levels of the discourse, and therefore, will appear in distinct sections of the analysis.

This 3rd level of analysis is intended to demonstrate the complex discursive articulation of the explanation, firstly as sequence, then as explanatory text, and finally as explanatory interaction. In this part of the analysis we will take into account how the participants in the interaction establish communicational relations. Basically, we examine three main aspects of the professional web forum interactions: *the construction of interaction*, *the structuring of actions within interaction*, and *the thematic progression in interaction*.

Each main aspect is considered in detail and adapted to the features of CMC when necessary⁷⁶. Thus, the description of the professional web forums interactions features a description of the *local* and *global discursive organisation* of the interactions, a *ranks analysis* and a *thematic progression analysis* for an optimal view of the way the explanation is constructive collaboratively on the Internet.

⁷⁶ For example, turn taking is different in computer mediated communication than in face-to-face conversation.

6.2. Phases of the Analysis

In what follows we will describe the main phases of the analysis, which consists in the following main parts: a) discursive representation of identities⁷⁷, b) explanatory sequences and explanatory texts, and c) interactive construction of knowledge as negotiation between ignorance and experience.

- a) *Discursive representation of identities*: represents the analysis of the identities involved in the transmission of knowledge. Two identities are involved in this situation: *the novice* and *the expert*. Since *the novice* seems to be the active agent as initiator and supporter of the discussion, in this first section of the analysis we focus on his/her discourse. The most important part concerning knowledge transmission in *the novice's* discourse is the *asking for information* sequence. The *asking for information* sequence consists generally in an interrogation and its immediate context. It represents a discursive strategy through which the locutor determines the contract of communication. He/she expresses his/her ignorance, positions the participants in the discussion and establishes the contract of communication. Certain discursive patterns are recurrent. Since the recurrence is an indication of systematicity, all the recurrent patterns will be registered and analysed. We will focus on the elocutionary, allocutionary and delocutionary acts of speech as discursive representations of the identities of the self and the other. After the analysis of the corpus, we will present the partial conclusions to the construction of identity on the *professional web forum* and we will highlight its specifics in Romanian.
- b) *Explanatory sequences and explanatory texts*: in the *expert* portion of the professional web forum discourse the most interesting part consists in the rich variety of explanatory sequences. Thus, we will focus our attention on knowledge transmission through explanation. We will distinguish between two main categories of explanations: simple explanations and complex explanations. The first category consists in different types of explanations. We distinguish between object/concept-oriented explanations, procedures/instructions, and prototypical explanations. These categories will be identified and described in the

⁷⁷ Objectives of enunciation: result from the social interaction between the participants in the situation (knowledge communication, knowledge transmission, collaborative knowledge construction).

Romanian corpus. The partial conclusions to the section will portray the way users 'explain' on a *professional web forum* and how they construct their discourse. Specific features of each language will also be highlighted.

- c) *Interactive construction of knowledge*: the transmission of knowledge as negotiation between two entities lends itself to an interactionist model of analysis adapted to the specifics of *computer mediated communication*. We highlight that a longitudinal analysis of the professional web forums interactions would constitute an advantage, because it will emphasise the contextual functions of the speech acts.
- d) Since examining each interaction in the *Romanian Computer Web Forums Corpus* would exceed the scope of our work, we will choose from the corpus a unique and representative interaction which we will analyse in order to observe how knowledge is constructed, transmitted, and validated through communicational interaction.
- e) The observations that will result from the analysis will form the basis of the description of the mechanism of knowledge construction and transmission. At the end of each analysis we will provide a model of the interactive construction of cognition.
- f) *Terminological content of specialised discourse*: a terminological analysis will be applied to the Romanian corpus consisting in professional web forum texts in order to highlight an important component of discursive construction of knowledge. The analysis of the monolingual Romanian corpus will allow us to observe the terminological density and the specialised terminological inventory used in the transmission of specialised knowledge and will give more support to our hypothesis of investigation.
- g) *Evaluation of the use of AI chatbots based on LLMs in discourse analysis*. This section examines the potential of ChatGPT to become a valuable tool that can assist researchers in the field of discourse analysis.

6.3. Protocol of Analysis

The following protocol of analysis will be used in order to describe the *professional web forum*. This protocol represents a general model that can be applied to any particular form of *professional web forum*:

1. Professional Web Forum: Situation of communication

a) Finality/Goal:

i. **Expert finalities** (present, explain, define, illustrate, exemplify, comment, advise, recommend, suggest, help, guide, warn):

1. teach ("faire savoir", "faire savoir-faire")
2. assist ("faire savoir-faire")
3. ask for feedback ("faire savoir")

ii. **Novice finalities** (persuade, describe, ask questions):

1. ask for information
2. learn
3. give feedback

b) Identities: formal construction and psycho-social construction

i. **Novice** (requests knowledge):

1. Discourse of ignorance:

a. **Complete ignorance** (request for information):

i. **Positioning** – inferiority in relation to the addressee/audience

b. **Partial ignorance** (request for information):

i. **Positioning** – inferiority in relation to the addressee/audience

ii. **Positioning** – equality in relation to the addressee/audience

ii. **Expert** (provides knowledge):

1. Discourse of experience:

a. **Explanatory sequence:**

i. **Definition** (*what-question*):

1. *Genus and differentia*
2. Metaphorical definition
3. Essential definition
4. Definition by similarity
5. Nominal definition
6. Descriptive definition:
 - a. Distinctive definition
 - i. Reparatory definition
 - b. Genetic definition
 - c. Causal definition
7. Ostensive definition

ii. **Procedures/Instructions** (*how-question*):

1. List of actions
2. Description of actions

iii. **Prototypical explanation** (*why-question*)

c) **Theme/Topic:** Knowledge communication / Knowledge construction in interaction / Collaborative knowledge / Knowledge co-construction

d) Circumstances/Device:

i. Scenic device:

1. Communication Channel:

- a. **Computer**
- b. **Web browser**
- c. **URL**
- d. **Web page**

2. Organisation of the communication:

- a. **web forum main title**
- b. **web forum domains**
- c. **thread titles**
- d. **thread content**
 - i. **Web forum domains:**
 1. domain title
 2. date of the last post
 3. number of threads
 4. number of posts
 - ii. **Thread titles:**
 1. id number
 2. pg number
 3. number of posts
 4. number of views
 5. date of last post
 - iii. **Thread content:**
 1. **Types of posts:**
 - a. opening post (mandatory)
 - b. thread body (optional)
 - c. closing post (optional)

ii. Discursive device:

1. Construction of interactions:

a. Local organisation:

- i. *Turn taking*: the participants write their interventions and the server where the professional web forum is hosted arranges the turns of speech chronologically
- ii. *Rules of alternance*:
 1. the web forum interactions are sequentially organised
 2. in the *initial post*, the initiator of the thread can select the addressee: implicitly, explicitly (audience, indefinite addressee)
 3. the initiator selects nobody (only enunciates)
 4. the other participants volunteer to participate in the interaction

5. nobody volunteers (the thread ends)
6. if nobody volunteers to participate in the cognitive interaction, the initiator continues and tries to get the audience's attention
- iii. *Speech turn composition*:
 1. The turn: word, simple clause, complex clause
 2. Transition point:
 - a. positioned at the end of the turn
 - b. sometimes discursively anticipated
 - c. graphically marked by the device (every intervention appears in a cell of a table that forms the thread)
- iv. *Turns regulation*: unique form of turns: "full turns" (tours pleins)
- b. **Global organisation**:
 - i. Opening:
 1. Opens the channel;
 2. Establishes contact;
 3. Defines situation;
 4. Rituals of beginning (cordiality, politeness)
 - ii. Body:
 1. Sequentially organised
 - iii. Closing:
 1. Organises the end of the conversation;
 2. Ritual
2. **The Organisation of Actions in Interaction**
 - a. **Monological units**:
 - i. the speech act (the minimal unit)
 - ii. the intervention (one/more speech act(s))
 - b. **Dialogical/Polilogical Units**:
 - i. the exchange:
 1. one intervention: truncation
 2. two interventions: initiative / reactive
 3. three interventions: initiative / reactive / evaluative
 4. extended exchanges
 - ii. The sequence (one/more exchanges thematically/pragmatically related)
 - iii. The interaction (the thread)
3. **Thematic Construction in the Interaction**
 - a. **Theme** (semantic cohesion, anaphora, cataphora):
 - i. Thematic discontinuity:
 1. closing of the theme:
 - a. explicit closing (sometimes preclosing)
 - b. implicit closing (last message of the thread)
 2. thematic rupture: related with the context

3. the proposal of a theme:
 - a. explicit: in the initial post
 - b. implicit: in the title of the threads
- ii. Thematic continuity:
 1. Theme ratification: implicit only (by answering the post)
 2. The elaboration:
 - a. Modes of thematic elaboration:
 - i. Descriptive-commentative
 - ii. Explanatory
 - iii. Narrative
 - iv. Argumentative
 - v. Échanges à batôns rompus

7. Knowledge Transmission on the Professional Web Forums between 2006 and 2009

7.1. Discourses of Ignorance. Identity on Web Forums

We shall begin by sketching the general situation that determines the interactions in the corpus we will analyse. The locutor, the *user* in Internet terminology, registers in and becomes a member of a specialised web forum (on computer hardware and software in our case) because her/his knowledge is limited in this field and s/he is aware that s/he needs information on how to deal with technical problems of varied complexities. The forum, a virtual place dedicated to collaborative work, counts as an active community. In order to obtain the knowledge s/he needs, the locutor has to establish contact with the community of users to be able to describe her/his problem and ask for help. From this brief introduction one can note that the locutor's discourse is already shaped. There are, no doubt, variations of this general scheme, which are the elements that individualise the discourse and identity within the corpus. We consider that the different parameters causing these variations can be identified from this general model: *language variation* (which will permit us to draw a general scheme for the Romanian corpus and to focus on identity), *individual variation* (every post is different because it has a different locutor), *thematic variation* (every variation in the topic of the discussion may modify the discourse), and *chronological variation* (different time, different discourse). In our analysis we deal with *language variation* and *individual variation*. Our goal is to observe the way different individuals perform their identities as *learners/students* in Romanian through the same discursive genre and the same topic of discussion.

In what follows, we will analyse the construction of identity through *person markers* in the *requesting information* interventions on a computer software web forum. In this analysis we will try to highlight such essential aspects of the construction of identity as:

- a) the strategies the locutor uses to achieve her/his aim (*learning, obtaining information*)

- b) the way the locutor relates to the collocutor (*positioning*)
- c) the way the locutor refers to the topic of discussion
- d) We will try to scrutinise the construction of identity by focussing on the deictic expressions and their determinants in the locutor's interventions *ask requesting information*.

7.1.1. Constructions of Identity in the Romanian Computer Web Forums Corpus

The analysis of the *Romanian Computer Web Forum Corpus* reveals varied discursive practices that the participants in the communication on Internet forums use for recounting, communicating and referring to himself/herself or to the other. As a general observation, the use of different varieties of Romanian is not relevant for the forum discussion unlike the case of English or Spanish, where the differences are significant and can be important in terms of the locutor's identity.

From the very beginning the locutor assumes that in Internet communication in Romanian important rules of politeness may be broken, whereas the same are essential in everyday communication and in specific situations such as *meeting someone, introducing oneself, being introduced to someone*. This makes the communication more direct and effective from the point of view of the communicating the locutor's aims, but also more disturbing, especially from the addressee's point of view, who is under no obligation to help the other members of the community with his/her knowledge and expects to be treated with consideration by the locutor.

7.1.1.1. The Impenetrable Locutor

The discursive representations of the locutor in Romanian can be realised explicitly, either through person deixis or morphologically through verbal endings when the personal pronoun is omitted, which is a characteristic of most Romance languages⁷⁸. In this case, the presence of the locutor can be suggested by different morphemes.

As the focus of our analysis is the way the identities of the participants in a communicational interaction are revealed during the *asking for information* sequence, we will evaluate the manner the locutor sees, refers to/evaluates himself or herself. We will also take into account the way the locutor relates

⁷⁸ It is the case of Spanish Catalan, Italian, Portuguese and Romanian.

to the topic of the discussion and his opinion on it, as well as the rapport established between the locutor, the addressee and the audience.

It is not unusual that the 1st person deictic forms are poorly represented in the corpus: *eu*⁷⁹ (78), *Eu* (11), *io* (1)⁸⁰, since deixis in Romanian is mostly realised through morphemes while the pronoun is not mandatory.

A survey of the Romanian corpus has led to the conclusion that it has a set of general characteristics, which we will discuss in detail in the next pages. For example, the locutor is very concise and usually eliminates what he may consider superfluous elements in the ritual of communication. From this point of view, forum communication in Romanian reveals a quite new form of interaction that breaks all the rules generally applied in conversation. For example, a very important aspect of the communicational interaction in Romanian is the greeting, usually followed by an introductory formula. In the forum communication the locutor not only avoids completely the introductory formula but he doesn't greet the others either. Moreover, often enough he doesn't use any discursive mark to establish contact with the collocutor.

We can contend then that we are dealing with an *impenetrable locutor* who is not particularly interested in socialising in the virtual space or in offering his/her opinion on the topic of the communication. Generally, the locutor develops a neutral discourse and tries to reduce as much as possible any subjective involvement and his positioning in what concerns the *addressee*. More than once in the corpus analysed the *asking for information* is drastically reduced to just one question, which we consider to be the most neutral discursive structure possible in Romanian.

As with the other corpora, the most powerful deictic form is the 1st person singular, the nominative⁸¹ *eu*. This form is not commonly used in every day communication, since the verbal morphemes already contain this information. When used, it is emphatic. However, we should note that while the deixis for the locutor is not important in Romanian, the deixis for the addressee and for the audience is very important and it is usually explicit in the discourse.

The *asking for information* sequence usually represents the entire opening post on Romanian forums and can be formed by an initial part, where the

⁷⁹ Different forms of "I" in Romanian.

⁸⁰ As usually, we applied the same principle in the case of the corpora text and we have preserved everything as written by the participants in the forum, even when the occurrences do not conform to the normative grammar of Romanian. We consider this to be very important, for alongside orthography it individualises the electronic discourse.

⁸¹ The noun in Romanian has cases.

locutor expresses the *difficulty* s/he faces (an IT problem in our case), and a second part, which contains the information s/he requests. In both parts of the message we can observe performances of identity by the locutor.

In the initial part of the message, where the locutor explains the difficulty s/he faces, he/she assumes either partial or total ignorance. We can observe how ignorance is expressed and how the locutor deals with it in a communicational situation. In the second part of the *asking for information* fragment we can observe the strategies the locutor uses in order to obtain the answer to the problem s/he faces.

As for the difficulty the locutor faces, it can be expressed in many different ways. One can note the different degrees of intensity in the way the locutor chooses to refer to the technical difficulty s/he is confronted with. This depends on the locutor's preoccupation with solving the problem, on his/her the degree of insecurity in dealing with this knowledge field, and also on the complexity of the IT problem.

In the following, we shall survey the cases we have found in the corpus and identify the way the locutor performs his/her identity in dealing with ignorance.

The first example is represented by the locutor who refuses to assume his/her cognitive limits in IT and envisages the communication as a simple request for information, as in [Ro1:15], [Ro2:371], and [Ro16:3821]. In these examples, the word "întrebare" (**question**) is used as an introductory formula by the locutor before enunciating his/her request. These formulas organise the discourse. For example, in [Ro1:15] it represents an opening: "am și eu o întrebare" (**I have a question**), followed by an interrogative. The emphasis on the 1st person deictic "eu" (I) and the word "întrebare" (**question**) represent the locutor as a *novice* that needs to upgrade his/her IT knowledge. The locutor's discourse is topic-oriented, impersonal and objective:

[Ro1:15] Salutare, am si eu o **intrebare**, am downloadat un film, si pentru a ma uita la el mi se cere un anume player Luna player, dar nu il gasesc nicaieri free, se poate sa il vizualizez si altfel sau stie cineva de unde pot sa il iau full? (**I have a question, I downloaded a movie, and in order to play it I am asked for a certain Luna player which I can't find anywhere for free, can I view it some other way or does anybody know where I can take it full?**)

As one can notice, in [Ro1:15] the locutor is the active agent of the communication. His/her discourse is formed by an impressive series of

actions as follows: “a avea” (**to have**), “a se uita” (**to look**), “a downloada” (**to download**), “a i se cere” (**to be asked for**), “a găsi” (**to find**), “a putea” (**to can**), “a vizualiza” (**to view**), “a ști” (**to know**) and “a lua” (**to take**). All these verbs form the body of a three-line message. Obviously, the locutor organises his/her message focussing on a serie of actions s/he regards as important. The representation of the locutor, as it results from [Ro1:15], is that of a determined person, impersonal, and unemotional.

In [Ro16:3821] we observe the introductory formula “I have two questions...” (**Am si eu doua intrebari**), followed by the focus of the communication: the program “Word”. In this case too the locutor is very precise. S/He mentions the number of questions s/he has on the topic. S/He avoids to assume ignorance or cognitive limits. As in the case of [Ro1:15], no other considerations on the topic indicate the locutor’s attitude or personal involvement in the problem he/she faces:

[Ro16:3821] Am si eu **doua intrebari** despre programul Word... (**I have two questions about the program Word...**)

[Ro2:371] presents a similar structure where, however, we can observe the use of the form *io* of the 1st person pronoun (oral and regional variant of *eu*), a peculiar occurrence since it is generally not recommended. The utterance is introduced by “am si io o intrebare” (**I have a question...**) followed by the enunciation of the topic. The utterance ends with “mă gândeam că poate mă puteți ajuta voi” (**I was thinking that maybe you can help me**), an epistemic judgement modality. In [Ro2:371] the message is locutor-oriented and his/her identity is constructed as that of a person that needs help. The fact that the locutor establishes the relation with the other as “help” puts the addressee in a position of authority and makes him/her the active agent of the situation:

[Ro2:371] am si io o **intrebare** legata de wireless si nu vreau sa deschid un topic nou... ma gandeam poate ma puteti ajuta voi. (**I too have a question concerning the wireless and I don’t want to open another thread ... I was thinking that maybe you can help me**)

The recurrence of the introductory formula “I have a question” in Romanian indicates it as a discursive strategy used in order to call the attention of the addressee/audience. Likewise, the fact that the locutor chooses to name it a “question” rather than a “problem” demonstrates that the latter doesn’t consider it an issue.

A different representation of the locutor on the web forums is that of a person facing a problem. This involves a different kind of image and also a distinct relation between the participants in the communicational interaction, especially as regards *positioning*.

As we have observed in the examples above, the Romanian locutor uses the same formula to introduce “the problem” he/she faces. Since “a problem” is more serious than “a question”, in the corpus the locutor shows a more personal involvement. His/her attitude towards the situation s/he faces is illustrated by the use of different *intensifiers*.

For example, an attenuated expression of the lexical item “problemă” (**problem**) is the diminutive “problemuță” (**little problem**). The locutor’s choice to of a diminutive suggests his/her attitude towards the situation he/she faces. The locutor also performs a feminine identity: “cunoscătoare” (expert) is a feminine form in Romanian. In her discourse she, the locutor, places the audience (someone) in a position of authority:

[Ro16:3645] am si eu o **problemuta**. ... am intrebat pe unul care credeam ca stie dar nu a stiut sa ma ajute. in plus, eu nu sunt o cunoscatoare. ma poate ajuta cineva? (**I too have a little problem ... I asked someone whom I thought he knows but he couldn't help me. In addition, I'm not an expert. Can anybody help me?**)

The use of the noun *problemă* (**problem**) involves a different perspective of the rapport between the locutor and the addressee. A problem represents a serious fact which affects the locutor. In the corpus it is generally associated with more complex IT problems that need extended explanations or a more complex set of information in order to be solved, as it results from the general context of the messages posted on the forum. As in the case of “question”, the locutor feels it necessary to introduce the issue through a special formula which permits the avoidance of all references to the addressee, thus making the discourse quite impersonal. Apparently, for the Romanian locutor there is nothing else to talk about on the forum but the problem he presents and he has no other goal but to solve it. The Romanian locutor could very well be described “*a man with a mission*”.

The following examples, [Ro16:3902], [Ro16:4657], are typically introductory formulas (**I have a problem...**) and represent the locutor’s impersonal enunciations. The discourse is locutor-oriented and any references to the addressee/audience are generally avoided:

[Ro16:3902] **Am o problema** in WORD 2003. **(I have a problem in WORD 2003)**

[Ro16:4657] **Am o problema** in office 2003 ... **(I have a problem in office 2003)**

An emphatic *eu* can be noticed in the introductory formula “am si eu o problema” (**I too have a problem...**) as in [Ro15:3256], [Ro16:3937], [Ro16:4063], and [Ro17:4851]. This emphasis underlines the importance of the problem for the locutor as well as marking his personal involvement. We can also observe that the first two examples are simply introductory formulas. The addressee is usually considered the authority in the situation:

[Ro15:3256] **am si eu o problema** imi apare aceasta imagine de multe ori chiar si cind nu fac nimic. please help **(I too have a problem this image shows up frequently even if I do nothing. Please help.)**

[Ro16:3937] **Am si eu o problema:** incerca sa fac "insert symbol" pentru diacritice si mi se lateste pe toata pagina. Ma poate ajuta cineva? **(I too have a problem: I try to do “insert symbol” for the special characters and it widens on the entire page. Someone can help me?)**

Examples [Ro16:4063] and [Ro17:4851] are more focused, for they introduce the topic of the problem (the name of the program the locutor has problems with):

[Ro16:4063] **Am si eu o problema** in Microsoft Word... **(I too have a problem with Microsoft Word)**

[Ro17:4851] **Am si eu o problema** cu Outlook. **(I too have a problem with Outlook)**

[Ro10:1888] demonstrates that these introductory formulas regulate the discourse in Romanian. The example with “o altă problemă ar mai fi” (**another problem would be...**) marks a resumption. After the presentation of the problem, the locutor introduces his need for more information as he proceeds with another question related to the topic:

[Ro10:1888] **O alta problema ar mai fi:** Cum pot colora un rand 1 sau coloana A daca A1 contine "reziliat"? **(Another problem would be: How can I colour one line 1 or the column A if A1 contains “rescind”)**

More personal involvement can be observed in the few cases where the locutor decides to use intensifiers that present the locutor’s perspective of

the problem. One good example is the introductory formula in [Ro16:3586] where the locutor states *ex abrupto*: “I have a big problem”:

[Ro16:3586] Am si o **mare problema..... (I have a big problem too)**

This example represents one of the few situations where the locutor admits his/her ignorance. The locutor highlights the seriousness of the situation he/she faces as a discursive strategy to elicit an answer from the audience. The opening shows the emotional involvement of the locutor. The identity he/she performs is that of a person overwhelmed by the situation he/she faces.

An even more personal implication can be observed in example [Ro20:5849], where the locutor expresses his utter despair. The locutor plays dramatically the role of the victim as we can observe from the use of the neography in “Heellp”, followed by the exclamative: “fac o criza de nervi!” (**I’ll have a nervous breakdown!**). The discourse creates an image of an anxious locutor who has lost control of the situation:

[Ro20:5849] Am si eu aceasi **problema** cu acelasi tip de laptop. ...
Heellp fac o criza de nervi! (I have the same problema with the same type of laptop... Heellp I’ll have a nervous breakdown!)

We have already noted that the main characteristics of the Romanian locutor are *focusing on the problem*, *no self-involvement*, and *distance from the other*. This illustrates a kind of defensive or undisclosed locutor who wishes to reveal the least possible of his/her real existence.

Another specific discursive construction often used in Romanian as a strategy of the defensive locutor is the use of implicits in order to limit the communication even more. An illustration of this phenomenon is the preference of some of the participants when faced with a problem similar to another already displayed to use the anaphora and reuse the information already presented. Subsequently, they use introductory formulas such as those we have already described, clearly mentioning that “the problem” is “the same” or “similar” to another problem already presented on the forum.

[Ro15:3456] Am si eu o problema asemanatoare.. ma poate ajuta cineva?
(I have a similar problem.. can anybody help me?)

[Ro18:5174] Am si eu aceiasi problema, faza e ca eu am reusit sa intru pe id. **(I too have the same problem, the thing is that I managed to enter the id)**

Other representations of the locutor on the Romanian forum show even more personal involvement, which sometimes may take the form of a desperate cry for help, as we can find in [Ro4:611]. Here, after a very warm greeting, the opening continues with an unusual formula. The locutor chooses an elliptic expression with no connectors: “rog ajutor” (**please help**), in a telegraphic style. On the other hand, the rhyme created by the nouns “ajutor” (**help**) and “începător” (**beginner**) creates a funny effect. All of this means that the locutor not only needs help but also has poor IT skills, which is equivalent to recognising one’s ignorance. The way the locutor chooses to express his ignorance is also peculiar. He/she doesn’t state directly “I don’t know” but presents his ignorance as a temporary situation. ‘A beginner’ entails the idea of evolution and of transformation:

[Ro4:611] Salutare si la mai bine!!!!!!!!!!!!!! Rog ajutor, ca sunt incepator
(**<greetings> !!!! Please help because I’m a beginner**)

One should also note how rich the Romanian vocabulary is and the many possibilities it offers for requesting help and assistance. In [Ro7:1081] the locutor asks directly for a *solution*, yet the locutor he/she constructs in his/her discourse is a person who is in control of the situation.

The modalities used in [Ro7:1081] are intended to mitigate the imperative: “as dori daca stie cineva cum pot rezolva...” (literally: **I’d like to know, if somebody does, how I can resolve ...**). It consists in the polite form “as dori” (**I’d like to**), an agent-oriented modality expressing a wish, followed by another modalisation (epistemic) suggesting possibility: “daca stie cineva” (**if somebody knows**). They are intended to make the request more acceptable. The message is locutor-oriented. The *positioning* of the participants in the discussion shows they are equal. The locutor is the active agent of the situation and stays in control in order to solve the problem he faces:

[Ro7:1081] Cum elimin un program,deja dezinatlat, din lista Add or Remove Programs? ... Nu este grav,dar nu inteleg de ce mai apare si as dori daca stie cineva,cum pot **rezolva**,astfel incat sa nu mai apara in lista de programe. (**How do I eliminate a program, already installed, from the Add of Remove Programs list? ... It isn’t a serious problem but I don’t understand why it still appears and I’d like to know, if somebody does, how I can resolve it, so that it won’t show up on the program list**)

Another instance of the locutors’ representations is that of a person who asks for *advice* and *suggestions*:

[Ro11:1989-1995] Caut un program care sa imi permita sa blochez accesul la diferite aplicatii de pe pc in anumite intervale de timp definite de mine. Cum gama de pe softpedia este foarte larga si ar dura ani pana sa le incerc pe toate sa gasesc unul care sa faca ce am nevoie, apelez la sfaturile voastre. Astept **sugestii** de un astfel de soft. Fara ironii si glume stupide va rog, daca nu aveti nimic constructiv de spus, mai bine nu comentati. **(I'm looking for a program which could allow me to block the access to different applications on my pc during certain periods of time defined by me. Since the range of programs on softpedia is very wide, it would take me years to try all of them and find one which would do what I want, I resort to your advice. I expect suggestions for such a software. No irony or stupid jokes, please, if you have nothing constructive to say you'd better make no comments.)**

An important aspect of the Romanian locutor revealed in [Ro11:1989-1995] is the way he conceives the discursive space. When the locutor states that he is waiting for suggestions and advice he automatically positions the addressee in a weak position. The addressee is the person who provides the information necessary to solve the IT problem but his status is that of a person whose advice is the object of the locutor's evaluation. Likewise, it depends on the locutor whether the advice will be followed or not. The last part of the message in [Ro11:1989-1995] highlights the control the Romanian locutor exerts over his/her discursive space. The locutor warns in a quite discourteous manner the members of the forum: "Fara ironii si glume stupide va rog, daca nu aveti nimic constructiv de spus, mai bine nu comentati." **(No irony or stupid jokes, please, if you have nothing constructive to say you'd better make no comments)**. This draws up a representation of the locutor as a person who can even choose his/her partners of discussion. This is not of a matter of the addressee choosing whether to answer a message but of the locutor stating that not everybody is welcome to contribute his/her knowledge to the thread he opened.

Other representations of the locutor are that of a person who is not sure whether the operations he/she performed in an IT context are correct or not. In this case, the locutor is a person who asks for *clarification*, like in [Ro15:3136]. This example is not singular, with the locutor modalising his question in order to make it impersonal (**maybe someone will clarify it for me...**) and acknowledging his ignorance (**if I did well what I did...**). He just wants to check if he is right or not in his/her actions as resulting from the situation he/she describes:

[Ro15:3136] Poate ma **lamureste** si pe mine cineva daca am facut bine ce am facut, adica ca pe siteul aratat de mine mai sus.... vad ca eroare nu mai apare... (**maybe someone will clarify it for me... if I did well what I did, as on the site I showed above... I see that the error doesn't show anymore**).

A way to modalise the representations of the ignorant user is to *ask for a clue*, which is a partial recognition of one's ignorance, a person who in the context of the communication has no idea of what he/she must do (**Does anyone have any idea what I did to it and what I have to do to it in order to fix it?**):

[Ro17:4680] Are cineva idee ce i-am facut si ce pot sa ii fac sa il repar? (**Does anyone have any idea what I did to it and what I have to do to it in order to fix it?**)

Similarly, the locutor can choose through agent-oriented modalisation to express politely the wish to know more about an IT problem, which involves implicitly the idea of ignorance. In this case "I'd like to know if there is any method..." is a formal manner of asking for information as enforced by the final interrogative: "is it possible?":

[Ro23:6675] As vrea sa stiu daca este vreo metoda sa ascund un program care ruleaza.... Se poate? (**I'd like to know if there is any method to hide a program when it is working... Is it possible?**)

7.1.1.2. The Discourse of Action

As we have already observed in the Romanian forum, the locutor does not merely ask for information passively. He is always in control of his/her discursive space, and expresses his/her wish to learn and to acquire knowledge and information. This creates different structures if compared to the other corpora. For example, in the Romanian corpus we can find numerous verbal structures which allow the locutor to organise his discourse and to orient it towards the practical aspects of its domain of application, as we will see in the following examples. Usually, in the Romanian discourse there is an important group of verbal forms depending on one main verbal expression which is generally the verb in the main question.

As for example [Ro1:16-17] where we can find a suite of nine verbs, all depending on the main verbal structure represented by "a lua" (litteraly: "to take"; meaning: "to download"):

[Ro1:16-17] Salutare, am si eu o intrebare, am downloadat un film, si pentru a ma uita la el mi se cere un anume player Luna player, dar nu il gasesc nicaieri free, se poate sa il vizualizez si altfel sau stie cineva de unde pot sa il iau full? **(I too have a question, I downloaded a movie, and in order to play it I am asked for a certain Luna player which I can't find anywhere for free, can I view it some other way or does anybody know where I can take it full?)**

In [Ro6:922] and [Ro10:1737] we have a similar representation of the locutor as an active and determined person who expresses the will to learn as the main motivation of his/her post in the forum. The general situation is described in [Ro6:922] in terms of activities/operations/actions through a string of six verbs, the main structure being the initial part of the communication "vreau sa stiu daca..." **(I want to know if...)** where the locutor, keeping the distance and avoiding every explicit mentioning of the addressee, deals in a different manner with his ignorance:

[Ro6:922] *Vreau sa stiu* daca este un program care sa arhiveze diverse fisiere si in momentul cand cineva acceseaza arhiva el sa dea doar install **(I would like to know if there is any program which could archive different files and if the moment when somebody accesses the archive he can do just install)**

[Ro10:1737] As dori sa stiu cum pot selecta doar acele randuri corespunzatoare persoanelor nascute intr-o anumita luna
E ceva pe la advanced filters dar nu ma descurc (vreo formula ceva?)..
**(I would like to know how can I select only the lines corresponding to the persons born in a certain month
There is something on advanced filters but I don't manage (any formula something?)**

The same situation can be observed in [Ro8:1285] but with a different verbal construction: "a face" **(to do)**. The judgement modality "am crezut" (I thought) through which is introduced the message represents an explanatory introduction of the *information request*:

[Ro8:1285] am crezut ca scap de acea avertizare, dar nu am scapat. Ce mai pot face ca sa scape de aia? **(I thought that I could get rid of the warning, but I didn't. What else can I do to get rid of it?)**

In [Ro21:5950-5955] the locutor initiates a series of interrogatives in order to describe the information he/she needs:

[Ro21:5950-5955] deci? ce program sa folosesc??

Care dintre toate este mai bun???

Sporeste persormantele calculatorului? sau sunt vrajeli sa ne ia banii?

(so? What program should I use?

Which one is the best?

Does it augment the computer's specification? or is it just empty talk for a rip off?)

As we can see, the representations of the Romanian locutor are those of a defensive person who avoids to take his personal life to the screen and who uses the forum only to discuss specialised IT topics. He avoids socialisation on the web forums and is not interested in providing opinions on and insights into the topics he discusses. His discourse is topic oriented, specialised, and he generally makes good use of terminology. In dealing with aspects of his ignorance, he tries to be impersonal and to contact the others as little as possible. He also tries to avoid positioning in relation to the addressee.

7.1.1.3. The Supporting Addressee

It is generally impolite for the Romanians to address someone by the 2nd person singular pronominal form "tu". This linguistic reality is illustrated by its low incidence in the Romanian corpus: tu (22), voi (7), Voi (1), va (37), Va (12). Actually, the unique deictic mark of the addressee referred to as "tu" is realised indirectly by a verbal morpheme, as in example [Ro14:2896]: "ai reusit sa instalezi..." (did you succeed to install ...) and it marks an informal communication between the two participants in the dialogue:

[Ro14:2896] eu am aceasi problema, ai reusit sa instalezi cs3?... vreo solutie? **(I have the same problem, did you succeed to install cs3? ... any solution?)**

The deixis in the Romanian corpus demonstrates that the addressee is perceived by the locutor as a community, a group of people supporting each other. The addressee is referred to as *voi* (**you**) in direct constructions and is particularly mentioned when the locutor focuses on the addressee.

The relation established between the participants in the dialogue places the addressee in the strongest position as the "superior instance" possessing technical knowledge and skills and ready to share them with the other members of the virtual community. Accordingly, the representation of the addressee in the locutor's discourse is as the *source of information*. In turn, this

source of information can be represented as a person whom you ask for help, as in the following occurrences: **Ajutor (Help):**

[Ro2:371] ... ma gandeam poate ma puteti ajuta voi. (**I thought that maybe you can help me**)

[Ro3:477] ...ma puteti ajuta?... (**Can you help me?**)

[Ro16:3505] **Va** rog frumos daca ma puteti ajuta. (**Please, if you can help me**)

[Ro18:4890] **va** rog ajutati`ma si pe mine. (**please help me too**)

And even 'help' (code-switching):

[Ro14:2632] **Va** rog **help** ca chiar vreau programul ala. (**Please help because I really want that program**)

The positions of the locutor and the addressee are not too asymmetrical in [Ro11:2075] and [Ro21:5955]. The addressee is only allowed to provide suggestions/opinions, which makes the position of the locutor stronger since it is s/he who decides if what the addressee says is effective or not. Nonetheless, even in this situation the addressee can influence the actions of the locutor, so he/she is still represented as the expert: **Sugestii (Suggestions):**

[Ro11:2075] Daca **aveti** si alte **sugestii** de programe asemanatoare **va** rog sa le precizati. (**If you have any other suggestions of similar programs please specify them**)

[Ro21:5955] Spuneti si **voi** ce **credeti** ca este mai bun.: (**Do say which one you think is better**)

In both cases the addressee is represented as an authority and can influence the acts and the decisions of the locutor.

7.1.1.4. The Friendly Audience

In the *Romanian Computer Web Forums Corpus*, the audience is referred to as a community, a group of persons whose role is to offer assistance in a specialised field as the members of a professional virtual community. Since the audience is represented by an indefinite multitude of persons, the locutor can address its members using impersonal expressions as in [Ro16:4004-4006]:

[Ro16:4004-4006] **Se poate** sa aranjez paragrafele din Word in ordine alfabetica (dupa cuvintele cu care ele incep)?

Exista o alta aplicatie in care sa copiezi tot textul si care sa faca treaba asta? (Is it possible for me to arrange the paragraphs in Word alphabetically (based on the initial words)? Is there another application in which I can copy all the text and do this job?)

If explicitly mentioned, the audience is represented in Romanian through indefinite pronouns such as: *cineva* (**somebody**), *nimeni* (**nobody**), and *ceva* (**any**):
Cineva (Somebody):

[Ro2:248] Stie cineva cum pot face asta si pentru xp ? **(Does somebody know how I can do this for the xp?)**

[Ro15:2999] Stie cineva ce e cu ea ? **(Does somebody know what is happening with her?)**

[Ro16:5596] stie cineva care e faza si ma poate ajuta? **(Does somebody know what's the matter and can they help me?)**

Nimeni (Nobody):

[Ro11:2010] Nu stie nimeni? Macar un indiciu, un sfat, ceva. Multumesc. **(Nobody knows? Not even a clue, some advice, something. Thanks.)**

[Ro15:3184] Nimeni nu se incumeta sa imi zica si mie daca e bine ca am umblat la registrii sa scap de eroare sau nu.... ?/ ?? **(Nobody dares tell me whether I did well to work on the registers in order to get rid of the error? /??) Ceva (Any):**

[Ro17:4736] Ceva Idei? **(Any idea?)**

Another possibility of audience representation on the Romanian forums consists in interrogative pronouns such as: *cine?* (**who?**), *ce?* (**what?**), and *care?* (**which?**):

Cine (Who):

[Ro9:1565] Cine stie cum pot sa sterg licenta de la un program instalat in computer?... Deci, cum as putea s-o sterg? **(Who can tell me how I can delete the licence of an program installed in the computer? ... So, how can I delete it?)**

Ce? (What?)

[Ro22:6451] de ce am nevoie ca sa-mi pot recupera datele? **(What do I need to recover my data?)**

[Ro13:2462] Am dezinstalat si reinstalat de mi-a venit rau, ce sa aibe?
(I uninstalled and reinstalled till I got sick of it, what could be the problem?)

Care? (Which?):

[Ro16:4128] Am nevoie de acest pliant facut pe maine deci va rog care stiti sa ma ajutati cu el cat mai repede. (I need this leaflet ready for tomorrow so please whichever of you knows how to, help me with it as soon as possible)

The communicational relation established between the locutor and the addressee during the process of knowledge transmission can be described as friendly and familiar. These aspects of the communication can be observed in the way the locutor constructs his/her discourse and addresses the audience. Our main argument for our statement is represented by the lack of an opening for the questions the locutor asks. The use of direct questions on the Romanian forum suggests that there is a certain degree of familiarity between the participants. Another indication of the familiarity is the lack of modalisation. In Romanian modalisation is a current strategy when the locutor addresses an unknown person, asks for information, or shows emotion (exclamation). Finally, the use of familiar expressions such as: “care e faza” (**what’s the matter**), “se incumeta sa imi zica” (**dare tell me**), “am umblat” (**I worked on**), “de mi-a venit rau, ce sa aibe?” (**till I got sick of it, what could be the problem?**)

It is obvious from the communicational behaviour of the locutor that he/she represents the audience as a group of friends with whom he/she can talk openly without the degree of formalism he/she would use in a face-to-face situation.

7.1.2. Romanian Locutor’s Identity on Web Forums

a. General considerations about identity on professional web forums

Our analysis of the *Romanian Computer Web Forums Corpus* has demonstrated that the discourse on the professional web forums displays the existence of two opposite identities: *the novice* and *the expert*, both involved in a process of cognitive transfer. The main agent of the communication is *the novice*, since it is the identity that starts the communicational relation, keeps it active until he/she fulfils his/her cognitive needs, and closes it when the needed cognitive content has been successfully transferred.

The novice enters a relation with the *expert*, identified on the professional web forum discourse as the *addressee* or the *audience*, and constructs their discursive representations as web forum identities.

I, novice

As the main identity on the professional web forum, *the novice* is discursively constructed in relation to *ignorance*, a key-concept in the process of knowledge transmission on the Internet.

Knowledge transmission in cyberspace can be described as a step by-step process in which *the novice* assumes his/her ignorance and establishes a communicative relation in the virtual space of the Internet with the purpose of fulfilling his/her cognitive needs:

- a. the locutor is confronted with cognitive limits in a specialised field (in our case: computer and Internet);
- b. he assumes his/her *ignorance* and seeks help on a specialised web forum;
- c. on the web forum, he establishes a communicative relation with other members of the forum through a discourse in which he/she encodes:
 1. his attitude in relation to himself/herself (*representing ignorance*)
 2. his attitude in relation to the addressee/audience
- d. (*positioning/evaluation*)
 - a. his attitude in relation to the topic of discussion
- e. (*subjectivity marks: motivation, emotion*)
- f. the locutor closes the communicational relation when the cognitive content has been successfully transferred. If the cognitive needs of the *novice* are fulfilled, s/he changes his/her status from *novice* to *expert* in what concerns the topic discussed.

The construction of identities is the result of the way the locutor relates to himself/herself and the others (addressee/audience):

Who is communicating	Locutor communicating about/with:	Manner of communicating	Identity assumed/attributed	Degrees of identity
I (locutor)	I (locutor)	Discourse of ignorance	Novice	Degrees of ignorance: <i>complete, partial</i>
	You	Discourse of experience (Positioning/ evaluation)	Expert	Degrees of experience: <i>equal, superior</i>

Who is communicating	Locutor communicating about/with:	Manner of communicating	Identity assumed/attributed	Degrees of identity
	Somebody (audience)	Discourse of distance Discourse of experience (Positioning)	Expert	Distance: <i>impersonal</i> ; Degrees of experience: <i>equal, superior</i>

Based on our analysis of the *Romanian Computer Web Forums Corpus*, identities on professional web forums are assumed/attributed by the locutor right from the start of the discourse. The locutor assumes the identity of a *novice* by talking about his/her situation in a specialised context through a *discourse of ignorance*. The identity he/she can assume is either that of a *completely ignorant novice* or of a *partially ignorant novice*.

You, expert

Once the locutor assumes his/her identity, he/she establishes a communicational relation (see in the table above *locutor communicating about/with*:) with the *addressee*. The identity of the addressee is attributed by the locutor, who assumes that he/she is talking with competent people. The identity which the locutor attributes to the addressee is that of an *expert*. The locutor achieves this through a discourse of experience he/she associates with the addressee, through *evaluation*, and *positioning*. The discourse of experience consists in addressee-oriented utterances used by the *locutor* to ask for opinion/recommendation/expertise (ex: *which one do you recommend?*). The *evaluation* of the addressee consists in explicit references to the addressee's proficiency in the specialised field of the web forum (*Any tips for me, doctors? Any IT specialists who can help me? But you are the experts, so I would appreciate suggestions from the wise.*). The *positioning* contrasts the position of the *novice* with the position of the *expert*. The locutor attributes different degrees of experience to the expert in relation to the degree of ignorance he/she has assumed. In the positioning of the participants in a professional web forum situation it is impossible for the *novice* to be placed in a superior position to the *expert*. This would signify that the degree of experience of the novice is superior to that of the expert, which is a non-sense. The locutor as the *novice* implicitly attributes to the expert a superior or, at least, an equal positioning in the communicational relation. The *positioning* of the addressee is regulated by the locutor's *degree of ignorance*. A *completely ignorant novice* will place the

addressee in a position of authority because of his/her superior degree of experience, while a *partially ignorant novice* will place the addressee in a position of equality.

Someone, expert

The locutor attributes the identity of the *expert* to the audience too because he/she assumes that the members of a professional web forum are competent persons. The locutors relate to the audience by engaging in a *discourse of experience* (evaluation and positioning) and a *discourse of distance* (impersonal constructions). The audience is conceptualised by the locutor as an indefinite group of persons sharing the same interest and proficiency in a specialised domain. This is expressed in the locutor's discourse *explicitly* (indefinite pronouns) or *implicitly* (every utterance is addressed to someone).

The *discourse of experience* consists in topic-oriented utterances used by the *locutor* to ask for help/advice/ideas (ex: *Is there another way to gain access?*). The *positioning* places *the novice* and *the experts* (audience is conceived as group) in complementary positions. The locutor assumes that the heterogeneous groups of members of the virtual community present different degrees of experience. *The novice* attributes to the experts a superior or equal positioning in the communicational relation. The *positioning* of the audience as the addressee is regulated by the locutor's *degree of ignorance*. The *completely ignorant novice* will place the audience in a position of authority because of the latter's presumed degree of experience, while the *partially ignorant novice* will place the audience in a position of equality.

b. Specific aspects of identity on the professional web forum in Romanian

Even if constructed similarly, the identities emerging on the professional web forum discussions display particularities that individualise them. In order to highlight the construction of the locutor's identity on our corpus we have decided to observe this phenomenon as the reaction of the subject ("I", locutor) to the different elements contained by his/her discourse (self-reference, relation to the other, and relation to the topic of discussion).

The observation of these parameters, based on the qualitative analysis we have carried out in the present chapter, has allowed us to portray different profiles of the Romanian locutor.

However, since the profiles are not supported by statistical values, they should be treated as mere guidelines:

Language	Who?	Related to:	Attitude	Nuance
Ro	I	I	Subjective	rational
		YOU	Interactive	emotional
		TOPIC	Objective	rational

As one can notice from the table above, the profile of the locutor is primarily constructed as related to self-reference, interaction with the other, and his/her attitude concerning the topic. The definable values are bolded. Not surprisingly, the most important aspects taken into consideration by the locutor is the topic. The interaction of the locutor with the self, the other, or the topic has allowed us to determine the attitude of the locutor as: *subjective* (in relation to self-reference), *interactive* (in relation to the other), and *objective* (in relation to the cognitive content/topic). Each attitude has been divided into two nuances: *rational* and *emotional* depending on the locutor’s insight and the communication content.

The profile of the Romanian locutor within these criteria is: *topic-oriented, objective, and rational*.

The analysis of our corpus confirms Thurlow’s (2001) claim that CMC is liable to use more deictics than written or face-to-face communication. Likewise, it confirms the author’s assertion concerning the prevailing presence of the 1st person deictic and the poor presence of other deictics. Thus, as we have too noted in our corpus, the identities of the *addressee* and/or the *audience* are less precisely represented and consequently it becomes more difficult to appreciate their specific profiles. Even so, we have been able to point out their profiles in general.

In what concerns the *addressee’s* profile in the research corpus, it has been considered in relation to the locutor as follows:

Addressee:

Ro: considered by the locutor as a supporting source of knowledge given the familiarity of the communication.

Ro: indefinite group or persons whom the locutor can address informally in order to obtain information (familiarity)

Our intention is to provide an insight into this topic in order to note that within the genre, communication can be different. In order to obtain more accurate information on the specificity of communication on Internet

professional web forums the analysis should be supported by statistical data from an annotated corpus.

7.2. Discourses of Experience: Explanation on Web Forums

The locutor as member of a professional web forum receives and recognises the “information request” of the initiator of a thread. He/she evaluates his/her proficiency in the specialised domain the collocutor wants to be informed on and, if the locutor appreciates that he/she can provide effective information, he/she reacts to the initial post of the thread. By providing information to the initiator of the thread, the locutor assumes the position of *expert* and decides the best way to organise discursively the cognitive content asked by the initiator. As mentioned in chapter 4.5, the knowledge is encoded in different *speech acts* such as: *definitions, description of actions (procedures/instructions), explanations, meta-explanations, explanatory references, and quotations*. In what follows we will analyse the way the explanation is structured as speech act in each language of the corpus. Firstly, we will analyse the explanation as *speech act* and the discursive strategies one uses in order to introduce or to close an explanatory sequence, then we will move on to observe an *explanatory text* in order to observe how complex explanation are constructed in a professional web forum intervention.

7.2.1. Explanation on Romanian Forums

The communication of knowledge on the Romanian web forums reveals varied strategies that organise the discourse in a specific way, as we will show in what follows. These strategies configure the profile of the professional web forum communication. Since the Romanian language is less spoken in Europe and for reasons of scientific rigour, we felt it was appropriate to translate the examples analysed. The translation of the Romanian examples will be literal or very close to the original texts.

7.2.1.1. Introducing Explanation by Epistemic Modalisation

An important aspect in the construction of the explanatory sequence is represented by the way it is conceptualised by the locutor. The conceptualisation of an explanation results from the introductory strategies used by the locutor for an explanation.

In the Romanian Computer Web Forum Corpus a very specific introductory strategy, is the *example*. The locutor doesn't comment, describe or explain. He/she introduces an illustrative example which can help the addressee find his/her own solution.

[Ro16: 3623-3629] Iti atasez aici un **exemplu...** (**I attach here an example**)

In example [Ro16: 3623-3629] one can notice that the explanation is implicit, since the addressee has to analyse and understand the example and then to apply the situation illustrated by the example to the particular one he/she faces.

An explanation can also be introduced as a *warning*, as in [Ro3: 285]. „Vezi ca...” (**see that**) in Romanian has the function of calling the attention of the addressee to the content of the communication that follows. This introductory strategy is addressee-oriented, it is expressed in a familiar register and it is commonly used in face-to-face communication. Its use on web forum communication eliminates the distance between the participants in an exchange, making it oral and interactive:

[Ro3: 285] Vezi ca... (**See that...**)

At times, the locutor introduces the explanation by accompanying it with supplementary information suggesting his/her attitude to the topic. The different modalities used on the Romanian web forums in the explanatory sequences suggest different degrees of imprecision. We have identified the first degree of imprecision in the introduction of an explanation as a possibility, as in example [Ro3: 301], where the locutor admits the possibility of the existence of a computer device:

[Ro3: 301] Da, s-ar putea sa ai un buton pentru wireless. (**Yes, there could be a key for wireless**)

The imprecision may also be expressed through verbs like “a spera” (**to hope**), as in [Ro18: 4827-4929], where the locutor expresses his/her good intentions and yet shows insecurity in what concerns the final result:

[Ro18: 4827-4929] sper ca te ajuta asta: (**I hope this will help you**)

The introduction of the explanatory sequences as *trial and error* procedures involves, too, some degree of imprecision. This structure is very popular on the Romanian web forums, as one can observe from their high incidence. It involves an invitation to action, even if the final result is uncertain, and

leaves it to the addressee to decide whether s/he should act or not. From this perspective “a încerca” (**to try**) is opposed to the verb “a face” (**to do**), the latter involving obligation for the addressee and positioning the locutor as the stronger of the exchange pair:

[Ro4: 577] **Incearca...** (try)

[Ro5: 646] **Incearca...**(try)

[Ro12: 2294] **Incearca...**(try)

[Ro13: 2566-2568] **Încearcă și varianta asta... (Try this variant/option too...)**

A more formal introduction of the explanatory sequences may adopt the form of recommendation or advice. In example [Ro6: 976-977] one can notice the emphasis on the 1st person deictic “eu” (I) and the use of the verb “a recomanda” (**to recommend**). As in the case of “a încerca” (**to try**), the verb “a recomanda” (**to recommend**) modalises the communication suggesting a certain distance between the partners in communication. In this situation, the locutor acts as mere adviser and it is for the addressee to decide whether he/she will follow or the recommendations. The construction is locutor-oriented and its use increases the distance and the degree of formality between the participants in the conversation:

[Ro6: 976-977] Eu **recomand...** (**I recommend**)

The same discursive construction, but using the oral/familiar register, can be observed in example [Ro7: 1103]. Here, the locutor starts the explanation with a conversational marker introducing a comment “păi” (well) followed by the introduction of the explanatory sequence as advice “sfatul meu e...” (**my advice is...**). One should note that the modalisation here is similar to that in the previous cases. The locutor focuses the message on him/herself and lets the addressee decide what to do with the information he/she receives:

[Ro7: 1103] pai, sfatul meu e... (**well, my advice is...**)

In some cases, in the Romanian forum communication, the explanatory sequences are introduced through *negative constructions*. They usually express imprecision. A prime example is [Ro3: 319-320], where the insecurity of the locutor concerns the attitude of the receptor with regard to the explanation he/she has provided rather than the result:

[Ro3: 319-320] Sper sa nu sune ciudat dar verifica... (**I hope this will not sound strange, but verify...**)

At times, the locutor may post an explanation of whose result he/she is not sure because he/she has only theoretical knowledge of it. In such situations, it is natural that the locutor should commence by assuming partial ignorance of the topic. Such a construction can be observed in [Ro19: 5615-5618]. The locutor begins with “nu știu” (**I don’t know**) and uses the adverb “exact” (**exactly**) as an attenuator, which diminishes the force of the previous negation:

[Ro19: 5615-5618] Nu stiu exact... (**I don’t know exactly**)

There are few expressions of certainty in the Romanian Computer Web Corpus. A 100% sure explanation will be introduced in Romanian *ex abrupto*. Once again, the locutor avoids direct expressions and modalises his/her intervention by introducing the idea of *necessity*. He/She chooses to introduce the explanation as *something the addressee needs* in order to solve the problem. He/she lets the addressee decide whether he/she will use the information provided by the former:

[Ro3: 335] Ai nevoie de... (**you need**)

[Ro15: 3017-3018] Ai nevoie de (**you need**)

A specific Romanian introductory strategy is the *reparatory introduction*, where the locutor introduces the explanatory sequence as the answer to a previous explanation. The introduction cancels the content of the previous explanation. This structure is very simple and presupposes the existence of a previous negative construction. In the case of [Ro10, 1923-1924], the structure “ba merge” (**it does work**) involves the existence of a previous negative construction: “nu merge” (**it doesn’t work**). The conversational marker “ba”, which can be interpreted as either “yes” or “no” depending on the context, marks the locutor’s intervention as oral and interactive:

[Ro10, 1923-1924] ba merge... (**yes it works**)

It is also important to observe that the incidence of introductory strategies on the Romanian web forums is fairly low. It seems that Romanians favour introducing explanations *ex abrupto* and avoid the introductory strategies. This reduces the subjectivity and personal interaction in the communication, eludes the positioning of the participants in the communication, and restricts the interaction to the main topic of discussion. The constant use of this strategy defines the profile of the professional web forum communication in Romanian as objective, effective, and impersonal. From this point of view,

the conceptualisation of explanations is very close to their conceptualisation in science and research.

7.2.1.2. Concise Instructions and Other Types of Explanations

Simple explanations are the basic explanatory cores that form complex systematic explanations. We have distinguished between the following basic explanatory types: *concept definitions*, *descriptions of actions*, and the explanations of *reasons for an event/process*.

a. Explaining concepts

As explanatory strategies, definitions are not very popular on the Romanian web forums. The definitions in this context are short, objective and impersonal. One can observe different kinds of definitions in the corpus.

Definition by genus and difference is the definition's classic meaning, where an object may first be described by a general category (the genus), and then further distinguished within the genus by distinctive attributes. In example [Ro20: 6304], the RegCleaner is defined as a part of JV16 PowerTools⁸² (genus) and "ultima versiune freeware" (**the latest freeware version**) (difference). One should also note the *aspectualisation* in the *difference* part of the definition: "ultima" (**the latest**) and "freeware".

[Ro20: 6304] RegCleaner e ultima versiune freeware a JV16 PowerTools.
(**RegCleaner is the latest freeware version of JV16 PowerTools**)

A similar example is [Ro8: 1360]. Here, X (**DirectX 10**) is expressed in a familiar register as genus "făcătură rusească" (**Russian makedo**) and is further distinguished within the category as "pentru xp" (**for xp**) (difference):

[Ro8: 1360] **Directx 10** pentru xp este o **facatura ruseasca**.

Another classic category of the definition is the definition by essential predicates, where the predicates can be as pointed out in chapter 3.5: substance, quality, quantity, and so on. The definitions by essential predicates identified on the Romanian web forums describe the object in terms of *substance* and *qualities*. For example, in [Ro15: 3103] X, the topic of discussion is defined as "o eroare cunoscută" (**a well-known error**), where X = Y ("eroare" – substance) and Y = cunoscută (**wellknown**) is an aspectualisation of Y.

⁸² JV16 PowerTools is a system cleaning and error fixing utility suite.

[Ro15: 3103] Este o eroare cunoscuta ... **(It is a wellknown error)**.

The same structure $X = Y$ (substance); Y (progrămel – **little program**) = “free” (aspectualisation) can be observed in [Ro21: 65026503]. We have noted that X , in both examples [Ro21: 6502-6503] and [Ro15: 3103], is implicit.

[Ro21: 6502-6503] Un progrămel free **(A free little program)**

Another defining strategy is *the definition by negation*. In example [Ro20: 5973-5976], the locutor expresses the idea of “commercial computer program” as “din păcate nu sunt free” (**unfortunately are not free**). In this case, “din păcate” (**unfortunately**) represents a marker of modality entailing a touch of regret. The structure of the negative definition is, as in the previous cases, an essential predicate referring to a quality (**free**):

[Ro20: 5973-5976] Registry Healer si jv16 Power Tools [...] din păcate nu sunt free **(Registry Healer and jv16 Power Tools ... unfortunately are not free)**

Some definitions fall into a different category of essential predication (action – *what an object does*). It is the case of [Ro10: 17561763]. Here, in a more developed explanatory sequence, the locutor explains the finality of the functions LEFT and RIGHT of the computer program MsExcel. Both definitions, (3) and (4), have identical structures: the *definiens* X (a) and (c) is explained as actions in (b) and (d) which form the *definiendum*:

[Ro10: 1756-1763] ... (3)- (a)functia LEFT (b)va retine din sirul de cifre al CNP primele 5 cifre dinspre stânga; (4)- (c)functia RIGHT (d)va retine din sirul anterior de 5 cifre ultimele 2 cifre ... **(3 – function LEFT stores from the numeric string of CNP the first five numbers starting from the left; 4 – function RIGHT stores from the previous five number string the last two...)**

Other defining forms are the essential predications expressing relations, as in example [Ro19: 5237]. Here, the locutor puts the *definiens* X (eroarea 10061 – **error 10061**) in relation with the *definiendum* Y (Winsock). The relation between the *definiens* and the *definiendum* is created through modalisation and introduces the idea of uncertainty:

[Ro19: 5237] ... eroarea 10061 ar avea legătură cu Winsock. **(error 10061 may have to do with Winsock)**

At times, on the forum discussions the locutor uses the so-called *nominal definition*. In [Ro22: 6840] the locutor answers the question of the collocutor concerning a specific computer program. In this case the verb “a numi” (**to name**) is the element that constructs the nominal definition. The definition has a *definiens* X (the name of the computer program – tryit!) and a *definiendum* (“programel” – **little program**). In the definition the genus is represented by the class of objects (“programel” – **little program**) and the *difference* is marked lexically by the name of the program (tryit!):

[Ro22: 6840] exista un programel numit tryit! (**there is a little program named tryit!**)

A similar definition is [Ro3: 335]:

[Ro3: 335] Ai nevoie de un utilitar pentru a putea porni placa wireless, care numeste Launch Manager. (**In order to start the wireless board you need a tool named Launch Manager**)

The definitions may display even more complex structures. In [Ro4: 493] the definition is introduced by modalisation, through the use of the conditional form of a verb which in Romanian introduces the idea of possibility (see the first part of the definition) followed by aspectualisation in the second part:

[Ro4: 493] ...un program ar fi Recuva si este free. (**one [such] program could be Recuva and it's free**)

Another essential predication expressing a relation is the elliptic example [Ro13: 2549-2550]. Here, the locutor reacts to the remark of the previous speaker who has stated that he/she sees no relation between the technical problem he/she exposed and the explanation. The answer of the locutor is elliptic, with the noun “legătura” (**relation**), repeated by the locutor in [Ro13: 2549-2550], representing the element of discursive cohesion in the verbal exchange as well as a definition. The *definiens* is Office XP SP3 and “legătura” (**relation**) is the *definiendum*. The meaning of the elliptic message is that the addressee must install Service Pack 3 for Microsoft Office (Office XP).

[Ro13: 2549-2550] Uite legatura: Office XP SP3 (**This is the relation: Office XP SP3**)

As one can notice, on the Romanian web forums the definition is not an essential aspect in the communication of knowledge. We have identified only a few examples in the corpus. Their structure is very simple, usually

formed by a unique core. Sometimes definitions are elliptic expressions or implicit constructions.

b. Descriptions of actions

The description of actions seems to be the most popular explanatory strategy on the Romanian web forums. The high number of occurrences and the diversity of constructions found in the corpus support our claim.

One such category that seems to be characteristic of the web forum communication in Romanian is represented by *elliptic instructions*⁸³. The elliptic descriptions of actions present a rich diversity on the web forums communication. The most reduced explanatory structure can be observed in example [Ro12: 2333], which only consists in the name of a computer program, all the rest of the communication being implicit. This kind of knowledge transmission is informational, impersonal and distant. The locutor provides useful information for the addressee but rejects every other social, communicational contact outside the topic:

[Ro12: 2333] "File and folder protector"

Many of the explanatory sequences on the forum are short enunciations having the form of an order/command, as in [Ro4: 594]:

[Ro4: 594] Foloseste Disk Scrubber. (**Use Disk Scrubber**)

These *elliptic instructions* are elliptic explanatory structures involving elements implicit in the communication. For example, in [Ro4: 594] the locutor refers to a computer program **Disk Scrubber** which apparently is using a simple structure. Its meaning is actually complex because of the implicits involved in the communication, as we will illustrate in the following. Implicit in the verb "a folosi" (**to use**) is the idea that in order to use the program the addressee must **download** it from the Internet, **install** it on the computer, and **learn** how to **use** it. Notice that the mention of the last verb in the logical chain of actions (**download, install, learn, and use**) creates an implicit logical series of actions easy to "re-create" by a computer user.

The same implicit structure can be observed in the case of [Ro8: 1344]. Here, the sequence is shorter and involves only two acts, **download** and **install**:

⁸³ We denominate *elliptic instructions* the procedural texts consisting explicitly in a unique act expressed by one verb which involves implicitly one or more other actions forming a series that precedes or succeeds the explicit verb.

[Ro8: 1344] Instalează ultimul driver pentru placa video. (**Install the latest driver for the video board**)

This is noticeable in the case of [Ro2: 155], where the *elliptic instruction* involves an implicit previous procedure: **download** and **install**. This structure is complex because of the necessity for installing more than one program, which makes the instruction more implicit and more complex. [Ro2: 155] displays the following conceptual structure:

download (implicit) + **install** (explicit) – concerns – Adobe Flash Player
download (implicit) + **install** (explicit) – concerns – Shockwave
download (implicit) + **install** (explicit) – concerns – Java

The following structure repeats implicitly the sequence download + install three times, for every program mentioned:

[Ro2: 155] **Instalează** ultima versiune a **Adobe Flash Player+Shockwave și Java**. (**Install the latest version of Adobe Flash Player+Shockwave and Java**)

Occasionally, the locutor mentions explicitly the first verb of the series **download + install**, leaving the second verb as implicit, as one can notice in example [Ro8: 1305]:

[Ro8: 1305] Descarcă acest DirectX. (**download this DirectX**)

We have also identified a category of *unique instructions*⁸⁴ which can involve different modalities. Example [Ro9: 1620] entails the idea of obligation and is an instruction given by the locutor to the addressee:

[Ro9: 1620] Trebuie sa cumperi programul acela. (**You must buy that program**)

Other modalisations introduce a divergence of ideas, as in [Ro10, 1923-1924], where the locutor takes a different position concerning a previously expressed opinion. The explanation in this case is interactively constructed, part oriented to the addressee (the explanatory part) and part to the previous speaker (modalisation):

[Ro10, 1923-1924] ba merge pe la Format-Conditional Formatting (**it does work from Format-Conditional Formatting**)

⁸⁴ Unique instructions are complete structures rather than elliptic, in the form of an instruction/procedural text, and contain one act only.

At times, they may introduce the idea of *restriction* (*numai/only*), claiming that the instructions the locutor provides is the only solution to the problem discussed:

[Ro10: 1889] numai scriind cod in VBA (**only writing codes in VBA**)

The modalisation of the instruction as *possibility* in example [Ro16: 4096] reveals the intention of the locutor to diminish the force of the imperative, which in Romanian functions as an order/command, and to compel the addressee to decide whether he/she will follow the instructions or not:

[Ro16: 4096] Poti sa folosesti oertype. (**You can use oertype**)

Another way of mitigating an imperative in Romanian is the use of verbal forms in the present tense, Indicative. This transforms the message in advice and positions the participants in the discussion as peers:

[Ro23: 6932] Il blochezi cel mai simplu din firewall
(**You simply block it from firewall**)

A more developed explanatory sequence describing actions identified in the corpus consists in the *enumeration of actions*. More complex than the *elliptic* and *unique instructions*, the *enumeration of actions* consists in a series of actions. The text has a very simple structure and the communication is reduced to the cognitive content. The series of actions are linear and follow a logic order:

[Ro16: 4022-4023] In meniul: Tabel-Sortare... (**In the menu Table - Sort**)

[Ro8: 1443] Device Manager: Start>Run scrii devmgmt.msc>Enter (**Device Manager: Start>Run write devmgmt.msc>Enter**)

[Ro4: 527-528] Tune-up Utilities -> Tune Up Shreder

[Ro6: 835] Excel Options> Advanced> Gridline color> alegi negru (de ex.).
(**Excel Options> Advanced> Gridline color> select black (for example)**)

Some of the enumerations of actions display a more developed discursive structure involving interactive communication, as in [Ro7: 1119], where the locutor commences the procedural explanation by confirming ("correct") a previous statement by the collocutor:

[Ro7: 1119] Corect... instaleaza CCleaner, si in program alegi Tools -> Uninstall -> Delete Entry. (**Correct ... install CCleaner and in program select Tools-> Uninstall -> Delete Entry**)

Text cohesion is ensured by the discursive markers that organise the flux of information, such as “și” (**and**) and “apoi” (**then**):

[Ro9: 1585] Dezinstaleaza programul si instaleaza apoi versiunea Trial.
(**Uninstall the program and install then the Trial version**)

Similar examples in the corpus are: [Ro16: 3666-3667], [Ro14: 2922], and [Ro16: 3922].

The procedural texts may also adopt the form of *lists of actions*, similar to the enumeration of actions, but formally the text is organised as a list. The order of the entries in the list is also the order of the logical flux of the actions. In [Ro18: 4907-4911] the list consists of the 2 variants that the locutor presents to the addressee as alternatives. Every element of the list describes a series of actions. The first series, 1., consists of four acts ordered logically as a series of actions: “a repeta” (**to repeat**), “a presupune” (**to suppose**), “a apăsa” (**to press**), and “a căuta” (**to search**). The alternative to this first sequence, 2., is a *unique instruction*: “incerci diverse combinatii la "forgot my...”” (**2. try different combinations at „forgot my...”**). The sequence is firmly ended by the locutor’s statement that there are no other solutions to the addressee’s problem:

[Ro18: 4907-4911] Ai 2 variante: (**you have 2 alternatives**)

1. fie incerci sa repeti greseala.. adica, presupui ca ai apasat 2 taste atunci cand ai scris noua parola si cauti diverse combinatii.. (**1. either try repeating the error ... I mean, suppose that you pressed 2 keys when you typed the new password and look for different combinations**) 2. incerci diverse combinatii la "forgot my..." (**2. try different combinations at „forgot my”**)

Alte varinate nu exista. (**Other alternatives do not exist**)

Other lists of actions can form a unique explanatory sequence, as in [Ro14: 2773-2778], where every entry in the list of actions is marked by hyphenation (-). Thus, one can observe three main entries in the list of actions. The first and the second entries are each formed by a single act: “asigură-te” (**check**) and “șterge” (**delete**). The third entry in the list is formed by two acts: “intri” (**enter**) and “sterge” (**delete**), and a metaexplanation. The list of actions ends with the last instruction of the procedural text, which is not marked by the locutor as an entry:

[Ro14: 2773-2778] - asigura-te ca in Control Panel n-a mai ramas nimic legat de Adobe Photoshop (**check if in Control Panel nothing is left about Adobe Photoshop**) - sterge si directorul aferent din "Program

Files" **(also delete the corresponding folder in "Program Files")** - incerca sa intri in registri si sa stergi eventualele urme de Photoshop ramase pe acolo. (Start - Run - tastezi regedit; CTRL+F pentru cautare cheie, DEL pentru stergere, F3 pentru Find Next); eu nu folosesc programe de curatat registrii, ci sterg cheile manual. **(try to enter registry and delete the possible traces of Photoshop left there. (Start – Run – type regedit; CTRL+F for search key, DEL for delete, F3 for Find Next); I don't use programs for cleaning the registry, but delete the keys manually.)** Restart & retry install

One should note that the *list of actions* is not a common practice in the Romanian web forum communication. We have identified in our corpus only three occurrences of such textual organisation, which means that Romanian locutors construct the discursive organisation of information in other ways.

The instructions may be constructed as *conditional relations*, as in the example below. The text in example [Ro3: 319-320] and the following sequences displays a heterogeneous structure. Here, the procedural sequences are mixed with causal clauses and create a coherent and logic structure based on a cause-effect relation. For example, in [Ro3: 319-320], the locutor presents the solution to the addressee by mentioning the possible causes of the problem. The structure of the phrase represents an invitation to action and is intended to eliminate the distance between the participants in the discussion. The "computer" in the discussion is replaced by "you", the locutor discussing the technical details in a personal way. Thus, he/she doesn't say "if your computer has errors", which corresponds to reality, but "if you don't have errors". He/she conceives of the computer in this discussion as "part" of the addressee's identity⁸⁵:

[Ro3: 319-320]...verifica in Start – Settings – Control Panel – System – Hardware tab – Device Manager – Network adapters **daca** nu ai erori pt adaptorul wireless si **daca** in (right-click) Properties este Enabled. **(verify in Start – Settings – Control Panel – System – Hardware tab – Device Manager – Network adapters if there are no errors to the wireless adaptor and if it is Enabled in (right-click) Properties)**

Other examples of *conditional relations* in the description of action sequences on the Romanian forum can be observed in [Ro3: 441], [Ro7: 1230-

⁸⁵ The identity assumed by the locutors on the specialised web forums is that of a person facing a cognitive problem in a technical context. Since the web forum field is the Computer and the Internet, a particular focus on the participants' identity on the forum shows them to be persons facing a cognitive problem related to the computer.

1232], and [Ro8: 1400-1401]. These examples demonstrate that in Romanian the description of actions sequence as conditional relations are systematically introduced by “dacă” (**if**), which is an effective way of structuring a discourse in two parts: the first is a procedural part which communicates the cognitive content followed by a complementary clause containing the conditions of validation of the actions described in the first part.

It seems that in the Romanian forum the instructions and the procedural texts represent very powerful mechanisms of knowledge communication. A special category of instructions is represented by the *multimodal instructions*, more precisely images. On the Romanian web forums, the images exist but they are not directly visible. The locutor has a link where he can open the image if interested in the topic of discussion. The image accompanies a description of actions (for example), as in [Ro16: 4455-4458], and represents a visual example intended to complete the description of actions. It is important to observe that on the Romanian forum the addressee can decide to follow either one of the channels of communication (text **or** image) or both channels (text **and** image). If he/she considers that the textual information is sufficient, he/she can ignore the visual part of the communication, whereas if he/she decides to view the image he/she has to download it. This option is imposed by the communication device, which can be implemented should the provider want to either display the multimedia content of communication or let the participants in the forum decide whether they want to see textual only and/or multimedia content. This structure can be observed in example [Ro16: 4455-4458], where the image is represented by an icon and a link consisting in the name of the document. This link also displays some supplementary information, such as the dimension of the file and the number of views:

 untitled.JPG (90.56K) Number of downloads: 16

The visual part of the multimodal sequence appears within a procedural text and is coherent with the content of the latter:

[Ro16: 4455-4458] ...Le gasesti in josul documentului, in bara DESEN (patratul ce are in interior un A in dreapta sus), sau la Insert (Inserare) / Text Box (Caseta text). **(you can find them at the bottom of the document in the toolbar DRAWING (the square with an A inside at the top on the right), or at Insert / Text Box)**  untitled.JPG (90.56K) Number of downloads: 16

A similar multimodal construction is example [Ro16: 3623-3629], which is formed by an enumeration of actions – sequences 1, 2, 3, 5 – and a prototypical explanation. The intention of the locutor to provide multimodal information is announced at the beginning of the sequence: “Îți atașez aici un exemplu” (I attach here an example). The visual information consists in a screen capture and, as in the previous example; viewing it is optional and depends on the addressee. The same information as in example [Ro16: 4455-4458] accompanies the image file:

[Ro16: 3623-3629] Iti atașez aici un exemplu: **(I attach here an example)**
 (1) dezarhivezi si (2) pui in C: in radacina. **(extract and put it in C: in the root)** (3) Nu modifici numele sau locatia la fisierul excel (4) ca nu o sa mearga. Si apoi din butonul "imbinare pt imprimanta" (5) listezi de la ce nr vrei la ce nr. **(Don't modify the name or the location of the Excel file because it won't work. Then with the „Print Merge” button print from the number to the number you want)**



EX.ZIP (153.31K) Number of downloads: 27

As one can observe, the description of actions and its varieties may be the main discursive strategy employed on the web forums in Romanian for knowledge communication. Our claim is based on the fact that the highest incidence of explanatory sequences consists of action descriptions.

c. Explaining reasons

Another category of explanations consists of sequences explaining the reasons/causes/motives for an event/action. Also known as *prototypical explanatory sequence*, it consists of an answer to a *why-question*. In Romanian, the locutor can adopt different strategies in order to respond to a *why-question*. Nonetheless, the prototypical explanation, a basic explanatory structure, is one of them. Very popular on the web forum discussions, it consists of two steps: (1) a general statement concerning the topic of the thread or an invitation to action, and (2) an explanation of the reason for (1). This relation between the two parts is generally constructed through specific discursive markers or by juxtaposition. The juxtaposition involves an implicit *cause-effect* relation between the two sentences (1) and (2) of an explanatory sequence, as in example [Ro4: 577], where the statement (1) is an invitation to action “încearcă Eraser” **(try Eraser)** and the following sentence expresses the reason: “e gratuit și are multe opțiuni” **(it is free and has multiple features)**. The juxtaposition lends orality and interactivity to the written dialogue:

[Ro4: 577] (1) Incearca Eraser. (2)E gratuit si are multe optiuni. **(Try Eraser. It is free and has multiple features)**

There are some prototypical explanations, such as [Ro12: 2202], which are addressee-oriented. Here, (1) represents an addressee-oriented invitation to action – “mai caută” **(keep searching)** –, followed by an expression of support “sigur găsești” **(you’ll surely find)** intended to eliminate the distance between the participants in the discussion and to reassure the addressee:

[Ro12: 2202] (1) Mai cauta, (2)sigur gasesti. Pe forum sau Gogle **(keep searching you’ll surely find [it]. On the forum or on Google)**

There are some particular cases where the prototypical explanation is impersonal, formal and accurate, as in [Ro6: 940-942], where (1) is a statement presented as supplementary information to a more extended explanatory content, completed by a similarly formal and impersonal sequence (2).

[Ro6: 940-942] ... (1) utilizatorul nu va avea nevoie de programul de arhivare pentru a dezarhiva arhiva [...], (2)arhiva se va despacheta singura **(the user won’t need the archiving program for unpacking the archive [...], the archive is self-extracting)**

A similar formal, impersonal and topic-oriented explanation can be observed in example [Ro17: 4311]:

[Ro17: 4311] ... (1) wordul nu se foloseste la reproducerea documentelor color. (2) Nu ai separatie de culoare si nici prea precis nu este... **(Word can’t be used to convey colour documents. There is no colour separation and it is not very accurate either...)**

The locutor can choose to orient the discourse towards his/her own person for personal involvement. For example, the reason why he/she is present in a statement, as in [Ro11, 2026], can be to express a personal habit “eu așa găsesc orice” (this is how I find everything). The locutor “invites” the addressee to adopt his/her own routines because of the similarity of the situation presented by the addressee:

[Ro11, 2026] cauta cu google eu asa gasesc orice **(search with google this is how I find everything)**

Personal involvement can adopt the form of an expression of solidarity with the previous speaker. In [Ro12: 2347-2349], such an expression – “folosesc și eu” **(I too use ...)** – is present in (1). The prototypical explanation

(2), which is a presentation of the computer program's features, warrants the locutor's statement in (1):

[Ro12: 2347-2349] (1) Tot "File and Folder Protector" folosesc si eu. (2) Ai optiuni de ascundere sau de parolare a folderului, cat timp sa poti vizualiza ce-i in folder dupa ce ai bagat parola corecta, si altele. **(I too use „File and Folder Protector”. It has options to hide and protect a folder by password, to set the time for viewing the archived folder after typing the correct password, and so on.)**

A *prototypical explanation*, due to the particular characteristics of communication on web forums, can be introduced, as in example [Ro12: 2294], by an operator in the form of a symbol. We have established that this is not a very popular discursive strategy in the corpus, since we have identified a single occurrence where the operator is a symbol. The argument supporting its interpretation as an explanatory operator is the possibility of replacing it by a discursive marker such as "pentru că" (**because**). The explanatory structure in (2) is formal and impersonal. The basis for its explanatory content is the actualisation "simplic, eficient și gratis" (**simple, efficient and free**):

[Ro12: 2294] Incearca Folder Guard Xp --> simplu, eficient si gratis (**Try Folder Guard Xp --> simple, efficient and free**)

Another discursive strategy suggesting personal involvement in an explanatory process is modalisation. The strategy adopted in this case by the locutor consists in a consecutive clause that modalises the conversation as possibility. "Poate" (**maybe**), in [Ro14: 2731], introduces the explanatory sequence as a hypothesis for the facts exposed in (2). This construction displays oral characteristics such as the use of the familiar register: "e prea coaptă" (**it is too old**) and "să meargă" (literally **to go**, contextual meaning **to work**), and interactivity. "Poate" (**maybe**) is also a reaction to a previous spate of interaction:

[Ro14: 2731] (1) Poate ti-e prea coapta (2)sa mearga un program asa de complex... (**maybe yours is too old to work with such a complex program**)

The prototypical explanatory sequences are also introduced by explanatory operators such as: "deoarece" (**for**), "pentru că" (**because**), "că" (**cause**), "ținând cont că" (**considering that**), "datorită" (**because of**), "așa că" (**so**).

The explanations introduced by "deoarece" (**for**) and "pentru că" (**because**) are constructions using a neutral register as in [Ro5: 646] and [Ro20: 6222]:

[Ro5: 646] Incearca OpenOffice.org Writer, **deoarece** acesta suporta formatul A3. **(Try OpenOffice.org Writer, for this supports format A3)**

Example [Ro20: 6222] is a modalised explanation. The locutor introduces the explanation accompanied by an expression of indecision: "As recomanda si n-as recomanda". The first part of the explanatory structure in this case isn't a statement but an affirmative-negative complementary construction emphasising the locutor's indecision followed in (2) by the reason for the fact expressed in (1):

[Ro20: 6222] (1) As recomanda si n-as recomanda Tuneup Utilities **deoarece** (2) mi-a sters odata ce n-a trebuit **(I'd recommend and not recommend Tune-up Utilities for once it deleted something it wasn't supposed to)**

The operator "pentru că" (**because**) introduces the explanations in a more familiar way and reduces the distance between the participants in the communicational exchange:

[Ro6: 976-977] Eu recomand 7ZIP, **pentru că** este freeware. **(I recommend 7ZIP because it is freeware)**

[Ro18: 4966-4967] Vezi sa nu fie apast Caps Lock cand scrii parola sau Shift, **pentru ca** in acest caz, chiar daca o scrii corect dar cu majuscule, sau cu o litera doar majuscula (si ea e minuscula) atunci nu te autentifica. **(Check if CapsLock is locked when you type the password or Shift, because in this case, even if you type it correctly but in capitals, or even if in just one capital letter (and it is lowercase) then it doesn't authenticate you)**

A touch of exaggerated familiarity is introduced in the explanation by the operator „că de-aia” (**that's why**). The locutor also introduces an additional ironical nuance. He/she constructs the initial part of the explanatory sequence as a rhetorical question, then, in (2) the locutor introduces a nominal definition "Că de-aia îi spune Guest" ('cause **that's why it is called Guest**), binding the explanation with the name of a computer account. Through this explanation, the locutor not only suggests a solution to the problem the addressee initiated, but also points to the simplicity and obviousness of the solution:

[Ro12: 2382-2384] (1) Nu e mai simplu să activezi userul Guest pentru vizitatori? (2) Că de-aia îi spune Guest... **(Isn't it simpler if you activated Guest user account for visitors? 'cause that's why it is called Guest...)**

The use of “datorită” (**due to**) as an explanatory operator represents a familiar but also erroneous way of using it. The locutor uses a formal register that is not used very often in face-to-face communication. In this case the operator is used as an explanatory operator replacing a more popular operator “din cauza” (**because of**), which is correct rather than formal:

[Ro15: 3153] Deobicei aceasta eroare apare **datorita** prezentei anumitor daunatori precum Heur.Trojan. Iti recomand o scanare! (**Generally, this error appears due to the presence of malware such as Heur.Trojan. I recommend a scanning!**)

Conclusive nuances in explanatory sequences: Sometimes, an explanation can be the result of the background knowledge or of the direct experience of the locutor. In this case, the explanatory content carries a conclusive nuance, as the explanation is the result of a cognitive process. One such example would be [Ro15: 3103]. Here, the locutor introduces the explanatory content (2) by “ținând cont că” (**taking into account that**). He/she expresses the result of the locutor’s personal observation (the error the previous speaker talks about is well-known since a lot of people have begun complaining about it):

[Ro15: 3103] (1) Este o eroare cunoscuta ... (de mine - am avut-o in computer) tinand cont ca (2) multi au inceput sa se planga de ea. (**This is a well-known error ... (to me – I had it on my computer) taking into account that a lot of people have begun complaining about it lately**)

Another conclusive nuance refers to the locutor’s cognitive background. In such cases the explanation is constructed as the conclusion to an expositive process formed by three acts, the first of which presents the general context of the explanation followed by two expositive acts. The explanation comes as a conclusion to the intervention. Its content isn’t cognitive but subjective, since the locutor seems rather preoccupied by the addressee’s state of mind of:

[Ro20: 6016] (1) daca le lasi cu setarile care iti vin din start (2) nu iti strica nimic... (3) oricum toate fac BackUp la registry....**asa ca** (4)nu trebuie sa-ti faci griji (**If you leave the initial settings they don’t damage anything ...anyway they all do a registry back-up ... so you don’t have to worry**)

7.2.1.3. Personal, Titles and Internet References

The locutor may introduce in his/her discourse references as discursive strategy. Their role in the discourse, as pointed out in the previous chapters,

can be referential or explanatory. In this section we will only consider the references used for explanatory purposes.

In the corpus there are many different kinds of references and verbal constructions incorporating references. If one considers the focus of the references, one will observe that they fall into three main categories: *personal references*, *title references*, and *Internet references*. *Personal references* focus on the person (usually, the locutor – selfreference), the *title references* mention the title or the genre of the text referred to, and the *Internet references* are URLs.

Personal references are just a few in the corpus. They are self-referential and denote previous explanatory interventions by the locutor, as in [Ro16: 4477-4478]:

[Ro16: 4477-4478] asa cum ti-am zis si eu... **(as I told you too)**

Other instances of self-reference are oriented not to the communication but to the locutor's cognitive background. In example [Ro23: 6915-6916], the locutor refers to his/her experience in the field: "vorbesc din experientă" (**I speak from experience**):

[Ro23: 6915-6916] ...Asta pe partea tehnica. Pe de alta parte, ce rost are sa-i limitezi doar WOW cand poate butona net-ul? Vorbesc din experienta.
(This concerns the technical aspects. On the other hand, why limit his WOW only if he can surf the net? I speak from experience)

Title references are rare too, for we have identified a single occurrence on the Romanian forum. Its use is explanatory, since the locutor introduces the reference after an expression of invitation to action: "citește acest articol" (**read this article**), where the word "articol" (**article**) is a link to a webpage. The reference is accompanied by a description of its content: "unde este explicat modul de remediere al problemei" (**where the remedy to the problem is explained**):

[Ro17: 4785] Oricum, citește acest articol, unde este explicat modul de remediere al problemei. **(Anyway, read this article, where the remedy to the problem is explained)**

Sometimes the references are conceptualised as locations. In [Ro17: 4871], for example, the locutor points out to the reference in terms of location: "aici și aici" (**here and here**). He/she implicitly invites the addressee to take action and follow the links for more information on the topic:

[Ro17: 4871] Vezi aici, sau aici, depinde ce versiune Outlook ai, dacă ai procedat corect. Din ce am putut să observ, serverul este setat greșit. **(Look here or here, depending on the version of Outlook you have, if you did the right thing. As far as I could notice, the server is incorrectly set).**

The *Internet references* on the Romanian web forum may represent an entire intervention consisting in a single line, with no other text but the URL. This occurrence is the most compact structure of an explanatory reference found in the entire corpus. Implicitly, the locutor invites the addressee to access the referred web page in order to obtain information on the topic of the thread:

[Ro16: 3987] <http://www.techsupportforum.com/microsoft...n-t-resize.html>

Generally, URLs are accompanied by comments, descriptions, and warnings concerning their content, as in [Ro11, 2091-2100]. Here, the locutor presents the main features of the program Fileprotpro. In the last line of the post, the locutor mentions that he/she hasn't tried the program, which means that this computer program may not represent the solution to the topic discussed:

[Ro11, 2091-2100] <http://www.softstack.com/fileprotpro.html> Major Features:

- * Protect files and folders
- * Protect files
- * Protect Folders
- * Disable Internet access
- * Password-protect any program
- * Protect files and programs by time
- * Hide folders

Nu l-am incercat. **(I haven't tried it)**

Similar examples of explanatory references accompanied by comments are [Ro12: 2256-2258] and [Ro16: 4160-4163].

In the first case, the introductory comment of the explanatory reference consists of an invitation to action followed by the enunciation of the goal of the action: "Vezi aici cum se face." **(See here how it is done):**

[Ro3: 409-410] Vezi aici cum se face. **(See here how it is done)**
<http://forum.softpedia.com/index.php?showt...p;#entry4547> 913

In the second example, the verb “a vedea” (**to see**) is accompanied by the attenuator “un pic” (**a little**) in order to diminish the force of the imperative:

[Ro3: 351] Vezi un pic si topicul asta: (**see a little this topic too**) <http://forum.softpedia.com/index.php?showtopic=419192>

The explanatory references may also be introduced through expressions of uncertainty, as in example [Ro15: 3482-3483], where the locutor introduces the reference using the verb “a încerca” (**to try**), which besides prefiguring the cognitive information also bears a slight hint at uncertainty. It is also important to observe that the reference is conceptualised as location: “aici” (**here**):

[Ro15: 3482-3483] Incerci ce e aici: (**you try what is here**) <http://forum.softpedia.com/index.php?showt...t&p=4099695>

In other cases, the modalisation of communication introduces a different expression of uncertainty, conceptualised as hope: “sper ca te ajuta asta” (**I hope this will help**). The locutor ends his/her intervention with a *ps* (*post scriptum* – which reminds us that while web forum communication displays many of the characteristics of face-to-face communication, it is, nevertheless, conceptualised as written text). The final comment by the locutor re-emphasises the idea of uncertainty, as he/she specifies: nu l-am testat....stiam duar ca exista asa ceva.... (**I haven't tested it ... I just knew that it exists**):

[Ro18: 4827-4929] sper ca te ajuta asta: (**I hope this will help**) <http://www.softpedia.com/get/System/Back-U...Recovery.shtml>
ps: nu l-am testat... stiam duar ca exista asa ceva.... (**I haven't tested it ... I just knew that it exists**)

It results from the analysis of the simple explanations in this section of our work that web forum communication in Romanian presents a rich diversity of discursive strategies aiming at explaining. They are simple cores that can form complex combinations in order to construct and communicate knowledge.

7.2.1.4. Complex Meta-explanatory Structures

Meta-explanations are a constant presence in the Romanian subcorpus, which is only natural since, as we have already observed, the ellipse is a characteristic of orality. The use of ellipse and implicits can also be a source

of ambiguity and misunderstanding which warrants the use of meta-explanations, whose function is to specify and concretise the cognitive content of the communication.

Several complex structures of meta-explanations are noticeable on the Romanian web forum. An illustrative example would be [Ro16: 4412-4416], where we have noted three meta-explanations. The fragment below is a complex explanation describing the use of tabs in a text document. Meta-explanations act as supplementary explanations on the simple elements in the main explanatory sequence. There are many kinds of meta-explanations. Thus, the first sequence in example [Ro16: 4412-4416] is a comment intended to clarify the situation of the document the locutor talks about. By “(si se pare ca nu sunt)” (**and it seems they are not**) the locutor pinpoints the general context of the problem he/she discusses. The meta-explanation continues thematically the main explanation to which it relates through the lexical items “document” and “tabs”, the topic of the meta-explanation. The second meta-explanation, (2), is a nominal definition explaining what the key INS is, while metaexplanation (3) begins as a nominal definition explaining “suprascrierea” (**overwriting**) and continues with instructions about how to localise the OVR option:

[Ro16: 4412-4416] Daca in document sunt folositi tabulatorii de care vorbeam (1) (si se pare ca nu sunt) atunci era simplu: ce tastai lua locul punctelor. In cazul in care nu ai tabulatori ai putea folosi tasta INS (2) (insert). Apasata o data se va activa suprascrierea (3) (OVR, vezi in bara de jos a word-ului, unde ai informatii despre numarul paginii, linii etc.)
If the tabs I told you about are used in the document (and it seems they are not) then it would have been simple: what you typed replaced the points. In case you don't have tabs you could use the key INS (insert). Pressed once it activates the overtyping (OVR, see in Word's bottom status bar, where you have information about the page number, lines, etc.)

Another complex structure consists in series of meta-explanations, as in [Ro13: 2566-2568]. Here, the locutor tries to define “folderul inf” (**folder inf**). This defining process, as one can notice, affects different levels of the term. In (1), the object is defined as *location* (the addressee can identify the file following its location in the computer). In (2), the definition is aspectual “(implicit, folderul este ascuns)” (**implicitly, the folder is hidden**) and informs on the properties of the folder:

[Ro13: 2566-2568] Caută în folderul inf (1)(C:\Windows\inf\) (2)(implicit, folderul este ascuns), fișierul phealth.inf... **(Search in folder inf (C:\Windows\inf) (implicitly, the folder is hidden), file phealth.inf)**

The meta-explanations on the Romanian web forum fall in different categories depending on their finality. We have distinguished between meta-explanations with *definitory goals*, meta-explanations with *aspectual* characteristics, and *procedural meta-explanations* describing actions.

The first category, meta-explanations with *defining goals*, are basically definitions embedded in the main explanatory sequence. One can identify different sub-categories of definitions within the metaexplanations. One such sub-category would be the *definition by location*, as in examples [Ro16: 3606-3607] and [Ro22: 6713]. In both cases they define an element from the main explanatory structure – “show wireless networks” and “the icon from tray” – in terms of location:

[Ro19: 5615-5618] Nu stiu exact cum e cu wirelessu, dar incearca click dreapta pe My Netwoerk (aia de pe desktop) > poroperties > apoi prin stinga show wireless networks [...] De obicei, apare si in tray (jos colt linga ceas) o icoana cu wireles.... **(I don't know how wireless works, but try right click on My Network (the one on the desktop) > properties > and then to the left show wireless networks [...]. Usually it also appears in tray (bottom corner by the clock)**

[Ro22: 6713] Icoana din tray (de lângă ceas), o poți ascunde ușor. **(The icon in tray (by the clock) you can hide it easily).**

Other defining meta-explanations consist of *nominal definitions*, which means that they are specifying the meaning of a term, as in examples [Ro16: 3561-3571], [Ro16: 3606-3607], and [Ro16: 4311]. The first example, [Ro16: 3561-3571], consists of a series of five metaexplanations used with defining goals and falling in the category of nominal definitions. In his/her intervention, the locutor is not sure which is the Word version used by the addressee, English or Romanian. In order to be sure of the effectiveness of his/her explanation, the locutor uses double terminology, in both Romanian and English, establishing a terminological equivalence: File=Fișier, Page Setup=Inițializare pagină, Portrait=în picioare, Landscape=pe orizontală, and Tools=Instrumente.

[Ro16: 3561-3571] intri in Word in File(1) (Fisier)-->Page Setup (2) (Initializare pagina)—[...] **(enter Word in File (File) -->Page Setup (Page Setup))** De asemenea aici mai poti alege si cum sa fie foaia Portrait (3) (in

picioare), Landscape (4) (pe orizontala). **(here you can also select how the page should be Portrait(standing), landscape (horizontally))**
 Daca nu ai ca unitate de masura intri in Tools (5) (instrumente) --> General si mai jos ai unitati de masura schimbi in centimetri si dai OK. **(If you don't have it as unit of measure enter Tools (Tools) --> General and below you find unit of measure change to centimeters and click OK.)**

The same discursive mechanism is used in examples [Ro16: 36063607] and [Ro:], where the definition can be a terminological equivalent in another language or a definition of the meaning of a word, like "precis" (accurate) in [Ro:]:

[Ro16: 3606-3607] Si cu mail merge (sau imbinare corespondenta) dai print de la foaia 1 pana la 100. Si automat acele serii se vor schimba. **(with mail merge (or mail merge – txt in Romanian) too press print from pages 1 to 100. And those series will change automatically)**

[Ro16: 4311] Nu ai separatie de culoare si nici prea precis nu este (vorbim de precizia la punct tipografic). **(There is no colour separation nor is it very accurate (I mean pixel accuracy))**

Some of the meta-explanations that fall in the category of definitions describe attributes of the *definiens*, as in [Ro6: 971], where the metaexplanation focuses on the aspectual part of the definition: "de asemenea free" **(also free)**:

[Ro6: 971] Dacă ai nevoie de ceva puțin mai avansat, adică dacă vrei să faci chiar un installer, nu doar o simplă arhivă, încearcă NSIS (de asemenea free). **(If you need something more advanced, if you want to do an installer, not only an archive, try NSIS – also free).**

A similar aspectual meta-explanation can be observed in example [Ro6: 1010-1012], where the locutor uses the meta-explanation in order to warn the addressee about the content of the file s/he attached to the message:

[Ro6: 1010-1012] Cand arhivezi bifezi optiunea "create SFX archive"
 Attached File(s)  untitled.JPG (32.79K) Number of downloads: 12
 (asta este multimedia are captura de ecran atasata) **(When you create the archive tick option "create SFX archive" ... (this is multimedia it has a screen capture attached))**

Meta-explanations can also take the form of a procedural text when the locutor's intention is to specify a series of actions as in [Ro19: 53895395], where the locutor assumes that the general indication "Mai porneste o data

serviciul Diskeeper” (**Start again service Diskeeper**) may not be very clear as to whether the addressee is a user of this service. In order to lend more precision to his/her indications, the locutor introduces a procedural meta-explanation: “cu “net stop”, apoi “net start”” (**with “net stop” then “net start”**):

[Ro19: 5389-5395] ... Mai porneste o data serviciul Diskeeper (cu "net stop", apoi "net start"), apoi programul... (**start again service Diskeeper**)

A more complex procedural meta-explanation is described in [Ro14: 2773-2778], whose discursive structure is similar to the previous example. After a general description of the procedure, every move is further described by meta-explanations. [Ro14: 2773-2778] is formed by a series of six acts indicating to the addressee the steps s/he has to take in order to eliminate the traces of Photoshop from the system:

[Ro14: 2773-2778] – incerca sa intri in registri si sa stergi eventualele urme de Photoshop ramase pe acolo. (Start - Run - tastezi regedit; CTRL+F pentru cautare cheie, DEL pentru stergere, F3 pentru Find Next); eu nu folosesc programe de curatat registrii, ci sterg cheile manual. (**try to enter registry and delete the possible Photoshop traces left there. (Start – Run – type regedit, CTRL+F for key search, DEL for delete, F3 for Find Next), I don't use programs for cleaning registry, but do it manually**)

As one can notice, in the Romanian forum conversations meta-explanations represent a discursive strategy the locutor uses in order to avoid ambiguity and lend more efficiency to the communication of the cognitive content he/she transmits.

7.2.1.5. Fewer Closures

It seems that in Romanian web forum communications the locutors avoid including the closing part in the construction of the explanatory sequence. Very few occurrences have been identified as closures of the explanatory sequences. The end of an explanation can be marked abruptly by the locutor, as in [Ro10: 1830]:

[Ro10: 1830] Gata (**That's it!**)

At times, it can be an invitation to action as in “try to install” or “I hope you ...”. This means that the explanation is oriented to a practical goal and actively involves the addressee:

[Ro13: 2549-2550] ...Incearca sa-l instalezi. (**Try to install it**)

[Ro16: 3561-3571] ...Sper sa te descurci... (**I hope you'll manage**)

As well, the closures can be constructed as greetings and good wishes, as in the case of examples [Ro10, 1947] and [Ro10, 1969]. This discursive construction suggests the idea of an invitation to act on behalf of the locutor:

[Ro10, 1947] Spor! (**Way to go!**) [Ro10, 1969] Spor! (**Way to go!**)

7.2.1.6. Diversity in Explanatory Texts

As already pointed out in chapter 3.5 we have considered two main aspects of explanations: the *speech act* and the *explanatory text*. The first is a complex structure, formed by different interrelated explanatory cores. The explanatory cores reveal the complexity of the internal structure of an explanatory sequence. In the case of the corpus it was quite difficult to encounter complex explanatory structures for, in general, the explanations on the Romanian web forums are formed by short explanatory cores.

In the first example, [Ro8: 1482-1488], the locutor explains the complex procedure of solving a driver conflict of the operating system Windows:

[Ro8: 1482-1488]⁸⁶ Sigur e driverul e cel corespunzător? **Faptul că** a stat atât până să instaleze driverul, nu cred că are legatură directă cu eroarea. **Din câte știi eu**, (1) DirectInput se ocupă cu procesarea datelor venite de la tastatură, mouse sau vreun game-controller (2) (joystick, gamepad, volan). (3) **De aceea** te-am întrebat dacă apare vreun semn de avertizare în Device Manager, fie la "Display Adapters", fie la "Sound, Video & Game Controllers", fie de altundeva. (4) **După ce** ai deconectat ce aveai în USB-uri, **tot în** Device Manager, dă-i "Action> Scan for Hardware Changes", **apoi** reîncearcă să intri în DxDiag, să vezi dacă reapare eroarea. (5) Încearcă să cauți și să instalezi ultimul driver pentru modelul plăcii video, cel mai bine de pe site-ul producătorului. LE: (6) **Uitam un lucru**, reinstalează și driverele plăcii de bază, cele pentru Chipset.

The explanatory sequence is formed by six cores marked by numbers from (1) to (6). In [Ro8: 1482-1488] there can be identified the main explanatory core formed by simple sequences (4), (5) and (6). Sequences (1), (2), and (3) precede the main core and form together a separate explanatory core that

⁸⁶ In the case of the extended fragments we will provide translation only for the sequences and examples analysed. The analysis has been revised and evaluated by Romanian native speakers, specialists in linguistics and discourse analysis.

is highly cohesive. The example is interactively constructed and this aspect can be observed in (3), where the locutor mentions a previous question: “De aceea te-am întrebat dacă apare vreun semn de avertizare în Device Manager” (**that’s why I asked you if there is a warning sign in Device Manager**). The way the three first sequences are interrelated is quite unique. Sequence (1) has a double explanatory function. It is both a definition, so its primary function is to point out what a concept is, and a part of a more complex structure, a prototypical explanation (responding to a *why-question*).

Simply as a definition, (1) explains what *DirectInput* is: “*DirectInput* se ocupă cu procesarea datelor venite de la tastatură, mouse sau vreun game-controller” (***DirectInput* processes the data received from the keyboard, mouse or some other game-controller**). As one can notice, the definition is constructed by pointing out the functions of the computer program. This first sequence is completed by a meta-explanation (2), in turn formed by examples: “joystick, gamepad, volan” (**joystick, gamepad, wheel**). The latter determines sequence (1) by explaining what the locutor understands by “game-controller”.

The last component of this explanatory structure is “**De aceea te-am întrebat dacă apare vreun semn de avertizare în Device Manager, fie la "Display Adapters", fie la "Sound, Video & Game Controllers", fie de altundeva.**” (**That is why I asked you if there is any warning sign in Device Manager, either at "Display Adapters", or at "Sound, Video & Game Controllers", or from elsewhere**). This structure is strongly related with (1) through the pro-form⁸⁷ “de aceea” (**that is why**), which usually pairs up with “pentru că” (**because**), which is elliptic in (1). It is also important to observe that (3) rephrases questions asked by the locutor in a previous intervention. The repetition of these questions represents in [Ro8: 1482-1488] the *problematization* stage of the explanatory process¹³¹. In this explanatory process (1) is the explanation, which corresponds to the second explanatory function cumulated by (1).

As we have already mentioned, the main explanation is a description of actions divided into 3 sequences: (3), (4), and (5). Every sequence consists of different acts, and the information is organised by using temporal markers: “după ce” (**after**), “apoi” (**then**). Sequence (4) consists of three acts: “ai deconectat” (**you have disconnected**), “dă-i” (**click**), and “reîncearcă” (**retry**). The sequence ends with a reference to the finality of the actions described: “să vezi dacă reappare eroarea” (**to see if the error reappears**).

⁸⁷ The Romanian Grammar denominates this pronoun as “element corelativ”. ¹³¹ by Jean-Michel Adam (1992: 95-97)

Another series of action descriptions form sequence (5). Here, the description of actions is modalised by the use of the verb “a încerca” (**to try**), which apparently in Romanian acts as the attenuator of an imperative, since it eliminates the idea of order/command and introduces that of an invitation to action. Example (5) is formed by two acts: “a căuta” (**to search**) and “a instala” (**to install**).

The last sequence, (6), is intended to complete the instructions in the preceding sequences, (4) and (5). It contains a singular act: “reinstalează” (**reinstall**) and it is introduced as the last piece of information the locutor needs to add in order to complete the information on the topic for the addressee. “Uitam un lucru” (**I forgot one thing**) is meant to actualise the context of the discussion and to create thematic cohesion with it. It also creates the impression of a conversation-like dialogue, since it eliminates the distance between the participants in the interaction.

The second example of systematic explanation confirms the importance of the description of action sequence on the Romanian web forums. This example is also a description of actions⁸⁸ explaining the simplest way to filter information in an MsExcel file.

[Ro10: 1834-1840] cel mai simplu e cu AutoFilter, dupa care (1)pe coloana cu data selectezi din drop-down optiunea "Custom" si (2)la conditii introduci: "is greater than or equal to" si (3)selectezi in dreapta inceputul perioadei care te intereseaza (4a)AND (5)(conditia a doua) (4b)"is less than or equal to" si (6)selectezi in dreapta sfarsitul perioadei (7)Dupa OK, vei avea filtrate doar acele randuri care indeplinesc cele doua conditii, (8)adica se gasesc in perioada pe care o doresti. Ca sa insumezi campurile, la sfarsit (9)scrii formula =SUBTOTAL(9,coloana H (10)de la primul la ultimul rand selectat).
Gata.

This fragment consists in ten explanatory cores marked by numbers from (1) to (10). The main explanation is a *description of actions* but the text displays the heterogeneous structure of other different explanatory sequences, which are also present. For this reason, we have assigned different colours to each category (red for instructions; purple for metaexplanations). The text is a description of actions formed by a series of sequences: (1), (2), (3), (4a+b), (6), (7), and (9). The entire text displays a linear structure. The sequences

⁸⁸ Actually, the most complex explanations in Romanian are formed by instructions. The procedural texts seem to be the most important on the Romanian web forums in terms of complexity, extension and quantity.

from (1) to (3) present a sequential progression of the description and involve explicit actions: (1) “selectezi” (**[you] select**), (2) “introduce” (**[you] introduce**), and (3) “selectezi” (**[you] select**). The cohesion between these sequences is maintained with the help of the conjunction “și” (**and**). Sequence (4) is split into two by sequence (5), a meta-explanation. This sequence represents the second part of the description of an Excel formula, and it is formed by elliptic structures. The role of meta-explanation (5) is to mark the introduction of a second condition as required by the syntax of a mathematical formula. Sequences (4b) and (6) are separated by the conjunction “și” (**and**). The elliptic construction (7) is introduced by the temporal marker “după” (**after**) indicating that the action in (7) is coherent with the actions previously described. This sequence is followed by an expositive sequence presenting the result of the actions. This sequence generates the prototypical explanatory sequence (8) which explains the meaning of “cele două condiții” (**the two conditions**) belonging to the previous sequence. The description of actions ends with (9), a sequence determined by meta-explanation (10) which explains the meaning of the formula in (9).

As one can notice, the explanations in Romanian form complex structures, whose main parts seem to be procedural⁸⁹. The main explanation is reinforced by varied minor explanatory cores that supplement the information in the main structure.

7.2.2. Conclusions to Explanation on the Web Forums

a. General considerations about explanation on professional web forums

The analysis of the *Romanian Web Forums Corpus* has demonstrated that the discourse on the professional web forums displays the existence of different explanatory strategies: *definition*, *description of actions*, and *prototypical explanation*, all involved in the process of cognitive transfer. In addition to the prefigured explanatory strategies, we have also discovered new strategies used with explanatory finalities: *references*, *meta-explanations*, and *rhetorical explanations*. Some of the explanatory cores that we have identified through analysis are not documented in the literature and we would like to highlight them here. It is the case of: the *explanatory use of references*, the *meta-explanations*,

⁸⁹ This statement has resulted from our empiric observations on the corpus that the three explanatory texts we considered for analysis were all procedural texts.

and *the rhetorical explanations*. Since these terms are proposed by us, we would like to define them in our concluding chapter.

The explanatory reference represents a speech act consisting in a web reference (active link or web address) that stands for an explanation.

The meta-explanation represents a speech act consisting in an explanatory core that specifies the content of another explanatory core or explanatory text. It is usually marked by parentheses.

The rhetorical explanations are speech acts that have the form of an explanation, stand for an explanation, function in the communicational context as an explanation, but add no new information or knowledge to the communicational content.

They all represent *sub-systems in interaction* that regulate the configuration of the explanatory text on the professional web forums.

We can also affirm that the explanation can be contemplated on two different levels; the first level is that of *speech act* and the second is that of *series of propositions*, both of which have been analysed in our corpus. If the first level can reveal the rich inventory of explanatory strategies the locutors use in the professional web forums discussions, the second level demonstrates how complex the relations between heterogeneous types of explanatory propositions can be. Both of the analysed levels support the idea that an important part of the communicational interventions on the professional web forum are explanatory, which converts them into *explanatory texts*. This persistence of the explanatory sequences at a textual level also supports the idea that there is a superior level where the explanation can be analysed: the discourse⁹⁰.

Finally, to conclude, let us state that we have noted the existence of a specific structure of the professional web forum explanation. If we take into account, the description of the explanatory sequence mentioned in Chapter 4.2 we observe a series of differences between the prototypical explanatory sequence described by the authors and the explanatory sequence we have found in the web forum discourse. These differences determine the features of the explanatory sequence in web genres.

The explanatory texts have been described taking into account the enunciation, the enunciative modalities, the terminology, the descriptive and evaluative adjectives, the stages of the explanatory activity, and finally, the discursive strategies.

⁹⁰ The explanation as interaction will be analysed in the next section.

One can note that the web forum explanation presents differences in each one of the enunciative and discursive aspects mentioned above, as follows:

	Prototypical explanation	Professional web forum explanation
Enunciation	Spatio-temporal references, Interdiscourse (authors), "We" – 1 st person deictic, Verb: Present Tense	Spatio-temporal references, (sporadic) "I", "We" or "You" oriented enunciation Verb: present tense, imperative, infinitive, conditional, imperfect tense
Enunciative modalities	Logic (necessity), Epistemic (certainty, opinion, possibility), No! affective modalities or subjectivity marks	Logic (necessity), Epistemic (certainty, opinion, possibility), Affective modalities (frequent), Subjectivity marks (frequent)
Terminology	Specialised lexicon, No! Polysemy or ambiguity, Loan words (anglicisms)	Specialised lexicon (sporadic), Polysemy and ambiguity (frequent), Loan words (depending on language)
Stages of the explanatory activity	Deductive explanation (from general to particular), Inductive explanation (from analysis to general), Cause-effect explanation, Discursive markers, Logical connectors	Deductive explanation (from general to particular), Cause-effect explanation, Discursive markers of orality, Logical connectors
Discursive strategies	Definition, Classification, Reformulation, Exemplification, Analogy, Quotation	Definition, Exemplification (sporadic), Analogy (sporadic), Quotation (web quotations), Explanatory reference (selfreference), Description of actions (instructions), Meta-explanation, Rhetorical explanations, Reformulation (sporadic), Analogy (sporadic)

As it results from the table above the explanatory sequence on the professional web forum has different features. We can observe that in the *enunciation* it presents more deictics than the prototypical explanation, more verbal tenses and lower use of the time and space references in the text, especially due to the orality of the communication. Both explanatory forms present the same use of the epistemic and logic modalities in communication, the difference consisting in the fact that the professional web forum explanation also allows the use of *affective modalities* and *subjectivity marks*. The use of specialised lexicon, loan words or technical terms is reduced to the basics in the professional web forums explanation. The imprecision in the explanatory texts of the web is generated by the frequent use of polysemy, ambiguity and professional jargon.

The explanatory forms we have encountered on the professional web forum consist of *deductive explanations* and *cause-effect explanations* accompanied by discursive markers of orality and logical connectors.

The explanatory sequence is constructed through a very rich variety of discursive strategies, such as: definition, exemplification, analogy, quotation, explanatory reference (self-reference), description of actions, meta-explanations, rhetorical explanations, reformulation, and analogy.

We consider that the contrastive profile we have presented of professional web forum explanations and prototypical explanation illustrates how different they are. It is easy to observe that the professional web forum explanation is not a subordinate category of the prototypical explanation. Both explanations share features but they also present complementary aspects which makes it impossible to include the professional web forum explanation in the prototypical explanation category.

b. Specific aspects of explanation on the professional web forums in Romanian

Even if constructed similarly, the explanatory sequences emerging on the professional web forum discussions display particularities that individualise them. The difference lies in their use. A French locutor will construct in a certain way his/her discourse in order to explain something to a collocutor, while a Romanian locutor, in order to explain the same thing, will use different explanatory sequences. In order to highlight the construction of the explanations on the professional web forums in our corpus we have decided to observe this phenomenon from a quantitative point of view.

Explanation	Ro
Introductory strategies	15
Closings	5
Procedures	24 (short)
Prototypical expl.	15
Definitions	11
References	10
Self-reference	2
Meta-explanations	10
Rhetorical expl.	0
Visuals	2
Humour	0
Slang	0

As one can observe from the table above, the use of the different types of explanatory sequences we have identified in our corpora differs with every language. The *introductory strategies* mark the importance the locutor allocates to the explanation by highlighting discursively that its content is important. The *closures* have the role to mark the end of the explanation and to maintain the contact between the collocutors. Their use is much more reduced compared with the *introductory strategies* in Romanian web forums.

The explanatory strategies are also differently used. It seems that the procedural explanation (*description of actions*) is the most widely used strategy. This can be also explained by the technical content of the knowledge communicated on the web forum and the type of knowledge transmitted: practical knowledge in Romanian. Here we can observe a relation between the number of occurrences and the length of the explanations.

The theoretical knowledge is transmitted generally through prototypical explanations; the second most used explanatory strategy, with 15 occurrences in the corpus. *The definitions*, with 11 occurrences, seem to be current in communication in Romanian web forums. *The references* (10) are also representative for web forums interactive exchanges. We consider that the other explanatory strategies such as *self-reference* and meta-explanation represent features of Romanian, since they are constantly used in online knowledge transmission. In addition to the explanatory strategies, we have also considered as specific mark of the explanation the presence of visual elements.

We propose below a simple profile of Romanian web forums communication based on the use of two main explanatory strategies and two specific explanatory strategies:

Romanian corpus	Strategies
Main strategy1	Procedures
Main strategy2	Prototypical explanations
Specific strategy1	Meta-explanations
Specific strategy2	Self-reference
Specific strategy3	Visual

We consider that the main explanatory strategies form the base of the web forums discourse and the secondary explanatory strategies individualize knowledge transmission discourse in Romanian.

7.3. Knowledge Construction: Negotiation between Ignorance and Experience

7.3.1. Introduction

The main objective of the professional web forums interactions is to fulfill the cognitive needs of the forum members that assume the condition of novice in a specialised field of knowledge and ask for information.

Knowledge is communicated through verbal interactions between the members of the forum. The initial intervention is essential, for it determines the cognitive needs of the locutor and the context in which they must be applied. The topic enunciated in the initial intervention is debated in successive exchanges between the members of the forum. The direct result of the exchanges is the accumulation of information that will be structured as knowledge. The criterion of validation of the knowledge is its effectiveness in the context described by the initiator of the interaction. The prevalence of the *explanatory sequences* and *interventions* on the professional web forums will determine the explanatory character of the professional web forum interactions.

In what follows, we will analyse the construction of the *explanatory interactions* on the professional web forums. The objective of our analysis is to observe and represent the co-construction of knowledge through polilogical interactions in Romanian *Computer Web Forums Corpus*.

Each example will be analysed under three aspects: *construction of interactions, organisation of actions within interactions, and the thematic construction of interaction*. In each example we will try to highlight the particular interactional aspects displayed in the process of knowledge construction.

7.3.2. Explanatory Interactions on the Romanian Web Forums

The interactive construction of knowledge on the Romanian web forums will be illustrated by the example of an interaction whose topic tackles the different modalities of uninstalling a program from the operating system MsWindows⁹¹. The interaction is the result of the contribution of six participants. The knowledge is constructed in this thread through 11 posts as follows:

Add or Remove Programs, Cum elimin un program?

 [miron1947](#)
Mar 22 2009, 13:36 Post #1

Cum elimin un program,**deja dezinstalat**, din lista **Add or Remove Programs**?Cu toate ca l-am sters si din registrii,apare in lista.Nu este grav,dar nu inteleg de ce mai apare si as dori daca stie cineva,cum pot rezolva,astfel incat sa nu mai apara in lista de programe.

This post has been edited by **miron1947**: Mar 22 2009, 13:37

 [onlyviu](#)
Mar 22 2009, 13:45 Post #2

QUOTE (miron1947 @ Mar 22 2009, 13:36) 

Cum elimin un program,**deja dezinstalat**, din lista **Add or Remove Programs**?Cu toate ca l-am sters si din registrii,apare in lista.Nu este grav,dar nu inteleg de ce mai apare si as dori daca stie cineva,cum pot rezolva,astfel incat sa nu mai apara in lista de programe.

pai,sfatul meu e sa folosesti your uninstaller,revu unininstaller sau ccleaner..ultimele doua sunt free.

 [yooman](#)
Mar 22 2009, 14:14 Post #3

QUOTE (onlyviu @ Mar 22 2009, 13:45) 

pai,sfatul meu e sa folosesti your uninstaller,revu unininstaller sau ccleaner..ultimele doua sunt free.

Corect... instaleaza CCleaner, si in program alege Tools -> Uninstall -> Delete Entry.

⁹¹ In this section all examples we comment on will be translated into English.

 [miron1947](#)
Mar 22 2009, 14:19 Post #4

QUOTE (onlyviu @ Mar 22 2009, 13:45) 
your uninstaller, revo unininstaller sau ccleaner.
Nu am rezolvat cu nici unul, nici macar nu apare in lista lor, in schimb in lista mea apare.

Attached File(s)
[Add_remove.JPG](#) (21.38K) Number of downloads: 22

 [Kakashi-Hatake](#)
Mar 22 2009, 17:28 Post #5

Pai dai Uninstall si iti va zice ca e deja dezinstalat si daca vrei sa il elimini din lista.
This post has been edited by **Kakashi-Hatake**: Mar 22 2009, 17:28

 [miron1947](#)
Mar 22 2009, 17:30 Post #6

QUOTE (Kakashi-Hatake @ Mar 22 2009, 17:28) 
Pai dai **Uninstall** si iti va zice ca e deja dezinstalat
Daca va uitati atent la poza, vedeti ca nu-mi apare aceasta optiune. Nici selectat nu apare optiunea.
This post has been edited by **miron1947**: Mar 22 2009, 17:37

Attached File(s)
[Add_remove.JPG](#) (20.59K) Number of downloads: 21 [Kakashi-Hatake](#)
Mar 22 2009, 17:33 Post #7

Pai in poza nu il ai selectat asa ca nu am ce sa vad. Dai click pe el si vezi.

 [vlad-doru](#)
Mar 22 2009, 17:54 Post #8

Foloseste unininstallerul asta de la Microsoft
IMG:http://forum.softpedia.com/style_emoticons/default/biggrin.gif
http://www.qooy.com/files/055O3POH/UNINSTA...AIR_msicuu2.zip

 [Neika](#)
Mar 23 2009, 18:45 Post #9

Dacă nu ai reușit cu Windows Installer CleanUp, caută în regiștrii la
HKEY_LOCAL_MACHINE\Software\Microsoft\Windows\CurrentVersion\
Uninstall,
acel program. și ștergi cheia respectivă. Ce scrie la *Display Name*, este numele
afișat în *Add/Remove Programs*.

 <u>miron1947</u> Mar 23 2009, 21:07	Post #10
Nu apare in lista respectiva(HKEY_LOCAL_MACHINE\Software\Microsoft\Windows\CurrentVersion\ Uninstall), multsim,dar am reusit cu <u>Windows Installer CleanUp</u> ,din link-ul postat de Dvs.Va multumesc. This post has been edited by miron1947 : Mar 23 2009, 21:13	
 <u>Neika</u> Mar 24 2009, 05:29	Post #11
Cu mare plăcere. (IMG: http://forum.softpedia.com/style_emoticons/default/arigato.gif)	

7.3.2.1. Waiting for the Right Solution

On the Romanian web forum there are few cases where the discursive marks indicate the end of the *turns of speech* and the *transition points* between the interventions.

Local organisation of the interaction: In the initial post, the initiator (L1) addresses the message to the audience: “cineva” (**somebody**) and avoids the explicit selection of the addressee. The members of the audience can willingly participate in the discussion and contribute to the knowledge construction. The participants in the explanatory interaction implicitly select as addressee the initiator of the thread, as one can note in posts [2], [5], [7], [8], [9], and [11]. Post [3] represents an exception, for the locutor selects consecutively two different addressees: the previous speaker (**onlyviu**) and **yooman**. The end of the turn and the transition point are marked by ellipse (...). The transition points between turns are sometimes discursively marked by "pai", which adds orality and interactivity to the message making it more conversation-like.

The *global organisation* of the interaction is conceived as a structure formed generally by three parts: *opening*, *body*, and *closing posts*. The *opening post* is initiated by forum member **miron1947**. Through this post the locutor opens the channel and establishes a communicational contact with the other members of the forum. He/she also enounces the finality of the communication, which, in the current example is the procedure of uninstalling a computer program. As it results from the last part of the initial post, the objectives of the communication are:

[10] “Nu este grav, dar nu înțeleg de ce mai apare și aș dori dacă știe cineva, cum pot rezolva, astfel încât să nu mai apară în lista de programe”.

(It is not serious, but I don't understand why it still appears and I'd like, if somebody knows how, to solve the problem so that it disappears from the program list).

The body of the message is formed by posts [2] to [9] exchanged between one *novice* (**miron1947**) and five *experts*. The initiator of the thread doesn't select the next speaker and doesn't use discursive strategies (interrogation, exclamation, lamentation, etc.) in order to obtain the solution. The collocutors volunteer the knowledge and their number is surprisingly high for such a short thread. The strategy of the construction of knowledge in this case is the description of different solutions to the problem in order to find the appropriate one. Each expert comes with his/her own solution. The novice listens to each of the experts, applies the solutions they propose and eventually provides feedback. The feedback is also a mechanism of communication control, because the thread ends when the solution is found and the initiator of the thread confirms that the problem has disappeared. The closing post of the current thread is [10]. It is not the last thread but is the thread that marks the end of the knowledge communication. As one can notice, the turns are controlled by the initiator of the thread, who can either stop or continue the discussion.

The last post of the thread, [11], is the answer of the *expert* who provided the solution to the problem and consists in a polite (greetings) answer to the previous post.

7.3.2.2. Multiple Reactions

The thread in the Romanian example consists of different *initiative* and *reactive interventions* forming a complex structure. The *initiative intervention* [1] generates two *reactive interventions*, [2] and [3], which are interrelated because intervention [3] represents a reactive intervention to [2]. These posts ([2] and [3]) generate a reactive intervention from the initiator of the thread in [4]. We can state that post [4] is the main element of the communication since it is connected as *reactive intervention* with posts [2] and [3] as the feedback answer to both these posts. Moreover, it also represents an *initiative intervention* for multiple posts such as [5], [6], [8], and [9].

Three sequences emerge from [4] and they have a quite linear structure. The first sequence is formed by a series of initiative and reactive interventions: [5], [6] and [7]. The second sequence is formed by [9], [10] and [11]. This sequence is also linear. The last sequence consists of a unique reactive intervention [8].

Each reactive intervention to [4] represents an individual alternative answer to the topic in [4] and indirectly in [1].

7.3.2.3. The Quotation and Textual Cohesion

Knowledge is communicated and transmitted on the web forums through a process of collective creation of meaning. Thus, the thematic aspects of the construction of the discourse are essential for the knowledge communication because they reveal the mechanism of creation of knowledge.

In the thread representing the current example, the initial post represents the *proposal of the theme* and it also defines the key elements that constitute the theme of the thread: “*elimin*” (**eliminate**), “*program*” (**program**), “*șters*” (**delete**), and “*registri*” (**registers**). The objective of the communication is defined in terms of “*a înțelege*” (**to understand**) and “*rezolva*” (**to solve**), which portray two different approaches to the cognitive content, the one theoretical and the other practical. As we will observe, the discussion will take into consideration only one of the two objectives of the communication, that is, the practical aspect of the construction of knowledge.

A part of the thematic progression in the current Romanian thread is realised through quotation, which creates an explicit thematic continuity between the thread posts. This thematic continuity is only partial, as the interactive construction of the meaning supposes the creation of an entire network of semantic relations throughout thread, as we will see further on.

Post [2] represents an implicit ratification of the theme, for the locutor accepts it by answering the initial post. The thematic progression is realised only by quotation in this case. The text of the locutor represents entirely new information (rheme) implicitly related to the theme.

A second ratification of the theme comes in [3]. Here, the thematic progression is realised through quotation, which relates post [3] thematically to the previous post, [2], and also through semantic cohesion – “*correct...*” (**correct**) and “*CCleaner*” – which strengthens the same relation as the quotation does [2 and 3]. The second part of the message is implicitly structured as new information (rheme) provided in response to the initial post. The information supplied corresponds to the second objective of the communication in [1].

Post [4] represents a thematic amplification realised through the following anaphoric relations: “*nici unul*” (**no one**), “*lor*” (**their**). The post is structured as multimodal feedback to posts [2] and [3].

The following post, [5], is thematically related (semantic cohesion) “*Uninstall*” to post [3]. It introduces new information intended to specify the

procedures the *novice* has to follow in order to reach his/her cognitive goal. As one can notice, this cognitive content is constantly oriented to the second goal formulated by the initiator of the thread, to practical knowledge respectively.

The initiator of the thread introduces in post no. [6] a thematic discontinuity through thematic rupture intended to explain to the previous speaker why he/she can't follow his/her indications. The post is multimodal. The image file attached to the message represents a thematical amplification of the textual message: "daca va uitati atent la poza" (**if you look attentively at the picture**). The following post represents a ratification of the new theme introduced in [6]. It thematically amplifies, with new information, the theme initiated in the previous post. The relation between the two posts is realised through semantic cohesion: "poza" (**picture**).

With post [7] one can notice that the knowledge communication fails because the cognitive needs of the *novice* (the initiator of the thread) are not fulfilled and the problem is not solved. In conclusion, the thread stays open, which has as direct consequence that other members of the forum will volunteer solutions for the current topic.

The thread continues with new information in [8] and [9]. Both posts are thematically related to post [4] where the failure of the knowledge communication was announced first. Post [8] is related through semantic cohesion "uninstalerul" (**the uninstaller**) to "nici unul" (**no one**) in post [4].

Post [9] is implicitly related to post [4], and the new information it brings is very complex. It defines semantically two spaces of reference that portray two possible solutions: "Windows Installer CleanUp" and "registri" (**registers**).

Post [10] presents a thematic discontinuity caused by the *close of the theme* introduced by the initiator of the thread. The post is thematically related (semantic cohesion – "Windows Installer CleanUp" and "registri" (**registers**) – to the previous post, [9], which contains the cognitive content necessary for the *novice* to solve the problem he faced. The post ends with greetings addressed to the previous speaker. "Vă mulțumesc." (**Thank you!**)

The last post [11] represents a *reactive intervention* by the expert who provided the solution to the greetings previously expressed by the *novice*. This reaction is part of a social ritual of giving and accepting thanks.

As we commented in the beginning of the thread's analysis, the knowledge requested by the *novice* was initially oriented in two directions: theoretical knowledge (understanding) and practical knowledge (instructions, procedures). As we can observe from the thematic construction of the knowledge, the cognitive content the participants in the situation provide is structured as

procedures and instructions. The text is short, it has a simple structure and contains many implicits, which may easily lead to misunderstanding.

Structure of the knowledge communication: The communication of knowledge in the example above goes from *expert* to *novice* and from *expert* to *expert* in the form of commentaries. The knowledge is the result of the communicational interaction between one *novice* and five *experts*. The active agent in the knowledge communication is the *novice*. He validates/invalidates the information provided by the experts and “invites” them to provide further information. The communication takes the form of *one-to-one communication* in posts [3, 5, 6, 9, 10, 11], *oneto-many communication* in [1, 2], and *many-to-one communication* in [4, 6, 9]. The knowledge is constructed through the accumulation of multiple solutions whose effectiveness depends on the validation of the initiator. The process of knowledge transmission ends when one of the solutions is validated. While not regarded as erroneous, the others are considered to be improper for the novice’s context of work. Still, they could work for another user.

7.3.3. Conclusions on the Explanation as Interaction

a. General conclusions

We begin our conclusions on the explanation as interaction by cofirming that the interactionist model of analysis has turned out to be an efficient tool for the analysis of the CMC texts. The hierarchic model we applied presents the advantage of offering a multilevel description of online interactions. It has also been particularly easy to apply in our analysis for the professional web forum communication, while displaying multimodal features (images, attached files), is basically formed by text. The texts have the form of *written conversations* and are the result of the contribution of different participants that share a common interest in communicating online specialised cognitive content. This content is organised as explanatory interventions that form, due to the discursive elements that give cohesion and interaction to the text, a conversationlike interactive written structure organised as: interaction, sequences, exchanges, interventions, and speech acts.

Like in face-to-face conversation, the professional web forum communication features many participants. The communicational relations that can be established during an interaction can be of type: *one to one*, *one to many*, *many to one*, or *many to many*. The participants are self-motivated when they open a thread and assume the role of *initiator* in order to contact the other members of the forum. Generally, the initiator doesn’t select the next speaker,

all the participants in the interaction being self-motivated⁹². The alternance of turns can be either marked or not (graphically, discursively, otrographically), depending on the locutor.

The actions are organised within the professional web forums interactions in different manners, depending on the number of the participants, the complexity of the topic and the cognitive content transmitted and validated or not by the initiator of the thread. Sometimes, they seem to be simply chaotic, with no internal organisation, which is a mere impression since it has already been demonstrated that conversations have internal organisation. Sometimes they are multireferential or consist in multiple reactive interventions. Simple and well-structured forms (symmetric or linear) can also be observed in the organisation of actions in the professional web forums interactions.

The thematic construction of the explanatory interaction describes how knowledge is transmitted between the participants and how it is constructed socially as a result of their interaction. A general structure can be observed where the initiator of the interaction defines the *theme* of the conversation for a particular context, and where the other participants add new information (rheme) related to the theme. Discursive mechanisms (semantic cohesion, anaphora, cataphora, etc.) create logical relations between the theme and the rheme, between the new and the already known⁹³. By using different explanatory strategies (definitions, description of actions, explanations), the participants in the professional web forums are able to construct knowledge through verbal communication. The effectiveness of the cognitive content is verified and then confirmed or infirmed.

b. Particular conclusions on the explanation construction in interaction

In what concerns the particular aspects of the explanatory interaction, we will discuss here a unique aspect, because the basis of analysis (one interaction from the corpus) doesn't allow us to obtain pertinent conclusions beyond this aspect. During the analysis of the professional web forums discussions, we observed that the interrogation seems to play a very important role in the interactive construction of explanation and that different uses of this mechanism can be observed in the corpus of research.

⁹² It is important to observe that the motivations are different: the initiator's to acquire knowledge, and the other forum members' – to share knowledge

⁹³ This mechanism is very close to the model Polanyi (1958) proposed for the explanation of how man learns.

One of the most important roles interrogation plays in the explanatory interaction is that of representing the mechanism which permits the controlling of turns. Thus, after an interrogation the locutor waits for the others to respond, which makes the interrogation itself a signal that the channel is free for use. Including a reference to the other in an interrogation is also a modality to select the addressee of a message and regulate turn taking. Likewise, if they include thematic progression and semantic cohesion the interrogations can shift the focus of the communication onto a certain topic or a specific aspect of the topic, depending on the finality of the interaction. From the thematic point of view, the interrogation can be articulated as an information request (the majority of cases in professional web forums communication) which brings new information to the CMC. By considering these elements, we arrive at the conclusion that the interrogation on professional web forums represents an important mechanism of thematic progression and, consequently, a mechanism of knowledge construction.

An analysis of the use of interrogations in our corpus reveals different employs, depending on the language. The parameters of its variation in use can consist in: focus of the interrogation, its position in the interaction (initiative or reactive interventions), the direction of interrogation (from whom and to whom it is addressed), and the quantity of interrogations used in an intervention by the participants. The results of our analysis can be observed in the following table:

Parameters of interrogation	Romanian web forums
Focus	Information
Position	Initiative
Direction	Novice to Audience (implicit – impersonal)
Occurrences	Low

As one can observe from the table above, each language presents a different use of the interrogation in the analysed segment. To begin with, the focus of the interrogation is mainly the information (Es, Fr, Ro) with some variation in En, where the locutor asks for assistance/help after he/she has described the situation. In Cat the locutor asks the other members of the forum to confirm/infirm his/her suppositions. The position of the interrogation and its direction can indicate who is controlling the situation. As we can observe, an interrogative placed in an initiative intervention indicates that the direction of the question is from the *novice* to the *expert* and consequently, the *novice*

controls the situation (En, Es, Ro, Cat). When the *expert* is the person who interrogates, the situation is controlled by him. The addressee of an interrogation can be, (see the table) the *novice*, the *expert* or the *audience*. In the last case, the interrogation can be addressed to the audience either explicitly (En) or implicitly (Ro, Cat). Even if they seem to be identical, the Ro and Cat forums present differences in the way they orient the interrogation, which in the case of Ro is impersonal and in the case of Cat is locutor-oriented.

Lastly, the number of interrogations used in an interaction is important too. In our analysis the lowest number of occurrences can be observed in the Romanian interaction, where the novice asks one question, and all the collocutors during the entire interaction refer to this initiative question. A moderate number of interrogations can be observed in En and Cat. The highest number of occurrences can be observed in Fr and Es.

As one can observe, even if the same procedures are used in order to transmit and construct knowledge, each language has a characteristic profile.

8. The Titles of Professional Web Forums

Within the web forum discourse the *title of a thread* has turned out to be a complex discursive element, its discursive function and structure, the discursive strategies the emitter uses in order to call the attention of the receivers determines a specific discursive configuration. This specificity of the *title of the thread* construction can be observed on the *professional web forums*. Therefore, following its discursive structure, we will consider that the web forum communication begins with the *title of the thread* where the emitter eventually encodes succinctly the essential of his/her communicational intentions.

In this section, we will observe the discursive function the title of a thread develops within a professional web forum discourse in Romanian and the way the titles of the threads are structured discursively.

8.1. Discursive Functions of the Title of a Web Forum Thread

The organisation of the communication in the professional web forums consists of a discursive pattern involving the following elements: *a) the web forum main title; b) the web forum domains; c) the thread titles; and d) the thread content*. At its turn, the *thread titles* consist of the *title sequence and complementary elements* (such as *id number, page number, number of posts, number of views, and date of the last post*).

There are different discursive functions the title of a thread fulfils in the situation of communication related to knowledge transmission in the Internet. Some of the most important are: *a) to introduce the topic of communication; b) to indicate the communicative intention of the emitter, and c) to call the attention of the other members of the professional web forum in order to obtain an answer and eventually complete the communicative process of knowledge transmission through Internet*.

These communicative functions determine the structural features of the titles which may be: *clear* (in the titles the emitter can use specialised terminology of the domain, have a logical structure, and avoid ambiguities), *concision* (the

emitter use of the ellipse is acceptable, he/she should be maximally efficient in representing information in the title), and *focus* (when creating a title of a web forum thread, the emitter should select the essential aspects of the problem he/she wants to discuss). Some of the examples below illustrate that these structural features exist in Romanian:

[RO9] Cum sterg licenta de la un program? Am nevoie de ajutor (**How do I remove the license from a program? I need help**)

[RO11] Soft de blocare a accesului la anumite programe, in anumite intervale de timp (**Software to block access to certain programs at certain times**)

These examples allow us to appreciate that the structural features of the construction of a title can adopt different discursive strategies.

8.2. Quantitative Analysis of Titles of Threads in Romanian

Within the three specific structural features of forum thread titles, *clarity*, *concision*, and *focus*, only *concision* can be assessed using quantitative analysis. For this reason, we selected three parameters which will indicate how *concision* is treated in knowledge communication in professional web forums in Romanian:

Parameters of analysis	Quantitative data
Number of the threads' titles	24
Average number of words in the threads' titles	5.04
Minimum and maximum length of threads titles (words/title)	2-13

The first parameter, the *number of the threads titles* indicates the length and the effectiveness of the communication of knowledge. Therefore, we can observe that people involved in knowledge communication in Romanian web forums have discussed topics within 24 threads, which proves to be a very efficient knowledge communication, since they debate briefly numerous topics. Under the aspect of *efficiency* in knowledge communication, Romanian forums seem to be efficiently involved in problem solving and knowledge

transmission, with a remarkable amount of threads solved in a small amount of text.

The second parameter we took into consideration in the analysis of the *concision* of the threads titles is the *average number of words in the threads titles* which suggests that people communicating in Romanian (5.04 words/title) tend to be more descriptive when creating the title of the threads. In a forum of discussions, a concise title would consist of 1-3 words.

The last parameter allowing us to analyse the *concision* of the threads titles in knowledge communication is the *minimum and maximum length of threads titles*. Under this aspect, we observe that the titles of the threads can be concise in Romanian, with – 2 words for the shortest title of thread. Nevertheless, some locutors tend to be *prolix*, with 13 words/title. With 50% of discussion forum thread titles exceeding 7 words/title, it can be said that Romanian speakers tend to be descriptive, with concision occurring occasionally.

We consider that the other two features of the titles we mentioned above (see 8.1.), *clarity* and *focus* can be also observed, at a certain level, through quantitative analysis of the corpus, because concise titles require also *clarity* and *focus*. Nevertheless, these features can be better studied and observed through qualitative analysis which will now proceed to analyse.

8.3. Qualitative Analysis of Titles of Threads in Romanian

The qualitative analysis of the discursive structure of the titles in the web forum threads will emphasise features we couldn't analyse with quantitative analysis such as *clarity* and *focus*. As mentioned above (see 8.1.), the titles should be *clear*, meaning that they should avoid ambiguity, present a logical structure, and use terminology. The titles should also be *focused* and mention essential elements of the topic the emitter wants to debate in the web forum. Both features involve *precision* and *accuracy* and determine an objective approach on the topic. Therefore, we will analyse the structure of the titles in the web forums threads taking into consideration their degree of *objectivity/subjectivity*, analysing the presence of their discursive marks in the web forum titles.

Thus, we will consider as objectivity marks any discursive element related with *concision*, *clarity*, and *focus* such as: *terminology* and *denominations*, *quotations*, *descriptions*, *expressions of intention*, and so on. Furthermore, the

subjectivity marks we will take into account in the current analysis consist of discursive sequences where the emitter is personally involved such as: *modalisation, subjective orthography, asking for help, interrogations, exclamations, and so on.*

The situation of the discursive marks in the titles of the threads in *Computer Web Forums Corpus* is the following:

Types of marks	Discursive marks	Titles of the threads
Objective marks:	Denomination and terminology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • wireless, connecting • office 2007 -excel • Automatic Extract • Avertisement directx • Microsoft Word • recover password • wireless amilo 2727, • wirelesu' recuperare date • Mozilla youtube eroare
	Quotation	• Defragmentare, Error 10061
	Objective description	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Program, Program de sters fisierele care se recupereaza • Soft de blocare a accesului la anumite programe, in anumite intervale de timp • Program ascuns Foldere
Subjective marks:	Subjective statements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Problema Outlook • Problema instalare Adobe Photoshop CS3 • Probleme in Word
	Direct interrogations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cum pot sa ascund un program care ruleaza • Add or Remove Programs, Cum elimin un program? • Help-ul in Office XP, De ce nu merge? • Programe de curatat registri., ce sa folosesc?? • Eroare 2, Stie cineva ce este cu ea?
	Dilemma	• Dilema OpenOffice Calc (sau MSOffice Excel)
	Asking for help	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Am nevoie de ajutor, restrictionare wow • Cum sterg licenta de la un program? Am nevoie de ajutor

Following the result of our analysis we can state that knowledge communication through professional web forums in Romanian presents *objectivity* and *subjectivity marks*. The ratio between subjectivity and objectivity marks in Romanian indicates a more objective type of communication:

Objectivity/subjectivity marks	Titles of the threads in Romanian
No of subjective titles	11
No of objective titles	13
Total	24

Following these data, the objective marks are preponderant in Romanian (13) thread titles.

Concerning the general discursive strategies used to create the titles of the threads we analysed in this section, we can observe strategies such as *denomination* and *terminology* (9) for the objective marks and the *subjective statements* (3) for the subjectivity marks. Specific discursive strategies can also be identified for the Romanian interactive exchange in web forums such as: Thus, the titles features are *direct questions* (5) and *dilemma* (1).

8.4. Use of the Titles of Romanian Web Forums

The conclusions of this chapter are that the knowledge communication in Internet is a complex process embracing different discursive genres such as *web forum discussions*. Knowledge communication within professional web forums presents specific features, one of the most important being the *titles of the threads*. These titles fulfil specific functions in knowledge communication and their main objective is to call the attention of the receiver and persuade him/her to share and communicate the knowledge the emitter needs and encodes in the titles of the threads.

We also appreciate that Romanian users develop an efficient manner to encode knowledge and express communicational intentions in the titles of the threads in terms of *concision*, *clarity*, and *focus*. This information is complemented by the fact that in Romanian web forums the users prefer the *denomination* and *terminology* as well as *objective interrogations sequences* to build the web forum threads. Thus, the encoding of titles is more objective than subjective in Romanian. It is also interesting to observe that the longest titles identified in Romanian web forums (13 words) indicates a verbose

communication. The explanation we found is that communication is quite effective in Romanian too, but the Romanian users of the professional web forums use the long titles as a strategy to call the attention of the other members of the group and, occasionally, write the entire message in the title of the thread. This confirms that Romanian speakers prefer to sacrifice brevity and conciseness in favor of descriptiveness in the communication of knowledge in Romanian-language web forums.

9. Developments in Communication in Specialised Web Forums between 2021 and 2025

9.1. Quantitative Analysis

The relevance and communicative dimension of *professional forums of discussions*, a discursive genre which is nowadays less popular than it used to be, can be further argued with current quantitative data. Thus, in 2021, a simple search for a phrase such as "computer forum"⁹⁴ using a search engine like *Google Search* displayed 1,070,000 results worldwide, independently of the language of communication⁹⁵. Further, in 2025, the same search, using the same search engine, generates 188,000 results worldwide, with no distinction based on language. In the latter search, *Google Search* mentions that AI cannot generate any results for the searched syntagma. This highlights the decreasing popularity of these forms of online knowledge communication, with just a simple online search.

While there are professional web forums that have been active for over 35 years, such as the WELL, some web forums may have a limited lifespan. In Romania, the professional web forum *Softpedia* (<https://forum.softpedia.com/>) has been active for 24 years (2001-2025). In 2021, it had 77 forums, structured into 9 categories, recording 26,514,772 posts from 818,464 members as a result of user interaction, of which 3,940 were online at the time of our query.

The same *Softpedia* forum, in 2025, featured 81 forums, organised into 9 categories, and registered a total of 493,056 members, who generated a total of 30,506,709 posts throughout time. Of these members, 1,154 were online simultaneously at the time of the research.

⁹⁴ The search performed using the search operator in the phrase "computer forum" was performed on March 21, 2021, and was intended to display accurate results for professional discussion forums. Using this search operator avoided displaying false positives. Thus, a simple search for the keyword forum would have displayed results such as: *web forum, internet forum, discussion forum, online forum, virtual forum*, and so on, without guaranteeing that these were professional forums focused on a specific specialised field.

⁹⁵ It is also important to note that forums may remain accessible online despite having been inactive for several years.

The above data provide sufficient evidence to illustrate that forums of discussion remain effective in conveying knowledge in the virtual space, despite the fact that they are no longer among the most popular forms of discourse. Furthermore, it can be observed that between 2021 and 2025, even though Softpedia increased the number of forums and diversified their topics, the number of forum members decreased by 60.2%. The average number of posts per year in Softpedia has also decreased. Thus, while between 2001 and 2021 the annual average number of posts was 1,325,738.6, between 2021 and 2025 it will fall to 798,387.4, a decrease of 60.22% per year, correlated with the declining number of users.

9.2. Qualitative Analysis

Forms of contract of communication established between participants in communicative interactions on specialized web forums have as their main purpose the exchange of information and experiences, getting news, and learning within a professional field, this serving as a means of knowledge transmission between users. We can therefore speak of a knowledge community in which all members tend to keep up to date with the latest information, learn and improve their skills in a specific field.

The identities participating in communicative interaction in professional discussion forums are different from those involved in educational forums and consist of a knowledgeable-novice pairing, in which, usually, novices, due to their limited skills in a particular field, contact the online community active on a web forum dedicated to a specific professional field in order to obtain a certain type of knowledge, specified in the opening sequence of the communicative interaction.

Discursive interaction initiated by the novice user can have different communicative purposes, within the sphere of knowledge transfer, such as: *obtaining knowledge, obtaining help/assistance, obtaining an opinion/feedback, completing partial knowledge, debating specialized topics, and obtaining an explanation of a phenomenon/process*. All these purposes involve the construction of a specific discourse through which knowledge is transferred between speakers, requiring them to assume a distinctive discursive identity.

As an example, in the opening message of a thread in a computer forum of discussions, the communicative intention is stated as follows: *hello guys, I need your help, please help me / I have an old PC [...] THANKS GUYS /*

can you help me fix this issue please. It can be noticed from the structure of the discourse that the locutor is asking for help in order to fix a malfunction. The method of addressing is informal, the interlocutors are referred to in familiar terms, “*guys,*” but the initiator of the speech act adds polite markers, “*please*” / “*thanks*” in order to establish a communicative contract and obtain the necessary help. It is worth pointing out the informal spelling, capital letters, random use of punctuation marks, typical of discourse in virtual environments, as well as the emphasis on the word “*help*” repeated three times, are indications of subjective writing, intended to convey the mood of the initiator of the dialogue to the receptors of the message and to get them involved in communication in order to help him.

9.3. Knowledge Transmission on Web Forums between 2021 and 2025

In order to provide evidence of knowledge transfer, examples of communicative interactions in Romanian were selected from the *Softpedia forum* (<https://forum.softpedia.com/>), allowing us to observe whether the manner of communication among Romanian users remains consistent between 2001 and 2025, despite generational change and the decline in popularity of web forums as a means of knowledge transmission. The selected examples were all published on the *Softpedia forum* between 2021 and 2025.

The discursive identities assumed in a professional web forum are determined and shaped by the communicative purpose of the initiator of the communicative interaction. Thus, once a person assumes that they lack the knowledge they need in a specialized field, they will discursively construct a particular identity within the forums in order to express their situation. The locutor may assume the lack of knowledge, may insist on a serious situation that forces them to seek information, may invoke unexpected circumstances, or may claim that they have a problem to solve. The identity that they are forced to assume is either one in which they openly acknowledge their ignorance, mitigate it discursively, or conceal it. For example, the speaker may construct a discourse such as „*știu dar problema mă depășește*” (I know, but the problem is beyond me), in which they do not admit ignorance but only that their level of knowledge is not specialized enough to allow them to solve the problem. This is a strategy through which the locutor actually claims not to know how to solve the problem they are facing, but does not admit their ignorance. Using

such discursive strategies, locutor construct different discourses of ignorance, some direct, others indirect, but all mentioning a cognitive deficiency.

Being the initiator of a discourse of ignorance, the locutor may offer a *contract of communication* to members of a *virtual knowledge community* (the forum) in order to obtain the knowledge, he/she seeks. To this end, the locutor establishes a specific discursive and cultural identity through the manner in which he/she initiates the discussion and the thematic progression of the communicative interaction. The identity is revealed by the manner in which the locutor constructs his/her discourse and refers to it.

It is important to notice that, through the discourse of ignorance initiated, the locutor constructs not only his *discursive identity* but also the *identity of the receivers* of his/her message. The "place" that the locutor gives to the *collocutor(s)* is essential because if no one in the virtual community wants to assume the role offered by the locutor in the situation of communication, the conversation will remain without a response and the communicative interaction will not occur.

In order to see which are the discursive identities assumed by locutors in professional web forums in Romania, the only objective method is to analyse authentic utterances belonging to the discursive interaction on professional web forums. This analysis will allow us to retrieve concrete discursive evidence of the identities assumed by Romanian participants in communicative interactions on Computer science topics in Romanian posted between 2021 and 2025. Based on these data, it will be possible to establish a profile of the Romanian locutor and a set of discursive strategies that he/she uses in a conversation on professional topics in the cyberspace. As mentioned in previous studies (Varga, 2011, Varga, 2015, Cotoc&Cotrău, 2022), discursive identities are determined linguistically, culturally, and diachronically, so the data obtained from discourse analysis will only be used to describe Romanian speakers, native speakers of Romanian, and their discourse in the period between 2021 and 2025.

Therefore, the analysis of the opening sequences of communicative interactions allows us to describe the identity of the locutor, the identity he/she attributes to the interlocutor, and to identify the communicative purpose of the message, as well as the discursive strategy used to obtain knowledge in the online environment. The examples analysed in the following section will provide us with this data and, based on it, enable us to describe precisely how the locutor sees himself, how he positions his interlocutors within the situation of communication, and in what manner he/she thinks he/she should address them in order to achieve his/her communicative goal.

9.3.1. The Locutor, a Person with a Problem to Solve

One of the first strategies used by the locutor is to adopt the identity of a person in distress, a "person who has a problem to solve" in various settings:

[Ro2125, 1] Va salut, am si eu o problema [...] Un sfat cum as putea remedia problema? Multumesc⁹⁶ **(Hello, I also have a problem [...] Any advice on how I could fix the problem? Thanks)**

In this first example, the locutor assumes the role of a "*person who has a problem to solve*" but which is not that serious. It can also be noticed that he/she does not assume ignorance, he/she is not uninformed, the locutor does not claim that he/she does not know or that he/she does not have the necessary skills. The purpose of his/her communication is to "*seek advice*", assistance from outside as he/she knows but currently has no idea how to solve the problem. So rather than knowing/learning, it is about having an assistant, and this secondary role of assistant is assigned to the collocutor. We notice that the speaker's discursive identity is placed in a position of strength, assuming the identity of "*a person who acts and is willing to listen to the advice of others*" and that the position he/she assigns to the interlocutor, the one with specialized skills, is a secondary one, without authority, that of advisor, counselor, assistant. As a strategy to catch the collocutor's attention, the locutor uses, in the closing sequence of his/her utterance, a mark of common politeness: *Mulțumesc* (*Thanks*). Given the minimal role assigned to the collocutor and the lack of recognition of his/her competences, it is very difficult for an unknown person to engage in such a contract of communication.

A different example:

[Ro2125, 2] Salutare! Am o problema la Windows 10 PRO.[...] Care a mai patit asa si a rezolvat problema? **(Hi there! I have a problem with Windows 10 PRO.[...] Who has experienced this and solved the problem?)**

The initial sequence of the communicative interaction is more familiar than in the previous example, and the discourse remains in the same register until the end. Thus, we can see the expression „*am o problemă la Windows...*”,

⁹⁶ The communicative interactions have not been modified or edited, as in the previous chapters, the author's intention being to preserve the authenticity of the discourse and the form in which it was transmitted by the emitter. Also, those parts of the message that do not correspond to the interrogative sequences involved in the transmission of knowledge have been omitted.

as well as the closing sequence, a direct question addressed to the audience, through which the locutor assigns a specific identity to "*somebody who has experienced this and solved the problem*" (**somebody who has experienced this and solved the problem**). It should be noticed that competence and knowledge are not relevant as long as the problem is solved. The locutor does not assume ignorance, which is implied in the text, and does not grant the collocutor a position of authority.

The following example presents a situation similar in terms of discursive structure. It should be noticed that the locutor approaches the "community" as a whole and constructs a collective discursive identity, avoiding positioning him/herself in any discursive relationship, which is established through inference. Thus, the collocutor is a multiple, non-individualized, impersonal character with no specific features. The written discourse is complemented by images, which are necessary due to the locutor's verbal schematism:

[Ro2125, 3] Salut comunitate

Am o problema la instalarea windows-ului de pe stick [...]. Poze aici:
(Hello community / I'm having a problem installing windows from a memory stick [...]. Pictures here:)

In [Ro2125, 4], the locutor assumes the identity of a person facing a serious problem and needing help. At the same time, he/she expresses his/her desire to take action in order to solve the problem, using the interrogative sequence "*what could I do?*" as a discursive strategy. On the other hand, despite asking for help, the speaker does not want to appear helpless, so he/she mentions that, before asking others for help, he/she tried to solve the problem and, after facing failure, he/she appeals to the community for help (the purpose of initiating communicative interaction). It is noteworthy that this locutor also does not admit his ignorance but prefers to express himself subjectively, showing concern that he might make mistakes: "*I'm afraid I might delete something.*" Obviously, in this context, deleting data can only be caused by ignorance of the subject. Of particular note are the initial sequence of the discourse, an informal but neutral greeting, and the closing sequence, which convey that this locutor is being more polite than the previous ones.

[Ro2125, 4] Buna.

am o problema grava cu tastatura de la laptop [...] ce as putea sa fac?
 am incercat cateva variante de pe internet dar nici una nu functioneaza,
 iar ca sa intru in bios sau ceva de genul mi-e frica ca as putea sa sterg
 ceva [...]. multumesc de ajutor. numai bine. **(Hi. / I have a serious**

problem with the keyboard on my laptop [...] what can I do? I tried a couple of options on the internet but none of them work, and to get into bios or something like that I'm afraid I might delete something [...]. thanks for your help. all the best.)

A more formal communicative interaction with a politeness that is more marked discursively (second person plural address, present tense of the verb to ask) is assumed by the locutor in [Ro2125, 5]. He states his ignorance euphemistically: "*I don't have much experience.*" The aim of the communication is to request advice ("*please advise*", "*can you advise me*"), guidance. As in the case of previous communicative interactions, this discursive identity, even if more formal, does not grant a position of authority to the one who has the advantage of knowledge. The locutor is the main character, the one who acts and knows what he/she wants, while the collocutor only has to guide him/her and make suggestions so that, despite his/her lack of skills, he/she can solve the problem. Asking for a suggestion takes cognition/knowledge transfer/learning out of the equation. The locutor does not want to improve his/her knowledge and is not willing to learn anything new.

[Ro2125, 5] Vă rog să-mi recomandați un program pentru backup [...] recunosc că nu am mare experiență pe windows 10, ... Îmi puteți recomanda un program care să poată face treaba asta și pe windows 10? Mersi frumos! (Would you please recommend me a program for backup [...] I admit I don't have much experience on windows 10, ... Can you recommend a program that can do the job on windows 10? Thanks!)

Example [Ro2125, 6] introduces a speaker who assumes ignorance in an indirect manner by expressing a willingness to "*know*". The message is rather brief, impersonal, and focused on technical issues, with discursive identities being merely implied. We are dealing with a locutor, a person who lacks the necessary knowledge and who "*wants to know*," interacting with "*a person who knows*" and from whom he/she expects the transfer of knowledge. There is no explicit discursive reference to the identity of the collocutor, but the relationship established is that mentioned in the theoretical framework of this volume, namely the binomial of *expert-novice*:

[Ro2125, 6] As vrea sa stiu si eu care e diferenta dintre x32 si x64. (I would like to know the difference between x32 and x64.)

In other situations of communication, [Ro2125, 7], ignorance is explicitly stated by the locutor, though not completely, since the presence of discursive attenuators such as „*nu prea știi eu cum se face... sau dacă am nevoie de o aplicație...*” is meant to reduce the impact of complete ignorance in the message. Thus, there is a locutor who assumes ignorance and who, despite this, is full of initiative „*...m-am gândit să fac o partiționare...*”. The purpose of communication, again, is not knowledge but finding new ideas. In this context, the speaker constructs the identity of the interlocutor, viewing them as a whole, as a community, not as an individual, as a “*source of new ideas*”, not as an authority or a possible source of knowledge.

[Ro2125, 7] Salut / Am un hdd de peste 400 de Gb mai exact de 470 si as vrea sa fac o partiționare. În primul rand mam gandit sa fac o partitionare [...] / Acum nu prea stiu eu cum se face partitionarea asta, sau daca am nevoie de o aplicatie anume. Daca aveti alte idei [...] ar fi excelent. Multumesc anticipat. **(Hi / I have a hdd of over 400 Gb more exactly 470 and I would like to partition it. First of all I thought to do a partition [...] / Now I don't really know how to do this partitioning, or if I need a specific application. If you have other ideas [...] that would be great. Thanks in advance.)**

In [Ro2125, 8], the locutor states that he needs help and, using politeness strategies, “asks to be helped.” His speech is much more subjective than the previous ones, with marks of subjectivity being much more present. The initial stated goal is the urgent need for help in resolving a situation described in detail, from which it can be seen that the locutor is not a passive person waiting for someone else to solve their problems. On the contrary, a series of unsuccessful actions are mentioned: „am fost la un service [...] am reinstalat Windows [...] am pus driver și tot nimic”, an objective description intended to attract the attention of the community and its specialists. It can be seen how, if at the beginning of the speech the speaker positions himself in a position of weak authority, asking for help from others, at the end of the communication, he/she no longer wants help but only needs “suggestions.” It can be seen how, with the last words of the communication, from a modest position of „vă rog, am nevoie de ajutor”, the speaker positions himself in a position of authority, makes assessments of the situation as „ciudat rău” and inquires “Suggestions?”:

[Ro2125, 8] Nu stiu daca am ales bine sectiunea dar va rog, am nevoie de ajutor! [...] am fost la un service cu unitatea sa imi puna cooler si ssd. Am reinstalat windows. Am pus driver audio si tot nimic. La Sound

nici nu imi apare acea chestie cu Speaker (High Definition Audio). Apare si dispare.... ciudat rau. Sugestii? **(I don't know if I selected the right section but please, I need help! [...] I went to a service with the drive to get my cooler and ssd put in. I reinstalled windows. I put audio driver and still nothing. In Sound, I don't even get that Speaker (High Definition Audio) thing. It pops up and disappears.... strange bad. Any suggestions?)**

The locutor assumes the position of an autodidact in [Ro2125, 9], who "*acuma caută pe net*" for the knowledge necessary to solve the problem, although the fact that "*nu mai știe dacă avea activată opțiunea*" constructs, by inference, a discourse of ignorance. Here we observe an identity that attempts to conceal ignorance through a series of actions that will make amends for the situation in which he finds himself: „*caut pe net [...] caut CD-ul de Windows*”. All these actions are contradicted by the phrase „*Până atunci poate aveți voi idei mai bune [decât mine]*”. We observe a locutor who conceals ignorance, does not grant the collocutor a position of authority, which is understandable in the case of knowledge transfer. The collocutors are not appreciated for their skills, they are only a "*source of better ideas*" and nothing else, the other is a source of ideas that the locutor can use. This expresses a common practice in the virtual space, that of using others for one's own benefit.

[Ro2125, 9] [...] Acuma caut pe net ce e de facut, sa fac un usb bootabil ca sa pot initializa Windows Recovery, desi nu mai stiu daca aveam pornita optiunea, Incerc sa caut CD-ul de Windows. Pana atunci poate aveți voi idei mai bune. (...) **Now I'm looking on the net what to do, to make a bootable USB so I can initialize Windows Recovery, although I don't know if I had the option turned on, I'm trying to find the Windows CD. Until then maybe you guys have better ideas.**

In [Ro2125, 10], the discursive communication presents a rather unusual structure. After outlining the technical aspects, the locutor intervenes ex-abrupto by using the interrogative sequence "*Care-i șpilu'?*" as a discursive strategy to obtain the knowledge he/she needs. This first colloquial interrogation is complemented by a second one that also includes an answer, expressing a possible cause of the problem, according to the speaker. Regarding the identity of the interlocutor who could resolve the situation, it is a person „*care a pățit și știe vreo soluție*" (**who has experienced this and knows a solution**). Thus, by addressing potential helpers with "you," the locutor does not conceptualize a collocutor "*who has specialized knowledge and skills*" but rather as "*people who*

know because they have been through this before and have managed to cope". Therefore, it is a matter of simple, pragmatic knowledge that does not necessarily involve specialized skills. For this speaker, the forum is discursively conceptualized as "a place where I can try my luck".

[Ro2125, 10] Asa cum zice si titlul, daca deschide Desktop-ul / [...] Care-i pilu? Imi porneste File Explorer fara drepturi de administrator sau cum? Nu stiu daca a patit cineva chestia asta si stie vreo solutie, da' imi incerc norocu' la voi. **(As the title says, if you open the Desktop / [...] What's the problem? Does File Explorer start without administrator rights or what? I don't know if anyone has experienced this and knows a solution, but I'll try my luck with you guys.)**

9.3.2. The Surprised Locutor

A discourse of ignorance built on the element of surprise can be noticed in example **[Ro2125, 11]**. The locutor is taken by surprise by a technical malfunction that he/she cannot explain. The message is one of the most formal among those analysed in the 2021-2025 corpus, a standard greeting is used, the identity of the collocutor is discursively constructed as a collective identity of "everyone", and the members of the virtual community are recognised as "people who know". It can also be noticed that the locutor expresses his subjectivity discursively by constructing an extended discourse in which he expresses his surprise over the technical problem he is facing and his gratitude for the information he will receive.

[Ro2125, 11] Buna ziua tuturor!
[...] Am constatat cu suprindeere ca atunci cand tastatura este conectata, nu se poate scrie [...] Daca cineva cunoaste vreo modalitate prin care se pot introduce diacriticele as fi extrem de recunoscator. **(Hello everyone! / [...] Am fost surprins să constat că atunci când tastatura este conectată, nu se poate tasta [...] Dacă cineva știe o modalitate de a introduce diacritice, aș fi extrem de recunoscător.)**

9.3.3. The Informative Locutor

A change in the discursive structure of communicative interactions on Romanian web forums can be noticed in several threads published in 2025. Here, it is no longer a matter of asking for help; on the contrary, an expert in the field announces the launch of a new version to the community, thus

taking the initiative to convey specialized knowledge without being asked. It can be seen that the speaker positions himself discursively in a position of authority, while the members of the community represent novices who require training. The communication is brief, clear, and concise, with any marks of politeness or subjectivity absent. The message lacks the opening and closing sequences.

[Ro2125 12] Microsoft a lansat versiunea 25H2 in Release Preview. / <https://www.neowin.n...elease-preview/> / Se pregateste lansarea variantei RTM in aproximativ 2 luni. **(Microsoft has released version 25H2 in Release Preview. / <https://www.neowin.n...elease-preview/> / The RTM version is scheduled to be released in approximately 2 months.)**

9.3.4. The Unsatisfied Collocutor

Whenever the locutor doesn't provide adequate information, even if the post is impersonal, clear, and objective, such discursive issue causes the collocutor to adopt an attitude of discontent due to lack of information. The latter responds to the locutor with a critical attitude, placing him in a novice position within the situation of communication, due to the limited amount of information provided. The collocutor displays an attitude of superiority and adversity:

[Ro2125 13] pai si care e nouatatea? zi ceva acolo despre el ca n-ai deschis topic sa zici ca apare o indexare de versiune:))) **(Well, what's new? Say something about it, you didn't open the topic to say that a version index appears :)))**

9.3.5. Discourses of Social Networks

One of the major visible changes in terms of communicative interactions in web forums is related to the way communicative contracts are established between collocutors in terms of discursive strategies used by new generations of users. Thus, it can be noticed that, in dialogues on web forums, Romanian users communicate within the same parameters as on social networks.

Such an example is [Ro2125, 14], where several interlocutors exchange information without using markers of subjectivity or politeness, using colloquial language. None of the participants in the communicative interaction use discursive sequences presenting aperture and closure sequences. There

are numerous markers of informal communication that are detrimental to transmission of knowledge.

[Ro2125, 14]

[L1] Ce se mai aude de update-ul acesta? (**How's that update coming along?**)

[L2] E în faza de rollout, poate dura și săptămâni până ajunge la toți... Nu mai rezistați acum și aveți musai nevoie de 22H2? (**It's in the rollout phase, it may take weeks to reach everyone... Can't wait any longer and absolutely need 22H2?**)

[L3] Am facut upgrade de la 21H2 la 22H2. / Din ce observ File Explorer nu are taburile, Task Managerul este cel nou... / La voi cum este? (**I upgraded from 21H2 to 22H2. / From what I can see, File Explorer doesn't have tabs, Task Manager is the new one... / How is it for you?**)

[L4] La mine pe Laptop a mers updateul din installerul de win 11 (nu o vint in updates). / Pe PC in schimb nu vrea nicicum. Nici din updates, nici installer, nici din ISO / Ambele aveau 21H2, dar PC-ul nu vrea deloc (**The update from the Windows 11 installer worked on my laptop (it didn't come in updates). / On my PC, however, it doesn't work at all. Neither from updates, nor from the installer, nor from ISO / Both had 21H2, but the PC doesn't want it at all.**)

[L5] Iti da vreo eroare? / Incarca cu mufa de internet scoasa. (**Are you getting any errors? / Try removing the internet plug.**)

From the interrogative sequences, it can be appreciated that interlocutors are not engaged in knowledge transmission, they are discussing a new software version in terms of a trivial matter. However, it appears that no one seems to require information and knowledge, each communicates the information they already know without any of the interlocutors appearing to require it. Knowledge transfer is replaced by dialogue, which is typical of conversations on social media.

9.3.6. The Expert Who Fails to Inform

One other example where it can be noticed that transmission of knowledge is not occurring, despite a direct request from the novice locutor, is [Ro2125, 15]. The locutor addresses the forum community directly and informally, requesting specific specialized information. Surprisingly, compared to the way communication took place within web forums back in 2009; in 2025, it can be remarked that the expert, instead of transmitting knowledge in response

to the novice-locutor's request, answers with a link to specialized bibliography and then, in two utterances, provides incomplete information.

[Ro2125, 15]

[L1] Aveti idee cum pot ramane cu tastatura doar pt engleza (united states) & romana? momentan sunt incurcate treburile pe la mine / multumiri (**Do you have any idea how I can keep the keyboard only for English (United States) & Romanian? Things are a bit messy at the moment / thanks**)

[L2] Ai ghid de instalare și gestionare direct de la Microsoft: (**You have an installation and management guide directly from Microsoft:**) <https://support.microsoft.com/en-us/windows/manage-the-input-and-display-language-settings-in-windows-12a10cb4-8626-9b77-0ccb-5013e0c7c7a2> / Poți schimba Display Language pe US English, dar nu are prea mare importanță. / Important e să adaugi la Preferred Language US English și Română (**You can change the Display Language to US English, but it doesn't really matter. / The important thing is to add US English and Romanian to Preferred Language.**)

These observations of the communicative interactions of users on web forums in recent years allow us to conclude that the transmission of knowledge on specialized Romanian-language web forums is no longer as reliable, which explains why web forums are constantly decreasing their activity.

The examples analysed throughout this section demonstrate that changes in discursive structure have occurred over time in professional discussion forums and that the constant interaction between the discourse of ignorance and the discourse of knowledge, expressed directly, inferentially or euphemistically, so specific to the transmission of knowledge on web forums in 2009, tends to disappear nowadays in favor of discussions that present the features of social networks' communicative interactions.

9.4. Knowledge Transmission on Web Forums Nowadays

With regard to web forums in Romania, it has been noticed that their popularity has declined significantly since 2009 in favor of multimedia communication and that, out of the numerous discussion forums accessible in Romanian cyberspace, very few are still active today.

On a discursive level, observing communicative interactions in professional web forums allows us to state that, compared to previous studies (Varga 2008, Varga 2015), the identity of interlocutors and their relationship

to knowledge and ignorance has changed. Thus, we observe that the locutor, rather than positioning themselves in a position of weak authority, which they should assume due to their lack of specialized skills, takes on a position of authority and places the competent person in a secondary position, as an *assistant*, *source of data*, or *source of ideas*. Moreover, it can be noticed that the speaker, despite his ignorance, shows no willingness to acquire knowledge. At present, we are witnessing a communication in which the ignorant speaker does not want to learn but wants to solve a problem with the help of someone who knows, without acknowledging that person's superiority in any way. On a discursive level, it can be noticed that ignorance and knowledge are brought under the sign of equality. On the contrary, within communicative interaction, the one who knows must accept the position of *assistant*, *advisor*, and *source of ideas* for the ignorant.

On the other hand, accepting ignorance as part of the locutor's discursive identity seems to be an increasingly difficult attitude to assume. The locutor, in the examples analysed, seems to prefer to omit, diminish or conceal ignorance, using discursive strategies to indicate that he/she is fully aware of it only that he/she does not want to acknowledge and assume it.

This striking change in the approach of those who lack knowledge but require it towards those who possess expertise in a particular field and are willing to assist took place in a relatively short period of time, within a decade. Comparisons with other similar studies allow us to conclude that, within discussion forums, discursive identity was assumed differently between 2000, 2015, and 2025.

Further typical discursive features of communication in professional forums of discussion in Romanian are as follows: most messages begin abruptly, without an opening sequence or any form of greeting. Most of the time, locutors use informal, casual language. They hardly ever use diacritics, and spelling mistakes are very frequent. At the discursive level, currently, in Romanian-language communication within professional forums, the main topic of discussion is narrowly focused on the technical issue that the speaker wishes to resolve. This conveys a communicative intention that differs from what could be observed in professional discussion forums from a decade ago. Thus, there is no longer a search for knowledge, understanding of the problem, its causes, and the mechanism that triggered it. At present, Romanian users on specialized forums are looking for simple, pragmatic knowledge, a quick solution that does not require intellectual effort for the problem they are facing. The locutor discursively constructs the identity of the discussion partner in

the virtual space, not as “a person who knows, who has studied and who has accumulated knowledge over time,” but as “an assistant, an advisor, an experienced person who has useful ideas,” in short, a person with cognitive resources whose knowledge can be useful to the ignorant speaker in solving a problem about which the latter does not want to know anything. Very seldom is the “desire to know” expressed, and under no circumstances is the fact that an interlocutor knows more than the locutor a reason to appreciate or consider he/she better.

For the time being, it can be said that in Romanian-language specialised forums, we are faced with a *discourse of refusal to engage in learning process* and a *discourse of dissimulation of ignorance* that may evolve in the future into a *discourse of imposture*. Furthermore, specialists demonstrate a subtle reluctance to share their knowledge with younger generations, with some encouraging collocutors to consult bibliographic sources. There is also a noticeable trend for communication on web forums to become increasingly similar to that on social networks.

10. Terminology on Specialised Web Forum Communication

Communication in professionally oriented web forums is specialised in nature, and the thematic focus of our study in this volume relates to issues concerning the Windows operating system. Therefore, in addition to the identities assumed by speakers and the discursive structure described in previous chapters, terminology constitutes a specific element of this discursive genre. In order to develop a deeper understanding of how Romanian-speaking users communicate in this field within web forums, it is important to analyze aspects such as: a) terminological density in the corpus of the study, b) most frequently used terms in conversations in the 2006-2009 corpus, c) terms most frequently used in conversations within the 2021-2025 corpus, and d) commonly used terms in both periods. Quantitative and qualitative analysis of all this information will allow us to establish a more accurate profile of discourse on Romanian-language web forums.

In the following sections, we will analyze this data step by step.

10.1. Quantitative Analysis of Terminological Data

A quantitative analysis of the data consists mainly of examining the frequency lists of monolexical and plurilexical terms identified in the two periods covered by the research corpus. These lists were created with the help of corpus creation and exploration software such as *SketchEngine* (<https://www.sketchengine.eu/>), and *AntConc* (<https://www.laurenceanthony.net/software/antconcl/>), while the application *One Click Terms* (<https://terms.sketchengine.eu/>) was used in order to automatically extract the terms. All terms, regardless of the software used, were extracted from the same corpus, together with their frequency. The main application used for this purpose was *AntConc*, with the others being used for additional information and comparison.

Duplicate terms were removed from the frequency lists using the application *Compare Two Lists* (<https://vovsoft.com/software/compare-two-lists/>), while all correctly spelled forms were preserved. These data provide the basis for our terminological analysis.

10.1.1. Terminological Density

Terminological density serves as an indicator of the specialisation level of written or oral communication. In order to assess specialisation level, the number of terminological occurrences in a document is compared to the number of words that comprise the document. We consider that a terminological density of at least 10% corresponds to an average level of specialization, one of at least 20% corresponds to a high level of specialization, and a terminological density of less than 10% represents texts of a general, non-specialized nature.

Thus, in this study, the research corpus compiled between 2006 and 2009 comprises 27,592 tokens, with 318 monolexical terms and 1,397 occurrences, and 129 plurilexical terms with 423 occurrences, i.e. a total of 447 terms and 1,820 occurrences. Therefore, the terminological density in the corpus covering the aforementioned period is 6.59%.

The research corpus, covering the period 2021-2025, comprises 26,286 tokens, of which 143 are monolexical terms with 331 occurrences, 280 are plurilexical terms with 1588 occurrences, forming a total of 423 terms and 1919 occurrences. This represents a terminological density of 7.3%.

The total density of the corpus takes into account 53,878 tokens and 727 terms, with 3,739 occurrences, resulting in a density level of 6.93%. This allows us to state that the terminological density of the corpus has a general, scientific popularization feature, which corresponds specifically to web communication.

10.1.2. High-Frequency Terms

With regard to the most representative terms in the corpus, the frequency lists show the following situation. From the analyzed terminological inventory, the most frequent monolexical terms in the period 2006-2009 are:

No	Monolexical Terms	Freq.
1.	program	87
2.	eroare	58
3.	net	41
4.	parolă	41
5.	wireless	28
6.	calculator	27
7.	microsoft	25

8.	software	22
9.	versiune	20
10.	windows	20

The plurilexical terms with the highest frequency during this period are:

No	Plurilexical Terms	Freq.
1.	program files	45
2.	system restore	25
3.	windows system32	18
4.	attached file	14
5.	control panel	13
6.	microsoft word	11
7.	software microsoft	11
8.	device manager	10
9.	Microsoft Internet Explorer	9
10.	placă video	7
11.	click dreapta	6

Frequency lists covering the period 2021-2025 indicate that the most frequent monolexical terms are:

No	Monolexical Terms	Freq.
1.	update	177
2.	click	45
3.	instalat	43
4.	ssd	31
5.	upgrade	30
6.	instalare	27
7.	preview	24
8.	version	24
9.	build	23
10.	files	23

Furthermore, the most frequent plurilexical terms in this period of the corpus are:

No	Plurilexical Terms	Freq.
1.	program files	26
2.	system restore	20
3.	program files	19
4.	windows system32	18
5.	control panel	13
6.	device manager	10
7.	microsoft internet	9
8.	remove programs	6
9.	click dreapta	6
10.	registry cleaner	4

Terminology identified in the corpus falls into the following 9 thematic categories: *file types, user types, interface elements, software, hardware, actions, internet, commands, and errors/malfunctions.*

10.2. Qualitative Analysis of Terminological Data

Contrastive analysis of frequency lists allows us to identify which terms are specific to each of the two periods of the corpus, as well as those used in both periods. In order to avoid unnecessary repetitions and excessive lists of terms, only the first 10 most frequent terms or terminological forms will be mentioned, as they appear in the body of the text, rather than in their lexicographical form.

Among the specialized terms identified in the corpus, some are used both in the 2006-2009 period and in the 2021-2025 period. Of these terms, the most frequent are:

No	Common Terms	Freq.
1.	eroare	58
2.	program files	45
3.	wireless	28

4.	system restore	25
5.	software	22
6.	restore	19
7.	windows system32	18
8.	folder	18
9.	file	17
10.	internet	17
11.	instalare	15

The list of frequencies in which the terms used in our research corpus appear between 2006 and 2009 allows us to observe that, during this period, terms referring to operating systems, types of users, or elements related to the Internet were used frequently:

No	Specific Terms	Freq.
1.	program	87
2.	net	41
3.	parolă	41
4.	moderators	36
5.	emoticons	34
6.	calculator	27
7.	microsoft	25
8.	versiune	20
9.	windows	20
10.	word	19

The terms used in professional web forums between 2021 and 2025 are much more focused on concrete concepts. It is remarkable to point out that, compared to the previous period of the corpus, Anglicisms with Romanian equivalents, such as *version*, *upgrade*, *build*, and *laptop*, are used in a more frequent basis. Some of the most common terms in this recent period of the corpus are:

No	Specific Terms	Freq.
1.	click	45
2.	instalat	43
3.	ssd	31
4.	upgrade	30
5.	preview	24
6.	version	24
7.	build	23
8.	actualizare	19
9.	laptop	17
10.	tab	16

In terms of the thematic categories to which they belong, the terms employed by users participating in web forums focused on IT issues are heterogeneous, as will be illustrated in the following section.

10.2.1. Categories of Terms

Terminology extracted from the corpus of Romanian-language web forums is commonly used by participants to acquire, communicate, and transmit knowledge. Given that communication occurs between individuals with heterogeneous levels of knowledge in a highly informal setting, it is reasonable to assume that the level of specialisation in these exchanges is relatively low. Even if the speaker is an expert, he/she is aware that they must communicate in a way that the interlocutor, who wishes to obtain knowledge, can understand.

Terminology used in the research corpus highlights the main areas of interest for web forum participants. As a result, 9 categories of terms were identified, which will be discussed below. As previously mentioned, only 10 terms, based on their frequency, will be provided as examples for each category.

From a thematic point of view, considering that these are web forums dealing with discussion topics related to operating systems, it is appropriate to proceed with the category of *software*. In this category, the most frequent terms refer to general concepts such as: *program* (87), *software* (22), *version*

(20), and *driver* (13). However, there are also terms referring very precisely to the operating system to which the web forum is dedicated: *windows* (20), *windows system*³² (18), as well as other applications such as: *office xp* (5), *firefox* (4), and *player* (4).

Another category consists of terms that refer to *hardware*, among which there are terms designating a computer system: *calculator* (27), *laptop* (17), *computer* (9), *calculatorul* (8) or parts of it: *screen* (19), *device* (17), *procesor* (15), *display* (13), *procesorul* (12), or *ecran* (8)

Another category of terms that users are interested in is *file types*, which appear in the corpus in a variety of forms and with a high number of occurrences. Their use demonstrates the areas of focus for communication in the web forum under study: *program files* (45), *word* (19), *folder* (18), *registrii* (15), *attached file* (14), *exe* (14), *microsoft word* (11), *excel* (7), *video* (11), and *arhivă* (5).

Knowledge transfer within the IT field often involves the communication of instructions, and their precise execution is a guarantee of success. For this reason, numerous terms refer to actions related to specific computer program operations. Of these terms, we mention the following as being the most frequent in our research corpus: *click* (45), *actualizare* (19), *instalarea* (14), *restore* (14), *reinstala* (13), *restart* (11), *recuperare* (10), *update* (10), *backup* (9), and *incarcare* (8). It can be noticed that, in terms of operations, four Anglicisms are used with great frequency in Romanian: *restore* (14), *restart* (11), *update* (10), and *backup* (9).

Closely related to the operations performed by the user while working on a computer are the various commands that must be selected in order for the computer to perform requested operations. Thus, specific commands associated with Windows operating systems are also featured in the corpus. Some of the terms in this category are: *preview* (24), *refresh* (10), *search* (10), *printscreen* (7), *registry* (7), *install* (6), *remove programs* (6), *password recovery* (3), *command prompt* (2), and *convert link* (2).

Furthermore, alongside the operations and commands of the Windows operating system, terms referring to elements of its graphical user interface are also used. These include: *preview* (24), *system restore* (20), *desktop* (18), *tab* (16), *taskbar* (16), *menu* (15), *iconitele* (5), *control panel* (13), *fereastră* (4), and *button* (4). Even though a Romanian terminology exists for these concepts, and the operating system and important software packages have been localized into Romanian quite a while ago, it is worth noting that most of the terms with the highest frequency are Anglicisms. This shows that Romanian users

are still very comfortable using operating systems and their applications in English.

Computer systems and applications currently used in everyday activities by users around the world can experience malfunctions. In order to address these issues, many users turn to professional web forums for guidance on how to avoid them or repair the damage they cause. Under the category of computer system or application malfunctions, the corpus contains terms such as: *bug* (12), *eroare* (12), *virus* (4), *infectat* (3), *piraterie* (3), *troian* (3), *antivirus* (2), *antivirusi* (2), *calculator virusat* (1), *anti-malware* (1), *setat greșit* (1) sau *tip de erori* (1). It can even be argued that user errors and hardware and software malfunctions are the driving force behind IT web forums.

Equally representative for communication in the IT field is the presence of terminology that designates the types of users these systems have. Among these, the following are mentioned in the corpus *user* (7), *administrator* (6), *admin* (3), *userii* (3), *userul* (3), *super user* (2), *userul guest* (1), and *system administrator* (2). This terminology designates the people who connect to a web forum and indicates their place in the hierarchy of a communication network.

Other terms designating elements related to the field of networking are: *net* (41), *emoticon* (34), *internet* (17), *connection* (10), *bluetooth* (9), *link* (7), *mail* (7), *site* (7), *conexiune* (4), and *internet explorer* (4). Most of these refer to broad terms (*net* 41, *internet* 17), ways of connecting (*connection* 10, *bluetooth* 9, *conexiune* 4), network communication applications (*mail* 7, *internet explorer* 4), but also to specific elements of network communication (*emoticon* 34).

Some unexpected terms show up throughout the research, for example the verb *a downloada* and its related words, used in Romanian in the 1990s when Romanian speakers, after the fall of communism, had free access to personal computers and IT language was developing in Romanian. This verb was replaced between 2005 and 2010 by the pair “*a încărca – a descărca* (*ceva de/pe Internet*)” (*to upload – to download something from/to the Internet*), disappearing from the vocabulary of speakers. However, we would like to point out that this verb is still used in communication on IT-specialised web forums. Such is the case in our research corpus, where the terms *downloadez* and *downloadat* are mentioned both between 2006 and 2009 and between 2021 and 2025.

Thus, for the 2006-2009 corpus period, we find one occurrence attesting to the use of two inflected forms of the verb *a downloada*, as shown in their contexts:

Salutare, am si eu o intrebare, am *downloadat* un film, si pentru a ma uita la el mi se cere un anume player... [Mar 30 2009]

mi sa instalat corect mia mers, dar la deschiderea programului i,i scrie ceva sa *downloadez* o E-Licenta. [Jun 14 2008]

The same inflected forms of the term referred to above are found in contexts proving their usage in the present:

Sunt mai multe motive, unii au *downloadat* noul ISO de microsoft cu 23H2... [04 November 2023]

Pur si simplu *downloadez* imaginea de W11 si o creez? [24 November 2022]

Such contexts confirm an unusually long-lasting presence for an Anglicism that is so difficult to adapt to the inflectional system of Romanian. Its presence in current usage is very difficult to explain because users who employ the terms in communication have different profiles within the forum; some are long-time users, while others are recent users. Furthermore, given that four different users employ the term, it cannot be claimed that its use is accidental. However, despite its attestation in IT web forums, the verb *a downloada* is scarcely used in present-day Romanian.

As it can be noticed, web forums show a low terminological density, a specific feature associated with popular science. Even so, the 727 terms detected and their 3,739 occurrences point to a rich terminology belonging to 9 thematic categories, enabling the fast and easy transfer of knowledge among users participating in Romanian web forums.

11. Discourse Analysis Based on Generative Artificial Intelligence in Romanian

Nowadays, Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) appears to be omnipresent in public communication, across political, economic, medical, and educational fields. Its developers, large multinational companies, target the general public with an overwhelming amount of enthusiastic messages, reporting on the latest achievements in GenAI. While this new technology is a very useful tool for some, for others it represents a shift in society towards a more efficient and less costly production and even creative process. At the same time, particularly in Europe, regulatory institutions and authorities are encouraging a balanced and ethical use of this recent technological breakthrough by publishing the *AI Act (EU Regulation 2024/1689 of the European Parliament and of the Council)* on June 3, 2024.

AI is used not only within the economy, commerce, and industry, but also within the field of science and academic research, with an increasing number of publications studying aspects of its use in fields such as *scientific communication, education, journalism, medicine, marketing, and business*, to name only a few.

Discourse analysis is also a field in which there are elements that indicate that GenAI can be used, without a clear methodology having been established to date and without systematic studies on the reliability of its results. Within this framework, we wish to address and answer the following questions as part of this research: *What operations can ChatGPT perform in discourse analysis? To what extent can ChatGPT assist a researcher in the field of discourse analysis?* For this purpose, we have established the following aims: *a) to establish that ChatGPT can correctly detect a discourse genre; b) that ChatGPT can describe the organization of a given discourse; c) that ChatGPT can correctly determine the number of participants involved in a communicative interaction and their roles; and d) that ChatGPT can identify speech sequences in a given discourse.* We believe that these questions will allow us to evaluate the potential and limitations of this chatbot as a software-based tool for automatic discourse analysis.

11.1. GenAI and Discourse Analysis. Theoretical Framework

Theoretical approaches to GenAI within the field of discourse analysis are currently under investigation in scholarly research. In this regard, a primary focus is placed on analysing the manner in which discourse is constructed and conceptualised in communication related to *artificial intelligence* (Scott 2023, Qiu et al. 2024, Abdulhameed & Al-Sieedy 2024, Alashtary 2024, Arbelaez Ossa et al. 2024, Elmholdt et al. 2025). Another line of research, based on critical discourse analysis, addresses the issue of GenAI with a focus on the way in which these chatbots are trained, as their training can influence the discourse they generate by introducing different ideologies (Breazu & Katsos 2024, Nasih Ahmed & Aziz Mahmood 2024, Algam & Jameel 2025, Mandal 2025). A third approach, on which we will focus in this study, consists of the use of LLM-based GenAI as a research tool within the field of discourse analysis and how it is employed. Included in this third direction we find the use of *chatbots* (*ChatGPT, Gemini, Copilot, etc.*) along with GenAI-based applications intended for discourse analysis.

To begin with, it should be pointed out that, in the virtual space, a certain degree of terminological ambiguity has been observed with regard to the designation of tools aimed at discourse analysis, an ambiguity that requires researchers to make a clear distinction between *discourse analysis* as a subfield of linguistics and *the applications used to perform qualitative data analysis*, sometimes referred to as *discourse analysis tools*, which are used in fields such as *social marketing* and *business*, especially for commercial purposes. Only GenAI-based discourse analysis tools that use a theoretical framework specific to this field in the context of linguistic research are relevant to this study.

This includes chatbots based on LLMs such as *ChatGPT, Gemini, or Copilot*, along with the platform *DiscourseAnalyzer* (<https://discourseanalyzer.com/interactive-articles/>), an online application that claims a focus on discourse analysis from an academic research perspective. The latter is an expert program that can provide theoretical data and practical applications in this field.

Whereas conversational assistants require prompting to achieve the results desired by the user, *DiscourseAnalyzer* is an application that simply requires the user to select the aspects of discourse analysis they wish to focus their research on and enter the text to be analyzed. The application's command menu is versatile, although it does not specify the analysis parameters in great detail, which could be an issue for researchers, as the analysis is rather general. Among the theoretical and practical aspects in this field that researchers can

address with the help of this application, we mention: *thematic analysis, sentiment and emotion analysis, rhetorical analysis, context and audience analysis, linguistic analysis, intertextuality and cross-cultural analysis, genre analysis, critical discourse analysis, conversation analysis, discourse and identities, pragmatics and text implicature, and metaphor and figurative language analysis*. As can be seen from this list, the categories covered are rather general, insufficiently specified in theoretical terms, and not suitable for an academic study in the true sense of the word.

In order to meet the demand for greater precision in analysis, the system features a second menu of options, which describes more specific aspects of the areas of research outlined in the first menu. Thus, depending on what the user selected in the first stage, the second menu can be used in order to narrow down the options. For example, if conversation analysis is selected in the first stage, the following options for the analysis of a given text can be selected in the second stage: *analysis of turns, examination of conversational structures, exploration of repair strategies, politeness strategies and social behavior, analysis of opening and closing sequences in a conversation*, and so on.

However, even with these additional clarifications, the system's analytical capacity is rather basic. Furthermore, being fully automatic, it does not allow for any user intervention during the analysis process. As a result, the discourse analysis cannot be guided towards a well-defined theoretical framework or specific aspects of the text. It is also worth mentioning the system's connectivity limitations, which can slow down the analysis process considerably or even prevent it from running. For example, the system displays error messages when server traffic is heavy. Last but not least, one of the important limitations observed concerns the amount of text that can be analysed, which varies depending on the subscription paid by the user. Therefore, for educational and research purposes, a user who activates a free account on this platform will only be able to analyze up to 300 words of text, which is far too limited to be relevant for any type of textual analysis.

For the purpose of illustrating the capabilities of this application, the system was asked to analyse 3 posts of the thread *Forumul Softpedia – Windows 11 Release Preview - 25H2 (Aug 31 2025)* within the corpus of research. The response generated by the application (Fig. 1) does not represent an academically rigorous discourse analysis, but rather a summary presentation of the content of the analysed dialogue, lacking the specific terminology of the field as well as the details required for in-depth research. Although each message is correctly identified within the communicative interaction (*initial post, response, follow-up*), and although we have a description of the *communicative function and style*

of each reply, it cannot be said that this discourse analysis meets the level of complexity required for academic research.

Furthermore, it can be noticed that the dynamics of the communicative interaction are described using general terms rather than focusing on any specific details, whilst the implication of the participants appears as an incomplete sentence whose meaning is unclear to the user.

Turn-Taking Analysis

Overview

The conversation involves three participants discussing the upgrade to Windows 11 22H2. The exchange focuses on the features, installation experience, and user interface changes.

Turn-Taking Structure

Participant 1: Initial Post

- **Content:** The first participant shares their decision to upgrade to Windows 11 22H2, highlighting new features like the task manager with dark mode, Start menu folders, and tabbed Windows Explorer.
- **Function:** Provides information and personal experience with the upgrade.
- **Style:** Informative and personal, sharing a screenshot and technical details.

Participant 2: Response

- **Content:** This participant separates the discussion into a new topic to focus on the specific version of Windows. They express interest in the new design and request additional visuals.
- **Function:** Organizes the discussion and requests more detailed information.
- **Style:** Directive and inquisitive, aiming to maintain clarity in the conversation.

Participant 3: Follow-up

- **Content:** Confirms the presence of a toggle in the new task manager and shares their preference for the design.
- **Function:** Provides feedback and additional information about the user interface.
- **Style:** Concise and supportive, reinforcing the positive aspects of the new design.

Interaction Dynamics

- **Sequential Order:** The conversation follows a logical sequence, with each participant building on the previous comments.
- **Engagement:** Participants are engaged and responsive, contributing to...

Fig. 1. *DiscourseAnalyzer* – discourse analysis on a given text

Apart from this platform, which, as can be seen, has major limitations in several respects, researchers can also use *ChatGPT*, *Gemini*, or *Copilot*

conversational assistants for discourse analysis. Given that they can be queried, trained, and asked to provide answers based on a given theoretical framework, we consider them to be a more suitable IT solution for automatic discourse analysis. Therefore, the following section will focus on assessing the ways in which *ChatGPT 5.0* can be used in *GenAI-based discourse analysis*.

11.2. Methodology of Work with ChatGPT 5.0

In order to highlight the strengths and limitations of using GenAI-based discourse analysis in academic research, a comprehensive, multi-stage methodology was developed. Therefore, as part of the initial research phase, it was determined which of the online chatbots would be selected in order to assess their capabilities as a valuable research tool. Taking into account that, according to specialised literature, ChatGPT 5.0 has been regarded as having the best performance, the decision was made to conduct the skills assessment via this tool.

The following step consisted in narrowing down a specific corpus for analysis, part of the Romanian web forum corpus covering the period 2021-2025, used in this study, in order to maintain the continuity of the work. Bearing in mind that it is already described in section (5.2.3), we will not revisit these aspects. For the purposes of evaluating the discourse analysis based on GenAI, the text fragment consists of the thread entitled *Forumul Softpedia – Windows 11 Release Preview - 25H2*, posted on Aug 31 2025, URL: <https://forum.softpedia.com/topic/1250888-windows-11-rtm-25h2/>.

Compared to the corpus of the entire work, the corpus selected for this chapter is rather small, consisting of only 1,352 words and 3 standard pages (2,000 characters with spaces). It is part of the corpus of the work and has been saved in a Ms Word file, in docx format. Its discursive structure has been presented in the previous chapters; specifically, it is an asynchronous communicative interaction with multiple participants, whose usernames have been anonymized, consisting of 38 replies and focusing on the Windows 11 operating system.

Stage three of the research involves *prompting*. During this stage, ChatGPT 5.0 was asked to perform various tasks involving the analysis of the given text in order to assess its capabilities. Since it was our intention to assess the system's default capabilities, it was not pre-trained with data and bibliography. However, the requirements were contextualized, mentioning

terms such as *discourse analysis*, *dialogue/conversation analysis*. The latter context was clarified further by mentioning a key author in the field of research, Véronique Traverso, whose work laid the foundations for the analysis of communicative interactions. Considering that ChatGPT has online access to the author's texts, this contextualization allows the analysis to be guided by the researcher in the desired direction and can be useful for limiting errors, incorrect responses, and hallucinations of the chatbot.

During the fourth stage of work, ChatGPT was asked to perform a series of discourse analysis tasks using the corpus that had been selected in the previous stage. This included:

- a identifying the discursive genre of the text;
- b describing the discursive organization of the text;
- c establishing the number of participants in the communicative interaction and their roles;
- d identifying as many discursive sequences as possible in the analysed text.

Once the responses had been generated, ChatGPT was asked for details about the analysis it had performed, including examples of discursive sequences such as disagreement, metadiscursive theme adjustment, clarification, reformulation, validation, etc. The system was also asked to organise all the examples into a table of which it would generate itself.

The final stage of the research consisted of assessing the level of complexity, correctness, and accuracy of the responses generated by ChatGPT 5.0, as an indicator of the extent to which it can assist the researcher in the field of discourse analysis.

All observations and relevant aspects of this research were mentioned in the conclusions section.

11.3. Case study

Automatically generated output from ChatGPT 5.0 following a request to analyse a given discourse can be considered quite complex and consistent with academic research parameters. Thus, the discourse analysis, which comprises 552 words and is organised into seven sections, starting from general parameters of the text and moving through several levels of it. One can see that the analysis is suited to a text with a dialogical structure (Fig. 2), with most of the analysis being dedicated to the participants in the conversation

and to the organization of the turn-taking. It should be noticed that ChatGPT does not have updated terminology for discursive analysis in Romanian, so for the term turn-taking, its training does not include the Romanian equivalent *schimb de replici* (*exchange of replies*), which forces the program to “create” a likely equivalent, according to its algorithms, which we see used throughout the analysis (Fig. 2.). The term is *turn / turnul / turnurile*. However, this issue can be easily addressed through adequate training of the system, allowing it to access Romanian terminology related to the field.

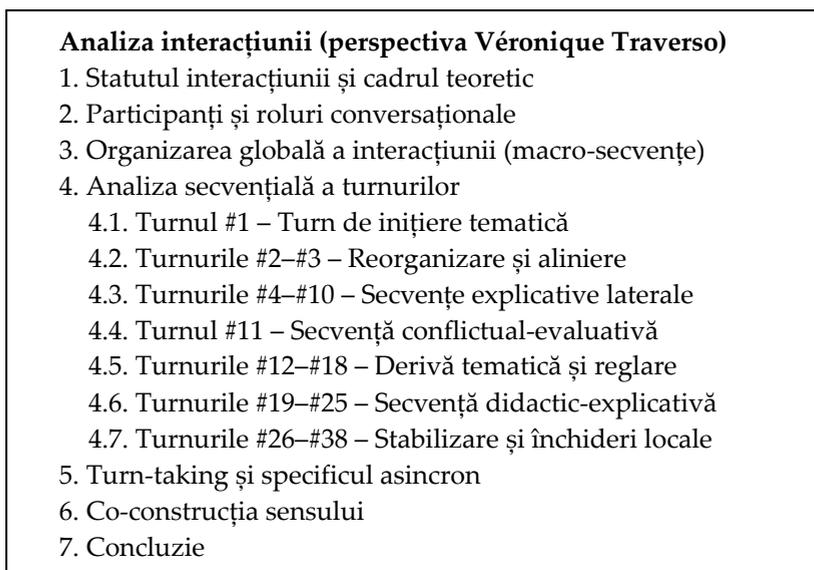


Fig. 2. ChatGPT 5.0 – structure of discursive analysis

A further aspect of the responses generated by ChatGPT 5.0 relates to the theoretical framework outlined in the works of Véronique Traverso. Particularly in the case of an untrained system, this statement should be approached with considerable caution. GenAI is thus able to carry out the tasks assigned to it by the user, however, without applying the same filters that a human trained in discourse analysis would apply. The important point to understand is that GenAI would not cross-check against the theoretical framework it references; rather, it would employ it as a means of contextualization. Hence the significant risk of obtaining erroneous results and interpretations, especially for individuals not thoroughly familiar with the theoretical framework being applied.

Therefore, this structure (Fig. 2), achieved in just a few seconds by the system, could generally confirm or refute that a large corpus of data contains

the information the researcher is looking for. Nevertheless, it is possible to notice a number of terminological inaccuracies, some of which may be of concern to the researcher. Thus, in the ChatGPT 5.0 response, one can notice the use of rather unclear terms in the classification of the discursive sequences that it identifies, such as: *reorganization and alignment*, *lateral explanatory sequences*, *conflictual-evaluative sequence*, *thematic drift and adjustment*, *didactic-explanatory sequence*, *stabilisation*, and *local closures*.

It is the researcher's responsibility to correct and adapt the terminology of the selected theoretical framework in these cases.

11.3.1. Identifying the Genre of Discourse

The first task allowing us to analyse the extent to which ChatGPT 5.0 proves useful for discourse analysis consists in identifying the discursive genre to which a given text belongs.

1. Statutul interacțiunii și cadrul teoretic
 Textul constituie o **interacțiune scrisă asincronă de tip forum**, analizabilă ca **activitate conversațională** în sensul lui Véronique Traverso (*L'analyse des conversations*).

Deși lipsește dimensiunea prosodică, interacțiunea:

- este **dialogică și polilogică**,
- este **organizată secvențial**,
- prezintă **turnuri de vorbire identificabile**,
- permite observarea **activităților conversaționale** și a **mecanismelor de reglare internă**.

Fig. 3. *ChatGPT 5.0 – identifying the genre of a given text*

As can be noticed, the macro-structural analysis has been carried out correctly. The system establishes that this is a "*written, asynchronous, forum-type interaction*" that presents a dialogical structure that can be analyzed from the theoretical perspective of conversation analysis (Traverso 2024). Although we observe certain terminological inaccuracies, such as *forum* instead of *web forum*, the generated response is valid with respect to the analysed text.

It is also worth noting the schematic structure of the response, which can be considered an advantageous feature, as it is easy to read, but also a drawback, as it lacks details, examples, and insights that a human researcher would have added.

11.3.2. Description of Discursive Organization

Concerning the macro-textual organisation of the analysed discourse, ChatGPT 5.0 establishes a thematic classification of speech utterances into six categories, each with a brief description (Fig. 4.).

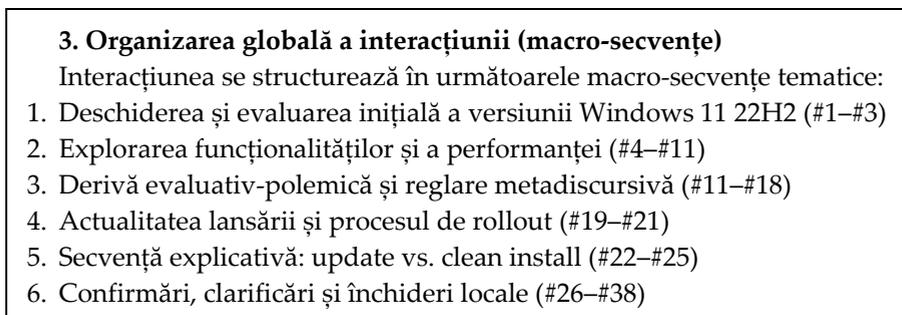


Fig. 4. ChatGPT 5.0 – overall organization of interaction

Once again, even if, apparently at least, the thematic classification of macro-sequences is correct with regard to the thematic content, the classification is rather general, imprecise, and schematic. Furthermore, there is a certain degree of inconsistency in the classification of macro-sequences. For example, macro-sequence 2 is described thematically (*Explorarea funcționalităților și a performanței #4–#11*), while macro-sequence 3 is described analytically (*Derivă evaluativ-polemică și reglare metadiscursivă #11–#18*).

Therefore, unless evaluated and validated by a human researcher, this classification may not be assumed to be accurate. Nevertheless, from a formal standpoint, it provides a valuable educational example for students in this field, demonstrating an effective method of organising information.

11.3.3. Number of Participants and Their Role in Communicative Interaction

When it comes to assessing the number of participants and their role in a given situation of communication, ChatGPT's analysis appears rather complex. Thus, to begin with, the system provides a complete list of locutors involved in the discursive interaction, stating that it is a case of "participare inegal distribuită" in which the discourse is characterized by "reluări tematice" and "adresări selective (quote-uri)."

ChatGPT also establishes a typology of the conversational roles of the participants to the discursive interaction, stating that this was established

based on the ‘tipul de acte produse’, the ‘poziția secvențială’ and the ‘recunoașterea de către ceilalți participanți.’

Following these methodological considerations, ChatGPT 5.0 systematically presents, using a table, the situation of all participants in the situation of communication, providing: name (anonymized in our research), dominant conversational role, textual indicators, and function in the construction of the interaction. Furthermore, the clear and concise organisation of the data is an excellent learning tool for discourse analysis classes (Fig. 5).

Participat	Rol conversațional dominant	Indicatori textuali	Funcție în construcția interacțiunii
1	Inițiator + expert-recunoscut	deschide topicul; răspunde la întrebări; oferă linkuri oficiale	Stabilizează tema, legitimează informația, închide secvențe
2	Contributor minim / resursă externă	postare exclusiv link video	Introduce material extern fără dezvoltare discursivă
3	Evaluator critic	întrebări retorice, judecăți axiologice	Lansează axa critică (AI, hardware)
3	Contestatar pragmatic	evaluări negative recurente; replici scurte	Polarizează discuția, introduce opoziție funcțională
4	Interogator tehnic reflexiv	întrebări complexe + evaluări	Produce secvențe de clarificare și dezbateră
5	Martor empiric precaut	„cred că...”, „o să verific”	Aduce experiență personală neconfirmată
6	Expert polemic / autoritate discursivă	auto-calificare ca specialist; tiradă argumentativă	Reconfigurează ierarhia competențelor, normalizează produsul
7	Novice explicit	întrebare simplă „de unde se poate lua?”	Activează secvență de explicare instituțională
8	Interogator focalizat	întrebare precisă despre CPU	Orientează tema spre compatibilitate
9	Anticipator speculativ	ipoteze despre 26H2 / Windows 12	Extinde temporal conversația
10	Rezolvator tehnic	instrucțiuni imperative + cod	Oferă soluție concretă, închide problemă punctuală

Fig. 5. ChatGPT 5.0 – number of participants and their communicative role

It can be noticed that, with regard to the participants and their role in a communicative interaction, ChatGPT 5.0 manages to fit well within the parameters required for discourse analysis. Moreover, it not only identifies the names of the participants accurately and rapidly, but also provides them with a role in the situation of communicative, established on the basis of textual markers. All of the above data is used by the system to determine the function of each participant in the construction of the interaction.

It must be acknowledged that an analysis of this level is rather noteworthy, considering that the program displays it on screen within seconds. However, despite an understandable level of enthusiasm, it is necessary for the researcher to perform further actions. The *discursive markers* on which the analysis is based are relatively few in the table. In order to establish an accurate profile, the researcher should add all the *discursive markers* he/she finds in the text to the column and afterwards perform the analysis of the role and function of the participants in the communicative interaction. He/she should also cross-check the markers provided by the ChatGPT 5.0 in order to prevent potential hallucinations.

Besides this data, ChatGPT 5.0 also mentions dynamics of participants' roles, setting up 4 different categories: *participatory asymmetry*, *coexistence of two axes*, *legitimacy through seniority and expertise*, and *fluid roles* (Fig. 6.).

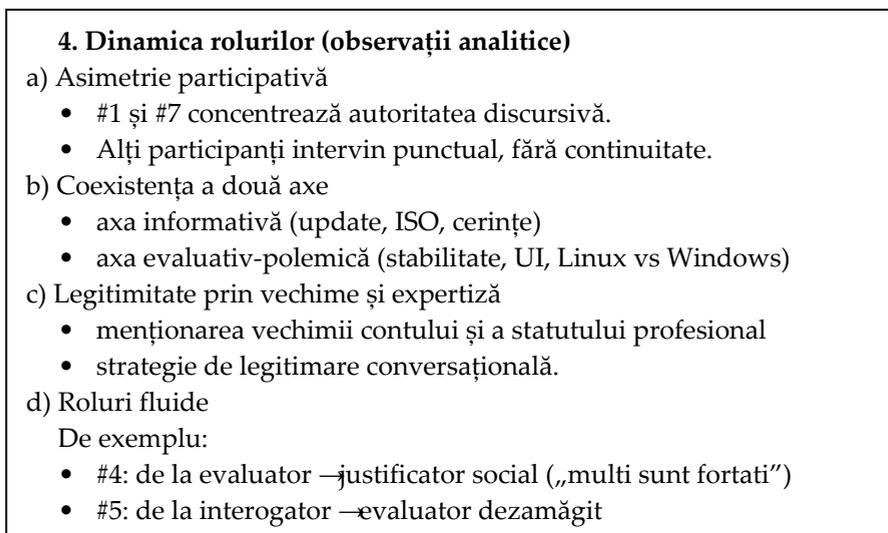


Fig. 6. ChatGPT 5.0 – role dynamics of participants

In the same way that in Fig. 6, in order to accurately determine the dynamics of these roles, a very precise profile based on the speaker's entire

discursive contribution is required. This can only be achieved by the researcher, whose role is to validate the accuracy of ChatGTP's proposed analysis of linguistic data.

In our assessment, with regard to this aspect of discourse analysis, the program demonstrates strong capabilities in organizing and structuring information. These capabilities are consistent with the level of complexity required for scientific research, although it should be pointed out that further data must be provided by the researcher in order to achieve greater accuracy. During this stage of the analysis, the researcher should double-check the data provided by ChatGPT 5.0 and make any necessary corrections.

11.3.4. Detection of Discursive Sequences

In response to a request to identify discursive sequences in the given corpus, the ChatGPT 5.0 mentions the theoretical framework (Traverso 2004) again and provides, without being asked, a definition of this concept: “A *discursive sequence* is understood as a *coherent set of turns* organized around *the same conversational action* (announcement, question, evaluation, polemic, resolution, etc.)” (ChatGPT 2025)

The purpose of these clarifications is most likely to remove ambiguity. Therefore, in the event that the researcher disagrees with the definition provided by the program, he/she may intervene and guide the analysis by providing a new definition or a more precise theoretical framework.

In addition, the program provides general observations on the given corpus, referring to the structure of the dialogue and the coherence of the text:

4. Observație generală (Traverso)

Acest fir de discuție este organizat ca o succesiune de secvențe semi-autonome, nu ca dialog liniar. Coerența este asigurată prin:

- citare selectivă,
- recurența temei,
- recunoașterea unor participanți-centru.

Fig. 7. ChatGPT 5.0 – role dynamics of participants

It should be noticed that the system recognizes specific elements present in online communication, such as the non-linear structure of discourse and its coherence achieved through thematic recurrence.

With regard to the discursive sequences detected, the system states: “The text contains 9 distinct discursive sequences, some of which overlap thematically but are clearly separable functionally.” These are shown in table form, specifying: the type of discursive sequence, the forum posts involved, the main participants, and their description.

Nr.	Tip de secvență discursivă	Turnuri implicate	Participanți principali	Descriere funcțională
S1	Secvență de anunț informativ	#1	1	Deschiderea topicului: lansarea Windows 11 25H2 în Release Preview
S2	Secvență de resursă externă	#2	2	Inserare link video fără comentariu
S3	Secvență de evaluare critică inițială	#3–#4	3,4	Critici privind AI, hardware și bara de start
S4	Secvență de clarificare + minimă corecție	#5–#6	1,4	Răspuns expert + reacție evaluativă negativă
S5	Secvență de problematizare tehnică	#7–#8	5,6	Întrebări despre click dreapta și confirmări empirice
S6	Secvență de polemica argumentativă	#9–#10–#12	7,4	Dezbatere Windows vs Linux/Mac, legitimare prin expertiză
S7	Secvență de cerere de acces / informare practică	#11–#13	8,1	Unde se poate descărca versiunea
S8	Secvență de anticipare și speculație	#14–#16	9,1,10	Cerințe CPU, enablement package, Windows 12
S9	Secvență de rezolvare tehnică procedurală	#17–#18	10,1	Instrucțiuni concrete + închidere instituțională

Fig. 8. ChatGPT 5.0 – discursive sequences identified

It is our understanding that Fig. 8 accurately illustrates how a situation involving discursive sequences identified in a text could be presented. However, the classification of discursive sequences remains relatively broad. Thus, rather than distinguishing between *enunciative, explanatory, argumentative sequences*,

and so on; it can be noticed that ChatGPT 5.0 groups them into thematic categories: *informative announcement sequence*, *external resource sequence*, *clarification + minimal correction sequence*, *argumentative polemic sequence*, and *procedural technical resolution sequence*.

Furthermore, relationship between turn-taking and discourse sequences may be inaccurate, given that a speaker's utterance may encompass multiple discursive sequences. Moreover, description of their functions remains too broad for academic research purposes. Nevertheless, identification of primary participants in communicative interaction is performed accurately.

We can conclude that, with regard to the identification of discursive sequences in the text, ChatGPT 5.0 needs more guidance from the researcher, which can train the GenAI in this regard. At present, the identification and interpretation of discursive sequences cannot be performed automatically by the GenAI, leaving the researcher with the entire task.

Therefore, we conclude that ChatGPT 5.0 has potential for use as a tool in discourse analysis for specific tasks, and can even be trained with data provided by researchers. Although this LLM-based chatbots can facilitate various aspects of a researcher's work, they should never be used outside of a researcher's supervision and validation.

At present, neither LLM-based chatbot can fully perform and at the required scientific level the task of the researcher in the field of discourse analysis. Their performance could be improved through training of chatbots with scientific data and bibliography in the field. However, even under these conditions, the system will not operate flawlessly and without hallucinations.

With regard to the use of ChatGPT 5.0 in discourse analysis in Romanian, it is our belief that a first step has been taken towards research in this field, allowing us to state that this tool can be used by researchers on specific tasks. Of the tasks that ChatGPT 5.0 can successfully perform in this field, the following are worth mentioning: *interaction analysis*, *discourse genre identification*, and *detection of the number of participants and their roles in communicative interaction*. The other issues we mentioned remain too challenging for the system to analyze with sufficient accuracy.

12. Conclusions to the Professional Web Forum Communication in Romanian

As we announced in the beginning of the current work, we have established three purposes for our research. They are: a) to describe the professional web forum as a type of discourse, b) to illustrate the mechanism of knowledge transmission in the professional web forums interactions, and c) to observe the discursive variations of knowledge transmission in Romanian.

In what follows we will present our conclusions on each of the three aspects. All the affirmations and evaluations will be based on the theoretical framework, on the analysis, and on the partial conclusions each chapter ends with.

12.1. Conclusions on the Discursive Genre

A genre is a complex discursive construction whose configuration is regulated by a series of conditions external and internal to the discourse. In order to describe the professional web forum as a genre we had to verify the existence of the necessary conditions for its discursive production and determine what these conditions were.

a. External characteristics of the professional web forums CMC (definition, historic and social aspects, categorisation)

Since the beginning (see Chapter 2) we have focused on the investigation of pertinent information in the literature that would allow us to describe *the nature, the categorisation, the historical evolution, and the social context of work* characteristic of the professional web forum communication. This initial investigation allowed us to observe that the professional web forum is a space where meaning is created as the result of the social interaction between its members whose aim is to communicate knowledge.

We identified as CMC the *nature* of the professional web forum communication, basing our statement on the definition of CMC (Herring, 1996: 1).

The next step in the description of the characteristics of the professional web forum communication was to identify its *category*. Based on its features,

the professional web forum belongs to the 1st generation of asynchronous, text-based CMC (see 2.2.2). If we take into account a categorisation based on the communicational aspects, the professional web forum can be described as a hybridised discursive mode that has the aspect of a *written conversation*. And last of all, if we focus on the thematic aspect of the CMC, we will include the *professional web forums* discourse in the category of specialised discourses.

Another external characteristic of the professional web forum is represented by its historical evolution. The emergence of the professional web forum, as in the case of many other important genres of the web, can be determined in time, since its emergence depends on the channel of communication. The precise chronology of the evolution of the Internet from the beginnings until approximately 2005 allows us to affirm that the professional web forum emerged in the late '70s. This information is important, for it creates a general view of the existence of the mentioned web genre. We can better appreciate the professional web forum as one of the most durable genres of the web. Its constant presence on the Internet is also confirmed by the forums that form our corpus. Their continuous activity on the web was observed over a time span of 2 to 8 years. In other words, the professional web forum as a discursive genre is not only a popular form of communication but also an enduring discursive practice.

The professional web forum communication emerged in a special *social context*. It is the result of the communication between “a group of people who associate themselves over time with a computer-mediated environment” (Herring, 2008 – see 2.3.1). In other words, the professional web forum needs special conditions of production, such as “group of people”, “computer-mediated environment”, a social relation established through language, and communication over “time”.

These four aspects describe the external context and features of the professional web forum communication. The features are completed by *internal characteristics*, which describe the internal configuration of the professional web forum as discourse.

b. Internal characteristics of the professional web forums CMC (discursive aspects)

In what concerns the inherent discursive characteristics of the professional web forum, we have tried to describe the professional web forum as genre using the framework developed by Patrick Charaudeau. Thus, we contemplated the professional web forum as *situation of communication* and observed its characteristics as discursive genre. According to the theoretical framework

established by Patrick Charaudeau, in the professional web forum, as in any other discursive genre, the discourse is determined by a series of factors: *the identities involved in a social interaction, the objectives of enunciation, the theme, and the enunciative device*. They individualise the professional web forum as a type of discourse from other types.

We observed, thus, that the *identities* the locutor and interlocutor assume on the professional web forum are constructed in accordance with the *goal* of their communication, which is *knowledge acquiring*. This objective makes the locutor who initiates the interaction to assume an identity accordingly. *Learning* and *knowledge acquisition* are processes that involve an *identity that possesses knowledge* and an *identity that is searching for the knowledge* he/she is deficient in. We designated those identities as the *expert* and the *novice*, and we observed from their discursive production that the identity of the *novice* is characterised by a *discourse of ignorance*, for he/she has to perform ignorance in order to obtain information/assistance. The identity of the *expert* is characterised by a *discourse of experience*, the expert being identified as a source of knowledge.

In what concerns the enunciative device, we determined (see Chapter 4) that the professional web forum is a *monolocutive situation*, where the participants are not physically present at the moment of enunciation. The channel of communication is basically written but can also display extended features of multimodal communication (image, video). We also noticed that the locutor is not conditioned by the immediate reactions of his/her partner of discussion, which determines a certain type of discourse organisation.

We consider that the union of the internal and external characteristics that describe the professional web forum has allowed us to consider it a complex discursive subgenre.

12.2. Knowledge Transmission on Professional Web Forums

The second objective of our investigation, the description of the mechanism of knowledge transmission in cyberspace through professional web forums communication, has led us to the following conclusions.

The transmission of knowledge in CMC is conceived as an act of creation of meaning that involves tacit and explicit knowledge. One deals every day with knowledge that can be articulated through language and knowledge than can't be expressed verbally (see Chapter 3). The knowledge transmission process consists in the effort to encode knowledge in language. The knowledge

can be oriented to the theory of practice and its transmission may differ based on the type of knowledge and the intentions of transmission. In the professional web forum discussions, the knowledge transmitted is *explicit* and *practice-oriented*. Within this classification it is important to distinguish a hierarchy of knowledge transmitted through communication. Based on the theoretical framework we have determined that the knowledge transmitted on the professional web forums can be ordered hierarchically as *skills*, *knowhow*, and *expertise* (see Chapter 3). The type of knowledge communicated determines the level of specialisation of the discourse on the professional web forums. It also differentiates the degree of expertise of the members of the forum, where the hierarchy is constructed only on a cognitive basis.

The participants in the process of knowledge communication are also classified by their degree of expertise. The *novice* is a person who lacks knowledge and is motivated to acquire *skills*, *know-how*, or *expertise*, while the expert is evaluated by the type of knowledge he/she can transmit. Lack of knowledge is also important in the process of knowledge communication. It is the lack of skills, know-how, and expertise that constitutes the motive for the existence of the professional web forums.

As one can notice, the knowledge is transmitted from a *source* (expert(s)) to a *receiver* (novice(s)) by an *informal communicational channel*⁹⁷. The message transmitted by the *source* encodes *explicit knowledge* (articulated as *text*) and *tacit* knowledge (multimodal content – audio, video, image). The knowledge is transmitted voluntarily by selfmotivated participants. Both participants in the exchange, *source* and *receiver*, consider knowledge transmission as a social act (*dialogue*, *collaboration*, *assistance*). The knowledge communication process on a professional web forum doesn't encourage competition between the participants. Here, the most proficient is considered the best and his/her expertise is widely acknowledged within the virtual community. We can conclude that, compared with other existing models of online learning, such as *e-learning* and *corporatist knowledge communication* (see Chapter 3), the communication of knowledge on the professional web forum presents specific features that individualises it as an alternative to the types of online learning mentioned above.

The specificity of knowledge communication on the professional web forums consists in the fact that it prepares *self-motivated autonomous learners*

⁹⁷ We use here the terminology and classifications of knowledge management we detailed in Chapter 3.

and that the learning process is precise and flexible, since it doesn't depend on pre-established curricula. On the other hand, the hierarchy is established through negotiation between users and the expertise is recognised and explicitly appreciated. It is a *social* and *collaborative* learning environment where there is no competition between the participants.

As one can notice, the model of knowledge transmission on the professional web forum is individualised by specific features which distinguish it from e-learning and corporatist knowledge communication. In other words, it is a completely different form of knowledge communication.

12.3. Knowledge Transmission in Romanian

In the 3rd chapter we observed that knowledge is encoded in the expert-locutor's discourse and we distinguished between different discursive sequences and discursive strategies used in order to transmit knowledge. The main procedure used in interaction in order to transmit knowledge on the professional web forum seems to be the *explanation*. In the interaction between participants in the situation, the *explanation* presents a rich variety of forms and strategies. Within the theoretical framework we presented the main explanatory strategies discussed in the literature: *the definition*, *the description of actions* (instructions/procedures), and the *prototypical explanation*.

The analysis of our corpus revealed two important elements concerning the explanatory strategies. The first element consisted in new explanatory forms, not mentioned in the literature. The second important element consisted in the profile of the explanation on the professional web forums, which presents a completely different profile if compared with the description of the prototypical explanation.

The *explanatory forms* the locutor chooses when constructing an explanation in order to transmit knowledge consist mainly of *definitions*, *description of actions*, or *prototypical explanation*. Statistically (see 7.2.6) these are the most used explanatory sequences. Apart from these, we have also observed the constant use in Romanian of explanatory forms we consider specific to the professional web forums discussions, since they are not mentioned in the literature: *the reference* (hyperlinks) and *the meta-explanation* (consists in explanatory comments to an explanatory sequence).

The analysis of the corpus revealed that in Romanian the explanatory configuration of knowledge is structured on the combination of the main

explanatory structures and the specific explanatory structures. Consequently, we were able to individualise the explanatory profile of knowledge transmission in Romanian as follows: *instructions, prototypical explanations, definitions, meta-explanations, self-references, visual explanations*. In the Romanian web forum corpus prevails the use of short explanatory structures (instructions) and of implicits.

All these differences we mentioned could have led us into thinking that the explanation as communicational strategy for knowledge transmission on the professional web forums may be a miscellaneous phenomenon. Instead, the explanation on the professional web forum has turned out to be a quite uniform phenomenon across all the languages of the corpus.

As it results from the analysis carried out in Chapter 7, the explanatory sequence on the professional web forum has different features. In what concerns the *enunciation*, for example, it presents more deictics than the prototypical explanation, more verbal tenses and a lower use of time and space references in the text. The use of epistemic, logic, affective modalities, and *subjectivity marks* also represents a feature of the professional web forum explanation. The use of specialised lexicon, loan words or technical terms is reduced to the basics in the professional web forums explanation. The imprecision in the explanatory texts of the web is generated by the frequent use of polysemy, ambiguity and professional jargon.

The explanatory sequence is constructed on the Romanian web forum through a very rich variety of discursive strategies not used in other contexts, such as: *definition, exemplification, analogy, quotation, explanatory reference (self-reference), description of actions, metaexplanations, rhetorical explanations, reformulation, and analogy*.

The main conclusion in what concerns knowledge transmission on the professional web forums is that it is prevalingly realised through explanation. The explanatory discursive forms and strategies represent special features that individualise this explanation from its other uses in academic or research context, where the professional web forum explanation is uniform across languages. The explanation within the professional web forum may evolve discursively over time in its internal discursive configuration such as was illustrated in Chapter 9. Furthermore, there is reason to believe that discourse analysis will continue to develop in the future with the use of GenAI in this field of research.

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Lucrarea este concepută ordonat, prezentând într-o succesiune logică, implicațiile cercetării și efectuarea concretă a acesteia. După specificarea intențiilor și a demersului general, autoarea introduce sistematic conceptele operatorii (comunicarea mediată de calculator cu subgenurile sale, discurs și conversație, comunități virtuale, forumuri profesionale și comunitățile acestora, transmiterea de cunoștințe) cu definițiile/acceptiunile acestora. Cristina Varga propune spre analiză genul de comunicare dintre utilizatorii obișnuiți («ignoranți») și cei profesioniști. Acest aspect, neexplorat până acum, solicită detalierea strategiilor explicative pe care le utilizează expertul pentru ca informația/cunoștințele să ajungă la utilizatorii profani cât mai clar posibil. Strategiile diverse, tipurile de negociere cu utilizatori diverși (unii dificili), chiar și eșecurile posibile ale unei astfel de comunicări, se fac cu metode calitative și cantitative, pe eșantioane reale de ChatGPT bazate pe inteligența artificială generativă (GenAI) românească. Structurarea analizei a modului de organizare a acestui tip de discurs se face luând în calcul numărul de participanți, detectarea secvențelor discursive specifice, și nu numai. Concluziile rezumă rezultatele și deschiderile acestui gen discursiv specializat.

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