INSTITUTUL LIMBII ROMÂNE
CA LIMBĂ EUROPEANĂ

Româna în lume

New Directions in Romanian as a Foreign Language.

Theory and Application

Ioana Sonea
(editor)

Presa Universitară Clujeană

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INSTITUTULUI LIMBII ROMÂNE CA LIMBĂ EUROPEANĂ

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Introduction

Teaching Romanian as a Foreign Language: Theory, Curriculum, and Classroom Practice brings together contributions by authors affiliated with Babeș-Bolyai University, whose teaching and research are connected, in different ways, to Romanian as a foreign language. Some chapters are revised and translated versions of studies that first appeared in Romanian in the journal *Discurs polifonic în româna ca limbă străină (RLS)*, issues 2/2020, 3/2022, and 4/2024, published by Presa Universitară Clujeană. Others were written specifically for this volume. One of the aims of the collection is to make this body of research more visible to an international readership and to place it in dialogue with wider debates in applied linguistics, curriculum design, and language pedagogy. The volume therefore combines already tested scholarly work with new contributions, offering an integrated view of current research, pedagogical reflection, and classroom practice in the field of Romanian as a foreign language.

The collection works at the intersection of applied linguistics, philology, curriculum studies, and language pedagogy. Its purpose is twofold: to consolidate Romanian as a foreign language (RFL) as a coherent field of inquiry and to make the field more accessible to those involved in curriculum design, teaching, and assessment. Addressed to researchers, teacher-educators, advanced practitioners, and policy-makers, the volume argues that RFL should be understood not as a peripheral extension of literary or linguistic study, but as a domain in which theory, level design, learner development, materials, and institutional frameworks must be brought into constructive alignment. Its overarching rationale is to connect international language-education debates with the specific realities of Romanian.

Romanian as a foreign language is entering international applied-linguistics debate at a moment strongly shaped by the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages*, the *CEFR Companion Volume*, the action-oriented approach, and renewed attention to plurilingual and pluricultural competence. Official Council of Europe guidance presents the Companion Volume as an update and extension of the 2001 CEFR, broadening the scope of language education and replacing the earlier descriptor set with updated scales that include mediation, online interaction, and plurilingual/pluricultural competence. In this perspective, language teaching is not limited to transmitting forms or communicative routines. It involves enabling learners to act, collaborate, interpret, and move across linguistic and social spaces as meaningful participants. For Romanian, this international agenda matters because the language is increasingly taught in contexts shaped by academic mobility, migration, heritage transmission, professional specialization, and multilingual repertoires rather than by a single, homogeneous learner profile.

The present volume responds to this complexity through a four-part structure. The articles included in the first part, *Romanian as a Foreign Language in Context: Histories, Concepts, and Debates*, establish RFL as a specific area of inquiry with its own conceptual memory, reminding readers that current classroom choices emerge from longer methodological and intellectual traditions. *Curriculum, Levels, and Course Design*, the second part of the book, addresses level building, syllabus logic, course design, and task construction, since coherent teaching depends on transparent relationships among aims, content, and outcomes. The third section *Learner Development, Variation, and Form* brings developmental evidence to the foreground, showing what heritage Romanian, learner production, and form-focused analysis can teach us about sequencing, difficulty, and variation. The final part, *Materials, Texts, and Classroom Mediation*, turns to practice in the strict sense, asking how textbooks, literary texts, autobiographical tasks, and digital environments shape what learners can actually do with Romanian in context.

Across these parts, the collection highlights several major themes. It reconsiders methodological eclecticism as principled pedagogical judgment rather than mere inconsistency. It argues for curriculum alignment, in line with CEFR thinking, by linking descriptors, tasks, classroom work, and desired outcomes. It insists on teacher education as a structural necessity, since curriculum "does not exist until it is enacted," and enactment depends on teachers who understand both theory and context. It brings attention to heritage Romanian and linguistic variation, which complicate simple boundaries between foreign, second, and inherited language learning. It addresses digital platforms and specialized language teaching, now central rather than peripheral to language education. It reopens the question of literary pedagogy, arguing that texts become pedagogically meaningful only when calibrated to learners' linguistic and inferential capacities. Finally, it points toward corpus-informed and data-aware materials development as an avenue for future textbook design and teacher decision-making.

This volume can be read in different ways. Researchers may follow it sequentially, from the framing of Romanian as a foreign language as a field, to questions of classroom mediation. Teacher-educators can use the parts on design and acquisition to build seminars on methods, sequencing, and reflective practice, while practitioners may go directly to the chapters on tasks, texts, literary pedagogy, and digital platforms. Curriculum designers can read the book alongside CEFR descriptors, especially where it discusses level building and progression. Assessment developers may use it diagnostically, identifying both strong areas of current RFL practice and points where evaluative instruments still need development.

Ioana Sonea (editor)

PART 1.

Romanian as a Foreign Language in Context: *Histories, Concepts, and Debates*

Lost in Methodological Eclecticism

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Abstract: *Lost in Methodological Eclecticism.* This paper starts from the observation of a certain methodological uncertainty among practitioners in the field of Romanian as a foreign language. Although teachers are often aware that no single method, applied in its pure form, can respond adequately to the complexity of language acquisition, they may feel insecure when choosing an appropriate teaching approach and, especially, when justifying that choice. For this reason, the paper brings into discussion the paradigm of methodological eclecticism, understood not as the absence of method or as an indiscriminate combination of techniques drawn from different traditions, but as a conscious, theoretically grounded, and pedagogically coherent option. When assumed in this way, eclecticism can offer teachers greater flexibility, while also encouraging a more comprehensive understanding of the language teaching process. The central argument of the paper is that teachers do not become "lost" in the plurality of methods when the elements borrowed from different methodological systems are integrated coherently and justified rationally. Classroom choices should therefore be guided neither by fashion nor by chance, but by a clear understanding of pedagogical aims, learner needs, and teaching contexts. In order to clarify this process, the paper identifies the main sources that have shaped the eclectic paradigm and briefly revisits the history of major traditional and modern language teaching methods. Such historical and theoretical awareness is necessary in order to decide which elements should be abandoned, which remain pedagogically valuable, and how they may be adapted to contemporary contexts of teaching Romanian as a foreign language.

Keywords: *contrastive method, grammar-translation method, direct method, audio-lingual methods, structural-global-audio-visual methods, communicative approach, eclecticism, postmethod*

1. Methodology as an Object of Research

We venture to take foreign-language teaching methodology as the object of our discussion, fully aware that, within the field of classical philology—concerned primarily with its two traditional domains, linguistics and literary studies—it is often suspected of lacking theoretical potential. Even within the domain of language didactics (DL), a debate centered on the old and now outdated concept of method has, today, very little chance of engaging the researcher. Compared, for instance, with debates on the complex processes involved in understanding a text in a foreign language—where one may draw on sophisticated theories from psycholinguistics, cognitive science, or neuroscience, all of which have gained prominence in recent decades—the concept of method undoubtedly appears unfashionable, irreversibly confined to the more modest sphere of teaching practice. As for methodology, understood in its simplest definition as the science of method, it too has been effectively displaced from the field of language sciences into that of educational sciences, alongside didactics and pedagogy. Linguists tend to distance themselves firmly from these disciplines, regarded as overly applied, tolerating them only for institutional reasons rather than out of any conviction that collaboration with them might prove beneficial[1].

Unfortunately, despite the significant development of research in language didactics—particularly in areas dealing with methodological questions—within the international academic environment, in the Romanian context methodology seems to have lost ground to the various ambitions of classical philology, which remains convinced that genuine

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[1] We refer above all to the well-known teacer training module, which is compulsory in the curricula of faculties of philology in Romania. This, we believe, reflects an awareness of the need to provide initial training for those who will teach Romanian language and literature, or another foreign language. Yet although these diciplines address the same linguistic and literary domain, the teacher training module has long remained institutionally attached to a different field of research, intersecting only marginally with philological studies.

research can only be conducted within its own domain. From our perspective, however, within a properly balanced ecology of the sciences, what ought to carry the greatest weight is the quality of theoretical reflection, the clarity and coherence of concepts, and the rigor of the methods used in investigating specific issues, rather than the intrinsic nature of the research object itself.

In the teaching of Romanian as a foreign language (RFL), in particular, methodological reflection has been strikingly sporadic, especially over the past two decades, as if everything at this level had already been definitively clarified and classified. For this reason, we consider the periodic reassessment of methodological concepts—whose semantics are often dense and blurred by imprecise usage—to be absolutely necessary. This is all the more important given that, in the field of RFL, practitioners are, whether they intend it or not, also required to act as theoreticians, and vice versa: there are virtually no pure theoreticians who are not also practitioners. Even if teachers do not set out to become "strategic thinkers," they are compelled to become at least "strategic practitioners," engaging in self-analysis and self-evaluation in order to make sound decisions in the process of teaching RFL (Kumaravadivelu 2003: 2). In practice, however, most teachers also become strategic thinkers, reflecting on learners' needs, the specific nature of teaching and learning situations, and, not least, on the most effective methods and strategies. Encouragingly, many of them recognize that, without a holistic understanding of what takes place in the classroom, it is difficult to grasp the deeper meaning of one's own pedagogical actions. Once the teacher reaches this level of reflection, he or she becomes a genuine specialist in didactics, insofar as such a practitioner is capable of "deconstructing the methods proposed by the methodologist," observing, analyzing, and comparing them in order to arrive at informed choices or recommendations (Puren 1988: 13). Language didactics thus occupies a privileged position as a discipline, being situated "above the set of methodologies" (Puren 1988: 13). It remains, therefore, the most comprehensive theoretical framework within which we can situate our reflections on methodological aspects of language teaching and learning, allowing for the analysis and comparison of the various theoretical models proposed within different systems.

In addressing here the question of methodological eclecticism—a notion far from new and extensively discussed in international scholarship, including in entire volumes (cf. Puren 1994)—our aim is to raise awareness among practitioner-theoreticians in the Romanian context of the need to examine their own practice with the greatest possible lucidity, in order to determine which combination of methods is most appropriate for their classroom work. Indeed, one of the major contributions of methodological eclecticism—emerging, according to some authors, from the inability of language didactics "to construct an entirely new methodological system"—is that it acknowledges the teacher's "right to borrow" the most valuable elements from different methodologies (Cuq 2003: 78). At the same time, however, it is important to recognize that this paradigm merely formalizes an eclecticism that has long existed in practice, since teachers have intuitively combined methods, techniques, and strategies in order to respond to the multiple variables of the teaching context. Eclecticism also proves useful in teacher training, especially when we are asked to provide the "perfect recipe." For example, we advise novice teachers to avoid using the source language when the target language can be used, without always recognizing that this principle lies at the core of the direct method. At other times, we encourage the introduction of new linguistic forms through oral input, a principle that originates in audio-lingual methods and is also preserved in audio-visual approaches and in communicative language teaching. Similarly, we recommend not abandoning structural exercises entirely, in order to ensure the consolidation of linguistic forms, following principles established by SGAV methods. In this sense, eclecticism is already widely practiced in language didactics in general, and in the teaching of RFL in particular, even if practitioners are not always aware that they are aligning themselves with a clearly identifiable methodological trend.

However fluid and difficult to systematize eclecticism may be, it still requires careful description, since only in this way can we justify recommending it as a consciously assumed methodological option. To construct such a profile, we must first understand the core principles underlying the methodological systems from which it draws. This involves a close analysis of the theories developed within these systems, identifying those that have proven durable over time and, above all, establishing the criteria that allow us to determine whether different methods can be meaningfully combined. Consequently, any clear and coherent didactic discourse on how Romanian should be taught to non-native speakers must begin with an updated understanding of the methods developed over time, along with their respective strengths and limitations.

We make this claim on the basis of our experience as teacher trainers, which has revealed certain confusions among teachers and future teachers of RFL regarding methods of foreign-language teaching—a situation that can be explained by the absence of specialized university training in this field. Among the "methods specific to language teaching" identified by trainees in reflective exercises, we encountered: explanation, problem-based learning, the Six Thinking Hats, the Mosaic method, the Cube, the Lotus Flower, frontal teaching, pair work, and so on. As is evident, some of these refer to classroom management (frontal teaching, pair work), while others belong to general didactics or to the teaching of other disciplines and are not specific to language teaching. In fact, most of them can be applied across disciplines, whether in mathematics, physics, or biology (e.g., explanation, problem-based learning, or the Six Thinking Hats). In light of this, without aiming to reconstruct, within a few pages, the entire history of methodological systems in language didactics, we consider it useful to offer an overview of the major stages in the evolution of language teaching. To this end, we will revisit the defining features of canonical methodologies, in order to determine whether they should be set aside as obsolete or whether their insights remain relevant today. Only in this way can we better understand the complexity of the methodological eclecticism in which we are all, to some extent, immersed, and thus avoid feeling lost within it.

Before undertaking this analysis, however, it is important to note that none of these methods can be applied in their original, “pure” form, as presented in their major theoretical formulations. A closer examination reveals that they are often marked by an excessive internal coherence, displaying a perfect alignment between guiding principles and theoretical foundations on the one hand, and between methods and classroom practices on the other. Yet the actual teaching context is far from coherent; it is characterized by variability and contradiction. This is, of course, natural, since the purpose of any theoretical model is to persuade. Such persuasion depends on demonstrating internal consistency, which can only be achieved through a certain degree of simplification. However, any simplification may produce what Puren calls “perverse” effects in language didactics (Puren 1994: 68), insofar as it neglects the multidimensional nature of the teaching process, which requires a complex and finely nuanced approach.

2. Traditional Methodologies

2.1. The Grammar–Translation Method or the Contrastive Method

The oldest traditional method, first used in the teaching of classical languages and later transferred to the teaching of modern languages, is the grammar–translation method, also known as the contrastive method. This theoretical model presupposes that the teacher knows the learners’ mother tongue (L1) and/or a contact language shared by all participants, ensuring interaction among them. Given that, in the past, the primary aim of language learning was to read major literary works in the original, the use of written texts (especially literary texts[2]) and translation as a means

[2] We make this clarification because teachers of Romanian language and literature in classes where instruction is delivered in the languages of national minorities often tend to overload textbooks and supplementary materials with literary texts, without taking into account the pupils’ level of linguistic competence or their ability to process

of understanding them constitute the fundamental principles of this method. Literature was understood as a kind of "single corpus meant to sustain the teaching of language and culture" (Cuq, Gruca 2017: 266). Moreover, language and literature were so closely intertwined that it was difficult to determine whether one was teaching "language through literature or literature through language," the literary text serving as the privileged support not only for oral translation activities but also for "the literary teaching of a culture" (Cuq, Gruca 2017: 266). What emerges here is an elitist conception of language—still identifiable today—which emphasizes a single norm, close to the literary model, and assigns greater importance to knowledge about the language than to the mastery of a functional language. The teaching of Romanian as a foreign language (RFL) was likewise deeply shaped by a strong focus on literary texts[3], as reflected in the nature of the textual input found in textbooks and collections designed for foreign students in the 1980s and 1990s (Crăciun et al. 1979; Poantă et al. 1979; Pașcalău, Poantă 1983), at a time when communicative methods were already gaining significant ground internationally.

Another defining feature of this method is the expository and explicit teaching of new grammatical and lexical items, which required the use of a heavy and often cumbersome metalanguage. This, in turn, generated the proverbial "fear of grammar" among entire generations of learners—a reaction that in fact reflects resistance to overly abstract descriptive concepts rather than to grammar itself. The central

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such texts. Understanding them requires inferential work which, according to studies in cognitive linguistics, becomes possible only after learners have reached the threshold level of language proficiency, namely B1.

[3] Only after the adoption of the communicative approach were certain linguistic variants connected with everyday or predictable communicative situations introduced into textbooks, and even then rather timidly. Examples include colloquial greeting formulas such as Salut!, Ciao!, or Pa!, whose presence would once have been unimaginable and for which we were, in fact, criticized after the publication of the textbook for levels A1–A2; cf. Platon et al. 2012: 16. The introduction of certain local variants also became "acceptable" in the context of teaching Romanian as a second language in a Romanian-speaking environment, as in the case of *Servus!* in Transylvania.

importance attributed to grammar is also evident in the constant and systematic comparison between two grammatical systems: that of the target language (TL) and that of the learners' L1 or contact language. At the center of all this stood translation, a convenient and often indispensable tool for the teacher, whether used to explain grammar or vocabulary. The reliance on translation was sustained by the illusion that one could easily move from one language to another with the help of the well-known vocabulary notebook, in which, ideally, words were grouped thematically rather than alphabetically (family, at the post office, at the airport, etc.; cf. Cuq, Gruca 2017: 265).

Like any theoretical model, this methodological system also had its shortcomings, among which we may note the tendency to foster interference from the reference languages (L1/contact language). Other disadvantages include: the absence of "perfect synonymy" between L1/contact language and the TL; insufficient mastery of the contact language either by learners or by the teacher (especially when the learners' mother tongue is used, in which case the teacher may even find themselves in a position of disadvantage); the lack of learner engagement in oral communication, or the artificial character of such activities. This artificiality stems from the fact that, despite the presence of pronunciation exercises at the beginning of the learning process, instruction remained oriented toward a standardized language, strongly centered on writing and illustrated through the flawless sentences of canonical authors, regarded as models of linguistic virtuosity. For this reason, we may speak of a tendency toward an "oralization of writing," rather than the application of pragmatic principles aimed at enabling a wide range of communicative functions and the use of varied linguistic registers (Cuq, Gruca 2017: 265).

In evaluating this traditional, literature-centered approach, however, a certain degree of understanding is necessary. One must recognize that the written form of the literary language shaped, for decades, the dominant representations of its users and, implicitly, the linguistic norm itself. This explains why the written form held such supremacy for so long, functioning as the absolute point of reference, while spoken language, in its linguistic and discursive functioning, was perceived as an inferior variant. Today, however, no language can be conceived as a homogeneous whole, and the variations specific to spoken language must play a significant role in shaping the teaching of modern languages.

2.2. The Direct Method

Also known as the "governess method" (Puren 1988: 38), the direct method was used at least from the fifteenth century in cases where the teacher shared no common language with the learners, but it became established in the educational systems of European countries only at the beginning of the nineteenth century. This new method brought about a minor revolution, imposing a new vision of the purpose of foreign-language teaching, shaped by industrial development and the expansion of trade. The acquisition of speaking and writing moved to the forefront, practical knowledge being expected "to take precedence over the acquisition of a literary culture" (Cuq, Gruca 2017: 266).

Thus, while the contrastive method was based on the idea that, when we speak a foreign language, we "translate unconsciously and instantaneously" into that language "a thought necessarily conceived in the mother tongue" (Cuq 2003: 73), the direct method draws inspiration from the empirical model of natural first-language acquisition. According to this long-standing paradigm, the best way to access the "genius of a language" is not to pass through a word in the mother tongue in order to reach a corresponding word in the target language (TL), but to learn "to think in that language" (Delobel et al. 1898, apud Cuq 2003: 73). This idea gave rise to a veritable mythology, each learner aspiring to think in the foreign language as quickly as possible, like a native speaker. The most straightforward way to achieve this objective was, of course, early and sustained exposure to the natural language. As a result, classroom practice attempted to recreate the family environment in which a child acquires their mother tongue: translation was avoided, and the mother tongue was not used—even to explain grammatical issues.

By proposing, for the first time, a natural and interactive approach to language through listening activities and message production (via imitation and/or repetition), and by dispensing with textbooks, rules, or complex grammatical tables, the direct method enabled remarkably rapid progress in acquisition. Its effectiveness lies in continuously prompting the learner to produce messages by initiating verbal exchanges. The meaning of words is conveyed intuitively, exclusively in the TL, through pointing to and describing objects, commenting in real time on classroom actions, using images and other direct procedures such as synonymy and antonymy, hypernymy and hyponymy, definitions, explaining abstract notions through already familiar vocabulary, and, not least, through non-linguistic means (gestures, facial expressions, movement, examples, situation, and context). Consequently, the teacher must also be physically engaged to a significant degree, often gesturing extensively and explaining, as it were, "with hands and feet" (cf. Goes 2005: 39). The intuitive principle is extended to grammar as well (taught inductively, on the basis of examples, without first stating the rule, as was previously the case, and without excessive use of metalanguage), to texts (understood initially in a global manner, without prior analysis of each sentence or paragraph), and to literature (taught directly through texts, without preliminary exposition of genres or literary theories; cf. Cuq 2003: 73). In essence, we recognize here the metaphor of language immersion—or, adapting it to the Romanian context, a "bath in Romanian broth."

Although, at first glance, the direct method may appear to be the ideal solution for many learners—especially those intimidated by an overload of grammatical rules—in its original, "pure" form it has also had its critics. Some have regarded the method's "naturalness" as a sign of the absence of any real method (Girard 1884, apud Puren 1994: 32). Others have pointed out that, at beginner levels or in groups without a philological background, there are relatively few means of explaining certain linguistic phenomena clearly enough to ensure understanding. Given that learners often process the second language "silently" (in their minds)—likely translating just as silently into L1 without the teacher's awareness—we can never be entirely certain that they have correctly understood a given point (Besse 1995: 34). For example, if the teacher touches their ear, learners might interpret this as referring either to the noun *ear*, to the verb *to listen*, or as conveying a message such as: "Please speak louder, I can't hear you." In such situations, the only reliable indicator of comprehension is the correct use of new structures, not simple agreement or acknowledgment. Moreover, it is not always easy to explain new vocabulary without resorting to translation. While a word such as *holiday/leave* can be paraphrased—"a longer period of time (2–3 weeks) when a person does not go to work because they are resting"—using already known vocabulary, more abstract notions resist such definitions. If there is any doubt about this, one might try to define a word like *idea*. Quite often, we find that we have no clear idea how to do so. Another shortcoming is that, despite its claim to naturalness, classroom dialogue can remain somewhat artificial, in the sense that we sometimes "describe realities we would not normally describe in real life," treating as explicit what is usually taken for granted and requires no description (Besse 1995: 33).

Despite these limitations, the durability and strength of the method lie in the continuous recycling of previously acquired vocabulary and grammatical structures, which become consolidated more quickly and can then be used to introduce new ones. Through this technique, acquisition of the TL proceeds like a "snowball," layer by layer—a metaphor that, unlike that of building a wall, suggests how each new layer reshapes and integrates the previous ones. In addition, the learner remains highly active, both intellectually and physically, engaging in imitative processes (through intensive and mechanical repetition), intuitive processes (by "guessing" meanings), and interrogative processes (remaining constantly alert to provide rapid responses). With these elements in place, we can finally speak of a global and interactive vision of language teaching (Besse 1995: 34).

In the teaching of Romanian as a foreign language (RFL), the direct method has been—and still is—privileged, given the absence of a shared language with successive generations of learners coming from diverse parts of the world. Although it has yielded very good classroom results over several decades, it should be noted that it has never been applied in its pure form, but rather in a mixed configuration, most often combined with structural methods, which we will discuss next.

2.3. The Structuro-Global Audio-Visual Methods (SGAV)

Around the middle of the twentieth century, a new system for conceptualizing the most effective ways of teaching and learning languages emerged, as a European[4] (French, Belgian, and Yugoslav) response to the audio-oral methodology developed in North America[5]. In fact, the system was new more in its procedures than in its underlying concepts, since it relied on the models of structural linguistics and behaviorist psychology, especially on the work of B. F. Skinner (Besse 1995: 34). The new method aimed to develop automatisms of expression in the target language (TL) through the use of linguistic clichés and stereotyped structures. The corresponding methodology designed for the American army (the "army method") had been developed during the Second World War and did not limit itself to helping learners read and understand texts in the foreign language; rather, it sought to develop all four communicative skills, with particular emphasis on oral proficiency. The program designed for American soldiers included lessons centered on the standard language, more precisely on micro-dialogues that had to be memorized perfectly, without insisting on an understanding of the grammatical functioning of the utterances (although a brief grammatical explanation was later provided by a linguistic expert). Subsequently, recruits were required to reuse these structures, with excellent results, given that they worked fifteen hours per week over a period of nine months, in groups of only six learners (which, according to current

[4] This methodological proposal for language teaching and learning was developed from 1960 onward by P. Guberina of the University of Zagreb and P. Rivenc of the ENS in Saint-Cloud. It was then further elaborated together with several university teams from Belgium, Croatia, Spain, Lebanon, and France, within the framework of an international association (Cuq 2003: 220).

[5] Initially, it bore the name *aural-oral method*, which, being difficult to pronounce, became *audio-lingual method* (Goes 2005: 40).

estimates, would correspond to approximately 560 hours needed to reach a B1+ level in Romanian). The enthusiasm of specialists for the army method was also due to the fact that it demonstrated that a language could be learned in a relatively short time, without requiring exceptional intellectual abilities (Besse 1995: 36). Nevertheless, it is generally believed that this success depended less on the intrinsic quality of the methods and more on the high level of motivation among soldiers, who were convinced that their performance would contribute to a quicker victory against Nazism (cf. Goes 2005: 41).

Unlike the American context, European audio-oral methods eliminated even minimal grammatical explanations, requiring learners instead to perform substitutions and transformations guided by preparatory examples illustrating newly acquired basic structures (Besse 1995: 37). These correspond to the well-known pattern drills, referred to in didactics as structural exercises (widely present, for instance, in the textbook coordinated by Grigore Brâncuș [1978] and enthusiastically used in the teaching of Romanian as a foreign language to this day). Although such exercises were not entirely new—having existed since the sixteenth century in the form of structured tables—structuralist linguistics profoundly influenced the conception of language[6] in general and of language teaching in particular, encouraging, among other things, the establishment of language laboratories.

Given that structuralist linguistics did not emphasize semantics but rather a global perception of linguistic form (the well-known Gestalt principle, that is, "the integration or reorganization by the brain, into a single whole, of various elements perceived through the senses and processed cognitively" [Goes 2005: 46]), language didactics likewise privileged form over meaning. Accordingly, SGAV methodology emphasized linguistic competence over communicative activities, assigning a key role to the gradual introduction of structures and vocabulary. At the same time, however, it valued spoken language and

[6] Language was viewed as "a set of syntactic frames, acquired as a set of habits, that is, linguistic automatisms, which determine the spontaneous use of correct forms, without any prior reflection" (Germain 2001: 141).

communicative situations (through the use of slides and simple dialogues recorded on magnetic tape), as well as comprehension in relation to production. Thus, the structuro-global project has been interpreted as an attempt by the individual "to structure himself or herself within the act of speaking in a dialogic situation," based on both verbal and especially non-verbal means: "rhythm, intonation, intensity, tension; gestures, facial expressions, bodily postures and spatial dispositions of interlocutors; spatio-temporal positioning and social context; interactional aspects of a psychological and especially affective nature (self-image, image of the other)" (Besse 1995: 43). At the same time, the qualifier global indicates that language learning presupposes the simultaneous and interactive coexistence of all these factors—verbal and non-verbal, individual and social, biophysiological and physical.

The learner, however, occupied a somewhat constrained position within this framework, subordinated to the teacher's directives. Even so, the learner remained fairly active, being required to listen, repeat, understand, memorize, and even speak "freely," within a stimulus–response–reinforcement triadic structure that defined this methodology. The proposed scenario assigned a fundamental role to repetition in the memorization of correct forms: active listening to a micro-dialogue accompanied by a corresponding slide; repetition and reproduction of the dialogue; comprehension, explanation, and repetition without the aid of the recording; and finally, its exploitation and reuse through the production of new utterances (activities that were, of course, far less controlled) (Goes 2005: 47).

By focusing on the formation of automatisms, SGAV methods recognized the need to organize linguistic structures according to their degree of urgency, productivity, and difficulty, making extensive use of linguistic stereotypes. Although the dialogues employed often lacked naturalness—being simplified and delivered at a slower pace, which could later hinder comprehension of native speakers—they nonetheless made an important contribution by approaching language teaching in a "situational, audio-visual, communicative, and integrated" manner, initially at the oral level and subsequently in written form. This approach included "verbo-tonal strategies for phonetic work, a progressive integration of the most common lexical, grammatical, and prosodic means of expression" (Cuq 2003: 221), as well as attention to intercultural behavior. However, a major limitation of these model-based mechanical dialogues is that, while they foster the formation of automatisms and the accurate consolidation of grammatical structures, they ensure only slow progress in acquisition and create an excessively prolonged dependence on memorized patterns, thereby significantly restricting the learner's linguistic creativity.

Among the undeniable merits of this approach, however, two innovative procedures stand out: on the one hand, paraphrasing, used from the presentation phase, which encourages learners to imagine as many possibilities as possible for verbal interaction based on the visual support of the dialogue; on the other hand, reported speech, which enables learners to distance themselves from the initial dialogue and encourages them to narrate the lesson's images and report the dialogue to a third person (Cuq, Gruca 2017: 272).

3. Modern Methodology. The First Communicative Wave

In response to the excessive formalism and overly rigorous grading of content imposed by the structuralist perspective, the learning of living, natural language, as it appears in authentic documents, began to be encouraged. Thus emerged the first ideas of communicative methodology, grafted onto a set of convergent theories from the 1960s and 1970s, developed in fields such as linguistics, economics, philosophy, and politics, as a result of the diversification of linguistic needs in an expanding Europe (the Common Market, the Council of Europe, etc.). During that period, Chomsky distinguished between competence and performance, defining competence as the innate capacity of a speaker-hearer to produce and understand an infinite number of new utterances that he or she had never produced or heard before (1965: 57–58). In philosophy, language was being discussed as an instrument of communication (for instance, by Austin and Searle), against the background of the increasing internationalization of economic exchanges. The semantic dimension of language and the need for its effective use—what would later be called communicative intention, communicative function, or speech act (giving an order, requesting information)—thus moved to the forefront. Behind these ideas we find a new philosophy of the human person, attentive to human needs, valuing experience, and encouraging participation in the life of the group, thereby moving beyond a strictly utilitarian perspective (cf. Goes 2005: 50).

The opportunity to bring all these orientations together into a coherent decision arose in 1972, when the Council of Europe commissioned a group of experts to design a unified program of language courses for adults. This decision was essential for the subsequent development of language didactics, since it led to the description of the Threshold Level (B1) for English (*Threshold Level English*, 1974) and French (*Niveau Seuil*, 1975). In fact, it was only from this point onward that the expression *communicative approach* proper was launched, along with the idea of a notional-functional approach to language teaching, which, in Romania, would arrive with a delay of almost three decades (Moldovan et al. 2002).

Although full of freshness, the new perspective was not without exaggerations, especially among the experts associated with the Lancaster School. Rejecting any form of grading linguistic content, virtually proscribing explicit grammar—and even imagining that grammar could be abandoned altogether—together with structural exercises and error correction (Lehmann 2000: 164), the first communicative wave ultimately came to reject any predetermined content. This gesture resulted either in the near-disappearance of syllabuses or in the proposal of a procedural syllabus based exclusively on tasks distributed over time, with textbook units organized not according to "linguistic categories" but according to structured sets of communicative tasks requiring the use of the target language. Establishing a strictly "communicative" progression, however, was far from easy, since it is almost impossible to arrange communicative situations logically and to predict whom the learner will encounter first in real life: the baker, the butcher, or the chimney sweep? (Plas, Lavanant 2010: 9). Or, adapting the issue to our own times, we do not know which emergency service the student will have to contact first: the fire brigade, the police, or the ambulance.

The elimination of content progression brings with it a series of complications, since, if we wanted to organize teaching exclusively according to communicative functions, we would need a potentially infinite number of catalogues containing an enormous number of conversational formulas to be supplied to the student for memorization and daily use. In such a purely hypothetical case, the learner's performance would depend on the speed with which he or she could access the catalogue of memorized formulas, rather than on that global capacity to express oneself in random situations of which Chomsky spoke. Cognitive theorists, however, have warned us that countless formulas cannot be memorized in a language if phonological representations, basic vocabulary, and morphosyntactic control remain insufficient, because access to formal cognitive networks cannot be automatized. More precisely, without the acquisition of a minimal quantity—and quality—of knowledge, "the created mnemonic (linguistic) network cannot perform effectively," and the learner cannot use the language in real communicative situations (Hilton 2009: 18).
Naturally, the lack of concern for the grading of linguistic content also encouraged the use of authentic audio-video documents—we recall that, at the beginning of the 1980s, audio-visual methods were criticized for their lack of authenticity—in order to present an L2 as close as possible to the natural language of native speakers. Thus, in the beginning, samples not designed for teaching purposes were used even at elementary level. Only later, in the "renewed" versions of the communicative approach, was the idea accepted that texts could be adapted in such a way as to give the impression of authenticity. These texts did not strictly follow a lexical-grammatical progression and contained somewhat more complex elements even from the beginning of the learning process, in order to lend greater authenticity to the input. In

this way, input was better adapted to the communicative context than had been possible with the dialogues of the audio-lingual period.

The communicative movement, however, should not be confused with its initial phase, since it subsequently underwent numerous readjustments. Although many practitioners claimed, after the 1980s, to belong to this orientation, in reality it covers an extremely broad field, referring to "very diverse and heterogeneous teaching practices and procedures" (Cuq, Gruca 2017: 278). The most significant changes appeared after the 1990s, emphasizing that effective communication requires a double adaptation of linguistic forms: first, to the communicative situation—including aspects such as the interlocutor's status, age, and social position, as well as the physical place in which the communicative act takes place—and second, to the communicative intention or function, such as asking permission, giving orders, or requesting the identification of an object. This shift in perspective was based on Hymes's view that mere knowledge of grammatical rules and vocabulary, although necessary, does not guarantee effective communication in a foreign language (Hymes 1972: 278). Thus, general communicative competence could no longer be reduced to linguistic competence proper, but had to include two fundamental components: sociolinguistic competence and pragmatic competence. Moreover, the major domains established by Council of Europe specialists for linguistic exchanges—personal, public, occupational, and educational—show the important role that would continue to be assigned to the communicative situation (CEFR 2003: 19).

In comparison with traditional methods, the traditional relation between form and meaning was also reversed. Since meaning was understood as the product of social interaction—that is, less as a simple product that the speaker intends to transmit and more as a negotiation between two interlocutors—it became more important than form. Furthermore, learning itself came to be conceived as a creative process governed more by internal mechanisms than by external influences. The role of imitation and reproduction was relativized, and the new understanding of communication encouraged linguistic creativity.

Thought itself was rehabilitated, its important role in discovering the rules by which new utterances are formed being recognized. Thus, behaviorist principles were replaced by those of cognitive psychology (Cuq, Gruca 2017: 276), which emphasizes the importance of mental processes in language acquisition. From this point to the idea of the individual's participation in his or her own learning process there was only one step, and the notion of learner-centeredness and attention to learner needs followed naturally. In this new context of thought, the learner could no longer be imagined as a passive being receiving external stimuli from teachers, as in behaviorist psychology, but as an active subject capable of interpreting and internalizing information, moving from input to output.

The emergence of the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFR 2001/2003), which clearly established the components of general communicative competence—linguistic, sociolinguistic, and pragmatic—was therefore prepared through a long process of readjustment within communicative approaches, in accordance with the diverse particular situations encountered in the classroom. In addition, the European document explicitly introduced the action-oriented perspective on language teaching, granting a central place to classroom tasks that students were expected to complete and that had to resemble, as closely as possible, tasks encountered in real life. The CEFR's merit, however, lies in the fact that it did not prescribe or promote a single method, but rather presented different possible options, allowing teachers to choose those most appropriate or to combine and reconfigure them freely. For this reason, post-CEFR methods are considered, taken as a whole, to have established "a balance between the different types of activities, micro-tasks and tasks," tending "to reduce the gap between learning and 'reality'" (Cuq, Gruca 2017: 281). Indeed, the action-oriented perspective should not be seen as a rupture with earlier communicative approaches, but as a natural extension of their major lines of force, now rendered more complex, more complete, and more attuned to contemporary needs. In fact, every newly emerged methodological system should be understood as, to some extent, inscribed within the one that preceded it, simply because it emerged as a reaction to it. This encourages us to notice, alongside discontinuities, the similarities as well—that is, those "neighbouring relations" that can explain the emergence of new systems within a "vast interactive continuum" (Cuq, Gruca 2017: 283), so as not to create artificial and unrealistic divisions.

This continuous reshaping and readjustment of the initial principles nevertheless created the impression of a "methodology of compromise." In particular, the return to a graded and systematic teaching of grammar and vocabulary was considered by some to be a genuine betrayal of the doctrine. Yet the recommendation to place grammar and vocabulary at the service of a communicative purpose, and to correlate the urgency of being able to communicate in a given situation with the linguistic difficulty involved in that communicative act, showed that a different type of methodology was already taking shape—one that was far more open and flexible.

4. The Post-Method Era

Used too strictly, within their own boundaries, any of the canonical methods described so far become limiting, both for the teacher and for the learner. Moreover, the use of a single method in language teaching and learning has become inappropriate, since it is considered unable to respond satisfactorily to the complexity of the factors involved in this process. As early as the beginning of the 1990s, methodologists stopped searching for the "perfect method," recommending instead "an eclectic blending of methods" that would foreground "the quality and motivation of learning" (Prabhu 1990: 167). The fundamental aim of the new eclectic methodology concerned the reception, creation, and transmission of meanings, the only activities through which communicative intentions can be realized. Other authors even spoke of the inauguration of a post-method pedagogy (Kumaravadivelu 2003: 23), a new methodological current that brought together convergent ideas favoring an approach free from rigidity and imbalance.

Post-method pedagogy is defined by three fundamental, interdependent parameters. First, it claims not to propose alternative teaching methods, but alternatives to method, leading to a reconfiguration of the relationship between theoretician and practitioner: whereas the traditional concept of method entitled theoreticians to construct professional theories of pedagogy, post-method empowers practitioners to construct personal theories of practice; whereas method authorized theoreticians to centralize pedagogical decision-making, post-method allows practitioners to generate innovative, locally specific, classroom-oriented strategies. The second parameter concerns greater teacher autonomy. The teacher is expected not only to know how to teach, but also to act autonomously within the academic and administrative constraints imposed by institutions, programs of study, curricula, and textbooks. Finally, the third element is a principled pragmatism, based on the teacher's shaping and reshaping of the didactic process through classroom self-observation, self-analysis, and self-evaluation, in virtue of the fact that "a method is tested only through teaching" (Kumaravadivelu 2003: 33). In order to respond to this final parameter, related to pragmatism, teachers are encouraged to develop a "sense of plausibility," which presupposes "a subjective understanding of the teaching they do" (Prabhu 1990: 172). This understanding may arise from one's own experience as a teacher or even as a former learner, through professional education, but also through constant consultation with colleagues. This special sense is not necessarily tied to the concept of method, since the concern is not to decide whether we are dealing with a good or bad method. On the contrary, what is at stake is something far more practical: whether the method is "active, alive or sufficiently operational" to create "a sense of involvement for both teacher and learner" (Prabhu 1990: 173).

Numerous researchers therefore emphasize the need to take into account all aspects of the teaching-learning process and to orient didactic practice toward a holistic, balanced, and integrated approach (Cuq, Gruca 2017: 281). For this reason, it is not advisable to claim that we act on the basis of "the communicative method" in the singular—the very existence of such a concept being contested, given the variety of methods of this type—but rather that we follow the "communicative principle," oriented primarily toward oral and written communicative activities. By choosing this principle, we make the tasks to be completed more flexible and correlate them more rigorously with the communicative aim pursued. In the new communicative approaches, in the plural, interactivity occupies a privileged place and should govern any practical language course. This involves interaction in the classroom at every level: between teacher and students, among students, and also among the various methods used in class, bearing in mind that none of them, on its own, has been able to capture the multiple dimensions underlying the assimilation and internalization of linguistic, metalinguistic, sociocultural, and pragmatic knowledge.

For the same reason, the aim is also to transform the classroom into a sociocultural setting as close as possible to "real" reality. Within this quasi-natural environment, everything should unfold as if teaching and learning were something taking place among students, rather than between the one "who knows everything and teaches" and the students "who know nothing and must learn" (cf. Goes 2005: 63–64).

Another essential element is the novelty of the proposed content and activities, not merely the format in which verbal interaction takes place. Even if a certain degree of disorder may emerge in the planning, development, and implementation of new techniques, strategies, or methods, this can be tolerated insofar as the activities correspond to the individual characteristics of the students, demonstrating a minimum respect for their capacity to discover knowledge through inductive methods, communicative activities, and problem-solving—elements that were not characteristic of the methods discussed earlier. According to the new paradigm of communicative methods, students must be allowed to take risks, accept their mistakes, and help others. In a more systematic summary, the eight key elements of the new communicative paradigm would be: learner autonomy, cooperative learning, curricular integration, focus on meaning, diversity, the use of didactic tasks designed to develop thinking skills, alternative assessment, and the view of the teacher as a co-participant in the learning process (Oprandy, apud Jacobs, Farrell

2003: 9). While acknowledging that communicative activities are a priority in a language course, we must nevertheless remember that they cannot take place without prior preparation. This preparation consists in the acquisition of the lexical units and grammatical structures necessary for constructing verbal interactions, together with awareness of the appropriate sociolinguistic and sociocultural norms, so as to make possible the realization of various communicative micro- and macro-functions in contexts as close as possible to those of real life.

Consequently, in the new communicative paradigm, centered on the profile of learners, no method is considered superior to another, since such a claim would imply that it is valid for all teaching contexts and all students (cf. Prabhu 1990: 171–172). Were we to opt for a single method, we would risk transforming the entire didactic process into a kind of ritual, in which the teacher's perceptions of teaching would be replaced by a set of standardized procedures, much as happens in assessment. It is worth asking, however, how far we can go with the standardization of teaching and whether we should not leave somewhat more room for the teacher's creativity, which in the classroom tends, in any case, to transgress methodological boundaries.

5. The "Anxious Teacher" Syndrome

In the field of Romanian as a foreign language (RFL), where the structural method was predominantly used, especially in the first decades, when applied linguistics had also established a school in Romania[7], several methodological systems were not rigorously theorized. On the contrary, whenever the need for renewal was felt, methods—or rather models of activities—were borrowed from foreign-

[7] Here we refer to the Circle of Applied Linguistics established at the University of Bucharest in the 1960s around Tatiana Slama-Cazacu, which had a decisive influence on the creation of a methodological model for teaching Romanian as a second language. This model formed the basis for the so-called "ministry textbooks," widely used in Romanian universities offering the preparatory year programme.

language textbooks, as well as from the didactics of Romanian as a mother tongue, without their underlying logic always being understood. Under the pressure of context, namely the need to teach Romanian to students with whom communication was possible only through the target language, Romanian specialists were compelled to invent an appropriate methodological system, adapted to the profile of the group and to the teaching context, mobilizing all their imagination. Some researchers have noted the same tendency to mix methods in other academic environments as well, attributing such hesitations to "major confusions" from a methodological point of view (Ellis 2003: 10), while others have spoken, in somewhat harsher terms, of a genuine "vicious circle" caused by insufficient knowledge of the specific nature of the methods adopted (Kumaravadivelu 2003: 162).

As emerges from the folklore of RFL specialists, they too seem rather theoretically uncertain about their own methodological choices, which are dictated more by the classroom reality they face than by the theories they have examined. We reproduce here some of the older and newer dilemmas of RFL teachers, expressed in the form of questions addressed to us over the years by colleagues from the Department of Romanian Language, Culture, and Civilization or by participants in teacher-training courses: *Is it ridiculous/inappropriate/outdated to use simple repetition exercises to consolidate the plural?*; *I know structuralism is criticized, but I cannot give up structural exercises of the kind found in the "Brâncuș Manual," nor the "acting out" of guided micro-dialogues; Am I still allowed to translate a word from time to time, especially when I can no longer find any way to explain it through mime, gesture, or familiar words? I am sorry, professor, but I cannot fully follow the linguistic progression and the microlanguage... I admit that I sometimes show them a film or an online advertisement, so they can hear what real Romanian sounds like...* (editor's note: comment referring to levels A1–A2); *I admit it: I focus more on grammar, because only in this way do I feel I can control everything... And they like it; they feel good, safe...* . Of course, we cannot end this series of statements without mentioning the already famous, informed formulation of a specialist from the new generation:

There is life beyond linguistic competences, which appears in the title of a study (Vasiu 2020).

We confess that we do not find such dilemmas worrying at all. Rather than seeing them as signs of methodological confusion, we regard them as an indication of the healthy thinking of a new generation of specialists. We prefer someone who manifests at least one of the two types of symptoms of the "anxious teacher" syndrome (Besse 1995: 103). The weaker, type A symptoms include: total dependence on a textbook; the constant search for working models applied empirically, without necessarily being concerned with understanding the scientific reasons that justify the methodological proposals identified; judging methods exclusively through the results obtained; experiencing a sense of security only when guided by an external recommendation; and, from time to time, moderate states of anxiety that diminish when someone validates one's choices. Alongside these, a series of stronger, type B symptoms may also appear, consisting in: a natural inclination toward eclecticism; the subversive use of any textbook, manifested in the refusal to use exclusively the method, exercises, or texts proposed there. Such a teacher does not "adopt" the textbook, but adapts it, transgresses it, remaining permanently dissatisfied with the limitations it imposes. For this reason, such a teacher will create additional personalized worksheets, even using the names of students in the group in order to motivate them as much as possible[8]; the proposal of additional activities such as games, interviews, and so on likewise reveals a creative, tireless, and constantly engaged teacher; the adoption of procedures not envisaged either by the method used or by the textbooks, because the teacher is driven by the noble impulse to adapt to the learning situation and to the students' interests. In the age of the internet, this type of teacher can therefore easily construct a personal and personalised teaching system—and not "a method"—borrowing and combining elements from different methods

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[8] We have supplemented Henri Besse's schematic table with this feature, inspired by the profile of several teachers in our department who fit this pattern perfectly, while also going beyond it by preparing customized worksheets according to the profile and preferences of the students in their groups.

or textbooks, because he or she is eager to understand not only how, but also "why" a certain activity is carried out. This anxious—and, we would add, eclectic teacher, in keeping with the title of this study—strongly wishes to be appreciated by the students, sometimes even at the expense of the methodology used. There is therefore a danger that, at times, certain less popular activities may be neglected, a risk that increases when two teachers work in tandem with the same group. In general, however, the advantages of such an approach outweigh its limitations.

What is certain is that in language didactics we cannot speak of absolute methodological recipes. For the time being, we too doubt that an entirely new methodological system could appear very soon in language teaching and learning. Nevertheless, regardless of the teaching context, certain fundamental principles—such as the frequency, urgency, usefulness, and currency of the notions taught, promoted in most approaches—remain valid criteria to this day. The systematization of content is also vital, since language must not appear as an amalgam of formulations linked to particular situations. In such a case, one would arrive at an atomized view of language facts, preventing the investigation of regularities and the discovery of the logic of the linguistic system as a whole. To complete this picture, we also invoke the encouragement of reflexivity in the learning process, since only by repeatedly moving from rule to examples and from examples back to rule, hundreds of times, can a reflective and nuanced acquisition of the language be ensured.

6. Eclecticism: Confusion or Methodological Freedom?

In conclusion, we may state that today, in language didactics, a form of methodological eclecticism is being promoted, which some associate with a certain indecision, with the absence of a firm trajectory, or even with the absence of any method. Indeed, a rigorous — that is, rigid — methodologist might criticize excessive eclecticism, regarding it as closer to bricolage than to a construction grounded in original methodological analysis. Nevertheless, we should not feel lost in this methodological eclecticism, but should rather welcome the broad openings and great flexibility it offers us. We should recall, moreover, that in its philosophical sense eclecticism originally lacked negative connotations, since it implied choosing the best elements from different systems, provided that they were "reconcilable," without necessarily aiming to create an entirely new philosophical system[9] (Cuq 2003: 78).

Therefore, in order not to feel disoriented within this amalgam of methods, our only chance is to distinguish the basic methodologies upon which the new framework has been grafted, and which circulate, like a revitalizing fluid, through the entire construction, sustaining it. It is also essential to ensure the coherence of the techniques borrowed from various sources, so that the eclectic selection of classroom practices remains, at all costs, a rational gesture rather than the result of fashion or chance. In our view, a possible metaphor for methodological eclecticism is that of the kaleidoscope: despite the diversity of the component pieces gathered inside the magic tube, made of materials of different colors and orientations, they never arrange themselves at random. On the contrary, the final figure produced by turning the cylinder is always coherent; in our case, this harmony is due both to the elements that rigorously delimit the space in which the multicolored pieces are reconfigured and to the trained eye of the teacher.

If we follow the dominant communicative principle — functional-notional and action-oriented — of the last two decades, which supports the multiplication, diversification, differentiation, and adaptation of teaching-learning modes to the reality of the classroom, then our methodological choices will certainly have to be situated somewhere at the "intersection of methods," as Puren suggested in the very title of his 1994 work. In this crossroads of methodological eclecticism, the risk of making major mistakes is smaller, since our choices are practical in nature, and only the field itself can test them, validating or invalidating them. In fact, eclecticism itself is the natural result of testing various theories in the field. Only in this way can useful elements be consciously

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[9] From this point of view, eclecticism differs from syncretism, which accepts the fusion of doctrines without showing any particular concern for coherence.

extracted from them, while all ballast is discarded. As a result of this process of validation, a form of reasoned eclecticism emerges (Puren 1994: 99), in which the justification obtained through field testing keeps the principle of minimal coherence permanently open. Yet the teacher can claim autonomy, construct a personal methodology, and adapt teaching to the particular classroom situation only if he or she is informed and, of course, properly "trained." Thus, the current stake in language didactics is not to give eclecticism "permission" to enter the stage, since, after all, neither a teacher nor a textbook author needs special authorization to use it. The aim is rather to reflect on it, in order to form "an overall methodological conception" of the language teaching-learning process (Puren 1994: 99), without seeking to identify a single type of global and universal coherence, but rather a set of weak, multiple, local, and provisional micro-coherences that allow the teacher to manage the complexity of his or her own methods and of students' learning styles, without entirely imposing his or her own teaching methods upon them.

In other words, in response to the dilemmas mentioned above, we may say that, if the classroom situation requires it, we are free: to use, from time to time, a little explicit grammar, as recommended by the grammar-translation method, while nevertheless privileging the implicit and inductive grammar promoted by communicative approaches; to use simple repetition exercises, widely employed in the direct method and in audio-lingual methods, as well as structural exercises used in SGAV; to introduce authentic documents even from elementary levels, without abandoning progression or the development of input appropriate to the learners' level, since SGAV methods and teaching practice have highlighted the important role of grading linguistic content; to rely also on the memorization of conversational formulas, in the manner of the direct, audio-lingual, or structuro-global audio-visual methods, especially at elementary level, while remembering that the ultimate aim is the learner's linguistic autonomy. Beyond all this, we must not forget that the teaching of linguistic content must always be subordinated to a communicative purpose, so that it does not become limiting and ineffective. As should be clear from what has been said here, methodology cannot be treated as a fashion. It has a history that deserves to be explored and valorized, and this reconstruction of the evolution of methodological systems has sought to demonstrate, among other things, how much we can learn through the simple act of remembering.

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The friendship between a Swedified Frenchman and the Romanian language

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Abstract: *The friendship between a Swedish Frenchman and the Romanian language*. In our study, we brought into the discussion the life and work of a linguist, who contributed intensively to the promotion of the Romanian language at the international level. Among the works of Alf Lombard, we insisted on the volume *La langue roumaine*. *Une présentation*, which could represent a real support for the RFL teacher, but we did not neglect the other research either. Towards the end, we exemplified the way in which the Swedish linguist pointed out the questionable aspects in the works of Romanian linguists or even the way in which he corrected them.

Keywords: *Alf Lombard, linguist, French, Swedish, Romanian language, Romanian phonetics, Romanian morphology, Romanian lexicology.*

1. Alf Lombard. Brief biographical profile

Alf Lombard considered himself a Swedified Frenchman all his life, and this phrase aptly describes the life story of the man who was called "the most profound" (Sala 2013: 199) or "the world's foremost foreign expert on the Romanian language" (Hoffmann 1996–1997: 20). He was born in 1902 in Paris to a mixed family of intellectuals; his father was French and his mother Swedish, so by the age of four he was bilingual. After his father's death, his mother decided to return to Sweden, where

Alf Lombard completed all levels of education, earning a doctorate in Romance philology from Uppsala in 1930 with the thesis *Les constructions nominales dans le français moderne. Étude syntaxique et stylistique*. Returning to the phrase *'Swedified French'*, we note that, although he obtained Swedish citizenship in 1924, for the linguist, France was just as dear as Sweden. Many details of his family life (spouses, children, trips etc.) and professional life (career progression, involvement in linguistic societies, doubts and concerns regarding various linguistic topics, among other aspects) are revealed in the correspondence Lombard maintained with numerous Romanian linguists; his letters to Al. Rosetti were published by Nicolae Mocanu, Ioana Anghel, and Heinz Hoffmann in four volumes (2000/I; 2002/II; 2004/III; 2009/IV).

What caught our attention were his methods for teaching foreign languages. His encounter with each foreign language had its own story, but his passion for Romance languages would shape his destiny: in 1930, he became a lecturer at Uppsala University, and in 1938, a full professor of Romance philology and head of the Department of Romance Languages at Lund University. His mother was a major influence on the researcher's linguistic life; thanks to her, he learned German in childhood, and as a teenager, he began studying Latin. In teaching foreign languages, his mother employed an ingenious method, namely, "inviting some of the boy's friends from abroad to stay at the family home, where only the guest's native language was permitted as the language of communication" (Hoffmann 1996–1997: 18). He spent the year 1920 in France, where he learned Italian through private lessons. It was also there that he conceived the idea of learning Russian, as there were many Russian immigrants who had fled the Bolshevik Revolution. His self-study of Russian was complemented by conversations with Russian refugees, and later, Russian became the language of conversation with his first wife, who was born in Saint Petersburg. In addition to languages of Germanic, Romance, and Slavic origin, Lombard was also interested in Arabic (due to its influence on Spanish), Chinese, Creole languages, and Basque. Since the list of languages known to the linguist ends with "etc." (*ibid*.: 19), we should also note that Albanian, Hungarian, Modern Greek, and Turkish piqued his interest for yet another reason: namely, his in-depth study of the Romanian language, a language that would transform his research preferences.

2. A passion for the Romanian language

As an outstanding Romanist, he could not accept a comparative study of the Romance languages that excluded Eastern Latin – that is, the Romanian language. In the preface to the first volume of *Le verbe roumain*, he compares such a study to "a table that a carpenter would be content to furnish with three legs instead of four—corresponding to the three main sister languages: French, Spanish, and Italian – leaving the fourth corner of the piece unsupported, in precarious balance" (Lombard 1954/I: VIII).

Thus, the importance of the Romanian language within the Romance family of languages led him, in 1930, to begin studying it on his own, using Gustav Weigand's grammar (*Rumänische Grammatik*) and Ghiță Pop's dictionary (*Langenscheisdt Taschenwörterbuch der rumänischen und deutschen Sprache*) (Lombard, Rosetti 2009: 268). Later, on the recommendation of the Romance linguist Erick Staaff, he traveled to Romania to perfect his knowledge of the Romanian language. There he was welcomed by Ovid Densusianu, who became his friend and introduced him to his student Augustin Zamfir Nelu Popescu, with whose help Lombard perfected his Romanian pronunciation: "The help I asked him to give me – and he did give it – was primarily of a phonetic nature, since the information regarding pronunciation that I had gleaned from G. Weigand's grammar and Gh. Pop's pocket dictionary was incomplete, unclear, and, at times, even erroneous. I asked detailed questions and made precise and thorough notes; among other things, I constantly asked him (perhaps several hundred times) to read me Petre Ispirescu's short story *Judecata vulpii*, while I accurately transcribed his reading into phonetic transcription, including all variants." (Lombard 1988: 73). The result of these successive readings took shape in a handbook on Romanian pronunciation.

On this first trip, he met N. Iorga, I. A. Candrea, Iorgu Iordan, and Al. Rosetti, whose friendship he enjoyed until each of their deaths. He undertook other trips to Romania, 12 in total (Rosetti, Lombard 2009: 273), attended Romanian conferences, visited major cities, and met numerous Romanian scholars, who would later return his visits to Lund. Among the linguists who enjoyed Lombard's friendship – many of whom were fellows of the Swedish Institute—we recall Andrei Avram, Marius Sala, Boris Cazacu, Florica Dimitrescu, Alexandru Niculescu, Constantin A. Gâdei, Gheorghe Bulgăr, and others.

Throughout his life, Lombard was deeply attached not only to the Romanian language but also to the Romanian people. As a result, he nominated Romanian writers such as Tudor Arghezi, Zaharia Stancu, and Mircea Eliade for the Nobel Prize. Furthermore, according to Sala, he was captivated by the beauty of Romanian women, the Black Sea, and Romania itself, which is why he published numerous articles about our country not only in the press but also in Swedish encyclopedias. He did not get involved in politics, but one of his newspaper articles was translated regarding "the Romanians' just claim to Transylvania" (Hoffmann 1996–1997: 25).

3. When passion becomes a profession...

Although he initially began studying the Romanian language to broaden his knowledge of the Romance languages, his passion eventually evolved into an in-depth study. Over the 76 years of his research activity (1920–1996), he studied numerous linguistic aspects of the Romance, Slavic, and Germanic languages, but he dedicated his most extensive work (over 1,000 pages) to the Romanian verb. The study of the Romanian language, marginalized by Swedish Romanists due to its structural particularities and differences from other Romance languages, became a priority in his research, which was complemented by his teaching. For half a century, he taught Romanian at Swedish universities, a language he himself introduced to the Department of Romance Studies at Uppsala (1936) and later at Lund (1938), and he supervised bachelor's theses and doctoral dissertations on topics in Romanian grammar.

As a scholar of Romanian studies, he kept abreast of everything published in Romania and built up an impressive library of works on Romanian philology. From 1947, when he became a corresponding member of the Romanian Academy, until his death, "a multitude of Romanian universities, libraries, publishing houses, fiction writers, and linguists regularly sent him their new publications" (Hoffmann 1996–1997: 27). This friend of the Romanians created, in Lund, the most impressive library of Romanian materials existing in Western universities. Because he specialized in the Romanian language, Romanian linguists find it difficult to call him a foreigner, since he mastered the Romanian language down to the smallest details, and this is evident in his numerous lectures on Eastern Romance, in articles on the Romanian language, and, in particular, in his four major works on Romanian grammar, which received praise in reviews from some of the greatest Romanian linguists (Emil Petrovici, Al. Graur, I. Iordan, Al. Rosetti, Mioara Avram, Florica Dimitrescu, and others):

a. *La prononciation du roumain* is the result of a linguistic study conducted on a single subject whose pronunciation lacked any dialectal features. Alf Lombard took this method to the extreme by having the student read the same text countless times in order to transcribe all phonetic variants and variations. The work is more than a simple manual in which instructions are presented briefly; it represents a study of descriptive phonetics, with the advantage of detailing "the acoustic impression produced by the language of today's Bucharest residents" (Lombard 1935: 103). In its 73 pages, it presents consonants, semivowels, vowels, diphthongs, nasalization, devocalization, duration, stress, and several phonetic phenomena (e.g., apocope, aphereis, etc.), and toward the end, it provides clarifications regarding Romanian spelling and pronunciation. The work concludes with a phonetic transcription of Ispirescu's story, *Judecata vulpii*. The volume represents a "must-have book for anyone studying the phonetics of our language" (Sala 2013, p.

200) and a source that "offers local linguists a wealth of observations on Romanian phonetic phenomena" (Petrovici 1936: 269–270).

b. *Le verbe roumain. Étude morphologique* is "the most comprehensive study of a chapter of Romanian morphology published to date" (Macrea 1973: 64), of significant importance both for the Romanian language and for Romance linguistics, about which Sala states that "nothing can be written in this field without consulting it" (Sala 2001). In this work, over 5,000 Romanian verbs are analyzed from the perspective of descriptive, historical, and comparative grammar. Regarding the genesis of this book, the preface (Lombard 1954: VII–VIII) states that an Introduction to the Study of the Romanian Language was being planned to serve Romanists concerned exclusively with Western Romance. However, while beginning a sentence about the Romanian vowel e and pausing on an older passage devoted to the verbal suffixes -(*i*)*ez* and -(*i*)*esc*, Alf Lombard had several ideas that he jotted down on a note card. The card turned into a large sheet, which he filled, forcing him to take a second, then a third, until everything turned into an article on the root and the verbal suffixes belonging to verbs of the first and fourth conjugations, in the indicative mood, present tense. His focus subsequently expanded to include the other conjugations, moods, and tenses, and the sentence about the vowel "*e*" evolved, after 10 years, into a two-volume monograph on the Romanian verb, spanning 1,223 pages. Without completing the planned Introduction, he maintained that it would be "without excessive digressions" (Lombard 1954: VIII).

c. *La langue roumaine. Une présentation* constitutes a part of that *Introduction*, which had been interrupted by the extensive study of Romanian verb morphology. Under the title *Introduction à l'étude du roumain*, Lombard had intended to publish a three-part work: a descriptive exposition of the language, a volume of annotated texts, and a summary of the history of the language. Of the three parts of the project, only the first came to fruition. The volume was written in his later years, after more than 30 years of teaching and researching the Romanian language. During his years as a full professor in the Department of Romance Philology at Lund, he devoted several courses to the Romanian language, which he improved year after year and distributed to Swedish students. These courses, which underwent substantial changes with each edition, form the basis of two books: the first Romanian grammar "to be published in Swedish or in Sweden, Rumänsk grammatik [Lund, C.W.K. Gleerup, 1973]", a work intended primarily for the study of the Romanian language at Nordic universities, particularly in Sweden; and the second, *La langue roumaine. Une présentation*, which "is intended for an international audience". We will return to the importance of this linguistic work below.

d. *Dictionnaire morphologique de la langue roumaine* is a work written by Alf Lombard in collaboration with Constantin Gâdei. It stems from the authors' desire "to supplement other dictionaries of the Romanian language" (Lombard, Gâdei 1981: IV), which generally cover both the orthographic and semantic aspects specific to lexicography, as well as the essentials of phonetic and morphological aspects. Through this morphological dictionary, the two linguists aim to provide the inflection of all inflectable words and the pronunciation of Romanian inflectional forms. This work takes into account the complex nature of Romanian morphology and the diversity of forms in which an inflected word may appear in speech, in most cases with two inflections: one external (extremely prolific) and the other internal (with numerous phonetic alternations). Compared to its sister languages, Romanian is characterized by several distinctive features, the most important of which are highlighted by the authors as early as the preface: the enclitic article, the genitive-dative case, the vocative, the present tense with the *-ez*, the opposition between suffixed and unsuffixed verbs in conjugations I and IV, the multitude of endings for nouns, adjectives, and pronouns, and the complex system of consonant and vowel alternations. Sometimes, choosing the correct inflection for a particular noun, verb, adjective, or pronoun "is no easy task even for a Romanian" (Lombard, Gâdei 1981: VII), which is why the dictionary, which in its final form benefited from the observations of Florica Dimitrescu, "aims to provide, for the first time, a systematic classification of the entire Romanian morphology and to make known, in its entirety, the inflection of all words that possess it" (Lombard, Gâdei 1981: IX).

4. Lombard in the context of Romanian as a foreign language

Through his interest and passion for Romanian, Alf Lombard made an enormous contribution to the recognition of this language, first in Swedish universities and then internationally. In the preface to the book *La langue roumaine. Une présentation*, based on Romanian language courses taught and revised over decades at the universities of Uppsala and Lund, the researcher states that "the study of the Romanian language beyond its borders is still in its infancy, or nearly so" (Lombard 1974, p. VII) and highlights the importance of studying our language from three perspectives: scientifically, without the Romanian language one cannot form a complete picture of what Latin has become today; practically, without the Romanian language one cannot communicate with the population of southeastern Europe; and literarily, without the Romanian language one is deprived of contact with one of the world's great literatures (*ibid.*). These are the reasons for which he wrote *La langue roumaine. Une présentation*, a work that presents the spoken and written language of educated Bucharest residents – a language devoid of marked regional features, the "zero style" that foreigners should imitate. The work is not intended exclusively for specialists, but also for an international audience eager "to learn to read the works of Eminescu, Creangă, Caragiale, Rebreanu, Arghezi, Sadoveanu, Blaga, Stancu" (*ibid.*: VIII). To facilitate access to his book and to the Romanian language, Lombard begins by listing the most common Romanian words and phrases (with their corresponding phonetic transcriptions); then, in the following pages, he focuses on Romanian pronunciation, continuing with the two essential parts of the work: a succinct and general section in which he presents the inflectional morphological classes, and then an extensive and detailed one, in which the morphosyntactic characteristics of each part of speech are described in detail with numerous examples, often providing historical explanations as well. The work is considered "the best grammar of the Romanian language published in a foreign language" (Sala 2013: 201), its value is "all the more remarkable given that it is a book written by a foreigner" (*ibid*.).

To highlight the subtlety and depth of the Swedish researcher's analysis of the Romanian language, we examine two revealing examples.

In their correspondence, the two friends discuss a wide range of grammatical issues, comment on each other's work and discuss various controversial linguistic topics. Thus, in the letter dated October 22, 1873, A. Lombard congratulates Al. Rosetti on the volume *Études linguistiques* and thanks him for sending it to him; after reading it, he expresses reservations regarding two grammatical issues: the Romanian neuter and the morpheme *pe* as a "marker of personal gender." Regarding the neuter, he draws attention to the difference between Latin, Greek, and Slavic, on the one hand—where the neuter characterizes the entire class of nouns (nouns, adjectives, pronouns)—and, on the other hand, Romanian, where the neuter is typically discussed only with reference to nouns. In Lombard's view, this difference should be reflected in the gender designation, and, given the way the Romanian neuter is formed—with masculine inflection in the singular and feminine inflection in the plural—he proposes the concept of "ambigen." Regarding the morpheme *pe*, Al. Rosetti specifies that it is "a marker of personal gender," but Lombard notes that "nevertheless, with a pronoun (constructed without a noun), this pe relates very well to an inanimate noun" (Rosetti, Lombard, 2002: 239), a point he had not seen noted in Rosetti's work. The Swedish linguist's observation is accompanied by numerous examples: "I didn't read his book, I read mine"; "the book I read," etc. (*ibid*.). The habit of critiquing linguistic works became a constant feature in the letters he addressed to Al. Rosetti, leading him to offer comments (positive or negative) on the research of Al. Graur, M. Iliescu, Iordan, V. Robu, M. Avram, Florica Dimitrescu, Al. Nicolae, A. Avram, I. Diaconescu, and others (see, in particular: Rosetti, Lombard, 2004).

His keen linguistic intuition enables him to make observations not only on Romanians' linguistic works but also on the language they use in their letters. Thus, in the letter dated August 1, 1989, he points out certain inconsistencies in Pătruț's epistolary style, who had used the adverb "numai" instead of "abia": "Pătruț, in a recent letter, writes to me, 'I am only now replying to your letter from...' and 'Only yesterday did I find Șt. Pascu...'. This 'only,' used twice, shocks me; shouldn't it rather be 'barely'? (The influence of the French 'seulement,' isn't it?)" (Rosetti, Lombard, 2009, p. 130).

5. Conclusions

Through this presentation, we sought to highlight the work of a linguist who, despite having contributed significantly to the international promotion of the Romanian language, has not been sufficiently recognized in the field of Romanian as a second language. We believe that Lombard's textbook, which stands out for its diversity of perspectives, comparative analysis, and wealth of examples, should be included in bibliographic references for morphosyntactic research in this field. Lombard's linguistic work, particularly *La langue roumaine. Une présentation*, constitutes a valuable resource for teachers of Romanian as a foreign language, as they can observe how a non-native specialist understands and explains Romanian morphosyntactic phenomena, especially since this non-native speaker is a specialist in Romance languages and Romanian studies.

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On the Border between Word and Silence: The Foundations of a Lexicultural Dictionary

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Abstract: *On the Border between Word and Silence: The Foundations of a Lexicultural Dictionary*. The primary aim of this paper is to open a discussion on the lexicultural approach to the acquisition of Romanian as a foreign language. To date, the term lexicultureme, which designates the foundational concept of this field of research, does not appear in Romanian dictionaries and has not been used in the teaching of Romanian as a foreign language. Our main objective is to familiarize Romanian specialists with lexiculturology, or lexicultural pragmatics, a theory developed in the 1990s within the French-language academic tradition, and to draw attention to the need for sustained and systematic theoretical reflection on words endowed with a cultural load shared by the majority of native speakers. At the same time, there is a need to develop didactic tools that facilitate foreign learners' access to Romanian culture through lexicultures. Starting from a widely circulated lexicultureme identified in everyday discourse, the paper outlines the methodological framework required for theoretical interpretation and for the development of practical intervention models, both of which are essential for teaching words and lexical units with added cultural value to non-native speakers. To this end, it presents the principles of the lexicultural approach and classifies the main types of lexicultural terms, offering examples from Romanian. Finally, the paper discusses the principles that should guide the development of a future dictionary of Romanian lexicultural terms for foreign learners, as well as the challenges involved in implementing the lexicultural approach.

Keywords: *lexicultural approach, lexicultural pragmatics, lexiculturem, culturem, suitcase words, verbal palimpsest, shared cultural load, culture-vision, culture-action, cultural implicit*

1. One Dorel, Two Dorels… or the Romanian "Doreliad." Preamble

The idea for this article originated from the title of an online news item: *The "Dorels" from the towing service of Cluj-Napoca City Hall destroyed a woman's car. They dropped it off the platform*[1]. The following day, we witnessed a conversation between two shop assistants in front of a store in central Cluj. Irritated by a power outage that had occurred in the middle of the day, they were convinced that the *Dorels* carrying out repairs on a nearby street were responsible for the incident.

Starting from this proper noun used in the plural in everyday discourse, we asked ourselves how familiar this character might be to Romanians and continued our investigation. Discovering the existence of a veritable "Doreliad" on the Internet, we opened other news items with similar headlines and observed that, from Satu Mare to Constanța and from Timișoara to Bacău, almost every city in Romania has its own… Dorel. Moreover, this figure seems to have migrated to Bulgaria, Germany, and even Azerbaijan, becoming a prototypical character associated with all kinds of mishaps, especially those caused by power outages. Linguistic reality thus shows that online news headlines have abounded in *Dorels*, at least since around 2010. For instance, Pro TV news confidently asserts: *Dorel exists. He cut an electrical cable in broad daylight*[2]. Other websites offer similar reports: *Dorel from Constanța strikes again. Railway cables supplying the station cut with an excavator*[3]; *A Dorel working on the sewage system cut a cable and left the Satu Mare border crossing without*

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1 News article published on 29 September 2023, available at: https://adevarul.ro/stiri-locale/cluj-napoca/masina-distrusa-de-doreii-de-la-serviciulridicari2304173.html#google_vignette.

2 News article published on 27 March 2023, available at: https://stirileprotv.ro/video/dorel-exista-a-taiat-un-cablu-electric-in-capitala-in-plina-zi/60438169.

3 News article published on 11 June 2023, available at: https://clubferoviar.ro/cabluri-feroviare-taiate-cu-excavatorul.

electricity[4]; *Dorel strikes hard in Timișoara*[5] — and the series continues with other Dorels from Bacău, Halmeu, Deva, Bragadiru, Constanța, and so on, the events extending beyond national borders: *The Azerbaijani Dorel cut the cable at the border. We've been waiting since noon between countries*[6]; *Dorel has reached Germany. CHAOS in Berlin after a worker cut the wrong cable*[7]. Finally, the "Bulgarian Dorel"[8] is blamed for interrupting the internet connection between Germany and Asia for ten hours.

Empathizing with the difficulties that a beginner-level (A1–A2) non-native speaker might encounter when interpreting messages whose protagonist is this new figure from Romanian urban folklore—especially when the proper noun appears in the plural[9]—we carried out a simple thought experiment, reconstructing the steps such a learner might take to identify, without external help, the meaning of the word *Dorel*. We begin from the premise that the foreign receiver has correctly inferred the singular form of this troublesome noun, by analogy with forms such as *ghiocel/ghiocei* or *băiețel/băieței*. Having identified the base form, an avid user of the DEX (the Romanian explanatory dictionary) might turn to this lexicographic tool designed for native speakers, where, unfortunately, no entry for *Dorel* will be found. A simple Google search, however, would lead to further headlines, such as: *A "Dorel" from the finance department*

[4] News article published on 13 December 2022, available at: https://ziare.com/dorel/trafic-tiruri-vama-halmeu-satu-mare-blocat-curent-electric-muncitor-cablu-taiat-1777504.

[5] News article published on 13 July 2021, available: *https://www.opiniatimisoarei.ro/dorel-loveste-naprasnic-la-timisoara-3000-de-locuinte-ramase-fara-curent-dupa-ce-muncitorii-au-taiat-un-cablu-pe-santierul-de-pe-cetatii/13/07/2021.*

[6] News article published 26 July 2012, available at: https://www.freemiorita.ro/dacioti/dorelul-azer-a-taiat-cablul-la-vama-asteptam-de-la-pranz-intre-tari/.

[7] News article published 20 February 2019, available at: https://www.b1tv.ro/externe/dorel-a-ajuns-in-germania-haos-in-berlin-dupa-ce-un-muncitor-a-taiat-un-cablu-gresit-zeci-de-mii-de-locuitori-fara-curent-electric-263399.html.

[8] News article published 23 August 2010, available: https://evz.ro/dorel-de-bulgaria-903958.html.

[9] It is highly likely that a non-native listener will fail to recognize that the plural form Doreii is a proper noun, since capitalization is not always perceived as a marker of proper names

triggered the bombshell of abolishing private pensions![10], further complicating the task.

Pushing this exercise further, we follow our virtual protagonist navigating online and encountering the *Encyclopedic Dictionary*, where, at last, he will find information about various Romanian personalities, such as Bally Dorel (1923–2005), a physicist at the University of Bucharest, whose work dealt with "X-ray diffraction and absorption spectroscopy in metallic compounds and neutron optics." This will finally lead him to understand that he is dealing with a Romanian first name—although it will not clarify the meaning of the word in the news context. Finally, Wikipedia will confirm his initial intuition that *Dorel* is "a Romanian male given name,"[11] offering a list of personalities bearing this name, such as Dorel Vișan, actor, director, and poet; Dorel Stoica; Dorel Zaica, painter and graphic artist, and others.

Yet even this final inventory offers no clue for correctly interpreting the meaning of the word in the aforementioned headlines. To grasp its current meaning, one must know the "biography" of Dorel. Further investigation reveals that the figure originates as a humorous character from a series of advertisements for an alcoholic beverage (Unirea brandy), such as *Dorel and the dump truck*[12], where our protagonist appears surrounded by colleagues who "help" him with advice rather than actual work, while enjoying his blunders. Following the broadcast of these commercials and, especially, thanks to the highly popular television series Las Fierbinți, in which Dorel appears among the main characters, he became a prototype of urban narratives satirizing the bad habits of Romanian workers, such as procrastination or careless workmanship. In today's Romanian cultural imagination, Dorel represents a bungler, incapable of completing tasks properly and someone on whom one

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[10] News article published 26 September 2023, available at: https://www.digi24.ro/stiri/actualitate/politica/scandal-in-coalitie-din-cauza-pilonului-ii-de-pensii-un-dorel-de-la-finante-a-amorsat-bomba-desfiintarii-pensiilor-private-2519161.

[11] Definition available at: https://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dorel.

[12] "Advertisement produced in the 1990s, available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cwwn00j-yGs.

cannot rely. The well-known line from the aforementioned television series—*That's Dorel. Whatever he touches, he breaks.*—is highly illustrative of this behavioral pattern.

For native speakers unfamiliar with the profile of the non-native learner of Romanian, this entire process may seem like an unnecessary or even amusing detour. However, those experienced in exolingual communication (CEX) know very well that foreigners often require additional clarification regarding Romanian first names, which they do not always identify correctly. A common difficulty is determining gender in the case of masculine names ending in "-a," such as *Mircea* or *Horea*, or atypical feminine names such as *Gigi* or *Cici*. Although one might assume that proper names pose no difficulty in comprehension, in reality they can be problematic, especially when dealing with a lexicultureme such as our *Dorel*[13]—that is, a word that has acquired, over the past two decades, cultural meanings capable of restricting or even preventing access to its full sense in such contexts.

In choosing this lexicultureme as an example, we have taken into account its pervasive presence in the online environment, where it frequently appears, for instance in television news tickers, as a possible identity marker of Romanian society: *Romania, the country of Dorel?*[14] Convinced, after three decades of experience, that this is not the only lexicultureme that significantly affects the process of acquiring Romanian as a foreign language, the present study aims to capitalize on the lexicultural approach, as developed in international scholarship, in order to justify the need for a future dictionary of lexicultureme[15] intended for

[13] We will define below this concept, which we have translated from French and which is neither recorded in Romanian dictionaries nor acknowledged in Romanian linguistic discourse.

[14] Cf. Anca Vancu, 'Special. How Dorel Became the Emblem of Stupidity in Romania,' in *Adevărul*, 30 January 2016, available at: https://adevarul.ro/stiri-interne/societate/special-cum-a-ajuns-dorel-emblema-prostiei-in-1684338.html.

[15] In Galisson's view, such a tool represents "the first systematic attempt to initiate learners into a type of culture conducive to egalitarian and convivial (verbal and cultural, author's note) exchange, yet difficult for foreigners to access, because it has neither been described nor taught until now" (Galisson 1988b: 341)."

non-native speakers—similar to those developed for other foreign languages—which we consider a highly useful tool for Romanian as well.

2. The Lexicultural Approach and Lexicultural Pragmatics

2.1. The Didactics of Language-Cultures

Since the scope of this study does not allow for a detailed historical overview of the approach under discussion, we will limit ourselves to outlining a few key reference points meant to delineate the theoretical framework[16] of the concept of *lexiculture*[17] within which we will conduct this initial discussion in the field of Romanian as a foreign language (RFL) concerning the need for a future dictionary of lexiculturemes—one that should certainly include *Dorel*.

Before proceeding to the actual delineation of the lexicultural approach, it should be noted that it did not emerge on a blank slate, but

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[16] We consider such a theoretical excursus necessary, given the lack of references to the lexicultural approach in the Romanian context and, more importantly, the absence of specialized terminology for the fundamental concepts that define this well-established field of research in other academic environments.

[17] The translation from French is our own. The term is also attested in English (*lexiculture*; Chrisomalis 2021), Italian (*lessicultura*; Bosisio 2003), Portuguese (*lexicultura*; Barbosa 2008/2009), and Spanish (*lexicultura*; Díaz 2003; López García, Morales Cabezas 2013), which indicates that this approach of Francophone origin has been scientifically legitimized in other academic circles as well, where it is recognized as a discipline concerned with "the integration of language and culture into an inseparable entity in the process of language teaching and learning" (Díaz 2003: 107). In anticipation of possible objections from linguists regarding the introduction of this term into the field of Romanian as a foreign language, we invoke Galisson's view that, as a lexicologist, he believed in the symbolic, innovative, and dynamic role that newly introduced terms can play in the development of a discipline (see, for instance, the impact of notions such as *communicative skills* in Europe or *competence* in the United States). Moreover, he encouraged didacticians to give free rein to words so that they might express their full potential, and to introduce new terms, convinced that "we should not fear semantic or formal inflation, since whatever is introduced into circulation, if it proves not to be useful, will quickly fall into oblivion," regulation occurring naturally, without any external pressure (Galisson 1990: 46).

rather has its roots in a long-standing research tradition within the social sciences and humanities (philosophy of language, sociology, linguistic anthropology, and ethnolinguistics), focused on analyzing the inseparable relationship between language and culture. Without entering into the numerous theories formulated in these fields[18], we recall only the well-known view of E. Sapir, who considers vocabulary "an extremely sensitive index of the culture of a people" (Sapir 1949: 27).

It is evident that language didactics (DL), a transversal and dynamic discipline accustomed to capitalizing on research findings from related fields, could not remain indifferent to theories demonstrating the consubstantiality of language and culture. It has drawn on them both to better understand the process of language acquisition and to identify the most effective ways of influencing it positively. For example, some of the most widely known dictionaries of language didactics reflect this concern, showing that the relationship between language and culture is not one of simple one-to-one correspondence, but rather one of "reciprocal implication," in which language appears as "the object of teaching and learning, composed of an idiom and a culture," while culture is "the domain of reference without which no linguistic production can have meaning" (Cuq 2003: 148).

The idea that language cannot be separated from culture in language teaching had, however, been established much earlier in language didactics, with the introduction of the concept of *language-culture* by Robert Galisson, rightly regarded as the founder of the didactics of language-cultures[19] (Galisson 1988b: 326), or more precisely, of the *didactology of language-cultures* (DLC)[20]. Within this discipline,

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18 These theories have been discussed at greater length in Platon 2020.

19 There are, of course, other didacticians who frequently use this concept, such as Ch. Puren (1997: 2).

20 The concept of didactology was introduced in the 1970s with the aim of distinguishing it from language didactics. It is considered to refer more transparently to metadiscourse, that is, to the discourse of specialists about the discourse of language didactics itself, and its elaboration requires a greater degree of analytical distance from the phenomena under investigation. The concept was taken up in later studies (Galisson 1985), and a clear indication of its growing prominence is the fact that the

considerable effort has been devoted to highlighting the symbiosis between language and culture by identifying three fundamental dimensions of language:

1. a universal vehicle of culture, since, "through signs, which are words," it "can account for everything that concerns them, whether literature, the arts, the sciences… myths, rites, or behaviors";
2. a socio-historical product, since, "to be a faithful vehicle, it must adapt, evolve, and constantly serve as a carrier of meanings, values, and new semantic loads generated by society"—a feature that explains the continuous enrichment of language through neologisms, genuine markers of cultural adaptation;
3. a producer of culture, insofar as, in verbal exchanges among members of a group, language "refines, balances, and shapes collective representations and attitudes" (Galisson 1991: 118–119).

Given that, as a social practice and socio-historical product (Galisson 1991: 119), language is permeated by culture, DLC refuses to isolate language from culture, seeking instead to capture it in motion, as it is embedded in everyday discourse. It follows that the discursive approach to culture is "integrative and associative," foregrounding LC (language + culture), in contrast to the metadiscursive approach, which is "isolating or dissociative," speaking about language or culture, or language versus culture (Galisson 1995: 7).

The lexicultural approach emerges against this background and is closely associated with the work of Robert Galisson, a renowned lexicologist and didactologist (Pruvost 2005: 17), who, in the 1990s,

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journal Études de linguistique appliquée adopted, beginning with issue 79 (1990), the subtitle Revue de didactologie des langues-cultures. In 2003, the term lexiculturology was added to its title, reflecting the increasing number of contributions on this topic—especially after issue 156 (2009), under the direction of Jean Pruvost (Pruvost 2009: 390). Lexiculturology has even become the subject of dedicated conferences, such as the Jornadas Internacionais de Lexiculturiologia, organized at NOVA University of Lisbon in 2021. In the American academic context as well, volumes devoted to lexiculture have been published, such as The Lexiculture Papers: English Words and Culture, edited by Stephen Chrisomalis from Wayne State University (*cf.* https://clunl.fcsh.unl.pt/en/eventos-cientificos/jil/jil-2021).

formulated a genuine theory of lexiculture, with the explicit aim of developing a lexicometodology. Although he initially used the term *lexiculturology* for the discipline concerned with the study of lexiculture, he later renamed this "branch of the didactology of language-cultures" *lexicultural pragmatics* (LP), considering the new designation better suited to contemporary orientations in language acquisition (Galisson 1999a: 477).

The study of lexiculture[21], or lexiculturology, aims to explore an alternative pathway into culture, alongside those already established by disciplines such as history, geography, anthropology, philosophy, sociology, and semiotics—namely, through words. More precisely, lexiculture refers to the cultural value added to words[22] in the process of use (hence its pragmatic nature), termed *shared cultural load* (henceforth SCL[23]), which is generally not captured by conventional dictionaries (Galisson 1988b: 331). Mastery of SCL also constitutes "a discreet but essential marker of group membership," thus fulfilling a clear identity function. Observing that, despite its role in facilitating mutual understanding among speakers, SCL had attracted little attention from linguists—considered "rather disinclined to deal with culture" (Galisson 1988b: 341)—Galisson, as a didactician, took a keen interest in it, regarding it as a major obstacle in asymmetrical communication, since

21 Lexiculture is defined as a form of culture that is "mobilized and actualized in and through the words of a discourse whose purpose is not the study of culture for its own sake" (Galisson 1995: 6). Its founder conceives it as a fully-fledged discipline that requires a "curricular model of lexiculture" (Galisson 1994: 25). Its scientific status has also been validated by other authors, such as Stengers, who regards lexiculture as a mobilizing, useful, and valid concept that opens up new ways of approaching language. He argues that it should be recognized insofar as it "produces an effective organization of phenomena," rather than merely reflecting "a projection of the ideas and presuppositions of the individual promoting it" (Stengers 1987: 11).

22 Galisson acknowledges that, within language didactics, other scholars, such as Christian Puren, had already pointed to the possibility of accessing culture through the lexicon. However, they did not assign it a specific designation, treating it instead as a simple "subcategory of the approach to culture through language" (Galisson 2000: 66).

23 In the original: *charge culturelle partagée* (CCP). In Portuguese, this has been translated as *carga cultural partilhada* (Barbosa 2008/2009: 34).

"cultural implicitness, the unspoken (in explicit terms), creates both recurrent and difficult problems for foreigners" (Galisson 1995: 5).

Why did Galisson choose words? First, out of a personal fascination with them. As a lexicometodologist[24], he was convinced that, for learners engaged in acquiring a foreign language, words have strong psychological salience. Moreover, observing what happens to words "in the field" (i.e., in real contexts and situations of use), he noted that they live "in semantic symbiosis with their environment," metaphorically describing them as ecological entities. In another metaphor, Galisson likens them to "preconstructed receptacles, thus stable and economical in use compared to constructed utterances," seeing them as "privileged entry points for certain cultural contents that settle within them and ultimately adhere to words, thereby adding a new semantic dimension to their ordinary meaning" (Galisson 1991: 119). Furthermore, he regards words as the privileged locus through which any reflection on the world necessarily passes, functioning as interfaces between two objects of study artificially separated in language didactics: language and culture. In summary, the driving force behind the entire lexicultural endeavor lies in the idea that certain words act as powerful accumulators of culture (Galisson 1999a: 479), serving as markers of cultural belonging and identity (Galisson 1991: 119).

Thus, lexicultural pragmatics (LP) set itself the didactic ambition of entering "into culture through the lexicon, and into the lexicon through culture," with the explicit aim of integrating the two entities within the teaching-learning process, in accordance with their natural consubstantiality (Galisson 1999a: 479). One of its major concerns was to find a method "to bring to light, explain, and interpret" (Galisson 1999b: 122) this culture hidden in or beneath words, without resorting to discourses produced in a language other than the one "appropriate to the

[24] The term appears even in the title of the book *Des mots pour communiquer. Éléments de lexicométhodologie* [*Words for Communicating. Elements of Lexicomethodology*], in the introduction to which the author recommends: "At least during the learning phase, I suggest that the text be placed at the service of words, just as words are placed at the service of the text" (Galisson 1983: 3).

culture in question" (Galisson 1995: 6). We consider this observation particularly valuable and take it as a foundational principle in constructing the theoretical framework supporting the idea of a dictionary of lexiculturemes.

The solutions proposed for achieving this aim led to the development of a comprehensive lexicultural theory whose impact on language didactics has been far from negligible. From the outset, Galisson defined the didactology of language-cultures as a discipline of observation, conceptualization, and intervention[25] (Galisson 1986: 48). As this operational definition suggests, the goal of lexiculturology is pragmatic: it begins with the observation of linguistic facts in context, formulates the conceptual tools necessary for theoretical elaboration, and ultimately proposes concrete solutions for action (intervention). LP thus privileges the analytical concreteness of vocabulary over the synthetic abstraction of specialized discourse, facilitating the work of language teachers, who are considered more accustomed "to handling words than to interpreting cultures"[26] (Galisson 2000: 50).

Through the lexicultural approach, Galisson appears to have found a way to challenge the myths surrounding the inaccessibility of foreign cultures, and even to intervene in their content and teaching processes, in order to improve performance, conditions, and outcomes in the teaching-learning of language-culture (LC). To this end, he also developed lexicographic tools such as *Dictionnaire de compréhension et de production des expressions imagées* (1984), *Dictionnaire de noms de marques courants. Essai de lexiculture ordinaire* (Galisson, André 1998), and even a *Distractionnaire* (1986), together with L. Porcher. Through these instruments, LP engaged with everyday linguistic reality, seeking to

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[25] Ch. Puren later addressed the "intervention" dimension in language didactics as well, understanding it as "describing, analyzing, interpreting, and understanding the process of teaching and learning languages-cultures, with the aim of guiding or modifying it in order to improve it" (Puren 1997: 116).

[26] The idea is taken up in other studies as well, with Galisson referring to a "practitioners' allergy to didactic discourse," as well as to a "theoreticians' amnesia regarding pedagogical discourse" (Galisson et al. 1982: 14–15).

facilitate foreigners' understanding of authentic documents and their communication with native speakers.

The new lexicultural theory was well received in the Francophone academic world, as evidenced by: the publication of a special issue of the journal *ÉLA* devoted to lexiculture in lexicography (Pruvost 2009); the publication of a tribute volume dedicated to Galisson (*Mots et lexiculture*, Lino, Pruvost 2003); and studies examining the lexicultural dimension in dictionaries such as *Le nouveau Petit Robert* (Attruia 2010). Such research has led to conclusions worthy of reflection. For instance, some studies suggest that the lexicultural dimension is "omnipresent in dictionaries, sometimes without our awareness," since, in reality, we all—whether language teachers or lexicographers—already practice lexiculturology, albeit unconsciously (Pruvost 2009: 137). Others show that certain cultural meanings are absent from dictionary entries, while those that do appear often take the form of heavy, encyclopedic glosses, difficult even for native speakers to understand, and reflect "the cultural choices of the lexicographer" rather than a coherent and systematic scientific approach aimed at highlighting SCL (Attruia 2010: 11–12, 21).

LP has also spread significantly in other cultural contexts—Portuguese (Barbosa 2008/2009), Italian (Attruia 2010; Bosisio 2003), American (Chrisomalis 2021), and Spanish (Díaz 2003)—though less so in Romania. For this reason, if we wish to avoid isolating language from culture in teaching Romanian as a foreign language, lexiculturological reflection becomes particularly useful. This is especially true because the progressive teaching of language, imposed by the use of the direct method, requires the use of microlanguage in input texts and classroom communication, in order to adapt to learners' interlanguage. Yet this process of adaptation entails the risk of purging microlanguage of words with a high degree of shared cultural load, which not only undermines the authenticity of the input but also leaves considerable room for subjectivity in filtering and organizing vocabulary according to CEFR levels. At other times, decisions are made intuitively, without sufficiently considering learners' needs regarding the urgency of teaching certain lexiculturemes. For example, in the name of authenticity, we may introduce culturally marked words even at elementary levels, such as *cozonac* (sweet bread) or *piftie* (aspic)[27], without considering that the latter has a lower frequency than the former, or that it may be less present in the learners' cultural context, thus failing to meet criteria such as frequency, usefulness, distribution, or communicative productivity (Nation 2016: 120).

On the other hand, when the contrastive method is used, there is less rigor in determining the order in which words are taught than in the direct method, which allows lexiculturemes to be introduced at any stage of the learning process. Yet even in this case, the fundamental principle of lexiculturology is violated—namely, the use of the target language in explanations. The tendency to isolate language from culture is equally strong in both situations: (1) in the preparatory year program for foreign students, where the direct method is used and culture is mainly taught in its "high" form (in a metadiscursive perspective), as evidenced by the course "Romanian Culture and Civilization"; (2) in Romanian philology departments abroad, where the contrastive method is generally used and culture is likewise taught separately, often through another language (for example, Romanian literary history taught in English or French).

In order to better understand the philosophy of lexiculturology, however, we must broaden the discussion to include two additional conceptual poles: culture-as-vision (CV) and culture-as-action (CA) (Galisson 2002: 502), which requires a brief detour.

2.2. *Culture as Vision (Scholarly Culture) and Culture as Action (Behavioral Culture)*

The didactology of language-cultures approaches the two types of culture both analytically, in their dichotomous relationship, and in a

[27] We refer specifically to these food items, as their names appear in A-level Romanian as a foreign language tests (Vasilescu et al. 2006: 81). From our perspective, assessing the acquisition of their names at elementary levels is premature—despite their highly significant cultural load for native speakers—especially since, in evaluating linguistic competence, it is recommended that we target the comprehension of texts that are as culturally neutral as possible.

complementary, synthetic, and functional relationship. On the one hand, culture-as-vision is understood as a scholarly, academic, encyclopedic culture, or even as a cultivated culture (Galisson 1991: 149)[28]. Since it includes information kept in the memory of native speakers in their social environment or through formal education, across artistic, technical, and scientific domains, it is largely a culture based on cultivated discourses, whether descriptive and/or explanatory, constructed from or on the basis of other discourses, cultivated or otherwise (Galisson 1999a: 488–489). If we intend to teach culture-as-vision to foreigners, we must be rather cautious, because by concentrating excessively on high culture, we tend to adopt an ethnocentric attitude: we display our cultural heritage, seeking recognition of its originality and specificity, and we valorize ourselves while ignoring the learners' cultures of origin, thereby accentuating the differences that separate us from others.

As a counterweight to culture-as-vision, which may have a pronounced individual character, there stands culture-as-action, a transversal culture belonging to the entire group. It is not "a title of glory" for anyone, nor is it exhibited; it is "a discreet culture, one that brings people closer and helps them live together" (Galisson 1988: 329). As a collective culture, it actualizes a logic accepted and disseminated by the majority of the community's members. This ensemble of collective opinions, beliefs, and convictions appears as indisputable, possessing "the force of evidence and the virtues of the absolute" (emphasis in original, Zarate 1987: 19), and plays an essential role in the emergence of a sense of belonging to a given cultural space.

Unlike culture-as-vision, culture-as-action is not learned at school, but "is acquired naturally, through imitation, not through reflection," that is, "through inculcation and the imposition of rules of conduct:

[28] As we have argued elsewhere (Platon 2021: 151–157), this type of culture has held a privileged position in the mindset of earlier generations of language teachers, including those teaching Romanian as a foreign language. Evidence of this privileged status can be found, first and foremost, in the content proposed within courses on Romanian culture and civilization, as well as in the major syntheses that organize and structure cultural phenomena for the purpose of teaching them to foreign learners (cf. Coteanu and Popescu, eds., 1991; Goga 2004, 2007; Dafinoiu 2016).

attitudes, behaviors, habits" (Galisson 1988b: 329). In other words, culture-as-action is acquired imperceptibly, in the infinitesimal dimension of social relations, through ordinary means such as participation, directly or through the mass media, in various sociocultural events (performances, exhibitions, fairs, book launches, etc.), and not through rational choices or deliberate adherence. These infinitesimal facts, of which we are not conscious, gradually accumulate, shaping a coherent vision of the world. Thus, culture-as-action is inscribed in our very way of seeing the world and behaving, which is why it is also called lived, behavioral, or everyday culture.

Lexicultural pragmatics has the merit of drawing our attention precisely to this lived culture, teaching us not to lose sight of references to the everyday reality of a linguistic community, to "that civilizational substratum which enables the concrete, useful, and effective understanding of a language"[29] (Pruvost 2009: 390). Yet teaching culture-as-action is quite difficult, because it "escapes the conscious control of those who possess it" (Galisson 1991: 119–120), not being described or explained in large-scale treatises comparable to the major syntheses of culture-as-vision currently available to us. In order for it to be taught, certain mechanisms of thought specific to the community of belonging must be revealed, mechanisms that may be ignored by the very members of that community.

2.3. On the Border between Word and Silence. Cultural Implicitness

The transformation of culture-as-action into a didactic object therefore places us in an extremely sensitive zone, situated "on the border

[29] The opposition between culture-as-vision (CV) and culture-as-action (CA), however, must be approached with caution and understood as carrying a provisional symbolic value, being useful only as an ideal-typical schema. Its adoption cannot be taken to its logical extreme, since "not everything that is scholarly is vision, and not everything that belongs to everyday culture is action; the everyday nourishes the scholarly, and the scholarly, in turn, colors the everyday" (Galisson 2000: 68). CV and CA are opposed primarily for reasons of prestige and power, but from a didactic perspective they must be treated in their complementarity.

between word and silence," where the notion of cultural implicitness governs: "the sign of a mute experience of the world" (Zarate 1987: 16), which, in teaching, we must bring to the surface of consciousness in order to analyze, describe, and explain it for non-native speakers. It may be circumscribed by three fundamental principles that govern its functioning, described in detail by G. Zarate: the principle of economy (economy of reflection and language), the principle of hypothesis formulation, and the principle of respecting the rules of the game by all participants in the communicative act.

The first principle is also specific to allusive language[30], since "the implicit signals existence, but does not make it explicit." We therefore say that the implicit is economical because it "invites the sharing of reference" (Zarate 1987: 16) without revealing it entirely, activating in communication the unspoken, not the unthought. For these reasons, cultural implicitness is likened to a "text with blanks," which "laconically actualizes entire archives of previous facts and experiences, awakening dormant meanings that it carries through time, even if the original meaning is often difficult to discern" (Zarate 1987: 17).

Since the implicit manifests itself above all during verbal exchanges, and only in relation to the other, the first speaker uses it to establish a kind of complicity with the interlocutor, showing that they belong to the same group. Thus, "winking" is characteristic of verbal interaction governed by implicitness, as part of a game with unwritten rules, well known to the interlocutors and applied with ease: the speaker alludes to

[30] For greater precision, we reproduce the definition of allusion from the *Dictionary of Linguistic Sciences* (DȘL): "A figure of thought based on analogy in which a word or (fragment of an) utterance is used to evoke or suggest, in various ways, a reality or an event with a general or abstract meaning; thus, the formulation avoids potential risks, excessive precision, or the vulgar (sometimes even obscene) character of expression; instead, it establishes a literary-type connection, a concretization of abstractions, or a situational parallelism" (DȘL 2005). We also learn that allusion has an "evocative and often euphemistic function." For the type of allusion resulting from the periphrastic reuse of popular expressions or from the evocation of local or classical customs, the following example is provided: "And the chimney smoke sinks downward / And the pig still walks with straw in its mouth" (Topârceanu, apud Dragomirescu), an allusion to the approaching cold and rainy weather, left unexplained in the dictionary.

something, sketches an idea, leaves the utterance unfinished, and expects the other to complete, even if only gesturally, what has not been fully said. In the case of our Dorel, this would involve unfinished utterances such as: *Well, why be surprised? The country is full of Dorels...*[31] or *I urgently need a plumber. But make sure he isn't some Dorel...*[32]

For greater objectivity, we also offer two online news headlines: "In the time of Pingelică[33], you weren't afraid to walk down the street or sleep with your door unlocked"[34] or "A mayor who swears like a coachman."[35] These reveal the capacity of cultural implicitness—closely linked to collective memory and to a process of renewing the past[36]—to articulate itself with the logic of the present, inducing the idea of continuity with what has already been done or said[37]. Relying on practical knowledge

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31 The utterance stops here, since all those who share the same culture-as-action (CA) and "know" Dorel will be able to complete it on their own with an explanation such as: *we should not be surprised by the occurrence of urban mishaps (such as power outages), given that workers are incompetent and constantly make blunders.*

32 In this case as well, the completion of the utterance will be carried out by the interlocutor, based on their knowledge of the characteristics of the invoked cultural referent: *some Dorel… who might cause disasters in my home or leave my house in disarray for months on end.*}

33 We note that the nickname given to the former dictator is recorded in the *Dictionary of Slang*, but not in the DEX.

34 Comment on the news article published in the newspaper *Tribuna* on 10 December 2023, available at: https://www.tribuna.ro/stiri/timp-liber/citite-auzite-ori-muncesti-tu-pentru-altul-ori-munceste-altul-pentru-tine-173322.html.

35 News article from the newspaper *Actualitatea*, dated 15 December 2023, available at: https://ziarulactualitatea.ro/un-primar-care-injura-ca-un-birjar, which also includes a pertinent comment in which the author asks why we do not say today *to swear like a driver*. This remark highlights the persistence of expressions that no longer correspond to the cultural reality that generated them, as well as the difficulty with which a new, more culturally appropriate expression manages to establish itself and enter everyday vocabulary.

36 This idea is also found in Galisson, for whom lexiculture constitutes an ongoing process and a product in continuous transformation: in space, it signifies communication, and in time, transmission, since "words carry the traces of heritages in perpetual becoming, helping to renew the pilgrimage to their sources" (Galisson 2000: 72).

37 Continuity sustains the sense of belonging to a coherent cultural system, giving us the impression that the social text is ordered, despite the apparent chaos that characterizes our everyday activities.

grounded in experience and reproducing knowledge whose effectiveness has been proven, we can make on-the-spot decisions based on solutions suggested by tradition yet directly linked to the given situation, and thus "economize reflection" (Zarate 1987: 17).

Returning to the idea that recourse to cultural implicitness makes sense only if correlated with a communicative intention, we understand why activating it also requires a strategy of adapting the speaker to the given situation and, especially, to the interlocutor. Thus, the first speaker performs an "anticipatory estimate, with a high degree of refinement," searching through the entire stock of experiences and references familiar to him or her in order to extract a common element which "he or she assumes is known to the interlocutor" (emphasis in original, Zarate 1987: 17). That element will be invoked partially, allusively, as the speaker attempts to create the optimal conditions for the receiver to decode the communicative intentions. If, in endolingual and endocultural communication, half-words or silence are natural, and the interlocutor might even feel offended if given all the necessary explanations, regarding them as an insult to his or her intelligence and cultural education[38], in exolingual communication the native speaker has a more

[38] In endolingual communication (CEN), things are not very different. Analyzing a passage by Alex Ștefănescu from the book *Cum se fabrică o emoție* (*How an Emotion Is Produced*), we learn that explaining a joke, an irony, or an allusion ruins its charm, because people are vain. More precisely, the success of allusive literature is attributed to "our secret desire to be considered intelligent," since "when someone speaks with implied meanings, we feel flattered by the trust the speaker places in us. The fact that they merely sketch an idea, merely suggest it, is the clearest proof that they consider us intelligent enough to complete the message ourselves. We thus feel admitted—as equal partners—into a form of elective complicity, into a kind of confraternity of those who understand (the eternal nostalgia of the elite). If, on the contrary, the speaker hastens to explain the hidden meaning, we experience a sense of frustration or even feel offended: why has that trust been withdrawn?" In the case of symbolic literature, the allusive style is not meant to flatter the reader, but to give representation a diffuse quality, stimulating imagination and increasing the expressive force of poetry; by contrast, "if you allude to something precise, something that can be named, you place yourself outside literature (as if you were using a foreign language and flattering the reader by allowing them to demonstrate that they also know it). But if you allude to

difficult task, being forced to explain everything fully, reveal the mystery, and verify the hypotheses formulated by the non-native speaker regarding the meaning of the elliptically transmitted message.

In this way, both partners remain in a constant state of alert, dancing together to the rhythm imposed by the second principle, hypothesis formulation: the foreign speaker puts forward various hypotheses in order to check whether he or she has intuited all the implied meanings and cultural references intended by the native speaker, while the latter strives to intuit the decoding strategies activated by the partner, in order to provide the necessary clues, at the risk of spoiling the charm of allusive language and violating the principle of economy.

Likewise, if in endolingual communication the exploratory phase at the beginning of verbal exchanges[39]—present even between native partners who do not know each other at all or who know very little about each other's social status—may not be very extended, in exolingual communication it must be expanded because of the lack of shared cultural references. Thus, in endolingual communication we will most likely be able to use various literary references[40]—in utterances such as "Eternal Romania, as seen by dear old Iancu,"[41] or "poor little country,"

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something imprecise, something that can only be approximated, the procedure gains artistic legitimacy" (cf. Ștefănescu 2014: 9–10).

39 This is defined as a process through which "an actor gradually reveals his ideas and status to the interlocutor. After stepping slightly out of this reserve, he waits for the partner to demonstrate that there is no danger in doing so; once reassured, he may, without fear, say a little more. By giving each new disclosure an ambiguous turn, the actor retains the ability to halt this progressive abandonment of his façade behavior at the moment when he no longer receives a reassuring response from his partner" (Erving Goffman 1973: 103).

40 We have chosen these references from Ion Luca Caragiale because they are frequently used not only in written texts but also in everyday communication among native speakers—a fact pointed out to us by interpreters at the European Parliament and by diplomats who attended our Romanian as a Foreign Language (RLS) courses. They even requested lists of such "famous quotations," commonly used in communication, to be explained "in accessible terms," so that they would not feel excluded from effective communication and, more broadly, from the community of Romanian speakers.

41 News item from the newspaper *Adevărul*, dated 12 September 2018, available at: https://adevarul.ro/stiri-locale/piatra-neamt/eterna-romanie-a-lui-nenea-iancu-cata-actu alitate-1889973.html. We note that Nenea Iancu has also become the name of a special beer

often invoked in political articles, as in "When the little country is used as an electoral club"—relying on intertextuality without worrying that the literary reference will not be correctly identified. By contrast, in exolingual communication, the use of language full of insinuations and ambiguities, of jokes intended to test the interlocutor's intelligence or culture, is risky, because respecting the rules of the game, the third principle of implicit culture, implies the tacit agreement of the participants: the sender acts as if he or she had not already emitted the message actually indicated, while the recipient has the right and obligation to behave as if he or she had not deciphered the allusion. This game is absolutely necessary, since one of the features of communication through implied meanings is that it is "deniable" (Goffman 1973: 76). From our point of view, however, in the case of the non-native speaker, it is difficult to distinguish whether he or she: 1. remains silent because the allusion has been understood but, not wishing to spoil the convention, faithfully respects the rules of the game;[42] or 2. remains silent because he or she has not managed to decode the message correctly, lacking the necessary references.

Of course, in analyzing the problem dichotomically and comparing the specificity of allusive communication in endolingual and exolingual communication, we have applied a reductionist reasoning, since, obviously, the presence of cultural implicitness creates comprehension difficulties not only for foreigners but also for native speakers. For example, allusive communication may occur even within a family, regional, or national community, without being transparent to other families, regions, or nationalities. Nevertheless, in both cases, the stake remains the same: marking belonging to a social group and drawing a line of demarcation between those who share and those who do not share

brand, more precisely *A Beer with Principles*, launched on the occasion of the 160th anniversary of the author's birth (cf. https://www.worldofbeer.ro/nenea-iancu). This makes possible the occurrence of utterances such as: "I drank a Nenea Iancu" or "Bring me a Nenea Iancu!" in communicative contexts related to gastronomy.

42 This principle is suggested to us by the very etymological meaning of the word *allusion*: in Latin, *alludo, alludere* initially meant "to play," "to frolic," "to joke" (Guțu 2007: 49).

the meaning of the ongoing communication. It follows that the cultural border is not only that of nations or geographical maps, and that we may be "foreign to someone" even within the same national community (Zarate 1987: 23).[43]

What is certain is that, in any cultural community, implicitness plays a decisive role—unfortunately neglected in research on language didactics, but easy to observe in teaching practice—by imposing discreet yet effective lines of social demarcation. The difficulty of teaching the implicit dimension depends on the learner's degree of familiarity with the target culture, both with culture-as-action and with culture-as-vision, since both types of cultural references may appear in everyday communication, although in the case of culture-as-action they are more difficult to identify.

The new lexiculturological framework, however, points to a reliable way of identifying cultural references in order to facilitate foreigners' access to the culture-as-action omnipresent in the lives of native peoples: lexiculturemes, that is, words endowed with a shared cultural load. We recall that shared cultural load refers to the implicit culture "stored in or beneath certain words, called cultural words, which we can identify, explicate, and interpret"[44] (Galisson 1999a: 480) in every language-culture, so as to foster understanding among all users of a language, whether native or non-native.

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[43] In practice, when we declare our belonging to a system of aesthetic or political values, or to our own generation, we always also designate the social groups we regard as different from our own. For this reason, when teaching implicit culture, we mobilize forms of knowledge capable of harmoniously stimulating sensitivity and receptiveness toward what is different.

[44] For greater precision, we also provide the quotation in French: "La culture en dépôt dans ou sous certains mots, dits culturels, qu'il convient de repérer, d'expliciter et d'interpréter. La démarche consiste à mettre au jour des sites culturels [...]. Les expressions imagées, les mots-valises, les mots à charge culturelle partagée, les palimpsestes verbo-culturels, les mots de situations, les noms de marques, les proverbes et dictons, les mots occultants [...] circonscrivent les sites (ou gisements)" (Galisson 1999a: 480).

2.4. What Do We Mean by Lexiculturemes?

As has been shown, the lexicultural approach reminds us that any culture can also be viewed as a series of verbal productions created by native speakers in different communicative situations. Within this theoretical framework, the lexicultural endeavor consists in bringing to light those "cultural sites, figurative expressions, portmanteau words, words with shared cultural load, verbo-cultural palimpsests, situational words[45], brand names, proverbs, sayings, and occulted words[46]" that "circumscribe cultural sites or deposits"[47] (Galisson 1999a: 480). Fortunately, this enumeration provides a genuine inventory of the types of lexiculturemes[48] that can be used in the didactology of language-cultures. We also have a register of benefits, showing that by using lexiculturemes we can: 1. use words as sites for observing certain cultural facts; 2. work simultaneously on language (words and their meanings) and culture (shared cultural load); 3. nourish reflection on the language-culture relationship; and 4. promote the coordinated, systematic, and integrated teaching of the two entities (Galisson 1988a: 90).

It is worth noting that the category of words with shared cultural load does not include slang words, technical or highly specialized terms, nor regionalisms or archaisms that members of a culture ordinarily ignore (Galisson 1991: 126). This category will therefore include the most ordinary words, generally known by native speakers, which speakers activate with great ease from their lexical repertoire. Thus, the lexicultural

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45 Situational words are those specific to typical situations, such as at a restaurant, at the doctor's, and so on; to these one must naturally add the appropriate behavior and attitudes, including gestures, facial expressions, proxemics, and the like.

46 For example, *old*, which is to be hidden or made to disappear in favor of *senior*; or *blind*, in favor of *visually impaired*, and so forth.

47 In French: "La culture en dépôt dans ou sous certains mots, dits culturels, qu'il convient de repérer, d'expliciter et d'interpréter. La démarche consiste à mettre au jour des sites culturels [...]. Les expressions imagées, les mots-valises, les mots à charge culturelle partagée, les palimpsestes verbo-culturels, les mots de situations, les noms de marques, les proverbes et dictons, les mots occultants [...] circonscrivent les sites (ou gisements)" (Galisson 1999a: 480).

48 In the Canadian context, "acronyms and figurative expressions, idiomatic expressions, or stereotypes" have been included among culturemes, that is, "all terms that implicitly evoke a cultural reality" (Collès 2007: 65).

approach dispels the myth of the inaccessibility of a foreign culture, becoming an access route to language-culture, more precisely to situational linguistic-discursive material that enables understanding among all speakers of a language.

One of the most complicated problems we face in creating lexicultural tools is that, given the symbolic nature of language in the broad sense, almost all words are cultural, just as, “at the limit, every human fact is a cultural and historical fact” (Alvarez 1990: 4). For example, cabbage, chrysanthemum, and tree are, in origin, natural elements. But as soon as the human hand and gaze attach themselves to them, they become cultural: on the one hand, because they have led to the emergence of specific technical behaviors (cutting, harvesting, cultivating), and on the other hand, because they constitute a source of different representations (myths, ideologies, etc.) that generate varied attitudes (distinct valorizations and uses, specific treatments, etc.).

A very simple classroom experiment demonstrated this truth to us: when students were asked to draw a tree in order to visualize how this concept is represented, we obtained highly relevant images. As can be seen in Figure 1, where we selected some of the students’ drawings, the association of the notion of *tree* with a palm tree is specific to those coming from a geographical and cultural space shaped by the presence of these trees, whereas the image is not typical of other European or Asian countries:

Fig. 1. Graphic representation of the concept *tree* by foreign students

Seen from this perspective, we risk reaching an impasse: if everything is cultural in human communication, it becomes difficult to decide what should be taught and in what order. Fortunately, as Animal Farm famously suggests, all animals are equal, but some are *more equal than others*, there are also words that are *more cultural than others*, in the sense that they carry a higher degree of shared cultural load. These are the ones we will examine below.

2.4.1. Mogodorf – a monster from an animated film?

We will address here only three types of lexiculturemes from Galisson's inventory[49]. The first category is that of portmanteau words, also known as telescoped words, a category recognized among Romanian translation scholars as well (Suciu 2009; Răuțu 2010, 2020). We will not dwell on it, however, since the meaning of such words is often opaque even to native speakers. No matter how imaginative we may be, it is difficult, for instance, to guess the meaning of words such as *codec*[50] or *Mogodorf*[51].

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49 In Romanian scholrship, these appear under the name *culturemes* (Lungu-Badea 2002, 2004, 2009, 2015; Rădulescu 2009; Untilă 2012), which are said to "designate any vehicle of meaning within a culture, more than a word, all cultural acts" (Badea 2015: 26). From our point of view, according to this definition, a gesture or an object may also be considered "cultural acts," and therefore culturemes, such as, for instance, kissing someone's hand, or the objects inventoried by Daniela Kohn (2012: 62) under the heading *You are Romanian if you know about*: *pufuleți*, ROM chocolate, Eugenia biscuits, the enclosed balcony, the glass fish on top of the television, *The Abduction from the Seraglio*, and so on.
This is one of the reasons why we consider that *lexiculturemes* must be distinguished from *culturemes*, since they may be regarded as a subcategory of the latter. Romanian researchers do not distinguish lexiculturemes from culturemes; they speak only of culturemes that appear in the lexicon and in messages, alluding to an already known situation (*poujadisme*, *toilette*, etc.), or of culturemes fixed in the message, which "are situated on the border between quotation and allusion, being difficult to recognize within the body of the text" (Lungu-Badea 2015: 27).
We invoke this view only in order to show that translation scholars have been far more receptive than specialists in FLT to the issue of culturemes.

50 We reproduce the meanings recorded in DEXONLINE: 1. coder/decoder device that converts video signals into/from a digital system for data transmission; 2. (IT) hardware or software that compresses or decompresses programs or audio or video files.

51 *Mogodorf* is the name of a 2007 programme involving an "exchange" of visual artists between Romania and Germany. The name was formed by agglutinating two words, Mogoșoaia and Düsseldorf. In the doctoral school courses held in 2024, we carried out a small experiment, testing the linguistic imagination of the doctoral students, whom

It must be acknowledged, however, that we initially assumed that most portmanteau words in Romanian were borrowings from other languages[52], such as the well-known *smog* (from *smoke* and *fog*) or *motel* (from *motor* and *hotel*). Yet an examination of journalistic language shows that Romanian speakers are not entirely lacking in linguistic creativity and that there are also local formations, such as *Blogtoșani* (*blog* + Botoșani), the name of a weblog dedicated to that city's community, or *Eminemscu* (*Eminem* + *Eminescu*), resulting from the overlap of the two figures in Eminescu versus Eminem by Florin Piersic Jr..

A richer and more transparent set of examples for native speakers can be found in satirical publications such as Academia Cațavencu. Among attested forms in dictionaries, studies, or online media, we may note: *tembeliziune*, *a furgăsi* (to steal = to find; Volceanov 2007: 243, 113), *Moș Messengerilă*, *Moculozauri* (Moculescu + dinosaur; Răuțu 2010), *jenibil* (Croitor 2022: 258), *Cântăreața Cheltuială*, *caftering* (in reference to the miners' protests led by Miron Cozma), *PeDeLerinaj*, *Cluj-Napocalipsa*[53], and others.

However, relative to the overall vocabulary, portmanteau words remain relatively rare. They are typically literary creations and only occasionally enter everyday speech. Given that they are difficult to decode even for native speakers—requiring diverse cultural references and inferential effort—this difficulty increases significantly for non-native speakers, especially below the B1 level. For this reason, we do not recommend their inclusion in a future dictionary of lexiculturemes. Although they may produce humorous, playful, or ironic effects, such nuances are difficult for foreign learners to grasp, even at higher levels.

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we thank here for their support. Most of them associated *Mogodorf* with the name of a "possible cartoon monster."

52 This is also shown by the portmanteau words invented by Galisson and Porcher in their *Distractictionary*: *acrobol* ("vaiselle grecque ancienne" [ancient Greek vessel]), *amalbigame* ("confusion conjugale" [conjugal confusion]), and so forth (1986: 12, 14). Any language is marked by plasticity and richness, containing multiple hidden meanings, while speakers may take pleasure in playing with words and phrases.

53 Cf. https://www.libertatea.ro/stiri/napocalipsa-dupa-untold-cum-arata-parcul-mare-la-finalul-festivalului-de-la-cluj-4631826.

Consequently, these lexiculturemes should be avoided—or at most presented as curiosities—at least in the first three levels of language proficiency.

2.4.2. All words are cultural, but some are more cultural than others. Verbal palimpsests[54]

The statement in the title of this subsection is modeled on verbal palimpsests, the second category of lexiculturemes identified in the literature (Galisson 1993; 1995b), and draws on the syntactic-semantic pattern of the well-known statement from *Animal Farm* cited above. To illustrate this category in Romanian, we will limit ourselves to a single example: *Maria, be a man!*[55], a lexicalized, allusive expression whose understanding requires knowledge of its original source and context—

[54] Verbal palimpsests have also been discussed in Russian academic circles, where the psycholinguist Yuri N. Karaulov defines so-called precedent texts within his theory of linguistic personality as "texts that are meaningful for a given personality, because of their informational or emotional aspect; they are supra-personal, that is, they are also known to the wider circle of that personality, who frequently draws these texts into his or her discourse" (Караулов 1987: 216, apud Déprenne 2008: 371). For Karaulov, substrate texts are not only the titles of literary works, the names of characters, or fragments of texts frequently quoted among the members of a given ethnoculture, but also passages from biblical texts, motifs from stories and children's tales, as well as works of art, all of which are considered "texts." Later, in 2002, the Russian linguist's conception became increasingly refined, including among these: precedent texts, such as classic literary works known to everyone, folk songs, advertising and political slogans, and press articles; precedent situations, such as the Judgment of Paris; precedent expressions, such as sayings, proverbs, aphorisms, sentences, and expressions; and precedent nouns, namely proper names connected with situations or texts known to the members of a linguistic community (Karaulov 2002, apud Déprenne 2008: 371). In a broad sense, precedent texts represent everything that exists within one language-culture but is absent from another.

[55] In French, more than 1,000 examples have been inventoried from ordinary discourse: press articles, performances and shows (cinema, theatre), literary works, radio and television programmes, reports, songs, comic strips, and so forth (Galisson 1993: 41–42). One frequently cited example is: *Children have their reasons, which parental reason cannot know*, whose syntactic-semantic substratum is Blaise Pascal's famous reflection: *The heart has its reasons, which reason does not know*.

both linguistic and extralinguistic—namely: *Zoe, be a man!* (Lungu-Badea 2015: 79).

Since verbal palimpsests are generally not easily decoded, we conclude that this type of lexicultureme is likewise of limited relevance for the acquisition of Romanian as a foreign language.

2.4.3. One Dorel, two Dorels – or shared cultural load (SCL)

Finally, a much more productive category from the perspective of the didactology of language-cultures is that of SCL words, defined as words that "magnetize, focus, and crystallize a particular form of culture." Because they can be identified and observed, they may be inventoried and described. Functioning as "markers of recognition and complicity," they include the interlocutor within the speaker's social group if the shared cultural load is understood, and exclude them if it is not (Galisson 1991: 120). As we can see, these clearly reflect the features of cultural implicitness.

To illustrate his conception of lexicultureme, Galisson also employs a visual representation, depicting them as container-like structures that suggest the idea that such words function as "privileged sites for the incorporation of cultural content," thus containing, "in addition to their basic meaning, an added cultural meaning"[56] (Galisson 1988b: 331).

Below we reproduce Galisson's schematic representation for clarity:

- CCP = shared cultural load[57]

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[56] This is distinguished from connotation, which is also added to the permanent elements of a word's meaning, that is, to denotation, but which, in certain dictionaries, is associated with the affective meaning of a term. For this reason, it is considered not to be common to all speakers (TLFI 2012). Connotations, in the plural, are opposed to denotation, in the singular, and constitute "everything that a term might evoke, suggest, arouse, or imply, clearly or vaguely, for each individual user." In the *DȘL*, too, connotation is associated with an additional representation of an individual nature, "which amounts to an association of ideas due either to objective relativity or to imagination, that is, subjective interpretation" (DȘL 2005).

[57] Shared culture is defined as "a transversal everyday culture, a kind of behavioral threshold level of the majority, which allows the immense majority of native speakers

- Sé = primary signified (semantic level, distinct from CCP)
- Sa = signifier
- Ré = referent (entity or object in extralinguistic reality)
- Pa-Ré = parareferent, that part of extralinguistic reality adjacent to or embedded within the referent, which lexicographers typically do not consider sufficiently relevant to include in dictionary definitions

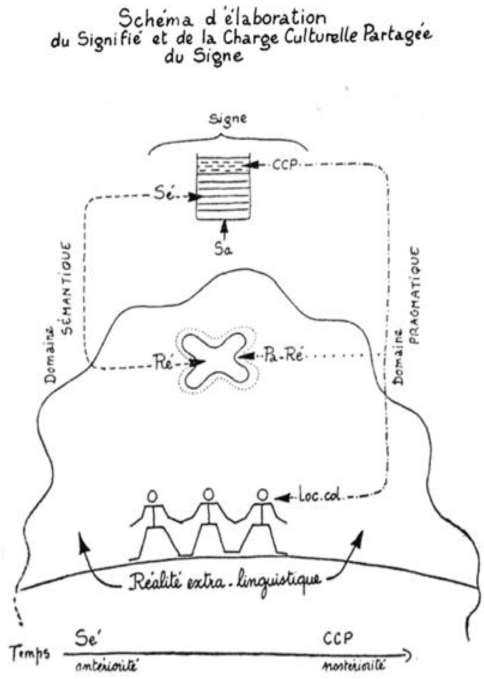

Fig. 2. The schema of the construction of meaning and shared cultural load of the linguistic sign (Galisson 1988b: 336–337)

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to feel like full individuals and to be recognized as such by all those who claim the same collective identity. Collective identity is the product of a shared language and culture, and therefore of a minimum of common knowledge that enables all members of a community to maintain certain relations of complicity among themselves, whatever their level of schooling, socio-professional affiliation, age, and so on. Shared culture is therefore, at the same time, a sign of tacit recognition among individuals who claim the same collective identity; a factor of conviviality, enabling them to understand one another through half-said words" (Galisson 1989: 114).

Since shared cultural load (SCL/ICI)[58] coexists with the basic meaning(s) within the same linguistic form (the signifier), and since the presence or absence of this cultural load does not entail any formal modification of the signifier, native speakers—despite mastering usage very well—often "do not clearly perceive the boundary between these two types of content, which complicates field investigations" (Galisson 1999a: 483–484). In other words, native speakers are not fully aware of these layers, because the cognitive schemas involved in the inferential processes required to identify lexiculturemes are difficult to articulate, given that they have never been presented as objects requiring explicit explanation.

For this reason, scholars have questioned whether native informants are indeed in the best position "to account for their own culture," since they possess primarily "a practical knowledge that enables them to respond in action to the constraints of a given situation," but are not capable of reconstructing the full range of responses that constitute their very way of life (emphasis in original, Zarate 1987: 27–28). As Pierre Bourdieu also observed, practical sense reflects a set of abilities that cannot be exhaustively described by those who possess them, just as not every skilled swimmer, violinist, dancer, or boxer is able to explain their movements step by step to someone who is only beginning to learn. The difficulty lies in the fact that actual practices "integrate all these elementary units of behavior—artificially isolated for didactic purposes—into the unity of an organized and goal-oriented pragmatics" (Bourdieu 1980: 174). Consequently, it is far from certain that even a

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[58] We stress that ICI, considered "a true currency of intercultural exchange" (Galisson 1991: 147), belongs to the pragmatic situation of the supporting lexeme, since the objectivity of the semantic approach and the subjectivity of the pragmatic approach explain very well why, from one language to another, so-called equivalent signs, which make the same division in raw reality and therefore have the same referent, may have identical meanings but different ICIs. For example, the word *cow* has the same referent in Romanian or French as it does in India, namely "the female of the bull," but it does not have the same ICI: in the first case, the cow is exploited as a source of milk, whereas in the second it is protected as a sacred animal; cf. Galisson 1991: 131.

highly competent practitioner will be able to explicate these decomposed and recomposed actions in full detail.

That is why the widely held assumption that "you have to be born there to understand it" does not guarantee a controlled or objective perception of cultural reality.

As for foreign learners, a number of obstacles arise, since they do not grasp the cultural background attached to such words: they may fail to perceive the shared cultural load altogether, or only partially intuit it, often in cases of communicative breakdown. Lacking knowledge of the event or figure implicitly referenced (as in the example "In the days of Pingelică…"), the non-native speaker will not easily identify the relationship between the word and its underlying cultural context, whereas the native speaker will automatically activate the cultural reference—provided it involves widely recognized elements.

For instance, in an utterance such as *How are you, brother?*, a foreign learner may have a weaker intuition of the implicit meaning "friend = brother" than a native speaker. However, in the case of *How are you, fârtate?*, it is quite possible that even native speakers—especially younger ones—will not fully grasp the cultural meaning (*fârtat* = sworn brother = soul brother = best friend). This demonstrates that the role of the native informant should not be overestimated: the inferential process underlying shared cultural load—namely, linking the word *fârtat* to a shared cultural experience—may not be possible without knowledge of the ritual practices of sworn brotherhood and their meanings in traditional Romanian society. Thus, once again, we are compelled to draw on culture-as-vision as well.

2.5. **Cozonac or Piftie?** ***Lexicultural Choices in Romanian as a Foreign Language***

The fundamental question arising from all these theoretical reflections is whether we can create didactic tools—inventories, dictionaries, and so on—that might equate to, supplement, or complete the shared cultural knowledge acquired outside school by native speakers, so that it can be taught to foreigners in school. As has been shown, the lexicultural project emerged from the strategic ambition "to rehabilitate everyday culture, to reduce the gap between the everyday and the scholarly, and to inscribe them within the same continuum" (Galisson 2000: 51).

At this early stage of our research, we can do no more than recommend beginning the process of creating a corpus[59] based on the identification of the most commonly used lexiculturemes in native speakers' everyday language. This is not impossible, since, although native speakers are not trained to objectify, explain, or systematize the elements that encode their worldview, and although they are not aware of the shared cultural load that emerges in the natural course of discourse, they nevertheless have the potential to identify lexiculturemes, provided they are sensitized to their specific profile[60]. In our experiments, we observed that, when asked to provide further examples of shared cultural load words on the basis of a given model, native speakers focus on their own repertoire and succeed in identifying similar examples, thus confirming Galisson's intuition that such items can indeed be detected.

Of course, for the creation of as complete an inventory as possible, the opinions of non-native speakers who know Romanian well should also be taken into account, since they are much more sensitive to the appearance of lexiculturemes in everyday communication, owing to the advantage of linguistic and cultural distance. The recommendations of foreign researchers who have already conducted studies on this topic are also highly useful for orientation. For instance, Galisson suggests inventorying expressions belonging to the cultural bestiary, such as *as*

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[59] So far, our recommendation has been taken up in a doctoral thesis project, *The Lexicultural Approach in the Acquisition of RFL*, undertaken by the doctoral student Olivia-Carmen Țîrlea. We nevertheless hope for a broader involvement of young researchers in this area of linguistics.

[60] In the Portuguese context, for instance, there are studies showing that, even among native speakers, the absence of explicit teaching of lexiculturemes creates problems of comprehension, while awareness of their implicit value develops only with difficulty. Lexiculturological education at the pre-university level is therefore necessary in order to facilitate the discovery of cultural implicitness and "to ensure the maintenance of communication with people of other ages" (Silva, Silva and Silva 2014: 74).

stubborn as a mule / as cunning as a fox / as cold as a snake, since they reveal "associations specific to each language, which derive, *ipso facto*, from what is conventionally called culture" (1988a: 79). In addition, such expressions meet another imperative of this approach: the selected lexiculturemes should be understood by approximately eighty percent of speakers with an average level of culture, in order to ensure that they create that feeling of collective complicity among the members of a cultural community (Galisson 1988b: 331).

In addition to this criterion, we should also take into account those lexiculturemes that are most frequently used in communication but can be more easily understood at the first levels of linguistic competence, since, as we know, idiomatic expressions are recommended to be taught systematically only at C1–C2 levels. The issue of assigning items to levels, however, is not an easy one, precisely because of their shared cultural load. For instance, if we consider two very ordinary Romanian common nouns, such as *sâmbătă* and *canal*, we start from the premise that their denotative meanings can be understood as early as A1 level—"the sixth day of the week" for the former—and at A2–B1 level for the latter. Since *canal* is polysemous, we order its meanings according to their presumed frequency, excluding the biological context: 1. a waterway, functioning as a street, in cities situated by the sea or on rivers; 2. "a pipe or conduit, usually made of concrete, designed to transport liquids for various purposes"; 4. "a one-way transmission channel for audio or visual programs intended for public broadcasting, especially in television" (DEXONLINE).

The issue becomes more complicated, however, in contexts such as *a se duce pe Apa Sâmbetei*, an expression meaning "to be ruined, lost, or wasted," where an additional explanation is needed for non-native speakers, one that includes references to the cultural meaning of this day. This is because: 1. in the folk calendar, Saturday is dedicated to the remembrance of the souls of the dead: "On Saturday nothing can succeed, because it is at the end of the week, and the end belongs to death and to the dead" (Bernea 1985: 187); 2. in the imaginary of Romanian folk communities, *Apa Sâmbetei* represents "an infernal river in the mythical geography of the Daco-Romanians," presided over by Saint Saturday, flowing toward the otherworld[61]. This provides further evidence that, in order to correctly decode the culture-as-action encrypted in lexiculturemes, the role of culture-as-vision embedded in situational discourse cannot be ignored.

Since most Romanians frequently use this expression—something that will certainly need to be demonstrated through corpus-based quantitative analyses—cultural explanations may not be strictly necessary for most native speakers. For foreigners, however, such information is vital for correctly decoding all the added cultural meanings.

Nor are things simpler in the case of the second noun, since a foreigner will have difficulty distinguishing between two utterances such as: *My neighbor died in the canal* and *My neighbor died at the Canal*. In fact, we chose this example inspired by the recommendations of two Romanianists who had become highly aware of the lexiculturemes that created difficulties either for them or for the students with whom they work in foreign universities. Among the examples they provided were *He died at the Canal* and *He was taken to the Bărăgan*. To avoid being suspected of subjectivism in constructing examples, we also cite several online news headlines: *The Last Survivor of the Canal Has Died*[62] versus *Manifesto for Therapeutic Massage at Canal 33*[63]. Here too, knowledge of

[61] This fabulous river, whose source lies at the roots of the *World Fir Tree*, is said, according to certain Romanian beliefs, to encircle the earth three, seven, or nine times, like a serpent, before flowing toward hell. Numerous practices from the funeral rite confirm the identification of the *Apa Sâmbetei* with a channel of communication between the living and the dead. Ritual offerings are placed upon it on various Saturdays dedicated to the commemoration of the dead; objects belonging to the deceased are thrown into it after the burial; and items no longer needed in the household are left there, since they are considered to belong to the ancestors, the water being expected to carry them by itself to their proper place (cf. Evseev 1998: 31–32). Moreover, ethnologists believe that the role of the *Apa Sâmbetei* may be played by any river near a village, which may explain both the wide circulation of the expression and the practice of placing useless or no-longer-needed objects on flowing water.

[62] News item dated 27 October 2017, available at: https://www.digi24.ro/stiri/actualitate/a-murit-ultimul-supravietuitor-de-la-canal-818054.

[63] Available on the ArtTherapy website: https://www.artaterapiei.ro/manifest-pentru-masajul-terapeutic-la-canal-33/.

historical-geographical and cultural references is vital, and the lexicultural approach teaches us that we can also reach historical information in the reverse direction: starting from words or expressions and moving toward the cultural referent.

For references to literary texts, we choose, by way of example, another proper noun: several headlines in which *Mr. Goe* appears reinvented: *Goe from Statistics Counts Loose Morals*[64]; *Mr. Goe Returns*[65]; *Mr. Goe Has Arrived in Ploiești. An Imposing Statue Was Installed at the South Station on the Occasion of the Artown Festival*[66]; *Mr. Goe in Washington*[67]; *Dani Ionescu, Lead Singer of the Band Dl Goe, Discovered the Stage Through Play*[68].... There is also a series of online seminars within the campaign entitled *Is Your Child Mr. Goe?*[69], and the name of the well-known character even appears in the name of a website selling children's products[70]. From a strictly practical point of view, if the foreign speaker is unable to associate *Mr. Goe* with a child, then, when searching for children's items, he or she will not open such a website at all, being unable to orient themselves by means of this proper noun. Therefore, although we may imagine that proper nouns are simpler, in reality the case of *Dorel*, presented in the preamble to this article, shows that they too can acquire cultural meanings that restrict foreigners' access to the meaning of the message.

From our point of view, these three nouns can be considered genuine lexiculturemes, since a shared cultural load has been added over

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64 https://www.analizeeconomice.ro/2014/10/goe-de-la-statistica-numara-moravurile.html?m=1.

65 News item dated 12 September 2023, available at: https://www.catavencii.ro/d-l-goe-se-intoarce/.

66 News item dated 28 July 2023, available at: https://www.telegrama.ro/social/cultura/foto-dl-goe-a-ajuns-la-ploie%C8%99ti-o-statuie-impun%C4%83toare-a-fost-amplasat%C4%83-la-gara-de-sud,-cu-ocazia-artown-festival.html.

67 News item dated 9 May 2024, available at: https://spotmedia.ro/stiri/opinii-si-analize/domnul-goe-la-washington.

68 News item dated 19 November 2022, available at: https://www.euronews.ro/articole/dani-ionescu-solistul-trupei-dl-goe-a-cunoscut-scena-dintr-o-joaca-dar-pasiunea-c.

69 Cf. https://observatornews.ro/eveniment/campania-copilul-tau-e-domnul-goe-52165.html.

70 Cf. https://www.domnulgoe.ro/.

time to their basic meaning, giving them greater semantic density. We suspect that these additional meanings are known by the majority of speakers in our linguistic community, at least those over the age of thirty, although this will clearly have to be demonstrated through linguistic surveys.

2.6. Instead of Conclusions: A Few Suggestions

One of the reasons why we have presented the lexicultural approach in detail, illustrating it with several lexiculturemes drawn from the online environment, is to raise awareness among specialists in Romanian as a foreign language that the lexiculture shared by the members of a linguistic-cultural community "is a fact present in everyday life and is not specific to a particular stratum of the corresponding population; its occurrence is therefore recorded in ordinary situations of linguistic communication" (Silva e Silva 2013: 79). It remains, then, the common cultural denominator of the dominated and the dominant, of the favored and the disadvantaged (Galisson 1991: 124), and allows us to "relaunch culture through the lexicon and the lexicon through culture" (Galisson 1999b: 494), even though culturemes have a relative status and do not produce "effects of the same intensity" on all speakers of a language (Lungu-Badea 2015: 80).

We may conclude that the acquisition of Romanian culture by foreigners can also take place through specific lexiculturemes, which the non-native speaker inevitably encounters, at least outside the classroom, especially if we have carefully purged the classroom microlanguage of too many lexiculturemes. In attempting to protect foreign speakers in class through the use of microlanguage, which presupposes the rigorous adaptation of texts to their level of linguistic competence, we ignore the fact that, for the most curious learners and those most actively involved in their own learning process, the provision of auxiliary tools, such as a mini-dictionary of lexiculturemes, could offer a valuable key to entering the host society. Such a tool could make them quasi-equal partners in interactions with native speakers, whether these interactions are direct or mediated by social networks or the mass media.

The first step in such a project would therefore be the establishment of the nomenclature. However, the inventory should remain open to later additions, given the dynamism of language. The material should not be reduced to a simple bilingual index in which lexiculturemes are merely translated into the learners' mother tongue or another language known to them, since, as is well known, perfect semantic correspondence between different languages rarely exists. Future research on the lexicultural approach will therefore have to make difficult decisions not only regarding how the nomenclature[71] should be constituted and organized, but also regarding the model for dictionary entries and the CEFR level at which certain lexiculturemes should be taught.

In addition to the meaning explained in the microlanguage appropriate to the learners' level of linguistic competence, each entry should contain as many contexts of use as possible, so as to address not only decoding but also encoding. Moreover, in presenting these contexts, aspects such as the following should be indicated:

a. the type of message in which they occur more frequently, oral or written;
b. the linguistic register, formal, informal, or neutral;
c. the communicative situation and the status of the speakers;
d. the role of their use, such as irony, humor, and so on;
e. the gestural language that may accompany them and provide additional clarification.

At the same time, each entry should record, alongside the shared cultural load, the basic meanings as well, for at least three reasons: 1. since shared cultural load is an added value of the sign, it is an addition not only to the signifier but also to the signified; it is therefore logical to provide an explanation of the sign as a whole; 2. by defining both the signified and the shared cultural load, the different layers of content can be more clearly distinguished and certain confusions avoided, which

[71] Some authors even argue for the inclusion of the lexicultural dimension in standard bilingual dictionaries, in order to strengthen the substance of these tools, which can achieve their purpose only *in vivo*, within a precise school-based educational situation, in both its processual and product dimensions (Silva and Silva 2013: 82).

would be beneficial from a didactic perspective; 3. experiments conducted in foreign contexts have shown that, when reading various dictionary entries, with and without a definition of the signified, foreign students overwhelmingly preferred this solution for practical reasons: in cases of homonymy or polysemy, the signified or signifieds are indispensable for identifying the sign or the meaning of the sign that serves as the support for the shared cultural load (Galisson 1991: 139).

We believe that lexiculturology can provide a more systematic and controlled way of teaching Romanian culture to foreigners, also offering indications about what might be taught in a course on Romanian culture and civilization (cf. Díaz 2003: 115). Although the lexicon remains the most slippery compartment of language, it possesses a degree of concreteness that gives it relative stability. Moreover, through the lexicultural approach, culture can truly become a basic ingredient of the Romanian-as-a-foreign-language course, rather than remaining merely a dessert offered at the end of the language course (Platon 2022).

We are also convinced that every teacher of Romanian as a foreign language has already intuitively applied the methods of lexiculturology, without being aware of the existence of this method, whenever they encountered so-called words with shared cultural load in the various texts proposed to students as input. Yet the systematic use of the lexicultural approach is necessary in order to adopt, consciously, clearer and more systematic working methods, which can serve a double function: either to validate our own intuitions or to offer suggestions for facilitating foreigners' access to lexicultural implicitness.

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PART 2.

Curriculum, Levels, and Course Design

Instructional Design in Romanian as a Foreign Language: A Cognitive Approach

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Abstract: *Instructional Design in Romanian as a Foreign Language: A Cognitive Approach*. This article surveys several theoretical frameworks that have shaped second language acquisition and curriculum design over the past decades. From traditional views of language and language learning to the more recent perspective of cognitive linguistics, supported by research in neuroscience and neuroimaging, these approaches have all left a visible mark on the planning of language courses. Against this background, we adopt an educational philosophy informed primarily by cognitive linguistics and the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), and we argue for the use of *Understanding by Design*, or backward design, as proposed by Wiggins and McTighe. We conclude by suggesting a possible model for organizing a syllabus in Romanian as a Foreign Language, one that is both research-based and consistent with the way the brain functions.

Keywords: *course planning, course design, curriculum, syllabus, scheme of work, second language learning, Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), Cognitive Linguistics*

1. Introduction

For those familiar with the Romanian education system—whether as teachers, (former) pupils, students, or parents—the word that best characterizes their relationship to it is *unpredictability*. If Romanian democracy, in all its dimensions—economic, social, and political—seems to have reached a certain degree of stability after decades of transformation, the same cannot be said of the Romanian public education system. For reasons that are more or less clear, it has entered a transitional phase that threatens to become permanent. The only predictable thing about Romanian schooling is precisely its unpredictability; the only thing we can truly count on is change. Year after year, we learn that curricula have been revised, that lower- and upper-secondary graduation exams have been altered, or that admission procedures for high school or university have been modified. Every minister who takes over the Ministry of Education promises reforms and transformations meant to remedy the "disaster" reflected in the PISA tests, which place Romanian children at overall proficiency Level 2, that is, at a "critical level."

Each team entrusted, for the duration of a mandate, with educational reform gives the impression of starting from scratch every time, placing little value on continuity, expending considerable energy reinventing the wheel, and, unsurprisingly, failing to reach any truly solid conclusion or to establish a durable and coherent system within the short time available.

Another reason why, in our view, reform remains far from complete may be the excessive centralization of the education system. It seems significant that the European countries with very strong results in the tests mentioned above have opted to decentralize their systems, eliminate standardized examinations, and leave many important decisions in the hands of schools and education specialists, whether practitioners or researchers. In other words, they have abandoned micromanagement and focused instead on ensuring the framework necessary for the educational process to take place under decent conditions, materially as well as otherwise.

Another possible cause of the instability and unpredictability of the educational process in Romania is the divide between specialists or theoreticians in the field and practitioners—teachers, principals, and managers. Every decision concerning curriculum design, the assessment of pupils or students, and the professional training of teaching staff should be the product of mixed teams bringing together people with teaching experience, who know the context in which that decision will be applied, as well as specialists whose role is to construct the theoretical basis and justify that decision on the grounds of what is currently known about the teaching-learning process.

The observations above concern primarily pre-university education, since higher education is privileged in this respect. University autonomy provides the kind of decentralization referred to above: it allows professors, or teams of professors and researchers, to adopt a particular paradigm, commit themselves to a set of theoretical principles, test them on groups of students, and ultimately, depending on the results, apply them over the medium or long term. The major disadvantage here is that such results or conclusions remain largely unknown, circulate only within restricted circles, and fail to be taken up more broadly, probably because of the divide mentioned above, poor communication, and other similar problems, to which the present article does not seek to provide an answer.

Among the various aspects of the educational process, we would like to begin at the beginning, more precisely with curriculum design as applied to foreign language teaching in general, and to Romanian as a second, foreign, or non-native language in particular, within a clearly defined context: adult learners in higher education. Our approach begins with the theoretical principles to which we subscribe, that is, with a set of convictions concerning language in general, on the one hand, and language learning and acquisition, on the other, as well as the curricular approach we adopt: what a syllabus is, what it should contain, who is responsible for creating it, and which organizational principles underlie it. Finally, in the last part of the article, we offer a sample syllabus section, thus illustrating the conclusions to which our theoretical investigation has led us.

2. How is a language learned?

2.1. The traditional approach

The question above obviously calls for a nuanced and complex answer. Our aim here, however, is simply to review several major trends in language teaching over the past half century. In order to say anything about how a language is learned, we must begin with an even broader question: what is a language, what are its characteristics, and what is its relationship, on the one hand, to reality and, on the other, to knowledge? A particular understanding of how human language functions gives rise to specific beliefs about the way in which language can be acquired or learned, beliefs that are later "translated" into pedagogical practices consistent with the underlying theoretical principles.

Each theoretical perspective substantially shapes the educational process in general, beginning with the stage of curriculum planning. First, the principles underlying a given approach guide the decision-making process in one direction or another: what content we select, what methodology is more appropriate, how we organize the content, in what order, and what roles are to be fulfilled by the participants in the educational process. As Tricia Hedge notes, "The structural syllabus of the 1960s and 1970s, the communicative syllabus of the 1980s, and the task-based syllabus of the 1990s, have all made their contribution to course design" (Hedge 2000: 339). The fact that we are dealing with a multidimensional syllabus is evident from the table of contents of most textbooks. These often include a list of communicative functions (the communicative approach), grammatical and lexical structures (the structuralist approach), and topics and projects (the influence of the task-based syllabus).

Somewhat earlier, between the 1940s and the 1970s, language teaching was strongly shaped by behaviorism. Robert Lado (1964), for example, made a significant contribution to the development of materials specific to the audio-lingual method (ALM). According to this approach, the emphasis fell on imitation and memorization and learners were expected to learn dialogues or simple sentence patterns by heart.

Convergent with ALM, and likewise a product of behaviorism, is the contrastive analysis hypothesis, according to which a person engaged in learning a new language begins from a set of habits formed in the mother tongue. Later research showed that transfer from the first language is not always predictable, whether in the case of directly transferable content or of errors. In the same period, Noam Chomsky (1957) outlined the principles of universal grammar. According to this view, the human being is born with an innate set of structural rules. Undoubtedly the best-known model of second language acquisition influenced by Chomsky is the one proposed by Stephen Krashen (1982), the *monitor model*, which includes several now-famous hypotheses: the acquisition hypothesis, the comprehensible input hypothesis, the natural order hypothesis, and the affective filter hypothesis. Whatever criticisms Krashen's conclusions have sometimes attracted, his work remains important because it helped shift attention from structure to meaning (Lightbown, Spada 2017: 103–107).

In *Cognitive Linguistics and Second Language Learning*, Andrea Tyler reviews several elements that characterize the traditional perspective on second language learning. According to this approach, language is seen as a system separate from other cognitive or social abilities, a distinct entity isolated from general cognitive processes and conceptual structures, consisting of a set of rules, a vocabulary list, and a list of exceptions. Consequently, the student's role is to master the rules and memorize the exceptions (Tyler 2012: 5).

Below are some of the central claims of the traditional view:

- Language is understood as a separate system, itself made up of subsystems such as phonology, morphology, syntax, lexis, and semantics. More recent versions of the approach have also added the pragmatic dimension. The linguistic system, therefore, is not influenced by interaction with the surrounding environment, but is autonomous.
- Language is acquired, not learned, and it represents an element "encapsulated" in the human brain, a "module" separate from other cognitive processes.

- Syntax is biologically preset; it is not learned, and it is somewhat detached from semantic and lexical elements.
- Non-literal language is peripheral, rather poetic in nature, and not central to cognition (Tyler 2012: 13–14).

A brief look at most textbooks of Romanian as a foreign language shows that they are organized in accordance with the principles outlined above and therefore adopt a still largely traditionalist approach to language teaching and learning. The same holds true for curriculum design documents, syllabi, or course descriptions made public by institutions that organize such courses. In recent decades, however, a new approach seems to be gaining increasing ground in second language teaching: cognitive linguistics. It appears to propose a change of perspective, which we will briefly describe in the following section.

2.2. Cognitive linguistics

Cognitive linguistics is not a single linguistic discipline. Rather, it may be viewed as a kind of "umbrella" encompassing a number of closely related theories of language, based on the following key claims:

- there is no autonomous "language acquisition device" responsible for language acquisition and processing;
- language is "usage-based," in the sense that it is a product of physical interaction with the world;
- a single set of cognitive processes operates across all domains of language, and these same processes are also involved in other kinds of knowledge and learning beyond language;
- words represent only a limited and imperfect means of expression;
- all components of language are meaningful, although grammatical meanings are more abstract than lexical meanings (Littlemore 2009: 1).

Cognitive linguistics views language as a product of its general interaction with other cognitive abilities and with the world. Thus, within a cognitive approach, language is "embodied," and the interpretation of meaning is based on everyday experience in the real world, on access to a "reservoir" of knowledge that facilitates understanding of the systematic relationships among linguistic units. This is the same reservoir of experiential world knowledge that underlies the human conceptual system in general. A cognitive approach makes use of this implicit knowledge by highlighting recurrent, meaningful linguistic patterns and organizing principles (Tyler 2012: 18).

Unlike the contrastive method, cognitive linguistics maintains that, by learning a second language, we develop the ability to see or describe things differently from the way we have been accustomed to. Learning a new language requires us to move beyond the cognitive habits we developed in our mother tongue and involves an effort to reorganize encyclopedic knowledge and the corresponding networks of word associations. Last but not least, when we learn a new language, we learn to repackage our ideas into constructions that highlight aspects different from those we habitually use in our native language (Littlemore 2009: 188–189).

An important aspect of the perspective offered by cognitive linguistics is its emphasis on the relationships among form, function, and meaning. Moreover, this approach offers an encyclopedic view of language, treating words as access points to complex networks of knowledge rather than as simple isolated entries in dictionaries. One of its fundamental aims is to describe not only the elements that make up language, but also the systematic relationships among those elements. Language is understood as an integral part of general cognitive processes. As such, language, including grammar, is seen as reflecting our understanding of the world and our interactions with it. Furthermore, in cognitive linguistics, there is no sharp distinction between lexicon and grammar; meaning is grounded in our everyday interactions with the world around us and in the way our bodies are structured; linguistic units form categories; and language is not an abstract system but a usage-based one (Tyler 2012: 19).

Therefore, if we accept the view of language proposed by cognitive linguistics, then the approach to second language teaching must also undergo radical changes. For the time being, we are still only at the beginning when it comes to the actual implementation of the conclusions listed above in a coherent program. On the other hand, unlike other systems, the cognitive perspective is not merely a theoretical construct (although, to a certain extent, every system is also a construct), but is supported by empirical data coming from neuroscience. "Advances in neuroimaging and mapping of pathways," Judy Willis notes, "connecting brain components working together, have further opened windows into the working brain. We can now see brain activity as information is being processed from the initial sensory intake to extended cross-brain conceptual networks. This ability provides us with a deeper understanding of neurological strategies that could promote students' learning, such as through personally immersive and emotionally engaging experiences." (Willis 2020: 1).

Investigative methods such as magnetic resonance imaging, positron emission tomography, or quantitative electroencephalography (qEEG) allow us to observe the brain in real time and to draw several important conclusions about the learning process. Among the more recent findings is the fact that the classical hypothesis of brain areas specialized for language can, if not be disproved, at least be qualified. According to that hypothesis, there are two main areas in the brain responsible for the proper functioning of linguistic communication: Broca's area (for production) and Wernicke's area (for comprehension), both located in the left hemisphere. Broca's area is also the site where grammar is localized, whereas Wernicke's area seems to "house" the mental lexicon.

However, neuroimaging studies show, on the one hand, that a given linguistic function recruits several different brain areas, and that the same brain area is involved in several different aspects of language, and, on the other hand, that many brain areas activated by language are also activated by non-linguistic tasks. For example, cells in the superior temporal sulcus are involved in speech processing, but also in motion perception, audiovisual integration, and social perception. In a fascinating study entitled *Language and the Brain*, Seana Coulson notes that language (the ability to communicate verbally) cannot be directly mapped onto the brain, because it emerges from the interaction of interconnected brain areas. The variability of the neural substrate of language suggests that there is no predetermined implementation of language in the brain. Moreover, Coulson concludes, the brain is both a product of linguistic capacity and a prerequisite for it (Coulson 2017). In other words, the brain "creates" language, and language, in turn, "creates" or "modulates" the brain.

What are the practical consequences of these discoveries?

a. The more ways in which we learn something, the more memory pathways are built. Therefore, stimulating the growth of multiple dendrites and synaptic connections is one of the best things teachers can do for their students' brains. In the classroom, the more ways in which learning material is introduced into the brain and reviewed, the more dendritic pathways of access will be created. There will be more synaptic bridges from cell to cell, and these pathways will be used more frequently, grow stronger, and endure over time. For example, the visual presentation of information establishes a connection with the occipital lobes (the posterior lobes of the brain that process visual information). Subsequently, or simultaneously, if students hear the information, a circuit will be activated in the temporal lobes (the lobes on the sides of the brain that process auditory information and play an important role in emotional regulation and memory processing). The more regions of the brain that store data about a topic, the more interconnections there will be. This apparent redundancy gives students more opportunities to retrieve data stored across multiple areas (Willis 2006: 3–4).

This is an argument for organizing the syllabus of language courses around communicative activities of reception, production, interaction, and mediation, passing communicative functions and linguistic, pragmatic, and discourse structures through multiple channels, thereby helping fix them in long-term memory.

b. Working memory (or short-term memory) involves the ability to retain and manipulate information in order to use it in the near future. Information is retained in working memory for only few minutes. The challenge students face is moving information from working memory into long-term memory. If they fail to do so within that time frame, that information may be lost. In order for newly learned material not to disappear, it must enter the network of brain connections. Students can retain new information by activating prior knowledge related to the new material. This prior knowledge is stored in circuits of neurons connected by branching axons and dendrites that carry information in the form of electrochemical signals (Willis 2007: 6).

From the perspective of designing a syllabus that takes into account how the brain actually works, it is essential to ensure not only the internal coherence of learning units, but also their external coherence—that the units are connected to one another and that these connections are transparent both to the teacher and to the student, so that previously learned information is recycled and used as a set of "hooks" that help "hang" new information onto existing knowledge and transfer it into long-term memory.

c. Although the process of thinking is slow, demanding, and uncertain, people like to think, especially when they believe the effort will be rewarded by the pleasant feeling we experience when solving a problem. Curiosity drives people to explore new ideas and problems, but when they do so, they quickly assess how much mental effort will be required to solve the problem. If it is too much or too little, they will stop. In order for problems to be solved, the thinker needs appropriate information from the environment, space in working memory, and the necessary information and procedures stored in long-term memory. Therefore, the teacher must ensure both that there are problems to be solved and that these problems do not surpass the students' cognitive limits (Willingham 2009: 10–16).

Willingham's observation seems to underlie a concept that will reappear in the third part of this article: essential questions. In *Understanding by Design*, Wiggins and McTighe speak of a series of essential questions that form the foundation of each learning unit, questions intended to ensure the transfer of newly acquired knowledge and skills beyond the classroom (Wiggins, McTighe 2006). We will return to this point a little later.

d. To ensure the conditions necessary for learning, a slight stimulation of the limbic system is needed. In Judy Willis's words, it should be “not too hot, not too cold, but just right” (Willis 2007: 24). In the presence of emotions or feelings, neuroimaging shows low-level metabolic states of stimulation in the amygdala. Students assessed under these conditions demonstrate better working memory, improved verbal fluency, better episodic memory for events, and more flexible thinking, generating creative ideas for problem solving. On the other hand, during periods of high stress, newly learned content simply does not reach the brain’s information-processing centers. To prevent overactivation of the amygdala, students must be protected from negative experiences that would block the passage of new information into long-term memory (Willis 2020: 33-34).

Here is yet another argument for creating a syllabus that is well organized, balanced, and above all transparent for students. Predictability is an important factor in maintaining a positive state, and teachers often underestimate the importance of communicating the goals of the class. If a syllabus is a map, then everyone involved in the teaching process must know where they are going, how far they have already come, and how much remains to be covered. In *Teaching and Learning in the Language Classroom*, Tricia Hedge offers the following recommendation: “As far as planning is concerned, I would say that it is desirable to strike a balance between a ‘magical mystery tour’ and ‘if it’s Tuesday, this must be Belgium’” (Hedge 2000: 30). In other words, we should aim for a balance between elements of surprise and predictability in order to achieve that moderate stimulation of the limbic system which supports learning.

3. What is a syllabus?

First of all, it should be noted that the process of educational design involves several stages of planning:

- establishing the educational philosophy;
- the curriculum – this includes the institution’s mission, the educational policies and values to which it adheres, and offers a description of the objectives and methods, while also referring to a broader framework of reference;

- the syllabus – a document specifying the objectives, content, and intended outcomes (with reference both to the student/pupil and to the teacher). It includes the content (grammar, lexis, etc.) to be covered over a given period of time and the skills to be taught and assessed;
- the scheme of work – a more detailed description of the content over a limited period of time (a week, a month);
- the lesson plan – the content and activities of a single lesson (North et al. 2018: 7–8).

With regard to educational philosophy, and to the view of the nature of language, of the way it functions, is learned, or is acquired, we opt, as stated above, for the cognitive approach, since it takes natural language as its object of study, language as an instrument for organizing, processing, and transmitting information, and proposes a recontextualization of linguistic inquiry, a resemanticization of grammar (the relationship between language and conceptualization), an emphasis on the discursive dimension, and a focus on use (Geeraerts 2007: 3–15). According to this line of thought, "to study language is to study patterns of conceptualization. Language offers a window into cognitive function, providing insights into the nature, structure, and organization of thought. The cognitive perspective differs from other perspectives in that it views language as reflecting fundamental properties and organizing principles of the human mind" (Evans, Green 2006: 5). Consequently, a language-learning program should reflect these theoretical positions.

Still at this first level of planning, we should also state that the educational philosophy to which we subscribe is the one promoted by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR): an action-oriented approach. Among the methodological implications of this approach are the need for a needs analysis, coherence and transparency with regard to objectives and intended outcomes, and, in addition, an emphasis on communication and self-assessment.

What, more precisely, does planning involve in the case of second language teaching? First of all, it establishes the roles of the teacher and the student. The teacher, for example, may play the role of controller in word generation; evaluator of correctness when students are trying to pronounce forms; corrector of pronunciation; organizer in giving instructions for various activities; initiator of those activities; monitor and provider of feedback; and resource when students need help (Harmer 2001: 57–62). Planning will then establish and define the learning activities (selected according to the objectives), decide how much time should be devoted to each activity, take into account the possibility of adapting the plan to the participants' needs (flexibility), and pay attention to the effort-result ratio (Hedge 2000: 31).

Starting from these clarifications, we describe below several possible models of educational curriculum in foreign language teaching.

3.1. A brief history

In *General English Syllabus Design*, in his introductory study, H. H. Stern offers a brief summary of several curricular models that were taking shape at the time: the Lancaster School, represented by Christopher Candlin and Michael Breen; the London School, whose main representatives were H. G. Widdowson and Christopher Brumfit; and the Toronto School, represented by J. P. B. Allen. In addition, the volume presents another interesting perspective, that of Janice Yalden, situated at the intersection of the London School and the Toronto School.

Candlin (1984) and Breen (1984) propose an interactive (and problem-solving) syllabus, one that results from ongoing negotiation between teacher and learners, and is therefore a rather open-ended material, continuously evolving. In this case, a syllabus becomes more a way of retrospectively recording what has been done than of planning future activity: a retrospective rather than a prospective syllabus. Thus, for the Lancaster School, syllabuses are social constructs, jointly produced by teachers and students in interdependent fashion, rather than fixed inventories of content or skills to be learned.

Representatives of the London School, Widdowson and Brumfit, on the other hand, regard the Lancaster School's perspective as "extreme and unrealistic" and instead offer a conceptual distinction between syllabus and teaching methodology: the syllabus should be structural, while only the methodology is communicative. “There is no such thing as a communicative syllabus,” remarks the author of the famous *Teaching Language as Communication* (Widdowson 1978) in his contribution to *General English Syllabus Design* (Widdowson 1984: 64), while Christopher Brumfit holds that we learn more effectively when we perceive elements as part of a system rather than as isolated items (Brumfit 1984: 75–81).

“It seems to me,” Widdowson explains, “that formal education represents a second-order kind of culture, consisting of schemes of conceptual and behavioural organization devised to supplement and support the first-order processes of primary socialization. Its aim is to give form to ideas, attitudes, beliefs, and actions in such a way that participants in education may take part in social life beyond their immediate environment and extend their individual experience. The totality of these schemes constitutes a curriculum. A syllabus represents a particular scheme for a particular area of content” (Widdowson 1984: 23). According to this view, the student may be regarded either as a social actor or as an individual, and the syllabus is both an educational construct (pursuing broad educational aims) and a pedagogical one (providing a framework within which learning can take place). Education may be person-oriented or role-oriented, depending on the cultural paradigm within which the learning process occurs, and no paradigm, the researcher warns, should be regarded as intrinsically superior to another (Widdowson 1984: 23–29).

For Janice Yalden, by contrast, a syllabus should be explicit for the teacher and should, at least in part, be produced by the teacher (with the help of an expert when necessary). It may also be more or less explicit for the student, being first and foremost a specification of content and only at a later stage of development referring to methodology and materials. Before actually developing the syllabus, we should answer the following questions:

(a) What does communicative competence refer to, and what components does it have?
(b) What can be taught systematically or non-systematically? And what can be taught linearly or cyclically?

According to Yalden, the organizing principles of a syllabus fall into one of the following categories:

1. organizing principles based on a view of the process of learning a language;
2. principles based on a view of the way language acquisition takes place;
3. organizing principles based on how the target language will be used.

"Since course participants have communicative abilities that they can share with other users of the target language, classroom activities should encourage them to exercise these abilities. However, if conversation is to take place (both in the classroom and outside it), we must have something to communicate, and needs analysis can contribute to determining topics of interest" (Yalden 1984: 18). Thus, principles 1 and 2 apply to the selection of methodology and materials, while principle 3 applies in the design phase. For Yalden, this is not a method, but an attempt to connect the first phase of curricular design with the second phase, that concerning materials and methodology (Yalden 1984: 19–20).

In short, Janice Yalden proposes the semantic dimension as the organizing principle of the syllabus. The linguistic component, in turn, should be treated non-systematically and should be derived from the functional area of language use. The element of continuity is represented by the theme, which becomes a kind of framework for several units/modules, and themes may be both specific and general. Thematic elements are organized chronologically, according to a linear progression, while functional and interactional elements are organized proportionally and somewhat spirally. At first, form predominates, but later the emphasis shifts more toward functions, discourse, and the like (Yalden 1984: 13–20).

Finally, the Toronto School, represented by J. P. B. Allen, holds that a syllabus should include three elements:

- a structural one, based on the grammatical component;
- a functional one, based on the discourse and sociolinguistic components of the foreign language program;

- an experiential one, based on several "horizontal" syllabuses, defined in terms of cultural knowledge, content taught in other subjects, or general life experience, in accordance with principles that exist independently of the target language itself (Allen 1984: 61–74).

After reviewing all these directions, H. H. Stern makes an essential distinction in defining a syllabus: it can be viewed both as product and as process. When viewed as product, we are interested in what kinds of information will be included in the document. When viewed as process, however, we are concerned with how a syllabus is developed, what the stages are, and who is responsible for each of them. In addition, Stern proposes four dimensions: a structural-functional one, an experiential one, a cultural one, and, finally, an element related to general language education (reflection on language, on the learning process, and on the cultural elements that influence them).

3.2. The "Understanding by Design" model and a proposal

As we noted in the previous chapter, beginning in the 1980s the focus of educational planning began to shift from an approach centered on content and methodology to one that gives greater attention to the roles played by students and teachers in the educational process and, above all, to the intended goals. Of course, as Richards (2013) points out, any curriculum devoted to foreign language learning will include considerations regarding content and methodology, as well as intended outcomes (determined by context and purpose). What differs is the element regarded as the dominant organizing principle. Richards therefore speaks of three possible models: forward design (the classical model, with an emphasis on content), central design (in which methodology plays the central role), and backward design (which starts from the intended outcomes) (Richards 2013: 30–31).

The CEFR (which functions as a curriculum in most European contexts where a foreign language is taught) views those engaged in the language-learning process not as pupils or students, but as users of the language in question. It is therefore primarily concerned with what users will be able to do with what they have learned at the end of the course, and with what they will need to learn in order to achieve their goals. The focus thus falls on intended outcomes, on the use of language in real contexts. From this perspective, the CEFR follows a backward-design curricular model, one derived from the concept of *understanding by design*, proposed by Wiggins and McTighe.

"Common sense," the authors of *Understanding by Design* remark, "suggests that the ultimate test of genuine understanding involves transfer: what can learners do with what they have learned in class? Although the creation or acquisition of new meanings is, of course, necessary, one may say that it is not sufficient; transfer is our goal as educators. Students must be able not only to think well, but also to act effectively on the basis of their ideas, skills, and knowledge" (Wiggins, McTighe 2005: 92). In short, the authors of the *understanding by design* model hold that genuine understanding has two facets:

- ideas and inferences (making connections, identifying central concepts);
- the necessary knowledge and skills.

By design, we mean that this is not a process that happens at random, but one that is carefully planned. By proper design, we essentially mean backward design. Planning precedes teaching, and it must include the intended goals and the evidence needed to demonstrate that they have been achieved. In the case of backward design, long-term and short-term goals are carefully interwoven, assessment is therefore more appropriate, and the teaching process has a clear purpose. We plan backwards from complex long-term performance (where will the result of learning be used?), not from isolated skills and pieces of knowledge. We do not begin with the content; we begin with what pupils/students should be able to do with that content (Wiggins, McTighe 2011: 1–9).

The *understanding by design* model includes three stages: Stage I, in which we detail the intended results at the end of the course; Stage II, in which we determine the evidence; and finally Stage III, that of the actual planning of educational activities (Fig. 1).

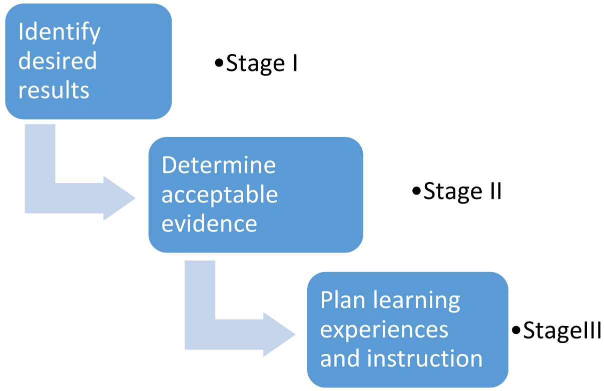

Fig. 1. Stages of the model *understanding by design* (Wiggins, McTighe 2005: 18)

The logic should follow the example shown in the table below (Table 1):

Tabel 1. (Wiggins, McTighe 2011: 9)

Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3
If the desired end result is for learners to . . . →	**then you need evidence of the learners' ability to . . . →**	**then the learning events need to . . .**
Drive in heavy traffic with aggressive and inattentive drivers without accident or anger.	Handle real as well as simulated driving conditions in which defensive driving is required by traffic and behavior of other drivers.	Help novices become skilled in handling the automobile; help them learn and practice defensive driving in a variety of situations; help them learn to defuse anger using humor and different thought patterns, etc.

In Stage I, we define the intended outcomes according to three coordinates: **transfer** (long-term objectives that can be applied in real-life contexts), **meaning** (which involves the ability to demonstrate deep understanding of the material covered and to respond to several essential questions), and **acquisition** (whether of knowledge or of skills).

When students truly understand, they are able to draw inferences and establish connections between pieces of information, express their own conclusions, and apply new knowledge (that is, transfer it) to new contexts or situations with flexibility and ease. Essential questions, another key concept of the model, prompt deeper discussion and often generate further questions; they lead students to consider alternative perspectives, weigh the evidence available to them, support and justify their answers, and make connections both with previously learned material and with personal experience. They arise naturally and create opportunities for transfer to new situations (Wiggins, McTighe 2011: 14–15). As for the second distinction, knowledge vs. skills, the matter is already familiar: in order to demonstrate that they have acquired the necessary knowledge, students must show good command of facts/information, definitions, and concepts (declarative knowledge), while, in order to show that they have developed the necessary skills, what will be assessed is their ability to carry out an action or a process competently (procedural knowledge).

In the second stage, where we establish possible evidence that the intended outcomes have been achieved, we may choose between two types of assessment: conventional assessment (tests, exams, exercises) and authentic assessment (in which activities similar to those encountered in real life are simulated). Authentic assessment should always carry more weight than purely didactic or conventional assessment.

In the third stage, where the teaching activities are described, the teacher will have the freedom to choose the methods best suited to the group of students with whom they are working. Thus, once the intended outcomes have been established, together with the appropriate assessment methods (following a complex process that includes needs analysis and negotiation before the beginning of the module or course), the *understanding by design* model is characterized by considerable flexibility. In other words, once we have established a destination, we may choose multiple paths to reach it.

If we view the CEFR through this new lens, we can see that its descriptive scheme is fully consistent with the backward design model proposed by Wiggins and McTighe, and that it thereby addresses a number of problems, such as the lack of coherence (solution: the establishment of internationally accepted proficiency levels, through the provision of descriptors for communicative activities, strategies, and communicative competences), the difficulty of defining content, the lack of attention paid to the student/pupil/learner, and the lack of orientation toward the real needs of course participants (solution: a focus on intended outcomes, which allows for the development of a less prescriptive syllabus) (North et al. 2018: 24–40).

In the diagram below, we offer a suggestion regarding the correlation of objectives with the various stages of the educational design process (Fig. 2):

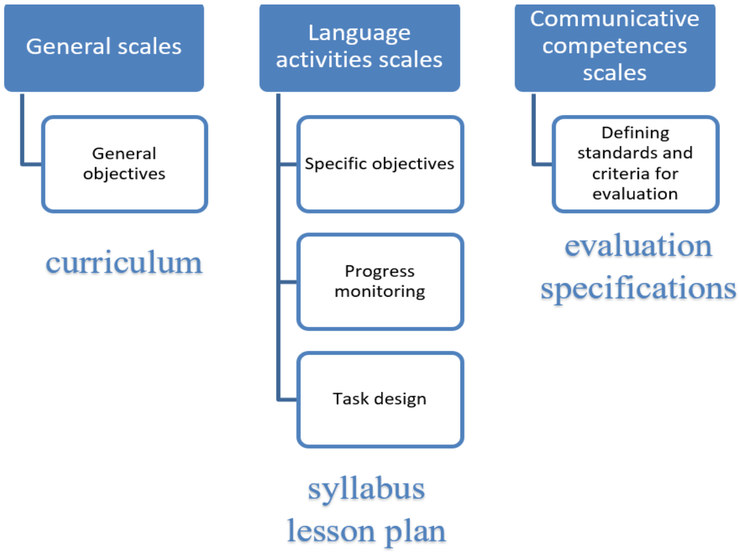

Fig. 2.

For those who adopt it as a framework of reference, the CEFR will function as a curriculum, providing a detailed description of proficiency levels. In developing the syllabus, the same document will indicate the general objectives (drawn from the general scales for communicative activities), while the specific outcomes will be taken from the scales for sub-activities (*reading for pleasure*, *reading for orientation*, etc.). From the same source, we can also extract descriptors on the basis of which we will develop tasks for authentic assessment, while the descriptors for linguistic, pragmatic, or discourse competence may serve in defining the assessment criteria. Of course, the teachers are not required to limit themselves to the descriptors drawn from the CEFR. They may select the descriptors they consider relevant, eliminate what seems unnecessary or redundant, and add new descriptors where needed.

In order to develop a syllabus adapted to the needs of all participants in the educational process, we must take several elements into account: the students' individual needs or objectives, the goals of the group, and, last but not least, the teaching materials available to the teacher (or those the teacher prefers).

Before beginning the actual work on the syllabus, we will identify the textbooks and materials to be used. We will then correlate the objectives (drawn from the CEFR) with what the textbook or complementary teaching material offers and, in this way, compile a list of possible objectives, which individual students will mark according to the extent to which they consider them a priority for themselves.

Finally, the students' individual needs and objectives are analyzed, and the list of the group's shared objectives is established (Fig. 3):

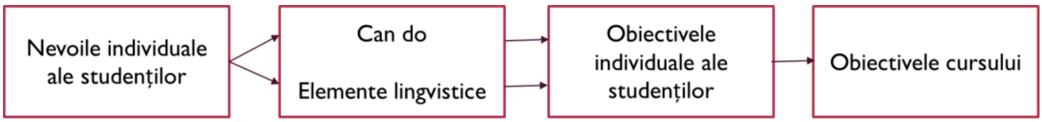

Fig. 3. (North *et alii* 2018: 54**)**

The syllabus should present information in a clear and accessible manner. Its contents should also be made available to students (for example, through brochures, posters displayed in the classroom, and so on).

Below, we offer one possible way of organizing the syllabus. The correspondence between its sections and the stages of the *understanding by design* model can easily be observed (Fig. 4):

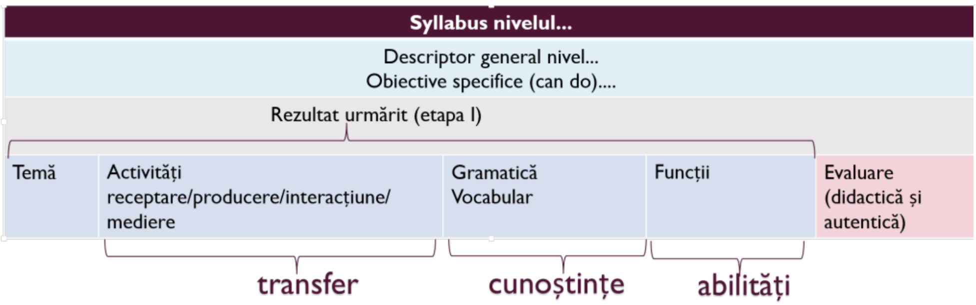

Fig. 4.

Another possible version was inspired by Tricia Hedge in *Teaching and Learning in the Language Classroom*, where she proposes the thematic criterion as an organizing principle, identifying texts appropriate to the chosen communicative situation (Fig. 5):

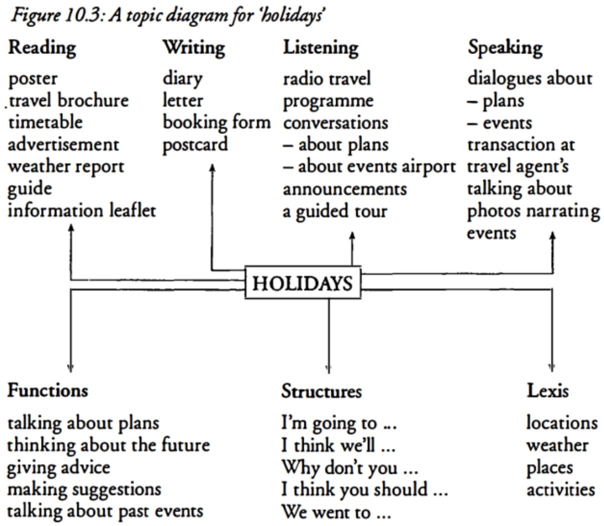

Fig. 5. (Hedge 2000: 348)

The model presented below retains the appearance of a mind map, but modifies the sections in accordance with the communicative activities set out in the CEFR and includes the *experiential-cultural* dimension as well as the component entitled *general language education*, as suggested by J. P. B. Allen (1984) (Fig. 6):

Fig. 6.

A syllabus corresponding to a CEFR level (or sublevel) will include between six and ten thematically organized units of this kind. The document will function not only as a syllabus, but can also be easily converted into an open-ended scheme of work, which the teacher may later modify by including or replacing certain activities. One advantage of this way of presenting things is that it highlights the connections between the various components and encourages structures (and functions) to be processed through multiple channels, thus facilitating their transfer from working memory into long-term memory. In addition, it places communicative activities—the ones that can be directly transferred to real-life situations—at the top of the model, while the lower half of the diagram is reserved for the skills (functions) and knowledge (lexical and grammatical) involved in those activities, similarly to the model proposed by Wiggins and McTighe in *Understanding by Design*

(2005): transfer and meaning, followed by acquisition of knowledge and abilities. This volume is published in black and white; consequently, the reader cannot see that each box is differently colored and that the text inside the boxes is itself marked in different shades, in order to draw the teacher's attention to the fact that certain activities can be organized on the basis of existing materials, in this case, *Manual de limba română. Nivel A1–A2* (Platon et al. 2012), whereas for others the teacher will need to look for different sources (possibly authentic ones).

This syllabus model can be used together with the CEFR descriptor posters, which are specifically designed to be displayed in the classroom, thus encouraging maximum transparency in the communication of objectives (Sacalîș, Sonea 2020). In the table, we have marked the descriptors used in the unit above (Table 2):

Tabel 2.

Reading correspondence								
Can understand a simple personal letter, email or post in which the person writing is talking about familiar subjects (such as friends or family) or asking questions on these subjects.	✓							
Can understand basic types of standard routine letters and faxes (enquiries, orders, letters of confirmation etc.) on familiar topics.								
Can understand short simple personal letters. Can understand very simple formal emails and letters (e.g. confirmation of a booking or on-line purchase).	✓							
Reading for orientation								
Can find specific information in practical, concrete, predictable texts (e.g. travel guidebooks, recipes), provided they are written in simple language. Can understand the main information in short and simple descriptions of goods in brochures and websites (e.g. portable digital devices, cameras, etc.).								
Can find specific information in practical, concrete, predictable texts (e.g. travel guidebooks, recipes), provided they are written in simple language. Can understand the main information in short and simple descriptions of goods in brochures and websites (e.g. portable digital devices, cameras, etc.).	✓							
Can find specific, predictable information in simple everyday material such as advertisements, prospectuses, menus, reference lists and timetables.	✓							

Can locate specific information in lists and isolate the information required (e.g. use the 'Yellow Pages' to find a service or tradesman).							
Can understand everyday signs and notices etc. in public places, such as streets, restaurants, railway stations, in workplaces, such as directions, instructions, hazard warnings.							
Reading for information / argument							
Can identify specific information in simpler written material he/she encounters such as letters, brochures and short newspaper articles describing events.							
Can follow the general outline of a news report on a familiar type of event, provided that the contents are familiar and predictable.	✓						
Can pick out the main information in short newspaper reports or simple articles in which figures, names, illustrations and titles play a prominent role and support the meaning of the text.	✓						
Can understand the main points of short texts dealing with everyday topics (e.g. lifestyle, hobbies, sports, weather).	✓						
Can understand texts describing people, places, everyday life, and culture, etc., provided that they are written in simple language.							
Can understand information given in illustrated brochures and maps, e.g. the principal attractions of a city or area.							
Can understand the main points in short news items on subjects of personal interest (e.g. sport, celebrities).	✓						
Can understand a short factual description or report within his/her own field, provided that it is written in simple language and does not contain unpredictable detail.							
Can understand most of what people say about themselves in a personal ad or post and what they say they like in other people.	✓						
Reading instructions							
Can understand regulations, for example safety, when expressed in simple language. Can understand short written instructions illustrated step by step (e.g. for installing new technology).							
Can understand simple instructions on equipment encountered in everyday life – such as a public telephone.							
Can understand instructions on medicine labels expressed as a simple command e.g. 'Take before meals' or 'Do not take if driving.	✓						
Can follow a simple recipe, especially if there are pictures to illustrate the most important steps.	✓						
Can understand simple, brief instructions provided that they are illustrated and not written in continuous text.							
Reading as a leisure activity							
Can understand enough to read short, simple stories and comic strips involving familiar, concrete situations written in high frequency everyday language.							

Can understand the main points made in short magazine reports or guide entries that deal with concrete everyday topics (e.g. hobbies, sports, leisure activities, animals).	✓						
Can understand short narratives and descriptions of someone's life that are written in simple words.							
Can understand what is happening in a photo story (e.g. in a lifestyle magazine) and form an impression of what the characters are like.							
Can understand much of the information provided in a short description of a person (e.g. a celebrity).							
Can understand the main point of a short article reporting an event that follows a predictable pattern (e.g. the Oscars), provided it is clearly written in simple language.							

4. Conclusions

We hope that the argument developed throughout this article is sufficient to convince the reader that the proposed model offers a number of significant advantages: a graphic layout consistent with the way the brain works; an emphasis on connectivity and on the multiple pathways leading to long-term memory; flexibility; an "open" character, in the sense that it can be continually expanded or revised; alignment with the CEFR; and, finally, its potential to function as a genuine planning tool. Because it is relatively detailed, the teacher can use it on a day-to-day basis in lesson preparation. More often than not, documents intended to support the planning of the educational process are completed at the beginning of the academic year, semester, or module and then forgotten in a drawer. At most, they are revisited when the management team requests a minor update or, occasionally, on the eve of examinations.

More broadly, we hope that the present study will encourage specialists in RLS, whether theoreticians or practitioners, to give greater attention to educational design. A perfect plan will not always produce perfect results, but a weak plan will almost certainly lead to weak results, as well as to the very unpredictability and uncertainty mentioned in the introduction. We therefore invite all those involved in teaching RLS to reflect for a moment on the role they play. At a time when student autonomy is being rightly emphasized, and when access to information is open and almost unlimited, the teacher is, first of all, a mediator and, we would argue, an architect: both a knowledgeable expert in their own field (the “engineering” dimension) and a committed artist, constantly seeking to offer students a learning experience that is balanced and rewarding, sufficiently predictable to provide security, but not so predictable as to become monotonous, and sufficiently varied to sustain interest, but not so unpredictable as to generate anxiety.

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Backward Design in Second Language Learning: Theoretical Considerations and Practical Applications

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Abstract: *Backward design and second language learning. A theoretical and practical approach.* The purpose of this article is to explore the advantages and limits of a *backward design* approach in language course planning. The first part is dedicated to a short overview of the history of the term curriculum and of different types of curricula. We then identify the *backward design* model as the most appropriate option for planning language courses, we discuss the appropriateness of the model from the perspective of language learning as a complex dynamic system and, finally, we suggest a range of instruments that can be useful in curriculum or syllabus design, as well as in planning learning activities.

Keywords: *backward design, course planning, course design, curriculum, syllabus, scheme of work, second language learning, Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR)*

1. Introduction

The planning and organization of the educational process remain a central concern for education specialists, whether teachers, educational managers, or directors of studies. This concern is, of course, well founded, since, as will become clear in what follows, the way a curriculum or syllabus is designed reflects our underlying assumptions about education, the nature of learning, and, not least, the roles played by those involved in the process. Less visible, perhaps, are the metaphors that underlie these assumptions and, to some extent, the cultural and ideological framework within which they take shape.

Before turning to the main argument, we invite the reader to reflect briefly on the perspective offered by Martha Crago in *Communicative Interaction and Second Language Acquisition: An Inuit Example* concerning what counts as acceptable or desirable behavior in a foreign or second language classroom. Her study is a longitudinal ethnographic investigation of the role of cultural context in communicative interactions with children from Inuit communities in Alaska. Because Inuit pupils appeared not to speak at all during class, their teachers, most of them English or French-speaking *Qallunaat*, that is, non-Inuit, concluded that approximately 30 percent of them had communication or language difficulties. When an Inuit teacher was invited to comment on these children, she observed: "These Qallunaat teachers never seem to learn that well-raised Inuit children should not talk in class. They should be learning by looking and listening." Conversely, when a teacher tried to compliment the parents of a more talkative pupil, he was surprised by their reaction: when he told them that their child spoke well in class and in fact talked quite a lot, the parent apologized (Crago 1994: 496–497). In a similar vein, a speech therapist called in to assess the communicative abilities of Inuit children noticed a pupil who seemed exceptionally active and intelligent. When the specialist drew the teacher's attention to him, she responded: "Do you think he might, have a 1earning problem? Sorne of these children who don't have such high intelligence have trouble stopping themselves. They don't know when to stop talking" (Crago 1988: 219).

The point is clear enough: what, from our perspective, may count as evidence of intelligence or as a sign that the aims of the educational process have been achieved may, in a different context, signify precisely the opposite. We are not advocating a relativization of the values and attitudes we adopt within our own cultural and educational setting. Rather, we suggest that a certain critical distance, even from our own views, and from whichever model we choose to adopt, is always beneficial. In *Educational and Pedagogic Factors in Syllabus Design*, Henry Widdowson reminds us that "one needs to proceed with caution and respect local educational attitudes as reflected in the attitudes and dispositions of learners and teachers. In our enthusiasm to reveal to the world the enlightenment of our own vision, we are apt to forget that this vision is in all likelihood itself culturally induced and that for other people in other cultures it may appear only as a delusion" (Widdowson 1984: 27).

At the same time, in the case of culturally heterogeneous groups—and not only such groups—the challenges become even more complex: how can we adapt our pedagogical approach so that it is appropriate for all learners? Cultural factors are accompanied by linguistic, psychological, and social ones, as well as many others. A partial answer is offered by more recent theories of learning emerging from cognitive psychology, social psychology, anthropology, and neuroscience, all of which describe learning as a fundamentally human activity. Beyond cultural specificity, the mechanisms involved in learning, as well as the way the brain functions, provide an important foundation on which an educational approach can be built. The second section of this study offers a brief historical survey of curriculum theory, while the third examines different approaches to curriculum design and organization. In the fourth section, we select one of the three models described and provide a theoretical justification for that choice. Finally, in the last section, we propose a model syllabus and a set of instructional planning tools designed to help teachers plan, structure, and implement the educational process in a coherent and theoretically grounded manner.

2. A Brief Historical Perspective on Curriculum Theory

In broad terms, curriculum has been defined in different ways over time, ranging from a simple "course plan" to a concept encompassing all the components, objectives, content, and teaching-learning-assessment methodologies involved in the educational process.

The traditionalist view, conventionally associated with the period stretching from the seventeenth century to the end of the nineteenth century (Cristea 2002: 126), remained faithful to the original meaning of the term, limiting the scope of curriculum to instructional-educational content, that is, to the body of school policy documents regulating and standardizing the educational process provided by educational institutions.

The main shortcoming attributed to this initial understanding of the term was described by John Dewey in *The Child and the Curriculum* (1902), where he highlighted the error that arises when the school subjects studied within the institutional framework of schooling are treated separately from, and differently than, the child's actual learning experience. His suggestion that the child's "natural capacities" should also be taken into account within the curriculum represented a first step toward changing the concept and extending the term to the individual's entire learning experience, both formal and informal. In its modern stage of development, curriculum thus proposes a reconfiguration that begins with the child's life experience and moves toward that which represents the organized body of truth that is assimilated through learning (Dewey 1902: 741). Almost two decades later, Franklin Bobbitt's work complemented Dewey's theory, focusing primarily on preparing the child for integration into society through specific activities, while taking into account objectives embodied in the "skills, attitudes, habits, and knowledge that men need" (Bobbitt 1918: 42).

Gradually, the expansion of the term's scope—from predetermined knowledge to the individual's entire learning trajectory—also came to include the way in which that trajectory is planned, implemented, and evaluated, through the redefinition proposed by R. W. Tyler in the course he taught at the University of Chicago between 1930 and 1940 (published in 1949 under the title *Basic Principles of Curriculum and Instruction*). Structured in four chapters, the work systematically addresses the following questions:

(1) What educational purposes should the school seek to attain?
(2) What educational experiences can be provided that are likely to attain these purposes?
(3) How can these educational experiences be effectively organized?
(4) How can we determine whether these purposes are being attained? (Tyler 1949: 1)

Tyler's perspective on curriculum revolves around four key elements: objectives, the content aimed at achieving those objectives, the organization of that content, and its evaluation at the end of the learning sequence (Richards 2001: 39). This new vision, adopted, theorized, and further developed from the second half of the twentieth century onward, emerged in response to the growing proportion of the population in Great Britain entering higher education, as well as to the increasing diversity of their competences and aptitudes, which rendered the traditional formalist curriculum model insufficient and ineffective (Wraga 2017: 230).

3. Different Approaches to Curriculum in Foreign Language Teaching

Although no single, exhaustive definition of the concept of *curriculum* has emerged in the specialist literature of recent decades, approaches to the term in foreign language teaching and learning have varied depending on which of its constituent components has been given priority: content, methodology/process, or outcomes.

Limiting the discussion specifically to foreign language teaching and learning, Jack C. Richards (2013) offers a broad account of the paradigm shifts brought about by successive innovative perspectives in the field. In drawing his conceptual distinctions, Richards adopts the description of curriculum proposed by G. Wiggins and J. McTighe (2006: 6), according to which "the curriculum takes content (from external standards and local goals) and shapes it into a plan for how to conduct effective teaching and learning. It is thus more than a list of topics and lists of key facts and skills (inputs). It is a map of the desired student performance outcomes (outputs), a map that suggests appropriate learning activities and assessments so that students might achieve the desired results" (Wiggins, McTighe 2006: 6).

In language teaching, the three components of curriculum—linguistic content (input), methodology (the way the teaching-learning process is carried out), and outcomes (output)—are interdependent. Depending, however, on which of these components is given priority in curriculum development, three different approaches may be identified, following the terminology proposed by J. C. Richards (2013).

a) A first approach is forward design, which starts from the premise that, before decisions can be made about methodology and before the outcomes of the teaching process can be determined, it is necessary to establish the content to be taught and, implicitly, assessed. This content is systematized in a syllabus focused primarily on language itself and including lexical, grammatical, and functional content. The logic of such an approach is essentially linear: once the content has been established (in our case, linguistic structures), the syllabus is organized, the methodology is determined, outcomes are pursued, and different forms of assessment are applied.

Within such a teaching-learning process, the active role belongs to the teacher, who is responsible for transmitting information, teaching the content, and ensuring the accuracy of the language used by students. Students, by contrast, perform a more passive role, consisting in understanding the content and applying the rules they have acquired. Once a given learning sequence has been completed, various methods of summative assessment are employed in order to measure the extent to which the linguistic forms taught have been cumulatively mastered.

b) In the 1950s, as a result of the growing number of immigrants and refugees (Richards 2001: 23), the need for a shift in perspective on curriculum was increasingly felt in the English-speaking world. The principal change consisted in moving the emphasis from content to the methodology adopted in language teaching. Jack C. Richards groups all manifestations of such a perspective under the label central design, an educational model that "starts instead with the selection of learning activities, techniques, and teaching methods rather than with the elaboration of a detailed language syllabus or specification of learning outcomes" (Richards 2013: 13).

The objectives, content, and outcomes associated with this type of approach are not general and predetermined; rather, they occupy a secondary position, emerging as a consequence of the participants' interaction and involvement in the learning context. The syllabus is therefore dynamic and activity-based, evolving over time according to the content negotiated with students and the specific profile of each learner group.

A curriculum based on central design is strongly oriented toward the learning process itself, in particular toward methods such as open discussion, decision-making, critical thinking, debate, and the like. This, in turn, calls for a more subjective form of assessment, based on general communicative competence. The teacher becomes the agent who facilitates learning, encouraging the learner toward self-expression and autonomy within the educational process, while also enjoying considerable autonomy in choosing how to teach.

Despite the advantages of a central design approach, certain vulnerabilities may also be identified, most notably the need for teachers to possess extensive teaching experience. Moreover, the absence of clear objectives and the lack of a unified method of assessment may make it difficult to determine the degree of success achieved by the educational process for each student individually.

c) Ralph W. Tyler (1949), H. Taba (1962), and later G. Wiggins and J. McTighe (2006) move away from the preceding model and argue that a teacher cannot plan what is to be taught before establishing the intended learning outcomes, the standards to be met, and the forms of assessment required to determine whether those standards have been achieved. Grouped under the label backward design, curriculum models based on needs analysis begin with the objectives around which content will be built and organized, together with the learning experience and the forms of assessment (Taba 1962: 12). A representative framework for this type of curriculum is the Common European Framework of Reference for

Languages (CEFR), which is designed to provide a common basis for describing communicative competence in all its components—linguistic, sociolinguistic, and pragmatic. Without proposing a syllabus as such, the CEFR gives teachers both the freedom and the responsibility to select and organize content, as well as teaching and assessment strategies, in relation to the standards to be attained.

4. The Backward Design Model in Second Language Teaching

In *Syllabus Design in General Education: Options for ELT*, Janice Yalden groups the organizing principles of a syllabus into three broad categories: principles based on a view of the process of language learning, principles based on a view of how language acquisition takes place, and, finally, principles based on how the target language will be used (Yalden 1984: 16). If we choose the first principle, we place at the center of the curriculum model the linguistic structures that are to be learned and taught, on the assumption that we are more likely to learn what can be presented as a system than a set of disparate elements. Since linguistic structures are the only component that can be presented systematically, they become the focus and the "backbone" of the instructional process. In the case of the second principle, no formal organization is needed, and attention is concentrated on creating an environment conducive to the acquisition or natural development of the target language. Finally, in the case of the third principle, the most important aspect is the connection between what is studied in the classroom and what will later be used outside it (Yalden 1984: 16–17). In other words, the organizing principles proposed by Yalden correspond, indirectly, to the three types of curricula discussed above: forward, central, and backward design.

H. G. Widdowson, by contrast, proposes a different classification. A curriculum may be organized according to the educational objective it primarily seeks to achieve. It will therefore be role-oriented if its purpose is to prepare a learner for a future social role, or person-oriented if its main aim is instead to contribute to the learner's individual development. Moreover, Widdowson continues, a curriculum, and, subsequently, a syllabus, is not only an educational construct, but also a pedagogical one. This relationship between educational policy, on the one hand, and methodology, on the other, is sometimes a source of tension. If, for instance, educational policy is centered on the idea of preparing social actors who are expected to perform their roles as effectively as possible within a given community, then a pedagogical approach in which the student is encouraged to take individual initiative is not necessarily the most appropriate. More often than not, however, the teacher seems to regard a person-oriented approach as pedagogically preferable, since it fosters learning. If we adopt such a perspective, we will allow the student to negotiate progress through communicative activities, with minimal intervention on the part of the teacher (Widdowson 1984: 24).

Although this approach is appealing to participants in the educational process, it is not always feasible. In planning a foreign or non-native language course, we must take into account not only the sociocultural context in which we are teaching, but also the contexts from which the students themselves come. It is certainly desirable for students to show flexibility and openness toward the pedagogical approach of the cultural environment into which they are to be integrated. Yet it is unrealistic to imagine that adult learners will rapidly adapt to the changes proposed to them and simply erase the years during which they were exposed to a very different educational model. This is one more reason why a curriculum constructed on the principles of backward design remains the most appropriate option. Below, we will outline several reasons why this type of planning is especially suitable, particularly in the case of heterogeneous student groups, while also noting the limitations and risks it entails. Section 4.1 is devoted to these limitations and to possible solutions.

4.1. The Limits of a Backward Design Curriculum in Second Language Learning

Among the various theories of second language acquisition, development, and learning, we will focus here on the one that views learning as a complex dynamic system. In a 2012 article entitled *The CEFR* *and the Dynamics of Second Language Learning*, W. M. Lowie argues that an approach grounded in dynamic systems theory can be crucial for understanding the interactive and variable nature of second language development. A dynamic system, Lowie explains, is iterative and unfolds through multiple phases of development, each shaped by internal and external factors. Consequently, its evolution is difficult to predict, and any developmental trajectory is fundamentally individual (Lowie 2012: 19).

Complex systems are, in a sense, irreducible to their constituent parts. It is impossible to isolate the interaction between two elements and analyze it independently, since every interaction takes place within a broader system that is constantly changing and branching out (Briggs, Peat 1989: 147–148). A dynamic system is therefore composed of multiple subsystems (in the case of language learning, these may include the linguistic community, the learner, their cognitive system, the linguistic system of the target language as well as that of the mother tongue, the teacher, and other participants in the learning process), each with its own trajectory and developmental "timeline." As a result, the learning process becomes unpredictable, variable, and highly individualized (Lowie 2012: 20–21).

This claim has significant implications for teaching and learning. If the learning process is indeed a dynamic system whose development does not follow a predetermined path, then planning pedagogical action and designing a curriculum become difficult—if not impossible.

And yet, foreign language learning must be integrated into what we conventionally call formal education. Regardless of the difficulties involved, planning inevitably entails making predictions about the pace at which students may acquire certain skills, competences, or knowledge. These predictions are often long-term. A well-known example is the effort of the Romanian Ministry of Education to align the teaching and assessment of foreign languages in pre-university education with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). Current curricula indicate that students are expected to complete a CEFR level within two to four years and to reach B2 or C1 level in one or two foreign languages by the end of secondary education.

Precisely because language learning is a complex dynamic system, it is not surprising that, at the beginning of high school, teachers often encounter students placed at three or four different CEFR levels, levels that differ from those recommended by the official curriculum or textbook for that age group. This is evidence that, when applied uncritically in curriculum design, the CEFR can become ineffective (Sonea 2018: 83–110). Such an approach runs counter both to the spirit of the document and to the way learning naturally occurs.

In brief, if we accept that language learning is a dynamic system, several defining characteristics follow:

- Dependence on initial conditions: the same teaching approach does not necessarily lead to similar outcomes; understanding differences requires a clear grasp of the starting conditions.
- Interconnectedness: all elements within the system are interrelated and mutually influential.
- Nonlinearity: cause–effect relationships are rarely linear; increased effort does not produce proportionally increased results.
- Change through internal reorganization and environmental interaction: development is shaped both by external input and internal self-organization.
- Dependence on internal resources (memory, learning capacity, conceptual knowledge, motivation) and external resources (time, access to information, etc.).
- Continuous, sometimes chaotic change, including the emergence of so-called *attractor states*—for instance, fossilization, when development stagnates without clear external causes.
- Iteration: each stage of development builds upon previous ones (Larsen-Freeman, De Bot 2011: 10–16).

Each of these features makes the planning of a second language course a serious challenge. If all elements are interconnected and each subsystem evolves at its own pace while interacting with others, then language learning cannot be understood as a linear process.

In the past, the learning environment was more controlled: classes were relatively homogeneous, students shared similar cultural backgrounds, teachers operated within the same sociocultural framework, and access to materials was largely limited to school and library resources. Today, however, the quantity and quality of information available to learners are impossible to regulate. In foreign language learning, some students are exposed to the target language for several hours a day, while others encounter it only in weekly lessons. It is therefore unsurprising that their development diverges significantly.

In intensive courses, which aim at rapid development of communicative competence, the CEFR may function somewhat more effectively as a planning tool, although challenges remain. As suggested above, a backward design approach is more appropriate—not because it can impose order on an inherently complex and unpredictable process, but because it allows participants to begin from clearly defined outcomes, ensuring a shared sense of direction, while retaining the flexibility to adapt the learning process to individual trajectories and to allocate time according to need. Moreover, the philosophy of assessment within a backward design framework is better aligned with how learning actually occurs and with how the brain functions.

Before outlining the advantages of this approach, it should be noted that instructional planning does not rely exclusively on a single model—forward (content-focused), central (methodology-focused), or backward (outcome-focused). As Richards (2013) points out, any form of instructional design must take all three into account; what matters is determining which element is dominant.

Finally, planning, implementation, and evaluation should function as an integrated system. Classroom experience should generate feedback that informs and refines planning, while course objectives should be continuously reassessed: are they sufficiently challenging, or unrealistic? Assessment, in turn, should reflect the types of activities carried out in class, and its results should help recalibrate the balance between intended outcomes and actual practice (North et alii 2018: 15).

4.2. The Advantages of Backward Design

As Wiggins and McTighe note in *Understanding by Design*, lessons, units, and courses should be logically derived from the results we aim to achieve, not from the methods, textbooks, or activities with which we happen to feel most comfortable. The purpose of a curriculum is to identify the most effective ways of achieving specific objectives. In short, the most appropriate forms of design are those derived backward from the intended learning outcomes (Wiggins, McTighe 2005: 14).

Perhaps the strongest argument in favor of this approach is that it allows for a closer alignment between learning processes and the way the brain functions. Advances in neuroimaging now enable us to observe brain activity in real time: we can see how incoming information is organized, categorized, and processed in working memory and long-term memory. As a result, those involved in education can draw on these findings in both classroom practice and curriculum design (Willis 2006: vii).

We know, for instance, that when students actively engage with new information, it is more likely to be stored in long-term memory. The more abstract the material, the more creative teachers must be in helping students relate it to prior experience or to identify meaningful future applications. We also know that learning depends on an optimal level of limbic system activation. In conditions of stress, fear, or anxiety, new information is effectively blocked at the level of the amygdala; stress acts as a barrier to learning. By contrast, moderate emotional stimulation is associated with improved verbal fluency, more effective memory, and greater cognitive flexibility and creativity (Willis 2006: 23–24).

New information, once processed by working memory, is retained only if it can be integrated with existing knowledge stored in long-term memory. Effective learners identify patterns, relationships, and discrepancies, distinguishing between relevant and less relevant information. Less efficient learners, however, may become confused or demotivated, unable to prioritize. In such cases, the teacher's role in fostering metacognitive skills becomes essential (Bransford, Brown, Cocking 2000: 16–17).

How, then, can we apply what we know about brain function to educational planning? One starting point is to examine the metaphors that shape our understanding of learning. In Latin, *curriculum* referred to a racecourse or the race itself. This metaphor still influences how we think about the "educational trajectory," implying linear progression and predefined milestones. Yet contemporary research suggests a different model: rather than a fixed path, planning tools should function as maps that guide learners through the exploration of new terrain—complex, non-linear, and open to multiple routes.

A similar metaphor underlies the seemingly harmless verb "to cover." As Bransford et al. observe, to "cover" material implies a focus on surface-level treatment. Applied to teaching, it reflects a superficial approach: a mass of undifferentiated information, lacking hierarchy, depth, or meaningful connection (Wiggins, McTighe 2005: 229). A more appropriate alternative might be "to uncover"—to explore what lies beneath the surface.

In sum, an effective learning environment should be simultaneously: (1) learner-centered (attending to prior knowledge, attitudes, and abilities), (2) knowledge-centered (focused on meaningful selection, organization, and deep understanding), (3) assessment-centered (especially formative, allowing continuous monitoring of progress), and (4) community-centered (connecting learning to real-world contexts and shared values) (Bransford, Brown, Cocking 2000: 23–25).

It is also worth noting that backward design operates across all levels of instructional planning: curriculum, syllabus, scheme of work, and lesson plan (North et alii 2018: 7). The shift in perspective it entails requires a clear sequence: first identifying desired learning outcomes, then determining acceptable evidence, and finally planning instructional activities (Wiggins, McTighe 2005: 18).

In Table 1, adapted from Wiggins and McTighe (2005), we provide a concise presentation of the three stages involved in backward design planning.

Table 1. (Wiggins și McTighe 2005: 22)

<table>
<tr><td colspan="2">Stage 1: Desired Results</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">General course objectives
What relevant goals (e.g., content standards, course or program objectives, learning outcomes) will this design address?</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Understanding
Here, understanding refers to the ability to transfer what has been learned to new contexts. The ability to transfer knowledge or skills implies their creative, flexible, and fluent use in new situations and without the teacher’s assistance.</td></tr>
<tr><td>Knowledge
What the student needs to know by the end of the course/unit.</td><td>Skills
What the student is able to do by the end of the course/unit.</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Stage 2: Assessment</td></tr>
<tr><td>Performnce tasks:
Through what authentic performance tasks will students demonstrate the desired understandings?
By what criteria will performances of understanding be judged?</td><td>Other evidence
Through what other evidence (e.g., quizzes, tests, academic prompts, observations, homework, journals) will students demonstrate achievement of the desired results?
How will students reflect upon and self-assessm their learning?</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Etapa 3: Learning plan</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Learning activities:
What learning experiences and instruction will enable students to achieve the desired results? How will the design
• W = Help the students know Where the unit is going and What is expected? Help the teacher know Where the
• students are coming from (prior knowledge, interests)?
• H = Hook all students and Hold their interest?
• E = Equip students, help them Experience the key ideas and Explore the issues?
• R = Provide opportunities to Rethink and Revise their understandings and work?
• E = Allow students to Evaluate their work and its implications?
• T = Be Tailored (personalized) to the different needs, interests, and abilities of learners?
• O = Be Organized to maximize initial and sustained engagement as well as effective learning?</td></tr>
</table>

In determining both the sequence of stages and the manner in which they are approached, attention is paid to the way learning occurs naturally. As noted earlier, for information to be processed effectively by the brain, the amygdala must be stimulated to an optimal level—sufficiently activated, but not beyond a certain threshold—and, at the same time, the learner must remain in a state of relative comfort, supported by appropriate levels of adrenaline and dopamine. If negatively overstimulated, the amygdala blocks the transfer of information into long-term memory; if stimulation is too low, boredom sets in.

In the model presented above, negative overstimulation is avoided by placing learning objectives and outcomes at the very beginning of the process. When students are clearly informed about what they are working toward, stress and anxiety are reduced. Returning to the metaphor of the curriculum as a map of an unknown territory, it is evident that, at the outset of any instructional process, the learner is confronted with a "new and unfamiliar world," and any effort to make that world intelligible—especially in terms of what is to happen and why—is essential.

In the traditional model, the learner does not know where they are headed and lacks a clear understanding of the overall objectives of the course or unit. Instead, they simply follow the teacher step by step, as if on a journey through darkness in which the only source of security is the person walking ahead. A practical solution in this regard is the explicit presentation of objectives at the beginning of the course and of each lesson. The *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)* can be used effectively here in the creation of posters displaying level-specific descriptors (see Appendix 1). These can be displayed in the classroom, and either the teacher or the students can check off the descriptors addressed at the beginning or end of each lesson. In this way, students can continuously monitor their progress, track where they are, how far they have come, and how far they still need to go, and can negotiate with the teacher which areas require further attention. This ongoing negotiation is consistent both with viewing second language learning as a complex dynamic system and with the idea that each subsystem ultimately follows its own individual trajectory.

Such tools may also reduce the time required for lesson planning. At a glance, the teacher can identify descriptors that are not covered by the textbook or materials used in class and can prepare supplementary resources accordingly. Moreover, the way in which descriptors are formulated serves as a constant reminder that classroom activities are meaningful only insofar as they can be transferred beyond the classroom, and that texts and tasks should be authentic—or at least simulate real-life communicative processes.

From the perspective of brain function, learning consists in the strengthening of connections between neurons. Relational memory develops when students integrate new elements into what they already know, exploring and expanding existing mental maps. Executive functions are activated when the brain scans memory in search of ways to connect new information with existing knowledge, subsequently identifying the patterns into which new material can be integrated. Education, more broadly, aims to expand the range of patterns that can be recognized, used, and communicated. As the ability to identify and apply such patterns increases, executive functions develop accordingly. When new material is presented in a way that allows students to perceive patterns and relationships, brain activity intensifies (new neural connections are formed), and storage in long-term memory becomes more efficient (Willis 2006: 14–15).

Each of the three stages of backward design is organized in accordance with this principle. In the first stage, which involves identifying desired results, students' prior knowledge and life experiences are activated. When objectives are established, students are encouraged to identify contexts in which new knowledge or skills may prove useful. In the second stage—assessment and the identification of evidence for achieving the intended outcomes—this planning model places particular emphasis on authentic tasks. As Wiggins and McTighe (2006) note, effective assessment resembles an album of varied "snapshots" rather than a single photograph taken at one moment in time. A good teacher will seek out and communicate multiple forms of evidence of student progress, using a range of methods and formats.

Ongoing assessment may include tests, examinations, direct feedback, as well as projects and authentic tasks. Assessment methods may be simple or complex, decontextualized or authentic, structured or unstructured. Traditional assessments tend to be structured and controlled, whereas authentic tasks are less controlled, allowing students free access to information, since the goal is to demonstrate the ability to use what has been learned in new, real-life situations. By authentic tasks, we mean tasks that could realistically occur outside the classroom and are addressed to a genuine audience (Wiggins, McTighe 2006: 74). Because backward design focuses on understanding and transfer rather than memorization, such tasks are central, as they demonstrate the learner's ability to apply knowledge in new contexts. Other forms of assessment serve mainly to refine and complement the emerging learner profile.

Student engagement and motivation tend to be higher in the case of authentic tasks, which supports the optimal level of dopamine required for learning. Finally, stress and uncertainty are reduced when assessment criteria are clearly communicated in advance—ideally at the beginning of the course. Such an approach shifts the focus from product to process, encouraging students to attend to organization, prioritization, analysis, and the effective use of resources, and helping them understand that achieving learning outcomes—and the grades that reflect them—are, to a significant extent, within their control (Willis 2006: 77–78), rather than external judgments beyond their influence.

In the third stage, which involves the actual planning of learning activities, the same sequence is followed: desired outcomes are established and communicated, expected evidence (assessment) is clarified, and only then are appropriate materials and methods selected. Appendix 3 presents a model for planning a learning unit at A2 level. Although the material may initially appear dense, it significantly reduces the time required for planning and preparation. The teacher is provided with a completed framework containing the relevant descriptors and needs only to add activities and resources.

With clearly defined objectives in place, the teacher retains the freedom to select resources, texts, and activities suited to the student group, as well as the order in which they are addressed. There is ample room for creativity, without losing sight of the intended outcomes. At the same time, the structure of the table encourages a balanced approach to communicative competences and activities. The method also ensures a degree of standardization in teaching and, when the syllabus is developed collaboratively by teams of teachers, fosters both cooperation and ongoing negotiation of content, materials, and assessment, while still maintaining a coherent overall framework.

5. Conclusions

The present article is intended as an argument in favor of a balanced approach to planning second language courses, one that treats with respect and trust all those involved in the educational process, teachers and students alike, and allows them to act as free and creative individuals. Such a perspective promotes an environment that takes into account students' knowledge, skills, and attitudes, as well as their cultural beliefs and practices. A teacher who adopts this vision will remain constantly aware of the intended objectives and outcomes, but also of the knowledge and abilities students already possess, and will consistently seek to establish connections between what is new and what is already familiar to learners, or what arouses their interest and motivates them.

Besides being learner-centered, such an approach is also centered on knowledge and learning. In other words, a language course should not function merely as a form of entertainment; it should lead to concrete and measurable outcomes. The intended results must be transparent both to the teacher and to the learners, whether at the level of each individual lesson and learning unit or of the language course as a whole. These same outcomes must also be transferable beyond the classroom, and the teacher's task is, first, to organize activities that simulate authentic situations in class and, second, to design forms of assessment capable of measuring the effectiveness of that transfer (authentic assessment tasks addressed to a real audience and extending beyond the classroom).

An assessment-centered approach, in this case, implies continuous evaluation, both formative and summative, based on criteria that are clearly known to all those involved. The backward design model appears particularly well suited to this purpose and, together with a theoretical frame of reference such as the CEFR, makes it possible to organize the process of foreign language learning while taking all these principles into account. Among the model's most valuable contributions are the clarity and simplicity of its logic, together with the ease with which it lends itself to the development of planning, teaching, and assessment tools.

Appendix 1

Listening A2

Can understand enough to be able to meet needs of a concrete type provided speech is clearly and slowly articulated.

Can understand phrases and expressions related to areas of most immediate priority (e.g. very basic personal and family information, shopping, local geography, employment), provided speech is clearly and slowly articulated.

Understanding conversation between other speakers							
Can generally identify the topic of discussion around him/her that is conducted slowly and clearly. Can recognise when speakers agree and disagree in a conversation conducted slowly and clearly.							
Can follow in outline short, simple social exchanges, conducted very slowly and clearly.							
Listening as a member of a live-audience							
Can follow the general outline of a demonstration or presentation on a familiar or predictable topic, where the message is expressed slowly and clearly in simple language and there is visual support (e.g. slides, handouts).							
Can follow a very simple, well-structured presentation or demonstration, provided that it is illustrated with slides, concrete examples or diagrams, it is delivered slowly and clearly with repetition and the topic is familiar.							
Can understand the outline of simple information given in a predictable situation, such as on a guided tour, e.g. 'This is where the President lives.'							

Listening to announcements and instructions							
Can understand and follow a series of instructions for familiar, everyday activities such as sports, cooking, etc. provided they are delivered slowly and clearly.							
Can understand straightforward announcements (e.g. a telephone recording or radio announcement of a cinema programme or sports event, an announcement that a train has been delayed, or messages announced by loudspeaker in a supermarket), provided the delivery is slow and clear.							
Can catch the main point in short, clear, simple messages and announcements.							
Can understand simple directions relating to how to get from X to Y, by foot or public transport.							
Can understand basic instructions on times, dates and numbers etc., and on routine tasks and assignments to be carried out.							
Listening to audio media and recordings							
Can understand the most important information contained in short radio commercials concerning goods and services of interest (e.g. CDs, video games, travel, etc.).							
Can understand in a radio interview what people say they do in their free time, what they particularly like doing and what they do not like doing, provided that they speak slowly and clearly.							
Can understand and extract the essential information from short, recorded passages dealing with predictable everyday matters that are delivered slowly and clearly.							
Can extract important information from short radio broadcasts, such as the weather forecast, concert announcements or sports results, provided that people talk clearly.							
Can understand the important points of a story and manage to follow the plot, provided the story is told slowly and clearly.							

Reading A2

Can understand short, simple texts on familiar matters of a concrete type which consist of high frequency everyday or job-related language. Can understand short, simple texts containing the highest frequency vocabulary, including a proportion of shared international vocabulary items.

Reading correspondence							
Can understand a simple personal letter, email or post in which the person writing is talking about familiar subjects (such as friends or family) or asking questions on these subjects.							
Can understand basic types of standard routine letters and faxes (enquiries, orders, letters of confirmation etc.) on familiar topics.							
Can understand short simple personal letters. Can understand very simple formal emails and letters (e.g. confirmation of a booking or on-line purchase).							
Reading for orientation							
Can find specific information in practical, concrete, predictable texts (e.g. travel guidebooks, recipes), provided they are written in simple language. Can understand the main information in short and simple descriptions of goods in brochures and websites (e.g. portable digital devices, cameras, etc.).							
Can find specific information in practical, concrete, predictable texts (e.g. travel guidebooks, recipes), provided they are written in simple language. Can understand the main information in short and simple descriptions of goods in brochures and websites (e.g. portable digital devices, cameras, etc.).							
Can find specific, predictable information in simple everyday material such as advertisements, prospectuses, menus, reference lists and timetables. Can locate specific information in lists and isolate the information required (e.g. use the 'Yellow Pages' to find a service or tradesman).							
Can understand everyday signs and notices etc. in public places, such as streets, restaurants, railway stations, in workplaces, such as directions, instructions, hazard warnings.							
Reading for information / argument							
Can identify specific information in simpler written material he/she encounters such as letters, brochures and short newspaper articles describing events.							
Can follow the general outline of a news report on a familiar type of event, provided that the contents are familiar and predictable.							

Can pick out the main information in short newspaper reports or simple articles in which figures, names, illustrations and titles play a prominent role and support the meaning of the text.							
Can understand the main points of short texts dealing with everyday topics (e.g. lifestyle, hobbies, sports, weather).							
Can understand texts describing people, places, everyday life, and culture, etc., provided that they are written in simple language.							
Can understand information given in illustrated brochures and maps, e.g. the principal attractions of a city or area.							
Can understand the main points in short news items on subjects of personal interest (e.g. sport, celebrities).							
Can understand a short factual description or report within his/her own field, provided that it is written in simple language and does not contain unpredictable detail.							
Can understand most of what people say about themselves in a personal ad or post and what they say they like in other people.							
Reading instructions							
Can understand regulations, for example safety, when expressed in simple language. Can understand short written instructions illustrated step by step (e.g. for installing new technology).							
Can understand simple instructions on equipment encountered in everyday life – such as a public telephone.							
Can understand instructions on medicine labels expressed as a simple command e.g. 'Take before meals' or 'Do not take if driving.							
Can follow a simple recipe, especially if there are pictures to illustrate the most important steps.							
Can understand simple, brief instructions provided that they are illustrated and not written in continuous text.							
Reading as a leisure activity							
Can understand enough to read short, simple stories and comic strips involving familiar, concrete situations written in high frequency everyday language.							
Can understand the main points made in short magazine reports or guide entries that deal with concrete everyday topics (e.g. hobbies, sports, leisure activities, animals).							
Can understand short narratives and descriptions of someone's life that are written in simple words.							
Can understand what is happening in a photo story (e.g. in a lifestyle magazine) and form an impression of what the characters are like.							
Can understand much of the information provided in a short description of a person (e.g. a celebrity).							
Can understand the main point of a short article reporting an event that follows a predictable pattern (e.g. the Oscars), provided it is clearly written in simple language.							

Appendix 2

<table>
<tr><td colspan="3">Unit: A venit presa
Manualul de limba română ca limbă străină (RLS). A1-A2[1]</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">Communicative competences</td></tr>
<tr><th>Linguistic</th><th>Sociolinguistic</th><th>Pragmatic</th></tr>
<tr>
<td>Grammar
• The past tense (perfectul compus) – active and reflexive forms
• Adverbs and expressions of time (a year ago, last summer, yesterday, the day before yesterday, three days ago)
Vocabulary
• Means of communication / media (newspaper, magazine, TV presenter, weather forecast, feature film, documentary, comedy, sports article, race, competition, medal)
• Personalities – biographies (to be born, to die, to grow up, famous, well-known)
• Travel
• Places in the city
• Shopping, restaurants, public transport</td>
<td>Can use basic communicative functions such as:
• exchanging information;
• expressing and requesting opinions or attitudes;
• basic social interaction, observing conventions of politeness (greeting, introducing oneself and others, addressing someone, making invitations, responding to invitations, offering suggestions).</td>
<td>Functional competence
• Can describe past experiences/events
• Can express opinions, viewpoints, and preferences
Discourse competence
• Can use adverbs and time expressions (three days ago, three days earlier) and sequencing markers (then, after that)
Flexibility
• Can adapt simple, memorized, and practiced utterances to specific contexts by substituting lexical elements
Turn-taking
• Can use communication strategies to initiate, maintain, and close a conversation
Developing a theme
• Can give examples using simple expressions (e.g., such as)
Coherence and cohesion
• Can use common connectors to link utterances when recounting events and in descriptions
• Can connect words using simple linking devices: and, but, because
Fluency
• Can make themselves understood in short contributions, even with pauses, reformulations, or occasional breakdowns in communication</td>
</tr>
</table>

Unitatea 9. *A venit presa*			
Activități comunicative			
Reception activities	**Activități și resurse**	**Production**	**Activități și resurse**
Understanding conversation between other speakers Can recognise when speakers agree and disagree in a conversation conducted slowly and clearly.	Ex. 20, p. 152 (Manual RLS)	**Sustained monologue: Describing experience** Can tell a story or describe something in a simple list of points. Can describe people, places and possessions in simple terms.	Ex. 10, p. 148 (Manual RLS) Ex. 11, p. 148 (Manual RLS)
Listening to audio media and recordings Can extract important information from short radio broadcasts, such as the weather forecast, concert announcements or sports results, provided that people talk clearly.	Ex. 19, p. 151 (Manual RLS) Authentic videos (wether forecast, news)	**Sustained monologue: Putting a case** Can explain what she likes or dislikes about something, why he/she prefers one thing to another, making simple, direct comparisons. Can present his/her opinion in simple terms, provided listeners are patient**.**	Ex. 4, p. 144 (Manual RLS)
Reding for information/ argument Can follow the general outline of a news report on a familiar type of event, provided that the contents are familiar and predictable. Can understand the main points of short texts dealing with everyday topics (e.g. lifestyle, hobbies, sports, weather).	Ex. 5, p. 145 (Manual RLS) Authentic texts (articles, written press)	**Addressing audiences** Can give a short, rehearsed presentation on a topic pertinent to his/her everyday life, briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions, plans and actions. Can cope with a limited number of straightforward follow up questions.	Presentation – a personality from your country
Reading for leasure Can understand the main points made in short magazine reports or guide entries that deal with concrete everyday topics (e.g. hobbies, sports, leisure activities, animals).	Internet articles (portofolio).	**Creative writing** Can write very short, basic descriptions of events, past activities and personal experiences. Can write short, simple imaginary biographies and simple poems about people.	Ex. 8, p. 147 (Manual RLS)

[1] Platon *et alii* 2012: 143-156.

Unitatea 9. *A venit presa*			
Activități comunicative			
Reception activities	**Activități și resurse**	**Production**	**Activități și resurse**
Can understand short narratives and descriptions of someone's life that are written in simple words.	Ex. 24, p. 154 (Manual RLS)	Can tell a simple story (e.g. about events on a holiday or about life in the distant future). Can write an introduction to a story or continue a story, provided he/she can consult a dictionary and references (e.g. tables of verb tenses in a course book).	Ex. 22, 23, p. 153 (Manual RLS) Documentar y – Internet search – personalities.
Interaction	**Activități și resurse**	**Mediation**	**Activități și resurse**
Understanding an interlocutor Can understand enough to manage simple, routine exchanges without undue effort.	Ex. 9, p. 147 (Manual RLS)	**Relaying specific information** Can relay (in Language B) in a simple way a series of short, simple instructions provided the original speech (in Language A) is clearly and slowly articulated.	All tasks involving collaboration.
Informal discussion (with friends) Can generally identify the topic of discussion around him/her which is conducted slowly and clearly. Can discuss everyday practical issues in a simple way when addressed clearly, slowly and directly.	Ex. 21, p. 152 (Manual RLS) Ex. 17, p. 151 (Manual RLS)	**Expressing a personal response to creative texts** Can express his/her reactions to a work, reporting his/her feelings and ideas in simple language. Can describe a character's feelings and explain the reasons for them. Can select simple passages he/she particularly likes from work of literature to use as quotes.	Ex. 22, p. 153 (Manual RLS)
Goal-oriented co-operation Can understand enough to manage simple, routine tasks without undue effort, asking very simply for repetition	Ex. 20, p. 153 (Manual RLS) Ex. 11. a, p. 148 (Manual RLS)	**Collaborating to construct meaning** Can collaborate in simple, shared tasks, provided that other participants speak slowly and that one or more of them help him/her to contribute and to	Ex. 22, p. 153 (Manual RLS) Ex. 11. b, p. 153 (Manual RLS)

<table>
<tr><td colspan="4">Unitatea 9. A venit presa</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="4">Activități comunicative</td></tr>
<tr><th>Reception activities</th><th>Activități și resurse</th><th>Production</th><th>Activități și resurse</th></tr>
<tr><td>when he/she does not understand.</td><td></td><td>express his/her suggestions.
Can make simple remarks and pose occasional questions to indicate that he/she is following</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>Interviewing and being interviewed
Can make him/herself understood in an interview and communicate ideas and information on familiar topics, provided he/she can ask for clarification occasionally, and is given some help to express what he/she wants to.</td><td>Ex. 21, p. 152 (Manual RLS)

Sarcină autentică: interviu cu un coleg român.</td><td>Adapting language
Can repeat the main point of a simple message on an everyday subject, using different words to help someone else understand it.</td><td>All tasks involving collaboration.</td></tr>
<tr><td>Correspondence
Can write short, simple formulaic notes relating to matters in areas of immediate need.</td><td>Dezvoltare pornind de la ex. 20, p. 152: Scrieți o carte poștală din Paris, din partea familiei Danciu către un prieten.</td><td rowspan="2">Collaborating
Can collaborate in simple, shared tasks, provided that other participants speak slowly and that one or more of them help him/her to contribute and to express his/her suggestions.
Can make simple remarks and pose occasional questions to indicate that he/she is following.</td><td rowspan="2">All tasks involving collaboration.</td></tr>
<tr><td>Interacțiune online
Poate face scurte comentarii pozitive sau negative despre linkuri, media etc., într-un limbaj elementar.</td><td>Dezvoltare pornind de la ex. 20, p. 152: să posteze imagini din vacanță pe un site de socializare și să scrie un comentariu la fotografiile colegilor.</td></tr>
</table>

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Principles for the Development of the Pre-A1 Level of Romanian and Their Role in Task Design

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Abstract: *Principles for Developing the pre-A1 Level in Romanian and Their Role in Proposing Task-Based Activities.* This study aims to highlight key concepts associated with L1 and L2 acquisition and learning mechanisms, and to examine their role in designing task-based activities. The concepts, defined according to nativist, empiricist, cognitive, and usage-based approaches, were competence, performance, input, and output. The proposed task-based activities were grounded in the theoretical framework and adapted to the action-oriented approach (CEFR, 2001, 2003) and the action-based developmental hypothesis. They also incorporated the use of *total physical response* (TPR), which applies to L2A and supports a progressive approach to language acquisition and language learning.

Keywords: *language acquisition, language learning, competence, performance, input, output, task-based design, total physical response (TPR), language level*

1. Introduction

In the present paper, a framework is presented to support task-based approach activities that enhance the process of acquiring Romanian as a second language (L2), emphasising the universal principles and operations underpinning L1A and L2A. The principles underpinning language acquisition are universal in nature; consequently, they are important theoretical concepts in the present study of the pedagogical specificity of L2A, as the aim of the research is to optimise the relationship between theory and practice in the task-design process, particularly for tasks adapted for pre-A1 and A1 levels, according to the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFR, 2001, 2003) and the *Companion Volume With New Descriptors* (CVND, 2018). To begin with, it must be noted that within the educational setting, there have been and continue to be several formal approaches to language acquisition (LA), ranging from behaviourist to empiricist and nativist approaches, as well as sociocultural theories. In the following sections, key directions will be outlined to support a task-based approach to L2A in creating materials for pre-A1 and A1 levels.

2. A nativist approach to the acquisition of language and the mental lexicon

To begin with, the nativist perspective argues in favour of the *language faculty* (LF) as innate, understood functionally as a cognitive and syntactic mechanism (Chomsky 1959, 1965) in relation to memory and other systems. As such, the existence of a mechanism, conceptually understood as a *language acquisition device (LAD),* is hypothesised and, by definition, associated with neural connections. Within this theoretical framework, the LF is viewed as a component of the brain, embedded within the neural network, representing knowledge—the ability to recognise the structures and rules identifiable in *the primary linguistic data* (PLD) or in *the input*—followed by the production of structures visible at the level of expression or in *the output* (Chomsky 1995, 2000, 2001).

Thus, from a nativist perspective, children are born equipped with the mechanisms necessary to construct language structures, and the mechanisms and operations underpinning LA are guided by binary operations and universal principles (Chomsky 1995). The theoretical model provides a representation of how language is acquired, at a primary level of interface, phonetics and logic. Consequently, *competence* and *performance* (Chomsky 1965) are described in ideal terms, the former understood as an internalised knowledge of syntactic rules, and the latter, visible at the level of expression, represented as a sum of its forms. In this context, competence must also be described in relation to the main dimensions of language: cultural, social, syntactic and semantic.

Based on these premises, LAD is defined as a system of principles with which children are endowed. This biological mechanism makes language acquisition possible and plays an important role in determining the order in which structures are acquired, thus providing empirical data on, on the one hand, language progression and, on the other, the turning points identified at each stage of linguistic development. Furthermore, the stages children go through in the process of acquiring a particular language are implicitly associated with the 'errors' they make during this process. These vulnerabilities can be observed at the interface level, namely the 'errors' identified in children's speech that they overcome through practice and sustained exposure to input. To move from one stage of linguistic development to another, exposure to authentic input leads to the acquisition of structures.

Variations observed at the L2A stage are associated with input-output dynamics, the role of working memory in LA, and the implications *of the critical period hypothesis*, which posits an optimal window for LA. Compensatory strategies work best during this critical period, both at the cognitive level and in language (Tsimpli 2009). Therefore, tasks must be designed to contribute pedagogically to this process, generating input that is adequate in both quality and quantity for each language level, with the aim of developing language and ensuring progression from one stage to another. Consequently, linguistic variations in L1 and L2, and the differences between them, can be attributed to interfaces between syntax and morphology, or between syntax and discourse (Sorace 2003, 2005). Problems that arise in production stem from the way interpretation occurs at the interface level (morphosyntactic, syntactic-phonological, syntactic-discursive) rather than from basic linguistic knowledge. Thus, the arguments above suggest that lexical elements define concepts, morphological features—abstract by their very nature—define syntactic structures, and representations at the syntactic level ultimately define what happens at the interface levels (Tsimpli 2009: 79). Such approaches to LA can inform the design of tasks and the creation of authentic input, even if the framework shifts towards a descriptive account of language. To create efficient tasks, a psycholinguistic perspective on language acquisition and language learning can inform task design and the selection of the optimal means of adaptation with regard to the descriptions proposed by the CEFR (2003), depending on the target language level, starting from pre-A1, when the speaker has not yet acquired generative skills and relies on a limited lexical inventory (CVND 2018: 46).

3. Applied approaches to L1 and L2 learning of vocabulary

If the first section followed the reasoning on how vocabulary is acquired and how children come to know the meaning of words, given limited input, this section will address some usage-based and empirical approaches to vocabulary acquisition in L1 and the learning mechanisms involved in building knowledge in L2. If the former model attributed content words to a *mental lexicon* and *functional elements* to UG, the latter expresses functionality through general learning mechanisms transferred from L1 to L2. Such processes are associated with exposure, repetition, frequency and instruction. In this sense, to optimise AL2, based on the characteristics of lexical items, it is recommended that learners be exposed repeatedly to varied input, at least eight times, to master those structures and facilitate transfer to long-term memory (Nation 2013, Schmitt 2008, Webb 2007, Horst *et al.* 1998). Furthermore, in L2 acquisition and learning, children can have access to varied input, either in authentic communication contexts to which they are exposed, or in a controlled manner within an educational setting, bearing in mind, however, that other variables may arise which should be taken into account in this process, such as children's motivation to communicate in the *target language* (TL) (Webb and Nation 2017: 50). The need to identify and offer young children interesting activities that are centred on their interests and appropriate to their age should be recognised.

Another variable in the process of L2 acquisition and learning is the age at which exposure to the L2 begins (*the age of onset*), both within the family environment and beyond, as this age is crucial for language acquisition from a cognitive perspective (Bisson *et al.* 2021: 558). Building on these principles, which link long-term and short-term memory, individuals' cognitive abilities, and the quality of input (Bisson *et al.* 2021: 560), activities can be designed for a wide variety of tasks, alternating between operations and contexts to enhance the teaching process. To facilitate language progression, it is recommended that the theoretical premises underpinning this process be incorporated into the practical approach. Thus, to achieve a better balance of activities in L2, it is recommended that the so-called *Matthew effect also be taken into account*, which refers to the directly proportional relationship between the size of the L1 vocabulary and the ease of learning new words in L2 (Bisson *et al.* 2021: 558).

Possible explanations may lie in how representation is achieved at the form level in L1 and L2. If the relationship between L1 and L2 is bidirectional, the content proposed in the design of task-based activities can be explored more effectively. Thus, in the language acquisition process, the same input can be used to expose learners to lexical items and their specific features in both L1 and L2. For example, studies focusing on the characteristics of bilingualism (2-year-old children, speakers of Italian and Nigerian) have shown that, in the case of words with a similar form in both languages (international words, for example), there is an interdependence between the lexicons of the two languages (L1 and L2), cross-linguistic activation based on phonological form, and that learning a word in one language can lead to its acquisition or learning in L2 (Barachetti *et al.* 2022: 418). Another important criterion in the design of the tasks is the frequency associated with exposure to input in the early stages of development, highlighting the importance of their exposure to high-frequency and concrete words in the language (Verhagen 2021: 1). The frequency of input can also relate to how interpretation occurs in L1 or L2. The ability to represent effortlessly is a strong indicator of early acquisition in children (Verhagen 2021: 4), since the frequency of the words in the input and the concrete representation are considered to be key criteria in the acquisition of vocabulary in young children (Verhagen 2021: 15).

4. Lexical acquisition and the comprehensible input approach

In L2A, there are theoretical approaches that assume the acquisition process continues in particular languages, L2, L3, etc., to which the child is exposed; therefore, tasks and activities should be designed to provide generous lexical and morphosyntactic input, structured progressively, to create optimal conditions for L2A. Some L2A theories distinguish between subconscious acquisition, implicit knowledge of the L2, and explicit learning and knowledge of the L2. Thus, structures should be acquired naturally, without effort, with children focusing on the task of communication and on the message being conveyed, in order to understand and be understood. Language learning is a conscious process based on rules and morphosyntactic constraints. Although his main focus is on the implications at the pedagogical level, Stephen Krashen (1981) subscribes to the nativist hypothesis that children are born with innate mechanisms (DAL), but adapts this model by including two variables: *the affective factor* and the mode of *organisation* at the cognitive level. According to this hypothesis, exposure to *primary linguistic data* (PLD) and its appropriate processing using *internal mechanisms* may, in certain situations, be conditioned by an *affective filter* (Dulay and Burt 1977).

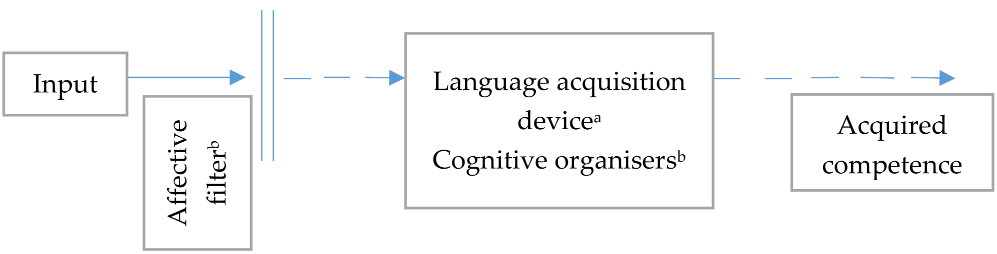

Fig. 1. Adapted from Chomsky, 1964; Dulay and Burt 1977 (Krashen 1981: 110)

Acquisition theories adopt the theoretical construct of the language acquisition device (LAD) in relation to the existence of a *critical period* (Tsimpli 2009) associated with early childhood education, when brain plasticity fosters effortless acquisition. Although the input is often insufficient and limited, children are capable of producing far more than the primary linguistic data (DLP) provides. Consequently, the concepts presented in this study serve as a starting point for developing task-centred activities with a high degree of authenticity, taking into equal account how interaction occurs in relation to children's cognitive development and environmental influences—in this case, the input proposed for the instructional-educational environment.

In what follows, the analysis shifts to how linguistic competence is defined within the broader framework of the CEFR (2001, 2003) and the CVND (2018). Whereas in applied linguistics, as seen above, the formal concepts of *competence* and *performance* (the former being hidden, and the latter visible at the level of expression) are interpreted as innate (Chomsky 1995), the CEFR (2001, 2003) defines linguistic competence in a much broader sense, encompassing communicative activities and strategies grounded in general communicative competences (linguistic, sociolinguistic and pragmatic). Therefore, in addition to linguistic competence, the tasks are designed to address sociolinguistic, discursive, strategic, and functional competences. In developing the tasks, descriptors from the CEFR (2001, 2003) were selected, as were the language policies proposed within the updated *Europass* project of *the European Union* (2020), the descriptive framework and reference levels of the *European Language Portfolio* (ELP), proposed for the *Council of Europe* to promote quality in foreign language teaching and learning, and the CVND, with detailed illustrative descriptors for pre-A1 level, a more detailed description of A1 level, and descriptors for text mediation and communication mediation (CVND 2018: 22). General competences: knowledge of the world, sociocultural competence, and intercultural competence are linked to communicative competences (linguistic, sociolinguistic and pragmatic) and strategies (general and linguistic communicative strategies), in order to develop and complete the design of the task (CVND 2018: 29). The main communicative activities and strategies will focus on reception, production, interaction, and mediation. The theoretical framework presented in this study can serve as a starting point for designing authentic, action-oriented tasks tailored to age-specific characteristics, building on this framework to facilitate L2A effortlessly.

5. Task design

Any teaching method that engages the child in real-life communication situations optimises the language acquisition process. Whilst in AL1 the input or PLD (*primary linguistic data*) does not undergo major changes, in AL2, particularly in educational activities conducted in an organised setting, the input is, in most cases, adapted to follow the stages of linguistic development and language progression, taking into account features specific to the Romanian language. To complete this framework and represent the characteristics more accurately, a diachronic perspective is presented on progression and on how this concept is defined and framed (Platon 2019, 2021). To propose an effective model, it is important to strike a balance between language acquisition theories and their applicability through tasks designed for instructional settings. To align AL2 theories with the principles of designing task-based teaching activities, the compatibility of theory with practice and the relevance of each to the other must be demonstrated (Ellis 1995, 1998).

When designing such tasks, one recommendation is to adopt a *backward design* approach, planning what the learner should be able to do through the proposed task, while taking into account the proposed theoretical framework and the particularities of Romanian as a second language (Sacalîș and Sonea, 2020). Assessment criteria must relate to how the child can cope in practice, in authentic communication situations. The targeted outcomes should be linked to the linguistic, strategic, sociocultural, and pragmatic competences that they can practise in real life. The reverse approach, starting from the outcomes—from what they should be able to do—optimises the proposed objectives and planned activities. Taking the theoretical framework as the starting point, one can identify several key criteria for task design: input authenticity, task relevance, motivation, mental patterns and schemas, affective factors, etc.

In what follows, a few types of activities will be presented, along with their role in demonstrating the applicability of the core theoretical elements. Starting from the premise that universal principles and basic mechanisms are at work in language, it is possible to devise tasks that take storytelling as their starting point. The persuasive power of stories lies in their universal nature. Guided by a conceptual framework, the story is informed by universal principles that transcend the constraints of any socio-cultural context. Consequently, the grammar of a story must be understood as an easily identifiable pattern. In designing such tasks, it is easier to tap into intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, with the affective filter having a positive influence. Cognitively, this enables resonance with the possible worlds described by the story's framework. The next step naturally leads towards the TPR technique (Asher 1969), frequently used in teaching activities, particularly at the pre-A1 and A1 levels, to facilitate visual, tactile, and role-play responses. Stories with complex structures can be more easily grasped and understood through the optimal use of methods and tools. Intrinsic motivation and the desire to understand the story's meaning are linked to the effort-reward curve: when individuals succeed in decoding the story's meaning, they feel rewarded (Wright 2009: 6).

Through stories, listening and speaking fluency are practised. Listening fluency is reflected in the child's positive attitude when they do not understand everything they hear, as well as in their ability to seek meaning and make predictions. Speaking fluency is assessed through production, monologue, interaction, and mediation activities. Oral production can sometimes be affected by emotional factors, and a fear of making errors may arise. The story, not only through its authenticity but also through the use of narrative grammar, facilitates the fulfilment of important stages in the language acquisition process. Difficulty in processing the input is linked to the expected level of linguistic competence, task design, the strategies available to subjects, and vulnerabilities that may arise at the discourse interface.

Tasks based on storytelling or retelling, combined with the TPR method (Asher 1969), are consistent with the theoretical principles outlined above. The method was first proposed in 1925 by James J. Asher. Its purpose was to demonstrate that L2 learning can follow the principles observed in L1 learning. During the activities, short- and long-term memory, cognitive stimulation, and the development of multiple intelligences, amongst other things, are engaged. The use of the TPR method aids in acquiring vocabulary and basic structures, followed by their expression through gestures, movement, and language in a natural way, without effort on the part of the child. It is used to develop fluency in speaking and listening. Building on the TPR technique, gestures can be introduced during storytelling when the passage is too difficult to understand (*for example, clap twice, snap fingers twice, raise the left arm, etc.*). Thus, we consider that the internal mechanisms of language blend naturally with the TPR method through active listening and comprehension, and that movement, as a basic element of the method, is integrated into both the AL1 and AL2 processes.

In what follows, two models that use the TPR method to facilitate L2 acquisition will be outlined. The first, proposed by James Asher, holds that the relationship between action and speech can lead to the acquisition of grammatical structures and vocabulary items through the adult's use of the imperative (Asher 1977). The premises on which this model is based are: comprehension always precedes production; the 'silent period' can be more easily overcome; and the use of imperatives becomes an integral part of this process. The second model, proposed by Stephen Krashen (1981), describes L2 as an intuitive, subconscious process involving monitoring; subjects can self-assess to see if they have acquired the language; it uses the TPR technique to follow the natural order of language acquisition; it assumes that input is always comprehensible; and for a successfully completed exercise, greater importance is placed on the affective state.

From an educational perspective, the TPR technique has both advantages and disadvantages. Drawing on their teaching experience, teachers will note that this technique requires little preparation, is physically engaging, and aims to involve all participants. However, it also has drawbacks: it is less effective with adults but works best with children, provided the latter are willing to 'get involved'.

6. The approach proposed for the development of task-based activities

Recognising the novelty introduced by the CVND (2018) through the inclusion of the pre-A1 level among the language proficiency levels—generally intended for young and very young learners—this study proposes an approach based on these descriptors (see Table 1), correlated with elements for regarding the content, speech acts and types of texts, using a minimal description proposed for L2 Romanian (Platon *et al.* 2023), so as to provide a starting point for the targeted content.

Table 1. Descriptors for reception, pre-A1 level in the CVND (CVND 2020:48)

Companion Volume *Overall oral comprehension*. Pre-A1 level
Can understand short, very simple questions and statements, provided they are delivered slowly and clearly and accompanied by visuals or manual gestures to support understanding and repeated if necessary.
Can recognise everyday, familiar words/signs, provided they are delivered clearly and slowly in a clearly defined, familiar everyday context.
Can recognise numbers, prices, dates and days of the week, provided they are delivered slowly and clearly in a defined, familiar everyday context.

The framework incorporates action-based tasks and the quality and relevance of the input to which the child is exposed during the language acquisition process, input designed with the children's stages of cognitive development in mind, as well as their limited ability to focus on a single task. Furthermore, an advantage of young age groups is their desire to experiment; they do not need to be motivated to learn, as is the case with adults (Alexiou and Stathopoulou 2021: 13).

It is worth noting that a significant proportion of the descriptors for the pre-A1 level focus on comprehension, supported by images, gestures, or paraverbal and nonverbal language. This, on the one hand, facilitates the transmission of the message and, on the other hand, aligns with the theory of teaching and learning at a young age (Alexiou and Stathopoulou 2021: 16). The presence of this observation in one of the descriptors relating to general oral comprehension led us to employ the TPR technique. Another factor in favour of this technique is children's ability to extract the meaning of a statement, not based on understanding every word, but rather on nonverbal and paraverbal elements (Halliwell, as cited in Alexiou and Stathopoulou, 2021: 13). In this regard, an approach based on the TPR technique aimed at acquiring a minimal lexical and grammatical inventory comprising familiar elements such as: family members (*mum*, *dad*, *grandad*, *granny*), pets (*dog*, *cat*), verbs in the present tense, third person (*to be*, *to do*, *to sleep*, *to drive*, *to jump*, *to cook*), personal pronouns, third person (*he*, *she*) and interrogative pronouns (*who*, *what*). At this level, the domain, according to the CEFR, is *personal*, and the theme addressed is the *family*. As it is important to present words in context, right from the very first activity, an activity that will initiate the familiarisation would be: *'Listen, repeat, and do!'*. In this sense, the proposal of a short dialogue, accompanied by *flashcards*, through which both the new lexical item and the associated action could be introduced: *Who is she? / She is my mum. / She is my mum. / What is she doing? / She is making pancakes*. Furthermore, in this final stage, the activity is supplemented by the TPR technique, which accompanies the action with a gesture, building on the initial idea that visual elements and gestures aid comprehension.

As Alexiou and Stathopoulou note in their analysis of reception descriptors in the CVND, familiarity with the topic, the short length of the text, and repetition are essential at this level (Alexiou and Stathopoulou 2021: 16). The chosen topic, *the family*, is among the most common and personal, and in designing the input, two further elements were taken into account – short texts with repetitive elements, present in the first activity and throughout the entire proposed task. Based on the same principle, the stage was called *'Listen and repeat!'*, in which, building on the cards used in the first activity, learners were guided to master the process.

Moving step by step to the next stage, *'Listen and Do!'*, involved checking whether the targeted elements had been acquired, particularly those relating to the TPR technique, followed by the *'Do and Say!'* stage, which aimed to check mastery of structures, again using visual aids and key questions: *Who is he/she? / What is he/she doing*? Once the acquisition of the targeted elements was ensured, they could transition to the game-based stage, which also involved movement, essential in activities designed for children.

1. Conclusions

In conclusion, the theoretical approaches analysed in this paper aimed to offer different, at times opposing, perspectives on first- and second-language acquisition and learning, to serve as a foundation for designing tasks in L2 Romanian. To better anchor the applications within the theoretical framework, the selected concepts are supported by experiments and empirical studies in both L1 and L2. The nativist approach explained the input-output relationship using the DAL and defined the concepts of *competence* and *performance* in relation to the interfaces involved in language acquisition—syntax, morphology, semantics, and discourse. Usage-based, cognitive approaches have provided insights from empirical studies that focus on general intelligence and how it operates in L1 and L2. Comprehensible input and its design are embedded in the unconscious process and in the implicit acquisition of language. In the broader context, all approaches should be considered when using the descriptive CEFR (2001, 2003) and CVND (2018) frameworks.

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PART 3.

Learner Development, Variation, and Form

The Role of Dual-Mechanism Models in L1 and L2 Acquisition and Learning

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Abstract: *The Role of Dual-Mechanism Models in Second Language Acquisition and Language Learning.* The present study aims to deepen understanding of how morphological processing and hierarchical structures operate, drawing on existing empirical studies and the theories underpinning them. It seeks to present key theoretical accounts of morphological and syntactic processing in linguistics, primarily in the context of language acquisition and language learning. The purpose of the analysis is to contrast single-mechanism models, which propose a connectionist whole-word storage hypothesis and do not offer an adequate explanation, with dual-mechanism models, which, although far from perfect, provide a two-route solution based on associative memory and combinatorial sets of rules. The study further provides accounts and examples that support a nativist basis for the dual models. As such, the analysis is based on syntactic accessibility and the role of memory in storing lexical items, and is supported by empirical evidence drawn primarily from psycholinguistic studies.

Keywords: *language acquisition, dual mechanisms, associative memory, syntactic processing, morphological processing*

1. Introduction

The study presents the main arguments in favour of a model of linguistic representation, drawing on semantic, morphological, phonological, and syntactic features, and on the mechanisms underpinning what is phonetically visible in the process of L1 and L2 acquisition (Chomsky 1959, 1965, 1995, 2000, 2001, 2007, 2015). The sections dedicated to the analysis outline the principles underpinning the main theoretical approaches to L1A and, in broad terms, present the theoretical directions associated with L2A and learning, and then move on to cognitive models of dual-process mechanisms. The cognitive models associated with LA are described, based either on a single mechanism (McClelland and Rumelhart, 1986) or on dual mechanisms (Pinker and Prince, 1988; Marcus *et al.*, 1992; Prasada and Pinker, 1993; Pinker, 1999; Pinker and Ullman, 2002). The architecture of dual models, consisting of a mental lexicon and a set of rules, explains how morphological processing is made possible, but it should be noted that the cited studies analyse languages with less rich morphology, such as English. In the case of languages with rich morphology, such as Romanian, such models only partially explain specific linguistic phenomena. The role of dual, hybrid mechanisms is important for establishing a bridge between the traditional and generative perspectives on LA, and between linguistics and cognitive psychology, by integrating formal structures with cognitive memory processes.

2. A nativist perspective on cognitive models

One nativist assumption is that the *language faculty* (LF) is innate (Chomsky 1959, 1965) and linked to memory, morphology, syntax, and other systems. Thus, the minimal conditions necessary for authorising syntactic derivation are found at the interface level, where semantic and phonetic features are associated with the other systems. In this regard, through the two interfaces—phonological and logical—and under the operation *Merge* (Chomsky 1995, 2000, 2001, 2007), LF satisfies the minimal conditions (Chomsky 2000, 2001). The universal and asymmetric operation *Merge* (Chomsky 2005, 2007) is the simplest binary operation and forms the basis for representing elements at the interface level. This allows movement at the syntactic level to higher positions in the hierarchy and implicitly explains the internal mechanisms activated during language structure acquisition (Chomsky 1995, 2000, 2001, 2007, 2015). While the logical form reflects the symmetry or regularity imposed by *Universal Grammar* (UG) (Chomsky 1981), the phonetic form accounts for linguistic variation and the actualisations attested in particular languages. Consequently, *functional categories* (FC) are part of UG and serve to explain the system's functionality in relation to other systems and to the domain of LA. The integration of a nativist perspective on L1A and L2A addresses the implications for L2 learning after the *critical period (*Lenneberg 1967). It starts from the premise that, for particular languages (L1, L2, L3, etc.), operations are universal, and that interpretation at the interface level optimises the LA process (Chomsky 1995, 2000, 2001, 2007). By adopting an analytical approach, one can observe that the model is based on a set of minimalist postulations: (i) LF is innate and genetically predetermined (Chomsky 1959); formal features are predetermined, and the abstract representations explain the regular forms found in particular languages; (ii) UG plays a decisive role in L1A and L2A; (iii) the results of interpreting the input support the predetermined nature and syntactic creativity. Last but not least, it is morphology that encodes the features of syntactic form at the phonological level. In defining morphological features, the approach relies on asymmetric representations enabled by Merge, as well as on meeting the minimal conditions for a hierarchical system grounded in interpretable linguistic mechanisms (Chomsky 2015). Therefore, to investigate morphological features in detail, the study continues with an analysis of models based on dual mechanisms that serve as bridges between different approaches: rule-based models and models that incorporate cognitive processing.

2.1. Theoretical approaches to L1A

Approaches to L1A focus on the degree of compatibility between child and adult syntax; more specifically, they seek to explain how the features that define linguistic competence are accessed. The main lines of research in L1A have focused on *compatibility or full access* (Poeppel and

Wexler 1993, Wexler 1994, 1998), *compatibility or partial access* (Radford, 1988, 1990, 1997), *compatibility or gradual access*, associated with processes of maturation (Smith and Tsimpli 1995, Tsimpli 1992/1996, 2005, Tsimpli *et al.* 2004), or *incompatibility or discontinuity* (Felix 1984). According to the continuous approach AL1A (Poeppel and Wexler 1993, Wexler 1994, 1998), children act minimally, as a result of necessity, and their linguistic behaviour is geared towards immediate structural advantages, namely the efficiency of form production, with universal operating principles based on linguistic economy. Consequently, the interpretation of the generated syntactic structures takes place at the semantic and phonological levels. From a minimalist perspective, to understand and verify the processes underlying the acquisition of syntactic and morphological features in L1-speaking children, the interpretability of these features must be demonstrated. In the early stages of L1A, the universal operation associated with feature interpretability is *Merge* (Chomsky 2005, 2007). Consequently, if interpretation can be achieved at the interface level, the syntactic derivation is sound. However, children generate forms that differ from those of adults; therefore, one must inquire whether syntax suffers in early grammar. To better understand these approaches to L1A, it must be noted that the premises are associated, on the one hand, with the assumption of total or partial access, or the lack of access, to *Universal Grammar* (Chomsky 1981).

The dual mechanisms presented in this study point to a continuous approach to L1A, with gradual acquisition (Smith and Tsimpli 1995; Tsimpli 1992/1996, 2005; Tsimpli *et al.* 2004). According to this view, children are endowed with predetermined mechanisms, but they use limited matrices and networks that are immediately accessible to them at certain stages of linguistic development, in relation to other systems. Consequently, children tend to use and access *default* settings, employing them in morphosyntactic and semantic interpretation. Over time, these structures, which are not found in adult syntax, decrease in frequency, and children eventually generate only adult structures. Thus, the authorisation of syntactic derivation explains the activation of formal features and the use of *default* settings in early grammars, known as *milestones* in the evolution of non-adult forms at various stages of language development. Syntactic asymmetries, the interpretability of features, and the computational complexity involved in interface-level interpretation point towards an optimised description at the syntactic and morphological levels.

In L2A, LF is defined in terms of the UG's total or partial accessibility (White 2009, 2011). If one accepts the premise that the GU is partially or gradually accessible and adopts a continuous, gradual approach in AL2, one accepts the existence of differences between narrow syntax and *interface syntax* (Tsimpli *et al.* 2004; Tsimpli 2007a). According to this perspective, L2 syntactic features can be processed, and at the interface between syntax and other domains, certain vulnerabilities arise. The conclusion is that specific features may not be accessible to speakers during L2A, and the interface must be understood as the relationship between computational mechanisms, combinatorial power, and performance systems, namely the relationship between LF and other systems (Tsimpli and Mastropavlou 2007a; Tsimpli *et al.* 2004).

3. Dual-mechanism models in L1A and L2A

By proposing theoretical models based on dual, associative mechanisms, an attempt has been made to explain how *storage* and *processing* take place in L1 and the impact this may have on L2 or on the process of learning a second language. More specifically, explanations were sought regarding how roots and suffixes are stored during language acquisition: as a single element (a single mechanism) or as two distinct elements (a dual mechanism). Consequently, associative models based on a single mechanism link word forms to orthographic, phonological or semantic codes. The first empirical studies focused on English, specifically on the regular and irregular forms of past-tense verbs, without accounting for morphological features (McClelland and Rumelhart 1986). According to this research, the speaker relies on operations such as association, analogy, and distributional representation, which are governed by distributional learning algorithms. Such models are associated with language learning, with frequency as the main criterion, and words are processed in isolation, independent of context. The rules are defined algorithmically and are not presented as explicit categorical sets or as rule-based systems capable of producing infinite language structures, as in generative models, which is why these models have faced criticism (Fodor and Pylyshyn 1988, Pinker and Prince 1988). Lexical items are stored and selected without being broken down into root and suffix, drawing on recurrent associative mechanisms connected to neural networks, yet such an approach fails to provide satisfactory explanations at the morphological and syntactic levels, beyond the processing of lexical items within neural networks (Fodor and Pylyshyn 1988, Pinker and Prince 1988). Furthermore, in the description of the approach, no explanation was provided regarding *a priori* and *a posteriori* knowledge in the processes of L1 and L2 acquisition, with the specific elements observed in children and adults, respectively (Legate and Yang 2002). It should be noted that models based on a single mechanism support the hypothesis that storage, processing, and representation are carried out by a single associative system. Another distinct category consists of associative models determined by a single mechanism but based on rules, according to which the inflections are the result of morphological rules, with memory being called upon very rarely (Halle and Mohanan 1985, Yang 2002).

Models based on dual mechanisms occupy a middle ground between the models mentioned above and generative models. They are abstract and linked to language acquisition, as they combine lexical elements—which are learnt through associative memory schemes—with categorical elements, which are hierarchically dependent at the structural level. Thus, the architecture of such models includes tools that target, on the one hand, combinatorial power at the phonological level, in line with generative approaches, and, on the other hand, associative memory in line with linguistic connectionism. Dual mechanisms postulate that, in the analysis of word morphology, complex forms can be processed in two ways: associatively and through rules (Pinker 1989, 1999). It must be noted the role of the division between Broca's and Wernicke's areas of the brain, as it is assumed that dual processing involves the association of two different areas of the brain: Wernicke's area (phonological and semantic) and Broca's area (syntactic). Hybrid models propose a version of morphology that focuses on dual mechanisms (Pinker 1999, Pinker and Ullman 2002). Consequently, two complementary systems are employed. The first system is *rule-based,* whilst the second is associative, based on *analogies,* frequency, distributional similarities, generalisations, and similarities with other words already stored in memory. Thus, there are *words* and *rules* (Pinker 1999). Declarative memory is associated with the associative system (words) and is located in the temporal lobe, whilst the rule-based system is located in the frontal lobe (Ullman 2001).

The dual-mechanism model proposed by Pinker is based on empirical studies of the processing and storage of regular and irregular past-tense verb forms in English. This model was fundamental to studies of language acquisition (Marcus *et al.* 1992). A processing model associated with brain systems aims to explain internal mechanisms. Such forms are associated with the verb stem, reflecting computational complexity. Pinker's contribution to the acquisition process at the paradigmatic level is significant, as he explains the role of the computational pattern and other systems, specifically the associative memory system. Processing mechanisms are associated with patterns or components of associative memory, involving the blocking and retrieval or selection of certain features (Pinker 1984, 1989, 1999). For example, if one intends to analyse how the structure 'o s-o vadă' [he/she will see her] is processed in Romanian by the speaker, it is clear that the two 'o' are processed differently, the first as a marker of a future form and the second as an accusative clitic. Although they manifest identically phonologically, the speaker will be able to process the two inputs in dualistic terms at the level of expression and, in real time, extract the targeted features. The same will apply to structures such as 'o să-i vadă' [he/she will see them] and 'o să-i ofere' [he/she will offer him], where the two '-i' inputs will be processed in a dualistic manner, the first marking accusative and the second dative.

In the model proposal, an attempt was made to explain the relationships between regular forms and acquisition through association, analogy, generalisation, or overregularization in complex structures. A key assumption was that the properties of associative memory are evident in matrices, with generalisations observed in both languages with rich morphology and those with limited morphology. Within this model, paradigms are represented as cells, and the acquisition process at the paradigm level is governed by the *Single-Entry Principle* (SEP), which posits that there should be a single entry per cell in the presentation of regular forms, with blocking and selection mechanisms (Pinker 1984). The dual-mechanism model is an experimental framework designed to describe syntactic behaviour in L1 and its potential impact on L2. The infrastructure optimises the model's functionality, noting that the empirical data were intended to test knowledge and syntactic manifestations in L1.

Thus, the main studies based on dual-mechanism models support the dichotomy between lexicon and grammar, focusing on the processing of regular and irregular past-tense verb forms in English. Irregular forms are assumed to be stored in declarative memory, in the lexicon, while regular forms are the result of computation and the combinatorial power of the rule. As observed, these processes cannot be explained by simple analogies or by models based on a single mechanism (McClelland and Rumelhart 1986), and no formula can be provided that applies across multiple paradigms. In exceptional cases, it is necessary to resort to other rules, and difficulties arise in applying this model to languages with rich morphology, such as the Romance languages, including Romanian.

4. Experimental data on language acquisition and language learning

By presenting a contrastive analysis of models based on a single mechanism versus dual mechanisms, the main features associated with L1 acquisition and L2 learning were examined. From a nativist perspective, theories of language acquisition align with the *critical period* *hypothesis* (Lenneberg 1967), which holds that LF is biologically predetermined and that language acquisition proceeds naturally. Accordingly, one can speak of pure acquisition as long as the speaker is within the critical period, and after this period, mechanisms of L2 learning also come into play. The scope is not to engage in a more in-depth analysis of such aspects, but it is clear that, alongside the critical period, other variables emerge in language design, such as the assumption of partial or total access to the UG (White 2009, 2011), the absence of inflection or the omission of verb morphology (Prévost and White 2000), and the inability or insufficiency to access target language features if these are not already present in L1 (Tsimpli and Mastropavlou 2007b, Tsimpli and Dimitrakopoulou 2007a). The purpose of the inquiry is not to provide an answer, but rather to conduct a qualitative analysis of how dual mechanisms can be integrated into the L2 learning process.

Some experimental models based on WUG tests – nonsense words to which rules are creatively applied – yielded significant results (Berko 1958, Prasada and Pinker 1993). Testing children's syntactic knowledge during L1A stages had a resounding impact. The experiments demonstrated that participants, children aged approximately 4;00 to 7;00 years, possess the mechanisms, sets of rules, and syntactic knowledge necessary to achieve full linguistic competence during the critical period in language acquisition, progressing through specific developmental stages. Elisabeth Berko used a picture of an animal which she called a 'wug'. In the test, subjects were shown a picture of an animal, then a picture of two such animals, and were asked to provide the regular plural form -s (wug > wugs). The results of the experiment demonstrated that language can be broken down into morphological and syntactic components, and that empirical investigations supported the hypothesis of tacit language knowledge, given the way the rules were applied to new syntactic elements. Such tests demonstrate that syntactic and morphological processing manifests itself through linguistic creativity, and that, in early grammar, children possess the necessary tools to apply the rule, passing through specific stages, such as overregularization, as they add the past-tense ending -ed to irregular verbs. In English, when processing irregular forms, patterns are grouped around phonologically observable alternations and changes that are to be identified and selected in the lexicon, for example, kneel>knealt or feel>felt, etc. In Romanian, such an associative operation applies to verbs ending in '-ez' and '-esc', with the caveat that morphology also demonstrates a set of rules associated with such phonological changes. In interpreting dual mechanisms, one must start from the base. The generalisations that appear in children's speech can be explained, to a certain extent, with the help of dual mechanisms. The overregularization indicates that there are neural-level rule sets and that syntax is functional. Such stages are marked in the developmental stages of language in the L1A; in the case of children, the presumed erroneous rule applications indicate that one cannot rely strictly on distributional and associative algorithms, since the rules are part of innate mechanisms. The assumption is that in L1, children generate mini-paradigms that subsequently develop into maximal paradigms. Choices sometimes appear to be unpredictable or random in L1. In synthetic languages, additional attention has been paid to the properties of the radical. This entails a much more in-depth analysis of agreement features, for example. Building on the theoretical arguments presented in this study, for a qualitative interpretation, a few examples were selected from a longitudinal study (Tărău 2021) on the acquisition of Romanian as L1.

The over-regularisations in language, whether they arise from 'wug'-type tests for plural forms (e.g. 'wug' > 'wugs') or from regular or irregular past-tense forms based on words that do not exist in the language (e.g. 'to pilk' > 'pilked' (Pinker 1989), 'wing' > 'winged', 'snake' > 'snaked' (Pinker 1999: 41)) or on words that do exist in the language, such as 'want' > 'wanted', 'hurt' > 'hurted', indicate that syntactic processing, abstract by its very nature, and default-type mechanisms at the morphological level, in particular languages, are applicable, productive, structurally dependent, and yield answers that can be supported and argued theoretically. Creatively, children devise their own *wug* tests, arriving at generalisations and over-regularisations of non-existent words such as '*a ponti' > '*pontește' (T. 2;11) (although in the language we have 'a ponta' > 'pontează' >[to mark]) or '*a pocționa' > '*să pocționeze' (T. 2;11) (in addition to aspects relating to morphological processing, were observed structural dependency and asymmetric syntactic operations through the presence of the morpheme 'să' in the structure). Also, the endings '-ez' and '-esc' were assigned, but they do not always correspond to how structures are processed by adult speakers of Romanian. Other examples include the omission of '-ez' in the present tense paradigm, 'a frâna (-ez)' [to hit the break]> '*nu frână' instead of 'nu frânează' [he does not hit the break] (O 2;04), or the use of ''-esc' instead of ''-ez', generating forms such as *a se ruja (-esc)' [to apply lipstick] > '*v(r)ea să se iuja(s)că' > '*se rujece' > '*s-o rujit' instead of the correct forms 'vrea să se rujeze' [she wants to put lipstick on] > 'se rujează' [she puts lipstick on] > 's-a rujat' [she put lipstick on] (O, 2;06). Returning to the hypothesis that codification occurs at the root or radical level, some examples correspond to intermediate stages in the paradigm structure, in L1A: 'a auzi' [to hear]> '*să audem' instead of the correct subjunctive form 'să auzim' [to hear] (T. 2;10), 'a apăsa' [to push/to press] > '*să se apase' instead of the subjunctive 'să apese' [to push/to press] (T. 2;11), 'a număra' [to count] > '*să număli' instead of 'să numeri' [to count] (O.2;04) or generalisations of the type 'a merge' [to walk/to go] for the reflexive verb 'a se duce' [to walk/to go] > '*te-ai mels' instead of 'te-ai dus' (T. 2;11), as well as intermediate stages denoting the existence of sets of rules 'a avea' > '*trebuie să ară' instead of the suppletive form for the subjunctive 'să aibă' [to have] (T. 3:04).

The explanation of the mechanisms of feature blocking and selection, and of the functioning of internal mechanisms in relation to input-output interaction, is not always satisfactory. The selection of syntactic features from the lexicon has been linked to memory through the lens of input frequency. Many questions remain about what is morphologically predetermined and how *a priori* knowledge can be traced in L1 and L2. The dual models posit that morphological and syntactic processing must be identified in roots and suffixes and, subsequently, associated with other brain systems and mechanisms. The model proposed by Pinker attempts to explain how verbal morphology develops in children by reference to the paradigms generated by adults in L1. In this account, syncretism plays an important role; however, due to the inflectional imperialism specific to many languages (Slobin 1985), the basic mechanisms should be associated with the verb root.

5. Conclusions

The paper presented arguments in support of a dual perspective on the mechanisms underpinning L1A and the implications this may have for L2A and L2 learning theories. The proposal of models grounded in dual mechanisms of functioning aimed to represent how storage, processing, and computation occur at the neural level. In this approach, some of the main research directions were presented, along with selected examples from empirical studies. The purpose was not to present a contrast between models associated with behaviourism, linguistic structuralism, empiricism, or cognitivist or nativist approaches, but rather to highlight that the design of hybridised models, intended to explain the processes and systems involved in L1A and L2A or learning, could facilitate a better understanding of the mechanisms associated with LF in relation to other systems. The attempt was to provide a broad overview of the cognitive models and present the strengths and weaknesses of models that propose learning strictly through imitation, which prove to be unproductive, frequency-dependent, and without accounting for categorical processing, acquisition, or learning by analogy, and, thus, are unable to explain the overregularization in language.

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Language Patterns and Case Hierarchies in L1 Child Romanian

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Abstract: *Language Patterns and Case Hierarchies in Child L1 Romanian.* This paper aims to analyse the theoretical frameworks of first language acquisition (L1A) from a nativist perspective and to highlight the core concepts associated with continuity approaches to L1A. The framework includes minimalist approaches to interpreting marked stages of development and, in a broad sense, defines concepts such as the faculty of language, Universal Grammar, poverty of stimulus, positive and negative evidence in the input-output relationship, case features, and case hierarchies. Qualitative examples selected from a longitudinal corpus of L1 child Romanian argue in favour of a nativist interpretation of the role of the input and of how positive and negative evidence are represented in child Romanian. The interpretation of the data continues with examples of how case features emerge and which default structures children use when marking developmental milestones, revealing patterns of syntactic asymmetries and case hierarchies.

Keywords: *first language acquisition, continuity hypotheses, positive and negative evidence, case features, case hierarchies*.

1. Introduction

This study offers a qualitative interpretation of the empirical data to support the role of input in *language acquisition* (LA) and to highlight specific patterns in the hierarchical representation of cases and case features, in line with a nativist approach to *first language acquisition* (L1A), specifically a continuous approach. The examples reinforce the input-output hypothesis regarding the efficiency of positive, negative, and indirect negative evidence. Accordingly, the data subjected to linguistic investigation were drawn from a corpus of L1 child Romanian and contribute to a better understanding of how positive, negative, and indirect negative evidence operate in LA, offering insight into hierarchies in the acquisition process (Tărău 2021). In this regard, the theoretical framework draws on the defining concepts associated with a minimalist perspective, namely economy, simplicity, and elegance (Chomsky 1993, 1995, 2000, 2001, 2008 et seq.). In outlining the theoretical model, the role of the underlying mechanisms in L1A and that of the *language faculty* (Chomsky 1965) are presented as opposing empiricist or behaviourist perspectives. The inquiry follows minimalist proposals for L1A (Chomsky 1959, 2002) and is paired with a continuous approach to first language acquisition (Wexler 1994, 1998). To continue, the distinction between a strong continuity (Wexler 1994, 1998) and a weak continuity hypothesis in L1A is explained in relation to the interpretation of brain modularity, the latter being more moderate, as the 'functional categories undergo a sequential process of maturation' (Smith 2000, Tsimpli 1992/1996, 2005). On the same note, the importance of the constructivist approach to the stages of cognitive development is noted, namely the pre-linguistic, single-word, early multi-word, and late multi-word stages (Piaget 1970), as it was associated with the emergence of mental representations and conceptualisations in children and contributed significantly to the development of theories in the domain of LA (Chomsky 1980).

Representation at the syntactic level must be understood in an algebraic sense, as natural languages have combinatorial power and are defined as a concatenation of strings. Children are endowed with the internal mechanisms necessary to achieve full competence in a very short time, in early grammar, with algorithmic variations observable from one individual to another. Therefore, according to the framework, the cost-free operations are universal in nature and serve to optimise the L1A process and enable representation at the interface level (Chomsky 1995, 2000, 2001, 2008). The operations are valued at distinct stages of the development of specific structures in early grammars. The stages marked by the children serve as benchmarks in establishing hierarchical structures. This is evident at the level of expression, as observed in the speech productions of monolingual children. As such, syntactic operations elegantly explain the internal and external mechanisms, *competence and performance,* and the ability to use language creatively, as they are naturally guided by principles such as economy and necessity, with a minimum of effort invested, resorting to a limited number of operations, depending on the syntactic, semantic and pragmatic resources available to them (Chomsky 1995, 2000, 2001, 2008).

2. Theoretical approaches to first language acquisition (L1A)

In this section, the defining characteristics of the main approaches to L1 acquisition (LA1) are presented to provide a concise overview of the key hypotheses and their strengths and weaknesses. The main differences centre on the degree of compatibility between adult and child grammars. Thus, the strong continuity approach adopts total compatibility between the two grammars in L1A (Wexler 1994, Poeppel and Wexler 1993); the weak continuity approach supports partial compatibility (Radford 1988, 1990, 1997); the gradual maturation hypothesis of the modules is another position adopted (Smith and Tsimpli 1995, Smith 2000; Tsimpli 1992/1996); and the discontinuity approach considers the two grammars distinct (Felix 1984). The first direction argues that there is consistency between children's and adults' grammars, positing that they operate in the same way. Consequently, the assumption is that a child can generate structures in the same way as an adult and that there are no differences between adult and non-adult forms (Poeppel and Wexler, 1993; Wexler, 1994, 1998; Borer and Wexler, 1987; Wexler and Culicover 1980), with linguistic competence being accessible from the very earliest stages. Weak continuity approaches condition the existence of UG principles during specific stages of child development, proposing a model that draws on the line of strong continuity approaches and combines these premises with the maturation of FCs, with the UG principles not being subject to this process (Tsimpli 1992/1996, 2001, 2005, Tsimpli and Ouhalla 1990). A radical approach proposes a pre-functional stage, calling into question, for example, the existence of the Tense (T) and Complement (C) systems in early grammars. According to this hypothesis, some features cannot be interpreted in the early stages of development (Radford 1988, 1990, 1997). All in all, the availability of the FCs and the role of the UG have been extensively debated both in L1A and L2A. The approaches mentioned in this section assume the total and/or partial presence of functional categories, or their (in)existence, from the earliest stages. From a minimalist perspective, the strong and weak continuity proposals to LA are aligned with UG and with the *Strong Minimalist Thesis* (SMT), according to which the FL is the optimal solution for satisfying the minimal conditions (Chomsky 2000, 2001), in an attempt to manage the necessary conditions at the interface level, using the universal *Merge* operation (Chomsky 1995, 2000, 2001, 2008). Conceptually, the paper presents a qualitative interpretation of evidence from the input and of how features and case hierarchies are manifested in child Romanian.

3. Positive and negative evidence

This section outlines the main arguments in favour of a nativist approach to positive and negative evidence. First, the innate nature of *the language faculty* (LF) is grounded in UG principles (Chomsky 1959). By its very nature, LF is innate, interpreted as an initial stage, and LA is guided by internal factors and is unconscious; children are equipped with LF in its tacit form. Second, the innateness is associated with what is known as Plato's problem, *the poverty of stimulus* (Chomsky 1959), or *the logical problem* (Hornstein and Lightfoot, 1981). In L1A, children can generate structures that go beyond what is provided by the inherently limited input. Furthermore, limited access to external stimuli is associated with the *Critical Period Hypothesis* (CPH) (Lenneberg 1967) and with the stages of language development in L1A, with critical periods linked to the role of LF, a functional property of the brain. Many studies on the effects of positive, negative, and indirect negative evidence are attributed to the CPH, from a nativist perspective, supporting the premise that children do not learn through imitation but make use of primary linguistic data (PLD), which can be accessed at various stages of linguistic development, with particularities attributed to the intermediate stages (Pinker 1989). Children are naturally endowed with the tools and mechanisms necessary to construct specific grammars. Their exposure to particular linguistic behaviour and their ability to identify and select positive evidence support the assumption that, in the early stages of development, it is pure acquisition rather than the learning of a particular language. This can be observed in the way children react to corrections from adults or caregivers, generating non-adult forms, as exemplified in example (1). The example provides evidence of linguistic creativity, which must be understood as part of the underlying mechanisms that allow for syntactic creativity in language, a *discrete infinity* (Chomsky 2005).

(1)	CHI:	Nu, eu pun. *Mă dai	două *poltocale (…)?
		'No, I put it. Can you *give meACC.1SG	two oranges
	MOM:	Îmi dai două portocale.	
		'Can you give meACC.1SG'	
	CHI:	*Mă dai	două *poltocale.
		me*ACC.1SG give.PRES.2SG	two oranges.
	MOM:	Îmi dai două portocale.	
		'Can you give meACC.1SG'	
	CHI:	*Mă dai două	*poltocale.
		me*ACC.1SG give.PRES.2SG	two oranges.
	MOM:	Îmi dai.	
		'Can you give me.'	
	CHI:	*Mă dai	două *poltocale.
		me*ACC.1SG give.PRES.2SG	two oranges.
	MOM:	Zi îmi.	
		'Say meDAT.1SG'	

CHI: Îmi.
me DAT.1SG
MOM: Acuma zi îmi dai.
'Now say me DAT.1SG give.
CHI: Îmi dai.
give meDAT.1SG.
MOM: Și acum zi îmi dai două portocale.
'And now say give me DAT.1SG two oranges.'
CHI: *Mă dai două *poltocale.
'Me. *ACC.1SG give two oranges.'
MOM: Nu mă dai două portocale, T. Îmi dai
'Not give me*ACC.1SG more oranges, T. give me DAT.1SG
două portocale.
two oranges.'
CHI: *Mă dai două *poltocale.
'me* ACC.1SG give two oranges.'
MOM: Îmi dai.
give me DAT.1SG.'

(T. 2;11)
(Tărău 2021: 206)

4. A qualitative interpretation of case features and hierarchies L1A

The examples presented in this paper were selected from a corpus of weekly recordings, each approximately 60 minutes long, from 6 children who speak Romanian as L1. The six children are monolingual, come from similar backgrounds, and interact spontaneously and authentically with their caregivers. In terms of linguistic behaviour, they are at different stages of language development, with the majority having moved beyond oral, holophrastic production and capable of producing much longer sequences of speech—and, by extension, sequences rich in interpretative potential—where FCs and the operation of formal features gain the greater visibility so essential to our analysis. The recordings consist of spontaneous, authentic conversations between children and various interlocutors, namely family members. The qualitative analysis of empirical data selected from the longitudinal corpus aims to contribute to arguments in favour of a continuous approach to L1A (Wexler 1994, 1998, Coene and Avram 2012) as opposed to some radical approaches mentioned in sections above (Radford 1988, 1990, 1997). In the analysis of examples of case hierarchies in the acquisition of Romanian as L1, this suggests that, in this process, children resort, from the earliest stages of development, to *default* settings and that generally valid patterns can be identified.

To gain a better understanding of the theoretical framework, a distinction between structural and non-structural cases needs to be made (Chomsky, 1981), emphasising the role of the grammatical features attributed to cases in Romanian and their interpretation at the interface level, to observe the linguistic behaviour of these formal features in the process of L1A. According to case theory, one must distinguish from the outset between cases with a high degree of formalised abstraction, such as the nominative and accusative cases, and the dative case (Chomsky 1995, 2000, 2001, 2008). In this context, the examples reflect a hierarchy of case features in Romanian L1A. From a continuity perspective on L1A, children respond to what is offered in the PLD and, linguistically speaking, do not respond to negative feedback from adults. They use what is accessible, and the relationship between input and output reveals patterns in the acquisition of pronominal clitics (Coene and Avram 2012). The nominative and accusative, being structural cases, are associated with *phi* features, agreement features, in our case, predominantly the person feature [+/- person], which are valued in the interpretation and acquisition of syntactic features. In the structural/non-structural asymmetry, as the empirical data also show, the language produced by children is relevant, with case features presented from both syntactic and semantic perspectives. Examples (2), (3), (4), (5) and (6) illustrate intermediate stages in the acquisition of case features. The decisive factor is not the children's age—as age differences are sometimes insignificant—but rather the stage of linguistic development they are at, with variations observed in their productions. Nevertheless, children who develop harmoniously, within normal parameters, reach the expected level of competence in a very short time. The conceptual framework of this paper is based on the premise that, in the case of children, linguistic knowledge exists from the earliest stage but manifests itself in a tacit form.

(2) CHI: Da eu, da* la mine *mă p(l)ace sucul.
yes I but to CL. *ACC1SG CL. *ACC1SG like.3SG juice.the
'Yes I, me me like juice.'
MOM: Mie îmi place sucul.
CL.DAT.1SG CL.DAT.1SG like.3SG juice.the
'I like juice.'
CHI: Mie *mă p(l)ace sucul.
CL.DAT.1SG CL.ACC1SG like.3SG juice.the
'I me like juice.'
MOM: Nu mie *mă place,
NEG meCL.DAT.1SG CL .meACC1SG like.3SG
ci mie îmi place.
but meCL.DAT.1SG meCL.DAT.1SG like.3SG
'Not me like, but I like.'
CHI: Mie *mă-mi pace
meCL.DAT.1SG meCL. *ACC1SG meCL.DAT.1SG
'I me I like.'
(…)
CHI: De ce ai spus mie nu *mă p(l)ace.
why did you say meDAT.1SG not me*ACC.1SG like.
'Why did you say I me don't like?'
MOM: Nu mie *mă place, mie nu-mi place.
NEG meDAT.1SG me*ACC.1SG like, me. not meDAT.1SG like.'
'Not I me like, I don't like.'

(T. 2;11)
(Tărău 2021: 199)

(3) CHI: Da, că mie *mă p(l)ace mov.
yes because 1SG me*ACC.1SG like, purple
'Yes, because I like purple.'

(O. 2;04)

(4) CHI: Stai un pic așa, ca să *mă scot banii
wait a bit like this to me*ACC.1SG take out money.the
'Wait a bit like this to take out the money.'

(O. 2;07)

(5) CHI: Și *aia îi *polnesc. Să nu *te fie *flică.
And that *theyACC.3PL start to NEG youACC.2SG be afraid
'And those turn it on so don't be afraid.'

(O. 2;5)
(Tărău 2021: 411-438)

(6) CHI: *Mă *p(l)ace *pe(r)na asta.
me*ACC.1SG *like *pillow this
'I like this pillow.'
MOM: Îți place? De ce?
'You like it? Why?'
CHI: *P(l)ace.
'*like'
MOM: De ce?
'Why?'
CHI: Mami, mie *p(l)ace așa.
mommy meDAT.1SG like this way
'Mon, I like this way.'
MOM: Dar de ce îți place?
'But why do you like it?'

(E. 3;02)
(Tărău 2021: 381)

In the case of pronominal clitics, 1st- and 2nd-person clitics behave differently in Romanian. Studies show visible asymmetries in the acquisition of *phi* features, variations in the acquisition of first- and second-person forms, and in the acquisition of third-person forms (Coene and Avram 2012). Consequently, the clitics could help explain possible syntactic hierarchies, with clitic doubling serving as another indicator of feature interpretability. As such, pronominal clitics are centres and carry *phi* features and agreement features. In examples (7) and (8), a transition towards a contextual interpretation of accusative structures is evident in the omission of clitics. The nominative appears to be formulated in the fashion exhibited by the adult, in this context, and is used strictly in the instances indicated.

(7) MOM: Ce spui, M.?
'What are you saying M.?'
CHI: *Mine.
*me ACC.1SG
'Me.'
MOM: Ce să facă mama?
'What should mom do?'
CHI: *Aiut.
* help
'Help.'
MOM: Să te ajut? Cu ce te pot ajuta, M.?
'To help you? How can I help you, M.?'
CHI: *(S)caun.
*chair
'Chair.'
MOM: La scaun? Cum te pot ajuta cu scaunul?
'At the chair? How can I help you with the chair? '
CHI: *Mine.
*me ACC.1SG
'Me.'
MOM: Mă ajuți, M.? Mă ajuți?
'Are you helping me, M? Are you helping me?'
CHI: *Mine.
*me ACC.1SG
'Me.'

(M. 1;05)

(8) MOM : *Biscuite. Așază-te, M.!
'*Biscuit. Sit down, M!'
CHI: *Aiut. Nu, *mine, *mine.
*help NEG * me ACC.1SG * me ACC.1SG
'Help. No, me, me.'
MOM: Te ajut și eu.
'I help you.'

CHI: Și *ioi. Și eu.
and *ioi *and I
'Me too. Me too.'

(M. 1;06)
(Tărău 2021: 568-569)

From a minimalist perspective, the retrieved items must be equipped with *phi*-features, agreement, and grammatical tense (Chomsky 1995, 2000, 2001, 2008). However, children generate forms that differ from those of adults, so the question is whether syntax suffers in early grammar. In line with the continuous approach in L1A and minimalist proposals regarding the authorisation of case features in derivation, one could argue that syntax is not deficient at these stages. Children are endowed with predetermined mechanisms, but they use limited templates and networks that are immediately accessible to them at certain stages of development; consequently, they tend to rely on *default* settings, employing them in syntactic and semantic interpretation. Such structures decrease in number and frequency over time, with children eventually becoming capable of generating adult-like structures in L1. The examples below reflect phenomena observable in the linguistic behaviour of all children and serve as benchmarks. Furthermore, children demonstrate that they can operate within obligatory contexts; see examples (9), (10), (11), (12), where the verbs most frequently used are *'to give'*, and examples (13), (14), (15), (16), where the verbs *'to like'* and *'to buy'* are used.

(9) CHI: *M-a adus tati.
*me$_{\text{ACC.1SG}}$ bring$_{\text{PAST}}$ daddy
MOM: Ți-a adus tati? Bine. Îți face mami o codiță.
'Daddy brought it to you? Ok. Mommy is making a pony tail.'
CHI: Cu *ioz. Mie *mă *p(l)ace *ioz.
with *pink me$_{\text{DAT.1SG}}$ *me$_{\text{ACC.1SG}}$ *like *pink

(O. 2;4)
(Tărău 2021: 409)

(10) CHI: *P(l)ace bomboanele. *Fo(r)ate mult *p(l)ace.
*like candy *very much *like
Likes candy. Very much likes.

MOM: Foarte mult îți plac?
'You like them very much?'
CHI: Da.
'Yes.'

(E. 3;01)

(11) CHI: *Mă p(l)ace pe(r)na asta.
*me *like *pillow this
'I like this pillow.'
MOM: Îți place? De ce?
'You like it? Why?'
CHI: *P(l)ace.
*like.
MOM: De ce?
'Why?'
CHI: Mami, mie *p(l)ace așa.
Mommy, me DAT.1SG *like this way
MOM: Dar de ce îți place?
'But why do you like it?'

(E. 3,02)
(Tărău 2021: 357-372)

(12) CHI: Tati, *mă dai gheață. *Mă dai gheață.
daddy *me ACC.1SG give ice *me ACC.1SG give ice
'Daddy, give me ice. Can you give me ice?'

(A. 3;05)

(13) CHI: Mami, *mă *cumpăli și mie? Și eu *dolesc.
Mommy * me ACC.1SG *buy PRES to me and I *want PRES
'Mommy, can you buy for me? I also want.'

(A.3;05)
(Tărău 2021: 461)

(14) CHI: *La mine *mă p(l)ace polumbul.
* to me *me *like corn
'I like corn.'

(T. 2;11)

(15) CHI: *La mine nu *mă somn.
*to me ACC.1SG NEG *me ACC.1SG sleep
'I am not sleepy.'
(T. 2;10)

(16) CHI: Ba nu, la mine nu, la mine nu m-ar p(l)ăcea sub pat.
NEG *to me ACC.1SG NEG *to me ACC.1SG NEG *me ACC.1SG would like under bed
(T. 2;11)
(Tărău 2021: 634-635)

In examples (4) and (16), children continue to select accusative forms rather than dative; the morphological paradigm extends the acquisition process in these cases. Naturally, children will first use accusative forms in all obligatory contexts where dative forms would be required, followed by a stage in which both forms are attested concurrently, before finally reaching full linguistic competence. As previously mentioned, the examples are representative of these defining stages, though variations are observed from one child to another.

At this stage, a potential tension between morphology and syntax is evident in the asymmetries observed in the acquisition of the accusative and dative pronominal clitics. The children demonstrate that they possess knowledge and use forms from the initial settings in obligatory contexts. The examples show that the acquisition of case features in Romanian is not only asymmetrical but also hierarchical. One possible explanation is the gradual emergence of these features; this stage is quite extensive, with the structures visible around the ages of 3;05 and 3;10, and such structures are attested even after the emergence of modal markers, as in examples (4) and (16). Another possible explanation may be the need for much more complex computation for *phi* features, with the morphological component playing an extremely important role.

One must also consider functional aspects, as syntactic and morphological arguments support a hierarchical case representation. Pavel Caha proposed a universal, abstract, and functional case hierarchy. This approach to case syncretism and the relationship between syntax and morphology aims to explain possible hierarchies in particular languages. The proposal is linear, with specificity at the morphological level. Romanian, for example, is a language with rich inflection and many syncretic forms. Caha proposed a generalisation underpinned by a functional sequence NOM<ACC<GEN<DAT<INS<COM, continuing in the tradition of linearity proposed by Kayne (1994, 2001) and Chomsky's derivation (1995), with differences in manifestation from one particular language to another (Caha 2009). To provide the most accurate explanation of the sequence, each case feature is combined with its specific case in a binary derivation, yielding a functional combination of the case and the generally assigned feature and the resulting asymmetries in the case hierarchy. These asymmetries in the hierarchy are viewed as universal and closely interrelated, capable of explaining phenomena observed at various stages of AL1; furthermore, the Romanian language exhibits genitive-dative case syncretism. The author hypothesises functional case syncretism and associates syncretic case features with syntactic structures, identifying morphology with syntax from a functional perspective. The author assumes that features are syncretic in neighbouring cases, which, from a universal perspective, would explain the functional nature of genitive-dative syncretism in Romanian. The case branch is structurally influenced by neighbouring cases, a fact reflected at the morphological level in derivation. Thus, aspects relating to case hierarchy, syntactic complexity, and even explanations regarding children's use of initial settings in the representation of case features can be explained. The basic structural cases are the nominative and accusative, whilst the genitive and dative are associated with syncretic morphological features. The framework proposed by Pavel Caha envisages *Universal Neighbourhood* relationships through which cases are associated with their 'atomic' features via universal operations (Merge). Stages of acquisition can be linked to hierarchies and asymmetries in the generation of functional sequences.

5. Conclusions

In conclusion, the examples provided demonstrate that, in early grammars, 'milestones' are marked in language development, and one way to examine these patterns is to take a close look at children's use of adult and non-adult forms. Furthermore, the agreement issues observed in spoken output, particularly in languages with rich morphology, such as Romanian, lead to generalisations and over-generalisations that do not reflect a cognitive inability of typically developing children, but rather stages in their development, as default structures are used at specific stages. Children react naturally to what is evident in their immediate reality and to what the PLD offers, with corrections from adults having little impact, as adults tend to negotiate and understand the message rather than constantly correct the forms produced by children. Beyond the roles of positive and negative feedback and the evidence supporting them, the examples showcased in this study are instructive in illustrating how morphological features contribute to the processual variety in the acquisition of Romanian as an L1. Children's syntax differs from adult syntax at certain stages of development, but it is not deficient; it uses limited means, relies on initial settings and non-adult forms, and the use of *default* structures becomes less frequent as they grow older, eventually leading to the production of adult forms in all contexts.

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Lexical Gaps and Gender Agreement in the Narrative Productions of Children Who Speak Heritage Romanian

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Abstract: *Lexical Gaps and Gender Agreement in the Narrative Productions of Children Who Speak Heritage Romanian.* The study aimed to contribute with a qualitative analysis of a small corpus of recorded speech produced by preadolescents who speak Romanian as a heritage language. The core concepts in this inquiry are child bilingualism and bilingual first-language acquisition. Within the same framework, the heritage language and the profile of the heritage language speaker were outlined, drawing on factors and variables such as age of acquisition, incomplete acquisition, and the scarcity of input and context. The analysis also examined lexical and grammatical processing and the role of acquisition stages. The lexical choices and agreement mismatches highlighted in the qualitative analysis provide insights into the dynamics of the minority and dominant languages at different stages of development.

Keywords: *bilingual children, child heritage speakers, Romanian as a heritage language (RHL), lexical gap, gender agreement, frequency*

1. Introduction

The present paper is structured into four parts; the first two present core concepts regarding bilingual acquisition in children, bilingual first-language acquisition, and the main arguments supporting the acquisition process in this context: age of acquisition, critical period, and quality of input. The framework is rooted in a nativist approach to language acquisition and in the distinct category of heritage language acquisition. The main theoretical section of the study is dedicated to heritage language acquisition and the profile of the heritage language speaker, and it also addresses associated concepts, such as incomplete acquisition, attrition, fossilisation, and the role of context and how they impact language processing in the case of individuals (children, adolescents and adults) who speak heritage languages. The majority of the studies presented in this section were on Spanish HL speakers from North America. Incidentally, the participants in the elicited task used for this analysis are preadolescent Romanian HL speakers from Chicago, North America. The last two sections are dedicated to a brief description of the corpus and the elicited task, and continue with a qualitative interpretation of the data, accompanied by suggestive graphs of word frequencies in the corpus for both Romanian and English words.

2. Bilingual first language acquisition

Bilingual first-language acquisition has been extensively researched, particularly during the preschool period, to identify evidence of mastery of both languages and of maintaining similar performance into adulthood (Genesee 1989, 2001, 2008, Nicoladis and Genesee 1996, 1998, Paradis 2001, 2010). To explain how languages are processed in bilinguals, linguistic phenomena and cognitive processes have been analysed to understand lexical and syntactic processing, code-switching, the relationship between first-, second-, and heritage-language acquisition, and the processing of CS. Linguistic processing focuses on language and how its structures change, while cognitive approaches address the role of the brain's executive functions (EF).

Fred Genesee’s research addressed the question of whether one or two linguistic systems exist from onset in child bilinguals, the age of onset of exposure, and the role of input, given that bilingual children have limited exposure to input compared with monolingual children (Genesee *et al.* 2004, Meisel 2009, Tsimpli 2014). The latter argued, in her research, in favour of the hypothesis of two separate systems with distinct grammars that operate independently. Another factor specific to L2A research is the role of the critical period and access to Universal Grammar (UG) (White and Genesee 1996). According to the critical period hypothesis (CPH), after puberty children can no longer achieve native competence, and, as a result, adult learners no longer have access to Universal Grammar (UG), the innate grammatical principles of the language system. The claim was that gaps in competence might not be related to the critical period of UG unavailability, but rather to the proficiency level of the individuals investigated. The two tasks administered to bilingual participants (English L1 and French L1), non-native and near-native speakers, measured accuracy and reaction time, respectively, to assess knowledge of UG constraints. The results showed that near-native speakers had control similar to that of native speakers, both in accuracy and reaction time, supporting the claim that competence can be acquired in L2 (White and Genesee 1996: 258-260).

Code-mixing is another phenomenon observed among bilinguals, and children can code-switch early in the acquisition process (Meisel 1989). A few qualitative examples will be presented in the section dedicated to the results; however, the study does not provide a description of a framework for code-switching, such as a structuralist or typological model. The present approach follows the line of language acquisition theories that posit rule-based processing, a lexicon, and the brain's modularity, which requires the involvement of other systems, such as memory. Children demonstrate sensitivity to code-mixing in speech. In the case of bilingual children, lexical mixing was observed early in their speech, supporting the claim that two systems exist in bilinguals (Comeau *et al.* 2003: 113), with children able to code-switch from their first year of life and to use the two languages functionally by differentiating according to the interlocutor's code (Genesee *et al*. 1995). The modelling hypothesis has at its core the role of input in the early stages of bilingual acquisition. As such, it is posited that, depending on what is emphasised in the input, discourse features or statistical properties, the rate of code-mixing in children could change.

Given the cognitive load in the acquisition process, the role of working memory, a component of executive function, specifically verbal working memory, was investigated in bilinguals to determine whether it confers an advantage for this group of speakers. The author posited that performance is sometimes affected not by bilingualism but by deficient working memory, which could be associated with the L2 level of proficiency in processing (Delcenserie and Genesee 2016: 9-10). Another factor considered was the age of acquisition (AoA), the age at which individuals first became exposed to L2, thus distinguishing among simultaneous, early successive, and late successive bilinguals. The conclusion was that the benefits of verbal working memory were conditioned by speakers' proficiency levels and the age of acquisition, with simultaneous bilinguals benefiting most from this cognitive processing (Delcenserie and Genesee 2016: 12-14).

3. Heritage language acquisition (HLA)

Silvina Montrul defines a heritage language (HL) as a minority language relative to a majority language, shaped by the sociolinguistic environment and input factors that influence stages of language development (Montrul 2016). In this framework, the acquisition of a heritage language (HL) falls under the umbrella of bilingualism. She emphasised, for accurate research, the need for longitudinal studies of heritage languages conducted with children, young adults, adult speakers, and adult immigrants in the United States (Montrul 2004, 2006, 2008, 2016), and cited a longitudinal study of two siblings from ages 1 to 6. An experimental study on the production of null and overt subjects in Spanish included 15 school-age bilingual children and 29 adult heritage speakers, with English as the dominant language and Spanish as the weaker language. The results were compared with a control group of monolingual children from Mexico (Montrul 2016: 532). Bilinguals who speak pro-drop languages produce more overt subjects than null subjects in their speech, indicating problems at the interface level, including difficulties in interpreting pragmatic properties (Sorace 2005). In the case of Spanish heritage speakers, the overt null subjects were ill-formed. Such results could be due to the influence of the majority language, in this case English, and to the pragmatic abilities of young adults being patterned similarly to those of bilingual children as they develop (Montrul 2016: 536-538).

One important observation was that the asymmetry between the heritage language and English, given that the individuals started as simultaneous bilinguals, was created by input factors (Montrul 2016: 530). In HL research, young adults and school-age children, in her opinion, are the most understudied categories of heritage speakers, even though exposure to their heritage language usually declines and they shift towards the dominant language, English. Spanish is a pro-drop language, as is Romanian, and the study investigated null and overt subject expression among Spanish speakers. The two vulnerabilities identified were the syntax-discourse interface and the possibility of incomplete acquisition in bilingual children who lack sufficient exposure to input during critical stages of development (Montrul 2016, Montrul 2008, Silva Corvalán 2016, Montrul and Silva-Corvalán 2019).

There are characteristics specific to HL that must be considered. She believes that the focus should not be on adult or young adult speakers of an HL, but rather on school-age children who are still going through the process of HLA, even as the dominant or majority language is taking over, since children are predominantly involved in educational instruction in the dominant language (Montrul 2016: 532). The expression of null and overt subjects in pro-drop languages reflects attrition (Montrul 2016). Attrition of HL is attested especially in adults (Montrul and Ionin 2012, Sorace 2004), and similarities in language characteristics and grammar control were observed in young bilinguals and adult speakers. If the heritage language is not used sufficiently during childhood and children do not receive sufficient input, this could affect acquisition and result in incomplete acquisition (Montrul 2016). The majority language transfer affects the way the language acquisition process develops in heritage languages (Montrul and Ionin 2012).

Beyond the formal approach to HLA, the explanation is also believed to be conditioned by input quality and sociopolitical context, which contribute to an incomplete or temporary developmental stage of HL. A specific phenomenon observed in young adult Spanish speakers is the social context, alongside the aforementioned input exposure, the timing and frequency of that exposure, and the syntactic complexity of the structures. Moreover, the experimental inquiries indicated that specific aspects of grammar were not fully acquired by heritage speakers and that fossilisations occur in adult grammars, not in the grammars of children as heritage speakers (Montrul and Silva-Corvalán 2019: 269-271). However, in addition to the internal grammar interpreted at the interface level, the authors acknowledge that, in the case of HLA, the importance of the social context that can influence acquisition in the early stages is evident, as input deficiency, alongside the age of acquisition and the individual characteristics of the speakers, is conditioned by the dominance of the majority language (Montrul and Silva-Corvalán 2019: 269-271).

The overgeneralisation of morphological patterns is a common phenomenon in language acquisition, in which the child first uses the regular form and then extends it to irregular forms. These patterns become concurrent in the intermediate stages of language development, and, as a result, irregular forms are used as expected in the target language. In HLA, heritage speakers tend to default to regular morphological patterns and use irregular forms less accurately (Montrul and Mason 2019:1-2). According to the authors, one factor that made defaulting to regular forms possible was the smaller vocabulary of heritage speakers compared with that of monolingual speakers. In this sense, the Tolerance principle was invoked (Yang 2016), positing that HL speakers, having access to a smaller inventory of words, also have access to a smaller number of irregular forms in the input (Montrul and Mason 2019: 1-2). The other factor referred to a model that explained the use of regular and irregular forms via memory mechanisms: declarative and procedural memory, two systems with distinct functions, the former for storing memorised lexical knowledge and the latter for grammar processing and the application of controlled rules (Ullman 2001). All in all, HL speakers default to core syntactic rules in the same way monolinguals do, but deviate in the case of irregular forms because of limited lexical access.

A key distinction is made between heritage speakers of Spanish, who were exposed to the language from birth, and L2 speakers of Spanish, who were exposed to the language later. As such, two concepts were outlined: the global age of acquisition (global AoA) and the first exposure to the language and the word age of acquisition (word AoA), respectively, the ages of exposure to lexical elements in HL or L2. The participants were subjected to a *lexical decision task* (LDT) and a *translation decision task (*TDT). A contribution of the study of HL speakers and L2 bilingual speakers of Spanish was in a three-way word classification design regarding the early or late acquisition of the words in L1 HL speakers and L2 learners of Spanish: Early L1- Early L2, Early L1- Late L2, Late L1- Early L2. The categorisation aimed to explain the asymmetries in acquisition between the two categories by including the timing variable (Montrul and Foote 2012: 276-280). The L2 learners were considerably faster than the HL speakers. The authors invoked the quality and means of accessing the input, noting that HL speakers of Spanish had access to input at home through listening (oral reception), whereas L2 learners had access to written input primarily in instructional settings. Moreover, they do not support the assumption that the results are conditioned by the critical period in LA for lexical acquisition; instead, they link the outcome to declarative, not procedural, memory. As such, in addition to the innate procedural mechanisms in global and word AoA, the process is conditioned by the experiential specificity of each group (Montrul and Foote 2012: 291-293).

The age of onset and the processing of grammar from the initial state have been debated in HLA, given factors such as input scarcity in L1 and the dominance of majority languages in sociopolitical contexts.

One research question addressed in an experimental study was whether grammatical gender is processed similarly in monolinguals, native speakers and proficient L2 learners. In the analysis of the domain, it must be noted that Spanish assigns masculine and feminine genders, and the paper distinguished between canonical nouns, which constitute the vast majority, and non-canonical nouns with irregular endings, retrieved from the lexicon and usually memorised in L2 processing. Gender agreement results from grammatical or syntactic processing and the retrieval of lexical properties of nouns. The two experimental groups, L2 speakers and HL speakers, produced more agreement mismatches with feminine than with masculine nouns, and the most mismatches occurred with non-canonical endings. As a distinction between L2 learners and HL speakers, the former performed better on the written tasks, while the latter performed better on the oral production task. Thus, L2 learners outperformed the HL speakers on explicit task/knowledge, while HL speakers outperformed the L2 learners on the implicit task/knowledge (Montrul et al. 2014: 120-121). Still, none of the groups demonstrated native-like knowledge of gender agreement. The mismatches produced by the two groups were similar to the error patterns produced by children during the L1 stages of development (Montrul et al. 2014: 121).

The characteristics of heritage languages and heritage speakers must be integrated into a minority language/speaker domain rather than a language/speaker majority domain. HL speakers are second-generation immigrant children whose parents immigrated to that country. Such children are exposed to multiple languages early on, and the heritage language usually begins at birth. Unlike their parents, whose dominant language is the language from their country of birth, second-generation children have the host country's language as their dominant language. As a result, the phenomena observed in them include stages of incomplete HL acquisition, transfers from the dominant language, and attrition in adults (Benmamoun *et al.* 2013: 132-133). Meisel believes that more granularity is required when categorising heritage language speakers (HLS) based on limited input, age of acquisition, critical period and language dominance. As such, it is difficult to treat them as a separate category, apart from simultaneous bilinguals (2L1), child L2, and adult L2 learners, and he remains sceptical as to whether HL speakers constitute a distinct category (Meisel 2013: 234).

4. Romanian as a heritage language (RHL). A narrative elicitation task

The qualitative data presented in this section were drawn from a small corpus of speech productions. The children are all second-generation speakers of RHL and had exposure to the language from birth, in their homes, with their caregivers. All the participants also had exposure to the language in the community. The Romanian community in Chicago, North America, is relatively large, and the children also participate in the Sunday School programme at the church, where the lessons are conducted in Romanian as well. There were 11 preadolescents who participated, aged 12 years (5 children), 11 years (1 child), 10 years (3 children), and 9 years (1 child). The corpus is very small but still revealing and insightful, as it provides examples supporting lexical gap processing, agreement mix-matches, and the frequency of key vocabulary in the production of stories.

The participants were exposed to Romanian as L1 from birth in the home environment. As described in the case of Spanish HL speakers, Romanian was the dominant language during the early stages of language acquisition and gradually became a minority language as the children started attending school, with English becoming the dominant language, the language of the majority. As such, the prediction is that Romanian has weakened, as input is limited to informal language spoken in the family and among friends, thus affecting proficiency in Romanian as well. The examples provide evidence of lexical gaps and vulnerabilities in morphological processing for complex structures.

The story used to elicit oral narrative production was the wordless picture book Frog Where Are You? (Mayer 1967), commonly used in language experiments on child L1 and child L2 acquisition. The interpretation of the data does not address the story's macrostructure but rather microstructural phenomena, such as code-mixing triggered in speech, gender agreement mismatches in referentiality with clitics, and certain word frequencies.

5. Frequencies and a qualitative analysis

In interpreting the data, the approach will be qualitative and supported by frequency graphs to track lexical items retrieved in the minority and dominant languages when tension occurred between the two languages. It is believed that children mix codes between utterances more than within utterances, and that the most frequent type of processing involves the selection and use of content words from the lexicon, rather than function words, which would be part of the core syntax. The detailed analysis of the corpus, with its limitations regarding the number of participants and the complexity of the task, supports this claim. Although the inquiry does not follow a story grammar unit categorisation, the selected examples are associated with the main characters and with the use of vocabulary related to nature. Given that the thematic vocabulary includes animals, such as the frog, one prediction was that not all children would have the Romanian word immediately available in their lexicon and would instead use the English word. They used the Romanian words for boy and dog, with a few instances of 'frog' being used instead of the Romanian word. As for the gender agreement, this is discussed in the experimental study on gender agreement in Spanish (Montrul *et al.* 2014). In Romanian, the canonical ending *–ă* for feminine nouns would be part of the "inner core" (Harris 1991, apud Montrul *et al*. 2014) for feminine animate and inanimate nouns. Still, there are many gender agreement vulnerabilities in the use of the indefinite article or in the use of clitics, referentially. For the most part, there were no gender agreement mismatches in the children's productions, showing that the nouns were well-formed and stored in the lexicon (Figure 1). However, there were some contexts in which gender mismatches were observed. For the noun 'broască' [frog], the masculine accusative clitic el/*-l* was used instead of *-o*/*o*/*o-*, agreement was wrong, and both the masculine and feminine forms were referred to in the same utterance, as concurring forms: *nu l-a putut prinde [he couldn't catch *him], 'să o prindă și nu *l-a prins' [to catch her and didn't catch *him], 'striga după *el' [called *him], 'să-l prindă', 'broasca vine și *el în cadă și ea în cadă' [the frog *he comes in the tub and she comes in the tub], 'broasca a fost singur' [the frog was *aloneMASC], 'și *el a venit' [and *he came]. The switch follows morpho-syntactic constraints in one of the languages: the use of the Romanian indefinite article with the English word 'a văzut *o frog' [he saw a frog] or the use of the definite article when the indefinite article is required in Romanian 'a fugit după *the frog' [he ran after the frog]. There were instances when prepositions were switched, such as 'instead of the broască' [instead of the frog].

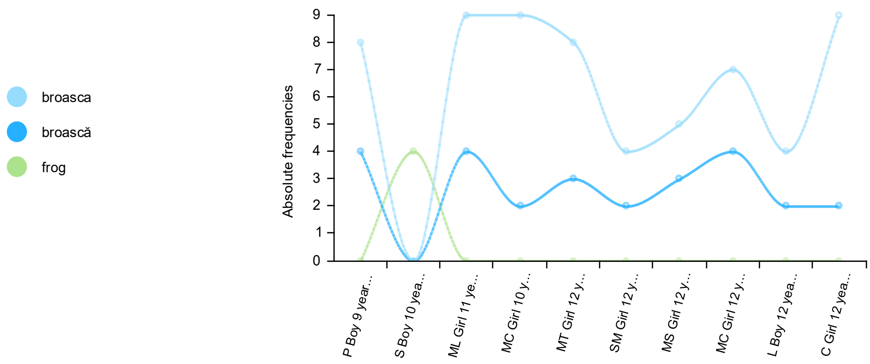

Figure 1. Frequency of use for the word 'broasca'[frog]

For the word 'creangă' [branch], the only English word used was 'root'. In all other instances, the children used Romanian words: 'creangă' [branch], 'crengi' [branches], 'ramură' [branch], 'lemn' [wood] (Figure 2). Another switch in the utterance was for the verb 'a se împiedica' [to trip], and the example from the corpus was 'pentru că he tripped' [because he tripped].

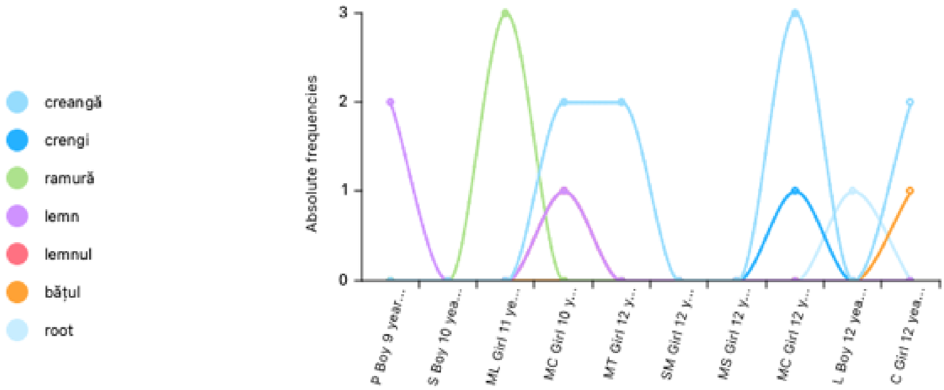

Figure 2. Frequency of use for the word 'creangă'[branch]

Another lexical insertion was the use of 'footprint' and 'footprints' in English instead of the Romanian word 'urmele' [the footprints] or the substandard, less acceptable 'urmile' [the footprints]. The children tended to overregularise the use of the definite article, doubling it to form '*urmelele' [*the footprints], or to produce unnatural forms from the verb 'a călca' [to step], such as 'călcări' [steppings], which refers to the act, the physical movement involved in taking a step, rather than the result of it, the footprint (Figure 3).

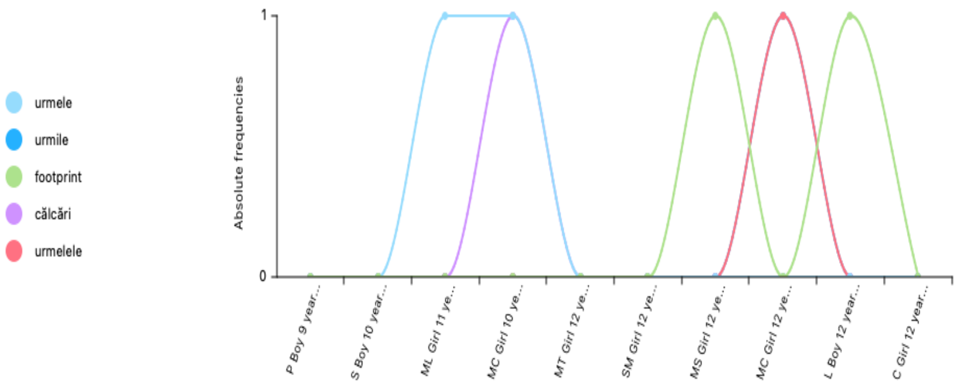

Figure 3. Frequency of use for the word 'urmă'[footprint]

Another example of the use of both Romanian and English insertions is the word 'cadă' [tub]. In Romanian, they used synonyms such as 'vană', 'cadă', or 'baie' [bath], or ill-formed words such as '*cadră' [tub], and a case of an English root used with a Romanian morphological ending for feminine, '*tabă' [tubFEM] (Figure 4).

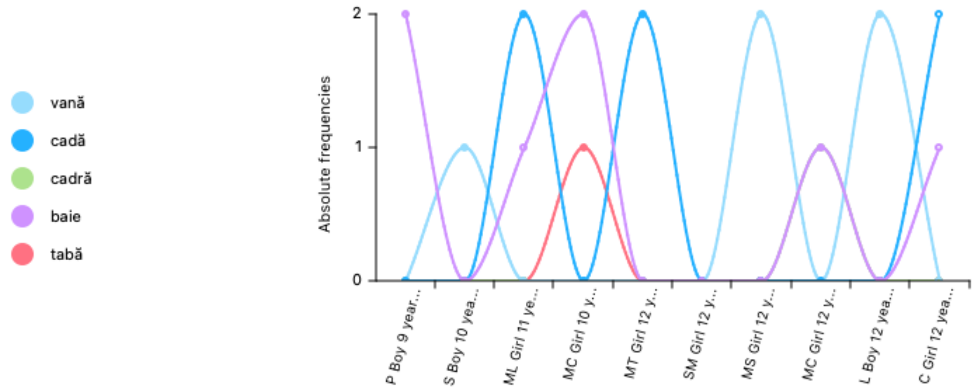

Figure 4. Frequency of use for the word 'sfârșit' [the end]

The same patterns were observed in the endings used by the children. Some did not use explicit ending words, as the ending was implicit in the formulated Romanian utterances, indicating that the friends lived happily ever after. Still, some of the children used expressions such as: 'the end', 'sfârșit' [the end], 'gata' [that's it], 'bye-bye'.

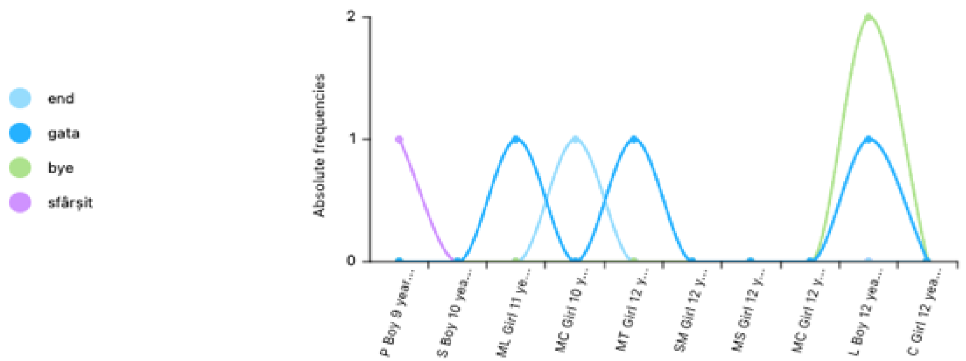

Figure 5. Frequency of use for the word 'sfârșit' [the end]

The data present qualitative examples of code-switching patterns and gender agreement processing in the narrative speech productions of preadolescents who speak RHL and are part of a large community of Romanian immigrants in North America. The data are insightful; however, the methodology's limitations must be noted, such as the small number of participants. Although the speech productions were not spontaneous and were constrained by the picture prompts, as they resulted from an elicited production task, the data were still very useful. The data are valuable because the children are 9 to 12 years old, when signs of incomplete acquisition might be more visible, with the dominant language more prominent. The data do not reflect a major shift, but the lexical choices and morphological processing in the selected examples do, indicating a shift from the minority to the majority language.

7. Conclusions

In conclusion, many studies place heritage languages and their speakers in a distinct category from native and non-native speakers, and the study of heritage language bilinguals, especially children, during their pre-school and school stages has been understudied. Research on heritage bilingualism has been conducted extensively in the United States and Canada, and, given the significant Romanian community there, the present study contributes to existing research with insightful examples of how RHL speakers, specifically preadolescents, process language at the lexical and grammatical levels. Although there are limitations to the study, as mentioned in the section above, the contribution to the research domain is significant and has potential for future investigations into language acquisition and learning.

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Lexical-grammatical Categories and Semantic Values

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Abstract: *Lexical-grammatical classes of words and semantic values.* In teaching Romanian as a foreign language, the lexical-grammatical elements (noun, pronoun, adjective, verb, etc.) and their specific grammatical categories (gender, number, case, mood, etc.) are never an end in themselves but a tool for developing linguistic competence. The use of metalanguage in the field of morphosyntax is limited (moderate), and grammatical structures are always taught in conjunction with and in relation to specific semantic-pragmatic contexts. For example, the noun may be associated with the expression of time (date, time), the adjective may be taught in relation to the lexical sphere of physical and moral qualities, and the conjunctive may be practised in relation to professions. In this sense, this paper aims to illustrate a series of semantic values assigned to the various lexical-grammatical categories and to demonstrate that the diversity of syntactic contexts in which nouns, pronouns, numerals and adjectives appear determines the diversity of semantic-pragmatic values associated with them.

Keywords*: lexical-grammatical classes of words, grammatical categories, semantic values, listening, reading, input*

1. Argument

In the teaching of Romanian as a foreign language (RFL) or as a non-native language (RNNL), lexical-grammatical classes and their specific grammatical categories are tools for developing grammatical competence, not the aim of language teaching/learning. The recommendation to avoid metalanguage/specialist terminology is increasingly common and nuanced in documents intended to guide RLS/RLNM teachers.

In *the Descrierea minimală a limbii române (Minimal Description of the Romanian Language)*, the presentation of grammatical classes specific to language levels A1, A2, B1 and B2 is always followed by their contextualisation. Furthermore, at least for level A1, conjunctions, adverbs, and certain prepositions are organised from a semantic-pragmatic perspective, without the use of metalanguage from the morphosyntactic sphere: "association – *and*, opposition – *but*, condition – *if*, relation/reference – *about*, temporal placement – *when*, *today*, *this morning*, etc., place – *where*, *here*, *there*, etc., manner – *well*, *badly*, *so*, etc." („asociere - *şi*, opoziţie - *dar*, condiţie - *dacă*, relaţie/referinţă - *despre*, situare în timp - *când*, *azi*, *astăzi*, *dimineaţă* etc., loc - *unde*, *aici*, *acolo* etc., mod - *bine*, *rău*, *aşa* etc") (Platon, Sonea, Vasiu, Vîlcu 2014: 23–24, 26).

In the *Programa școlară pentru disciplina Limba și literatura română pentru școlile și secțiile cu predare în limba maghiară, clasele a V-a – a VIII-a (Curriculum for the subject of Romanian Language and Literature for schools and departments teaching in Hungarian, Years 5–8),* the emphasis is placed on an "applied approach" („abordare aplicativă"), which "refers to the didactic processing of content through the analysis of linguistic phenomena without theorising, but using terminology to structure/guide thinking and discourse about language (for example: the names of verb tenses are used, without theorising the concept). The use of terminology is based on the contextual practice of the concepts in question" („desemnează prelucrarea didactică a conţinutului, prin analiza fenomenului lingvistic fără teoretizare, dar cu folosirea terminologiei pentru a structura/a orienta gândirea şi discursul despre limbă (de exemplu: se foloseşte denumirea timpurilor verbale, fără teoretizarea conceptului). Folosirea terminologiei are la bază exersarea contextuală a conceptelor vizate") (Programă 2017: 38). Furthermore, under the heading *'applicative'*, the curriculum indicates those lexical-grammatical categories that are taught and learnt through contextualisation, without theorising (for example, verbs in the subjunctive mood, present tense, or verbs in the conditional mood, present tense). Moreover, the grammatical content indicated in the curriculum is organised according to semantic-pragmatic criteria as follows: Expressing an action, state and existence (the verb), Naming objects, beings and natural phenomena (the noun), Expressing the coordinates of the action – space, time, modality (the adverb, the adverbial phrase) etc. Similarly, in the *Programa școlară pentru disciplina Limba și literatura română pentru școlile și secțiile cu predare în limba maghiară, clasa a IX-a (Curriculum for the subject of Romanian Language and Literature for schools and departments teaching in Hungarian – theoretical stream – lower secondary level, Year 9),* the aim of teaching and learning grammatical content (the building blocks of communication) is the development of communicative competence. As specified in the curriculum, 'although, during the teaching process, significant time will be devoted to grammatical issues or lexical exercises corresponding to level B1+ or, where appropriate, level B2, these will always be subordinate to the communicative aim. It must be as clear as possible to all teachers that we are aiming to develop communicative competence in Romanian, and not the acquisition of theoretical knowledge about the language" („deși pe parcursul procesului didactic, se va rezerva un spațiu semnificativ și problemelor gramaticale sau exercițiilor lexicale aferente nivelului B1+ sau, acolo unde este cazul, nivelului B2, acestea vor fi subordonate, întotdeauna, scopului comunicativ. Trebuie să fie cât mai limpede, pentru toți profesorii, că urmărim dezvoltarea competenței comunicative în limba română, și nu achiziția unor cunoștințe teoretice despre limbă") (Programă 2021: 25).

The attempt to shift the emphasis from learning knowledge about the language to its actual use in communication is also evident in more recent specialist literature on the teaching and learning of Romanian as a mother tongue (RLM). For example, in the *Gramatica limbii române pentru gimnaziu (Grammar of the Romanian Language for Lower Secondary School)*, edited by Gabriela Pană Dindelegan, the subchapters on verb moods and tenses are titled as follows: 'How are the indicative moods used?', 'How is the subjunctive mood used?', 'How is the conditional-optative mood used?' („Cum se folosesc timpurile modului indicativ?, Cum se foloseşte modul conjunctiv?, Cum se foloseşte modul condiţional-optativ?") (Pană Dindelegan (ed.) 2019: 44, 56, 60). In *the Gramatica limbii române pentru elevi şi profesori (Romanian Grammar for Pupils and Teachers)*, edited by Adina Dragomirescu, all parts of speech, grammatical categories and syntactic functions are defined from a semantic perspective as well, including explanations of certain more abstract concepts, which were previously simply learnt/memorised as such, such as (verbal) mood or case (Dragomirescu (ed.) 2022: 66, 90, 210–213).

Moderate use of metalanguage and the teaching of grammatical content for communicative purposes are achieved through microlanguage (Platon 2016), visual or audio-visual aids, and contextualisation, which associates lexical domains with each grammatical concept. For example, in *the Manual de limba româna ca limbă străină. A1-A2 (Romanian as a Foreign Language A1-A2 textbook)* by Elena Platon, Ioana Sonea and Dina Vîlcu, reflexive verbs are associated with the lexical sphere of daily activities, the subjunctive mood with the sphere of professions, and so on.

In our view, contextualising lexical-grammatical categories involves not only providing as many examples as possible of their use, but also diversifying those examples—that is, the semantic (and pragmatic) values with which these grammatical elements are used. In this article, we aim to provide as many semantic values as possible for various grammatical structures and to demonstrate that these can be introduced, for example, in oral and written comprehension activities, starting from level A1, so that the non-native speaker is exposed to as wide a range of language samples as possible, which will subsequently help them produce oral and written messages.

To clarify, here is an example. Generally, the common, articulated noun in the nominative case, functioning as the subject, is illustrated by the agent role: ***The students** are learning Romanian.* However, it can also have several semantic roles, such as cause: ***The storm** broke all the windows and left the town without electricity;* source: ***Reading** is my joy; and* matter: ***Wood** is recyclable*, etc.

2. Grammatical content and semantic values

Having analysed several works on Romanian grammar, I have identified the following semantic values: agent, patient, result, theme, causal, instrumental, experimenter, stimulus, possessor, beneficiary, recipient, target, location, source, path, modal, measure, determiner (identification), quantitative, modifier, specifier, qualitative, qualifying, categorical, reflexive, reciprocal, partitive, matter, possessed object, relative, time, repetitive (iterative), durative, limitative, comparative, concessive, oppositional, cumulative, sociative, purpose, conditional, consecutive, exceptional, situational, passive (Gheorghe 2009: 31–33, Rădulescu Sala 2014: 345–351, GBLR 2010: 380, 581, GALR I 2008: 171, Neamţu 2014: 80). In this regard, we also find *the Dicţionar de Contexte Verbale. O descrierere detaliată a complementelor din cadrele de valenţă a verbelor româneşti (Dictionary of Verbal Contexts* to be a very useful tool. *A detailed description of complements within the valency frames of Romanian verbs) is* provided by the 'Iorgu Iordan – Al. Rosetti' Institute of Linguistics of the Romanian Academy[1], where verbs are described according to the semantics of their determiners.[2]

The inventory of semantic values is intended for teachers, not for learners. By consulting it, teachers could diversify the examples in which certain grammatical classes appear, the texts provided as input for oral and written comprehension activities, and even the structural grammar exercises.

Considering the inventory of semantic values, the noun in the nominative case is associated with the semantic functions of determiner

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1 Available on the website of the "Iorgu Iordan – Al. Rosetti" Institute of Linguistics of the Romanian Academy, under the Linguistic Resources section https://www.lingv.ro/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=351&Itemid=245.

2 For example, under the meaning "+ quantity" appear the verbs 'to increase' (a crește), 'to diminish' (a diminua), 'to estimate' (a estima), 'to evaluate' (a evalua), 'to measure' (a măsura), 'to reduce' (a scădea), etc. In other words, we understand that the subordinate terms of these verbs have a Quantitative thematic role.

(identification), qualitative, categorical, comparative, and source: a) *My best friend is **Oana***. (determiner), b) *He came to our school as **headteacher***. (qualitative), c) *They consider themselves my **parents** because they raised me from a young age*. (categorical), d) *You are just **like my mother***. (comparative), e) *You are **the source** of my joy*. (source).

The accusative noun is associated with the following semantic values: patient, theme, experiencer, path, target, time, durative, repetitive (iterative), instrumental, comparative, categorical, and qualitative. Examples include: a) *I **hit Adi** without meaning to*. (patient), b) *He buys lots of **books***. (theme), c) *Does **Alina** have a headache?* (experiencer), d) *He is crossing **the road***. (path), e) *He kept asking **Dana** until I answered him*. (target), f) *I'm leaving for Iaşi **in the morning***. (time), g) *I meditate for ten minutes **in the morning***. (repetitive), h) *I worked on this project for five **hours***. (durative), i) *Use **the opener**, not the knife!* (instrumental), j) *I love you **like** my **brother***. (comparative), k) *I consider him my **brother***. (categorical), l) *I thought he was **a Doctor** of Philosophy*. (qualitative). By replacing the noun, pronoun and numeral in the accusative case, values such as patient, subject, experiencer, instrumental, comparative, categorical and qualitative are associated with them.

The dative case of nouns, pronouns and numerals is associated with the following semantic functions: recipient, beneficiary, experiencer, target, possessor, location, relative, comparative: a) *I sent a message **to Alina*** (recipient); b) *I bought **my mother** a new handbag* (beneficiary); c) ***Ioana** is feeling hot* (experiencer); d) *The dress suits Ioana* (target); e) ***Ion's** parcel was delivered straight to his home* (possessor); f) *Stay **put***! (location); g) *He is **Mihai's** friend* (theme); h) *George is my **mother's** nephew* (relative); i) *He gave you as much money as he gave **me*** (comparative).

Nouns, pronouns and numerals in the genitive case are associated with the semantic functions of possessor, relative and source: a) *My **brother's** opinion influences me* (possessor); b) ***Mara's** sister lives near me* (relative); c) *Darkness is needed to see **the moonlight*** (source).

Nouns and pronouns in the accusative case with a preposition are associated with the following semantic functions: agent, instrument, sociative, location, time, source, comparative, causal, purpose, oppositional, patient, target, result, recipient, modifier, path, material, cumulative, exceptional, partitive, limitative, relative, conditional, concessive, consecutive, qualitative: a) *Her lectures are eagerly attended* ***by students***. (agent), b) *Does Mihai still write* ***with a pen****?* (instrument), c) *I play* ***with*** *my* ***daughter*** *every day.* (sociative), d) *I'm going* ***to the seaside*** *this year*. (location), e) *Every* ***autumn*** *I enjoy nature more.* (time), f) *Water flows* ***from the spring****.* (source), g) *Here we live just* ***like in the countryside****.* (comparative), h) *I cried* ***over*** *his* ***loss****.* (causal), i) *I'm studying* ***for*** *top* ***marks****.* (purpose), j) *I'm having dessert* ***instead of*** *the main course*. (oppositional), k) *Don't take advantage* ***of*** *poor* ***people****!* (patient), l) ***I miss Elena***. (target), m) *You've turned into a bad* ***person***. (result), n) *My brother* ***asks Mum*** *for money*. (recipient), o) *I don't like* ***fluffy*** *toys.* (modifier), p) *When we come to visit you, we pass* ***through Sighişoara***. (route), q) *The furniture is* ***made of wood***. (material), r) ***Apart from paper****, I need colours.* (cumulative), s) ***Apart from Adina****, everyone wants to come on the trip*. (exceptive), ş) *Two* ***of*** *my* ***friends*** *work at that pharmacy*. (partitive), t) *It refers* ***to*** *his* ***family****, not yours*. (limitative), ţ) *Mihai is friends* ***with Dan***. (relative), u) ***In case of a storm****, close all the windows*. (conditional), v) *He goes to football even* ***in the rain****!* (concessive), w) *He is* ***terminally*** *ill*. (consecutive), x) *He appeared to him* ***in the form of an angel***. (qualitative). Apart from time, all the other semantic values also apply to the numeral in the accusative with a preposition.

The adjective is associated with the following semantic functions: modifier, qualifier, categorical, qualitative, specifier, measure, source, material, situational, possessive, relative, passive: a) *The people here are very* ***hard-working***. (modifier), *b) I thought she* ***was clever***. (qualifier), c) *The* ***Chinese*** *language is very difficult to learn*. (categorical), d) *He became* ***a millionaire***. (qualitative), e) *He drank a couple of coffees*. (specifier), f) *He spent* ***many*** *days going from one institution to another*. (measure), g) *Valentine's Day is an* ***American*** *holiday*. (source), h) *It is* ***woody*** *material*. (matter), i) *This is a* ***private*** *space*. (situational), j) *Is* ***your*** *work complete?* (possessive), k) *Is* ***your*** *mother coming with us?* (relative), l) *Irina is* ***praised*** *by her clients.* (passive).

Non-finite verb forms are associated *with* the semantic functions of qualitative, categorical and consecutive: a) *She always enters the office*

smiling (qualitative); b) *He bought a furniture* ***glue*** *gun* (categorical); c) *She is* ***hideously*** *ugly* (consecutive).

Adverbs are associated with the semantic functions of location, time, repetitive (iterative), modal, concessive, specifier, cumulative, measure, limitative, modifier, source, and duration: a) *Go* ***there****!* (location), b) *Come* ***now****!* (time), c) *She comes to see me* ***every day****.* (repetitive), d) *Come* ***quickly****!* (modal), e) *He acted* ***contrary to*** *our recommendations.* (concessive), f) *I wrote* ***about*** *three pages in the exam.* (specifier), g) *Daniela is coming with us* ***too****.* (cumulative), h) *He runs* ***a lot*** *every day.* (measure), i) *He talks* ***only*** *about his children.* (restrictive), j) ***That*** *book* ***over there*** *is mine.* (modifying), k) *The water comes* ***from here****.* (source), l) *The bus goes* ***past here****.* (route).

Interjections are associated with the semantic functions of modal, modifier, qualifier and comparative: a) *The* ***little*** *rabbit hops through the garden* (modal); b) *The little train* ***choo-choo*** *has arrived at the station* (modifier); c) ***Poor*** *thing!* (qualifier); d) *It's just like poor thing!* (comparative).

3. The diversity of semantic values in the input material for receptive activities

The best way to provide our learners with as many examples as possible of how to use grammatical structures with diverse semantic values is to incorporate them into texts designed for receptive activities. As the non-native speaker progresses from one language level to another, it would be ideal for them to be provided with input that is as varied as possible from both semantic and grammatical perspectives.

Below, we present several sample texts, categorised by language levels A1, A2, B1, B2 and C1, in which nouns and adjectives in certain syntactic positions have different semantic values. The texts can be used as input for oral or written receptive activities.

Level A1

"The mirror in my bathroom **has a serious problem**. Although it lives with me in the house, it's a bit… **deceitful**. Every time I wake up, I go to the bathroom and look in the mirror. But every morning, I see a different face. I don't understand who is standing there, in front of me, looking back at me from the mirror."

Don't you believe what I'm saying? I'm telling the absolute truth. It's just **my mirror that's lying**. Yes, it's a big liar. I don't even know why I still keep it in the house."

(„**Oglinda** din baia mea **are o problemă gravă**. Deşi stă cu mine în casă, este puţin cam... **mincinoasă**. De câte ori mă trezesc, mă duc la baie şi mă uit în oglindă. Dar, în fiecare dimineaţă, văd o altă faţă. Nu înţeleg deloc cine stă acolo, în faţa mea, şi se uită la mine, din oglindă. Nu credeţi ce spun? Eu spun adevărul adevărat. Doar **oglinda mea minte**. Da, e o mare mincinoasă. Nici nu ştiu de ce mai stau cu ea în casă.") (Platon, Gogâţă, Vasiu, Ursa 2021: 15)

Observations

- The inanimate possessor, the mirror, is assigned an object (the possessed object) that is typically associated with an animate possessor, the problem. Other contexts of this type are: My laptop has a problem. The microphone isn't working anymore. My phone has a problem. The battery runs out very quickly.
- The inanimate agent, the mirror, is assigned a characteristic (the qualifier) and an action typically associated with an animate agent: 'liar', 'lies'. Other contexts of this type include: 'The scales never lie.'; 'The body does not lie.'; 'Love does not lie.'; 'The league table does not lie; it is clear who the champion is.'

Level A2

"Look at the picture on the right! Every mărţişor must have two parts: a small symbolic object, believed to bring good luck. You know, a four-leaf clover, a horseshoe, etc.

But these objects, on their own, have no power. The power of the mărţişor lies in the cord woven from a white thread and a red thread: **the white** represents **the cold winter, which does not yet want to leave**, and **the red** symbolises **the warm season, which is preparing to arrive** but cannot because of **the stubborn winter**. Everyone gives mărţişoare to their loved ones, as a sign of joy **at the arrival of spring**, and **for health and good luck**: men give mărţişoare to their wives and girlfriends, and children give them to their mums or teachers. They **are worn hanging** from the chest or fastened to the wrist in the first days of spring.

(„Uitaţi-vă în poza din dreapta! Fiecare mărţişor are obligatoriu două părţi: un mic obiect simbolic, despre care se crede că aduce noroc. Ştiţi voi, un trifoi cu patru foi, o potcoavă etc.

Însă aceste obiecte, singure, nu au nicio putere. Forţa mărţişorului se află în şnurul împletit dintr-un fir alb şi un fir roşu: **albul** reprezintă **iarna friguroasă, care nu vrea încă să plece**, iar **roşul** este simbolul **anotimpului cald, care se pregăteşte să vină**, dar nu are loc din cauza **iernii încăpăţânate**. Toată lumea oferă mărţişoare persoanelor dragi, în semn de bucurie **pentru venirea primăverii**, dar şi **pentru sănătate şi noroc**: bărbaţii le oferă mărţişoare soţiilor şi iubitelor, copiii le dau mămicilor sau profesoarelor. Ele **se poartă agăţate** în piept sau prinse la mână în primele zile de primăvară.”) (Platon, Gogâţă, Vasiu, Ursa 2021: 111)

Observations

- Both the cause and the purpose are expressed by nouns with prepositions: *for the arrival* (cause) *and for health* (purpose).
- The inanimate agent is characterised by actions and modifiers specific to an animate agent: *the cold winter, which does not yet wish to leave.*

Level A2+/B1

“One, two, three. **Four, let it be**. The sugar cubes drown clumsily in my coffee. Iulia looks at me sympathetically. I know what she’s thinking, but she doesn’t say it. **Iulia is sensitive. And clever. And kind.** But not annoyingly sensitive, clever and kind. Just enough to believe her. [...]

The sweetness in my coffee **is no accident**. From time to time I have these **insatiable spells**. When **I want a lot, big, expensive**. **Tasty** and **glossy**. And now, **voracious**. These days, nothing fits me anymore. **The streets are narrow, the car is old, I am old. The holidays are short, and the working hours long**." („Una, două, trei. **Patru, să fie**. Bucățile de zahăr se îneacă stângaci în cafeaua mea. Iulia se uită la mine înțelegător. Ştiu ce gândeşte, dar nu spune. **Iulia este simțită. Şi deşteaptă. Şi bună.** Dar nu agasant de simțită, deşteaptă şi bună. Atât cât să o crezi. [...] **Dulcele** din cafeaua mea **nu este întâmplător**. Din când în când am astfel de **perioade nesătule**. Când **vreau mult, mare, scump**. **Gustos** şi **lucios**. Acum şi **hapsân**. În aceste zile nimic nu mă mai încape. **Străzile sunt înguste, maşina veche, eu bătrână. Vacanțele scurte, iar serviciul lung**.") (Țîbuleac 2021: 16)

Observations

- The adjective functions as a qualifier both for an animate agent: *Julia is sensitive. And clever. And kind.*, and for an inanimate agent: *The streets are narrow, the car is old […] The holidays are short, and the working hours are long*.
- The noun derived from an adjective appears as an inanimate agent, *the sweet one*. Other contexts of this type: *The sweet one upsets my stomach.*
- The adjective functioning as a qualitative modifier appears in the absence of a noun/pronoun: *When I want a lot, big, expensive. Tasty and shiny.*
- Strictly speaking from a grammatical point of view, the text includes three types of adjectives: those with four forms (*good, clever*), those with three forms (*long*) and those with two forms (*big, old*).

Level B2

"A habit is **a behaviour that has been repeated** enough times **to become automatic**. **The** ultimate **purpose of habits** is **to solve** the problems of life with as little energy and effort as possible. The Four Laws of Behavior Change are a simple set of rules we can use to build better habits. They are (1) make it obvious, (2) make it attractive, (3) make it easy, and (4) make it satisfying." (Atomic Habits by James Clear.pdf.pdf - Google Drive)

(„Un obicei este **un comportament care a fost repetat** de suficiente ori încât **să devină automat**. **Scopul** fundamental **al obiceiurilor** este **să rezolve problemele** de viață cu un minimum efort de energie. Cele Patru Legi ale Schimbării Comportamentale reprezintă un set de reguli simple, pe care îl putem utiliza în formarea unui obicei pozitiv, după cum urmează: **indiciul trebuie** să fie vizibil; acţiunea trebuie să fie atractivă; acţiunea trebuie să fie uşor de executat; **acţiunea** trebuie **să ofere satisfacţie**." (Clear 2019: 57)

Level C1

"Although it was her first time in Paris, **the city knew her**. It desired her. It welcomed her tenderly into its embrace. Like an old lover who never forgets. [...]

Slowly, he carried this thirty-five-year-old woman through its streets, as if she were fresh blood.

Over the cobblestones – which smoothed out so as not to hurt her feet.

Through the cafés – which vied with one another to brew enchanted potions.

Through **museums** – **which were decked out in their** festive **finery**.

Through the parks – which had urgently called their lime trees to work.

There were millions of people around, but on that day **Paris lived only for her**. For this tormented woman, who had come here **to start a new life.** A life which, for the time being, **she could** only **see** in her dreams."

(„Deşi era la Paris pentru prima dată, **oraşul o cunoştea**. O dorea. O primea, tandru, la braţul său. Ca un amant vechi, care nu uită. [...] Încet, el o purtă pe această femeie de treizeci şi cinci de ani prin arterele sale, ca pe un sânge tânăr. Pe caldarâmuri - care se nivelau, ca să nu-i rănească picioarele. Prin cafenele - care se întreceau la fiert licori fermecate. Prin **muzee - care se îmbrăcau în straie** de sărbătoare. Prin parcuri - care şi-au chemat urgent teii la serviciu. În jur erau milioane de oameni, dar în acea zi **Parisul trăia doar pentru ea**. Pentru această femeie chinuită, venită aici **să înceapă o viaţă nouă.** O viaţă pe care, deocamdată, **o vedea** doar în vise.”) (Ţîbuleac 2021: 105–106)

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Assimilation of the enclitic definite article at the A1 level (N-Ac forms). Statistical data and observations

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Abstract: *Assimilation of the enclitic definite article at A1 level (N-Ac forms). Statistical data and observations.* The study aims to highlight the aspects that make it difficult for non-native speakers/foreign students to assimilate the Romanian definite article. In order to do this, we looked at the way students assimilate the N-Ac forms of the definite article focusing on the key-elements that are stressed in the teaching-learning process: the position of the article, the articulation type and the contexts which require definite articulation.

Keywords: *Romanian as a foreign language, definite article, noun, preposition, verb, rules, statistical data.*

1. Introduction

In Romanian linguistics, the enclitic definite article is one of the most controversial structures, sparking debate at all levels of the language: phonetic, morphological, syntactic, lexical, pragmatic, and stylistic. Diachronic disputes are compounded by synchronic issues concerning grammatical meanings. Thus, several theories currently circulate regarding the morphosyntactic interpretations of the Romanian definite article.

The differences of opinion regarding the enclitic article found in the scholarly works of Romanian researchers disappear when this linguistic unit or subunit is taught to non-native speakers. Therefore, in the teaching process, the teacher of Romanian as a foreign language (RFL) will focus not on the controversies in the specialized literature, but on the elements that facilitate the assimilation of the article by foreign students, which according to RFL works[1], are three in number: the position of the article, the manner of articulation, and situations or rules of usage.

Given that there are several theoretical studies on the teaching of the article[2], we set out to conduct a practical study aimed at highlighting the factors that hinder the acquisition of the linguistic unit mentioned in the title. To this end, we analyzed a corpus of texts comprising the written works of 126 students of various nationalities. The texts represent the students' responses to various tasks from the A1 final exam[3] (describing a person, describing a room, or writing a letter) between 2013 and 2016. In our study, we examined how students acquired the nominative-accusative (N-Ac) forms of the enclitic definite article, focusing on the three elements emphasized in RFL courses: the position of the article, the manner of articulation, and the situations or rules of usage.

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[1] Pop, Moldovan 1997; Iliescu 2002; Vrăjitoru 2003; Kohn 2009; Platon, Sonea, Vîlcu, 2012; Dafinoiu, Pascale 2015.

[2] Căpățână 1978: 86-95; Florea 1983: 154-199; Iliescu 2005: 214-220.

[3] We would like to note that the students whose written work we analyzed studied within an institutional setting, specifically at the Faculty of Letters, Babeș-Bolyai University (UBB), Cluj-Napoca, under professors from the Department of Romanian Language, Culture, and Civilization. We also note that the primary textbook used for instruction at the lower levels (A1–A2) is Elena Platon, Ioana Sonea, and Dina Vîlcu, Manual de limba română ca limbă străină (RLS) (A1–A2), Cluj-Napoca, Casa Cărții de Știință, 2012. After completing each level of language proficiency, students take a level-specific exam, and these exams are aligned with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) and are ALTE-accredited.

2. The position/topic

Unlike other languages, including English, the Romanian definite article is individualized by its position; that is, it is placed after the noun and fused with it. Even though this aspect generates multiple controversies among linguists, we have observed that the enclitic position of the definite article relative to the noun does not cause problems for foreigners learning Romanian; thus, in students' written work, we have not encountered even a single instance in which the enclitic definite article precedes the noun, following the pattern found in languages with a proclitic definite article (for example, we have not encountered a segmentation like: **ul băiat*, **a fată*).

3. Mode of articulation

In addition to being enclitic, the Romanian definite article has several distinctive features regarding how it attaches to the noun, since enclisis can be achieved simply by agglutination (for masculine singular nouns ending in *-e*: *fratele*, *peretele*, etc.; for masculine plural nouns: *frații*, *cartofii*; for feminine plural nouns: *femeile*, *doamnele*, etc.; for some feminine singular nouns ending in *-e*: *vulpea*, *învățătoarea*, etc.; for neuter singular nouns ending in *-e*: *numele*, *prenumele*; for neuter plural nouns: *vinurile*, *tablourile*, etc.; for masculine and neuter singular nouns ending in *-u*: *metrul*, *teatrul*, etc.), through agglutination and the addition of the linking vowel *-u-* (for masculine and neuter singular nouns ending in consonants or vowels other than *-u* or *-e*: *băiatul*, *radioul*, etc.), by substituting the number and case ending (for feminine/masculine nouns ending in *-ă*: *mama*, *tata*, etc., for some feminine nouns in the singular ending in *-e*: *femeia*, *cheia*, etc.).

Although there are several ways to conjugate the definite article, in the corpus of texts written by A1-level foreign students that we examined, there were only four nouns for which the article and its mode of articulation were incorrect (**numa*, **tatăle*, **cursiurle*, **fratul*). In the first example, both the article and the mode of articulation were incorrect, so the desinence was substituted instead of adding the article *-le*; in the second example, the article was incorrect, and therefore, instead of *-l*, *-le* was added; in the third example, the number and case desinence *-i* was replace with the definite article *-le*, a situation in which the simple addition of the article *-le* was required, and in the last example, both the article and the mode of articulation were incorrect, so that, instead of the agglutination of the article *-le*, the linking vowel *-u-* and the article *-l* were added.

We believe that the almost complete acquisition of the way nouns are articulated can be explained by the fact that students used nouns in their written messages that had been repeated many times in class (e.g., *orașul*, *camera*, *parcul*, *prietenii*, *familia*, *cantina*, *facultatea*, *părul*, *ochii* etc.).

4. Situations of using the article: rules of articulation vs. non-articulation

Perhaps the most problematic aspect of the definite article when it comes to assimilation by a foreign student is the situations of use, namely when a noun is articulated and when not. The definitions of the article provided by Romanian grammar books, which are based on the known–unknown dichotomy, are not helpful to non-native speakers, at least not at the A1 level; for this reason, some textbooks, grammar guides, or courses dedicated to Romanian as a foreign language (RFL) offer specific rules for using the article, which aid its acquisition. Since the analysis we are conducting is based on the written work of students who studied using the *Manualul de limba română ca limbă străină (RLS)*, *A1-A2*, by authors Elena Platon, Ioana Sonea, and Dina Vîlcu, in our study, to observe how and when the enclitic definite article is used, we took into account the rules found in this textbook, which we supplemented with several rules derived from students' recurrent usage. According to these, we listed the situations in which the definite article is used correctly or incorrectly, noting that, inevitably, we also had to consider indefinite or unarticulated nouns.

Therefore, in our research, we examined how foreign students acquired the definite article in Romanian, based on the following rules:

A. Mandatory use of the enclitic definite article

(1) subject of the sentence

(2) *amândoi/amândouă* 'both' + noun

(3) *tot/toată/toți/toate* 'all' + noun

(4) the verb *a-i plăcea* 'to like' + noun

(5) cu 'with' + means of transportation/tools in general

(6) preposition + noun + determiner

After reviewing the corpus of texts, we observed that students correctly use the definite article with nouns even in structures not explicitly listed as rules in the cited textbook (Platon, Sonea, Vîlcu 2012). The correct use of the article in such cases can be explained by the fact that the teachers either wrote the rules on the board or repeated them so often that the students learned the structures as fixed phrases:

(7) noun + possessive/possessor

(8) noun + number

(9) noun + proper noun

B. Prohibitive use of the enclitic definite article

(1) *mult/puțin* 'a lot of/ a little bit' + noun

(2) cât/câtă/câți/câte 'how many' + noun

(3) number + noun

(4) fiecare 'each' + noun

(5) preposition + noun

To these rules, we have added the following three:

(6) noun in the vocative case (without a determiner)

(7) a fi 'to be'+ noun without a determiner

(8) indefinite article + noun

The rules listed below will appear in each table header in section 5, following a predetermined order:

- the absence of the definite article in situations where the rule requires it;
- the addition of the definite article in situations where the context excludes it;

- the presence of the definite article in situations where the rule requires it (= correct use of the definite article);
- the absence of the definite article in situations where the context excludes it (= use of the zero article/indefinite article).

We would like to note that we have not included unclear, illegible, or out-of-context constructions in our inventory (e.g., **Eu merg la frumos loc pentru exampie gardina piatra*; **Profesie ingineria biomedica universitatea*), structures referring to temporary units when they function as adverbs of time (*iarna, vara, dimineața*), constructions outside the mentioned rules, and structures where both the presence and absence of the definite article are acceptable (in the case of the direct object: *pregătesc mâncare/mâncarea*; *spăl haine/hainele*).

5. Statistical data on the use/non-use of the definite article by foreign students at the A1 level, according to the given rules

5.1. The absence of the definite article in situations where the rule requires it

Table 1.

native language↓/ rules →	subject of the sentence	*amândoi* + noun	*tot* + noun	*a-i plăcea* + noun	*cu* + means of transportation/ tools in general	preposition + noun + determiner	noun + possessive/ possessor	noun + number	noun + proper noun
Arabic (49)	9	0	7	20	1	29	24	11	5
Albanian (18)	3	0	3	5	0	8	4	0	4
Asian (14)	1	0	4	2	0	2	3	0	0
Spanish (8)	0	0	0	0	2	1	2	3	0
Italian (7)	0	0	0	1	0	15	1	0	0
French (7)	1	0	0	2	0	5	4	0	0
African (6)	0	0	1	1	1	4	3	0	0

native language↓/ rules →	subject of the sentence	*amândoi* + noun	*tot* + noun	*a-i plăcea* + noun	*cu* + means of transportation/ tools in general	preposition + noun + determiner	noun + possessive/ possessor	noun + number	noun + proper noun
Hungarian (1)	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0
Hindi (1)	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Greek (3)	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
Turkish (1)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
German (1)	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	0
Bulgarian (1)	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
Polish (1)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Armenian (1)	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Ukrainian (2)	0	0	0	1	0	2	1	0	0
Turkmen (1)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Kazakh (1)	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
English (1)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Kurdish (1)	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0
Slovak (1)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

5.2 The addition of the definite article in situations where the context excludes it

Table 2.

native language↓/ rules →	*mult/puțin* + noun	*cât* + noun	*number* + noun	*fiecare* + noun	preposition + noun	noun in the vocative case	a fi + noun without a determiner	indefinite article + noun
Arabic (49)	4	0	10	2	51	8	0	12
Albanian (18)	0	0	2	1	22	1	3	1
Asian (14)	0	0	1	1	10	6	2	0
Spanish (8)	2	0	0	0	5	1	0	2
Italian (7)	0	0	1	0	12	3	4	4
French (7)	3	0	1	1	7	0	0	4
African (6)	0	0	2	0	1	1	1	0
Hungarian (1)	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0
Hindi (1)	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0
Greek (3)	0	0	0	0	1	2	0	0
Turkish (1)	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0
German (1)	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0
Bulgarian (1)	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0
Polish (1)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Armenian (1)	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Ukrainian (2)	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
Turkmen (1)	0	0	0	0	2	0	1	0
Kazakh (1)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
English (1)	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0
Kurdish (1)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Slovak (1)	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0

5.3. The presence of the definite article in situations where the rule requires it (= correct use of the definite article)

Table 3.

native language↓/ rules →	subject of the sentence	*amândoi* + noun	*tot* + noun	*a-i plăcea* + noun	*cu* + means of transportation/tools in general	preposition + noun + determiner	noun + possessive/possessor	noun + number	noun + proper noun
Arabic (49)	31	0	6	20	10	45	59	76	6
Albanian (18)	5	0	2	6	4	36	14	44	1
Asian (14)	9	0	0	7	2	27	11	26	0
Spanish (8)	8	0	1	0	0	11	6	12	1
Italian (7)	1	0	1	4	0	6	12	4	0
French (7)	9	0	1	1	0	11	4	4	0
African (6)	6	0	0	5	2	8	0	14	1
Hungarian (1)	0	0	0	0	0	1	3	0	0
Hindi (1)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Greek (3)	2	0	0	0	0	3	3	2	0
Turkish (1)	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
German (1)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Bulgarian (1)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0
Polish (1)	1	0	0	1	0	2	2	1	0
Armenian (1)	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	4	0
Ukrainian (2)	0	0	1	3	0	3	5	3	1
Turkmen (1)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Kazakh (1)	1	0	0	0	0	2	0	2	0
English (1)	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	1	0
Kurdish (1)	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0
Slovak (1)	3	0	0	2	0	2	0	0	0

5.4. The absence of the definite article in situations where the context excludes it (= use of the zero article/indefinite article)

Table 4.

native language↓/ rules →	*mult/puțin* + noun	*cât* + noun	*number* + noun	*fiecare* + noun	preposition + noun	noun in the vocative case	a fi + noun without a determiner	indefinite article + noun
Arabic (49)	16	0	74	38	208	4	31	113
Albanian (18)	4	0	21	8	52	2	14	46
Asian (14)	7	0	17	11	83	0	6	39
Spanish (8)	6	0	5	8	134	1	4	21
Italian (7)	2	0	4	3	12	0	2	11
French (7)	5	0	10	2	32	0	2	29
African (6)	2	0	7	5	18	0	4	5
Hungarian (1)	0	0	0	3	2	0	0	1
Hindi (1)	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Greek (3)	2	0	4	2	5	2	2	4
Turkish (1)	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
German (1)	0	0	1	1	3	0	0	1
Bulgarian (1)	0	0	1	0	3	2	0	4
Polish (1)	0	0	2	1	5	1	1	2
Armenian (1)	0	0	3	0	2	0	1	0
Ukrainian (2)	0	0	5	1	15	0	2	3
Turkmen (1)	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	1
Kazakh (1)	0	0	1	0	2	0	0	1
English (1)	3	0	2	0	8	0	0	7
Kurdish (1)	0	0	0	0	2	1	0	11
Slovak (1)	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	5

6. Remarks on statistical data

To summarize, after reviewing the situations in which the rule requires the use of the definite article, we have the following information:

Table 5.

The absence of the definite article in situations where the rule requires it (line 1) vs. the presence of the definite article in situations where the rule requires it (line 2)								
subject of the sentence	*amândoi* + noun	*tot* + noun	*a-i plăcea* + noun	*cu* + means of transportation/ tools in general	preposition + noun + determiner	noun + possessive/ possessor	noun + number	noun + proper noun
17 (18%)	0	16 (55%)	32 (39%)	4 (18%)	73 (31%)	44 (27%)	14 (7%)	9 (47%)
77 (82%)	0	13 (45%)	51 (61%)	18 (82%)	160 (69%)	119 (73%)	198 (93%)	10 (53%)

Regarding the mandatory use of the enclitic definite article, we have observed that:

(1) The subject noun is correctly articulated especially when it is followed by a determiner (e.g., *mâncarea tradițională*), while in all situations where the article has been omitted, the subject does not have a subordinate word.

(2) The phrase *amândoi/amândouă* + noun was not used at all by the students, which is why I was unable to determine whether or not they had internalized the rule.

(3) To our surprise, in more than half of the instances, the noun preceded by the universal quantifiers *tot/toată/toți/toate* was left unarticulated, contrary to the rule.

(4) Despite extensive practice and use in class, in approximately 40% of cases, the unipersonal intransitive verb *a-i plăcea* is followed by an unarticulated noun; most likely, students are unable to move beyond the comparison with English, where the rule dictates the absence of an article.

Added to this is the complexity of the cognitive processes involved when this verb is used in Romanian: the dative pronoun, the verb form depending on the singular/plural of the following noun + the definite article.

(5) Unlike other intra-sentential connectives, which, in the absence of a subordinate term, impose a restriction on articulation, the preposition cu is unruly because, in certain contexts (*cu* + means of transportation/instruments in general), it requires the articulation of the noun. Even though students most often articulated the nouns in such structures correctly, we encountered cases (which we did not include in the inventory) in which the preposition in question was followed by a sociative circumstantial, a situation in which the noun remained unarticulated (*eu cu prieteni mă uit la televizor*, *fac plimbare cu colegi*, *preferă să stea cu prieteni*, *merg cu prietene/cu prieteni/cu familie*). Therefore, we believe it would be opportune for the rule *cu* + means of transport/tools in general to be supplemented by *cu* + association (nouns expressing association: *merg cu pisica/câinele/mama/bunicul/colega* etc.).

(6) Although the rule is clear – that a noun accompanied by a preposition and followed by a subordinate element is articulated – students often make mistakes (31% of instances), and we believe this is due to the rule prohibiting the use of the article in constructions of the type preposition + noun. In this situation, one way to help students use this rule correctly is to have them practice comparing groups consisting of preposition + noun vs. preposition + noun + determiner, with an emphasis on the difference between unarticulated and articulated forms.

(7) The rule regarding the use of an articulated noun followed by a possessive adjective is generally applied correctly (in 73% of instances), and the number of errors (27%) is not excessively high, given that the possessive pronoun is taught toward the end of the level.

(8) The noun + number construction is successfully assimilated in 93% of cases, even though we have not found a formal rule for it. This can be explained by the frequent use in class of structures such as *ora* + number, *căminul* + number, *etajul* + number; in other words, students have internalized them as given constructions.

(9) The phrase noun + proper noun occurs approximately 20 times, but in half of these cases it is used incorrectly, with an unarticulated determiner (e.g., **Grădină Botanică*, **cămin Hașdeu*, **stradă Buzău*, **oraș Cluj-Napoca*), which is why we suggest including this rule in the course.

To summarize, after reviewing the situations in which the rule prohibits the use of the definite article, we have the following information:

Table 6.

The addition of the definite article in situations where the context excludes it (line 1) vs. the absence of the definite article in situations where the context excludes it (= use of the zero article) (line 2)							
mult/puțin + noun	*cât* + noun	*number* + noun	*fiecare* + noun	preposition + noun	noun in the vocative case	*a fi* + noun without a determiner	indefinite article + noun
9 (16%)	0	17 (10%)	5 (6%)	121 (17%)	25 (66%)	14 (17%)	25 (8%)
48 (84%)	0	161 (90%)	84 (94%)	587 (83%)	13 (34%)	70 (83%)	304 (92%)

With regard to the improper use of the enclitic definite article, we have found that:

(1) In most cases – 84%, to be precise – the noun preceded by the existential quantifiers *mult* 'a lot of' and *puțin* 'a little bit' remained unarticulated.

(2) The phrase *cât* 'how many' + unarticulated noun was not used at all by the students, which is why I was unable to determine whether or not they had internalized the rule.

(3) In only 10% of the situations, the students articulated the noun preceded by a numeral with adjectival value, the mistake being doubled, sometimes, by the failure to recognize the plural (e.g.: **doua fiica*, **doua ora*, **trei colegii*, **trei prietenii*).

(4) The rule fiecare 'each' + unarticulated noun was very well mastered by the students, so that in only five cases the noun preceded by the distributive quantifier was articulated definite. This is due to the intensive use of structures such as: *fiecare student*, *fiecare persoană*, (*în*) *fiecare an/zi/săptămână* etc.

(5) The rule that a preposition must be followed by an unarticulated enclitic noun is violated in 17% of cases, most likely due to the influence of English or the speaker's native language (see, for example, French, where nouns with prepositions are followed by the definite article).

We note, however, that articulation restrictions, even when there is no subordinate term, also depend on the semantic characteristics of the head noun, which, if "its semantics are close to that of the proper noun" (GBLR 2010: 325), is articulated (e.g., *Merg la bunica*.; *Stau lângă bunicul*.; *Lucrez pentru mama/tata*), a fact that should be mentioned in classes (at least in those for advanced levels).

(6) In most of their early letter-writing attempts, students retain the articulated form of the noun, even when the noun is in the vocative case and, therefore, is not articulated (e.g., **dragă mama*, **dragă tata*, **dragă prietena*, **dragă familia*). Although the excessive use of metalanguage is avoided in classes (we do not mention the existence of the vocative case, at least not at the A1 level), it might be advisable to establish a rule requiring the noun to remain unarticulated in direct address.

(7) In the students' writings, several occurrences of the type *a fi* 'to be'+ noun (predicative noun) without a determiner were recorded. In 83% of the cases, the unarticulated form of the noun was used correctly, because the construction was appropriated as a type-form. To help the student, we propose the formulation of a rule of the type *a fi* + name of profession without a definite article (e.g. *El este inginer/doctor/profesor/ recepționer*).

(8) In a few instances (8%), the noun was accompanied by both the definite and indefinite articles at the same time. For this reason, we believe that the following should be added to the list of rules prohibiting the use of the definite article: indefinite article + noun.

In conclusion, it can be said that, with few exceptions, the definite article is well mastered by foreign students. However, to maximize students' results in terms of learning Romanian in general, and assimilating the definite article in particular, these statistical data – which show the frequency of contexts in which the article is used and the degree to which the rules have been assimilated – could be taken into account in the future. If the inventory of rules is considered too extensive for the A1 level, a division could be made, with a decision on what belongs to A1 and what belongs to A2, what is too difficult for A1, and what should be included in A2.

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Compensatory Strategies in Romanian as a Second Language (RL2) at A2–B1 Levels

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Abstract: *Compensatory Strategies in Romanian as a Second Language (RL2) at A2–B1 Levels.* This article delves into the compensatory strategies used by learners of Romanian as a second language (L2) through a detailed analysis of a corpus comprising oral storytelling productions based on visual prompts, including the classic "frog stories". By examining these narratives, the study offers a nuanced portrait of L2 Romanian users, revealing the creativity and adaptability inherent in their language use. The analysis uncovers a range of strategies, both linguistic and rooted in universal cognitive mechanisms, such as paraphrasing and lexical substitutions. The empirical insights gained from this corpus provide a deeper understanding of the dynamic interplay between language proficiency and compensatory strategies, offering valuable implications for language teaching and curriculum development.

Keywords: *compensatory strategies, paraphrasing, lexical substitutions, approximation, circumlocution, generalization*

1. Introduction and Theoretical Background

An important piece of the puzzle that makes up the portrait of (non-)native speakers is the way in which they draw on communicative strategies. The multitude of classifications of communication strategies and the numerous specialist studies in the field of foreign languages attest to the importance of strategic competence in the communicative process. We mention here only a few names associated with this aspect of communicative competence. Elaine Tarone highlights the social dimension of communication, emphasising that participants in interaction use strategies in attempting to overcome the lack of shared understanding. For Tarone, communication strategies are divided into: (1) paraphrase-type strategies, based on the target language (L2), or, we might say, on the interlanguage, such as approximation, word coinage, and circumlocution; (2) strategies that are not based on L2, but on the first language (L1) or on gestures – literal translations, direct borrowings, appeals for assistance, and recourse to mime; and (3) avoidance strategies (Tarone 1980, apud Cook 2009: 107, 112). Bialystok separates knowledge-based strategies (activated to adjust the message in L2) from control-based strategies (used to preserve the original meaning of the message through expressive means that go beyond L2). Analysing their effectiveness, the author shows that coinages are generally better understood by interlocutors than approximations, circumlocutions, or direct borrowings, although circumlocution remains the most frequently used (Bialystok 1990, apud Cook 2009: 107). Faerch and Kasper propose a psychological approach to communicative strategies, dividing them into avoidance strategies and achievement strategies, the latter being further subdivided into non-cooperative and cooperative. In addition, they also propose the category of interlanguage strategies, such as substitution, generalisation, description, exemplification, word invention, and utterance restructuring (Faerch, Kasper 1984, apud Cook 2009: 109–110).[1]

Naturally, communication strategies, as an integral part of communicative competence, receive adequate attention and recognition in the *Cadrul European Comun de Referință pentru Limbi* (CECRL 2003) (*Common European Framework of Reference for Languages*, CEFR), and subsequently in its companion document, the *Companion Volume* (CV 2020). From a metacognitive perspective, these are classified into strategies

[1] For a diachronic overview of the classification and naming of communication strategies, see Vasiu 2020: 73–117; Platon 2021: 311–316.

of (1) planning, (2) execution, (3) monitoring and remediation, and, from a linguistic standpoint, into strategies of (1) reception, (2) production, (3) interaction, and (4) mediation (CECRL 2003: 53, 58, 64, 73, 75).

Turning attention to the Romanian context, it can be observed that interest in communicative strategies remains relatively limited. The *Descrierea minimală a limbii române* (*Minimal Description of Romanian*), the document that aims to detail the CECRL levels by adding linguistic content for Romanian as a foreign/non-native language (RL2), includes repair acts in the section concerning communicative functions (Platon *et alii* 2023). These partially overlap with communicative strategies, through the functions they address: signalling misunderstanding, requesting repetition or clarification, approximation, and self-correction. Some of the descriptors from the CECRL, CV, and *Descrierea minimală a limbii române* (*Minimal Description of Romanian*) concerning communicative strategies are used in the development of specifications for standardised RL2 assessment. Thus, both ALTE Q-mark examinations[2] (B1, B2 levels) and examinations without the Q-mark but complying with ALTE standards (A1 and A2 levels) track certain compensatory strategies in evaluating oral production and interaction skills. For instance, at B1 level, the use of circumlocution, signalling misunderstanding, requesting clarification, and exemplification are monitored, while at A2, signalling misunderstanding and requesting repetition and clarification are mentioned. Although the relevance of communicative strategies in sustaining interaction is thereby acknowledged, we consider that, without the elaboration of concrete forms of realisation – an elaboration grounded in empirical studies – the assessment of strategic competence risks remaining incomplete and failing to capture the actual behaviour of non-native speakers (NNS).

[2] It concerns the Q-mark quality label awarded by the Association of Language Testers in Europe (ALTE), a European association of foreign language test providers dedicated to establishing quality standards, promoting fair assessment of language proficiency, and developing the common Q-Mark framework, built on CECRL levels and "can-do" descriptors. For more details about ALTE, see https://alte.org/. For more details about tests accredited for RL2, see https://roexam.com.

An empirical inventory of communication strategies in RL2 at A1 level was proposed by Vasiu (2020) and subsequently supplemented by analyses of smaller corpora of oral or written productions (Șinca 2024). For higher levels, the existing references for Romanian are limited to the descriptors provided by the CECRL and CV. We consider, however, that the results of corpus-based studies can lead to a more detailed and nuanced description of RL2. Given that the productions comprising our corpus consist of the oral responses of NNS participants to the task of narrating three stories based on images (*frog stories*), our analysis focuses on compensatory strategies. In this sense, the present study aims to contribute to the characterisation of A2 and B1 levels from the perspective of communication strategies.

We adopt, as our starting point, the perspective from CECRL 2020: 53 and understand by compensatory strategies (or compensation strategies) those procedures through which speakers attempt to maintain the fluency and intelligibility of discourse in the absence of adequate linguistic resources, drawing on either verbal means (definition, paraphrasing, use of an approximate term) or paralinguistic or multimodal means (gestures, facial expression). In our analysis, we will focus on the following types of strategies identified in the corpus:

(1) **circumlocution** – explaining or describing an inaccessible word through a descriptive sequence that activates semantic features of the referent: *an object used for carrying water*, for *bucket*;

(2) **approximation** – replacing the target term with a word from the same semantic field, perceived as close enough to ensure comprehension: *pool* for *lake*;

(3) **use of general words** – resorting to words with vague or very broad meaning, which substitute a more specific lexical item inaccessible to the speaker: *he goes to the river because he has this*;

(4) **word coinage** – the spontaneous formation of non-existent lexical units in L2, generally based on morphological patterns known to the speaker – *cântător* for *cântăreț* [singer], *frată* for *soră* [sister];

(5) **literal translations** – the direct transfer of structures or expressions from L1, without adaptation to Romanian usage – *la restaurant ei au un timp bun*, after Eng. *to have a good time*;

(6) **Romanianisation** (foreignisation) – phonetic or morphological adaptation of lexemes from other languages to the Romanian system: *boatul*, from Eng. *boat*, for *barcă* [boat]; *o pusetă*, after Fr. *poussette*, for *cărucior* [pushchair/pram];

(7) **direct borrowings (transfer)** – the unmodified use of a word from another language, as a temporary solution to a lexical gap: *cuando* (Sp.) for *când* [when];

(8) **appeals for assistance** – an explicit metalinguistic strategy through which the speaker signals the difficulty encountered and requests support from the interlocutor: *I don't know what it is / how to say it… I forgot!*.

2. Corpus Description. Methodology

The corpus analysed[3] for the identification of compensatory strategies consists of oral productions by international students enrolled in the 2023–2024 academic year at the Faculty of Letters, Babeș-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca, in the Preparatory Year of Romanian language.

For the compilation of the corpus, 21 students were interviewed, aged between 17 and 38, coming from 12 different countries. They spoke 9 distinct first languages (French, Spanish, Arabic, Turkish, Farsi, Ukrainian, German, Bulgarian, and Burmese), but all were also proficient in English.

Each student participated in three recording sessions, held at approximately two-month intervals, starting from the end of January (after the completion of courses and the sitting of A2-level examinations)

[3] The same corpus was also described and analyzed in Bocoș, Vasiu 2025: 42, from the perspective of the use of the subjunctive, and in Tărău et alii 2025: 83–84, in order to identify markers of story grammar.

and up until the end of May (after the completion of the study programme). In each session, students carried out oral storytelling tasks based on the illustrated books from the *Frog Stories* series by Mercer Mayer (Mayer 1967; Mayer 1973; Mayer 1974). The selection and ordering of the materials presented to the study participants took into account a number of criteria, including: the degree of narrative complexity, the types of lexico-grammatical structures and communicative functions involved, all assessed relative to the participants' level of linguistic competence.

The use of narrative productions based on visual stimuli is common in language acquisition research (L1 and L2), as it provides a relatively standardised framework for investigating intra- and inter-level linguistic progress with regard to lexico-grammatical complexity and accuracy, discourse organisation (e.g., the use of connectors), fluency, or communication strategies (Bamberg 1987; Berman, Slobin 1994; Strömqvist, Verhoeven 2004).

Recordings were manually transcribed according to standard conventions in the field (Dascălu-Jinga 2002: 34–41). Data analysis was based on mixed methodologies combining quantitative and qualitative approaches (Dörnyei 2007: 30–47). Quantitative analysis enabled the identification of the types of compensatory strategies used by participants and their frequency according to level of linguistic competence. Qualitative analysis highlighted the difficulties encountered in oral production at different levels of competence (A2+, B1), while also providing a basis for formulating observations on the teaching and assessment of communicative strategies in RL2, as well as on the interlanguage characteristics of the speakers.

3. Data Analysis

The table below inventories the types of compensatory strategies used by participants in each of the three stories (S1, S2, S3), corresponding to the chronological order of the recordings. For the 21 participants, a total of 619 occurrences were recorded, with a mean of 29.47 occurrences/subject.

Strategy	S1	S2	S3
Circumlocution	27	55	38
Approximation	56	100	92
General words	6	8	10
Word Coinage	5	16	10
Literal translations	9	18	6
Romanianisation (foreignisation)	5	5	14
Transfer	32	31	15
Appeals for assistance	9	36	16
Total strategies	**149**	**269**	**201**

Fig. 1. Inventory of Compensatory Strategies

The data analysis indicates that in S1, participants drew relatively infrequently on compensatory strategies to maintain fluency and intelligibility of discourse (149 occurrences). At this level of linguistic competence (A2+), the tendency to resort to avoidance strategies – which are not the subject of the present study – is more clearly visible than in subsequent stages. In S2, the number of occurrences increases significantly, nearly doubling, while in S3 a decrease is recorded, correlated with the consolidation of linguistic competence in RL2.

Approximation, circumlocution, appeals for assistance, literal translations, and coinages follow the overall trend described above. In the case of transfer, a progressive decrease is observed – discreet between S1 and S2, but more pronounced in S3. General words and Romanianisation (foreignisation), though less well represented in the corpus, follow a different trajectory, showing a steady increase from S1 to S3.

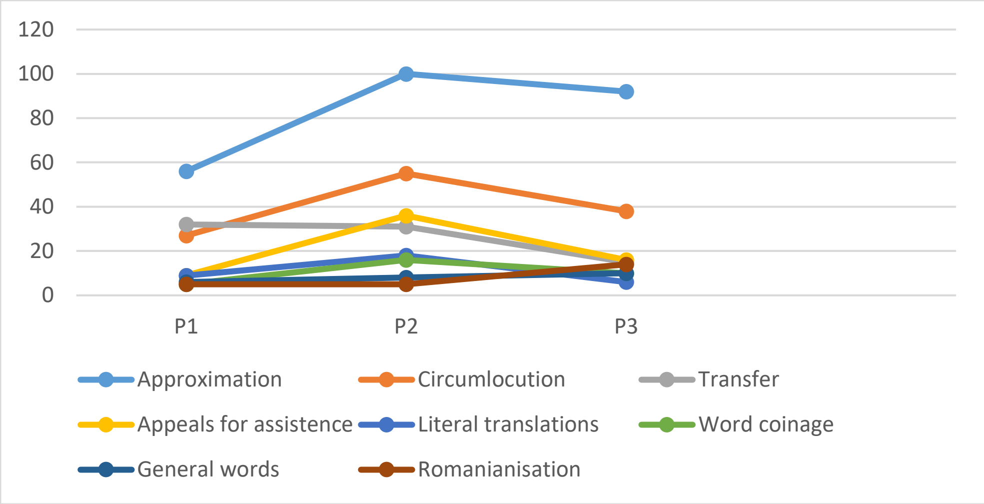

Fig. 2. Frequency of compensatory strategies from S1 to S3

The typological analysis at the global level highlights the participants' preference for intra-linguistic strategies, suggesting that speakers tend to rely increasingly on the resources of the target language. In this regard, approximation and circumlocution record the highest number of occurrences in the corpus. On the other hand, inter-linguistic strategies, such as transfer and literal translations, are used to a lesser extent.

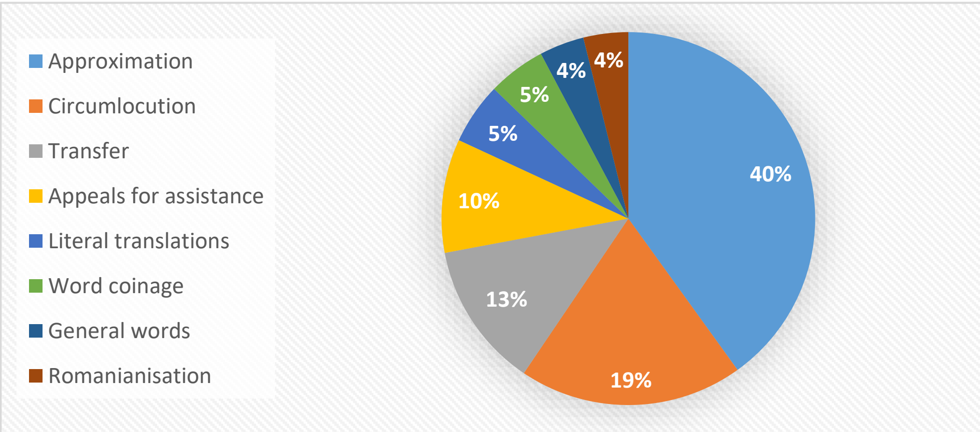

Fig. 3. Frequency of compensatory strategies at the global level

The analysis by native language reveals differences between speakers of Romance languages (RLS) and speakers of non-Romance languages (NRLS). RLS totalled 292 instances of compensatory strategy use, with a mean of 32.44 occurrences/subject – above the overall mean of 29.47 – while NRLS recorded 327 instances, with a mean of 27.25 occurrences/subject, below the overall mean.

Furthermore, several nuances specific to each group are noted: NRLS maintain the global trends regarding the evolution in the number of occurrences from S1 to S3, with the exception of Romanianisation (foreignisation), which is almost absent from their oral productions, and resort less to literal translations compared to RLS. RLS, in turn, maintain the global trend, with the exception of general words, which remain constant, and transfer, where no downward slope is observed.

Although the NRLS group is more numerous (12 out of the 21 participants), the data indicate a higher individual productivity among RLS. This difference can be interpreted through the lens of *linguistic proximity* between L1 and L2 (Ringbom 2007), as well as the concept of *psychotypology*, i.e. NNS perception of L1–L2 distance (Kellerman 1983).

In the case of RLS, lexical and morphosyntactic similarities with Romanian appear to facilitate the activation of L1 resources as a compensatory strategy, especially in the form of positive lexical transfer, where a mean of 6 occurrences/subject is recorded, compared to 2 occurrences/subject among NRLS. This proximity, both objective and perceived, contributes to legitimising transfer as an effective communicative solution.

By contrast, the greater distance between L1 and L2 in the case of NRLS is associated with a more restrained use of transfer and a stricter control of cross-linguistic influence, a tendency that becomes more evident at higher levels of competence. The corpus data confirm this orientation, with NRLS recording, in S3, a mean of 0.25 occurrences/ subject.

The analysis by age reveals a direct relationship between age and the frequency of strategy use. Participants under 20 years of age (6 subjects) recorded a mean of 24.33 occurrences/subject, below the overall mean of 29.47; those aged between 20 and 30 (9 subjects) showed a mean of 29.78 occurrences/subject, close to the overall mean; and participants between 30 and 40 years old (6 subjects) reached a mean of 34.17 occurrences/subject, above the overall mean. These data indicate that younger speakers use compensatory strategies less frequently, while their frequency increases with age, which may be attributed to broader linguistic experience and greater confidence in one's communicative resources among more mature participants. This observation is supported by the literature on compensatory strategies and individual variables in L2 acquisition, which demonstrates that personal factors, including age, can influence the frequency and typology of such strategies (Dörnyei 2007).

Although, in the CECRL, the compensation strategies captured in the A2 level descriptors appear to be limited to gestures, approximations, and the use of general words, the corpus analysis reveals that, at this level, NNS are far more creative and effective than that, employing all types of strategies identified in the corpus[4]. The same observations apply to B1 level, suggesting that the development of compensatory strategies may be more rapid than that anticipated by the CECRL descriptors. Likewise, other studies in the field of RL2 acquisition confirm this idea, indicating that NNS can use advanced communication strategies from lower levels of competence (Vasiu 2020: 145–153).

In this regard, the results of our analysis, once supported by broader corpora, could provide useful indications for a possible reconsideration of the CECRL descriptors, with a view to a more adequate reflection of learners' progress in the use of communication strategies at A2–B1 levels. A direct implication of such a perspective would concern the adjustment of assessment practices, so that oral productions including compensatory strategies are not automatically penalised, but rather interpreted as natural manifestations of the communicative competence characteristic of these levels.

[4] See above, ***Fig. 1. Inventory of compensatory strategies***.

Compensation	
C2	Can substitute an equivalent term for a word they can't recall, so smoothly that it is scarcely noticeable.
C1	As B2 +
B2	Can use circumlocution and paraphrase to cover gaps in vocabulary and structure.
B1	Can define the features of a concrete thing they can't think of the word for. Can convey meaning of a word by substituting a synonymous one (e.g., 'a passenger truck' for 'bus').
	Can use a simple word meaning something similar to the concept they want to convey and invite 'correction'. Can freignize a word from their mother tongue and ask for confirmation.
A2	Can use an inadequate word from their repertoire and use gestures or other non-verbal means to clarify what they want to say.
	Can indicate what they want by pointing (e.g., 'I'd like this, please').
A1	*No descriptor available.*

Fig. 4. Scale for compensation strategies (CECRL 2023: 59)

4. Compensatory Strategies and Problematic Vocabulary: Examples from the Corpus

To illustrate the use of compensatory strategies in the corpus, examples of approximation and circumlocution are presented, accompanied by the reconstructed meaning. These shed light on unknown lexical units and serve as a starting point for formulating pedagogical recommendations, by identifying problematic lexical areas.

Story 1

1. Examples of approximation:

a. the boy and the dog *fell* into the lake → *they went into the water; he was in the lake with the dog; the boy and dog hit the river;*
b. the boy wants *to catch* the frog → *he was picking butterflies; try to take frog; wants to bring this frog with him; tried to be with a frog; to collect*

the frog; to fish a frog; wants to touch the frog; looking for frog; to get a frog; to hold a frog;

c. *lake → we go to the pool; a frog in the bath, in the water.*

2. Examples of circumlocution:

a. they tripped and fell into the water → *both had an accident; there was a tree on the road and fell into the lake; fell down because there is a tree; was a problem for the boy; very fast legs nearby; ended up on the ground because didn't see a tree;*
b. fishing net → *an object used to catch insects, it's lighter, I don't know the name, and another object used to carry water; that thing you fish with; materials for looking for animals; a basket for collecting flowers; object for catching.*

Story 2

1. Examples of approximation:

a. the frog jumped → *escaped into a salad; escaped into a cup; flying on food; flying into a glass; the frog climbed onto the boy's clothes; climbed onto the plate; the frog went into a breakfast; went to the drink of a boy; fell into a glass; fell into a saxophone; collapsed into the saxophone; hit the leaf of the man;*
b. the frog/family left → *to leave outside; to leave from the pocket; to leave the restaurant.*

2. Examples of circumlocution:

a. the frog *hid* in *the jacket pocket → the frog goes into the boy's jacket; the frog was in a jacket; the frog jumps into a boy's clothing; the boy is not aware that the frog is with him; the frog hides in the boy's clothes; the frog was with him, but the boy didn't understand that the frog was in the pocket; the frog went into the pocket; the frog climbed onto his clothes;*
b. *upset / nervous / angry → his mother is not happy; his sister is a little happy about the situation; the boy was not happy; the family was not happy; his parents are not happy; all the people are not happy; everyone was not happy.*

Story 3

1. Examples of approximation:

a. the bee stung the frog in the tongue → *the bee ate her mouth; hit the tongue; the bee hits her; the bee hurt her; the bee bit her;*
b. the frog's tongue swelled up → *didn't feel well; painful tongue; her tongue hurt;*
c. pram / pushchair → *cart; the baby's bed;*
d. the frog jumps → *the frog changed its place; the frog flies;*
e. the frog clung to the woman's arm → *came to the arm; climbed onto the girl's hand; hugged her hand.*

2. Examples of circumlocution:

a. the frog jumped into the pram → *the frog jumped where the baby was; the frog got into the thing where you put a baby; for very small children; into a place where the baby is;*
b. sank → *the boat went under the water; the boat was completely in the water; is under the water and not on the water; a boat now was in a water;*
c. tortoise / turtle → *an animal that carries its house on its back;*
d. the frog's tongue swelled up → *Ooh! What a pity! It's hard for a frog!*

The most frequently unknown words for which participants resorted to compensatory strategies were: *to catch, to fall, bucket, fishing net, footprints, boots, to jump* (S1); *to jump, to hide, pocket, jacket, saxophone, drum, to kiss, upset/nervous/angry* (S2); and *pram/pushchair, to cling, to sting, to swell, to sink, to jump, to catch, nervous* (S3). These can be subsumed under semantic fields such as: (a) verbs of motion: *to jump, to fall, to catch, to hide, to cling, to sink*; (b) verbs expressing physiological processes or changes of state: *to swell*; (c) concrete everyday objects: *boots, jacket, pocket, pushchair/pram, bucket, fishing net*; (d) musical instruments: *drums, saxophone*; (e) affective vocabulary, predominantly negative: *upset, nervous, angry*.

It should be noted, however, that the use of compensatory strategies does not indicate a lack of lexical competence, but rather signals areas of lexical vulnerability, in which input and guided practice are insufficient. From this perspective, the data can contribute to a more effective prioritisation of vocabulary-related content and a more refined adaptation of teaching materials designed for A2–B1 levels.

Alongside the revision of materials and pedagogical approaches oriented towards the development of lexical competence, reflection is also required on the status of compensatory strategies in RL2 teaching. In the specialist literature, on the one hand, it has been argued that these strategies belong to the speaker's general communicative competence and do not require specific instruction, as they are transferable from L1 to L2 (Kellerman 1983) or are deployed in similar ways in both L1 and L2 (Poulisse 1990).

On the other hand, there are studies that highlight the positive effects of explicit instruction in compensatory strategies on L2 communication. Dörnyei (1995) showed that Hungarian students who received explicit instruction were able to overcome communicative blocks more effectively by describing inaccessible words, compared to a control group. These results indicate that the conscious integration of compensatory strategies in L2 courses can support the development of communicative competence, even if the strategies themselves are not learned from scratch.

Consequently, it is useful for foreign language teachers who seek to develop oral interaction competencies to be familiar with communicative strategies, particularly compensatory ones. These can support the maintenance of communication even in situations of lexical deficit and can be practised through specific activities, such as definition games or paraphrasing exercises, in which the emphasis is placed on developing the ability to manage communicative difficulties rather than on lexical acquisition per se.

5. Conclusions

The analysis of compensatory strategies used by RL2 speakers highlights several trends of descriptive, theoretical, and pedagogical relevance.

The data indicate a decrease in the frequency of compensatory strategies as the level of linguistic competence increases, an evolution that reflects the consolidation of lexical and morphosyntactic competence in RL2.

The use of strategies is also influenced by individual variables, particularly L1 and age. The differences between RLS and NRLS, as well as the direct relationship between age and strategy frequency, confirm widely accepted conclusions in the literature regarding the role of personal factors in L2 acquisition.

The results suggest that the teaching and assessment of RL2 may benefit from a perspective that takes into account the learners' plurilingual competence, in which linguistic transfer and code-switching are understood as legitimate communication strategies rather than as deviations from the norm. The data analysed in this study confirm that speakers do not compartmentalise their linguistic competences in the languages they speak into separate 'boxes', not even at higher levels of L2 competence; rather, they flexibly deploy their entire available linguistic repertoire in order to make themselves understood and to communicate effectively. In this sense, the influence of other languages and code-switching can be seen not as deviations, but as manifestations of plurilingual competence, and transfer can be interpreted as a legitimate compensatory strategy with a role in supporting communication.

Comparing the results with CECRL descriptors reveals that the development of compensatory strategies may be more rapid than anticipated. In this context, the study's findings can offer useful indications for a possible reconsideration of the CECRL descriptors relating to compensation strategies, with potential implications for assessment grids.

From a pedagogical perspective, the data suggest that compensatory strategies constitute an important component of communicative competence, indicating that their integration into teaching and practice activities may be beneficial. At the same time, the analysis of problematic vocabulary points to the need for the recurring treatment, at A2–B1 levels, of semantic fields such as verbs of motion, physiological processes, everyday objects, musical instruments, and affective vocabulary, suggesting that both input and guided practice can be systematically optimised.

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PART 4.

Materials, Texts, and Classroom Mediation

The Development of Lexical Competence in Romanian as a Second Language: An Analysis of Upper Secondary School Textbooks

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Abstract: *The Development of Lexical Competence in Romanian as a Second Language: An Analysis of Upper Secondary School Textbooks*[1]. This article investigates how vocabulary exercises in Romanian language textbooks intended for students in schools where instruction is conducted in minority languages contribute to the development of lexical competence. The analysis is based on two textbooks for 7th and 8th grades and employs a qualitative methodology focused on the typology of exercises, the degree of contextualization, and relevance to lexical acquisition. The results indicate a significant discrepancy between the two grade levels. The conclusions highlight the need to rethink lexical exercises from the perspective of foreign language teaching and the development of communicative competence.

Keywords: *lexical competence, Romanian as a second language, textbooks, vocabulary teaching, L2*

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1. Introduction

In the context of teaching Romanian as a foreign language (RLS) or a non-native language (RLNM) – in other words, in L2 instruction[2] – vocabulary is an essential component of communicative competence. By having access to as wide a range of words as, the non-native speaker gains autonomy both in terms of precision of expression and in terms of the adequate comprehension of written or oral texts belonging to different registers or curricular areas. However, as Elena Platon (2014: 6) rightly points out, it should not be overlooked that "the non-native speaker's lexical repertoire is, in general, the most difficult to measure and control." Thus, when we speak of the lexicon that is recognized or manipulated in the context of foreign language learning, we find ourselves from the outset on territory that is difficult to map.

If learning is accompanied by different, sometimes divergent goals, the complexity increases. From the perspective of students belonging to national minorities in Romania, we observe, for example, that vocabulary is not merely a simple tool for communication, but also a fundamental condition for accessing the academic content of various subjects studied and for social interaction.

From this perspective, examining how lexical competence is developed in the teaching of Romanian as a non-native language is justified by the interest in integrating these students into Romanian society. Given the communicative-functional and action-oriented approach proposed by the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFR 2001) or the *Companion Volume* (CV 2018)[3], or the applied approach[4] , which the 2017 National Curriculum adopts, the

[2] This overarching framework, which brings together RLS and RLNM, is proposed by Arieșan-Simion (2022: 23), who draws on the distinction made by Webb and Nation (2017: 50) between the mother tongue, foreign language, and second language.

[3] For a comparative analysis between the CEFR and the CV regarding descriptors of lexical competence, see Arieșan-Simion (2022: 43–47).

[4] According to the Curriculum 2017, the applied approach "refers to the didactic processing of content through the analysis of linguistic phenomena without theorizing, but with the use of terminology to structure/guide thinking and discourse

lexical component does not and should not represent an end in itself, as it is not taught and/or assessed in and of itself, in the form of lists or word banks that the student must memorize without ever putting them into practice. Rather, it serves as a support or tool in the development of other competencies, whether receptive or productive, oral or written. Nevertheless, the specific goal of acquiring a complex lexical repertoire, which would assist non-native speakers belonging to national minorities in their integration, prompts us to investigate more closely the tools and methods used in teaching RLNM.

RLS/RLNM textbooks play a central role in organizing the teaching process, serving as the primary formal resource used by teachers; for this reason, the lexical exercises they propose can directly influence the quality of vocabulary acquisition. In this context, the question arises as to what extent these exercises are designed appropriately to support the development of lexical competence in non-native speakers.

While things seem clearer in the case of RLS textbooks – given that teaching objectives are much more clearly defined and the goal is to achieve a specific level, usually B1-B2, within a defined timeframe – the same cannot be said for RLNM textbooks. For a long time, the objectives of the latter have had a dual purpose: one of acquiring/learning a language other than the mother tongue, and the other of preparing for the National Exam, since Romanian is the official language of the state and, therefore, an exam subject. Particularly important in this context is lexical selection, which should be based on "criteria such as *frequency*, *utility*, *productivity*, or *the derivational power* of a word, depending on which it was placed higher or lower on the scale of the four levels" (Platon 2014: 6).

Although the situation appears to be stabilizing with the publication of the latest curriculum (National Curriculum 2017) for national minorities and the subsequent alignment of textbooks with it, the path

about language (for example: the names of verb tenses are used without theorizing the concept). The use of terminology is based on the contextual practice of the concepts in question" (Curriculum 2017: 38).

toward standardizing textbooks in accordance with all best practices and an adapted methodology for teaching RLNM is still quite long[5] .

In this regard, this article aims to critically analyze, through qualitative research, the lexical exercises in two Romanian language textbooks for 7th grade (Hedwig 2020) and 8th grade (Maxim, Militar, Nemes, Bărbos 2020), used in Hungarian-language schools, from the perspective of their contribution to the development of lexical competence.

To ensure our approach leads to a point of reflection where we address the specific situation of RLNM textbooks in relation to both the national curriculum and their role as *stepping stones* on students' path to acquiring a non-native language, we will focus this article on two detailed analyses of the selected textbooks. We will consider their relevance to the development of both communicative competence and other competencies, whether productive or receptive. The conclusions arising from such a comparative approach will form the subject of the second part of the paper, dedicated to synthesis and critical analysis.

2. Textbook Analysis

We have chosen to base our argument on two textbooks, both published in 2020, thus reflecting the changes made to the school curriculum in 2017 with the aim of providing support tailored to the needs of non-native speakers. Both present a variety of exercises dedicated to vocabulary development, but the way they approach this component differs, as we will show below. Given that our goal is to reveal the philosophy behind the construction of the textbooks, particularly regarding vocabulary, we do not consider it relevant that the selected texts are intended for different grade levels (8th grade and 7th grade,

[5] It is commendable that the authors of *Romanian language* textbooks *for schools with Hungarian-language instruction* are usually also members of the working group that drafted the curriculum, which should, at least in theory, lend the textbooks greater coherence.

respectively). We will, of course, refer to the specifics of the grade level to interpret certain choices, where appropriate, but what interests us primarily is the authors' understanding of how lexical competence and, consequently, communicative competence can be developed among students belonging to national minorities, regardless of age.

2.1. Maxim, Militar, Nemes, Bărbos (2020)

2.1.1. General aspects of vocabulary exercises

Regarding the 8th-grade textbook published by Art-Klett, we observe that the lexical element is primarily addressed in three contexts: either as a standalone unit (in Unit 1, where, according to the current curriculum, lexical elements are taught: internal vocabulary-building techniques, archaisms, regionalisms, calques etc.), or in direct connection with the unit's main text, both in the pre-reading/pre-listening section and in the subsequent reading sections, in the text comprehension component, or in the analysis component. We also find lexical exercises in the sequential assessments at the end of the unit; however, in these, the pre-reading section is absent, given the adaptation to the format of the National Exam.

2.1.2. Lexical exercises as pre-reading

The first unit, which focuses on the seasons, presents an initial lexical exercise (Fig 1). It begins with a *brainstorming* element regarding the emotional states associated with the seasons. From our perspective, this exercise is very useful for reviewing vocabulary specific to emotions and feelings, as the lexical inventory updated by all students in the class can be significant. Furthermore, the synesthetic association with a color and a sound leads to a good review of these semantic spheres as well, and to a better retention of both concepts and vocabulary.

a Notează câte un cuvânt-cheie sau un element grafic care reprezintă starea sufletească pe care ți-o trezește fiecare anotimp.

b Asociază fiecărui anotimp câte o culoare și câte un sunet caracteristic.

Fig. 1. Exercise 1, page 14

The third unit also uses the strategy of selecting key words in the pre-reading phase, but this time in the form of a dynamic pair-work exercise (Fig. 2). In this case as well, the targeted lexical domain is that of emotions, but the synonymic and/or periphrastic component is much more prominently highlighted, given that the emotion described will not be named directly. This segment of vocabulary is thus refreshed very effectively. Furthermore, by associating a keyword with each emotion, grammatical competence is also addressed, as students must form correct phrases with them (articulated noun + noun in the genitive case, comparisons, nominal predicates etc.).

1 Notează în caiet o emoție pozitivă și amintește-ți un moment în care ai trăit-o.

2 Lucrați în perechi.

a Fiecare dintre voi îi prezintă colegului momentul/contextul pe care și l-a amintit la exercițiul anterior, fără a numi emoția.

b Apoi fiecare alege din prezentarea colegului un cuvânt/sintagmă-cheie.

c Perechile scriu pe tablă cele două emoții și cele două cuvinte/sintagme-cheie pe coloane diferite.

d La nivelul clasei, asociați fiecărei emoții câte un cuvânt-cheie. (de exemplu, *bucurie – barcă*, din care se pot obține îmbinări de tipul: *barca bucuriei*; *bucuria ca o barcă pe valuri*; *bucuria e o barcă pe marea vieții* etc.).

3 Realizați un poster al clasei în care să centralizați cele mai interesante răspunsuri.

Fig. 2. Exercises 1, 2, 3, page 66

Although these are the only two examples where lexical exercises are used for the pre-reading section, it is worth noting that this section is not omitted, as in the case of the 7th-grade textbook analyzed below, but fulfills its role as a gateway to the text. Even if the pre-reading exercises focus on writing, speaking, or listening, it is very important – all the more so for a non-native speaker of Romanian – that they accompany the reading text.

We cannot fail to note, even though it is not the main focus of this analysis, that the texts selected for the reading section itself are quite difficult for a target group of students for whom Romanian is a non-native language, which is why the pre-reading section proves all the more necessary. In this regard, the lexical component, presented through a playful filter, is highly beneficial even for an eighth-grade student, as it is designed to help them retain the vocabulary much more effectively.

2.1.3. Lexical Exercises in the Comprehension and Analysis Stage

The lexical exercises related to text comprehension and analysis are quite varied and well-suited to the knowledge of non-native 8th-grade students. We can identify several types of well-structured lexical exercises: true/false (Fig. 3 or Fig. 4), selection/transcription (Fig. 5 or Fig. 6), and association and justification (Fig. 7 or Fig. 8).

5 Notează cu Adevărat (A) sau Fals (F) următoarele afirmații:

a Enunțul „Dar vreți să se joace cu noi?" conține două cuvinte care au omonime.
b Antonimele cuvintelor *ieși, dreptate, masă* din textul dat sunt, în ordine: *intră, nedreptate, scaun.*
c Cuvintele *clipesc* și *sclipesc* sunt paronime.
d În enunțul „Fac mai multe copii de data aceasta.", cuvântul *copii* este omograful celui din textul dat.

Fig. 3. Exercise 5, page 11

2 Recitește poezia Anei Blandiana și notează cu Adevărat (A) sau Fals (F) următoarele afirmații:

a Sunt derivate toate cuvintele din seria: *neadormiți, neduse, vântul.*

Fig. 4. Exercise 2, page 18

4 Transcrie o pereche de antonime din textul-suport.

5 Selectează cuvinte care aparțin câmpului lexico-semantic al timpului.

Fig. 5. Exercises 4, 5, page 15

6 Recitește următoarea secvență și selectează cinci cuvinte cu sens propriu. Construiește un enunț în care două dintre aceste cuvinte să aibă sens figurat.

Fig. 6. Exercise 6, page 146

4 Notează perechea cifră – literă care indică sensul din text al cuvintelor din coloana A:

A	B
1 stamină	a care aparține Troiei, privitor la Troia, originar din Troia
2 fecund	b partea de dinapoi a gâtului
3 tâmplă	c grămadă de cărbuni care ard fără flacără
4 jar	d care nu se manifestă în exterior, dar se poate manifesta oricând
5 a se deda	e aplecat într-o parte, oblic, diagonal
6 a întrezări	f parte laterală a capului, cuprinsă între ochi, ureche, frunte și obraz
7 troian	g a se legăna
8 pieziș	h care dă rod îmbelșugat
9 latent	i parte componentă a florii
	j a vedea în chip vag, a zări în treacăt
	k morman, grămadă
	l a se consacra unei activități, unei idei, unei pasiuni

Fig. 7. Exercise 4, page 146

Formați grupe de câte patru elevi. Transcrieți în caiet strofa dată din poezia studiată și apoi rezolvați următoarele cerințe:

„Lasă-mi, toamnă, pomii verzi,
Uite, ochii mei ți-i dau.
Ieri spre seară-n vântul galben
Arborii-n genunchi plângeau."

1 Asociați fiecare termen din lista: *a îngălbeni, înserare, ochiul-boului, tomnatic, pomișor, plângăcios, arbore-de-cacao* cu unul dintre cuvintele marcate în text.

2 Precizați motivul pentru care ați realizat asocierile.

Fig. 8. Exercises 1, 2, page 22

Moreover, we can also observe a series of exercises, such as those in Fig. 9, concerning the origin of words, searching for neologisms in dictionaries for the source language, replacing neologisms with native terms, etc. These types of exercises promote, in addition to the intercultural aspect, the learning of vocabulary through a jargon familiar to today's students, where Romanian and English coexist quite harmoniously.

1 În enunțul „Nu mai avem frizeri și croitorese, avem hair stiliști și creatoare de fashion" sunt două cuvinte scrise cu roșu. În ce limbă le-ai mai întâlnit? Tradu cuvintele cu ajutorul dicționarului bilingv, citind cu voce tare atât cuvintele, cât și traducerea acestora.

2 În fiecare enunț din fragmentul citat poți remarca câte o pereche de sinonime. Rostește perechile de sinonime, împreună cu colegul tău de bancă. Caută în dicționar sensul cuvintelor scrise cu roșu și numește limba lor de proveniență.

3 Transcrie ultimul enunț din cele de mai sus, în așa fel încât să schimbi cuvintele care provin din limbi străine cu termeni românești.

Fig. 9. Exercises 1, 2, 3, page 25

It should be noted, however, that the exercises in Fig 9 also contain an inconsistency. Given that students are asked to identify the origin of these words, the instruction to use a bilingual dictionary without specifying which languages are involved seems somewhat inappropriate to us. We can acknowledge that English is a fundamental component for an eighth-grade student, but what happens if English is a second language (L2) for a particular class, making the answer increasingly less obvious?

On the other hand, we believe it would be more helpful for students if, instead of using a dictionary, they were asked to deduce the meaning of words from context, especially since Pleșu's syntax in this passage allows for such an approach.

We must not forget the production exercises based on the lexical component, such as in Fig. 10. These prove very useful in reinforcing recently acquired vocabulary, effectively combining both lexical competence and the competence to produce written messages.

1 Scrie un text de 80 – 100 de cuvinte, pe o temă la alegere, în care să utilizezi arhaisme și regionalisme pe care le vei sublinia diferit.

Fig. 10. Exercise 1, page 26

2.2. Hedwig (2020)

Regarding the EDP 7th-grade textbook, we note from the outset that the exercises are not as diverse as those in the 8th-grade textbook published by Art Klett, and that the adaptation of certain exercises to the level and needs of a 7th-grade non-native student is questionable.

Moreover, we can observe that lexical exercises are not used for the pre-reading or the pre-listening component of the reading and listening text respectively; instead, they serve either for the comprehension and analysis sections immediately following the reading/listening or for the summative exercises of the unit.

2.2.1. Inappropriate Pre-reading/Pre-listening Exercises

From the outset, we must note that this textbook stipulates that each listening text be followed by the same text in written form; consequently, we will address them without distinction in the following. We cannot fail to mention, although it is not the subject of our analysis, that this strategy undermines the stakes of listening comprehension, as it is feasible at the A1 level for a student of RLS who must develop associations between the two codes, but questionable in the case of an RLNM speaker who has, nevertheless, undergone an educational journey in the Romanian language.

Each unit begins with a pre-reading/pre-listening exercise that does not quite fit what we would expect from such an exercise.

A prime example of such an ill-suited lexical exercise is shown in Fig. 11 and requires identifying words containing the letters of the word "călători". Although the idea behind the exercise seems appropriate to us – the examples suggest that the exercise actually targets terms from the lexical domain of travel – the instruction does not mention this aspect. Moreover, the position of the letter within the target word is left entirely up to the student. In this sense, the exercise loses one of its objectives – that of expanding the travel-related vocabulary – becoming a mere exercise in unguided word stringing.

Fig. 12 follows the same pattern; we will not dwell on them here, as their structure is extremely similar to the exercise analyzed above.

2 Indicați cuvinte care conțin litere din cuvântul „călători”:
C: catedrală, ...
Ă: orășel, ...
L: lac, ...
Ă: apă, ...
T: turn, ...
O: operă, ...
R: rucsac, ...
I: țări, ...

Fig. 11. Exercise 2, page 12

2 **Menționați cuvinte conțin litere din structura *roșu și alb*:**

R: trandafir, ...
O: popular, ...
Ș: școală, ...
U: imperiu, ...
Ș: mărțișor, ...
I: prieteni, ...
A: Moldova, ...
L: simbol, ...
B: Dobrogea, ...

Fig. 12. Exercise 2, page 164

Another exercise that, in our view, only partially achieves its objective is presented in Fig 13. The alphabetical ordering of nouns is a task entirely unsuitable for seventh-grade students, as it does not effectively engage their vocabulary nor ensure its assimilation. The second part of the exercise, which asks students to identify words of Turkish/Ottoman origin, is well-structured, with the caveat that students are not instructed to use a dictionary. Without this instruction, the task can prove quite difficult, especially since the audience consists of non-native speakers.

7 **Ordonați alfabetic substantivele. Menționați-le pe cele care credeți că sunt folosite de turci/otomani.**

- serdar
- clopotniță
- cruce
- cetate
- gaziu
- serhat
- argint
- vilaiet
- împărat
- pașă
- poartă
- bazar
- bronz
- hafiz
- recitator
- construcție
- circumferință
- istoric
- pagină
- moschee
- Coran

Fig. 13. Exercise 7, page 15

2.2.2. Comprehension and Analysis

As with the other textbook analyzed, this one also offers several types of lexical exercises, such as fill-in-the-blank (Fig. 14), clarification (Fig. 15), production (exercise 15/p. 17), substitution (exercise 12/p. 54), and association (exercise 7/p. 107)

9 **Completați structurile cu termenii potriviți din paranteze.**
(*puternică, chiparos, loc, preoțești, oară, sale, masive, apă, acesta, omului*)

a. o moară de ....
b. case ....
c. zece volume ....
d. în formă de ....
e. de mărimea ....
f. nicio palmă de ....
g. pentru a șaptea ....
h. în felul ....
i. construcție ....
j. a mamei ....

Fig. 14. Exercise 9, p. 15

15 **Formulați enunțuri în care substantivele date să aibă sens propriu (de bază și secundar) și sens figurat: *casă, loc, poartă, apus.***

Model: *cruce*
Crucea bisericii este aurită. (sens propriu de bază)
Și-a făcut *cruce* când a intrat în biserică. (sens propriu secundar)
Fiecare își poartă *crucea* lui. (sens figurat)

Fig. 15. Exercise 14, p. 16

2.2.3. After reading

The exercises in the comprehension and reading analysis stages do not fundamentally differ from those presented earlier. We can observe this in a comprehension exercise such as in Fig. 16, which asks students to identify words containing the consonant "ț." We believe that this type of exercise is not suited to the knowledge or needs of a seventh-grade student.

In contrast, the very next exercise (Fig. 16) asks students to identify technical terms in the text, making it a useful and methodologically well-designed exercise. Thus, in this case, the textbook offers a mix of well-designed exercises and those that are not as well-designed.

48 **Identificați în textul *Autobuze moderne în Cluj-Napoca* cuvintele care conțin consoana „ț".** 49 **Identificați termenii tehnici din textul *Autobuze moderne în Cluj-Napoca.***	5 **Ascultați interviul cu un redactor coordonator.** **a.** Precizați cuvintele care încep cu sunetul „c". **b.** Precizați cuvintele care au legătură cu termenul „carte". **c.** Enumerați profesiile din textul audiat.
Fig. 16. Exercises 48, 49, p. 28	**Fig. 17. Exercise 5, p. 128**

The exercise in Fig. 17 is structured along the same "yes/no" dichotomy. While the first step requires selecting words that begin with the sound "c" – a highly mechanical task that does not rely on deep semantic processing (see Thornbury 2002) – the second sub-item requires the selection of words from the book's lexical field (the lexical field is not named directly, but through a circumlocution "related to…," although the curriculum specifies it as early as the 5th grade).

The exercises below – selecting words containing a certain letter, filling in missing letters, and counting words containing a certain letter – are entirely inappropriate for a seventh-grade student, even a non-native speaker. Furthermore, they do not contribute in the least to understanding the text, failing to fulfill their role within the lesson as a whole.

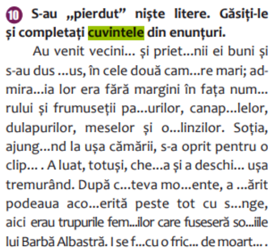

Fig. 18. Exercise 10, p. 113

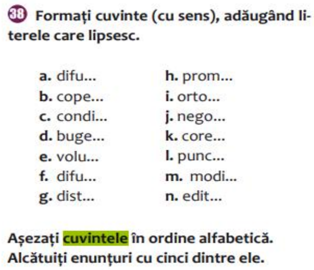

Fig. 19. Exercise 38, p. 137

Moreover, Fig. 19 calls for forming "meaningful" words by adding the missing letters. This raises the question of why a student would form *meaningless words*, as well as what the definition of a word might be in this case.

Furthermore, the intended meaning of these words is not specified, so the completion of the exercise depends entirely on the students' linguistic creativity. We note once again the emphasis in the textbook exercises on alphabetical ordering, which, as mentioned above, does not contribute significantly to lexical competence.

3. Interpretation of the Analyses

The two analyses highlight significant differences between the 8th-grade textbook (Maxim, Militar, Nemes, Bărbos 2020) and the 7th-grade textbook (Hedwig 2020), particularly regarding methodological coherence and the suitability of lexical exercises for the level and needs of non-native Romanian-speaking students.

The Art Klett textbook (8th grade) stands out for its coherent didactic structure, which actively leverages lexical skills throughout all phases of the lesson – pre-reading, comprehension, analysis, and evaluation. The exercises are varied, organically integrated into the learning process, and, for the most part, motivating: lexical brainstorming, semantic association activities, synonym exercises, or contextual inference exercises. There is also a playful and practical component, adapted to the cognitive and e level of eighth-grade students, which supports the consolidation of active vocabulary and preparation for the National Exam.

In contrast, the EDP (2020) textbook for 7th grade presents a rigid and less modern approach to lexical competence. The proposed exercises are often mechanical (alphabetical ordering, letter identification, filling in missing letters) and do not support the actual development of vocabulary or text comprehension skills. The lack of relevant pre-reading activities and lexical contextualization exercises means that the textbook does not effectively meet the specific needs of non-native students. Furthermore, the difficulty and pedagogical value of the tasks vary unevenly, creating the impression of a lack of curricular coherence.

The Art Klett textbook proposes a modern teaching strategy, centered on communicative and lexical development through contextualized and reflective exercises, while the Hedwig textbook remains tied to a traditional, structural approach that is more mechanical and less adapted to the realities of a multilingual student body. Therefore, from a methodological and pedagogical standpoint, the 8th-grade textbook represents a more effective and up-to-date model for integrating lexical exercises into the teaching-learning process of Romanian as a second language.

4. Conclusions

A comparative analysis of the two textbooks highlights significant differences regarding the pedagogical approach to lexical competence development. The study's results indicate that the effectiveness of lexical exercises depends directly on their degree of contextualization, the level of semantic processing involved, and their integration into tasks with communicative relevance.

The 8th-grade textbook broadly proposes a coherent model for developing lexical competence, based on varied, contextualized activities oriented toward the active use of vocabulary. In contrast, the 7th-grade textbook exhibits a series of methodological inconsistencies, characterized by the presence of mechanical exercises, some of which lack semantic and communicative relevance.

The results confirm the hypothesis that not all lexical exercises actually contribute to the development of lexical competence. Only those activities that involve deep semantic processing, contextualization, and active language use can support effective vocabulary acquisition.

In this context, it is necessary to rethink the design of vocabulary exercises in textbooks for Romanian as a second language, with a view to aligning them with the principles of second language teaching and the recommendations of *the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* and the *Companion Volume*. Such an approach would contribute not only to improving students' language performance but also to facilitating their educational and social integration.

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The Use of Literary Texts in Teaching and Learning of Romanian as a Foreign Language

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Abstract: *The use of literary texts in the teaching and learning of Romanian as a foreign language.* The design, selection and preparation of a text represent the first step in organising a reading activity and may pose a real challenge for teachers of Romanian as a foreign language. The success of the reading activity depends on the choice of text. The chosen text can spark interest among students or, conversely, bore them; it can foster their satisfaction at understanding and noticing progress in learning the language, or it may lead to frustration at understanding very little. Therefore, in this article we aim to make a few observations regarding the use of literary texts in the process of teaching and learning Romanian as a foreign language, the adaptation of the text to students' language levels, and activities based on literary texts; we also wish to highlight the importance of reading for pleasure, even in the classroom.

Keywords: *literature, text adaptation, activities based on literary texts, reading for pleasure*

0. Introduction

In this article, we wish to present several arguments in favour of using literary texts as input in the process of teaching and learning Romanian as a foreign language. In this regard, our reasons are varied.

Firstly, we believe in the formative role of literature: 'the dialogue between pupils and literature becomes doubly formative: once through what they encounter – worlds and experiences otherwise inaccessible – and, once again, through the way in which the encounter takes place – through the construction of meaning and significance of these worlds and experiences" („dialogul elevilor cu literatura devine de două ori formativ: o dată prin ceea ce întâlnesc – lumi şi experienţe altfel inaccesibile – şi, încă o dată, prin modul în care se petrece întâlnirea – prin construcţia sensului şi a semnificaţiei acestor lumi şi experienţe") (Pamfil 2016: 6). Literature contributes to the formation of personal, cultural and intercultural identity, and reading is a process of knowledge and self-knowledge. From our point of view, the formative role of literature does not take linguistic boundaries into account: in other words, whether we read a literary text in our mother tongue or in a foreign language, the encounter with the worlds and experiences possible within the text is equally valuable. However, the foreign student learning Romanian should not be deprived of this opportunity to discover meaning, on the one hand, and to create meaning, on the other, which literature offers us.

Secondly, we raise a point that has already become a cliché, namely that literature enriches the reader's vocabulary and develops their imagination. Although we do not in any way consider this to be the essential role of literature, we cannot deny that reading a literary text offers the reader the opportunity to acquire new words, thereby developing their vocabulary. However, this aspect is far more relevant, we believe, in the context of learning a foreign language. For example, when a foreign student learning Romanian reads a literary text in the target language, they not only learn new words and the specific contexts in which these words can be used, but also have the opportunity to identify and acquire new grammatical structures, new contexts in which already familiar grammatical or lexical structures are used, aspects relating to topic and the use of punctuation marks, modes of expression and their specific features (narration, description, dialogue), and various pragmatic functions (persuasion, argumentation, requesting/providing information, expressing agreement/disagreement, expressing circumstances, expressing regret or gratitude, etc.).

We would like to make an observation regarding the role of literary texts in developing imagination and creativity. Often, when learning a foreign language at school, we were advised to 'think directly' in that language, without using our mother tongue as an intermediary, that is, more specifically, without 'translating in our minds' from the target language into our mother tongue or vice versa.[1] This mediation process is entirely natural, particularly at levels A1 and A2, and is gradually phased out as language learning progresses. However, we believe that this is precisely where literature could play a decisive role. By reading literary texts in the target language – reading as a repeated process, not a sporadic one – the learner could be encouraged to move away from comprehension and even oral expression mediated through the use of their mother tongue.

Thirdly, we believe that literary texts can serve as input for a range of language activities, including reading and listening comprehension, as well as writing and speaking. We emphasise that, in our view, using literary texts as input for speaking activities has at least two significant advantages: on the one hand, such texts offer a wide variety of discussion topics, particularly because interpretations of textual meaning differ from reader to reader and because they can be examined from multiple perspectives (for example, the characters, the plot, and the world depicted in the text, which may or may not exist in reality); on the other hand, we believe that literature offers authentic topics for discussion, in which students will engage with greater curiosity, openness and enthusiasm.

Furthermore, another reason why we raise the issue of using literary texts in the teaching and learning of Romanian as a foreign language is that we have observed both the absence of this type of text from textbooks intended for university education (Bălănescu 2005,

[1] Moreover, even in the teaching of Romanian as a foreign language, it is recommended that the teacher should not use the learners' mother tongue or another contact language.

Iliensc u 2002), as well as its presence in a form adapted to the learners' language level (Sonea *et alii* 2020) or, conversely, in an unadapted form (Pop 2008, Kohn 2012).

At the same time, we consider that literary texts would offer non-native students the opportunity to experience reading for pleasure in Romanian. The new pedagogy of literature, shaped according to the 'personal development model' („modelul dezvoltării personale”) (Pamfil 2016: 8), 'aims to harness, through its strategies, the formative value of reading and to restore to school reading the joy of “unimposed” and “unguided” reading. As for the principles underpinning these strategies, they place the pupil and the literature book (not the teacher) at the forefront of the teaching process, affirm the primacy of the text (not the metatext), and, at the metatextual level, they prioritise discourse that conveys understanding and interpretation (not analysis)' („intenţionează să valorifice, prin strategiile sale, valoarea formativă a lecturii şi să redea lecturii şcolare bucuria lecturilor «neimpuse» şi «nedirijate». Cât despre principiile care stau la baza strategiilor, acestea aşază, în prim-planul acţiunii didactice, elevul şi cartea de literatură (nu profesorul), afirmă primatul textului (nu al metatextului), iar la nivelul metatextului, privilegiază discursul care transcrie înţelegerea şi interpretarea (nu analiza)” (Pamfil 2016: 11).[2]

Therefore, we aim to highlight the advantages of using literary texts as input in teaching and learning activities for Romanian as a foreign language, and to offer some observations on aspects such as the selection and adaptation of literary texts according to learners' language proficiency levels, the types of activities that can use literary texts as input, and the stages of reading.

[2] Of course, in the teaching of Romanian as a foreign language, the question of literary text analysis (classifying the text within a literary genre, identifying the characteristics of literary genres, etc.) does not arise, but we have chosen to reproduce the quotation in full to emphasise that, in recent studies on the pedagogy of literature, the emphasis is placed on the pupil's direct encounter with the literary text and on the joy of this encounter, unmediated by the teacher or by the excessive use of metalanguage.

1. Selection and adaptation of literary texts

1.1. Selection of literary texts

In the context of a student-centred approach to teaching literature, we believe that one of the most important criteria for text selection is the learner's interest in the ideas, meanings and themes present in the text. 'There is, however, one area for which the teaching of literature bears full responsibility, namely the learning of two fundamental strategies, strategies that enable the pupil's authentic encounter with literature and thus the formation of an inner library. I am referring to bringing books closer through understanding (construction of meaning) and through interpretation (construction of significance), but also to the appropriation of meanings relevant to the reader's life, to their assimilation and internalisation' („Există însă o zonă de care didactica literaturii este integral responsabilă, şi anume învăţarea a două strategii fundamentale, strategii care permit întâlnirea autentică a elevului cu literatura şi deci formarea bibliotecii interioare. Mă refer la aducerea aproape a cărţilor prin înţelegere (construcţie de sens) şi prin interpretare (construcţie de semnificaţie), dar şi la apropierea semnificaţiilor relevante pentru viaţa cititorului, la asimilarea, la însuşirea lor") (Pamfil 2016: 8). We therefore take into account, when selecting the input, the age of the learners, the stage of life they are at, their passions and even their literary preferences.

Another criterion for choosing a text is the type of activity we intend to carry out after reading it. We are not discussing here activities involving the reception of written or spoken text[3] , but we highlight, by way of example, the organisation of a speaking activity based on a literary text, where we can identify at least two *pitfalls*: a) if a native speaker can speak for a few minutes on a text, whether guided by questions or not, then a non-native speaker could do the same; b) if the teacher adapts the

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[3] Ultimately, any text is intended, first and foremost, to be received. Yet here too we must ask the following question, particularly in the current context, where numerous literary texts – and others besides – which were originally *written* are now also available as *audiobooks*: can any type of text be received through both reading and listening?

text to the student's language level, the student will understand it and be able to speak/answer questions. However, in our view, however simple a text may be in terms of vocabulary and grammatical structures, for the foreign student to be able to engage in speaking, the themes/topics presented in the text must also be sufficiently accessible to them. Furthermore, the student must have sufficient lexical and grammatical resources to express themselves regarding the topics under discussion, as achieving comprehension in the target language does not automatically imply the ability to express oneself orally in that same language.

Another relevant criterion would be the possibility of adapting the text to the learners' language level without unduly diminishing its meaning and specificity, that is, its very value.

Furthermore, we will not select a text merely for the presence (or the possibility of incorporating, through adaptation) of certain grammatical or lexical structures, whilst ignoring the true potential of literature. Let us not forget that a native speaker would never read a text simply to observe grammatical or lexical elements.

Finally, when selecting a text, we also take into account other aspects we wish students to observe, such as modes of expression – narration, dialogue, monologue, description – or various communicative functions, the cultural or intercultural dimension of the text, elements relating to sociolinguistics, etc.

1.2. Adapting literary texts

Enough has been written in the specialty literature on adapting texts to students' language level and the necessity of doing so; therefore, we shall mention here only a few elements that we also focus on when adapting literary texts: morphosyntax and lexicon, text type, structure, and length (CECRL 2003, Platon *et al.* 2011: 45, Platon 2019).

When preparing the input, it is necessary to consider both *the interlanguage* – 'the varieties of language that form successively in the learner of a foreign language (L2) and which do not coincide entirely with the target language (TL) proper, with the natural language (NL)' („varietățile de limbă ce se formează în momente succesive la cel care învaţă o limbă străină (L2) şi care nu coincid, în totalitate, cu limba-ţintă (LŢ) propriu-zisă, cu limba naturală (LN)" (Platon 2015: 527–539) – as well as *microlanguage* – 'the series of linguistic microsystems developed by the native speaker during exolingual communication, representing 'reduced' variants of the NL to varying degrees, which take shape according to the stages reached by the non-native speaker in the acquisition of their mother tongue' („seria de microsisteme lingvistice elaborate de locutorul nativ în timpul comunicării exolingve, reprezentând nişte variante «reduse» în diferite grade ale LN, ce se configurează în funcţie de stadiile parcurse de interlocutorul nonnativ în însuşirea limbii sale materne") (Platon 2016: 644).

Familiarity with the descriptions of each language level – A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, C2 – in the CECRL 2003 (*CEFR: Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment*) is particularly important when designing input. However, given that every language has its own specific characteristics, which are also reflected in the stages of its acquisition by non-native speakers, we believe that *the* Descrierea minimală a limbii române (*Minimal Description of the Romanian Language*) (Platon *et alii* 2014) is a very useful document (also) for adapting texts, as it structures not only the grammatical and lexical elements but also the communicative functions for each level (A1, A2, B1, B2).

Furthermore, a tool we find very useful for checking whether the text used as input is appropriate for the students' language level is the 'text description sheet', which recommends filling in the following sections: 'text type', 'communicative functions', 'lexical scope', 'lexical elements', 'specific grammatical classes and categories', 'expression of circumstances', 'sentence construction', 'achieving cohesion and coherence', and 'appropriate level' (Platon 2019: 150).

As regards the issue of authenticity – or, more accurately, the lack of authenticity – in adapted texts (see, for details, Platon 2019: 143–144), particularly in literary texts, we wish simply to make one observation: adaptation is not a new process confined to foreign language teaching, but an older one, frequently encountered in children's literature. Original works of literature are retold, adapted, abridged, fragmented, or supplemented with or accompanied by images not present in the original version, in order to make them more accessible to children and to be used for educational purposes. If, in this case, the issue is not one of a lack of authenticity but rather the educational purpose, we should adopt the same approach in the context of language teaching, where the aim of adapting texts is exactly the same.

Furthermore, from our perspective, just as we discuss the existence of a 'microlanguage' („microlimbă") (Platon 2016) used by the native speaker when communicating with a non-native speaker, we can similarly speak of a micro-language of the texts/documents used in teaching, the mechanism being the same: adapting the language level of the native speaker and the texts to the foreign learner's interlanguage. However, the native speaker – we refer here in particular to the language teacher – is not accused of inauthenticity for using the micro-language because, in the absence of the use of a contact language and the micro-language, the process of teaching and learning a foreign language would fail or would not be possible.

Last but not least, we wish to emphasise that the cultural and social dimension of the text is also important. It should not contain statements, messages, expressions, names, etc., that might offend the reader – for example, issues relating to discrimination or taboo subjects in their culture. In this regard, we believe that texts can be adapted.

Below, we propose one unadapted literary text which, in our view, can serve as a basis for activities focused on the comprehension of written text, oral production and written production. We have chosen the text for its themes/messages, which we believe may spark students' enthusiasm, for the diversity of its modes of expression – first-person narration, reported speech and dialogue, and for the illustration of communicative functions. Another reason for choosing it is that we wished to demonstrate the situations in which we can use unadapted literary texts in the teaching of Romanian as a foreign language. Furthermore, another factor we took into account when selecting the two texts is the lexical range and grammatical elements that students are capable of using in speaking/writing activities following the reception of the text (de completat exemple). We consider the text to be at B1+ level, particularly due to the grammatical structures (past perfect continuous (imperfect)) and lexical items (‘failure’ (îndoială), ‘stagnation’ (stagnare), ‘to waste’ (a irosi), ‘playful’ (jucăuș), ‘root’ (rădăcină), ‘doubt’ (îndoială), ‘locomotive’ (locomotivă), ‘excavator’ (excavator).

“What do you want to be when you grow up?” is probably the most common question children are asked by adults, and their answers are spontaneous, natural, and full of confidence. When they are little, children imagine they could have many professions, and everything seems possible in their world—a world without doubt, where the phrase “you can’t” hasn’t taken root yet, and the fear of failure feels more unreal than a unicorn.

I asked a few friends what they wanted to be when they were young, and I really liked their playful answers. One wanted to be a train mechanic, another an astronaut, and another a Formula 1 driver—today, they are all programmers. A friend wanted to become a hairdresser—today she works in a multinational company. Another friend wanted to be a veterinarian—now she’s a lawyer, but she has a dog that “guards” our group and is loved by everyone. And that’s not all! I have a friend who wanted to be a wife and another who dreamed of becoming an excavator!

When I was little, I wanted to become a singer, a gymnast, or a doctor, or to be like Andreea Marin. However, more than anything, I wanted to be a teacher and, at the same time, a shop assistant.

I used to play “teacher” by myself or with my grandmother. At home, in our apartment, I would place all my dolls on the couch, and they would listen politely to my lessons. The living room furniture was my blackboard, and instead of chalk, I used a pencil without a tip. That way, the furniture was only slightly scratched, not coloured—much to my mother’s relief. When I stayed at my grandmother’s house, she was my best-behaved student, and when she was busy cooking, my students were the chickens and the rooster in the yard—until one day the rooster got angry and jumped at me like a rebellious, rude student. After my grandmother rescued me, I expelled the entire class of chickens and never went back to teach them again.

With my mother, I played "shop" every day. I would place all kinds of objects from around the house on the kitchen table, and my mother would come to my shop to buy them. In addition to these items, I wrote long lists of detergents and soaps, adding a price next to each one. I imagined that if I worked in a shop, I could eat all the sweets I wanted for free, and I believed that shop assistants were very important people who helped others make decisions—such as which detergent to buy or which soap to use.

When I started school, I had good teachers who inspired me and became role models. From the 5th grade onwards, I was sure I wanted to become a Romanian language teacher, just like my teacher at the time. This wish remained unchanged throughout my school years, and after finishing high school and passing my final exams, I enrolled in the Faculty of Letters.

Before that, however, I visited the Faculty of Law. Why? Well, my father wanted me to become a lawyer. He believed it was the most beautiful profession in the world and that I had all the qualities needed to be a good lawyer. Trying to convince me, he suggested we visit the faculty. I knew that law wasn't right for me and that my passions were grammar and literature, so no discussion or visit could make me change my mind. In the end, my father came with me to enrol in Letters, and a few years later, he proudly told me, "You made a good choice, you know!"

Fortunately, my parents always supported me when it came to education. They showed me and explained my options, but in the end, they gave me the responsibility and freedom to choose.

If we think about it, we spend almost half our lives at work, so it would be good to choose a profession that brings meaning and joy to our lives. It would be good not to waste half our lives. It would be good not to hate the alarm clock, not to feel that going to work is like going to war, not to avoid our boss or colleagues, not to leave work holding back tears, not to live only for weekends—and if, at some point, all of this happens, or if the profession we chose no longer fulfils us, then we should have the courage to make a change.

I know several people whom I admire for having the courage to change their profession (sometimes to something completely different) when they became deeply unhappy at work. I was impressed by the story of a student who came to Romania to start over: "In my country, I had everything I could wish for. I had a degree, a good job, and my family and friends were there. Still, I realised I wasn't fulfilled by my profession. For years, I kept postponing a decision, afraid to change something. But this year, in September, I decided it was time to do what I love, so I gave up everything I had there and came to Romania to study what I had always wanted: physiotherapy. Now I can truly say I'm happy!"

I think it takes a lot of courage to choose what's best for us, especially when we feel the fear of change, of the unknown, or of what others might say. Maybe that's exactly when we should remember the courage we had as children, when we believed we could become anything we wanted. "Sure, but we were children back then!" you might say. "Life was simple and we had no responsibilities!" That's true—but courage has no age.

From time to time, it's good to ask ourselves whether we are still in the right place: at work, in our family, in our relationship, among friends, in our home—and then answer honestly. Celebrate if the answer is "Yes!" and change something if the answer is "No!" If we feel confused and don't yet know what to answer or what decision to make, we should be as understanding with ourselves as we would be with a good friend, giving ourselves time and patience to figure out what we truly want and what really matters to us.

Is there a perfect job? Probably not. Every job has its pros and cons. We go through better periods and more difficult ones, times of growth and times of stagnation. Sometimes we feel like the work never ends; other times, we have time for two coffees. There are moments when colleagues feel like family and moments when we feel alone within our own team. Of course, ideally, the good periods would be more frequent, and the difficult ones less so.

For me, the most important things that make me say "Yes, this is my place!" about my job are passion for what I do, the opportunity to grow and develop, the feeling that I can contribute something good to society, and human relationships.

I like what I do, and it brings me joy, positive energy, and a sense of fulfilment. I enjoy discovering and learning new things in my field. I like knowing that, through my work, I help other people have better lives or achieve their dreams. I go to work gladly when I have good relationships with my colleagues—based on honest, kind communication without judgement, criticism, or gossip; on empathy, healthy boundaries, respect, mutual support, respect for personal space, the ability to give and receive feedback, humour, and good cheer.

But what matters to me might be irrelevant to you. That's why it's important to know ourselves, to discover what we want and what makes us happy, and then to make the best decisions—being aware that we only live this life once. (Băilă 2025: 97–99)

(*Ce vrei să te faci când vei fi mare?* este, probabil, cea mai comună întrebare pe care o primesc copiii din partea adulților, iar răspunsurile lor sunt spontane, naturale și pline de încredere. Când sunt mici, copiii își imaginează că ar putea avea multe profesii și orice lucru pare posibil în lumea lor, o lume fără **îndoială**, în care expresia *nu se poate* nu **a prins** încă **rădăcini**, iar frica de **eșec** e mai ireală decât un unicorn.

Am întrebat câțiva prieteni ce și-au dorit să fie când erau mici și mi-au plăcut mult răspunsurile lor **jucăușe**. Unul voia să fie mecanic de **locomotivă**, altul voia să se facă astronaut, iar altul visa să fie pilot de Formula 1 – astăzi, toți sunt programatori. O prietenă voia să devină *tundătoare* (de la verbul ***a tunde***), adică **frizeriță** – azi lucrează într-o multinațională. O altă prietenă își dorea să fie medic veterinar – acum e avocat, dar are un câine care **ne păzește gașca** și care e iubit de către toată lumea. Și asta nu e tot! Am o prietenă care își dorea să fie **nevastă** și un prieten care visa să ajungă **excavator**!

Eu, când eram mică, voiam să mă fac cântăreață, gimnastă, doctoriță sau să devin ca Andreea Marin. Totuși, cel mai mult îmi doream să devin profesoară și, în același timp, vânzătoare.

De-a profesoara mă jucam singură sau cu bunica mea. Acasă, în apartamentul nostru, îmi așezam pe o canapea toate păpușile pe care le aveam, iar ele ascultau lecțiile foarte cuminți. Mobila din sufragerie era tabla pe care scriam, iar, în loc de cretă, foloseam un creion fără vârf. Astfel, mobila era doar puțin zgâriată, dar nu și colorată, spre bucuria mamei mele. Când stăteam la bunica mea acasă, ea era cea mai cuminte elevă, iar, când bunica era ocupată cu gătitul, elevii mei erau găinile și cocoșul din curte – asta până când, într-o zi, cocoșul s-a enervat și a sărit pe mine ca un elev **rebel** și nepoliticos, și, după ce bunica mea a venit să mă salveze, am exmatriculat toată clasa de găini și nu m-am mai întors să le predau niciodată.

Cu mama mă jucam în fiecare zi de-a magazinul. Așezam pe masa din bucătărie tot felul de obiecte din casă, iar mama venea la magazinul meu ca să le cumpere. Pe lângă aceste produse, scriam liste lungi cu **detergenți** și cu săpunuri, iar în dreptul fiecăruia treceam un preț. Îmi imaginam că, dacă aș lucra într-un magazin, aș putea mânca gratis toate dulciurile pe cale le voiam și credeam că vânzătoarele sunt persoane foarte importante, care-i ajută pe oameni să ia multe decizii, cum ar fi ce **detergent** să cumpere și cu ce săpun e mai bine să se spele.

Când am început școala, am avut parte de profesori buni, care m-au inspirat și mi-au fost modele, așa că, din clasa a V-a, am fost sigură că vreau să mă fac profesoară de română și să fiu exact ca profesoara mea de română de atunci. Dorința mea a rămas neschimbată în anii de școală și, la finalul liceului, după ce am dat **Bacalaureatul**, m-am înscris la Facultatea de Litere.

Înainte de asta însă am vizitat Facultatea de Drept. Cum așa? **Păi**, tatăl meu voia să devin avocat. Credea că e cea mai frumoasă profesie din lume și că eu aș avea toate calitățile necesare pentru a deveni un avocat bun. Încercând **să** mă **convingă** de acest lucru, mi-a propus să vizităm facultatea. Eu știam că domeniul dreptului nu mi se potrivește și că pasiunile mele sunt gramatica și literatura, deci, nicio discuție și nicio vizită nu m-au putut convinge să îmi schimb alegerea. Prin urmare, tata a venit cu mine ca să mă înscriu la Litere, iar câțiva ani mai târziu mi-a spus cu mândrie: *Ai făcut o alegere bună, să știi!*.

Din fericire, părinții mei m-au susținut mereu în ceea ce privește educația, mi-au arătat și mi-au explicat ce opțiuni am, dar, în final, mi-au lăsat responsabilitatea și libertatea de a alege.

Dacă ne gândim bine, cred că aproape jumătate din viață ne-o petrecem la serviciu, așa că ar fi bine să ne alegem o profesie care să aducă sens și bucurie în viața noastră. Ar fi bine să nu ne **irosim** jumătate din viață. Ar fi bine să nu urâm ceasul deșteptător, să nu simțim că mergem la serviciu ca la război, **să** nu **ne ferim** de șeful nostru sau de colegi, să nu ieșim de acolo **cu plânsul în gât**, să nu trăim doar pentru weekenduri, iar, dacă, la un moment dat, se întâmplă toate acestea sau, pur și simplu, profesia pe care am ales-o nu ne mai **împlinește**, atunci să avem curajul de a face o schimbare.

Cunosc mai mulți oameni pe care îi admir pentru curajul lor de a-și schimba profesia (uneori, cu una total diferită de cea pe care au avut-o) atunci când au devenit profund nefericiți la locul de muncă. M-a impresionat povestea unui student care a venit în România pentru **a o lua de la zero**: *În țara mea, aveam tot ce-mi putea dori. Am făcut o facultate, aveam un job bun, familia și prietenii mei erau acolo. Totuși, **mi-am dat seama** că nu sunt **împlinit** cu profesia mea. Câțiva ani, **am** tot **amânat** să iau o decizie, să schimb ceva, fiindcă îmi era frică. Dar anul acesta, în septembrie, am decis că e timpul să fac ceea ce-mi place, așa că am renunțat la tot ce aveam acolo și am venit în România, ca să studiez ceea ce mi-am dorit dintotdeauna: kinetoterapia. Acum pot spune că sunt cu adevărat fericit!*.

Cred că e nevoie de mult curaj ca să alegem ceea ce e mai bine pentru noi, mai ales atunci când simțim frica de schimbare și de necunoscut sau frica de *ce-o să zică lumea*. Poate tocmai atunci ar fi bine să ne amintim de curajul pe care îl aveam când eram copii și puteam visa să devenim orice voiam noi. *Sigur, dar atunci eram copii!*, vei spune, *viața era simplă și nu aveam nicio responsabilitate!*. Așa este, dar curajul nu are vârstă.

Poate e bine ca, din când în când, să ne întrebăm dacă (mai) suntem în locul potrivit: la job, în familie, în relația cu partenerul nostru, între prieteni, în casa noastră, iar apoi să ne răspundem cu onestitate. Să sărbătorim dacă răspunsul e *Da!* și să schimbăm ceva dacă răspunsul e *Nu!*, iar, dacă ne simțim confuzi și nu știm încă ce să răspundem sau ce decizie să luăm, să fim înțelegători cu noi așa cum am fi cu un prieten bun, să ne acordăm timp și răbdare pentru a afla ce ne dorim și ce e cu adevărat important pentru noi.

Există un loc de muncă perfect? Probabil că nu. Fiecare loc de muncă are **plusuri și minusuri**. Traversăm perioade mai bune și perioade mai dificile, etape de creștere și etape de **stagnare**. Uneori, avem senzația că munca nu se mai termină, alteori, avem timp pentru două cafele. Există momente în care colegii ne sunt ca o familie și momente în care ne simțim singuri în propria echipă. Desigur, ideal ar fi ca perioadele bune să fie cu plus, iar cele mai grele, cu minus.

Pentru mine, cele mai importante lucruri care mă fac să spun *Da, aici e locul meu!* la jobul pe care îl am, sunt pasiunea pentru ceea ce fac, posibilitatea de a crește și de a mă dezvolta, sentimentul că pot **contribui** cu ceva bun în societate și relațiile interumane.

Îmi place ceea ce fac și acest lucru îmi aduce bucurie, energie bună și sentimentul de împlinire. Îmi place să descopăr și să învăț mereu lucruri noi în domeniul în care lucrez. Îmi place să știu că, prin munca mea, îi ajut pe alți oameni să aibă o viață mai bună sau să își îndeplinească visurile. Merg cu drag la serviciu dacă am relații bune cu colegii mei, bazate pe comunicare onestă și blândă, fără judecată, critici sau bârfe, pe empatie, limite sănătoase, respect, ajutor reciproc, respectarea spațiului personal, capacitatea de a primi și de a oferi un feedback, umor și **voie bună**.

Dar ceea ce e important pentru mine s-ar putea să fie **irelevant** pentru tine. De aceea, e important să ne cunoaștem pe noi înșine, să aflăm ce ne dorim și ce ne face fericiți, iar apoi să luăm cele mai potrivite decizii, fiind conștienți de faptul că... trăim această viață o singură dată.) (Băilă 2025: 97–99)

2. Types of activities based on literary texts

Any activity organised around a text involves three stages: pre-reading, reading (with any necessary re-reading) and post-reading. Bearing in mind that in literary reading we are particularly interested in the direct interaction between the reader and the text, which involves two stages: understanding the meaning and significance of the text and interpreting them, that is, creating meaning, we wish to make a few observations regarding activities organised around a literary text.

Firstly, we believe that the teacher should allow more time for reading a literary text and even for rereading it, these activities taking place in silence, at the students' own pace: "literary reading transports the reader into the world of the text; they immerse themselves in the fiction, being more interested in 'how' it is said than in 'what' is said; we are talking about slow reading, with pauses" („lectura literară transpune cititorul în lumea textului, el se instalează în ficțiune, fiind interesat mai mult de «cum» se spune decât de «ce» se spune; vorbim de o lectură lentă, cu întreruperi") (Platon *et alii* 2011: 40); "the more time the student has to read and reread a text, the greater their chances of understanding it and applying a range of strategies" („cu cât elevul dispune de mai mult timp pentru a citi şi reciti un text, cu atât va avea mai multe şanse de a-l înțelege şi de a pune în valoare un set de strategii") (Platon *et al*. 2011: 45).

Secondly, we believe that, just like a native speaker, non-native students should not have to exert a great deal of effort in decoding new lexical items in the text. Let us not forget that the primary role of literature is not to teach us new words or new grammatical structures. Furthermore, regardless of the educational purpose of literature, we believe that reading it should always include reading for pleasure. However, the joy of reading could be diminished by long interruptions to decode unfamiliar meanings. To avoid this, the teacher has several options: to ensure that new words are explained during the pre-reading stage; to underline new words and provide students, alongside the text, with a glossary in which these are explained using simple synonyms they are already familiar with; to answer students' questions as they arise, not just at the end of the reading.

Furthermore, if literature is primarily about creating meaning, we consider that freedom of interpretation and subjectivity are two very important aspects. Therefore, the first step in the post-reading stage would be to pose questions such as: What did you like most about this text and why? What did you dislike about this text and why? How did you feel when you read the text, and what emotions did it evoke in you?.

Students' creativity should also be encouraged during the pre-reading and post-reading stages. Numerous activities are already associated with these stages, depending on the reading objectives (see, for examples, Platon *et al*. 2011: 45), so we shall now limit ourselves to proposing a few activities based on our literary text, which we presented above.

- Examples of pre-reading activities: a) students look at a set of images (these could be the illustrations from the book) and draw or write down a few spontaneous ideas, then share them with their classmates; b) students answer questions such as: What did you want to be when you were a child? What did the adults think of your wish? What was the most interesting idea you had when you were little?.
- Examples of post-reading activities: a) students answer questions such as those below in writing or orally, then discuss them with a classmate who offers advice and solutions: 'What profession do you want to have, or what profession do you already have? Why do you like your profession? Why did you choose it? How do you feel when you practise your profession? Are there aspects you would like to improve at your workplace? What don't you like, or what is difficult for you in your profession? Have you ever had a difficult period at work? How did you overcome it? What aspects are important to you at work so that you feel good? Was it ever hard for you to leave a job and start over? Do you think it's better to have the same job your whole life, or is it advisable to change jobs multiple times? How do you manage to maintain a balance between your professional and personal life?' („Ce profesie vrei să ai sau ce profesie ai deja?, De ce îți place profesia ta? De ce ai ales-o?, Cum te

simți când practici profesia ta?, Există aspecte pe care vrei să le îmbunătățești la locul tău de muncă?, Ce nu îți place sau ce e dificil pentru tine în profesia ta?, Ai avut vreodată o perioadă dificilă la locul de muncă? Cum ai depășit-o?, Ți-a fost greu vreodată să renunți la un loc de muncă și să o iei de la zero?, Crezi că ar fi bine să avem același loc de muncă toată viața sau ar fi indicat să schimbăm mai multe joburi?, Cum reușești să menții un echilibru între viața profesională și cea personală?") (Băilă 2025: 100); b) students create a few illustrations based on the text, which they explain orally.

Last but not least, to reinforce the idea of reading for pleasure, even among non-native speakers, we believe that students could be given such literary texts to read at home, possibly accompanied by a reading sheet with a few exercises to check their understanding of the text.

3. Conclusions

Literary texts can be effectively used to organise a range of teaching and learning activities for Romanian as a foreign language. Adapting literary texts to students' language levels does not detract from the authenticity of the literature but rather facilitates readers' engagement with it. The main reason for choosing a literary text should be learners' interest in its meanings, themes and values, rather than the introduction of new lexical and grammatical structures. The purpose of literature is to create meaning through reception and interpretation; therefore, readers' freedom of interpretation and subjectivity should be brought to the fore. Literature encourages reading for pleasure, the benefits of which students can also enjoy in the classroom. The formative role of literature is all the more valuable and necessary in a context where the international student is not only learning a new language but also discovering a new culture, which in turn contributes to the formation of their identity.

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The Aim of Writing and Reading Fiction in L2. Modest Creativity and the Affective Turn

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Abstract: *The Aim of Writing and Reading Fictional Text in L2. Modest Creativity and the Affective Turn*. Building on the premise that fictional texts should not be treated merely as sources of linguistic or cultural input, this paper argues that literature is most effectively integrated into L2 classroom when attention is given to both form and content. In the first part, I examine the cognitivist perspective on the role of creativity in the use of fiction for language teaching. The second part, drawing on the CEFR and the "affective turn" in the humanities and social sciences, investigates the significance of an affect-centered approach to literary texts in language instruction.

Keywords: *L2, literary text, linguistic content, cultural content, form, creativity, brainstorming, affect, affective turn, affective journal*

1. Introduction

The writing and reading of literary texts are two complex communicative activities within L2 classes. One of the most common challenges today arises from the teaching method itself, namely the communicative approach, which prioritizes authentic communicative contexts and the simultaneous development of linguistic and functional-pragmatic competence. According to contemporary didactics and teaching practices, functional-pragmatic competence not only focuses on the language user and their needs, but also positions any L2 learner as a social actor (Rose & Kasper 2001: 2). From this perspective, the principal aim of L2 learning extends beyond the successful completion of communicative tasks; it also involves the ability to sustain and cultivate relationships with others. As such, language use is not merely transactional, but fundamentally interpersonal, requiring learners to navigate social norms, manage meaning in context, and respond sensitively to their interlocutors. This broader understanding of communication aligns with what Kenneth R. Rose and Gabriele Kasper describe *in Pragmatics in Language Teaching* as "an interpersonal rhetoric" (Rose & Kasper 2001: 2), that is, the capacity to use language in ways that are socially appropriate, relationally aware, and responsive to the dynamics of interaction.

Does literature contribute to the construction of such a rhetoric? Can the production and reception of literary texts be meaningfully integrated into a language-learning framework oriented primarily toward functional and practical proficiency? If so, to what end? In real-world contexts beyond the classroom, second-language users can function entirely without engaging with literature, or even with the arts more broadly. It is therefore unlikely that any innate, genetically determined artistic predisposition exists; rather, such a disposition appears to be acquired. As recent findings in neuroscience suggest, an inclination toward the artistic dimension of human experience is cultivated through long-term memory processes that encode and integrate visually mediated images with strong affective resonance (Kandal 2023: 256).

Central communicative functions activated by literary texts, such as the poetic and emotive functions, can be largely disregarded in everyday contexts. Routine transactions, whether at the bank or the supermarket, as well as ordinary social interactions in the street, within the family, or among friends, do not require an advanced command of these functions. Why, then, should the reception and production of literary texts − two inherently interconnected activities − be incorporated at the intermediate (B1, B2) and advanced (C1, C2) levels of language learning? Is their role to expand the learner's linguistic repertoire, and if so, should this be understood as an end in itself or rather as a secondary outcome? Or is their primary purpose to bring the learner closer to the culture of the target language, granting access to a linguistic and imaginative horizon that might otherwise remain distant or inaccessible?

There are two main approaches in this regard, as well as two labels assigned to proponents and opponents of the view that literature − primarily at the level of reception rather than production − should be integrated into foreign language instruction. Proponents are referred to as "essentialists," while opponents are labeled "non-essentialists" (Rabb Khan & Alasmari 2018: 169). The former argue that the role of literature in L2 classrooms is highly significant, both linguistically and culturally, as it enriches learners' knowledge along both dimensions. In addition, they maintain that literature fosters critical thinking and enhances and sustains learner motivation. The second group, with which this study aligns, the "non-essentialists," does not regard literature as essential for the development of advanced linguistic competence, nor does it attribute to literature a distinct cultural mission beyond the general recognition that any artistic work is, by definition, a cultural product.

We argue that literature is more than a body of content; as the influential contemporary feminist critic Rita Felski has repeatedly noted, it is first and foremost a matter of the formal structuring of meaning (Felski 1998: 28). Literature primarily teaches us that meaning is not contained in isolated linguistic units. A word, a sentence, or even an entire text does not carry meaning on its own; rather, meaning emerges from the way these elements are arranged within a specific structure and from the relations they establish with one another. It is this organization, both formal and contextual, that determines how a text is produced and interpreted. As such, reducing the role of literature in L2 classrooms to linguistic or cultural content fails to acknowledge its fundamentally formal nature, insofar as literature operates as an aesthetic practice in which meaning is generated through the structured organization of language. This does not imply, however, that literature should be integrated into L2 instruction purely in the spirit of *l'art pour l'art*. Such an approach would be neither coherent nor realistic, given that even within literary studies today, approaches detached from social context and grounded in a traditional notion of aesthetic autonomy are no longer viable.

Thus, the central premise from which I proceed and which we will develop in this essay is that the primary function of literature in L2 instruction is more closely related to emotional intelligence than to knowledge, IQ, linguistic competence, or cultural skills. I argue that literature is necessary in Romanian as a Foreign Language (RFL) classes at intermediate and advanced levels for two main reasons. First, it supports the development of abstract thinking, which in turn fosters learners' creativity by encouraging them to move beyond literal interpretation and engage with more complex, inferential forms of meaning-making. Second, it contributes to emotional education by exposing learners to fictional representations of experience, thereby enabling them to recognize, interpret, and articulate emotions through language.

1. Modest Creativity

According to a survey conducted between 2017 and 2022 on a sample of 37,609 individuals aged between 4 and 17, carried out by the U.S. National Center for Health Statistics as part of the National Health Interview Survey (NHIS), although the prevalence of attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) increased markedly in the twenty-first century, recent years suggest a plateauing trend (Li et al., 2023: 1). While between 1997 and 1998 the increase was 6.1%, and between 2003 and 2011 it reached 42.0%, the period from 2017 to 2022 shows a relatively stable range, between 10.08% and 10.47% (Li et al., 2023: 4).

Despite moderate rates in recent years, the prevalence of ADHD among young people in the 21st century remains at historically high levels, a trend largely influenced by increasingly early and sustained exposure to numerous, diverse, and often simultaneous visual stimuli. What has been progressively lost in the age of speed and within a visually saturated society is attention to language itself, to literary texts, and, in particular, to close reading practices. More broadly, attention has also been eroded, as Yves Citton argues, because in the new market economy the emphasis is no longer placed on the product itself, but on the attention required for its consumption. As the critic argues, attention represents the key currency of the 21st century: when a product is free, what is actually being exchanged is not the product itself, but the user's attention (Citton 2017: 8–9).

I argue that a possible way to cultivate a different kind of attention from that demanded by contemporary society, and to engage second-language learners in a humanistic form of education, is through the use of literary texts in L2 instruction. This approach focuses on interpreting the meaning of words and sentences, as well as the broader meanings, values, and experiences they convey. It applies both to the reception and, especially, to the production of literary texts.

In contrast to a humanistic education organized around literary texts, an approach to L2 instruction focused on the development of skills, abilities, and competences brings together learners for whom progress in the foreign language is primarily oriented toward practical goals. Such an approach cannot foster attention to language beyond its functional dimension through the same mechanisms employed in literary studies.

If close reading is, in our view, the indispensable method underpinning the study of literature within the humanities, then L2 classrooms require a balance between a close, "textual" reading of fictional texts (at the level of reception) and the stimulation of creativity derived from them (at the level of production).

Traditionally, creativity has been linked to expertise in a given field, with originality understood as increasing in proportion to the level of knowledge acquired within that domain. However, cognitive theorists argue that there is also a form of creativity that exists prior to experience and can therefore be developed through education. Alongside exceptional creative achievement, often wrongly associated in popular imagination with the Romantic figure of the genius, there is also a more modest, everyday form of creativity, referred to as "normative creativity" (Sternberg 1998: 191). This type of creativity arises from existing cognitive structures and mental representations. By contrast, there is also an experimental, exploratory form of creativity that is less structured, in which chance and spontaneity play a significant role in creative thought. In this view, cognitive theorists distinguish between two broad types of creativity: structured, generative creativity, and unstructured, exploratory creativity (Sternberg 1998: 208).

These distinctions, however, should not be confused with the two categories used in the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (*CEFRL) to describe written production: on the one hand, writing essays and comments, and on the other, creative writing. Writing essays and comments refers to formulaic, model-based production, in which learners produce set text types such as argumentative essays or postcards. Creative writing, by contrast, does not necessarily involve fictional writing, even at advanced levels. Instead, it refers to more open-ended writing that is not tightly constrained by templates or fixed structures, but allows for freer expression, such as, for example, describing a person.

Both categories proposed by the CEFRL and commonly used in L2 instruction are beneficial not only because they contribute to a coherent pedagogical framework, but also because they help shape and develop new cognitive patterns. The repeated emphasis on formulaic, structured writing, as well as on writing as a process, turns written production into a form of work like any other, in which effort and perseverance take precedence over talent, genius, and other traditionally Romantic attributes. However, since form often determines content, texts produced in L2 classrooms tend, in most cases, to constrain creativity in favour of adapting to language level, task requirements, context, and the learner's needs and interests.

What cognitive theorists propose as a way of fostering creativity is the construction of a form that anticipates the functions a text is meant to fulfil, through what Sternberg calls "preinventive structures that are relatively uncontaminated by knowledge of the specific goal or task" (Sternberg 1998: 204), such as the brainstorming. A well-established strategy not only in L2 classrooms, but also in the increasingly common creative writing courses and workshops, the brainstorming stimulates creativity by providing an initial impulse for the exchange of ideas, whether in the form of an image, a quotation, a word, a film scene, a piece of music, and so on. At the same time, it encourages an exploratory and contingent dimension of thinking, allowing for chance and unpredictability, since, although the process is framed by a shared prompt, the outcome cannot be anticipated. The brainstorming thus creates a form that is both task and objective in itself, a structure whose primary function is to shape content. Moreover, it not only fosters what cognitive theorists call "everyday" or "modest" creativity, in line with learners' needs and interests, but also conveys a key insight from literary theory: that fictional texts are, above all, an aesthetic form that both shapes and is shaped by its content.

I argue that, in order to move language users out of their comfort zone and to foster both creativity and the kind of abstract thinking that has traditionally underpinned humanistic education, the production of fictional texts should be encouraged already at intermediate levels (B1, B2), even if linguistic resources and competences are not yet fully developed. Free, dynamic, and alert modes of thinking can be cultivated, and the most effective environment for stimulating and developing them is the arena in which the ideas, values, and experiences of humanity are most fully articulated, namely, literature. Thus, although the CEFRL framework and its level-based organization of content are highly effective for second language acquisition, I also argue for the need to create spaces of freedom (moments of respite within language classes) that should occasionally be devoted, as a form of ethical responsibility, to the reception and production of literary texts.

While the primary aim of literary text production should be the stimulation of creativity, in terms of reception it is important not to fall into the analytical framework proposed by the CEFRL, as further developed in the *Companion Volume*. According to the descriptors in the Companion Volume, language users are expected, first, to develop the competences required to work with literary texts only at advanced levels (C1, C2), and, second, to engage in reading only once these competences are fully established, at which point reading is defined as critical and analytical, as follows: there are no descriptors for levels A1 and A2. Up to level B2, the emphasis is placed on description rather than evaluation. At B2 level, the language user/learner is able to analyse similarities and differences between works, expressing a reasoned opinion and referring to the perspectives of others. At C1 level, analysis becomes more nuanced, focusing on the ways in which a work engages its audience, the extent to which it is conventional, or whether it employs irony. At C2 level, the language user/learner is able to recognise finer linguistic and stylistic nuances, uncover connotations, and provide more critical evaluations of how structure, language, and rhetorical devices are deployed in a literary work for a particular purpose (*Companion Volume*: 2020: 107).

Such a progression does not appear fully appropriate for non-specialist readers, such as second-language users, for whom the reception of literary texts should primarily be an experience of pleasure rather than a professional mode of reading. This is not to suggest that analytical thinking and critical skills should be excluded from L2 instruction; however, in the case of literary texts, an affective and identificatory mode of reading arguably brings learners closer to literature than a critical, objective, or professionally oriented approach. Moreover, from an essentialist perspective, the culture of the target language cannot be accessed otherwise than through an affectively engaged and explicitly subjective mode of reading.

2. The Affective Turn

The "affective turn" in the social sciences and humanities in the mid-1990s emerged not only as a response to broader historical changes (Clough 2007: 2) and to the need to theorise issues such as traumatic memory, but also as part of a shift in feminist theory away from an excessive focus on bodily functions toward an embodied perspective that takes into account not only the surface of the skin, but also what arises at its point of contact with the "flesh" of the world and of the social. With the "affective turn", emotions came to occupy a more central role at both individual and collective levels, being understood as forms, textures, and material processes that circulate, are shaped, and are transformed through encounters with societal realities.

In applied linguistics, the "affective turn" refers to a shift in focus toward the emotions experienced by both learners and teachers in L2 classrooms (Richards 2020: 1). I argue that, in the absence of national educational programmes based on Affective Strategy Training, literary texts remain the most effective means of exploring and working with the range of emotions present in the classroom. This, however, comes with the caveat that engaging with literary texts in L2 instruction may bring learners into contact with their own emotions as well as those of others, provided that the teacher encourages an identificatory, empathetic, and affective mode of reading rather than a critical, analytical, and detached one.

As the CEFRL (including the *Companion Volume*) indicates, affective reading should be systematically developed from level B1 onwards, although the groundwork for such an approach needs to be laid earlier, at elementary levels (A1, A2). According to the CEFRL, at lower levels (A1–A2), learners are expected to develop a basic affective relationship with non-literary texts, with the people and emotions they convey, as well as with the way in which texts "speak" to the learner. At this stage, teachers may invite students to express whether they enjoyed the text, describe their emotional responses, discuss the characters, and relate elements of the work to their own experiences (*Companion Volume* 2020: 106). A similar approach can then be continued at B1, but with greater emphasis on detail and affective nuance.

At B2 level, however, the descriptors suggest that learners are expected not only to articulate their emotional responses to a (literary) text, but also to reflect on and analyse those responses in terms of how they were generated by the text itself, that is, how specific textual features and narrative strategies elicit particular affective reactions (Companion Volume 2020: 106). The issue with this claim, in our view, is that it conflates linguistic competence with what might be called "emotional competence" (Richards 2020: 1), implicitly assuming that a higher level of language proficiency directly corresponds to greater emotional maturity.

Solutions to such a problem may be multiple; however, what is essential is the development of affective skills and an identificatory mode of reading literary texts, which over time can lead to the formation not only of mechanisms for analysing and understanding literary texts, but also of tools for monitoring one's own emotional state. Within L2 instruction, as in formal education more broadly and from as early as primary school, an alternative to critical and objective reading, namely, one that fosters an affective mode of interpretation, would be the implementation of an affective journal. In such a journal, second-language users would record and reflect on their emotions from basic levels (A1, A2) through to advanced levels (C1, C2). Whether referring to their relationship with literary or non-literary texts, with peers, with the surrounding world, with places they encounter, or with everyday life more generally, all of these experiences could be documented through the teacher's guidance in L2 classes and through engagement with texts, primarily literary ones.

The advantages of such a journal would be multiple: (1) it fosters emotional discipline and an inclination toward self-reflection, contributing to the individual's overall emotional development, not only in their capacity as a language user; (2) it promotes the construction of a personal relationship with the text (literary or non-literary), which can be extended to the surrounding world and may contribute to the development of an "interpersonal rhetoric"; (3) it becomes an indicator of both emotional and linguistic progress, as development across levels can be observed through vocabulary, syntax, and grammatical structures; and, finally, (4) as cognitive theorists suggest, affective stimulation in L2 classrooms leads to more effective acquisition of linguistic competences, skills, and knowledge (Richards 2020: 1-15).

In conclusion, beyond its role as linguistic and cultural content, literature in L2 instruction has the potential to foster creativity and contribute to learners' emotional development, provided that it is not approached solely through a critical or professionally oriented mode of reading. When conceived as a space of openness and reflective engagement, the literary text can facilitate a form of encounter with the world and with the social that goes beyond surface meanings, cultural clichés, or syntactic structures, and enters into the increasingly central domain of emotions. As both a response to and a counterpoint to a society in which artificial intelligence is becoming an empirical agent, this paper maintains, in a humanistic spirit, that an education and a society grounded in affect are unlikely to be fully subsumed by non-human, digital forms of intelligence.

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The Didactic Approach of the Linguistic Biographies

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Abstract: *The Use of Linguistic Biographies in Foreign Language Teaching*. Linguistic biographies represent a valuable pedagogical tool that can be effectively integrated into the teaching of Romanian as a foreign language. They enable teachers to monitor students' progress and contribute to the development of communicative competence. Furthermore, linguistic biographies can serve as a form of assessment, providing a comprehensive perspective on learners' proficiency levels as well as on the communication strategies they employ.

The use of linguistic biographies in the language classroom facilitates the design of both speaking and writing activities, allowing for the integration of productive skills in a meaningful and contextualized manner.

Keywords: *classroom activities, linguistic biographies, speaking and writing, communicative competence*

0. Introduction

The process of acquiring a foreign language is a complex and demanding endeavor in which the use of appropriate instructional tools is essential for ensuring that the entire teaching–learning–assessment process is centered on the effective development of each student's competences. One of the primary purposes of language learning is communication, as it represents a fundamental need of the individual in relation to society. To this end, students require a wide range of activities that encourage them to actively use their existing linguistic repertoire, while also developing communication strategies that enable them to overcome potential difficulties, such as gaps in vocabulary or unfamiliar expressions.

The present paper aims to present a series of activities through which linguistic biographies can be integrated into the process of teaching Romanian as a foreign language. Each of these activities can be adapted to the students' profile and can combine both spoken and written components. The paper begins with a theoretical framework, including the definition of linguistic biographies and an overview of key concepts related to the development of communicative competence, followed by a description of classroom activities that can be implemented in practice.

1. Theoretical Framework

1.1. Linguistic Biographies

In outlining the theoretical framework, it is necessary to review several key characteristics of the concept of the linguistic biography, a relatively recent field that remains insufficiently explored. Linguistic biographies are examined across multiple areas of research, including sociolinguistics, migration studies, didactics, as well as within the core documents of the European Language Passport, and, not least, in linguistics - more specifically, in discourse analysis.

From a didactic perspective, linguistic biographies (LB) represent an important tool for the development of communicative competence and lend themselves to a dual function. Firstly, for students, they provide an opportunity for reflection, self-assessment of language proficiency, and increased awareness of linguistic errors, which facilitates their subsequent correction. Secondly, for teachers, they constitute a valuable instrument for understanding individual students' needs, improving teaching methods, and adapting both strategies and activities to learners' educational requirements. Furthermore, they offer insight into how students use their linguistic repertoire.

Linguistic biographies are regarded as dynamic, evolving documents in which learners narrate their linguistic and intercultural experiences acquired throughout the process of learning one or more foreign languages. One of their main advantages lies in their adaptability, as they can be continuously updated and revised alongside the expansion of learners' linguistic repertoire and the accumulation of new experiences. We consider their use in the classroom to be essential, as they function both as a language exercise and as a means through which teachers can gain a clearer and more comprehensive understanding of students' language proficiency.

Linguistic biographies (LB) do not follow a fixed structure, although they may be organized according to several guiding criteria. In this regard, EAQUALS/ALTE proposes a four-part structure for the linguistic biography, providing guidance and explanations for each component of the activity:

1. **Learning objectives in the language acquisition process**, which include both the reasons for learning a foreign language and the components considered important. The purpose of this section is to support learners in gaining a clearer understanding of their motivations and desired outcomes. In the case of formal instruction, it also enables the teacher to design a course plan aligned with students' objectives; for independent learners, it facilitates the identification of necessary learning steps (EAQUALS/ALTE 2000: 3).
2. **Linguistic experiences presented in chronological order.** This section includes a chronological account of all language-learning experiences, encompassing languages encountered in early childhood (e.g., within the family or while living abroad or in multilingual regions), languages studied in school, visits to other countries, and languages used in professional contexts. All known languages should be included, regardless of proficiency level or mode of acquisition. The aim of this section is to provide a clear and

comprehensive overview of the learner's linguistic background at the time of writing (EAQUALS/ALTE 2000: 3).

3. **Significant linguistic and intercultural experiences.** This section includes all intercultural experiences that have influenced the learner, particularly those that have contributed to the development of linguistic competence and/or to a deeper understanding of another culture. Such experiences may involve personal interactions with speakers of the target language, travel, participation in exchange programmes, or engagement with cultural products such as literature and music. These experiences often enhance motivation and shape learners' attitudes toward the language and its associated culture. When addressing intercultural experiences, attention should be directed toward the most relevant cultural differences, as well as to all types of experiences, regardless of their nature. Equally important are any misunderstandings or difficulties arising from cultural shock. Finally, learners are encouraged to reflect on the changes and influences generated by these experiences (EAQUALS/ALTE 2000: 4).
4. **Current linguistic priorities**, including the evaluation of proficiency levels attained. The purpose of this section is to enable learners to assess their linguistic competences and to establish future learning objectives. Periodic self-assessment allows learners to monitor their progress and to identify areas for further development (EAQUALS/ALTE 2000: 4).

Each of the four sections can be continuously updated in accordance with the learner's linguistic development and their integration into diverse environments that contribute to the overall intercultural experience. The linguistic biographies described in the European Language Passport are traditionally produced in written form; however, they may also serve as an effective alternative means of formative assessment, for instance as part of a portfolio. Such a portfolio may include a number of texts, determined by the teacher, and can adopt a more informal format, allowing students to incorporate additional elements such as travel photographs, anecdotal accounts, or descriptions of visited places.

Furthermore, prior to the actual writing process, preparatory speaking activities can be carried out in the classroom in order to support and facilitate text production.

1.2. Communicative Competence

Communicative competence in foreign languages is one of the eight key competences defined by the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFR). It encompasses both the comprehension and production of oral messages—such as initiating, maintaining, and concluding conversations—as well as the ability to read, understand, and produce written texts appropriate to various communicative contexts. In other words, communicative competence involves the effective use of language in interaction with others, where language functions as a tool serving the individual's needs.

According to the CEFR (2003: 1), communicative competence is structured around the interrelation of three core components: the linguistic component, the sociolinguistic component, and the pragmatic component. The linguistic component refers to the development of lexical, phonetic, and syntactic skills; the sociolinguistic component involves the integration of sociocultural parameters relevant to language use; and the pragmatic component is reflected in the functional use of linguistic resources, including the realization of communicative functions and speech acts, based on established interactional patterns and descriptors.

The CEFR adopts a pragmatic approach to this phenomenon, emphasizing that individuals who learn and use a foreign language are "social agents (members of society) who have tasks to accomplish (which are not exclusively communicative in nature) within a given set of circumstances, in a specific environment, and within a particular domain of activity" (CEFR 2003: 15). While speech acts are carried out within communicative activities, these activities themselves are embedded within a broader social context, which alone can confer their full meaning. This perspective highlights the role of language as a tool for communication.

In the same document, this role is further illustrated through a systematic description of the language learning process: language use, including language learning, involves a series of actions performed by individuals who, as both persons and social agents, develop a set of general competences, and more specifically, communicative competence based on the use of linguistic resources. Learners employ these competences in a variety of contexts and conditions, responding to different constraints in order to carry out communicative activities that involve the reception and production of texts on specific topics within particular domains. In doing so, they apply the most appropriate strategies for accomplishing given tasks, while interaction with interlocutors contributes to the consolidation or modification of these competences (CEFR 2003: 15).

In light of these considerations, we argue that the primary objective of language learning is fundamentally communicative, with language functioning as a tool available to the user for establishing and developing social relationships. The development of communicative competence can only be achieved through activities involving both speaking and writing; however, these should not be treated as separate from the teaching of grammar or other competences. Rather, they should be integrated, as all competences are interdependent and do not function in isolation.

The development of communicative competence is achieved through activities that encourage students to interact both in pairs or groups and with the teacher. In addition, activities involving the reception and production of both oral and written texts are essential. Since the communicative act extends beyond simple question-and-answer exchanges, it is recommended that activities be based on authentic communication situations, thereby preparing students for real-life contexts outside the classroom.

One such activity is role-play, which simulates everyday interactions, such as conversations in a shop, restaurant, or theatre. In this context, one student may assume the role of a waiter or shop assistant, while another takes on the role of the customer. The purpose of the activity is to facilitate the use of previously taught lexical and grammatical elements in a manner that does not appear constrained by isolated or mechanical exercises. An additional advantage of this approach lies in the familiarity of the communicative situations, allowing students to draw on their existing experiential knowledge.

Another effective strategy involves the description of words through sentences. In this activity, a student selects a slip of paper containing a word and must describe it to the rest of the class in order for it to be guessed. For this activity, the teacher is required to prepare the slips in advance, ensuring that they contain the target vocabulary. A similar activity can be based on question formation: a student receives a card with a word written on it, which is shown to their peers but not to the student themselves. The student must then formulate as many questions as possible, to which their peers respond, in order to guess the word. The lexical item may refer to a vegetable, a fruit, an object, a well-known person, or a profession. As in the previous activity, the teacher is responsible for preparing the materials beforehand.

2. Teaching Activities

In the context of developing communicative competence, a range of activities can be designed that incorporate the use of linguistic biographies. Given that the topic is a familiar one—namely, personal experience—we consider that such activities can be introduced as early as the end of the A1 level, following the teaching of the present perfect tense.

The most widely known method of integrating linguistic biographies into foreign language instruction involves asking students to produce a written text in which they describe their experiences of learning foreign languages (Baroni & Bemporad 2011). Linguistic and intercultural experiences are subsequently included in a portfolio—a collection of written productions that allows both students and teachers to observe linguistic development over time. Since language acquisition is a continuous process, this progression is reflected in the increasing complexity of the texts, from simpler structures at lower levels to more advanced constructions at higher levels. This type of activity is particularly valuable, as it enables students to develop writing skills while also applying lexical and grammatical elements in context. Moreover, it encourages reflection during the writing process, allowing students to identify and correct errors and to consult dictionaries when necessary. However, the use of external resources may affect the accuracy of assessment, as it can obscure certain gaps in students' linguistic competence.

Another activity that we consider particularly effective is debate. Raphaël Baroni and Chiara Bemporad (2011) propose a conversational approach in which each student recounts their language learning trajectory, thereby facilitating the exchange of ideas and information. Conducted in pairs or small groups, this activity focuses on the questions students ask one another and represents a predominantly oral task, in contrast to the previously described writing activity. It is highly beneficial, as it encourages spontaneous expression and requires students to employ appropriate lexical strategies when they encounter gaps in their vocabulary.

In our view, the development of oral competence is essential and involves a different pedagogical approach from that used in writing activities. During writing tasks, students are typically given sufficient time to select appropriate structures and may use dictionaries to support their production, which provides a higher degree of comfort. Additionally, revisions can be made to improve coherence. In contrast, speaking activities require real-time processing: error correction is more challenging, and students must rapidly select appropriate structures, ensuring grammatical agreement (e.g., subject–verb or noun–adjective agreement) before producing utterances. As a result, such activities are more demanding and make students more aware of both their current level of proficiency and their communicative capabilities in the target language. At the same time, they allow teachers to more easily observe students' communication strategies and learning needs.

As an extension of this activity, students' oral accounts may be recorded and subsequently discussed in class with the aim of improving oral production. These recordings can then be included in the portfolio alongside written texts. A comparative analysis of written and oral productions can help students better understand their own discourse organization and identify differences between the two modes. Raphaël Baroni and Chiara Bemporad (2011) emphasize the importance of such narrative activities, as they lead to broader reflections on learning objectives and strategies in the acquisition of the target language. Following the speaking activity, the authors also recommend the subsequent production of written texts.

Another writing activity proposed by the aforementioned authors is based on pair work. Raphaël Baroni and Chiara Bemporad suggest that, in the first stage of the task, each student should analyze a peer's text in order to identify aspects such as language learning strategies, as well as linguistic and intercultural difficulties encountered. In the second stage, students are required to identify and mark language errors, recognize communication strategies, and suggest ways of improving linguistic competence. The activity is structured around a set of five guiding questions proposed by the authors. Although the experiment was conducted with a group studying French, the questions can be adapted to Romanian as a foreign language:

- How and why did you learn French? What role does French play in your country's educational system? How important was it to you before enrolling in this course?
- What factors (people, events) have influenced, positively or negatively, your motivation to begin and continue learning French?
- Have you visited a French-speaking country? What did this experience mean to you?
- Why did you choose this French course?
- In your opinion, how might this French course be important in your life? (Baroni & Bemporad 2011: 123)

The usefulness of this type of activity also lies in the fact that it encourages interaction among students and facilitates mutual understanding within the group. However, it is important to take into account the profile of the group, as overly critical peer feedback may have a negative impact on the recipient.

The two authors further propose extending this activity through the production of an individual written text, thereby transitioning from pair or group work to independent work. Within the same framework, they also recommend exercises focused on error correction and the improvement of linguistic competence.

The next activity described in the same article by the aforementioned authors involves the use of an online forum, with a focus on learners' acquisition experiences. The activity was implemented with a group of approximately 20-year-old students who had reached a B2 level at the time of the study. Within this framework, students were invited to publish, on an online platform, their personal experiences accumulated from the beginning of their language learning process up to the moment of posting on the forum. Given the nature of the online environment, the writing style adopted was informal, which simplified the process in comparison to tasks requiring adherence to formal writing conventions.

Through the use of the forum, students not only had access to their peers' contributions but were also able to respond to questions and engage in discussions on various topics. Each participant was required to be active on the forum at least three times per week, either by initiating new discussion threads or by contributing to existing ones. The experiment lasted three weeks and concluded with an evaluation questionnaire and a follow-up classroom discussion.

In our view, this type of activity can be highly beneficial, as students often find it easier to express themselves in an online environment, where they feel less exposed and can participate more comfortably in discussions. On the other hand, the informal nature of forum writing may result in less complex linguistic structures compared to those found in formal classroom assignments, which can make it more difficult for teachers to accurately assess students' proficiency levels. Nevertheless, we consider that forum-based interaction is valuable, as many students feel more at ease sharing their experiences in an informal format. Furthermore, the use of such platforms contributes to a more flexible and student-centered teaching approach, aligning more closely with learners' preferences and habits.

In addition to the activities discussed above, two further tasks can be incorporated, one of which focuses on oral production and the other on written production. The first activity is an oral task carried out in pairs and consists of an interview. We propose that students conduct an interview based on a set of questions provided by the teacher and record their responses. Following the recording, each student listens to their own production and is given the opportunity to identify and correct any errors.

A similar activity was implemented with a group of students enrolled in a preparatory year programme; however, instead of working in pairs, the teacher recorded each student individually. Afterward, students listened to their responses, with some identifying their own errors, while others received feedback and explanations from the teacher. The set of questions used—whose purpose is not exclusively didactic—consists of twelve items addressing both personal information and language learning experiences, as well as personal opinions (Suciu 2009: 843):

1. Where are you from?
2. Where did you grow up?
3. What language(s) do you speak at home? With whom do you speak this language/these languages?
4. What other languages do you know?
5. Why did you learn these languages? With whom do you speak them?
6. Why are you learning Romanian?
7. When and where did you start learning Romanian?
8. What do you find easiest in Romanian?

9. What difficulties have you encountered in learning Romanian (e.g., comprehension, grammar, writing, speaking)? Please explain.
10. Do you think that living in Romania helps you learn Romanian more easily?
11. When and with whom do you speak Romanian?
12. What is your opinion of Romanian people's mentality?

In this case, we consider that the production of written texts is no longer necessary, as recommended by Raphaël Baroni and Chiara Bemporad for their proposed activities, since the recording of responses provides sufficient material for observation and analysis.

The next activity we propose, as previously mentioned, focuses on writing. Unlike the interview task, this activity requires students to create the linguistic biography of a fictional character based on a set of images, with the text constructed in a narrative, storytelling format. The images may either be presented without a predetermined order—distributed on separate sheets for students to arrange before composing the narrative—or provided in a sequence established by the teacher.

For the implementation of this activity, the class is divided into groups of three or four students. Each group receives a set of images along with basic information about their character (e.g., name, age, nationality, country, and city of origin). Students are also provided with a range of useful temporal and causal expressions, which they are required to incorporate into their narratives, such as *a week/month/year ago; after/after that/after; because/since; after a week/month/year; at present*.

Within linguistic biographies, it is also possible to observe instances of language transfer (calques), in addition to grammatical and lexical errors. This is often due to the fact that respondents are placed in spontaneous communicative situations, where they are required to provide responses despite not possessing all the necessary lexical resources. One illustrative example is the calqued expression *"explosion in my head"* (from *"mind-blowing"*), used to describe the difficulties encountered in learning Romanian, particularly in relation to the dative and accusative cases.

3. Conclusions

In conclusion, we reiterate the view that linguistic biographies constitute an important tool in the teaching of foreign languages, not only Romanian as a foreign language, as they contribute significantly to the development of communicative competence through the contextualization of lexical and grammatical elements. Their usefulness lies in the comprehensive perspective they provide on students' proficiency levels, facilitating both the reduction of errors and the enrichment of lexical repertoire.

At the same time, by addressing a familiar and personally relevant topic, linguistic biographies encourage the exchange of opinions and foster interaction among students. Beyond their linguistic function, they also serve as a means through which students become better acquainted with one another and develop more effective relationships, both with their peers and with the teacher.

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Online Platforms in Teaching Technical Language

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Abstract: *Online Platforms in Technical Language Teaching***.** Specialized language constitutes a fundamental component of language instruction, playing a key role in effective communication. Its teaching also aims to establish the lexical foundations necessary for future students and professionals. In recent years, approaches to teaching specialized language have evolved significantly, increasingly integrating technology into the teaching–learning process, as online platforms have become valuable tools for both teachers and students. Among their advantages are the creation of a more flexible and engaging learning environment, the ease with which teachers can monitor students' progress, and the accessibility of course materials for learners. The present article aims to provide a selection—based on our experience—of the most useful and intuitive educational platforms, while also presenting effective methods for teaching technical language through their use. To this end, we propose a series of practical activities that can be implemented in the classroom, including lexical exercises (both for introduction and assessment), tests, and flashcards.

Keywords: *specialized language, technical language, digitalization, online platforms, teaching, interactive activities*

0. Introduction

This paper examines the use of online platforms in teaching technical language, which gained significant prominence during the pandemic and continues to exhibit an upward trend. Their growing popularity can be attributed primarily to their versatility, as they offer a wide range of exercise types and activities that can support various stages of a course - from the introduction of new lexical and grammatical concepts, to their practice, and ultimately their assessment. With regard to technical language, we consider its teaching to be an essential stage in learning any foreign language, not only Romanian, as it represents a key component for individuals intending to pursue a career in a technical field.

The structure of this paper is as follows: the first section presents several theoretical premises related to online platforms; the second reviews didactic approaches to the teaching of specialized language; the third section, adopting a more practical perspective, outlines activities that can be implemented using online platforms. The final section presents the conclusions.

1. Online Platforms: An Effective Method?

In the context of the technological advancements of recent years, online platforms have become a prominent topic within the field of education, being increasingly employed in the teaching of foreign languages, including Romanian. Another factor contributing to their widespread adoption among young people is the popularity of social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok. For students, completing exercises in a virtual format has become increasingly convenient, often being preferred over traditional worksheets.

Online platforms facilitate the gamification of learning, particularly in the acquisition of new lexical items. This approach reduces the pressure associated with providing correct answers and instead introduces a playful dimension, similar to that found in social media environments. Gamification can be understood as the application of game elements to non-game contexts. For students, virtual exercises - especially those incorporating competitive and game-based features (Suciu 2019) - tend to be more engaging, with some learners reporting increased levels of concentration compared to traditional exercise formats. This phenomenon can be explained by the transformation of task completion into a form of light competition, either among peers or against time constraints, thereby associating the learning process with a game-like experience.

However, the advantages extend beyond these aspects. For teachers, online platforms function as valuable instructional tools, as they enable the integration of all essential components within a single environment, thereby creating a more accessible and user-friendly learning space. Consequently, theoretical materials, practice activities, assessment tasks, and students' homework can be centralized in one location. Furthermore, materials can be accessed at any time and from any location, while feedback can be delivered more efficiently.

Another significant advantage, particularly in the context of specialized language teaching, is the integration of visual support. Certain platforms provide both customizable "character" images, which can be adapted to meet specific course requirements, and images of "tools" that facilitate the teaching and reinforcement of vocabulary items.

As previously noted, the body of research on online platforms is extensive; however, we will refer to two studies that we consider particularly relevant and representative.

The first, *The Effects of Gamification-Based Teaching Practices on Student Achievement and Students' Attitudes Toward Lessons*, conducted by Ibrahim Yildirim (2017), examines the impact of gamification through an experimental study involving 97 second-year students from the Department of Elementary Mathematics Education at a state university in southern Turkey during the 2014-2015 academic year. The experimental group comprised 49 students, while the control group included 48 students. The findings indicate that gamification-based teaching practices have a positive effect on both students' academic performance and their attitudes toward lessons.

Within the research design, the 150-minute course was structured into 90 minutes of face-to-face instruction and 60 minutes of distance learning, thereby adopting a blended learning approach that combined traditional education (60%) with online instruction (40%). During the distance learning phase, the Moodle platform was employed. Each student created an account and accessed the system using individual login credentials, while teachers also established accounts in order to monitor students' progress. Course materials were made available via the Moodle platform to enhance students' level of preparedness and engagement.

In addition to the ease of access to materials and the points awarded for completing assignments-subsequently incorporated into the final assessment-the platform's game-like design, which included XP (experience points) and badges, rewarded students with achievement points for their participation in classroom activities and blog-based tasks. This approach fostered a competitive environment and shifted the learning experience closer to that of gaming, rather than traditional study practices.

The second study, *Online Platforms Used for Teaching and Learning during the COVID-19 Era: The Case of LIS Students in Delta State University, Abraka*, conducted by Doris Emetarom Aduba and Okeoghene Mayowa-Adebara (2021), demonstrates that online platforms-particularly those designed for communication-facilitate the teaching process. Specifically, they enhance teachers' accessibility and enable more efficient communication with students through virtual tools.

2. Technical Language and Why We Teach It

With regard to teaching - more specifically, the introduction of technical language in Romanian as a foreign language courses within the Erasmus programme - our approach is grounded in students' curiosity to acquire Romanian vocabulary relevant to their field of study. Our students are enrolled in faculties such as Civil Engineering, Automotive Engineering, Mechanical Engineering and Mechatronics, as well as Industrial Engineering, Robotics, and Production Management. In addition, some attend courses within the Faculty of Automation and

Computer Science. Over time, we have also worked with students from other specializations, including Architecture and Electrical Engineering.

During their mobility period in Cluj-Napoca, which typically spans one semester or one academic year, Romanian is not a core subject for Erasmus students. Nevertheless, they opt to study it, attending two hours of instruction per week. Given this limited instructional time, it is reasonable to assume that they will not achieve a high level of proficiency by the end of the course; however, this does not diminish their motivation or curiosity.

Although didactic frameworks generally recommend the introduction of specialized language at the B2 level (CEFR 2003: 63), in this context we adopt a more flexible approach, introducing specialized lexical elements at earlier stages in order to respond to students' needs and interests. This is achieved through the integration of general vocabulary with elements of specialized lexis.

A concrete example would be when teaching the present indicative. For practice, terms such as *țiglă (*engl*. tile)* and *acoperiș (*engl*. roof / rooftop)* can also be incorporated (*Constructorul pune țiglă pe acoperiș*. / engl. *The builder installs tiles on the roof*.)

However, we always keep in mind that, for our students, specialized language is not essential, the main focus remaining communication. Therefore, in order to make classes as engaging and interactive as possible, we recommend diversifying activities. This is where online platforms support us - tools we will discuss in the third part of the paper - which we do not hesitate to use whenever we have the opportunity (Simina-Suciu 2023).

3. How and Which Platforms We Use

Although numerous platforms can be employed in the teaching process, we have selected five that we consider to be the most user-friendly and intuitive.

3.1. Quizizz

In this regard, the first platform is the well-known Quizizz (www.quizizz.com). The primary reason for its use is the possibility of importing materials from Google Classroom, which makes it particularly effective both for introducing new lexical items and for formative assessment.

With regard to our instructional practice, we find this platform especially useful due to the possibility of incorporating drawings (Fig. 1), an aspect that proves essential, particularly for Erasmus students whose interest in specialized language emerges as early as the A1 level. For instance, an activity such as *"Draw a triangle"* can be designed, through which students not only practice newly acquired vocabulary but are also introduced to the imperative mood.

Although the imperative is not typically associated with the A1 level (Platon et al. 2023: 20), in the context of Erasmus groups we prioritize the introduction and practice of elements that are most relevant to students' immediate needs, presenting them in the order in which learners naturally encounter these lexical and grammatical structures, rather than adhering strictly to prescribed proficiency levels.

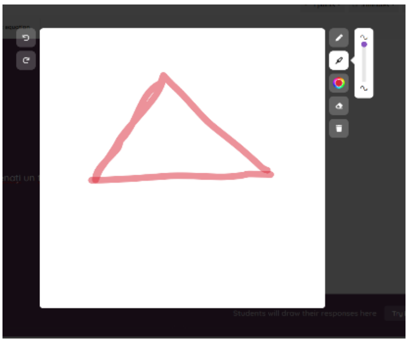

Fig. 1.

Furthermore, the platform allows lessons to be uploaded in the form of slides, which can be accessed by students at any time for independent study.

3.2. *Wordwall*

The second platform frequently employed in our courses—not only in those focusing on technical language, but also in general Romanian and medical language instruction—is Wordwall (www.wordwall.com). One of its key advantages is that it offers two types of interactive activities (Fig. 2, Fig. 3, and Fig. 4): matching words with their definitions and crossword puzzles. Both activities are time-constrained, thereby incorporating an element of gamification into the learning process.

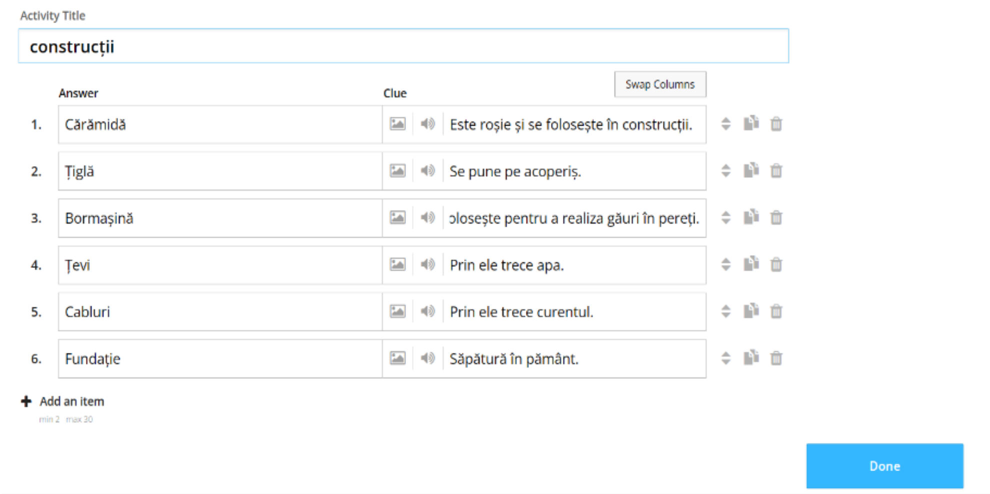

Fig. 2

Fig. 3

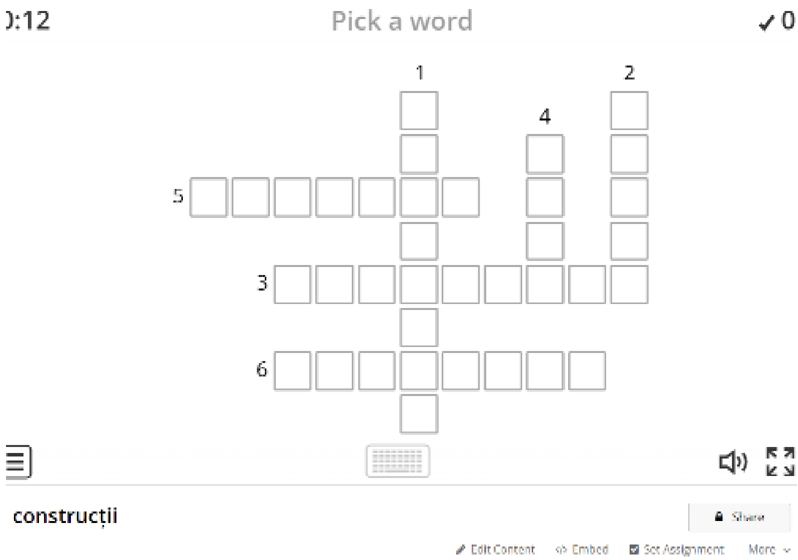

Fig. 4.

One of the key advantages of the Wordwall application is that, within matching exercises, images can be incorporated to facilitate task completion, while learners also have the possibility of accessing the pronunciation of the target words.

3.3 Pixton

The third platform we would like to mention is Pixton (www.pixton.com), which is primarily used for developing communicative competence and for integrating specialized language into communicative contexts.

On this platform, dialogues and role-play activities can be designed using customizable characters. However, one limitation is that the character creation process can be relatively time-consuming; therefore, we recommend that students prepare their avatars prior to the classroom activity.

A task we propose in order to consolidate vocabulary is the following: *Create a dialogue between a worker and a team leader in which you use at least five lexical items belonging to technical language* (Fig. 5).

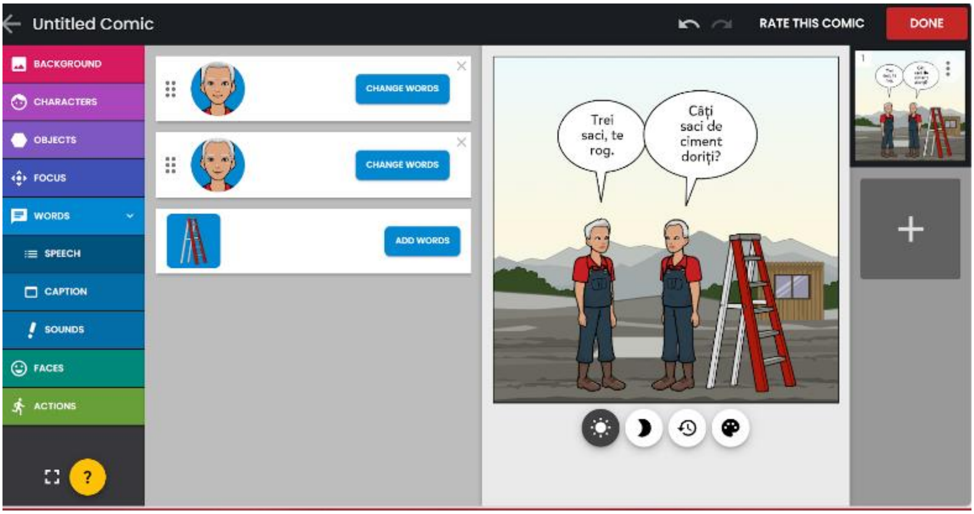

Fig. 5.

An activity of this type is highly important for the development of communicative competence, as it integrates technical language with the aim of practicing and consolidating it.

3.4. Wordart

The WordArt platform (www.wordart.com) provides an ideal tool for creating word clouds, as well as other visual formats, for the purpose of introducing and assessing vocabulary. Here, an activity such as the following can be designed: *Group the words from the cloud into two columns: mechanical elements and construction elements* (Fig. 6).

Fig. 6.

To complete this exercise, after the grouping stage, students can be asked to select 4–5 words and construct sentences using them, or to create a dialogue in which they integrate these terms, similarly to the activities carried out using the Pixton platform.

Another exercise based on the word cloud in Fig. 6 could be: Select five components of machines from the cloud and explain their meaning.

3.5. Linoit

The final platform we will discuss is Linoit (www.linoit.com). This is an easy-to-use virtual board, suitable for both face-to-face and online classes, which involves "posting" colored sticky notes containing words.

The board is useful for creating a word bank (e.g., *Work in groups! Write five specialized terms from the field of construction*), as well as for writing individual words that students are then asked to explain in a whole-class activity (Fig. 7).

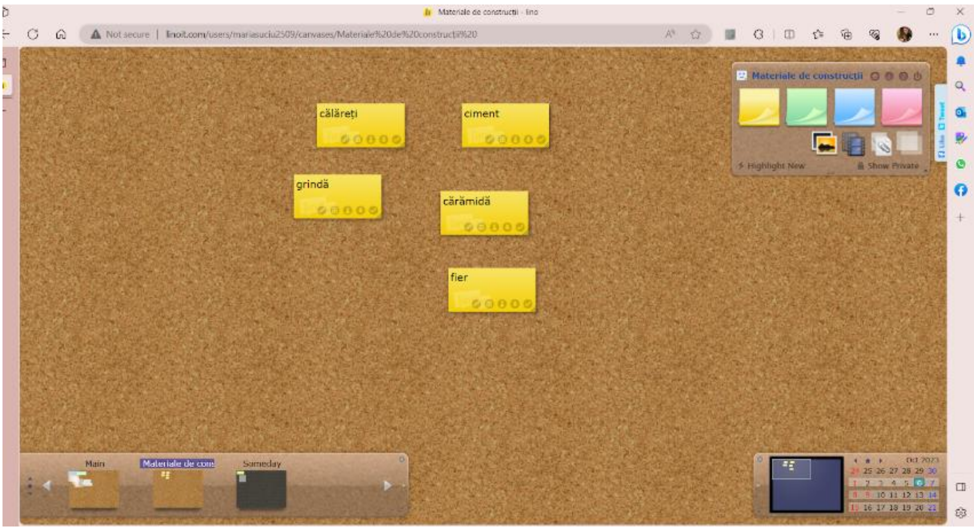

Fig. 7.

4. Conclusions

In conclusion, we would like to emphasize that online platforms are not used to replace traditional methods or to eliminate other forms of assessment; rather, they support both teachers and students with the aim of facilitating the teaching–learning process and transforming classes into engaging and relaxed environments, especially when the primary goal is communication in a foreign country rather than standardized examinations.

In this regard, we highlight the essential role of these platforms—namely, gamification—which attracts our students, encourages competitiveness, and enables them to complete the proposed tasks more efficiently. We believe that classes should not be monotonous and that any method that supports students' learning is valuable; therefore, we strongly encourage the use of online platforms, as this leads to positive outcomes.

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Practical Applications

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