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Grammatical Structures Difficult for Foreign Students to Integrate in Learning the Romanian Language

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Abstract:

Studying the Romanian language as a foreign language is a challenge for foreign students, who find themselves, not infrequently, in probable situations of understanding the Romanian language experienced in everyday life. Both the functional-communicative dimension and the one focused on the knowledge of grammatical structures are fundamental for learning the Romanian language as a foreign language. Learning a foreign language does not remain only at the individual level, but facilitates interpersonal contacts from different spaces and cultures. Learning Romanian as a foreign language is useful, even if those who try to do it will not end up being perfect and efficient speakers in all communication situations. Foreign students wishing to learn Romanian as a foreign language are characterized by linguistic and cultural diversity, so there is the possibility of a more difficult adaptation to a cultural and linguistic space totally different from the one they come from. This is where foreign students sometimes have difficulties in understanding and learning new grammatical structures for their linguistic system.

Keywords: *communication, Romanian language, linguistic system, grammatical structures, foreign students.*

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Introduction

The Romanian language and its study have seen increased interest from foreign students who want to study at Romanian faculties. The reason for foreigners' interest in the Romanian language is different: integration into the social environment, facilitation of communication in various spheres, employment in the field of work, completion of bachelor's / master's studies in Romanian, etc. Language develops not only according to the structural relationships that keep the system in balance, but also, especially, in relation to other spiritual, cultural-artistic, social, extralinguistic phenomena. According to Lăpădat, L. and Lăpădat, M.-M.:

> "Students learn languages for several reasons. Of course, one of the most important reasons is to learn how to use language in real communication with speakers of various mother tongues. A foreign language is likely to be used in two types of environments: in interaction with native speakers or in communication with people who know another foreign language.
>
> Studying a foreign language is more of a necessity than a tendency or a preference. The interest in learning and speaking it is determined by world trends: globalization, interculturality, the need to educate personalities who agree to live in a diversified, multicultural and tolerant society, to understand people who represent different cultures, while ensuring progress and prosperity of national culture. Learning a foreign language consists not only in acquiring phonetic, morphological, grammatical, semantic vocabulary and structures, but also in new ways and ways of thinking, reflecting, visions and philosophies about contemporary civilization". (Lăpădat, L., Lăpădat M.-M., 2020: 144)

For foreign students who are familiar with Latin, Latin roots or a Romance language such as Italian or French, then learning the Romanian language becomes easy, but also due to the fact that the Romanian language is a predominantly phonetic language, which means that everything it is pronounced as it is written with very few exceptions, and the sentence structure is logical and quite clear. The grammatical structure of the Romanian language is quite difficult because it has many rules, many exceptions, many suffixes and endings.

In order to learn the Romanian language, foreign students must acquire a coherent system of elementary lexical knowledge, which they can use in creative active language, as well as the training of the skills of receiving and expressing oral messages in various communication situations, for that in a foreign country the language can exclude you from the community of others. The study of the Romanian language as a foreign language focuses on knowing the structure, the norms of the language, on acquiring a conscious attitude towards its values and expressiveness. Thus, "The morphological, syntactic and, more importantly, the stylistic analysis is based on the context, that is, on a set of verbal constructions, which shed light on the meaning of the words, of their combination in sentences and phrases. The structural peculiarities of the Romanian language appear in all sectors of linguistic analysis: phonetics, vocabulary, morphology and syntax, styles. Only by looking at these aspects of language interdependently can its rich resources be discovered and its originality brought to light. The choice and fluency of expression in spoken or written exposition is an essential element of culture, which concretizes man's way of thinking and perception". (Ionescu, C., Cerkez, M., 1997: 9)

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Difficulties and difficult grammatical structures in learning Romanian as a foreign language

The organization of the teaching-learning process of the Romanian language as a foreign language is one of the main problems that persist before specialists in this field.

In the attempts to identify the difficulties in the teaching-learning process of the Romanian language as a foreign language, the fact that the status of a language is perceived differently by the people who learn it, by those who teach it and by the context must also be taken into account. So, foreign students who come to learn Romanian in Romania come from different cultures and speak different native languages. There is also an inhomogeneity of the group of foreign students who have the common goal of learning the Romanian language, both from the point of view of age and from the point of view of ethnicity, social, racial, sexual, intellectual, spiritual, religious, but also motivational. Therefore, it is very important in learning the Romanian language as a foreign language and the fact that:"Native intelligence in cooperation with work ethics and a propensity to achieve continuous perfection elevates normal users to the status of advanced users". (Chirițescu, I. M., Păunescu, F. A., 2021: 101)

An important aspect in the process of learning the Romanian language by foreign students is that a transitional language is used, namely English, when extensive explanations are needed in connection with a better understanding of a grammatical problem, or of some information on which foreign students do not understand in Romanian. This aspect can be one that prolongs the period of accommodation with the Romanian language and complicates the learning process of this language by foreign students, because,

"When English functions as a communication language in teaching Romanian, and practically Romanian will remain at the stage of a material that is either read, written or listened to, things will become complicated, and Romanian will not reach the status of a language that students can communicate in, or this is the level they need. While working with foreign students we have noticed that some of those who have advanced knowledge of English tend to filter the entire educational process of learning Romanian through this language. At a given moment, they will not be able to get passed the translation of the simple vocabulary items, and certain features of Romanian, like inflected forms, pronominal clitics, strong and weak forms of pronouns, etc. will bring about many issues because they will be compared to English grammar. Things become complicated the moment when, due to the flux of grammar explanations in English, the course risks to become a metalanguage form, eventually a translation course, or interested students are not in the least philologists, and their level of all grammar notions is unknown. This is also the cause for which the lecture in English is unreliable". (Coroamă, L., I., Popeți, E-A, 2016: 273-274)

According to studies on foreign language learning, the level of difficulty of a newly learned language depends on several factors. For example, how close the new language is to the native language or other known ones, how complex it is, how many hours are allocated each week to its study, as well as the motivation. Both for those who use Romanian as a second language and for those who study it as a foreign language, a series of difficulties related to the specific grammatical structure may arise.

Regarding Romanian as a foreign language, a first obstacle can be represented by the phonetic system itself, because here we have some sounds (and letters) specific to our language, such as: *ă, î, â, ş, ţ*, as well as groups of sounds: *ce, ci, che, chi, ge, gi, ghe, ghi*. However, among the sounds specific to the Romanian language, it is not the consonants that present difficulties. The vast majority of errors are committed in pronouncing and writing vowels. Thus, to a greater or lesser extent, there is confusion between *ă* and *î* non-existent in the native language of foreign students. In some cases, difficulties arise in the correct pronunciation of groups of sounds: *ce, ci, che, chi, ge, gi, ghe, ghi*, which results from the fact that there is no equivalent in the native languages of foreign students.

Another example of error is *i* – plural sign. In the phonetic realization it is confused with *i* - the definite article. So, *(nişte) pantofi - (some) shoes*, where *i* only softens the preceding consonant without constituting a separate syllable, is often pronounced by students in the same way as *the shoes - pantofii*Another phonetic error is the mobile, unstable, irregular accentuation in Romanian. Unlike other languages, the position of the accent varies. It can be at the beginning, in the middle or at the end of the word without any precise rule. For a foreign student, such a shift in emphasis causes many difficulties. As a conclusion, it can be said that phonetic errors are caused in a very high percentage by the influence of the phonetic system of the mother tongue of foreign students.

The understanding of verbal and nominal inflection is also problematic. The word in Romanian changes its shape a lot and we witness phonetic alternations that are relatively difficult to explain and very difficult to understand. For example, in the present indicative, the first person sg is conjugated - *eu beau*, and in the first person, pl **-** *noi bem* and this because the verb in this mode and tense obeys the rule according to which the first person, pl. is formed from the infinitive of the verb to be conjugated. In the process of learning Romanian as a foreign language by foreign students, there are some difficulties in rendering the endings from the conjugation paradigm, due to not knowing how to construct some verbs in combination with other parts of speech, or with the meanings of certain verbs, or the way different from pronouncing and writing some verb forms.

So, verbs of the I conjugation of his type: *a înfăţişa, a angaja, a îngrăşa, a degaja*, having the consonants as a theme *ş, j*, is conjugated in all moods and tenses in the same way as other verbs in the same conjugation, with the subject ending in any other consonant (eg: *eu îngraş / eu cânt, tu îngraşi / tu cânţi, el, ea îngraşă / el, ea cântă, noi îngrăşăm / noi cântăm, voi îngrăşaţi / voi cântaţi, ei, ele îngraşă / ei, ele cântă*); verbs of the IV conjugation, with the theme ending in the same consonants, *ş, j* (*a întovărăşi, a îngriji, a necăji*) forms the present subjunctive, 3rd person sg.: *el,ea să întovărăşească / el, ea să îngrijească*, and the imperfect: *eu îngrijeam / întovărăşeam, tu îngrijeai / întovărăşeai, el, ea îngrijea / întovărăşea, noi îngrijeam / întovărăşeam, voi îngrijeaţi / întovărăşeaţi, ei, ele îngrijeau / întovărăşeau*, so with the same endings as any verb of the IV conjugation. However, the verbs like *a aşeza* and *a înşela* have in the present indicative, 3rd person sg. and pl., and in the imperative, 2nd person sg., the forms: *aşază, înşală* and not *aşează, înşeală*, the latter being the result of analogy with other verbs, as for example *lucrează*, where *-ea* it is fair and motivated. Another difficulty that students face when learning the present indicative is represented by the multitude of vowel alternations that appear in the verbal root. In this sense, we believe that these should also be presented and explained through a grouping of verbs in classes

with identical or similar characteristics and their subsequent practice in relevant contexts. For example, with verbs *a învăţa, a cumpăra, a număra, a spăla* in the second person singular vocal *–ă* from the verb root will become *–e*: *tu înve*ţi, *tu cump*e*ri, tu num*e*ri, tu sp*e*li.*

Another situation in which it is often mistaken occurs with some neological verbs ending in *-ia*; in the present indicative, first person sg., they receive the ending *-ez* (eu *concediez / expediez / premiez / copiez,* etc.), and in the 3rd person sg. and pl. *-ază* (*el, ea concediază / expediază / premiază / copiază,* etc.) and not *-ează*. Sometimes mistakes are made related to not using specific endings, so in the case of the verb *a copia*, for example, the wrong form appears in the conjugation *eu copii / el, ea copie* instead of *eu copiez / el, ea copiază*. Other verbs ending in *-ia*, of the type: *a peria, a mânia, a împrăştia, a zgâria, etc.*, whose root ends in *-i*, presents some writing difficulties for foreign students in some persons and moods, such as 1st person sg. which is identical to 2nd person sg. in both present indicative and present subjunctive, spelling correctly with two i: *eu (să) perii / (să) mânii / (să) împrăştii / (să) zgârii // tu (să) perii / (să) mânii / (să) împrăştii / (să) zgârii*. And in the gerund mode, in the case of these types of verbs, the *i* is doubled, adding the suffix *-ind* to the basic theme of the present: *periind, mâniind, împrăştiind, zgâriind, copiind, concediind, expediind, premiind*, etc.

Another case where there are possible mistakes is that of verbs *a crea, a agrea, a veghea, a îngenunchea*, etc., because graphically they appear to be of the II conjugation, but they actually belong to the I conjugation (*eu creez / veghez, tu creezi / veghezi, el, ea creează / veghează, noi creăm / veghem, voi creaţi / vegheaţi, ei, ele creează / veghează*). Sometimes mistakes are also made with verbs belonging to the 3rd conjugations (*a ţine, a scrie, a prescrie, a descrie, a transcrie, a înscrie*) and the 4th (*a şti, a veni, a deveni, a reveni*, etc.) in the indicative and present subjunctive 2nd person sg. which must be written with two *-ii*, because the theme ends in *-i*, to which the corresponding endings are added: *tu (să) ţii / (să) scrii / (să) vii / (să) ştii*. Sometimes there are confusions between the forms of verbs of the 2nd conjugation and those of verbs of the 3rd conjugation, by shifting the accent: *tácem* according to the model *fácem* instead of the correct form *tăcém*, or *bátém* instead of the correct form *bátem*, which leads to a wrong framing of the verb *a tăcea* with the incorrect option *a tace* to the 3rd conjugation, or of the verb *a bate* with the incorrect option *a bătea*, in the second conjugation.

At the morphological level, I noticed problems in understanding the gender agreement of the adjective with the noun, or its positioning after the noun. Thus, it is very plausible for foreign students, especially Arab ones, to say, for example, "the student is good" or "the window is bright". Another tendency for foreign students to make mistakes exists within the *noun + adjective* group, where the articulation is performed according to the topic of the two terms. Thus, when the order is *noun + adjective*, the noun is articulated, and the adjective remains unarticulated: *camera luminoasă, grădina verde, casa albă, fata frumoasă*, etc.; when we have *adjective + noun*, the adjective is articulated, and the noun remains unarticulated: *luminoasa cameră, alba casă, frumoasa fată*, etc.

Great difficulties of understanding exist among foreign students who want to learn Romanian also in the case of prepositions. Thus, the dative is wrongly replaced by another case, namely the accusative by using the preposition *la* instead of the correct dative form: *Am dat cartea <u>la colegi</u>*, instead of the correct form *Am dat cartea <u>colegilor</u>*.

In general, before nouns that name lands, countries, continents, the preposition is used *în: Merg în Oltenia / Merg în Australia / Se duce în Anglia*; before common nouns, proper nouns, personal names, pronouns, city names, the preposition is used *la: Pleacă la mare / S-a dus la Maria / A venit la noi / Merg la Bucureşti*; when the name of the locality is preceded by the words: *city*, *village*, *commune*, it is recommended to use the preposition *în: Merge în oraşul Craiova / A plecat în satul Breb / S-a dus în comuna Gogoşu*. Depending on the meaning of the communication, the expressions are also correct: *Plec în(la) oraş / Merg în (la) ţară*, etc. Therefore, "(...) we must remember that before proper nouns, which name continents, countries, republics, lands, regions, districts, the preposition is used *în* and not *la*. (...) we could also use the preposition *la* – but looking at... *the cardinal points*. For example: M-am pornit *la* Polul Nord (...). It is important, (...) that all these tiny words, called prepositions, are in their place". (Guţu V.,1998: 220)

Most prepositions in Romanian express certain relationships, they are specialized in marking various relationships: the preposition *cu* show the association (*Eu merg cu tine la piaţă / Îmi place să mănânc pâine cu unt*), *pe* – the surface of an object (*Cartea este pe masă*), *spre* – direcţia (*Vin spre tine*), *sub* – the space located below another object (*Scaunul este sub masă*), *în* – the inclusion (*Pixul este în penar*). Some confusion among foreign students also occurs when two or more prepositions express the same relationship. For example: *la*, *până la*, *spre*, indicates a specific direction (Mă duc *la / până la / spre* magazin.); *în*, *într-un / într-o*, *dintr-un*, *dintr-o* refers to the interior of an object (*Maria intră în / într-o casă / Ea a scos telefonul dintr-o geantă roşie*). The most frequent mistakes that foreign students make in the use of prepositions, however, consist in replacing one preposition with another, causing confusion between them. For example, the preposition *de* is replaced by the preposition *cu* (*de* shows the destination, *cu* show the content): *pahar de apă*, *sticlă de vin*, *cană de lapte*, *ceaşcă de cafea*; *pahar cu apă*, *sticlă cu vin*, *cană cu lapte*, *ceaşcă cu cafea* considering both correct formulations but having different meanings; but there are other situations in which the preposition *de* is incorrectly used in its place *cu: El era un tânăr de un real talent*, *Camera de flori îi aştepta*, instead of: *El era un tânăr cu un real talent*, *Camera cu flori îi aştepta*; the oscillations between *de* and *cu* it also manifests itself in the opposite sense, so that we encounter certain wrong constructions, such as: *sufăr cu stomacul / cu inima*, instead of: *sufăr de stomac / de inimă*.

Another case is that of the possessive pronoun and adjective where there are mistakes commonly made by foreign students regarding the agreement of the genitive article. So, the most frequent mistake in the use of the genitive article consists in replacing the forms *al*, *ale* and *ai* with *a*. This often happens due to agreement with another noun in the sentence, closer than the one determined, which can sometimes lead to a change in the meaning of the respective sentence or phrase: *Rezultatele excelente obţinute la examenele naţionale sunt încununarea efortului susţinut şi* **al** *dorinţei de autodepăşire a elevilor*, in this example the genitive possessive article *al* is wrongly assimilated to the noun *efort*, when the agreement should have been made with the noun *încununarea*, in which case the correct form of the genitive possessive article would be *a*. Some grammar works mention the article as one of the most problematic elements of the Romanian language: "Appreciated as the most difficult chapter of Romanian grammar for foreigners learning our language (especially when they are speakers of a language without an article, but also when are accustomed to a different number and other forms of articles; the existence of several kinds of definite articles is a peculiarity

of the Romanian language compared to most European languages), the article poses enough problems for the cultivation of the language even for speakers of the Romanian language as a mother tongue." (Avram, M., 1986: 66). This characterization of the article warns about the complexity of the Romanian article and the difficulty that foreign students face in the process of learning the Romanian language.

The difficulties of the assimilation of the Romanian article by foreign students would oblige those who are in charge of teaching the Romanian language to approach this determinant in a way that facilitates this process. The teacher of Romanian as a foreign language must be concerned with appropriate correction techniques and strategies and must always be prepared to discuss language problems in order to eradicate the occurrence of errors and ensure the optimal context for foreign students' language learning. Error reporting and correction can be done in various ways. It is up to the teacher to find the right moment and the proper technique needed to make the correction. It is advisable for teachers to avoid giving foreign students the correct forms and encourage them to discover and formulate the correct structure themselves.

As methodological suggestions, we obviously focus on starting from the basic elements to the complex ones in learning the Romanian language, based on the principle of concentric circles, in order to obtain a well-fixed minimum background on which more complex elements of grammar can then be taught . The attractiveness of modern methods, where interactivity is the basis of learning, is unquestionable, if we compare it with traditional approaches.So according to Drăgulescu, R.: "The teaching-learning activity bore fruit when it focused more on communication and interactivity than on the mechanical learning of morphosyntax elements (these being acquired in the process of communication in Romanian), even starting from GALR, a "constructed work (...) on a syntactic-functional conception, and within it, on a generative-transformational method". (Drăgulescu, R., 2019: 88)

The exercise method is very effective: exercises to identify the correct forms, translation exercises, filling in the blanks with the right forms, exercises to establish the order of the words in the sentence, substitution exercises, etc. If learning the Romanian language as a foreign language is done under the direct guidance of a teacher, the option for the conversation method, the heuristic dialogue, is obvious. We dialogue in each lesson, we compose new dialogues, modify their content, perform various simulations, etc. It is very important that we must be aware of the value of implementing interactive learning situations within the Romanian language lessons as a foreign language and, at the same time, assimilating the skill of using the minimal unit of study - the statement, not the isolated word; the lexicon - semanticized in linguistic and situational contexts; conversation and oral expression exercises - essential; grammar and grammatical explanations, necessary to understand the linguistic phenomenon; language difficulties cannot be excluded - selected and graded on the principle of accessibility, according to frequency criteria; the theory of concentric circles, because the acquisition of knowledge in a foreign language is done gradually.

We must not forget that the Romanian language has distinctive features compared to the other Romance languages, due to Slavic and other influences, such as Greek, Turkish, Hungarian, French, English, etc. That's how those lexical doublets appear (*a munci – a lucra, a hotărî – a decide, a spune – a zice*, etc.) that complexity of grammatical elements and rules (vowel and consonant alternations, verbs ending in -*ez*, -*esc*, -*Ø*; feminine nouns – professions and nationalities: -*ă*: studentă, -*(oar)ă*: profesoară, -*(oar)e*: muncitoare, -*iță*: actriță; *nationalities:* daneză, româncă, franțuzoaică,

elveţiancă, arăboaică, chinezoaică, nemţoaică, italiancă, americancă; double negation – *Pe masă **nu** este **nimic** / **Nu** l-am văzut **niciodată***; free topic, etc.).

According to Borș, M.: "In teaching Romanian to foreigners, I often had to apologize for my language, when the articulated form of the noun *tată*

it was not *tatul*, but *tatăl* (so a masculine noun should use a feminine ending, like *mama?*), and the plural of the noun *oameni* it was not *omi*, although the plural formation rule required the addition of the ending *i*, added to the singular form. The excessive inflection of the word was a touchstone (…)". (Borș, M., 2016: 86)

The strategies and didactic approach in cases of this kind is to start from a grammatical approach to the standard language structured on levels (lexical, phonetic, morphological, syntactic), in a descriptive manner, in order to arrive at elements of normative grammar, structured on the same levels, emphasizing the mistake/interfering element and immediately giving the correct version. The didactic materials of a theoretical nature are doubled by practical materials consisting of corpuses of spoken language texts, recorded audio/video fragments, for a better and correct knowledge of the Romanian language as a foreign language.

Conclusions

The issue of acquiring any language requires an interdisciplinary perspective on the phenomenon, in which the elements of linguistics, grammar, language and culture in general are applied in specific sociolinguistic and psychopedagogical contexts. As such, the problem of acquiring the Romanian language as a foreign language is not only a linguistic problem, but also one of mutual knowledge, acceptance and respect for the otherness of the Other.

In the teaching of the Romanian language to foreign students, one of the conditions for the efficiency of this didactic process is the adequacy of the language register used by the teacher to the level of the foreign students. So, the teacher must build his speech in advance, making choices inspired by the breadth of vocabulary that the students master.

In order to achieve the objectives proposed in the didactic activity intended for the teaching of the Romanian language as a foreign language, it must be taken into account, without interruption and above all, the adaptation of the knowledge and information provided through the explanations provided to the recipients of the educational act, in this case foreign students, to their Romanian language level. If the activities of learning and deepening the Romanian language are carried out constantly, substantial changes will be observed in the expression of foreign students in the Romanian language. At the same time, there will be a positive change in the attitude of foreign students towards classes where the emphasis is placed on the in-depth teaching of grammar, precisely because the difficulties observed in assimilating the Romanian language as a foreign language by them are becoming less and less. Beyond the difficulties encountered by foreign students in learning the grammatical structures of the Romanian language as a foreign language, it must also be taken into account that any mistake they make is a step forward in the discovery of a language and a people that for a longer period or more shortly he will adopt them.

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