

ONLINE LEARNING OF ROMANIAN AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE AND TEACHING METHODS USED IN THIS APPROACH

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Abstract: In the context of learning Romanian as a foreign language there is a need to adapt to the requirements of a communicative situation, becoming necessary to adapt the theoretical elements to the specific situation: teaching Romanian as a foreign language in the preparatory year of Romanian online. The article also offers a systematization of the difficulties faced by foreign students in the effort of understanding and adapting to the conditions of teaching and learning the Romanian language as an online foreign language. Understanding the Romanian language as a foreign language, with certain lexical meanings of the word, with a dynamic structure of functional grammar, with a communication system based on the particularities of logical-verbal thinking of the foreign student solves the problem of teaching Romanian language in this regard. It is necessary to take into account, in fact, in such a process of teaching-learning-online evaluation of the Romanian language as a foreign language and the experience of the teachers involved, but also the interests and needs of foreign students and analysing the quality of results. process Romanian as a foreign language is not learned overnight and is not the type of foreign language that creates a certain communicative fluency among students belonging to other cultures and other language systems, which is why the weight of approaching such a language online becomes a challenge for both students and teachers involved.

Keywords: Contemporary Romanian language; teaching Romanian as a foreign language; on-line system; direct method.

1. Introduction

The pandemic learning process at this time was a challenge in addition to previous years because the transition to online teaching activities required a rapid adaptation to the new conditions by both teachers and students, which had some positive or negative effects in the instructive-educational process.

The transition of online teaching activities required training, as in the case teachers, as well as students, audiovisual skills (Sokoli et al., 2014) to replace the traditional part of reading and listening, part of language skills, which took place, until the outbreak of the pandemic, face to face.

Distance education is a planned way of teaching-learning that uses a wide range of technologies to reach distance learners, designed to encourage student interaction and recognition through certified learning (Rogers et al., 2009).

Online learning gives foreign students the opportunity not to be constrained by a fixed schedule, to consistently reduce their expenses because they can take online courses of Romanian as a foreign language from anywhere and to have time physically to his liking. However, there is also an important aspect in this educational approach for foreign students involved in the didactic act of teaching-learning the Romanian language as a foreign language, they must be responsible and disciplined. The positive parts of online learning are counteracted by certain negative parts. If a large number of students

are enrolled in a course, they cannot all actively participate in the discussions that take place, which could lead to some gaps in understanding some issues. Learning is more focused on individual work, and the lack of human interaction, socialization, working groups has negative effects because students are not involved in a competitive atmosphere.

In teaching Romanian as a foreign language for foreign students in the year of Romanian language training at the Faculty of Letters, University of Craiova, in the conditions of simultaneous education in online format there are major differences in the methodology of teaching Romanian, because in terms of content, most textbooks and courses for teaching the Romanian language to foreigners are thematically structured for lexical assimilation and some basic grammatical structures:

“Taking into consideration the teaching prerequisites associated with teaching Romanian as a foreign language at the Faculty of Letters, the University of Craiova, as well as the personal and collective experience of every teacher at the Preparatory Year, we can safely affirm that professional language training must be substantially rooted in both classic and modern platforms of relevance. It is not our duty to reinvent the Romanian language, but it is our absolute prerogative to contextualize it, to bring it firmly and robustly into the 21st century and make it relatable to highly versatile and eclectic groups of learners.” (Lăpădat, 2020: 140)

Today's generation of students is much more adapted to the conditions of online courses, they live in a digital age and master from an early age the digitized area of learning, which is why this generation has been framed by specialists in the "digital natives", while most of their teachers remain in the category of "digital migrants" (Prensky, 2001: 1-2). Thus arises a need for teachers to adapt to this digitized system of training-information, requiring a special approach and an adaptation of teaching methods. It must also be borne in mind that today's young people naturally think and process information in a fundamentally different way (Prensky, 2001: 1-2), so that the educational paradigm requires a continuous transformation or even a complete change - a process that cannot take place without the use of computer technologies. However, in the context of current education, a wise approach would be to carefully combine new technologies with traditional methods and techniques, the use of which has been tested over the years.

2. Online teaching and learning, challenges and methods

E-learning, known as "e-learning" or, more recently, as "e-education", is represented by the interaction between the teaching-learning process and information technologies. E-learning is now more than a concept, it is part of current education, tending to become increasingly sought after through the time savings involved. E-learning means, in an unconsecrated definition, the chance for a person to get information easily, quickly, in any field, not being conditioned by a physical support (paper books) or an intermediary (teacher). This concept allows the educational process to be flexible to offer the widest range of e-books, tips, images and text.

Internet learning can be defined as a form of education in which students are presented with training content via the Internet. Therefore, the basic condition imposed on participants in the learning process is the possession of a computer and an Internet connection.

When it comes to supporting the program that is used in internet education, most often the so-called course tools are used, which allow the storage of educational content on a Web server, the creation of communication networks between the participants in the process. education, learning and management, allowing the independent testing of their knowledge through various tests.

In the context of understanding and learning the Romanian language as a foreign language, the use of various strategies can be of real use. Starting from the statement that strategies are “behaviors and ideas that a teacher uses in the learning process and that are meant to influence the process of decrypting messages” (Weinstein and Mayer, 1986: 315). The online teaching and learning of the Romanian language as a foreign language can involve several aspects.

There are different methods of interaction between foreign students and the teacher in the development of an exclusively digital education, such as e-learning, namely:

- *The asynchronous method*, represented by the institutional E-mail, which is the simplest form of asynchronous interaction and which is often used only as a supplement in addition to other forms of communication. The advantages of communication via institutional e-mail are: simplicity of use, communication is private, allows enough time for reflection and response.
- *The synchronous method* can be represented by communication through WhatsApp, which is a synchronous communication based on text messages via Internet or Intranet in real time and allows connecting students with approximately equal knowledge, objective evaluation of content and the possibility of retrieving information omitted. Video conferencing used in an online course through the Google Meet or Zoom applications is another synchronous method of communication and direct connection between teacher and students. Whiteboards are another way of synchronous interaction, in which students participate by working as a team on the software application. The advantages of this mode of interaction are the simulation of reality and the encouragement of group learning.

Online learning is often a kind of blended learning, a learning in which teaching methods, materials and means vary, in which study materials are predominantly visual and auditory requiring the spirit of observation and the development of perceptual skills specific to phonemic hearing. Of course, for the Romanian language, the development of phonemic hearing involves performing exercises for listening and rendering the correct pronunciation of words with the possibility of listening and self-correction. This implies the use, for example, of Romanian proverbs, of a Romanian musical repertoire, which should be integrated in the reception of the Romanian language for foreigners, especially in the case of linguistic groups educated mainly by hearing, such as those of Arabic students or fragments of literary works that can be exploited excellently for this purpose. For a better understanding of Romanian as a foreign language, an investigative approach to the language is needed, i.e., the idea of understanding how languages work, highlighting the differences and similarities between one's own language and the languages spoken by others (Macaro et al., 2010: 78), in our case attempting as much a parallel approach as possible between the transition language, English and Romanian. English is often used as a transition language between the native language of foreign students and the one they have to assimilate, Romanian, precisely based on the fact that English is known by most students. However, there is an impediment when English

is not very well known by foreign students, or when the grammatical structures of the Romanian language cannot be compared with those of English and then we can move to another approach that can make students' work easier, that is video or audio tools.

It is important that the video support, an exceptional means of learning, which challenges students to provide answers, to be integrated into a teaching strategy that does not lack the method of conversation, a method that involves prior conceptual structuring according to the chosen teaching strategy. Conversation is not "just a technique", but a "difficult art, which requires a deep knowledge of the legitimacy of language and speech, of the psycholinguistic and psycho-pedagogical mechanisms that govern the processes of verbal communication" (Branişte, 2005: 95). Conversation as a teaching method and video or audio support as a means of learning, along with printed course support or illustration boards as teaching materials are part of the teaching strategy.

In this period when the courses are conducted exclusively online, a method of evaluation of foreign students eager to learn Romanian can be achieved through the project method. The project is a complex assessment tool, being recommended especially for summative assessment, learning occurring intrinsically. The advantages of the project, as a method of learning or assessment, are indisputable, whether we refer to the fact that learning occurs beyond the formal context of the class, but especially given the transversal skills, which are developed by involving the trainee in own formation, as well as through interaction with others. For, even without realizing this, the project is ubiquitous in our lives, whether it is personal projects or they are aimed at professional life. Although the method is not new at all, being used for several centuries, the changes that took place in the field of education and science at the beginning of our century involved rethinking teaching strategies, with greater emphasis on the formative role of learning. And the project method, along with other interactive methods, creates the favorable context for achieving these objectives. Within the approach of a project, the students collaborated permanently with each other. For "the project method [...] stimulates authentic learning in real contexts, personal commitment, group solidarity and involvement in social change at the community level" (Ulrich, 2016: 9).

The project method is suitable in different ways, depending on the level of language achieved by the students. Also, the choice of the project method depends on the teaching-learning content to be addressed and especially on the type of activity, because, depending on the more generous or limited time allocated to formal learning, it is necessary or not to expand the scope of the investigation. on the subject and beyond the classroom space, this time can be dedicated to fixation rather than broadening the sphere of knowledge.

Within the teaching staff of the Romanian language as a foreign language, we carried out projects related to the knowledge of the Romanian culture and civilization, as well as to presentations of the culture and civilization specific to the countries of origin of the foreign students.

However, it must be borne in mind that there are also limitations to this method. From the discussions with the students, regarding the self-evaluation of the project realization process, we found out that the most common risk was to fail to understand, process and synthesize the multitude of information and materials collected for the project realization, as well as to be needed the help of our teachers in the correct use of the Romanian language. In addition, in the case of group projects, responsibilities and involvement are often unequal within the team. The project method is a method that we can use

successfully in online courses, of course, by ensuring access to learning resources. A not inconsiderable advantage of this method is the effective involvement of students, the creation of a group enthusiasm that leaves much to be desired during the conduct of online courses, this being natural by keeping them in the same environment for long periods of time, without proper socialization and without creating a high level of competitiveness. Many times, during the online courses, I was confronted with not very pleasant situations, in which the students found the possibility to hide, not to be actively involved in the course under the pretext of the internet or the video and audio devices not working. For this type of approach exclusively online, students should have a certain type of education, seriousness and involvement so that the results are maximum and the work of the teacher and theirs is not in vain.

In this context, the teaching methods need to be alternated to keep alive the attention and interest of students in online courses, and this is a real challenge. In addition to traditional methods of teaching-learning Romanian as a foreign language that provide solid knowledge of grammar and vocabulary, develop written expression skills are used, especially in online courses and modern methods that are preferred by students due to their effectiveness. their ability to communicate, developing their ability to express themselves orally. Other advantages would be that the interaction between teacher and student and between student and student is increased. There are also game-based methods, which makes them more enjoyable, increasing students' motivation. For example, through a brainstorming exercise we can find out immediate answers related to the level of assimilation of the Romanian language as a foreign language by foreign students and especially to their opinion on debated situations. One of the debated and current situations was the question: "- What do you think about the two ways of learning / teaching, traditional and online?". Some of their answers were:

"Online education is complementary or even an extension of classical education. Even the best online courses cannot replace the interaction with a teacher or the inter-human relationships that develop in a group. Therefore, traditional courses should not be replaced by online courses." (Hussam Aqlan - Iraq)

"When students are tested online, they get rid of stress, because compared to the traditional education in which the exams take place in a quiet classroom, with many observers watching you, which makes the student unable to concentrate, there is no one to affect your performance during an online exam." (Joti Amarildo -Albania)

"Classroom learning is more important, because there is the possibility that students and teachers interact more, and interactions with good teachers help motivate students to a higher grade. (...) We want to go back to the times before the virus, because we want to have fun with friends in college. We prefer to study in the reading room in our dormitory with classmates. For us, everything in this situation is new, and we have to get used to it." (Miloš Živadinović, Goran Drulić - Serbia)

"For some individuals, online learning is more appropriate, while for others traditional learning is the preferred method. Traditional faculties usually have a diverse student population from a wide range of cultural backgrounds, where students are tasked with learning how to interact, understand, and solve problems with peers other than their peers. themselves. The same opportunity may not be available to students who participate online, a traditional school prepares students for a life in a diverse society. In addition, classroom learning helps students and teachers get to know each other better. This allows teachers to get to know students better and better assess their strengths and weaknesses, so that they can act as mentors and

guide students so that they can get the best opportunities in their future careers." (Basel Ehab Elghaysha - Egypt)

"Online courses and classes are open to all types of students, people from all over the world. Online courses and classes are free of casteism, communism, poor and rich and black and white comparison. Everything is available to everyone in the same way and quantity. (...) In online courses, students are free to access the course with their own learning ability. That is, the speed of learning can be fast or slow and this form of online learning accepts all kinds of students. In traditional classes, some students respond slowly, they understand the subject slowly, in this case, they often did not overcome their doubts. And not everyone cares, because teachers have to complete their course at a certain pace, they have a time limit that they have to meet. Everyone has to answer to everyone. But in this case, students remain in doubt about the topics covered in the course. Such doubts in the minds of students create conflicts of interest and a point of debate later in their careers." (Laith Mutasim H. Jabeiti - Syria)

"A disadvantage of online courses may be the possibility of human appearance, reduced ability of verbal expression of the examinee, accompanied by a loss of ability to present-argue-counter-argument and increase the degree of dehumanization, paradoxically even if the technique and technology has opened up new avenues and provided new tools and techniques for interpersonal communication. It is not possible to socialize as in a real classroom environment and there is an inability to ask questions immediately, being a digital classroom. Students and pupils do not know their own progress compared to the progress of their peers and thus the competition that usually predominates within a group does not develop. Communication with the teacher is impersonal and there is no "enthusiasm", and the passion that can inspire students has a good result." (Vasiliki Busho, Konstantina Kogia - Greece)

"Traditional education gives us the chance to be part of a team, in this way we have the opportunity to socialize actively and in real time. It is very uncomfortable for me to sit in front of the computer for hours on end. Lack of exercise, due to quarantine, and excessive use of computer or telephone can harm our physical and mental health. (...) Technology has given us the opportunity to learn in real time also from our teachers, wherever we are as long as we have access to the internet. But in the case of specializations, online courses are not an option. For example, medical and pharmacy students have in the curriculum practice in hospital, laboratory and others. For them, online courses are a disadvantage. In the case of these specializations, practice is a basic element." (Georgieva Loreta Ivaylova - Bulgaria)

The Romanian language often seems unapproachable, through an endless series (even for the Romanian student) of endings of nouns, of endings of adjectives, through the irregular forms of its nouns and verbs, through its composition, through its excessive inflectional character. That is why a strictly online approach to learning Romanian as a foreign language is all the more difficult. The use of music and films in Romanian related to the culture and civilization of this people can help to a large extent the assimilation of a complex lexical baggage and grammatical structures much easier to understand in a relaxed environment and that can capture much easier the attention and interest of foreign students. The value of the Romanian language consists in the formation of the intellect, supported by the exercise of cultural life, through which the foreign student identifies the most precious historical phenomena in the life of the Romanian people. As the researcher Gh. Doca stated, this phenomenon allows the foreign student to become "an intellectual tool in knowing the culture of this people" (Doca, 2001: 115-123).

There is a traditional approach to teaching Romanian as a foreign language, namely through the direct method or through the practical method, much more relevant for

learning a foreign language. In order for the foreign student to achieve certain linguistic performances, the teacher must know very well what methods and procedures to use, when one method or another must be applied, relating them to the communication intentions of the foreign language speakers. Very important, in any strategy we approach, to teach the Romanian language as a foreign language is the fact that the foreign student will have to understand that the lexicon is the basic mechanism in fixing different forms of expression. Therefore, the acquisition of an essential vocabulary becomes essential in the process of teaching - learning the Romanian language as a foreign language, focused on the "mechanical knowledge of some contexts" (Vasilescu, A., 2006: 23-29). The vocabulary of the texts should be richer, and in the opinion of the researcher A. Vrăjitoru the communication in Romanian of foreign students, focused on different teaching-learning techniques, contributes not only to the knowledge of the Romanian language, but also to the enrichment of oral expression. of the following maxim: a dynamic vocabulary gives rise to a dynamic expression (Vrăjitoru, 1999: 418-423, 71-76).

The Romanian language lesson for foreign students must propose dialogues with various opinions from both students and the teacher. The teacher's art consists in the correct selection of the vocabulary, depending on the level of knowledge of the Romanian language. In the case of online courses, the "Socratic method" of dialogue is welcome, which involves the use of different procedures with various forms of expression: organizing interactive games, comparative debates on various socio-economic issues related to their country of origin and our country, etc.; thus, foreign students are challenged to speak the language they are studying. However, we could say, from the experience of this year and a half of online teaching, that the traditional method of approaching face-to-face education is a much better option for teaching-learning Romanian as a foreign language, in the first place because it creates a connection between teacher and students based on trust, which is often lacking in the online environment. Through the traditional education system, I believe that more questions can be constructed and more answers can be found in a classroom, that there is a clear recognition of the level of assimilation of the Romanian language by foreign students and last but not least that there is a certain degree of competitiveness and mutual respect.

3. Conclusions

The Romanian language teacher for foreign students, in the context of the digitalized education, is not a simple transmitter of information but an innovator of teaching strategies he designs, is a cultural ambassador, who has extensive teaching knowledge, including teaching methodology, speech therapy, IT knowledge and especially the teaching-learning practice. In online teaching, the teacher's free time has been significantly reduced because, for the design of video and audio materials dedicated to an online course, the Romanian language teacher must be an author, typist, teacher, editor, IT person, proofreader and program producer. It is a much higher work and nervous load and most of the times the results obtained are not as expected, and the satisfaction of contributing to the evolution in the assimilation of the Romanian language by foreign students is not at all the same as in the classrooms.

Even if we look at the development of online courses from a positive or negative perspective, this is a reality that we will have to get used to and understand that once this teaching-learning method is approached, it will have to be perfected because taking technology in the classroom is a development of learning that cannot be stopped.” (<https://epale.ec.europa.eu/en/blog/rise-online-learning-benefits-and-challenges-teachers-part-one-benefits>). Beyond the shortcomings of this digital way of teaching-learning-assessment, the major satisfaction for us as teachers is to be able to stay in touch with our students, to support them in their effort to learn the Romanian language and to adapt to a new, unpredictable context, a context to face and manage in a different country and a new culture.

Digital technology becomes, in the context of conducting online courses, the foundation of completely renewed and progressive traditions of skills training and development, allowing interaction and, especially, the development and innovation of practices.

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