ROMANIAN AS A SECOND LANGUAGE (RL2).
PORTRAITS OF THE RL2 USER

Fortunately, in recent decades, there has been a growing interest in research papers focused on speakers of Romanian as a second/as a foreign language (RL2): individuals who reside in Romania for shorter or longer periods (foreign students, various professional categories employed for fixed terms, immigrants, etc.); pupils or students belonging to communities where Romanian is learned/spoken only at school, during Romanian language classes (as a second language); individuals who, for various reasons, learn Romanian as a second language outside Romania (for example, students in philology departments at universities abroad); or even, marginally included, people (generally young) who speak Romanian as a heritage language.

Such research explores speakers' mental representations of the languages they know or are learning, as well as the relationships between these languages (plurilingual competence, cross-linguistic influence); the place of Romanian in the learners' imaginary and the role of such representations in language acquisition and learning; the role of intercultural competence in the teaching and learning of RL2; inter- and intra-speaker variation among RL2 learners, along with the factors that drive these variations, and more. Each of these studies represents an important piece of a larger puzzle which, when combined with others in various configurations, helps to form a wide range of portraits of the RSL speaker – each equally valid.

This volume brings together 11 studies that contribute to the shaping and/or understanding of the complex and multifaceted portrait of the speaker of Romanian as a foreign/non-native language. Precisely because of the complexity of this portrait (composed of multiple elements across various dimensions) we did not aim to group the included studies according to a specific structure. Nevertheless, a certain order naturally emerged. The first studies highlight the key elements that should be taken into account when investigating

the profile of the RL2 speaker, the next focus more on cognitive aspects involved in processing and producing the target language; the following contributions discuss individual and social factors in RL2 learning; while the final articles prioritize didactic aspects (teaching and assessment of RL2).

Elena Platon opens this thematic issue with the study *La langue roumaine dans l'imaginaire des locuteurs non natifs*, which highlights a relatively unexplored yet crucial aspect for a more comprehensive understanding of how RL2 is acquired, namely, the learner's perception of the target language during the acquisition process. The author shifts the focus from an interlanguage analysis to an approach centered on investigating the linguistic imaginary, interpreting the responses of non-native speakers to a questionnaire about their representations of Romanian language and culture.

In a similar vein, in her study *Portraits in the Making: German Users of Romanian as a Foreign Language*, Diana Burlacu draws attention to the need for the portraits of non-native Romanian speakers to include the speakers' own perspectives. The author also emphasizes the multitude of factors influencing speakers' interlanguage and its variable nature.

With a perspective shaped by cognitive linguistics, Ioana-Silvia Sonea (in *Listening in L2 Romanian: Why Function Words Go Unnoticed*) analyzes the decoding and reception of words in the comprehension of oral messages at the B1 proficiency level. Building on empirical studies conducted in other languages, the author replicates this research for Romanian, confirming the findings that L2 speakers prioritize lexical content words over grammatical function words when listening to a message in the target language.

Using a corpus of oral productions by RL2-speaking students, Ştefania-Lucia Tărău, Adelina Patricia Băilă, and Antonela-Carmen Arieşan-Simion (in *Story Grammar as a Strategy for Enhancing Narrative Skills in the Case of L2 Romanian Adult Learners*) investigate how narrative units specific to story grammar are processed and orally reproduced. They emphasize the importance of practicing narrative strategies in the process of learning Romanian as a foreign language to develop the ability to tell and retell stories.

In her study *The Portrait of the Romanian L2 User as a Young [Romanian!] Man*, Nicoleta Neşu examines the characteristics of a specific group with an ethnic profile, represented by speakers of Romanian as an ethnic/heritage language. The author highlights the complexity and heterogeneity of this category and stresses the need for an interdisciplinary approach that includes linguistic, sociolinguistic, and psycholinguistic perspectives.

Anamaria Radu and Alexandra Cotoc (in *Socio-Cultural Dynamics of Romanian through the Lens of RL2 Learners*) examine the social and cultural role of the Romanian language within communities of RL2 speakers. They analyze online discourse in RL2 and attempt to identify current trends regarding the construction of RL2 identities, within the context of plurilingualism.

In the study *Exploring Perceptions of Academic and Social Integration through Intercultural Competence Development among French-speaking Medical Students*, Nora Neamț focuses on the social and academic integration challenges faced by medical students who are RL2 speakers. She emphasizes the role of cultural and social integration in the process of learning Romanian as a foreign language and highlights the importance of developing intercultural competence.

Iulia Nica (in *Notas sobre la enseñanza del rumano en España*) presents several teaching strategies for Romanian as a foreign language, taking into account the complex profile of learners, cross-linguistic influences, linguistic awareness skills, and plurilingual competence.

In her study *Strategies for Developing Listening and Reading Skills in Romanian as a Second Language for Primary School Students*, Anca-Lorena Sacalîș emphasizes the importance of focusing on reception strategies among young learners of Romanian as a second language. She highlights the benefits of this approach in enhancing their listening and reading abilities.

Dina Vîlcu also highlights the role of plurilingual competence among speakers of Romanian as a foreign and heritage language in her study *Plurilingualism and Assessment: Romanian as a Foreign and Heritage Language*. The author demonstrates how plurilingual competence was taken into account in the revision process of assessment grids evaluating general communicative competence in written production/interaction activities (A1 level) and oral production and interaction (B1 level).

Finally, Anca Ursa, Mihaela Mihai, and Narcisa Albert propose a study investigating the role of AI in designing teaching materials for RL2: *The Design of Teaching Materials for Online Interaction Activities with the Help of ChatGPT: The Case of Romanian as a Foreign Language*. The authors explore how the CEFR grids for online interaction can be utilized in creating teaching scenarios with the aid of ChatGPT, emphasizing the need for a critical and reflective use of this tool.

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Lavinia VASIU,
Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca;
lavinia.vasiu@ubbcluj.ro

Cristina BOCOŞ,
Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca;
cristina.bocos@ubbcluj.ro

Alexandru MARDALE,
Institut National des Langues et
Civilisations Orientales (INALCO), Paris;
alexandru.mardale@inalco.fr