

SOCIO-CULTURAL DYNAMICS OF ROMANIAN THROUGH THE LENS OF RL2 LEARNERS

Anamaria RADU¹, Alexandra COTOC²

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ABSTRACT. *Socio-cultural Dynamics of Romanian through the Lens of RL2 Learners.* This research investigates the social and cultural dynamics of the Romanian language, with a particular emphasis on its status as a prestige language within the RL2 learner communities. Using a mixed-methods research design, the study combines quantitative data with qualitative data obtained from observations and a questionnaire addressed to RL2 learners. Shifting the role played by the Romanian language from being a ‘minor’ language to being a prestige language within an RL2 community of practice through cultural immersion underscores the significance of social interactions in the language learning process. By offering a detailed understanding of the Romanian language within its cultural milieu, this study seeks to contribute to the portrayal of the RL2 learner profile.

Keywords: *prestige language, ‘minor’ language, RL2, community, socialising identity*

¹ **Anamaria RADU** is a junior lecturer PhD in the Department of Romanian Language, Culture and Civilization at Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania. Currently, she is an ILR lecturer at the Institute of Romance Studies at the Humboldt University of Berlin, Germany. In addition to teaching and evaluating Romanian as a foreign language, her research interests include Language Acquisition, Sociolinguistics, Discourse Analysis, and Digital Humanities. Email: anamaria.radu@ubbcluj.ro

² **Alexandra COTOC** is a lecturer PhD in the Department of English Language and Literature at the Faculty of Letters, Babeş-Bolyai University, Romania. Her scientific fields of interest are Internet Linguistics, Sociolinguistics, Discourse Analysis, and Digital Humanities. Alexandra Cotoc teaches undergraduate courses on the Grammatical Structure of the English Language, and courses and seminars on Digital Culture and Communication, Internet linguistics and Sociolinguistics to MA students. Email: alexandra.cotoc@ubbcluj.ro

REZUMAT. *Dinamica socio-culturală a limbii române prin filtrul vorbitorilor de RL2.* Această cercetare investighează dinamica socială și culturală a limbii române, cu accent pe statutul său de limbă de prestigiu în cadrul comunităților de vorbitori de RL2. Folosind o metodă mixtă de cercetare, studiul îmbină date cantitative cu date calitative obținute din observații și dintr-un chestionar adresat vorbitorilor de RL2. Schimbarea rolului jucat de limba română de la o limbă „minoră” la o limbă de prestigiu în cadrul comunităților de vorbitori de RL2 subliniază importanța interacțiunilor sociale în procesul de învățare a unei limbi străine. Oferind o înțelegere detaliată a limbii române în mediul său cultural, acest studiu urmărește să contribuie la portretizarea profilului vorbitorului de RL2.

Cuvinte-cheie: *limbă de prestigiu, limbă „minoră”, RL2, comunitate, identitate socială*

Introduction

The online communities of influencers who promote Romanian as a second language (RL2) provide a fresh perspective on the social and cultural dynamics of RL2. In this context, this study aims to explore the language-culture nexus from an emic perspective. By selecting five reels produced by RL2 speakers, we delve into the experiences of RL2 speakers, presenting their digital narratives. Through qualitative analysis of these reels and the answers provided by RL2 respondents to a questionnaire, this study allows us to better understand and portray the RL2 learner profile. Our questionnaire was applied in the timespan November-December 2024, and targeted RL2 speakers living in Romania and abroad. We present the relevant theoretical concepts and ideas, then we proceed to qualitatively analyse and discuss a selection of examples. All selected reels, as well as the answers to the questionnaire are in Romanian and in English. We reproduce all of them verbatim, and we also provide an English translation of the examples that were produced in Romglish or Romanian.

Weaving Online Stories and Identities: Superdiversity and RL2

Online discourses today take place within the conditions of superdiversity in which 'globalization has altered the face of social, cultural and linguistic diversity in societies all over the world' (Blommaert 2011, 1). Superdiversity is thus marked by globalisation, digital technologies, and increased migration and it is understood as a condition which is 'distinguished by a dynamic interplay of variables among an increased number of new, small and scattered, multiple-origin, transnationally connected, socio-economically differentiated and legally

stratified immigrants' (Vertovec 2007, 1024). These shifting demographics are reflected in communication practices within a social world which is configured by globalization and movement of people, objects and ideas around the world (see Barton and Lee, 2013). To these features of superdiversity, we might add the uncharted dimensions configured by the participation in online social network sites where digital affordances create a space in which different linguistic profiles co-create each other in an attempt to communicate to audiences and create meaning.

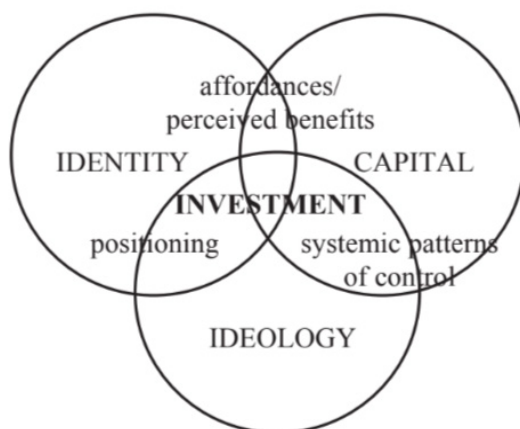
The daily encounters in the digital space show a complex 'communicative ecosystem' (Ardévol and Gómez-Cruz 2014: 7, apud Cotoc and Radu 2024, 355) which portrays 'ritual practices and cultural modes' (Cotoc and Radu 2024, 355). They also show a connection with a global network in which local languages are represented, while global and local discursive participations mark new identities and also identity affiliation and community membership. The language choice and the social-cultural practices in day-to-day online interactions show that there is an inherent power dynamics which reflects the intention of some users to expropriate the Anglocentric hegemonic language in favour of Less Widely Used Less Taught (LWULT) Languages and Langues moins Diffusées et moins Enseignées (MoDiMEs) in the EU (see for example Torres and Drobnik-Rogers 2024; Kakoyianni-Doa, Monville-Burston, Papadima-Sophocleous, Valetopoulos 2020) or Less Commonly Taught Languages (LCTLs) in the USA (see for example Uebel, Kraemer and Giupponi 2023).

The online discourses are shaped semiotically and socially and there is an 'awareness of language as imbued with social, political and cultural narratives' (Nero 2006; Brutt-Griffler 2007 apud Myrrh Domingo 2016, 551). As 'storytelling has become a suitable social practice for studying the complex ways in which social actors assume, reject and/or contest individual and collective identities, as well as forms of production and reproduction of a particular social and institutional order' (Patiño-Santos and Relaño-Pastor 2018, 2), the online narratives of some RL2 users construct linguistic biographies through storytelling strategies that show their attitude towards the Romanian language and culture, food and its quality, ideas and beliefs. Moreover, 'Romanian as a foreign language (RFL) is reimagined as a linguistic resource that provides popularity to its speakers and also functions as a self-branding online tool' (Radu and Cotoc 2024, 28). RL2 users become cultural ambassadors of Romania in the global space of the Internet and also commodities because they construct a self-brand that is recognised and validated within the communities of practice of social network sites. This online self-branding manoeuvre is configured by storytelling and identity is constructed in the context of marking a sense of belonging through 'discourses that cross and merge cultural and linguistic boundaries' (Darvin 2016, 533).

On the Internet, the self-branding techniques and storytelling take place in multilingual, translingual and multimodal scenarios because several languages and modes of representation intertwine in order to produce meaning. 'While multilingual indicates the combination of separate languages, translingual signals how languages mutually influence each other and produce new hybrid meanings and grammar. The meshing of diverse languages and modalities in digital texts results in unconventional idioms and word choices' (Darvin 2016, 529). In our case, RL2 users on social network sites engage in code-meshing, blending their mother tongue and/or other languages with Romanian. This results in RL2 discourses that demonstrate a bona fide language variety, characterised by stylistic choices, creative expressions and meshed idiomatic expressions. Moreover, a useful concept to describe these linguistic productions would be the concept of *interlanguage* as used by Gass and Selinker who states that the focus on the learner and the processes involved in learning are inherent in an analysis of interlanguage data (1994, 14). Accordingly, Romanian as a foreign language can be viewed as an interlanguage - a linguistic system that emerges when non-native speakers are in the process of learning the target language. This interlanguage consists 'not only of elements from their native language and the target language, but also "autonomous" elements.' (Gass and Selinker, 17). RL2 online, regardless of the level, can serve as an effective productive branding strategy used by certain influencers promoting Romanian culture and language. This moves beyond the narrow focus of the native-speaker perspective which can be limiting when analysing online communicative repertoires.

The RL2 self-identification in the context of social media landscape is emergent in these narratives because these online users represent themselves as subjects of discourse. They are 'points of identification, the unstable points of identification or suture, which are made, within the discourses of history and culture' (Hall 2019, 226).

All the points advanced so far show that RL2 users on online social network sites affirm identity affiliation and exhibit knowledge of the Romanian culture as a capital and the reels they produce are cultural resources for native and non-native speakers alike. This entitles us to say that RL2 users construct an identity reflecting a model of investment generally valid for L2 learners in conditions of superdiversity and digital technologies (this model borrowed from Darvin 2016 and can be seen in Figure 1 below).



Source: Darwin and Norton (2015: 42).

Figure 1. RL2 Model of investment

In consideration of Darwin's assertion that there are 'three dynamics in Internet-mediated interactions: indexical linkages to macro-level categories (ethnic or nation-state affiliations); functionally defined subject positions (e.g. youth, author, expert, novice), and fluid shifts in language choice, stance and style' (Darvin 2016, 530), the RL2 profiles on social network sites manifest a macro-level category (for example: American learning Romanian), a subject position (e.g. influencer), and different language productions which are fluid and transitory (see for example the Reels on Instagram). This three-dimensional conceptualisation of online RL2 identities show an understanding of everyday online activities combined with linguistic data and this 'provides a way of reaching deeper into the ethnographic description of social or institutional processes. The slow and intensive analysis of language and communication sheds light on small (but consequential) aspects of social practice, taking the ethnography into smaller and more focused spaces and drawing analytic attention to fine detail'. (Shaw, S., Copland, F., Snell, J. 2015, 8). Hence, the combination of ethnographic details with linguistic analysis helps us understand the complex process of constructing an RL2 identity in conditions of superdiversity, globalisation and digital technologies. In addition, 'by communicating across multiple symbolic systems in the online world, individuals can imagine new identities and ways of being in the world. They are able to share these self-representations with diverse audiences, who may interpret the meanings of these representations in very different ways' (Darvin 2016, 531).

Methodology

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore the emic perspective of RL2 speakers scattered throughout the world towards the use of Romanian as a foreign language as used on Instagram by influencers who create stories and identities, actively promoting Romanian culture and language. This would contribute to a better understanding of the status quo of this LWULT language within the framework of constructing a self-brand on social networking sites.

Participants and Procedure

Our study utilizes a complementary research method. On the one hand, the study concentrates on observing the online discourse in five reels created by non-native content creators, with the goal of identifying linguistic and digital trends in the construction of RL2 identities. On the other hand, it focuses on the emic perspective of RL2 speakers aiming to collect their views on Romanian culture and language as well as on the content depicted by these content creators in their reels.

Besides the analysis of the online discourses, the study utilized a survey distributed via Google Forms in November and December 2024. The participants are adult non-native speakers of Romanian, including those living in Romania, those who previously lived in Romania but no longer reside there, and those who have never lived in Romania. The data collected via this survey was analysed using both quantitative and qualitative methods. The first section of the survey collects general information about the respondents, and we analyse the responses provided by 81 participants in the research. Our respondents declared having the following mother tongues: Albanian (4), Arabic (12 respondents), Chinese (1), Czech (2), Dutch (1), English (4), French (5), German (6 respondents), Greek (1), Hebrew (1), Hungarian (30), Italian (5), Polish (1), Russian (2), Spanish (5), Ukrainian (1), Tamazight (1), Turkmen (2). Among these, 5 respondents declared being bilingual: English-Spanish, Arabic-English, French-Spanish, German-Romanian and Italian-Romanian. It is important to note that the respondents who declared being bilingual in Romanian and another language are members of the Romanian diasporic communities. They were born in Romania and have at least one Romanian parent, but they emigrated from Romania as children. The profile of our respondents is multilingual, as all of them speak at least one foreign language besides Romanian. Most of the respondents

declare being proficient in several languages like English, German, French, Chinese, Spanish, Chinese, Arabic, Hungarian, Italian, Ukrainian, Russian, Turkish, Albanian and many others. Moreover, our participants also engage in translingual practices as they use all the repertoires available whenever they speak RL2.

When asked to self-assess their level in Romanian language, almost half of our respondents chose B1-B2 (45.7%), many of them declared being C1-C2 level (24.7%), some of them declared being A1-A2 level (18.5%) and the lowest percentage was registered for pre-A1 (see Figure 2 below).

Nivelul meu de limba română este: My Romanian level is:

81 responses

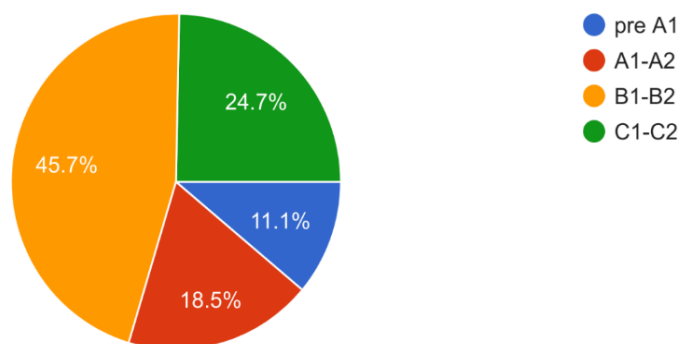


Figure 2. Level of RL2

Research Instruments

The survey contains three main sections: the first section focuses on Demographic information about our respondents such as their mother tongue, the foreign languages they speak, their level of Romanian, and the reason they have learned/are learning Romanian. It also asks our respondents whether they watch nonnative Romanian speakers. The second section focuses on general aspects of RL2 and includes 4 checkboxes. The first part of the third section focuses on our respondents' attitude towards the content produced by five nonnative speakers on Instagram, and it includes 4 open questions, 1 checkbox and two yes/no questions. The last part of this section contains two items focusing on the respondents' attitudes and viewpoints on the Romanian language (1 checkbox, 1 open question).

Research Hypotheses

Our research concentrates on exploring three hypotheses that guide our investigation and provide a view on RL2: 1. Generally, the profile of RL2 speakers is multilingual and their discourse productions are translingual; 2. RL2 as a LWULT language is produced in a translingual and superdiverse space online; 3. The content created online shows a curated brand tailored for niche communities comprising both nonnative speakers and native speakers who engage with and consume this kind of content.

Findings and Interpretations

The study analyses a selection of the responses, linking the findings to our research hypotheses, and illustrating how respondents perceive the use of RFL online. We provide our translation for each of the responses selected in this analysis.

The motivations for our respondents to learn Romanian can be grouped into the categories below. Here are a few examples for each category:

- **Necessity:** *I live in Romania; Romania is the country that I live in, and because of that I have to learn the romanian language; Pentru facultate si acuma ma gandesc sa stau in romania dupa facultate* [For college and now I'm thinking about staying in Romania after college]; *Am trait in Romania* [I once lived in Romania]; *Învăț limba română ca să mă afirm mai bine în țară* [I'm learning Romanian to establish myself in this country]; *Vreau să fiu la fel de fluent în această limbă cum sunt în maghiară sau engleză. Știu cât de important este să ai competențe lingvistice bune în țară. Vreau ca barierele mele lingvistice să dispară* [I want to be as fluent in this language as I am in Hungarian or English. I know how important it is to have good language skills in the country. I want my language barriers to disappear]; *îmi place și este necesară pentru jobul meu* [I like it and it is necessary for my job]; *Cetățenie* [Citizenship]; *Pentru a lucra* [to work].
- **Studies and future plans:** *Studii, I will do my master's degree on Romance language; For educational purposes; I studied in Romania, Erasmus, Cluj-Napoca; I was studying master degree in Cluj; M-am născut în România, în copilărie am început deja să învăț limba română. M-am înscris la Facultatea de Litere la specializarea Română pentru că vreau să predau limba română vorbitorilor nonnativi* [I was born in Romania, I already started learning Romanian as a child. I enrolled in the Faculty of Letters,

majoring in Romanian, because I want to teach Romanian to non-native speakers]; *studiez antropologie și terenul meu de cercetare e aici în România* [I study anthropology and my research field is here in Romania].

- **Personal connection:** *Pentru socra mea și copiii* [for my mother-in-law and my children]; *I have Romanian friends and I need it for my work too occasionally; Because my boyfriend Romanian and I want to know his family better; Vreau să vorbesc cu familia soției mele* [I want to be able to speak with my wife's family]; *e o limbă romanică și vreau să călătoresc în România din nou* [it is a Romance language and I want to travel to Romania again]; *Părinții vin din România* [my parents are from Romania]; *It's interesting and my ancestors lived in Romania, so I want to be able to understand the written records.*
- **Personal reasons and passion:** *Pentru că vreau să înțeleg bine oamenii, oriunde aș merge să nu fie jenă* [Because I want to understand people well, wherever I go there should be no embarrassment]; *I wanted to discover a new language as I was tired of English; Imi place foarte mult* [I like it very much]; *I will use in future; mă bucură pe mine* [it brings me joy]; *Out of curiosity; E o limbă interesantă* [it is an interesting language]; *am vrut să studiez o limbă balcanică* [I wanted to learn a Balkan language]; *I love romanian folklore and I want to understand, maybe I would like to study in Romania; I am interested in Romanian classical music.*

When asked whether they watch reels produced by nonnative Romanian speakers, almost half of our respondents answered positively (49.4%) (see Figure 3 below). This shows that following content online in RL2 has become a popular trend.

Urmăresc reel-uri/video-uri produse de vorbitori nonnativi de română în limba română I watch reels produced by nonnative Romanian speakers
81 responses

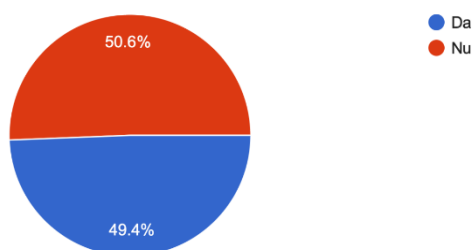


Figure 3. Reels produced by RL2 speakers

Many of our respondents are also in contact with RL2 speakers (61.7%) and with Romanian native speakers (81.5%) (see Figure 4 below).

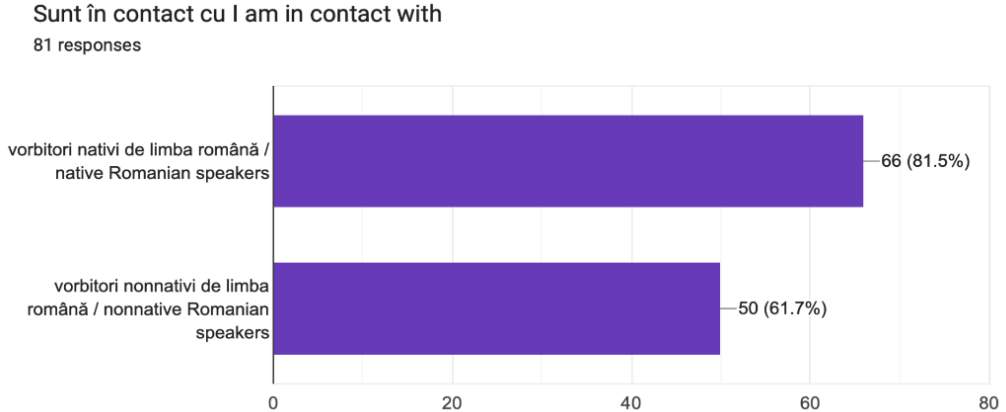


Figure 4. Contact with RL2 speakers and native speakers

RL2 Examples

Influencers under Scrutiny

The influencers selected for this study exemplify the multilingual and translanguaging practices found in the online space. While these influencers share a common purpose, that of attracting followers using efficient self-branding techniques and storytelling, they vary significantly in several aspects, including nationalities and backgrounds, proficiency levels of RL2, the format and the topics of their reels, affective dimension, and communicative strategies. Edsta (133 tsd. followers) is an American photographer and cameraman based in New York. Originally from Romania, he moved to the United States as a child and speaks Romanian as a second language. He describes himself as ‘New York’s favorite Romanian 🎥 • 🇷🇴 • 🗣️ I ♥ NY & i ♥ Romania’. Most of his reels feature him teaching Romanian words and phrases while strolling through the streets of New York or presenting Romanian food and promoting Romanian restaurants and traditions. In these reels, he often merges English with Romanian, offering literal translations of clichés and idiomatic expressions in English before presenting the Romanian equivalent. Primal Gourmet (1.5 mil. followers), whose real name is Ronny Lvovski, is a self-taught chef, food photographer, stylist, recipe blogger, and coffee lover residing in Canada. He says about himself that he makes food for the

Internet. Married to a Romanian woman, he frequently visits his in-laws. His social media reels feature recipes and anecdotes of his trips to the market in Braşov or leisurely walks with his wife. He produces English content in which he includes some Romanian words or even short sentences. Lifeofisiah19 (8777 followers) is an African photographer residing in Romania. Many of his reels feature extensive narratives and insights into the cultural and culinary differences between African and Romanian traditions. Although he speaks Romanian as a foreign language, having lived in Romania since 2006, he has become proficient. His reels are typically detailed, and he rarely employs code-switching. While his initial Instagram reels were in English, he eventually transitioned to Romanian. Zm95z (29.9 tsd. followers) is an Iraqi barber living in Romania who creates reels that highlight everyday activities. His Instagram description is: 'zain kamil. My country 🇮🇶 Iraq. I live 🇷🇴 Romania. I'm a barber ✂️ كوافير 🧑🏿 🧑🏿'. His content frequently features (self-)irony and sarcasm. He shares his posts in both Arabic and Romanian, demonstrating fluency in Romanian, albeit with a distinct accent, and he does not engage in code-switching. Southy (74.7 tsd. followers) is an English singer and songwriter currently in a relationship with a Romanian woman. He has limited proficiency in Romanian, and his videos mix Romanian and English. He initially created content that followed a specific theme, exploiting Romanian clichés and stereotypes. In his latest videos, he presents Romanian cuisine and products while also releasing songs in a blend of Romanian and English.

Analysis of Reels and Emic Perspectives

The analysis that follows will be bipartite; first, we will analyse the five reels that were chosen for this study and we will examine their specificity. Next, we will examine the respondents' emic perspectives on these five reels. This will provide a broad viewpoint on the generated RL2 content.

The reel *Weird things Romanian say (Part 2)* shows Edsta walking on the streets of New York and speaking English while introducing a variety of Romanian idiomatic expressions. He breaks down each expression word by word before revealing the full Romanian expression. This constitutes a discursive strategy that allows Edsta to present the nuances of the Romanian language. The typical opening line 'As a Romanian'/'A Romanian' followed by a negative sentence in the present simple tense establishes his identity and affiliation to the Romanian community. Edsta's style of presentation aims to foster understanding and appreciation for the Romanian language. See below the transcript of the reel:

A Romanian doesn't just say 'never' to something. He says: 'when the pig flies', 'când zboară porcul'. As a Romanian you don't fool yourself. 'You get drunk with cold water', 'te îmbeți cu apă rece'. As a Romanian I don't say: 'I don't care about something'. I say: 'it hurts in my b*tt', 'mă doare-n f*nd.' As a Romanian I don't have unusual ideas, 'I have a curly mind', 'am mintea creță'. In Romania we don't say: 'I'm cool'. We say: 'I'm concrete'. 'Sunt beton'. (He stops a guy on the street who says: *beton*.) (Referring to the guy) He's beton. What's your name? Roberto Monticello. Remember: *betoon*. A Romanian didn't confuse you. 'He turned your head into a calendar.' 'Ți-a făcut capul calendar'. A Romanian isn't nervous or fidgety. 'He has a carrot in his b*tt.' 'Are un morcov în f*nd'. As a Romanian, I don't say 'cause I want to, I say: 'cause that's what my muscles want', 'așa vor mușchii mei'.

The respondents expressed a variety of opinions about Edsta's reel promoting Romanian idiomatic expressions. Many found the concept engaging, fun, and informative, expressing appreciation for the way in which it highlights cultural peculiarities of the Romanian language while making learning accessible, especially for non-native speakers and younger audiences: *Firstly, the fast-paced output style attracts the audience more effectively, and secondly, by showing how to replace the high-frequency expressions in daily life in Romanian, the video content is more practical and accessible to non-native Romanian speakers; I think it is great and catches your attention. If you are interested in languages, like I am, this kind of content is really entertaining and useful for my language learning as well.* Some mentioned its potential to attract interest in learning Romanian and to promote the language in general: *I think that's a fun way to promote the language, and maybe because of that, many nonnative speakers could have the idea to learn Romanian.* Some respondents note that understanding of the Romanian language is enhanced by the incorporation of subtitles: *I think this is a good idea and it could help Hungarians to understand some things in Romanian language. I think the subtitles are a good idea too in Romanian language or English.* However, some respondents stated that this reel benefits only intermediate learners rather than beginners: *Foarte interesant, dar greu pentru incepatori* [Very interesting, but hard for beginners]; *Mi-a capturat atenția, dar asta poate fi de mai mult folos pentru cei care deja nu sunt începători în limba, și se poate că va ține în minte aceste propoziții interesante* [It caught my attention, but this may be of more use to those who are already not beginners in the language, and may keep in mind these interesting sentences]. Others expressed indifference towards social media trends or doubted that such content would lead to substantial language learning outcomes. Overall, responses ranged from positive viewpoints showing enthusiasm about the creativity and humor of the reel to negative viewpoints showing skepticism about its long-term educational value.

The reel *Come with me to the local farmers market in Braşov, Romania* shows primal_gourmet at the local farmers market in Braşov, Romania. The reel immerses the audiences into Romanian culture by highlighting traditional produce such as "covrig" (a type of pretzel), "telemea" (a cheese). Primal_gourmet is speaking English while narrating what he is doing and he is also engaging directly with the vendors, using basic Romanian structures and vocabulary. This makes it relatable for the audiences interested in language acquisition. By sharing personal reactions ("Mmmmmm" while eating) and expressing enjoyment ("Incredible! I love Romania"), he creates a friendly and approachable persona that resonates with the audiences. Overall, this reel shows an exploration of Braşov's culinary offerings while also functioning as a practical guide for those interested in experiencing daily life in Romania or learning some basic phrases in Romanian. See below the transcript of the reel:

Come with me to the local farmers market in Braşov, Romania. We can get some incredible fresh produce and practice the very little Romanian that I know. First stop: a little covrig. Bună dimineaţa! Un covrig cu floare de soare. [Good morning! A pretzel with sunflowers] Mmmmmm (while eating it). Bună ziua! Da-mi vă rog trei bucăţi de roşii, mai tari, vă rog. O bucată de ceapă vă rog. O jumate de kilogram de castraveţi, două bucăţi de mărar şi două de pătrunjel. Atât! Mulţumim mult! Vărbioară, una. La revedere! Aste e telemea? Daţi-mi, vă rog, 200 de grame, vă rog. Urdă dulce. [Hello! Give me three pieces of tomatoes, please. Harder one, please. One onion, please. One pound of cucumber, two dill and two parsley. That's all! Thank you very much. A piece of steak. Goodbye. Is that cheese? Give me 200 grams, please. Sweet cheese]. I need a little espresso break. Mulţumesc! [Thank you!] Now we move on to the fruit section. Una de asta. [One of these] Let's get some cherries. O jumate de kilogram. [Half a kilo] Last stop is the watermelon. 6 kilograme, mai dulce. Se poate proba? [6 kilos, sweeter. Can I try it?]. Incredible! I love Romania.

The respondents provided varied opinions to the Instagram reel created by influencer primal_gourmet. Many respondents appreciated his effort to speak Romanian and considered his approach engaging and relatable: *I like this video much more, it is more dynamic and presents a real life situation. I think it is a good example of a multilingual-themed reel and his discourse is just the way it needs to be.; The fact that it also uses English besides Romanian helps a lot for me to connect with the content. I really like this one.* Respondents also state that he communicates clearly. Moreover, respondents consider that the influencer shows respect for local culture: *His discourse with Romanians is filled with respect. I think he is really looking forward to learning a lot more Romanian if he*

likes the language that much.; I think he's basically fun to watch. He seems to really be enjoying his experience with Romanian culture.; Very good he is trying to respect the locals and order in their language. Some notice his good pronunciation and his ability to navigate everyday situations in Romania. Some respondents expressed surprise at his fluency given his claim of limited knowledge: *I'm impressed I wasn't expecting him to speak that good. He looks fluent even though he said he would use the little Romanian he knew.* In opposition to the reel produced by Edsta, our respondents pointed out that while this reel is enjoyable and useful for beginners, it may not be as effective for advanced learners: *As a total beginner, I find it useful and interesting, because I will want to go to the markets in Romania. I cannot speak on the quality of his pronunciation or vocabulary, though.; I think it is somewhat easy to achieve this level of discourse and understandable if you are a beginner.; I think he just gave some hint how easy it is to practice the language.* There were also comments which highlighted the overall entertainment value of the content over teaching the Romanian language: *In my opinion, his video is more about Romanian daily living than it is about learning the language. However, it might help the audience feel more connected to Romania.* Last but not least, the reel showcases daily life in Romania: *POV-type videos are very trendy and if the influencer is known, it is a powerful means to get Romanian culture known by more people.*

In the reel *Nu poți face sarmale fără orez* [You cannot make cabbage rolls without rice] Isiah shares in a humorous manner a story about him being mocked by a female friend about his desire for a traditional family despite not having the means to establish one, as he is a poor student. He reflects on his upbringing in a household with traditional gender roles, which has influenced him to seek similar values. His female friend emphasises that he wants a "housewife," but he doesn't own a house. Isiah reacts to this comment by comparing his situation to the desire of making traditional Romanian sarmale without essential ingredients like rice. He interacts with the audiences by asking them to post a comment with the Romanian word for 'roast'. This fosters interaction and relatability. See below the transcript of the reel:

Unul dintre cele mai mari roasturi care le-am primit vreodată. Nu știu care-i cuvântu' exact pentru roast în română. Da', dacă știți, puneți în comentariu, vă rog. În fine, a fost faptul că eu fiind crescut într-o familie tradițională în care mama și tata au roluri tradiționale, e normal ca eu să gravitez către o familie tradițională. În fine, și eu când vorbesc cu prietenii, cam asta este punctul meu de vedere. Și o prietenă de-a mea a spus unei alte prietene de-a mea acest lucru despre mine. Ceva în ideea că Isiah vrea femeie de casă, dar el n-are casă. (Uhhhhuuuhuuu!) Emotional damage. Dar a spus în engleză și-n engleză sună și mai bine. Bine că Isiah vrea un

housewife, but he has no house. What did I do to you? You woke up and chose violence. Sunt un student sărac, la facultate. Cum ar trebui să-mi permit o casă? Dar cam are dreptate. E ca și cum zici: Vreau să fac sarmale, dar tu n-ai orez. Cum sărăcia crezi că o să faci chestia asta?

[One of the greatest roasts I've ever received. I don't know the exact word for 'roast' in English. But, if you do, put it in the comments, please. Anyway, it was the fact that I was raised in a traditional family where mom and dad have traditional roles, it's only natural that I would gravitate towards a traditional family. Anyway, and when I talk to friends, that's kind of my point of view. And a friend of mine told another friend of mine this about me. Something along the lines that Isiah wants a housewife, but he doesn't own a house. But she said it in English and in English it sounds even better. [...]. I'm a poor college student. How am I supposed to afford a house? But she's kind of right. It's like you're saying: "I want to make cabbage rolls, but you don't have any rice. How on Earth do you think you're gonna do that?"]

Many respondents found his humor engaging and appreciate his ability to mix Romanian and English expressions: *Își expune logic și plastic punctul de vedere, îmbinând expresii engleze și române într-un mod haios și potrivit. Îmi place că are curaj să vorbească despre așteptări și diferențe sociale.* [He makes her point logically and plastically, combining English and Romanian expressions in a funny and appropriate way. I like that he has the courage to talk about social expectations and differences] *Este adevărat ce spune și distractiv* [it's true what he says and entertaining]. Respondents consider that he creates a relatable narrative that reflects social expectations and references to Romanian culture: *Funny to see people from all over the world have Romanian references; This one is also great. It uses memes that most people are familiar with;* Some praised his fluency in Romanian: *I think he is native speaker; Nici nu se pare ca nu e roman.* [One cannot even tell he is not a native speaker]. A few considered that this reel lacks originality and appreciated it as being less appealing due to its broad target audience. Additionally, some respondents noted minor errors but acknowledged their relatability to everyday speech among Romanians: *Vorbește foarte fluent și pronunția lui este foarte bună. Face vreo greșeală (o prietenă de-a mea, în loc de o prietenă de-ale mele), dar chiar și românii vorbesc așa* [He speaks very fluently and his pronunciation is very good. He makes the odd mistake, but even natives speak like that]; *Vorbeste repede, este elocvent dar nu neapărat corect din punct de vedere gramatical* [Fast-talking, eloquent but not necessarily grammatically correct]. Overall, there was a consensus on the entertaining quality of Isiah's storytelling style and the potential barriers posed by his language pace for certain nonnative speakers in the audience.

The reel *Cel mai bun sfat din lume* [The best advice in the world], zm95z offers humorous advice to girls about relationships. He suggests that they should date chubby guys like him instead of those preoccupied by their looks. He states that fit men are often strict with their diets and can get hangry, while chubby guys enjoy good food, always make jokes, and are more relaxed. See below the transcript of the reel:

Fetelor, vă dau un sfat. Asta îi cel mai important: Cine vrea face relație cu un băiat să face relație cu un băiat grăsuț ca mine. Nu faci relație cu un băiat are mușchi. De ce? Pentru că băiat are mușchi tot timpul cu dieta și să fie nervos și nu mănâncă asta și asta nu e bun. Băiat grăsuț ca mine, nu! Mănâncă tot mâncare bun. Și tot timpul râzi și glumești. Nu o să fie nervos. Mănâncă șaormărica, ciorbica. Și băiat are mușchi mănâncă tot timpul mâncare de la grătar și mănâncă mai puțin, mai mare, protina, mergi la sală. Ca mine, așa, vorbim, glumim. Crede-mă, asta-i cel mai sfat important de la tot fete. Eu, șmecher, și știu! Te pup!

[Girls, a word of advice. Here's the most important one: Whoever wants to date a guy should date a chubby guy like me. You don't date a guy with muscles. Why not? Because a boy with muscles will all the time be dieting and being hangry and not eating this and that's no good. A chubby boy like me! He eats all good food. And you're always laughing and joking. He won't get irritated. He'll eat the soup, he'll eat the swharma. A boy obsessed with muscles, he always eats grilled food and eats less, and goes to the gym. A boy like me, like this, we talk, we joke. Trust me, that's the most important advice for all the girls. I am smart and I know this! Kiss!]

Our respondents considered the reel funny and appreciated the influencer's humour and self-irony. Some appreciated his good pronunciation and pace: *He's ridiculous but funny. I think he's half-joking and half-sincere. Plus he's got a point — you wouldn't want to be with a guy who's constantly just thinking about when he'll work out next.; Are unele caracteristici tipice limbii române (anumite cuvinte, diminutivele, formula de a-și lua la revedere) și este drăguț cum vorbește despre relații cu umor și autoironie. [His discourse has some typical Romanian features (certain words, diminutives, the goodbye formula) and it's cute how he talks about relationships with humor and self-irony].* Others noted that he has a noticeable foreign accent. Several respondents mentioned difficulty in fully understanding him due to grammatical mistakes, suggesting that subtitles could enhance comprehension: *It was quite funny, using captions might help though.; I can notice loads of mistakes but I can not decide if it is "for real" or for fun since the topic and the vibe of the video is to induce laughter.; I don't understand him also, they need to put English subtitles;.* A few respondents were indifferent or even bored with the content, although they acknowledged

its humorous nature: *I can notice loads of mistakes but I can not decide if it is "for real" or for fun since the topic and the vibe of the video is to induce laughter.* Overall, there was a mix of positive reactions regarding his delivery and style, alongside some critiques about clarity and language proficiency.

The reel *Meeting my tată socru* [father-in-law] *for the first time* shows Southy preparing to meet his father-in-law for the first time. He prays and sings while looking out the window. When his father-in-law arrives, Southy enumerates the traditional foods and drinks brought by his father-in-law. The reel captures a warm familial moment marked by laughter and cultural traditions. See below the transcription of the reel:

Today is the day. I get to meet my tata socru [father-in-law] *face to face for the first time. He's bringing mici, pălincă, vin, bere* [skinless sausages, brandy, wine, beer]. (On his knees praying) *Înger, îngerășul meu!* [Angel, my little angel - a Romanian prayer meant for kids] *Tată socru* [father-in-law] (singing and looking out the window). *Tati!* [Dad] *He's here. Salut, tati!* [Hi, Dad!] *How much stuff did he bring? Woooooow! Is that țuică? Pălincă* [brandy]. *Noroc, tati!* [Cheers, Dad!] (Father-in-law explaining) *Nu e tare rău, dar e plăcută. Arde pe urmă în jos.* [It is not so strong, it is smooth. It burns your throat] *Uuuuu!*

When asked what they think of Southy's idea to promote Romanian culture, clichés and cuisine using a hybrid discourse (English and Romanian in the same sentence), the main 4 options selected by our respondents were funny, a good way of promoting the language and the culture, original, it makes Romania and Romanian more appealing (see Figure 5 below).

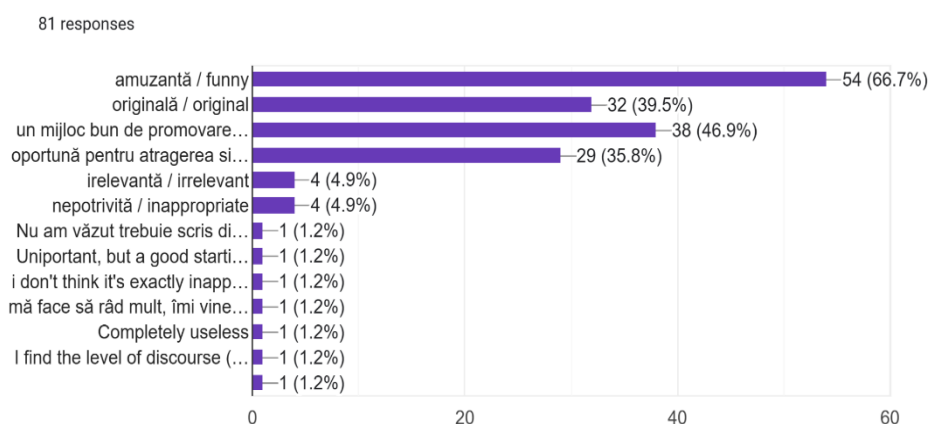


Figure 5. Reactions to Southy's Reel

After analyzing our respondents' attitudes towards the content produced by the 5 influencers selected for this study, we asked our respondents to answer two yes/no questions. The first question concerns the connection between hearing other nonnatives and our respondents' motivation to improve Romanian (see figure 6 below). The result shows that the vast majority of our respondents are motivated by this fact (86.4%).

Utilizarea românei de către nonnativi mă motivează și pe mine să învăț mai mult. / Hearing other nonnatives speaking Romanian motivates me to improve my level.

81 responses

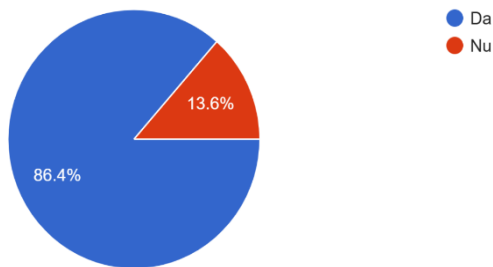


Figure 6. RL2 spoken by nonnatives motivation

The second question targeted the assumption that Romanian might help these influencers to create a personal brand and 77.8% of our respondents answered positively (see figure 7 below).

Credeți că limba română ca limbă străină îi ajută pe acești influenceri să își construiască un brand personal original? / Do you think Romanian enables these influencers to create a brand?

81 responses

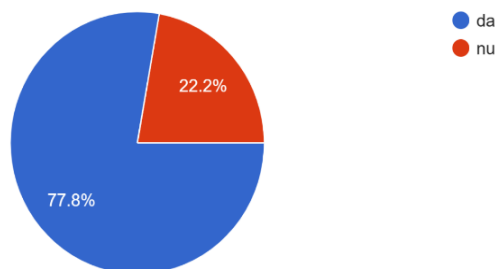


Figure 7. Perception of RL2 and Brand Construction

When asked to reflect on the benefits of knowing the Romanian language, we noticed that the highest score is registered for personal advantages (81,5%). Our respondents also declared having professional advantages (60.5%), and many of our respondents declared having a passion for learning the language which prevails over any kind of benefit.

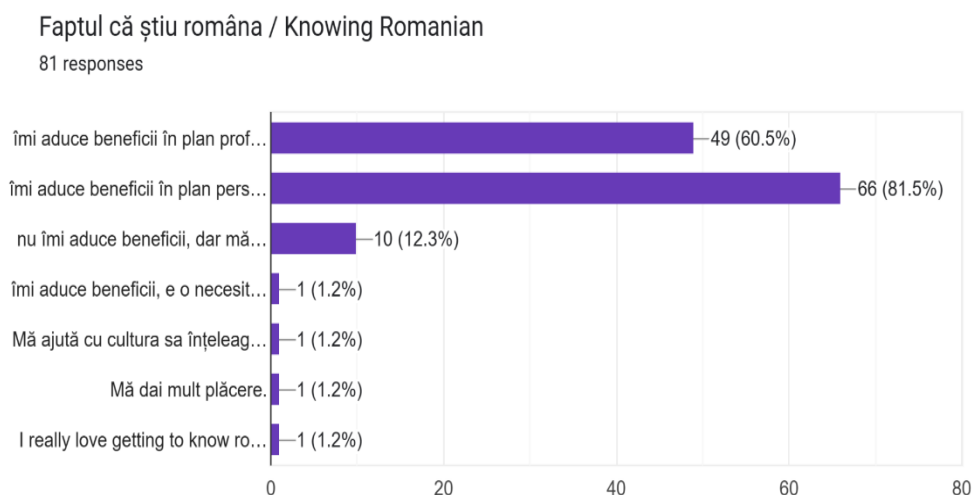


Figure 8. Benefits of Knowing RL2

Our respondents expressed emotional and professional connections to the Romanian language. Many of them view Romanian as a gateway to a better life in Romania, helping them integrate socially and professionally. For some, it represents a new beginning and a significant part of their daily lives, while others see it as a beautiful and musical language that enriches their cultural experiences. Despite the challenges of learning Romanian because of its complex grammar, respondents appreciate its unique sonority. Some respondents have a strong emotional attachment to the language because it connects them to their heritage or loved ones. Others find joy in the learning process itself, viewing it as a personal challenge or a way to stand out among peers. Overall, the Romanian language is seen as a valuable tool for communication, cultural exploration, and personal growth (see Figure 9 below).



Figure 9. RL2 Meaning

Final remarks

This study shows that RL2 speakers produce discourses which are inherently translingual. This aligns with our first hypothesis, demonstrating that RL2 speakers often navigate multiple languages and resources, blending them in their interactions. The translingual nature of their discourse highlights the adaptability of RL2 speakers in various linguistic contexts, reinforcing the idea that multilingualism is a defining characteristic of this community. Furthermore, our research shows that RL2, as a LWULT language, gains popularity in the superdiverse space of online communities. This validates our second and third hypotheses. The content created in this environment is not only linguistically diverse but also strategically curated to appeal to niche communities. These communities, comprising both nonnative and native speakers, engage with RL2 content positively. This fosters a sense of belonging and identity among its users, showcasing the dynamic and inclusive nature of the RL2 online community.

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