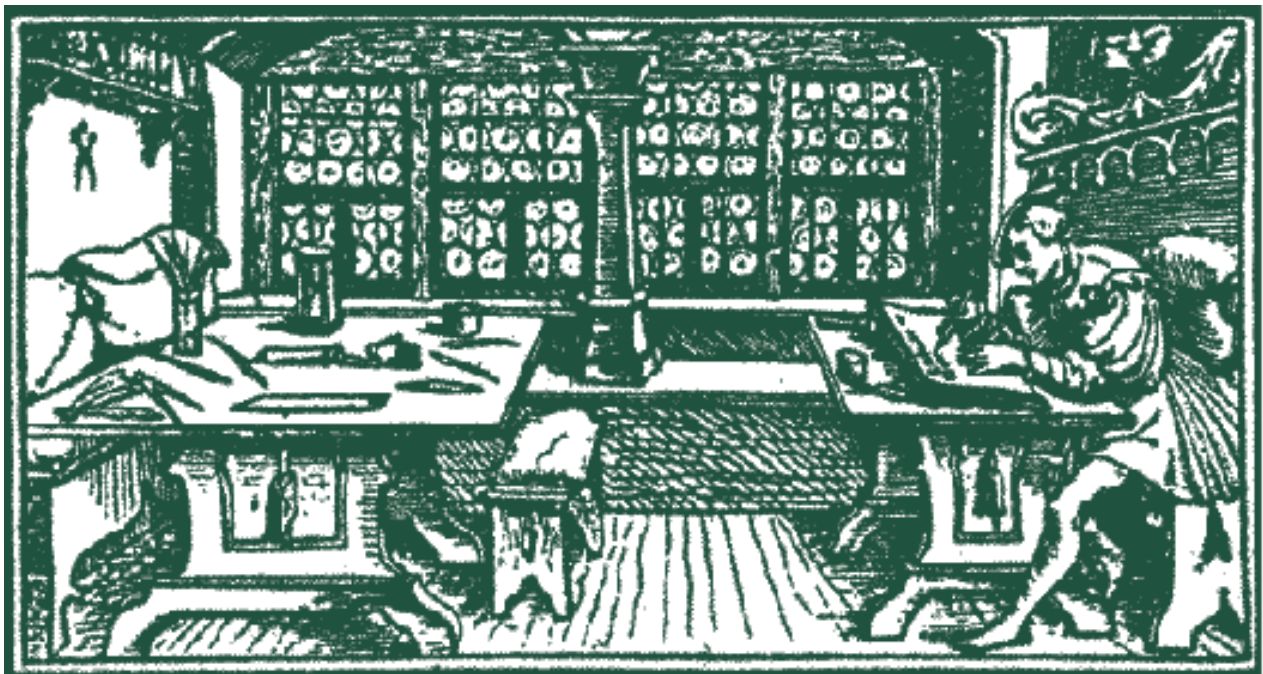




STUDIA UNIVERSITATIS  
BABEȘ-BOLYAI



# PHILOLOGIA

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## INTRODUCTION

DINA VÎLCU<sup>1</sup>

The Department of Romanian language, culture and civilisation of the Faculty of Letters, Babeş-Bolyai University, expresses appreciation and gratitude to the editorial board of *Studia Philologia* journal, part of *Studia Universitatis Babeş-Bolyai* series, for hosting an ensemble of studies related to the processes of teaching and assessment of Romanian as a foreign language (RFL) in our institution. This issue is especially dedicated to the process of auditing of our examinations by the Association of Language Testers in Europe (ALTE), a process which concluded with a positive outcome. In present, we are developing the legal procedures for becoming full members of ALTE, as a result of successfully passing the auditing process of our examinations.

The suite of examinations submitted to the ALTE audit by the Department of Romanian language, culture and civilisation, Faculty of Letters, Babeş-Bolyai University, is composed of four level examinations (*Examen la limba română. Nivel A1; Examen la limba română. Nivel A2; Examen la limba română. Nivel B1; Examen la limba română. Nivel B2*). These examinations constitute the axis around which the whole educational process concerning the academic programme of preparatory year organised at Babeş-Bolyai University develops.

The examinations are considered high stakes from several reasons: 1) they condition the continuation of studies in the academic programme of the students in the preparatory year, with only one chance for a makeup examination for every level; 2) once all these examinations are passed, a graduation certificate is issued by the University; this certificate can be used by the student who obtained it to enrol in any university in our country and begin his/her studies in Romanian; 3) the examination in level B2 is particularly important, because it can also be taken by persons who have not studied with our Department, but have already linguistic skills in Romanian. Passing this examination will grant the issuing of a certificate which will allow the candidates (as far as skills in Romanian language are concerned) to enrol in any university in Romania. The four examinations are commissioned by the Ministry of Education, which approves the academic programme in its entirety. For the time being, the main categories of population taking the examinations are 1) the students

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<sup>1</sup> Lect. dr. Faculty of Letters Babeş-Bolyai University.



enrolled in Babeş-Bolyai University, in the preparatory year (for all four examinations) and 2) the persons who need a linguistic competence certificate in Romanian in order to be able to start studies in our country (for B2 examination). We currently administer each of our examinations to a number of about 120-140 students per year. The characteristics of our test takers are constant from one session of examination to the next. They are similar in their: level of education, age, interests for learning Romanian, and varying, at the same time, in educational and cultural backgrounds and in L1.

Romanian as a foreign language (RFL) has been taught and assessed in Babeş-Bolyai University, through the Department of Romanian language, culture and civilisation, for more than forty years. While the courses taught here have always been highly valued and appreciated, the assessment has rather been seen in its dimension of a necessary, final stage of the didactic process. Being only in a small measure standardised or monitored, the assessment process accomplished, for many years, the normal role of providing the marks for the transcripts of records and varied largely from one year to the next, even from one group of students to the next, within the same academic year, the examinations being designed, administered and marked by in a diversity of registers and visions. This started to change approximately ten years ago, when the team at the Department grew with new members. However, the idea of aligning our examinations to the *Common European Framework of Reference for languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment (CEFR)* and to the ALTE standards appeared years before, in 2001 – 2002, when our Department, together with the Alpha Centre of Modern Languages, started to represent Babeş-Bolyai University as affiliate institution of ALTE. Another important event which took place in the same period was the publication of the *Threshold Level for Romanian language* (Council of Europe, Strasbourg, 2001) by a team of teachers and researchers from our Department. Since then, members of our Department have constantly participated in ALTE meetings and have set as an objective the transformation of this status in that of full member of ALTE.

The RFL examinations we apply have a common structure, assessing candidates' receptive and productive skills (listening, reading, speaking and writing), as well as their structural competence. For each level, the examinations have basically the same structure, including five components: *Listening, Reading, Elements of communication construction, Writing and Speaking*. The number of items, as well as the types of tasks vary, however, from one level to the next. The total number of points a test taker can obtain in the examination is 100, 20 points for each of the five components. Cut off score is calculated for each component separately and also for the whole examination. Then it is corroborated with the national system of education in Romania, which states that an examination can be promoted with mark five (the maximum mark being ten).

## INTRODUCTION

The RFL examinations submitted to the ALTE audit have been developed, in their structure and content, by members of the Department of Romanian language, culture and civilisation, who are experienced RFL teachers and assessors. They gained their external experience especially through participation in the ALTE bi-annual meetings and ALTE conferences, as well as in other scientific events organised by prestigious associations (Eaquals, CercleS, different universities and educational institutions). Expert judgment is involved in the whole process of test development. Experts internal and external to our institution were kindly asked to participate in a process of item validation, working with us on line and also in various workshops, before the items and tasks were introduced into the item bank.

The examinations are based on the communicative language model developed by Lyle F. Bachman and Adrian S. Palmer and are linked to the CEFR. The process of relating our examinations to the CEFR has been developed by following the main steps in the Manual published, in this sense, by the Language Policy Division of the Council of Europe (2009). We developed activities of familiarisation with the CEFR whenever we organised training and standardisation workshops, both for the new assessors or item writers, and for the more experienced members of our team or collaborators. We designed clear specifications for our examinations and created all items and tasks following them rigorously. We organised activities of standardisation for the assessment of spoken and written productions of the test takers and we designed new instruments (assessment grids for spoken and written productions) which we now use in every session of evaluation. Starting with the academic year 2013-2014, we organise sessions of standard setting, using the results from pre-testing and from examinations.

We began to use psychometric analysis in the academic year 2013-2014, in order to have a new confirmation or to perform the necessary revision of the items in our item bank. The results obtained by our students in every pre-testing session are used for estimating the coefficient of difficulty and the discrimination index for every item. Reliability and validity of the components proposed in pre-testing sessions are also calculated for *Listening, Reading and Elements of communication construction*. The results are used in order to do the necessary revision of items and only after that the items and tasks are included in live examinations, in the following academic year.

For the time being, the RFL examinations we created are administered locally, at the headquarters of the Department of Romanian language, culture and civilisation (The Faculty of Letters, Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca), which allows us to control all the aspects related to registration of test takers, conditions of examination, fairness and handling of test papers, allowing us to work with our candidates' exam papers in perfect conditions of security. This

aspect also allows us to manipulate the content of our examinations, the candidates' exam papers and the results obtained by the test takers in conditions of total confidentiality. It was during the academic year 2014-2015 when we started to ensure support for candidates with special needs, allowing people with dyslexia or with hearing problems to take the examination in conditions favourable for them and compliant, at the same time, with the regulations specific to exam administration. We are also prepared to handle other types of special needs our candidates might have. These aspects, as well as all the procedures of examination administration, are specified in a new, specially designed document, called *Regulation of exam administration. Romanian as a foreign language*.

A crucial domain in which our activity and performances improved significantly is the one of marking and rating. For the first three components in our examination: *Listening, Reading* and *Elements of communication construction*, we designed clear mark schemes and implemented the system of marking each exam paper by two assessors. For the productive skills we also adopted the system of double assessment. Writing is assessed by two raters, while the assessment of the spoken productions is done by commissions of three persons: an examiner and two assessors. It goes without saying that the assessors are not the teachers of the students who they examine. The commissions are always formed so as the teachers from one group to not be able to assess their own students. This way, the objectivity of the rating and marking is ensured, a quality which is strengthened by the fact that rating of productive skills is conducted according to clear and stable instruments of assessment.

The raters who work as members or collaborators of our Department are trained with us and regular sessions of standardisation are organised for all the assessors, more or less experienced. Marking and rating are monitored, intra- and inter-rater consistency are calculated and measures of close supervision or removing of some raters from the team are taken, provided this is necessary.

We are constantly preoccupied with improving our communication with stakeholders and we have developed various means of transmitting information and for being connected with all the categories of public interested in our examinations. While a few years ago the only functional means of communication with potential candidates for our examinations was direct contact (persons came to the Department or sometimes called and asked for information), we later started to make available information about examinations through electronic means, first of all through the site of the Department. We also created leaflets, brochures and other documents in which we present all the important data concerning our examinations. More than that, we diversified very much the information we make available to our stakeholders. While some time ago the only type of information related to the examination the public had access to was the

## INTRODUCTION

administrative one and the one concerning the use of results in official documents, now the stakeholders are offered a large variety of data on the examinations: a detailed form of the specifications; documents describing the procedure of construction, administration and marking of examinations; distribution of the points for each component; samples of complete examinations for all the levels; samples of assessed live examination of written and spoken productions, etc.

The RFL examinations designed and administered by the Department of Romanian language, culture and civilisation have gone through a thorough process of revision and the members of the Department are confident that these examinations are adequate and reliable instruments for verifying and certifying the test takers' competence and skills in Romanian language. Our intention is to develop them further, to improve them and to maintain and increase their reliability and validity, as well as their impact. We hope to be able to offer them to various categories of public, besides the ones who already use them and to transform them into a largely appreciated, trustworthy and popular instrument of assessing Romanian as a foreign language.

The preparations for the ALTE audit constituted for us the opportunity for a crucial revision of our examinations. We were right in our expectation of having our examinations confirmed, in some aspects, from the point of view of their quality and reliability and also in that of receiving the best of advice for getting them to an even higher level of adequacy and popularity.



## THE ROLE OF THE PARAPHRASING COMPETENCE IN ELABORATING RECEPTION EXERCISES

ELENA PLATON<sup>1</sup>

**ABSTRACT.** *The role of the paraphrasing competence in elaborating reception exercises.* Our study is based on the premise that, in the case of native speakers, the ability to paraphrase is innate, without their internalising any paraphrasing rules, whereas a non-native speaker is commonly bound to acquire such rules. Although the general studies dedicated to the didactic-related paraphrase focus rather on developing the paraphrasing competence specific to foreign students, our aim is to highlight the paraphrasing competence of the teacher-native speaker, more exactly, the awareness of their own paraphrasing operations while elaborating various didactic materials on the oral- and written-reception competences in the Romanian language. If during the oral communication to the students, the teacher's appeal to the paraphrase, viewed as an explicative method, is, to a certain degree, intuitive, and thus difficult to record, control and analyse, in the case of oral- and written-reception exercises (the input-texts, the proper items), the mechanisms of paraphrasing adopted by the teacher are easier to identify and examine. The aim of our study is to sensitise the teachers to the adequate use of the paraphrase in elaborating reception exercises, so that the foreign students can have easier access to the meaning of the oral or written message, along with the development of their paraphrasing competence.

**Keywords:** *paraphrase, paraphrasing competence, reformulation, paraphrasing techniques, Romanian as a foreign language, Romanian as a second language, oral reception, written reception.*

**REZUMAT.** *Rolul competenței parafrastice în elaborarea exercițiilor de receptare.* Lucrarea noastră pornește de la premisa că, în cazul vorbitorilor nativi, abilitatea de a parafraza se dezvoltă în mod natural, fără a conștientiza regulile de parafrizare, în timp ce un vorbitor nonnativ este, în general, nevoit să învețe aceste reguli. Cu toate că, în mod obișnuit, studiile consacrate parafrazei în context didactic pun accentul mai degrabă pe modalitățile de dezvoltare a competenței parafrastice specifice studenților străini, noi ne vom concentra pe

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competența parafrastică a profesorului-locutor nativ, mai exact, pe necesitatea ca acesta să conștientizeze propriile operații de parafrază realizate în timpul elaborării materialelor didactice destinate competențelor de receptare orală și scrisă în limba română. Dacă, pe parcursul comunicării orale cu clasa, apelul profesorului la parafrază, ca procedeu explicativ, se face oarecum intuitiv, fiind mai greu de înregistrat, de controlat și, prin urmare, și de analizat, în cazul exercițiilor destinate receptării orale sau scrise (textele-input, itemii aferenți), mecanismele de reformulare parafrastică puse în act de către profesor sunt mai ușor de identificat și de cercetat. Scopul cercetării este acela de a sensibiliza profesorii cu privire la utilizarea adecvată a parafrazei în elaborarea exercițiilor de receptare, astfel încât să se ușureze accesul studenților străini la sensul mesajului oral sau scris, dar și să se dezvolte competența parafrastică a acestora.

**Cuvinte-cheie:** *româna ca limbă străină, româna ca limbă nematernă, parafrază, competență parafrastică, reformulare, tehnici de parafrază, receptare orală, receptare scrisă.*

## 0. Introduction

Tackling upon the subject of the parafrastic phenomenon seems to be a rather unrewarding task. If such a phenomenon is viewed from a native speaker's perspective, a speaker able to paraphrase naturally, *namely* – already one of the commonest paraphrastic markers –, to produce and recognise semantically equivalent utterances, we run the risk of minimising it, considering it unworthy of any further investigation. The empirical definitions of the paraphrase also hinder us from making it a research object, thus reducing it to the classic, yet often perceived as unnatural, requirement present in all classrooms: *Can you say it in other words, please?* Such a “spontaneous” concept, traditionally defining the paraphrase as “the diversity of phrases corresponding to the same content” (Fuchs 1982a: 175), is reflected in the dictionary definitions as well: “presentation, explanation etc. of a textual content, oral communication etc. personally (and extensively) formulated” (DEX: 748). If we appeal to the different linguistic theories concerning the paraphrase in the last 65 years<sup>2</sup>, we

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<sup>2</sup> Certain schools should be mentioned here: the School of Pennsylvania represented by Z. Harris, who introduced the much-tackled-upon valuable concept of *transformation* in 1951. Later on, his disciple, Noam Chomsky, will explain the mechanism of phrase-generation, as part of his famous Transformational Grammar; the Russian School of Semantics - A. Žolkovskij, at the end of the 1950's, whose first publications on the automatic translation and paraphrase issued in 1964 were excelled only by the Linguistic Circle in Cambridge (M. Masterman and others). Together with Igor Mel'čuk, Žolkovskij will put forth the renowned *Théorie Sens-Text* (TST – Meaning-Text Theory), vital in the comprehension of the paraphrase; the Prague School, with P. Adamec's studies on the role of communicative information in the paraphrase process and, generally, in text-production; the studies

will undergo the same lack of enthusiasm: the paraphrase appears as an extremely intricate and unapproachable phenomenon to everyone not familiar enough with the sophisticated linguistic models proposed to comprehend the mechanisms of paraphrase production<sup>3</sup>.

Completely aware of the variable character of the paraphrase, which renders it hard to control and categorise in a unique typology, we have approached the paraphrase phenomenon with the aim of exploiting the various theories on the paraphrase, meant to improve the training process of the specialists in Romanian as a foreign/second language (RFL/RSL). Such an objective may seem unusual, since most studies on the didactic-related paraphrase underline the strategies of developing the students' paraphrasing competence (PC), not the teacher's (in our case, the RFL/RSL teacher's<sup>4</sup>). Nevertheless, we have decided to examine the PC of the RFL/RSL teacher – native speaker, since he/she should clarify certain basic notions of the paraphrase types or the techniques used in the paraphrasing reformulation, in order to facilitate the foreign students' access to the meaning of the oral/written message, but also to their own PC development. Since there have been no RFL/RSL studies on the paraphrastic phenomenon, we will provide an elementary theoretical frame followed by certain observations on the necessity of PC conscious exploitation in the elaboration of reception activities.

## 1. The concept of the paraphrase

Despite the perspective diversity throughout the time, the paraphrase has been defined by at least two fundamental elements: *the semantic invariant* and the relation of *semantic equivalence*<sup>5</sup> between a *source utterance* (SU - *l'énoncé-source*) and the *reformulated utterance* (RU). For instance, Fuchs considers the paraphrase a semantic equivalence between two utterances,

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of generative semantics of J. R. Ross and J. McCawley in the 1980's, which extend the domain of paraphrase, considering that the semantic equivalence cannot be reduced to the logical equivalence and exploring notions such as *conversion*, *noun-phrases*, *illocutionary acts* etc.; the Theory of Enunciative Operations, elaborated by A. Culioli in 1990, emphasises the role of the paraphrase, together with the experimental studies of C. Fuchs (1982a) and C. Martinot (1994) in the French academic context, placing the paraphrase within language acquisition (*apud* Milićević 2003: 102-118).

<sup>3</sup> Such as the linguistic functional model proposed by TST, elaborated in Moscow (1965) by Žolkvskij, Mel'čuk and Apresjan, which analyses the formal means to be utilised in the paraphrase modelling (for further information on TST, see Mel'čuk 2012).

<sup>4</sup> As a general term for all those involved in elaborating oral or written activities (teachers or didactic-material authors).

<sup>5</sup> Fuchs separates *the semantic equivalence* from *the total semantic identity*, since, similarly to the non-existence of lexical absolute synonymy, there is no total identity between the paraphrastically-related utterances (the paraphrase being a particular case of synonymy - Fuchs 1982a: 53).



“based on the existence of a common semantic joint<sup>6</sup>, on which various secondary semantics are transplanted” (1982a: 53), corresponding to formal transformations. In this author’s perspective, the appearance of secondary semantics is due not only to the alterations on the form level, but also to the context of utterance and the speaker, which have a decisive role in setting the paraphrastic relation. *In other words*, the paraphrase represents a certain equivalence not only on the language level, but also on the discourse level<sup>7</sup>, since there is no other means “besides the intuition of the speaker<sup>8</sup> to decide which are, among the linguistically equivalent utterances, the synonymous ones, namely paraphrastic” (Fuchs 1982b: 28). As an illustration, in the pair of utterances: **a.** *John wrote a book.* and **b.** *The book was written by John.*, the paraphrasing relation is purely linguistic, as a syntactic transformation; in such utterances as: **a.** *It is cold!* and **b.** *Close the window!*, the paraphrasing connection cannot be established exclusively on the basis of linguistic knowledge, but it also implies extralinguistic information, related to the communication context and the speaker’s world knowledge. As a matter of fact, the classifications including the nature of the necessary knowledge to produce/recognise the paraphrase refer to two major types of paraphrase: “the linguistic paraphrase, encoded in the language system” and “the non-linguistic paraphrases”, namely “the referential and pragmatic paraphrases (encoded in the speaker’s use of language)” (Fuchs 1982a: 75), also called “cognitive paraphrases” (Milićević 2007: 136). Yet, since a paraphrastic relation is valid only within a certain judgement on the degree of semantic equivalence between the two utterances, the paraphrase should be simultaneously viewed as a metalinguistic activity and a meta-discursive one.

In order to overpass the dichotomy language-discourse characterising the theoretical approaches on the paraphrase, we will propose an all-encompassing, yet straightforward definition of the paraphrase: a “relation which binds (quasi-)synonymous utterances, such as: **a.** *Penelope is certain that Ulysses will return.* **b.** *Penelope does not doubt Ulysses’s return.* **c.** *Penelope thinks that Ulysses will certainly return.* (...) **e.** *In Penelope’s view, Ulysses’s return is a certain fact.* etc.” (Milićević 2007: 1). On the contrary, the definition of the

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<sup>6</sup> In *Dicționarul de științe ale limbii [Dictionary of Language Sciences]*, this concept appears in the rhetoric approaches of the paraphrase: “a figure of thought close to accumulation, by which more (variants of some) ideas belonging to the same **semantic core** can develop/be reformulated” (our emphasis, Bidu-Vrăncianu: 370).

<sup>7</sup> The discourse as “a communicative event, evinced by a linguistic behaviour” (Bidu-Vrăncianu: 184).

<sup>8</sup> Differently from Fuchs and following Harris’s theory, Martinot considers that it is not the speakers’ paraphrastic exercise which “creates paraphrases”, but “the more or less extended possibility of paraphrasing or not an utterance, which we call paraphrastic plasticity” (Martinot 2009: 30-31), specific to each language and dependent on its restructuring possibilities.

paraphrase as a “relation” triggers certain observations on the character of this connection, respectively on the degree of semantic equivalence between SU and RU, which can significantly vary. Thus, between the utterances **a.** *Maria has solved this exercise correctly.* and **b.** *Maria has found the correct solution to this exercise.*, there is a high level of equivalence, but, between **a.** and **c.** *Maria has found the proper solution to the problem.*, it can be argued that there is only a relation of approximate equivalence (quasi-equivalence), since lexically substituting *exercise* by *problem* and *correct* by *proper*, the meaning modifies and we start doubting whether it involves an exercise or a personal problem, of a different sort. The disambiguation may be possible by contextually neutralising the semantic differences, thus adding a supplementary explanation: **d.** *Maria has found the proper solution to the mathematics problem.* In contrast, between **a.** and **e.** *Maria has solved her problem.*, the relation is certainly of non-equivalence, since by the use of the possessive pronoun, the meaning disambiguates, the problem naturally turning into a personal one.

Summing up our opinions on the specificity of the paraphrastic phenomenon, we observe a slight reiteration of the four fundamental principles of the paraphrase issued more than five decades ago, within the Meaning-Text Theory, namely: **1.** the paraphrase should always be perceived from the speaker’s perspective, as a linguistic activity of producing/identifying certain synonymous utterances; **2.** the linguistic meaning represents the invariant of the linguistic paraphrases; **3.** the paraphrastic connection is intuitive – the native speaker can intuitively confirm the paraphrastic equivalence or non-equivalence, and **4.** any paraphrase is approximate, the absolute identity of the utterances sharing a paraphrastic relation being non-existent (*apud* Milićević 2007: 13).

## **2. The role of the paraphrastic competence (PC) in communication**

PC, more specifically, the ability of a speaker “to produce synonymous or quasi-synonymous utterances” (Milićević 2003: 1), is an essential element of the general linguistic competence (Fuchs 1982a: 93). Thus, during the oral production, paraphrasing allows a better clarification of ideas, as well as a further diversity of expressions in order to avoid repetitions. At the same time, the production of semantically equivalent utterances represents a genuine communication strategy, by which any communication breach caused by the absence of a certain linguistic means can be avoided (Tsedryk: 19). For example, the speakers can replace a word they cannot remember with an equivalent term, making all the necessary changes so that their utterances be correct grammatically and lexically, but also “acceptable”, in Chomsky’s terminology, namely “immediately comprehensible, easy-to-get and

homogeneously decoded...” (Vasiliu, Golopenția: 27). The paraphrastic reformulation is also used in the production of the written text, in order to clarify certain ideas, especially in the case of those studies which “vulgarise” scientific terminology (Fuchs 1982b: 30). PC is not important mainly because it helps us be understood, but also because it helps us understand better; PC has, in fact, a vital role in the reception of the oral/written text. The exploitation of PC becomes obvious in writing, as a tool to avoid plagiarism, since the quality of understanding a scientific text reflects in the quality of paraphrasing bibliographical references. During a verbal interaction, PC is present in reformulating the other’s reply in order to assure ourselves of understanding correctly the message, whereas during the inter-linguistic translations, the PC becomes a guarantee for the interpreter’s expertise.

Furthemore, in a didactic context, the role of PC cannot be neglected, the teacher making use of a certain “intra-linguistic translation” (Cuq 2003: 186-187) whenever they reformulate the utterances for their students, to render them more precise and transparent. In the case of teaching a foreign language, the paraphrase acquires the status of a “correction method”. The teacher reformulates the incorrect utterances of the student, who becomes aware of the mistake and corrects it, by comparing their own production with the teacher’s. Similarly, the didactic explanation transforms the paraphrastic reformulation into “an explicative procedure”, to facilitate comprehension, by simplifying the language (Cuq 2003: 187). In fact, in foreign language teaching, the paraphrastic reformulation becomes a very complex process – it preserves the semantic equivalence and follows other linguistic restrictions too. Such restrictions are imposed by the need to use a micro-language adapted to the student’s inter-language level, with a view to ensuring the success of exo-language communication<sup>9</sup>.

Therefore, PC plays an essential role in language acquisition, functioning as both “a recognition tool for the learning stages” and “a means of acquisition” (Martinot 2009: 29, 32). Because the present study refers to the native speaker - teacher’s PC, we consider it useful to focus on the manner in which this competence appears and develops. Thus, it has been demonstrated that PC develops “progressively” and is acquired “naturally”, without the speaker becoming aware of the paraphrasing operations or the learning stages. Following the methods of PC development in the case of French-speaking children and running comparative studies with the Italian-speaking children, Martinot ranges the types of paraphrastic reformulation for

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<sup>9</sup> See Platon 2016, for the concept definition of *micro-language (ML)* and *exo-language communication (CEX)*.

each age<sup>10</sup>, reaching the conclusion that their number increases gradually and systematically, with a climax between 6 and 8 years, the non-linguistic paraphrases occurring only after the age of 10. It is worthwhile mentioning that, at this age, the PC is already formed, namely the main paraphrasing operations are functional (which does not entail that the PC cannot continue improving, by exposing the child to a more and more complex language, allowing them to produce comparably complex utterances).

In comparison to a native speaker, the non-native adult speaker (especially the one not constantly exposed to a foreign language) must be aware of the paraphrasing mechanisms and to benefit from the explicit teaching of the paraphrasing rules, so as to improve their PC (Tsedryk: 21). As a matter of fact, these rules describe the equivalence connection among the linguistic expressions. For example, in the pair of paraphrastic utterances: **a.** *Maria has analysed this problem properly.* and **b.** *Maria has made the proper analysis of this problem.*, the paraphrasing rule should sound as follows: V  $\approx$  support V (N) + N - the verb *to analyse* was replaced by a noun-construction (derived from a verb), *analysis*, together with the support-verb *to make*, which forms a collocation. Taking into account that a complete inventory of the paraphrasing rules functioning in a language should be realised on the basis of an extensive corpus, in the present analysis we will introduce solely certain elementary paraphrasing operations, to be traced in various languages.

### 3. Types of paraphrastic operations

Since a native speaker applies the paraphrasing rules intuitively, while a non-native speaker ought to acquire them in order to achieve PC, should the teacher also be conscious of such rules? We assume that, as a native speaker, the teacher is already an ideal “paraphraser”, making use of all the linguistic and extra-linguistic information for the efficient functioning of PC; however, the teacher should also internalise the reformulation mechanisms necessary in a didactic context. In the absence of this internalisation, the teacher will not be able to clarify the paraphrastic operations, by means of simple rules, neither will they be capable of designing special exercises to develop the students’ PC. On account of this premise, we believe that a short presentation

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<sup>10</sup> Between 4 and 6 years, there occur “lacunar descriptive reformulations” – for example, *to whisper*  $\approx$  *to say something in a certain way* is reduced to *say*; starting with the age of 6, there occur “the semantic paraphrases” (synonymous substitutions such as “to hold one’s hand  $\sim$  to hold one’s arm”); after 8, “the formal paraphrases”, such as *transformations* (for ex. *She was holding a girl’s arm* vs. ... *who was holding her arm*) and *restructuring* (*Max loads the lorry with cases* vs. *Max loads the cases in the lorry*); after 10, there already occur the explicative and nonlinguistic paraphrases (Martinot 2015: 10).

of the types of paraphrastic operations is more than welcome, because, no matter how diverse the perspectives on the paraphrase are and no matter how many efforts have been made to exclude it from the language domain, the conclusion is that merely linguistics allows a satisfying formal double-layered analysis of the linguistic paraphrases: the analysis of “forms” as such and the analysis of “formal procedures”, illustrated by Harris’s transformations (Harris 1951). In conclusion, a linguist makes use of no other means of “revealing” the sense of an utterance or setting a meaning relation between two utterances but by describing “the manner of producing these utterances, viewed as such transformations or operations” (Fuchs 1982b: 28).

Our mini-inventory will adopt only some of the types mentioned in Milićević’s classification system (2007: 138-141). The objective is to assure a minimal theoretical frame for the analysis of some reception exercises proposed in RFL. A *paraphrastic operation*<sup>11</sup> refers to the particular alteration of an utterance in order to produce a paraphrase. The examples we will provide represent utterance pairs of paraphrases, **a.** representing SU, whereas **b.**, **c.** etc., the RU. We have chosen such a manner of paraphrase description, considering that in TST it seems easier to admit the fact that two utterances have *the same meaning*, on account of intuitive perception, than to recognise *the meaning*. In other words, “the same meaning” appears to be a simpler notion than “the meaning” (Milićević 2007: 17).

The broad categories of paraphrastic operations fall into *lexical-syntactic*, *syntactic* and *semantic*. The first ones include different types of lexical substitution (which can be synonymous, antonymous, conversing and derivative), frequently combined with syntactic restructuring. For instance, by a simple synonymous substitution, **a.** *Maria has solved the problem correctly.* changes into **b.** *Maria has solved the exercise correctly.* By syntactic restructuring (more exactly, a lexical-syntactic operation), it results into **c.** *Maria has found the correct solution to this exercise.* In the case of antonymous substitution, two lexemes in the SU are replaced with their antonyms, the result being paraphrases as: **a.** *It is possible that passing be forbidden here.* and **b.** *It is impossible that passing be permitted.* In what concerns the conversion substitutions, they include the change of lexical-grammatical category and syntactic restructuring, as in: **a.** *My friend loves films.* and **b.** *Films are my friend’s love.* In what regards the derivative substitutions, they include the change of lexical-grammatical category of a word by means of derivation: **a.** *Ironing bores me.* and **b.** *Ironing is a boring activity.*

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<sup>11</sup> In the literature of paraphrase, the *paraphrastic operation* is synonymous with *paraphrastic procedure*, *paraphrastic technique*, *paraphrastic strategy* etc. Our choice is Milićević’s term.

The second category is represented by *syntactic operations*. A good example is passivization, where: **a.** *Maria has solved a difficult exercise correctly.* changes into **b.** *A difficult exercise was solved correctly by Maria.*, or relativization, where **a.** becomes **c.** *The exercise that Maria has solved correctly was difficult.*

In their turn, the *semantic paraphrases* (we refer here merely to the sentence-related ones, focused on denotation) can be the result of four types of operations: inferences, semantic additions/completions, semantic substitutions or decomposition. The semantic inferences are considered, to a certain extent, as halfway between the linguistic and non-linguistic paraphrases, because the semantic inference operation may trigger, besides the linguistic knowledge, naïve world-knowledge or elementary cognitive abilities, such as the deduction. For example, in the pair: **a.** *Grandfather gave good advice to his grandson.* and **b.** *Grandfather helped his grandson by his advice.*, the speaker generally knows, out of experience, that good advice is usually helpful. On the contrary, in the pair: **a.** *Maria likes swimming.* and **b.** *Maria loves going to the swimming pool.*, the elementary deductive reasoning is that, if Maria likes swimming, it is natural that she should go often to the swimming pool. The category of semantic completions is rather special, since they can lead to the production of certain quasi-equivalent paraphrases. In this case, the paraphrastic equivalence is realised only by adding supplementary explanations about the context, in order to neutralise any semantic differences. For instance, if in **a.** *Maria has solved this difficult exercise correctly.* we insert the verbs *can* or *know*, the result will become **b.** *Maria could/knew how to solve this difficult exercise.*, a fact that brings supplementary information on the context: *Although the exercise was very difficult, Maria managed to solve it.* The semantic substitutions function by replacing certain semantemes in the SU, but only under special circumstances: **a.** *Maria has solved this difficult exercise correctly.* **b.** *Maria has solved this difficult exercise successfully.*, thus *a priori* presuming as equivalent *to do something correctly* and *to do something successfully*, a reason for which such a case is also a quasi-equivalence. The semantic decomposition involves the replacement of a lexeme in the SU by its semantic equivalent, more specifically, by its lexicographic definition: **a.** *Maria is the author of the exercise.*; **b.** *Maria is the person who designed the exercise.*, a more adequate technique when the aim is to find an “absolute” identity relation.

At the end of this elementary classification, two further remarks are necessary. Firstly, following Chomsky’s tradition, some of the reformulation procedures mentioned before have a universal character, generally depicting the linguistic activity and particularly, the acquisition process (Martinet 2012: 64). Secondly, even if we have isolated every type of paraphrastic operation, for the sake of clarity, seldom in reality does a paraphrase stem from one single operation. Regularly, during the paraphrastic reformulation, more procedures are combined and the more operation types are used, the more

difficult to produce/recognise the equivalence relation will be, due to the existence of various cognitive operations. As an illustration, in the pair: **a.** *Maria has many questions for her teacher all the time.* and **b.** *The teacher answers the numerous questions that Maria asks.*, a semantic inference can be traced: *to have questions – to answer questions* (since the one who asks naturally expects an answer, even if not always the case). Lexical substitutions are present too: *to have* is replaced with *to ask*, *many* is replaced with *numerous*, accompanied by syntactic alterations, such as relativization and the case category.

#### 4. The role of PC in elaborating reception exercises

As easily assumed, PC is problematic to describe and separate as a subject of study. The first reason is the infinite number of variants, the paraphrastic reformulation having “no homogeneous working method”, because of both the *paraphrastic plasticity* (see note 9 above), and the speakers’ creativity, their abilities to adapt to the communication situation etc. Moreover, normally, “nothing obliges a speaker to produce a paraphrase of the “pure” restructuring type (Martinot 2009: 31), so, in everyday life, it is impossible to control the SU and RU pairs the way we have organised them above.

Nevertheless, during the courses addressed to the future experts in the domain of RFL/RSL, the controlled paraphrasing frequently occurs in the process of designing reception exercises. In fact, the very idea of this study resulted from the course-participants’ empirical observations on the exploitation manner of their own PC, while elaborating True/False (T/F) items or multiple-choice items. Among the recommendations on the correct item-formulation, there is one requiring the paraphrasing of the targeted excerpt from the input-text, since a *tale quale* reproduction of the SU in the items will never trigger any further cognitive operations, thus making the exercise utterly irrelevant. How it is stated in the studies dedicated to the assessment of reception competences, the item-validity depends on the capacity to test “what is desired to be verified by them: *the comprehension* (on various levels) of the *listened text*”. Consequently, the text in the item/at the basis of the item/in the variants should not be provided in its listened or read form, our task being “to paraphrase at least a part of the fragment whose comprehension we need to verify” (Vasiu 2015: 77).

In spite of this paraphrasing recommendation, also included in an *Item-decalogue* (Platon et alii. 2015: 369), the respective condition is frequently infringed. Even if most of the course-participants are native speakers and their PC is excellent, this PC is not functional at all or the reformulation is oversimplified, due to the limited number and types of paraphrastic operations. Such errors are frequent in the portfolios of the participants, who copy the SU as such

in the item, not modifying it formally. Similarly, wrongly-formulated items can also be found in certain published tests. For example, there are True/False items which reformulate to a minimal extent, by using merely one type of paraphrastic operations. As an illustration, we will analyse such an item exclusively based on synonymous substitution: the source utterance in the text: *When living with a roommate, the young can have many problems.*, is reformulated in the item as: *When having a roommate, the young can encounter hardships.* (Medrea et alii: 42). Although the exercise addresses an A2-level, where the text length and the students' inter-language do not always allow a sufficiently complex reformulation, we still doubt the efficiency of the item in the message comprehension. Reformulated as mentioned above, the item mainly regards the lexical competence, not the reception competence, thus solely verifying certain synonymy relations (*to have = to live (with) a roommate*, respectively, *problems = hardships*). Actually, the elimination of the adjective *many* seriously affects the character of the paraphrastic relation, which is no longer an identity relation, but one of semantic quasi-equivalence. However, this item can also be solved as false (although the exercise key claims it is true), because *having problems* is not entirely identical to *having many problems*. Unfortunately, nothing neutralises this semantic difference (for example, *many* could have been substituted by *numerous*, as illustrated above, but the second adjective may have been perceived as too difficult for an A2 level, the solution being an approximate paraphrase). On the other hand, the "negation of such semantic differences" during the paraphrasing process comes as a natural reaction of the paraphraser, who considers them "insignificant and nonpertinent" (Fuchs 1982b: 33). In spite of this expected and accepted tendency in other communication situations, we think that the teacher should never ignore such differences during the item-designation, being obliged to neutralise them (by searching for the best paraphrastic variant or scheme, adding or omitting some context-related information in order to obtain a high level of semantic identity, etc.).

While elaborating a reception exercise, we share a double status: native speakers and RFL teachers. The first status leads us to intuitive reformulation. The second one obliges us to consider a series of restrictions, such as the students' language level and the type of comprehension on focus. In a study on the B2-level validity of the construct, VasIU reaches the conclusion that the majority of True/False and multiple-choice items in the item corpus on analysis target "literal comprehension, on a local level" (VasIU 2014: 135), not the global comprehension, and provides two further explanations. The first explanation refers to the easiness of elaborating such items, in comparison to the interpretive ones, recommended in the verification of global comprehension. The second one mentions the text length, considering that the selected texts



are usually too short and, thus, do not allow any further elaborate items. We completely agree to the fact that the text choice is essential, on account that “the complexity degree of the paraphrase (the fact that some paraphrases are more difficult to produce than others) depends on two factors: either the SU is “complex” or the paraphrastic procedure applied to this SU involves the simultaneous function of various mechanisms” (Martinot 2009: 29). Nevertheless, Martinot’s second factor makes us wonder if the choice of the simplest paraphrastic operations (in our case, the synonymous substitution) may result from the insufficient awareness of all the possible paraphrastic operations, whose consequence is the designation of non-valid items.

We are of the opinion that, sometimes, even a shorter SU can be reformulated so that a lexical or lexical-syntactic paraphrase may occur. Although the comprehension type will not always be global-interpretive – due to the character of the information/text length/simplicity of the SU structures, the A2-level restrictions on the lexical means, the aim of text reception, etc. –, more complex paraphrastic operations can be used in order to activate more intricate cognitive operations than the plain identification of simple synonymy. For instance, an item formulated on the *sum pro habeo* principle may have proved efficient in our analysis: SU: *...the young can have many problems vs. the young’s life can be difficult*. Or in the first part of the SU, a better choice would have been a semantic paraphrase, based on logical deduction and negation, rather than the simple synonymous substitution suggested by the author: *When sharing their room with somebody else vs. when they do not live alone in the room*, which would have triggered further restructuring in the second part too, so that the item will have at least three-four different variants, despite the so-called paraphrastic scarcity of the SU and the level restrictions: *When sharing their room with somebody else, the young’s life can be difficult*. or *If they share their room with somebody else, many difficulties appear in the young’s life*. or even: *In the young’s life numerous difficulties appear when they share their room with somebody else*, the last variant simultaneously appealing to more synonymous and antonymous substitutions, syntactic restructuring, inclusively the change of topic. For the last variant, the SU-RU inversion would be suggested (the teacher can afford such ‘luxury’ since they are the authors of the input and the items), based on the recommendation to use the more simple variant of the paraphrastic pair in the items, not in the input-text. Only in this way will the item become a real tool for the easy access to the SU meaning (Vasiu 2015: 77). If various paraphrastic operations were simultaneously used, more relevant items would be more easily produced, thus revealing whether the human receptor has reached the semantic joint of the text – that “deep structure” coined by

TST and extensively described by the transformational grammars, or not, thus remaining to its surface, where the noun *problems* was merely replaced by *hardships*. Moreover, the diversity of paraphrasing techniques will help us decode the message in genuine situations of communication, since rarely will the receptor face such subtle reformulations, limited to few cognitive operations and to the simple synonymous identification. On the contrary, outside the classroom, the receptor will always have to simultaneously activate more cognitive operations in order to decode the various paraphrastic variants to which he/she is exposed. As a consequence, the exercises should be designed by the model of authentic comprehension.

## 5. Conclusions.

The analysis of one single item does naturally not account for any further valid conclusions regarding the manner of using the PC in elaborating items within the listening or reading comprehension. In spite of the fact that such conclusions also rely on our empirical observations about the manner of item-formulation in the student portfolios, the latter cannot be persuasive in the absence of a minimal corpus analysis, which represents the topic of a future study. Nevertheless, we believe that the RFL teacher should be completely aware of the necessity of mastering their PC in order to devise the reception activities more efficiently. Besides their knowledge of the different types of reading and listening comprehension, the RFL teacher ought to master all the paraphrasing techniques specific to their own language; as a result, they will be able to elaborate more complex and subtler exercises, meant to ease the student's access to the text meaning and to demonstrate their language level.

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## **SUR L'ADAPTATION AU NIVEAU (A1, A2, B1) DE LA LANGUE ROUMAINE COMME LANGUE ÉTRANGÈRE DANS LA MÊME SPHÈRE LEXICALE**

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**ABSTRACT.** *The adaptation to the level (A1, A2, B1) of the Romanian language as a foreign language within the same lexical sphere.* Along with the finalization of the courses part of the project „Continuing education for teachers from the post-secondary education who teach Romanian to the national minorities, POSDRU agreement 87/1.3/S/63909”, the work tool of the Language, Culture and Romanian Civilization Department, *A Minimalist Description of the Romanian Language (A1, A2, B1, B2)*, has finished, and the profile levels of the linguistic competence has come along much more clearly. Thus, based on this document which has already become legitimate within the department, drafted from a communicative-functional perspective, with a very well shaped structure in some large sections, within each level: communicative functions, elements of communication construction, lexical elements, expression of circumstances, sentence construction, etc., it has been produced, within the aforementioned project, a series of audio-visual materials on levels, with specific worksheets. These visual aid materials, necessary for the development of the oral and written communication skills, have been drafted according to a different lexical sphere, for example, animals, health, travel, weather, school, personal presentation, etc., in such a manner that all of the three levels have been covered. The purpose of the present paper is to exemplify, based on the suggested texts, how the adaptation has been made concretely, more precisely, how the passage from A1 to A2 and B1 has been made, within the same lexical sphere, according to all of the variables enforced by the linguistic tool aforementioned.

**Keywords:** *level of linguistic competence, linguistic tool, level adaptation, lexical sphere, visual aids*

**REZUMAT.** *Adaptarea la nivel (A1, A2, B1) a limbii române ca limbă străină în cadrul aceleiași sfere lexicale.* Odată cu finalizarea cursurilor din cadrul proiectului „Perfecționarea cadrelor didactice din învățământul preuniversitar care predau limba română minorităților naționale, contract POSDRU 87/1.3/S/63909”, instrumentul de lucru al Departamentului de Limbă, Cultură și

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Civilizație Românească, *Descrierea minimală a limbii române (A1, A2, B1, B2)*, s-a finisat, iar profilul nivelurilor de competență lingvistică s-a conturat mult mai clar. Astfel, pe baza acestui document devenit deja legitim în domeniu, redactat din perspectivă comunicativ-funcțională, cu o structură foarte bine delimitată în câteva secțiuni mari, în interiorul fiecărui nivel: funcții comunicative, elemente de construcție a comunicării, elemente lexicale, exprimarea circumstanțelor, construcția enunțului, mijloace de realizare a coeziunii și coerenței în textul vorbit/scriș, etc., s-au produs, în cadrul proiectului amintit anterior, o serie de materiale audio-video pe nivel, cu fișe de lucru specifice. Aceste materiale didactice, necesare dezvoltării competențelor de comunicare orală și scrisă, au fost redactate conform unei sfere lexicale diferite, de exemplu, animale, timp liber, sănătate, călătorii, vremea, școala, prezentare personală etc., astfel că toate cele trei niveluri au fost acoperite. Scopul lucrării de față este de a exemplifica, pe baza textelor propuse, cum s-a făcut, concret, adaptarea la nivel, mai exact cum s-a realizat trecerea de la A1 la A2 și la B1, în cadrul aceleiași sfere lexicale, ținând cont de toate variabilele impuse de instrumentul lingvistic sus-amintit.

**Cuvinte-cheie:** *nivel de competență lingvistică, instrument lingvistic, adaptare la nivel, sferă lexicală, materiale didactice*

## 0. Introduction

Cet article propose une discussion générale sur l'adaptation au niveau des certains matériaux utilisés dans la didactique du roumain comme langue étrangère, des textes pour les niveaux A1, A2, B1, concernant la même sphère lexicale, proposés pour développer la compétence de la réception orale.

### **1. Le grand projet « Améliorer les compétences des enseignants dans l'enseignement secondaire, qui enseignent le roumain aux minorités nationales », POSDRU/87/1.3/S/63 909<sup>2</sup>**

Ce projet ambitieux, ayant une période de trois ans pour la mise en œuvre - 1 Octobre 2010-30 Septembre 2013 - a été initié par l'équipe de recherche du *Département de langue, culture et civilisation roumaine* de la Faculté des Lettres, l'Université « Babeș-Bolyai » de Cluj-Napoca, en même temps bénéficiaire, avec l'implication de l'équipe *Learn & Vision*, en tant que partenaire.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> „Perfecționarea cadrelor didactice, din învățământul preuniversitar, care predau limba română minorităților naționale”, POSDRU/87/1.3/S/63909.

<sup>3</sup> *RLNM:P1-ciclul primar* 2011, Apropos.

Suivant les préoccupations constantes de l'équipe et par ses volontés affirmées de trouver les méthodes les plus efficaces et les outils didactiques dans l'ensemble du processus éducatif (l'enseignement/apprentissage/évaluation) de la langue roumaine comme langue étrangère, l'appel à un tel projet a été aussi motivé par:<sup>4</sup>

a. L'absence d'une description précise des niveaux de compétence linguistique correspondant au *Cadre européen commun de référence* (CECR)<sup>5</sup>, A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, C2;

b. La fragilité des manuels scolaires de l'époque, générée par plusieurs aspects: un marché modeste des manuels modernes de langue roumaine, rédigés sur les niveaux précisés; le manque de nouveaux manuels, concernant les langues spécialisées; l'insuffisance des matériaux pour les besoins des germanophones, francophones, anglophones etc.;

c. L'expérience substantielle du département dans le domaine de la langue roumaine comme langue étrangère. A l'université de Cluj, on enseigne la langue roumaine depuis 1974, de sorte que les professeurs ont enregistré des résultats considérables avec les étudiants étrangers, concrétisés dans quelques documents spécialisés;

d. Les résultats des élèves pré-universitaires, appartenant à d'autres ethnies, à l'épreuve de langue roumaine, peu satisfaisants. Dans ce contexte motivant, le projet a proposé l'objectif global: « assurer le perfectionnement des professeurs qui enseignent les élèves roumains issus des minorités le perfectionnement des professeurs nationales, afin d'améliorer la qualité de l'enseignement/apprentissage/évaluation de la langue roumaine comme langue étrangère, l'efficacité et son alignement aux normes européennes. »<sup>6</sup>

Du point de vue géographique, le public cible du projet était les professeurs qui ont enseigné la langue roumaine comme langue étrangère, à cette époque, dans trois régions de développement du pays: à l'ouest, au nord-ouest, centre, des départements ayant la plus forte concentration de citoyens d'une autre ethnie que le roumain (1.250 enseignants, dont 875 dans le cycle primaire, 250 pour le secondaire, 125 du lycée).<sup>7</sup>

## 2. Parmi les résultats du projet

D'une manière objective, le succès du projet « Le perfectionnement des enseignants ...» a été visible et à long terme. L'investissement dans la

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<sup>4</sup> RLNM: P1-ciclul primar 2011, Apropos.

<sup>5</sup> Cadrul european comun de referință.

<sup>6</sup> Selon les résultats issus par L'institut de statistique, entre 2008-2009, en Roumanie étudiaient dans les langues des minorités 199.207 élèves, voir RLNM: P1-ciclul primar 2011, Apropos.

<sup>7</sup> RLNM: P1-ciclul primar 2011, Apropos.

ressource humaine a connu un inattendu résultat: environ 3.500 enseignants préuniversitaires roumains ont bénéficié de programmes de formation, à la fois face à face et en ligne, axés sur l'enseignement/l'apprentissage/l'évaluation, sur la technologie de l'information et de la communication, sur la pédagogie-didactique et aussi sur l'éducation multiculturelle.<sup>8</sup>

En raison de l'utilité généralement reconnue par toutes les parties concernées, en tant que participants du projet, qui ont donné leur avis positif sur la façon de structurer les niveaux, l'un des résultats les plus importants peut être considéré l'achèvement de la rédaction de la *Description minimaliste du roumain (A1, A2, B1, B2)*.<sup>9</sup>

Bien que reconnue comme une première étape dans le processus de standardisation, la tentative enthousiaste des auteurs du *Cadre européen commun de référence* pour façonner les niveaux communs bien connus, A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, C2, est en fait seulement le dessin d'« un cadre d'orientation, général pour toutes les langues », mais déterminer avec précision les détails doit être faite par les praticiens de chaque langue.<sup>10</sup>

L'inconvénient de cette organisation commune est déterminée directement par la flexibilité des descriptions: généreuses, sans restrictions, elles permettent une plage d'interprétations possibles<sup>11</sup>, générant des graves ambiguïtés pour chaque partie du processus d'enseignement: d'une part, pour ceux qui enseignent et évaluent, parce qu'ils ne connaissent pas bien les limites du travail dans la préparation du contenu livré et testé; d'autre part, pour l'apprenant, parce que d'habitude, il est situé en dehors des exigences qu'on lui impose, pour se préparer de sorte qu'il puisse obtenir aussi un certificat de compétence linguistique.

Ou, à la fois dans l'enseignement, mais surtout dans l'évaluation, « réaliser une description minimale scientifique exige, au moins, la présentation détaillée des structures morphologiques, syntaxiques, lexicales et les actes de langage pour chaque niveau. La démarcation ponctuelle des niveaux de compétence de la langue est inconcevable en l'absence d'un tel support. »<sup>12</sup>

Par conséquent, sur ce fond équivoque et sans une description graduée des niveaux, pour la langue roumaine, les attitudes contradictoires sur les principes énoncés dans le *Cadre européen commun de référence* ne tardèrent pas à apparaître dans l'espace universitaire roumain.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>8</sup> RLNM: P1-ciclul primar 2011, Apropoș.

<sup>9</sup> *Descrierea minimală a limbii române (A1, A2, B1, B2)* 2014. Dans le projet, l'instrument linguistique a connu une forme intermédiaire.

<sup>10</sup> Platon 2007, p. 310.

<sup>11</sup> Platon 2009, p. 500.

<sup>12</sup> Ibidem p. 502.

<sup>13</sup> Platon, Sonea, Vasîu, Vîlcu 2014, p. 2.

De cette façon, les conséquences ont été immédiates, touchant à la fois le développement et l'évaluation du matériel didactique. Ainsi, la matérialisation urgente de ce « passeport linguistique » adapté aux descriptions des niveaux (progressivement et efficacement tracées) de la langue roumaine comme langue étrangère est devenu urgente. Nous croyons que seulement entre ces paramètres on peut discuter sérieusement d'un progrès visible pour les compétences au sein d'un système, valide aussi pour le roumain.<sup>14</sup>

En acceptant que « l'objectif principal d'étudier toute langue est la formation des compétences de communication orale et écrite dans la langue cible »<sup>15</sup> dont l'intention est « d'assurer le bien-être des apprenants par le relâchement des règles et des contraintes grammaticales, au bénéfice de la communication »<sup>16</sup> l'enseignement/l'évaluation RLE/RLNM.<sup>17</sup> comme parcours didactique doit être organisé, sans aucun doute, autour de la langue « en acte ».<sup>18</sup>

Outre la discussion sur la dichotomie, connue dans la littérature spécialisée tel « *documents authentiques vs documents semi-authentiques* »<sup>19</sup>, nous acceptons le point de vue sur les deux critères fondamentaux et complémentaires dans l'utilisation des dernières dans RLE/RLNM, en ce qui concerne l'importance de la compétence de réception orale: d'une part, *le critère de l'authenticité*, d'autre part, *le niveau d'adaptation*: « sont absolument nécessaires d'autres documents, voir les « semi-authentiques », pour diverses étapes d'apprentissage des langues. Cette catégorie est un peu hybride, parce qu'elle est conçue/adaptée pour répondre à un objectif didactique; pourtant, elle s'efforce d'offrir « un semblant d'authenticité. »<sup>20</sup>

Malgré l'accord sur ce type de travail, la présence effective dans la salle de classe du préuniversitaire, dans les activités d'enseignement/apprentissage, des documents semi-authentiques (tel audio ou vidéo) est inquiétant superficielle: si le matériel audio est insuffisants à présent, la vidéo est inexistante.

En fait, une analyse minutieuse des manuels de roumaine comme langue étrangère, au moins au primaire, montre un aspect beaucoup plus grave: la présence minimale des exercices visant à développer les compétences de réception orale, en traduisant non seulement qu'il n'y a pas de textes supports enregistrés, mais, en fait, qu'il n'y a pas de textes. Par exemple, pour les classes IIIème et IVème, on a signalé les suivantes: « Le manuel de l'édition Dacia se

<sup>14</sup> Platon 2007, p. 310.

<sup>15</sup> Platon, Sonea, Vasiu, Vilcu 2014, p. 5.

<sup>16</sup> Mărcean, Feurdean 2014, p. 96.

<sup>17</sup> En roumain, RLS/RLNM.

<sup>18</sup> Platon 2014, p. 10.

<sup>19</sup> Plus détaillé dans Platon, 2014, pp. 18-19.

<sup>20</sup> Platon 2014 p. 19.



concentre très peu ou pas du tout sur les exercices qui puissent développer la compétence de réception des messages oraux. »<sup>21</sup>

Une possible explication pourrait être « la pénurie des moyens techniques dans les écoles roumaines. »<sup>22</sup> Cependant, quelles que soient les problèmes qui pourraient survenir, des solutions y doivent être, depuis que la présence des textes supports et des exercices spécifiques pour la compétence de réception orale est évidente, à partir de deux angles complémentaires: d'une part, on a besoin d'un équilibre entre les quatre compétences; d'autre part, suivant les assertions précédentes, la programme scolaire propose, dans ce sens, toute une typologie d'activités: par exemple, pour la IV<sup>ème</sup> sont visé: « le choix d'une image qui suggère la signification du message, à partir d'un ensemble d'images, des exercices à discriminer l'essentiel dans le détail, des exercices de reconnaissance des moments importants dans un message entendu, la cohérence temporelle des séquences d'un message oral, relier les mots inconnus avec leur définition, etc. »<sup>23</sup>

Dans telles conditions, en essayant de compléter cette réelle lacune et de fournir un modèle de travail, à partir duquel on pourrait se réclamer, à l'avenir, des documents similaires, au sein du projet *Le perfectionnement des enseignants ...* sont publiés deux volumes: *Des matériaux audio pour développer les compétences orales en RLNM. A1, A2 et B1*,<sup>24</sup> aussi que *Des matériaux vidéo pour développer les compétences orales RLNM. A1, A2 et B1*.<sup>25</sup>

En grandes lignes, les volumes contiennent quatre catégories de textes, représentant un large éventail de messages oraux. En outre, selon le type de texte, on a sélectionné aussi le public-cible préuniversitaire roumain, notre intérêt dans le présent document, destiné aux étudiants jeunes et milieu: éduquer cinéma haut-parleurs spécialement conçus niveaux A1 non indigènes, A2, B1, pour les petites et moyennes d'âge des étudiants.<sup>26</sup>

### **2.1. Adapter au niveau les supports audio**

L'acceptation de l'instrument linguistique, *La description minimale du roumain*, en tant que document officiel, engage dans RLE/RLNM la discussion autour du terme « adaptation au niveau ». Dès le début, ce phénomène peut se produire que dans les limites qui tracent un certain niveau de production écrite ou orale.

<sup>21</sup> *RLNM: P1-ciclul primar* 2011, p. 158.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibidem* p. 178.

<sup>23</sup> Pour d'autres types mais aussi pour des exemples proposés, voir *RLNM: P1-ciclul primar* 2011, pp. 179-181.

<sup>24</sup> *Materiale audio pentru dezvoltarea competențelor orale în RLNM. A1, A2 și B1* 2014.

<sup>25</sup> *Materiale video pentru dezvoltarea competențelor orale în RLNM. A1, A2 și B1* 2014.

<sup>26</sup> Plus de détails, voir Platon 2014, pp. 20-21.

Dans ce cas, le niveau d'un texte proposé afin de développer la compétence de réception orale est confirmé ou réfuté par le rapport immédiat à tous les composants de *La description minimale*: les structures morphosyntaxiques, le vocabulaire utilisé et les actes de parole spécifiques. En même temps, on doit retenir toutes ces constantes, lors de la rédaction des exigences, y compris les items des textes.

Normalement, il y a inévitablement deux situations distinctes en analysant le phénomène de l'adaptation; la note commune – le rapport permanent aux compétences de l'étudiant.

(1) D'une part, on peut comprendre « l'adaptation au niveau » ou le rattrapage d'un texte déjà construit/rédigé à but précis et suivant un thème convenant à notre objectif didactique. Dans cette situation, l'adaptation peut démarrer vers deux directions : soit vers la simplification du texte qui surclasse le niveau de l'étudiant, en supprimant les structures/mots/phrases qui dépassent le niveau ; alors, une descente aux niveaux inférieurs. Ou bien compliquer le niveau du texte, pour qu'il soit en dessous du niveau de compétence de l'étudiant, en introduisant des structures/mots/expressions plus difficiles.

(2) D'autre part, on pourrait comprendre « l'adaptation » du niveau propre, lors de la conception personnelle d'un texte, sur un thème particulier. Fréquemment, les projetant de ces textes « a un parcours régressif, en termes de la complexité linguistique; c'est-à-dire, le professeur opère des visibles réductions de sa langue maternelle, dans l'effort d'adaptation à l'apprenant »<sup>27</sup>, en particulier pour les niveaux inférieurs A1 et A2.<sup>28</sup> De plus, visant les deux situations décrites ci-dessus, on ne doit pas abandonner l'opposition « fabriquer » pour adapter vs « brosser »<sup>29</sup> pour adapter; la différence s'établie en fonction du niveau de langue que nous voulons atteindre, pour qu'il soit le niveau adéquat de l'apprenant.

D'habitude, le terme « fabriquer » ou de rédaction vise le contexte dans lequel les autochtones proposent un texte spécifique pour les niveaux inférieurs A1 et A2. La situation est compréhensible, étant donné que, *La description minimale* réduit considérablement, en termes de langue, les deux niveaux nommés, par rapport à B1 et B2. Ou, en toutes circonstances de communication, le niveau de compétence dans la maternelle ne change jamais pour le natif, excepté la pression des contraintes importantes.

En échange, à partir du niveau B1, plus proche du natif dans certaines circonstances, on peut reprendre des publications différentes, afin d'assurer

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<sup>27</sup> Platon 2016, p. 636.

<sup>28</sup> Pour la description des niveaux A1 et A2 en roumain, voir Platon, Sonea, Vasiu, Vîlcu 2014, pp. 9-48.

<sup>29</sup> Pour ce termen, voir Platon 2009, p. 503.

plus d'authenticité à la langue, à condition qu'on les brosse, pour éviter des structures typiques pour autre niveau.

Naturellement, « du plus simple au difficile », en commençant par la plus élémentaire manifestation linguistique (associée aujourd'hui avec A1), et jusqu'à atteindre B2 (ou le palier avancé),<sup>30</sup> la progression, comme une mise au niveau, comporte deux aspects complémentaires, même si on parle d'une ou des plusieurs composants typiques de *La description minimale*:<sup>31</sup>

a. Introduire de nouveaux aspects. Par exemple, pour les *Fonctions communicatives* sous-section B. *Échange d'informations*, on constate que les niveaux A1, A2, B1 présentent les questions suivantes: A1 vs A2 : « annonce d'un fait », « considérer un acte comme probable/improbable » examen effectivement unir comme probable/improbable »; A2 vs B1 « considérer un fait comme apparemment » tout le reste étant constant. Seule différence est conditionnée par le vocabulaire spécifique et par les structures morphosyntaxiques.<sup>32</sup>

En ce qui concerne la Section 2. *La construction de la communication*, sous-section, sous-section 2.1. *Classes grammaticales*, sur l'article roumain, par exemple, les étapes sont les suivantes: à l'exception du niveau A1 et A2, où l'accent est maintenu sur les formes des articles défini et indéfini pour A1, pour le Nominatif-Accusatif, niveau A2, ceux Génitif-Datif, niveau B1, on introduit les formes du NAC, qualifiées au sens traditionnel,<sup>33</sup> possessives au génitif et démonstratifs.<sup>34</sup>

b. Développer quelques aspects déjà introduits

On prend comme exemple la Section 2. *Construction de la communication*, sous-section 2.1. *Classes grammaticales*, concernant le nom roumain; pour une de ses catégories grammaticales, le cas, les étapes marquent une mise à niveau progressive de l'actualisation: pour A1 on introduit les formes NAC des noms communs, les formes GD de noms propres, noms de personnes; pour A2: on introduit des formes de noms, au GD; pour B1: formes de vocatif.<sup>35</sup>

En guise de conclusion, on souligne que dans le processus d'enseigner, l'adaptation graduelle et prudente du matériel doit se conformer à la gradation naturelle d'un système linguistique, y compris du roumain. Par exemple, par rapport à une sphère lexicale, nous reconnaissons qu'il se développe progressivement, commençant par les mots les plus faciles à comprendre, pour qu'à parcourir, ils deviennent « l'instrument » à travers lequel d'autres termes, même des expressions idiomatiques encore plus difficiles, peuvent être expliquées.

<sup>30</sup> Pour les motifs qui ont démontré la description avec le B1, voir Platon, Sonea, Vasîu, Vîlcu 2014, p. 4.

<sup>31</sup> Voir des brefs exemples pour les niveaux A1 și A2, Platon 2009, pp. 502-503.

<sup>32</sup> Platon, Sonea, Vasîu, Vîlcu 2014, pp. 9-70.

<sup>33</sup> Cet article ne concerne pas la dispute sur leur statut morphosyntaxique.

<sup>34</sup> Platon, Sonea, Vasîu, Vîlcu 2014, pp. 9-70.

<sup>35</sup> Idem.

En même temps, le vocabulaire d'une langue ne peut pas se matérialiser en dehors des structures morphologiques et les actes de parole. Une lecture chronologique des formes morphosyntaxiques roumaines, on peut observer, sans surprises, qu'ils commencent à prendre forme, en respectant un mécanisme d'opération logique et cohérent: par exemple, la forme casuelle des substantifs en GD ne peut être enseignée que précédemment les prépositions/locutions prépositionnelles spécifiques aux cas mentionnés. Une possible explication serait qu'après ces parties du discours, les formes nominales se réalisent à l'aide des formes de GD.

Il n'est pas surprenant qu'un certain acte de parole, le même, apparaît matérialisé différemment selon le niveau où il se produit : par exemple, pour A1, les félicitations – *Merci!* est la seule réponse possible; contrairement, pour A2, où il apparaît *Je te remerci beaucoup!*, étant donné que, à ce niveau, les formes inaccentuées des pronoms personnels en Datif apparaissent accompagnés par d'autres verbes, non seulement avec *plaire*. Ainsi, nous insistons sur l'importance de connaître les niveaux de contenu inférieurs et supérieurs, parce qu'ils contrôlent d'une manière efficace l'enseignement et l'apprentissage, en fournissant implicitement une meilleure gestion du support didactique supplémentaire.

Les textes audio qu'on propose dans cet étude ont été rédigés sous certaines « contraintes ».<sup>36</sup> Outre l'intérêt majeur pour le critère d'authenticité, ayant « toujours attention à ne pas élaborer des textes artificiels, arides et dépourvus de charme »,<sup>37</sup> les auteurs ont été concernés aussi de suivre une progression réelle dans l'enseignement/l'apprentissage des faits de langue, mesurées, évidemment, par les descriptions de niveau: « pour cette raison, adapter le niveau de langage utilisé dans les enregistrements audio-vidéo a été l'un de nos principaux objectifs. »<sup>38</sup>

En proposant un parallèle entre ces textes et ceux qui apparaissent dans les manuels scolaires,<sup>39</sup> comme composantes des unités d'enseignement,<sup>40</sup> on doit formuler quelques idées-cadre:

Les manuels de langue roumaine étrangère plus récents proposent des textes qui développent toujours les compétences de réception orale (et écrite), sans aucun doute, les mieux « prétextes » pour introduire le vocabulaire spécifique d'une certaine portée lexicale, des certaines parties du discours, avec à côté des catégories grammaticales caractéristiques et leur actes de parole liés.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>36</sup> Pour toute la typologie des contraintes, voir Platon 2014, p. 21.

<sup>37</sup> Idem.

<sup>38</sup> Ibidem p. 20.

<sup>39</sup> Par exemple, *Aventuri in Nucania* 2014.

<sup>40</sup> Pour une discussion autour du sintgme « unité didactique », voir Platon 2012, pp. 17-20.

<sup>41</sup> Plus d'exemples dans *Aventuri in Nucania* 2014.

Selon les objectifs (ils apparaissent généralement dans une boîte au début de l'unité), le texte des manuels peut exploiter soit une certaine classe des mots, soit des actes discours de portée lexicale propre, ces indications ayant, le plus souvent, un lexique particulier.

En revanche, nos textes audio ont été conçus en gardant le model communicatif, mais seulement pour les sphères lexicales des niveaux A1, A2, B1, les auteurs renonçant à d'autres types d'objectifs morphosyntaxiques et de la parole. Par conséquent, tous les neuf textes proposés pour les trois niveaux tournent autour d'un thème de la famille: *présentation personnelle, hygiène et santé, nourriture et boissons, la maison* etc., qui coïncide, en fait, avec le programme.

Cependant, on doit signaler ceci: peu importe comment nous essayons de garder une distance entre le texte et la partie du discours (sans en user dans un texte pour la réception orale), il y a une réelle compatibilité entre un thème et une classe lexico-grammaticale qui la représente, où il peut être facilement exploité. À cet égard, un exemple pratique est le nom et sa disponibilité de cette valeur morphologique de soutenir le thème *La maison*,<sup>42</sup> comme cela est arrivé, en fait, pour nos textes audio.

Dans le périmètre de nos textes, la flexibilité est encore plus élevée; par exemple, ils visent, dans une première étape, la réception par l'intermédiaire d'un exercice personnalisé. C'est à l'enseignant de choisir seulement une pratique ou tout un processus d'enseignement; il a la liberté d'exercer le lexique, pour le moment de pré-réception et aussi pour l'étape de post-réception, lorsqu'on peut exploiter un message entendu, à travers une relation immédiate aux expériences de vie des enfants. Lorsque le niveau de langue doit être respecté (parce qu'on s'adresse aux enfants jusqu'à l'âge de 12 ans), les auteurs des textes doivent adapter leur propre niveau quand ils le conçoivent.

Alors, il ne suffit pas que le phénomène d'adaptation tient compte que d'un des éléments de *La description minimale*, le vocabulaire est insuffisant pour « déclarer un texte comme appartenant à un certain niveau », tel comme une classe grammaticale ou un acte de parole ne suffit pas pour placer le texte sur un certain niveau. Dans ces circonstances, on a également imposé d'autres restrictions, à savoir, considérer aussi les classes lexico-grammaticales, les catégories grammaticales spécifiques et les actes de langage connexes.

Par la suite, en choisissant comme exemple la sphère *Voyages, vacances*, on propose quelques échantillons pour observer, en fonction de *La description minimale du roumain*, d'une part, comment ces textes sont conformes au niveau, et d'autre, comment ils ont augmenté, visiblement, les niveaux.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>42</sup> Voir l'unité didactique spécifique des manuels de RLE, *Manual de limba română ca limbă străină (RLS) A1-A2 2012*, pp. 47-61.

<sup>43</sup> Platon, Sonea, Vasîu, Vîlcu 2014, pp. 9-70.

## I. Niveau A1<sup>44</sup>

### 1. Fonctions de communication:

#### A. Conventions sociales:

- a. Le salut: saluer la réunion: *Bonjour!*; dire au revoir: *Au revoir!*;
- b. Présentation: *Je m'appelle André.*

#### B. Échange d'information:

a. Une information sur un fait/sur un acte mental/sur les capacités: pour demander des informations sur un fait: *D'où partez-vous? ; Avec qui allez-vous?; Où avez-vous trouvé l'offre?; Avez-vous une bonne offre à la montagne pour la prochaine période?; Vous voulez aller où?; La station, elle est où, exactement?; répondre à la demande d'information sur un fait: De Mangalia.; Avec deux amis du bloc voisin.; À d'une agence de voyage j'ai trouvé une très bonne offre ...; Oui, nous offrons.; À la montagne. Dans le département de Hunedoara.*

b. Formuler des hypothèses éventuelles: *Près de la cabane, un kilomètre distance, il y a aussi une patinoire, si vous aimez patiner.; Si vous aller à la mer, passer par le parc de Neptun, aussi!*

#### C. Exprimer des attitudes, des sentiments et des états:

a. La volonté: *Je veux aussi faire une croisière sur la mer Noire.; Ma famille et moi, nous voulons un billet pour trois nuits.; Je veux plus de détails!*

b. L'opinion - demander l'avis: *Je veux aussi faire une croisière sur la mer Noire.; Ma famille et moi, nous voulons un billet pour trois nuits.!.; Je veux plus de détails!; Je pense que c'est une très bonne idée.*

### 2. Construire la communication:

#### 2.1. Les classes grammaticales:

a. Le nom: le genre: *dans une agence de voyage; j'ai loué une voiture; des chambres individuelles*; le nombre: *agence de voyage, une voiture, des chambres simples*; le cas: *j'ai rencontré beaucoup d'enfants; il y a beaucoup de jeux*;

b. L'adjectif qualificatif à quatre formes: *bonne offre; Les enfants ont été très heureux.*

c. L'adjectif pronominal possessif, formes de NAc: *Mon nom est Andrei; Ma famille et moi, nous voulons un billet.*

d. Des pronoms:

d.1. Pronoms personnels: *À côté de moi, il y a trois touristes.; Pour moi, tout est nouveau.; J'aime les livres.*

d.2. Pronoms réflexifs: *Vous pouvez vous promener en traîneau.*

d.3. Pronoms négatifs: *Je ne pouvais rien faire.*

e. Verbes:

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<sup>44</sup> Platon, Sonea, Vasiu, Vilcu 2014, pp. 9-28.

- e.1. Présent: *Où voulez-vous aller?*  
e.2. Passé composé: *Vous êtes venus seuls à la mer?; Je ne suis jamais allé dans un tel parc.*  
e.3. Infinitif,<sup>45</sup> personne I, II, singulier, pluriel: *Où voulez-vous aller ?; Si vous aimez patiner.*  
e.4. Impératif, deuxième personne du pluriel: *..., passez aussi par le parc Neptun!*  
e.5. Le verbe « pouvoir » + l'infinitif: *Je ne pouvais rien faire.*  
e.6. Le verbe « plaire » au présent: *J'aime les diapositives.*  
f. Le numéral cardinal: *Nous voulons un billet pour trois nuits.; La cabane offre des chambres avec un lit, deux et même trois.; Il a plu deux jours.*  
g. De prépositions simples et composés avec Ac: *Il s'agit du chalet « Ursul de aur » dans la station Straja.; Il organise des excursions à la montagne? Pour une personne, le billet coûte ...; Avez-vous visité l'Aquarium de l'entrée?; Allez aussi au parc de Neptune!*  
h. Des adverbes - de lieu: *Nous sommes en direct, ici, dans le parc ...; Je n'y suis jamais allé;* - de temps: *On se voit demain; Je n'y suis allé jamais.;* de manière: *Seulement une minute!*  
i. Des conjonctions de coordination: *Il possède un restaurant et une salle de jeux.; Je ne pouvais rien faire, mais il était ensoleillé.;* de subordination: *J'ai lu dans un magazine que la soupe de poisson était excellente.*  
**2.2. Éléments lexicaux:** *agence de voyage, offres, voyager, louer, bateau, cuisinier, soupe de poisson, chalet, destination, traîneau, feux de camp, patinoire, nourriture traditionnelle, sports d'hiver, parc d'attractions, piscine.*  
**2.3. Exprimer les circonstances:** a. temps: *Quand avez-vous quitté le Delta? antériorité: Il y a une semaine et sept jours.;* postériorité: *J'attends jusqu'au mois prochain.;* fréquence/itération: *Je ne suis jamais allé dans un tel parc.;* durée: *Je n'ai pas été là depuis quatre ans.;* lieu: *J'ai volé jusqu'à Constanta.;* D'où vous partez?; *Près du chalet, à un kilomètre ...;* moyen et outil: *Vous pouvez vous promener en traîneau ou en voiture.*

## II. Niveau A2<sup>46</sup>

### 1. Fonctions de communication

#### **B. Echange d'information:**

- a. Des informations sur un fait/sur un acte mental/sur des capacités: pour demander des informations sur un fait: *Ai-je mis tous les objets*

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<sup>45</sup> La variante roumaine c'est le *conjunctiv présent*, selon l'exemple: *Unde vreți să mergeți?; Dacă vă place să patinați.*

<sup>46</sup> Platon, Sonea, Vasîu, Vîlcu 2014, pp. 29-48.

*nécessaires dans les bagages ?; D'où l'idée de proposer un tel camp ?; Quel est le thème du camp et quel âge comprend?; répondre à la demande d'information sur un fait: Je ne sais pas.; Je pensais aux enfants, aux leurs besoins passions.; Il aura un thème médiéval.*

b. Formuler d'hypothèses d'éventualité: *Si vous avez besoin de quelque chose, aller vite au centre commercial pour acheter plus.*

**D. Influencer des actions:**

a. Instructions: donner des instructions: *Ne pas oublier les lunettes de natation!*

**2. Construction de la communication:**

**2.1. Les classes grammaticales:**

a. Le nom: le cas, les formes de GD: *préparer les bagages de montagne, dans le coffre de la voiture, devant la porte, le thème du camp, les organisateurs du camp d'été.*

b. L'article défini, indéfini, formes de GD: *préparer les bagages de montagne dans le coffre de la voiture, devant la porte.*

c. Adjectifs pronominaux interrogatifs, les formes de NAc: *Quels âges comprennent?*

d. Pronoms:

d.1. Personnels, Ac, avec des verbes à l'indicatif présent, passé composé, futur littéraire et futur populaire, subjonctif présent: *nous ne les avons pas emballés, je les mets dans ma valise, je ne les ai pas inscrit sur la liste, nous allons vous apprendre.*

d.2. Réflexifs, Ac, avec les verbes à l'indicatif présent, passé composé, futur littéraire et futur populaire, subjonctif présent: *Je revoie mes affaires, je pensais à mes enfants, nous nous sommes proposé.*

e. Verbes:

e.1. voix réflexive (présent, passé composé, futur littéraire et futur populaire) *Il faut/ils doivent apprendre à se débrouiller.*

e.2. subjonctif présent, III: *Il faut qu'il se débrouille.*

f. numéral: ordinal: *Je pense qu'elle est la première des cinq derniers. Nous vivons comme au XVème siècle,* adverbial: *Tu lis, lorsque je regarde une fois de plus les affaires.*

g. adverbes locutions adverbiales, de relation: *Nous allons leur apprendre à combattre avec l'épée et tirer à l'arc.*

h. conjonctions de coordination, adversatives: *Tu lis, lorsque je regarde une fois de plus les affaires.;* de subordination: *Je descends maintenant pour les recevoir et je vais garer la voiture devant la porte, pour qu'on puisse organiser les bagages mieux.*



**2.2. Éléments lexicaux:** *hygiène personnelle, crème solaire, matelas d'air, lunettes de natation, garage, voiture, carte routière, guide touristique, camp d'été, thème, siècle, tirer à l'arc, citadelle.*

**2.3. Construction de l'énonciation:**

a. affirmatif relatif: *Nous allons leur apprendre lutter et tirer à l'arc.*  
b. interrogative relative de type « quel » + verbe: *Quel est le thème du camp?*

c. Interrogative relative + verbe: *Quel âge comprennent?*

d. Impératif: *N'oublions pas nos lunettes!*

**2.4. Cohésion et cohérence dans le texte parlé/écrit:**

a. opposition: *Tu lis, lorsque je regarde une fois de plus les affaires.*  
b. but: *Je descends maintenant pour les recevoir et je vais garer la voiture devant la porte, pour qu'on puisse organiser les bagages mieux.*

**III. Niveau B1<sup>47</sup>**

**1. Fonctions de communication:**

**D. Influencer les actions:**

a. intention/absence d'intention: *Nous voulons aussi partir.*  
b. ordre: *Préparez les billets pour l'embarquement et attendez en ligne!*  
c. avertissement: *Attention à la rampe, essayez de ne l'atteindre pas, pour ne pas tomber dans l'eau!*  
d. conseil: *Venez d'abord sur le pont!*

**2. Construction de la communication**

**2.1. Classes grammaticales**

a. l'article démonstrative, formes de NAc: *Il semble que les gens de l'entreprise.*

b. l'adjectif:

b.1. la comparaison de l'adjectif au superlatif: *Je ne m'attendais pas de te voir si tôt.*

b.2. adjectifs sans degrés de comparaison: *Il était horrible.*

c. Adjectifs pronominaux indéfinis, les formes de NAc: *Mais je me suis dit de demander également d'autres opinions.*

d. Le pronom:

d.1. réflexif, en Ac, avec des verbes à l'imparfait, impératif, conditionnel et gérondif: *Je ne m'attendais pas de te voir si tôt.*

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<sup>47</sup> Platon, Sonea, Vasiliu, Vilcu 2014, pp. 49-70.

e. Verbes:

e.1. Imparfait, actif et réflexif: *Le poids des bagages n'était pas acceptable; J'ai bien voulu se sentir bien.; On ne pouvait pas atterrir parce qu'il y avait du brouillard.*

e.2. Voix passive: *Chaque jour, nous avons été accueillis avec tous les repas chauds.; On a vu comment les costumes folkloriques traditionnels sont cousus.*

e.3. Conditionnel présent, actif et réflexif: *Nous voulons aussi partir.; Je retournerais là-bas à tout moment.*

e.4. gérondif: *En regardant cela, on peut saisir...*

f. conjonctions: *J'étais depuis 20 minutes au téléphone, alors j'ai renoncé. L'avion aura un léger retard ... alors j'ai attendu sur la piste.*

g. adverbes:

g.1. de temps: *Venez sur le pont la première fois! Honnêtement, je retournerais là-bas à tout moment.*

**2.2. Éléments lexicaux:** *accident, bagages main, bagages cabine, hélice, piste, aile, vide d'air, hôtesse de l'air, accueillir, panier, costumes folklorique, icône, port, embarquement, couchette, gilet de sauvetage, pont, phare, bouée, bateau, côte.*

**2.3. Exprimer les circonstances:**

a. antériorité: *Venez d'abord sur le pont!*

**2.4. Cohésion et cohérence dans le texte parlé/écrit:**

a. Hypothèse: *Je vous donne maintenant les gilets de sauvetage, à utiliser en cas de danger!*

Afin de conclure, on souligne, de nouveau, la pertinence de l'instrument linguistique *La description minimale du roumain* visant les objectifs didactiques des enseignants, ayant pour but d'orienter ceux qui se préoccupent de l'ordre dans lequel il est recommandé de placer des structures spécifiques du roumain. Par défaut, rédiger des supports finit par être une action plus transparente, une fois acceptées les limites des niveaux du roumain.

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## **WORDS IN (EVERY)ONE'S MIND. TIPS AND TRICKS ON ROMANIAN LEXIS ACQUISITION**

**DIANA V. BURLACU<sup>1</sup>**

**ABSTRACT.** *Words in (Every)one's Mind. Tips and Tricks on Romanian Lexis Acquisition.* Words, be they viewed as separate entities, semantically related or connected in utterances, represent the basis of a language and, extensively, of communication. Due to the world knowledge we all share, to which several social features are added, humans basically 'speak' the same 'language', assumed as a series of common-sense (non-)verbal actions. It goes without saying that communicators understand each other mostly by means of a common language; once they intend to transfer their thoughts into a foreign language, overlapping, misunderstandings or breaches of communication may occur. Such linguistic facts represent the premise of the present study, which aims to survey certain differences between native and non-native speakers, the focus being the Romanian language (as a foreign language). A peculiar Balkan Romance language, with Slavic, Greek and Turkish influences, the Romanian language has intrigued different speakers from all over the world, both by its lexis and its grammar. Out of practical considerations, merely the Romanian vocabulary is examined here, and particularly the A1-A2 speakers (in accordance with the CEFR, *The Common European Framework for Languages*) are addressed, since it is the beginners who typically encounter many linguistic hardships. Certain pragmatic learning strategies (validated through research and teaching experience) are collected in the study, meant to represent a useful (yet not extensive) tool for anyone interested. Naturally, relevant examples are provided, in a gradual approach from simple to complex, such degrees encompassing phonetics, semantics and pragmatics.

**Keywords:** *CEFR; communication; language; lexicology; learning strategy; meaning; mental lexicon; Romanian vocabulary; semantics*

**REZUMAT.** *Cuvintele din mintea noastră. Strategii și tehnici de achiziție a vocabularului limbii române.* Cuvintele, indiferent dacă sunt privite ca unități

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distincte, relaționate paradigmatic sau sintagmatic, reprezintă structura de bază a unei limbi, dar și a comunicării, în general. Datorită cunoștințelor despre lume pe care fiecare le are, cărora li se adaugă diverse particularități sociale, oamenii 'vorbesc', de fapt, aceeași 'limbă', percepută ca o serie de acțiuni (non-)verbale, de bun simț. Este de la sine înțeles faptul că o limbă comună facilitează comunicarea; odată ce se dorește exprimarea într-o limbă străină, participanții la procesul comunicativ se pot confrunta cu diferite neajunsuri, cum ar fi suprapunerile semantice, interpretările eronate sau chiar lipsa oricărei comunicări. Astfel de fapte lingvistice constituie premisa lucrării de față, care își propune să abordeze diferențele dintre vorbitorii nativi și cei nonnativi, cu referire la limba română (ca limbă străină), singura limbă romanică din spațiul balcanic, având influențe slave, grecești și turcești, asemenea particularități lexicale și gramaticale intrigând diferiți vorbitori din întreaga lume. Din considerente practice, doar lexicul limbii române este supus examinării aici, îndeosebi primele niveluri de competență lingvistică, A1-A2 (așa cum se stipulează în CECR - *Cadrul european comun de referință pentru limbi*), din moment ce începătorii se confruntă cu cele mai multe dificultăți de ordin lingvistic. Studiul de față oferă strategii practice de învățare (validate prin studii de specialitate, dar și prin experiența concretă de predare), constituindu-se, credem noi, într-un instrument valoros (chiar dacă nu complet) pentru toți cei interesați. În plus, nu lipsesc exemple relevante ale observațiilor teoretice, care pornesc de la simplu la complex, acoperind nu doar fonetica, ci în special semantica și pragmatica.

**Cuvinte-cheie:** CECR; comunicare; limbaj; lexicologie; strategii de învățare; sens; lexicon mental; limba română; vocabular; semantică

**Motto:**

*Words are stitched together in one's mind like pieces on a patchwork quilt.*  
(Jean Aitchison)

*Words are stitched together in one's mind like pieces on a patchwork quilt...* No matter how clear-cut or inspiring such words are, "the whole situation is more like badly spread bread and butter, with the butter heaped up double in some places while leaving bare patches in others. Some words overlap almost completely, as with *chase* and *pursue*, or *plump* and *fat*, while elsewhere there are inexplicable gaps: there is no generally accepted term for 'live-in lover' or 'dead plant' " (Aitchison 1996: 73). Such an argument even lengthens in the case of acquiring a foreign language, since lexical or semantic items, but also cultural concepts may not find their counterparts: "[I]anguages rarely divide up the world in exactly the same way, and so we should not be surprised if we find students using the word 'cup' to describe an object which is in fact a 'glass', a 'mug' or even a 'bowl' (Gairns, Redman 1991: 13).

The key explanation lies in the so-called *prototypes*, which "represent the mental models of the world we live in, models which are private and cultural

architectures, and only partially in touch with 'reality'. Such models are referred to under various names: mental models, frames, scripts, internalized cognitive models or ICMS, cognitive domains" (Aitchison 1996: 70). Hence, the fact that certain students whose national or social backgrounds lack(ed) the cultural element are unable to understand what *statuie* (*statue*), *monument*, *teatru* (*theatre*), *balet* (*ballet*), even *spectacol* (*show*), *orchestră* (*orchestra*) and *concert* mean, should not be viewed as shocking or incredible any more. They could simply not relate such concepts to anything they knew or were exposed to.

If we are to differentiate between a first/native language (L1) and a second or foreign language (L2), learning an L1 has been regarded as "*imitation and practice*" (Lightbown and Spada 1993: 2) – the behaviourist view; as "innate endowment/ *Universal Grammar*" (Lightbown and Spada 1993: 8) – the innatist position; as well as "a result of the complex interplay between the uniquely human characteristics of the child and the environment in which the child develops" (Lightbown and Spada 1993: 14) – the interactionist view, the last of which seems the most comprehensive.

In what concerns the second/foreign language acquisition, its success highly depends on certain **learner characteristics**, such as:

- ✓ "knowledge of another language
- ✓ cognitive maturity
- ✓ metalinguistic awareness
- ✓ knowledge of the world
- ✓ nervousness about speaking" (Lightbown and Spada 1993: 21),

and **learning conditions**, namely:

- ✓ "freedom to be silent
- ✓ ample time
- ✓ corrective feedback: grammar and pronunciation
- ✓ corrective feedback: word choice
- ✓ modified input" (Lightbown and Spada 1993: 21).

The aforementioned 'modified input' refers to '*motherese*' or *caretaker talk* in L1, or *foreigner talk/ teacher talk* in L2, a rather artificial, yet comprehensible and helpful style adjusted to the needs of the learners, by **deceleration, simplification, repetition** and **paraphrase**. However, such a talk is absent in the case of 'language immersion' or 'street learning' (Gairns, Redman 1991: 1), as different from school learning; still, the main features of such a *bain de langage* are extremely valuable in the didactic-related context too.

Probably the 'affective filter', "an imaginary barrier which prevents learners from using input which is available in the environment" (Lightbown and Spada 1993: 28), should also be taken into consideration as another criterion of learning a new language. Boredom can be eventually overpassed by the proper activities, but the lack of motivation (be it personal or professional) or of aptitude represent real hindrances in the acquisition process.

## A. Word-Choice in L2

In what regards vocabulary in general, its importance can be definitely summed up by the following statement: “Without grammar very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary *nothing* can be conveyed” (Wilkins, in Thornbury 2005: 13), the lexical items actually forming the foundation of any language. Words are basically approached from four interconnecting angles: *meaning, pronunciation, collocation* and *expressions* – Gough 2002: 3 (set phrases or formulae, phrasal verbs, idioms), the last two representing the language user’s ability to contextualise them.

In the process of learning a second/another language, a first crucial problem is the L1-L2 overlapping, a *trap* that an A1 learner can hardly escape from but, at the same time, a *prop* of the new language acquisition; the dual situation is illustrated below, adapted to Romanian as a foreign language (RFL):

**Table 1.** Intralexical factors that affect vocabulary learning (Laufer, quoted in Pavičić Takač 2008: 8)

<i>Facilitating factors</i>	<i>Difficulty-inducing factors</i>	<i>Factors with no clear effect</i>
Familiar phonemes	Presence of foreign phonemes (usu. <i>ă, î, â, ș, ț</i> )	
Phonotactic regularity	Phonotactic irregularity	
Fixed stress	Variable stress and vowel change	
Consistency of sound-script relationship	Incongruency in sound-script relationship ( <i>elefant</i> - [e], <i>este</i> - [je]; <i>a iubi</i> - [ii], <i>urși</i> - [i]; adj. <i>deși</i> - [i], conj. <i>deși</i> - [ii])	
		Word length
Inflexional regularity	Inflexional complexity (RFL)	
Derivational regularity	Derivational complexity (RFL)	
Morphological transparency	Deceptive morphological transparency	
	Synformy (ex. <i>brown</i> has two lexical restrictions: <i>căprui</i> (as of eyes), <i>șaten</i> (as of hair), and a third general form, <i>maro</i> , for miscellaneous items.	
		Part of speech
		Concreteness/abstractness
Generality	Specificity	
Register neutrality	Register restrictions	
	Idiomacity	
One form for one meaning	One form with several meanings	

It should be stated from the very beginning that the size and the main semantic spheres of a second-language speaker’s vocabulary vary, in accordance with the learning settings (full or restricted exposure to/use of L2); age (children, young learners or adults); areas of interest (general language or specific

languages – medical, business, legal, etc.), to which several others may be added: the L2- course duration; the speaker's intelligence and talent for languages; subjective word-selection (the so-called "vital personal relevance of an item" - Gairns, Redman 1991: 65) and so on.

However, the essential criteria of word-choice and lexis acquisition in L2 are:

- a. USEFULNESS: "If the student does not perceive the vocabulary input to be useful it will be difficult to engage his interest" (Gairns, Redman 1991: 60);
- b. FREQUENCY: the more recurrent a word is, the sooner it will be learned and taught;
- c. LEARNABILITY and
- d. TEACHABILITY (in Thornbury 2005: 34-35).

While the last criterion refers to the easiness of lexical demonstration or illustration, learnability is commonly associated with the *contrastive analysis hypothesis* (CAH). According to it, "where there are similarities between the two languages, the learner will acquire target language structures with ease; where there are differences, the learner will have difficulty" (Lightbown and Spada 1993: 23). Consequently, the first L2 lexical items to be introduced should be those sounding similar, thus familiar to the learners, but they ought to be ratified by the criterion of frequency in all cases:

- ✓ *arogant* (Engl. *arrogant*, Fr. *arrogant*), before its synonyms, *îngâmfat/încezut*
- ✓ *a combina* (Engl. *to combine*, Fr. *combiner*), before its synonym, *a potrivi*
- ✓ *a decide* (Engl. *to decide*, Fr. *décider*), before its synonym, *a hotărî*
- ✓ *inteligent* (Engl. *intelligent*, Fr. *intelligent*), before its synonym, *deștept*
- ✓ *similar* (Engl. *similar*, Fr. *similaire*), before its synonym, *asemănător*
- ✓ *\*tomată* (Engl. *tomato*, Fr. *tomate*), not applicable (not ratified by frequency – such a specialised term is replaced by *roșie*).

However, "human mental dictionaries cannot be organized solely on the basis of sounds or spelling. [...] humans fairly often confuse words with similar meanings" (Aitchison 1996: 11). Even if some A1-A2 speakers of RFL still confuse *mănușă* (Engl. *glove*) with *mătușă* (Engl. *aunt*), *a găti* (Engl. *to cook*) with *a găsi* (Engl. *to find*), *rochie* (Engl. *dress*) with *roșie* (Engl. *tomato*) or *a călări* (Engl. *to ride*) with *a călători* (Engl. *to travel*), some others have problems with the so-called 'false friends' - seemingly identical lexical items: *library* and *bookstore*, respectively *biblioteca* and *librărie*; *advertisement* (Rom. *reclamă*), similar to *avertisement* (Engl. *warning*). Moreover, due to the mental lexicon and the so-called *interlanguage* (Selinker, in Lightbown and Spada 1993: 55) – a more or less conscious blending of a speaker's first and second language characteristics, some would naturally say *\*a călări o bicicletă* (Engl. *to ride a bike*), instead of the correct variant *a merge cu bicicleta* or *\*Eu sunt 20 de ani*. (Engl. *I am 20 years old.*), instead of the correct variant *Eu am 20 de ani*.



As a matter of fact, in the case of these false cognates, the “equivalence hypothesis may fail and lead to erroneous conclusions because of the following reasons (Swan, in Pavičić Takač 2008: 9):

- ✓ lexical units in two languages are not exact equivalents (i.e. there is more than one translation);
- ✓ equivalent lexical units in related languages have different permissible grammatical contexts;
- ✓ equivalents belong to different word classes;
- ✓ equivalents are false friends;
- ✓ there are no equivalents at all”.

### **B. RFL/RSL Learning/Teaching Strategies**

As in the case of any L2 acquisition process, mainly viewed as cognitive progression, RFL or RSL (Romanian as a second language) proves no exception at all, making use of similar learning/teaching strategies, such as:

**1. Word-translation** (in the students’ mother tongue or in an intermediate/contact language) – still the commonest learning strategy, but the last choice in a modern language classroom – is the quickest, time-saving approach to grasp the meaning of a word, yet rather often the least efficient. Such a contrastive method usually impedes or slows the rapid access to acquiring both vocabulary and fluency.

**1.1.** Looking words up in a bilingual dictionary, a method frequently used for self-study, not necessarily in the classroom; a more productive alternative, especially for higher levels, would be the **monolingual dictionary** or the **thesaurus**. For example, the English Vocabulary Profile (EVP), structured on the 6 levels of language knowledge stipulated by *The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* – CEFR, reveals some undoubtedly giant work behind the A1-C2 word lists for the English language, a vital starting point in vocabulary acquisition, language teaching and assessment, as well as text and manual elaboration, to be found under the following link: [http://vocabulary.englishprofile.org/dictionary//word-list/uk/a1\\_c2/A](http://vocabulary.englishprofile.org/dictionary//word-list/uk/a1_c2/A). In addition, certain words are assigned various levels in accordance with their different meanings: “for instance, the word *degree* is assigned level A2 for the sense TEMPERATURE, B1 for QUALIFICATION, B2 for AMOUNT and C2 for the phrase *a/some degree of (sth)*” (<http://vocabulary.englishprofile.org/staticfiles/about.html>). Unfortunately still inexistent at the moment, a Romanian Vocabulary Profile would absolutely ease the students’, teachers’ and manual authors’ tasks.

In Seashore and Eckerson’s classification, an average speaker should have knowledge of: “common ‘basic words’ ” (in Aitchison 1996: 6) – a ‘core vocabulary’ of approximately 2,000 words or at least 3,000 word families, as argued in Thornbury 2005: 21; “rare ‘basic words’, and derivatives and compounds” (in Aitchison 1996: 6). If applied to RFL, the noun *pui* (Engl. *chicken*) belongs to the

first category, the second-person verb *pui* (Engl. *you put*) may be a rather rare 'basic word' for a non-native beginner (because of the frequent incorrect form *puni\**), whereas *pui de animal/ pasăre* (Engl. *the young of any animal or bird*) and *pui de somn* (Engl. *nap*) fit in the last category of compounds; in the CEFR terminology, the above-mentioned item should range from A1, A1/A2 to B2 and C1 (the idiomatic expression *a trage un pui de somn* – Engl. *to take a nap*).

2. The use of **visuals** for vocabulary acquisition, practice and revision: "flashcards, photographs, blackboard drawings, wallcharts and realia (i.e. objects themselves)" - Gairns, Redman 1991: 73, sometimes accompanied by mime and gesture.

3. The use of **non-visuals** or **verbal means** for vocabulary acquisition, practice and revision: "providing an example situation; giving several example sentences; giving synonyms, antonyms, or superordinate terms; giving a full definition" (Thornbury 2005: 81) or even providing a scenario on the target word(s), although such a strategy may prove scarce in case of A1-level.

4. **Vocabulary organisers** – as an example, for the intermediate level and above (A2+-C1), Chris Gough has proposed 100 topics for self-study, structured into 17 sections, such as: people, describing people, feelings and emotions, the human body, health, around the house, food and drink, leisure time, sport, the media, technology, money matters, travel and transport, education and work, society, our world and abstract concepts (time, numbers, size and shape, quantities, etc.) – see Gough 2002: *passim*. A good hint at the end of each section is the empty box for any personal words/expressions one may want to add.

Besides such topic-related items, 'items grouped as an activity or process' (the steps involved in buying a house, for example), Gairns and Redman (1991: 69-71) suggest lists of semantically similar and frequently confused lexemes; pair-items (synonymy or antonymy); items within a scale (degree-differences); word-families; discourse-markers; polysemy; 'items causing particular difficulty within one nationality group': false cognates, phonological difficulties, etc.

Another valuable tool for the systematic increase of the lexicon is *The Words You Need* (Rudzka et al, 1990), a series of miscellaneous texts from books, magazines, newspapers or advertisements, also organised on common themes and followed by discussions, word studies (including fine semantic delineations, classified, explained and contextualised; synonymous pairs) and exercises.

5. The use of **interactive worksheets/didactic films** (focusing on speaking and listening skills) for vocabulary acquisition, practice and revision; valuable RFL/RSL materials ranging from A1 to B2 are available under: <http://video.elearning.ubbcluj.ro>.

6. **Reading** in the target-language or **listening** to music/TV shows, **watching** films. Even if such a learning strategy seems outlandish at A levels, it is totally approachable if the story-lines or films are adapted to a beginner's level (see the link above, on the series of didactic videos, listening materials

and exercises); higher-level speakers will naturally have no/fewer problems with authentic texts and films.

**7. 'Playing' or Five-minute activities** – besides the more or less classical activities, aiming to develop the linguistic and intercultural competences, Penny Ur and Andrew Wright suggest various *five-minute activities*, mostly appealing to our *homo ludens* side, thus applicable from the very first levels. A first plain example could be *Categories* - listening comprehension of isolated words (Ur, Wright 1993: 6): food and drink, animals/objects, big/small, round/square, land/sea/air (Ur, Wright 1993: 7).

Even if illustrated for EFL/ESL, further activities for vocabulary acquisition, review and enrichment, easily adaptable to RFL/RSL as well, are to be found below, in two (interchangeable if adjusted to a more complex or simple level) broad groups (*our categorization*):

**7.1. Beginners or elementary (A1-A2; B1) students:**

*Making groups, Feel the object, Odd one out, Opposites, Likes and dislikes, Favourite words, Simon says* – “simple commands to perform” (Ur, Wright 1993: 27); *Words beginning with..., Something interesting about myself* – “volunteering personal information” (Ur, Wright 1993: 77); *Find someone who ...* – “brief pair conversations” (Ur, Wright 1993: 76), *How many things can you think of that ...?, I would like to be ... , Compare yourselves/things* (use of comparatives or opposites), *Crosswords* (name learning, vocabulary review), *Cutting down texts* – “forming new grammatical sentences by eliminating words/phrases from the original” (Ur, Wright 1993: 13) and *Expanding texts; Piling up a sentence, Don't say yes or no, English words in our language, Hearing mistakes* – “listening comprehension with quick reactions” (Ur, Wright 1993: 34) or *Mistakes in reading; Martian* (explanations of everyday objects, developing the paraphrastic competence), *Questions about a statement, Miming, Songs, Spelling bee; Who, where and what?* – describing and guessing; *Say things about a picture, Slow reveal* (of a picture), *Sentence starters*, Chain stories (repeating the verbs/connectors), changing sentences/ *Rub out and replace* (“practice of sentence patterns” – Ur, Wright 1993: 8, translated here into Romanian):

Noi	deseori	a mânca	podea/parchet.
Oamenii	niciodată	a sta pe	carne.
Copiii	uneori	a se juca cu	scaune.
Câinii	întotdeauna		păpuși.
	de obicei		ciocolată.
			baloane.

**7.2. Advanced (B1-B2, C1+) students:**

*Brainstorm round a word*, with variations such as limited “free associations” (Ur, Wright 1993: 5): adjectives or verbs that can apply to the noun; “a central adjective can be associated with nouns” (Ur, Wright 1993: 5); prefixes or suffixes, etc.; *First, second, third; Damaged property* (the central question: *What might have*

*happened?* – using the past tense and passives) or *What has just happened?*; discussion of *Controversial statements* (e.g. *Boys and girls should have the same education.*) - (Ur, Wright 1993: 10), *Five-minute writing storms* (Ur, Wright 1993: 28), *The other you*, diaries, *Expanding headlines*, *If I had a million dollars/ If I weren't here*, *Proverbs*, *Why have you got a monkey in your bag?* – using one's imagination.

Irrespective of the strategy preference, the teacher should be adaptable and also able to involve the learners actively, encouraging them to speak in real-life contexts, thus productively using their receptive vocabulary acquired in the classroom. Even if the students will naturally favour certain activities, the four competences (reading, listening, speaking and writing, to which two further competences may be added: grammar and vocabulary and the cultural competence) should always intertwine, similarly to everyday communication.

As a matter of fact, if native speakers are able to differentiate between words and non-words, non-native speakers cannot, at least, not on an inferior level of language knowledge. For such a reason, after gradually acquiring new items, the non-native speakers should start using them in concrete situations and become familiar to their meaning in the new language (the three English lexemes *old – young/new* become *vechi – nou (old – new)* and *bătrân – tânăr (old – young)*, whereas *a cânta* includes both singing and playing an instrument), contexts of use, dynamism (archaisms or words whose meaning has been updated) and connotations (a good example is *securitate/Securitate*, the common noun *security* still being surpassed by the Communism-associated body of control; actually, “the term *connotation* tends to slip awkwardly between something like ‘peripheral meaning’ and ‘emotive meaning’ and ‘personal associations’” (Yallop, in Halliday et al. 2004: 28).

Moreover, special focus should be given not only to individual or pair-work/group activity, but also to contextual guesswork, by which the learners' understanding is checked and also their cognition and attention are engaged. Ultimately, it is the student who has to learn the vocabulary which, paradoxically, “...cannot be taught. It can be presented, explained, included in all kinds of activities, and experienced in all manner of associations” (Rivers, in Thornbury 2005: 144). The main idea underlining this statement is that one cannot learn certain dictionaries or word-lists as such, but has to integrate the new lexical items into their idiosyncratic mental lexicon; consequently, the resulted vocabulary (in one's mind) does not coincide with the initial vocabulary taught in the classroom. In other words, “the relationship between a book dictionary and the human mental lexicon may be somewhat like the link between a tourist pamphlet advertising a seaside resort and the resort itself” (Aitchison 1996: 14).

### C. Conclusions

In summary, words represent the basis of any language, any sequence of communication and, extensively, of our humanity. Due to the multi-faceted

character of vocabulary and its being taught/learned, some final observations should be emphasised at this point:

- ✓ Even if languages share the same reality, each language is unique and creates a specific linguistic realm; consequently, “words need to be presented in their typical contexts, so that learners can get a feel for their meaning, their register, their collocations, and their syntactic environments” (Thornbury 2005: 30).
- ✓ “Learners should aim to build a threshold vocabulary as quickly as possible” (Thornbury 2005: 30), by various tasks, such as: “identifying, selecting, matching, sorting, ranking and sequencing” (Thornbury 2005: 93-94).
- ✓ Words should be acquired gradually, from simple to complex, their introduction in a syllabus or mental lexicon being ratified by four criteria: usefulness, frequency, learnability and teachability.
- ✓ “Learners need multiple exposures to words and they need to retrieve words from memory repeatedly” (Thornbury 2005: 30).
- ✓ The higher the language knowledge is, the fewer RFL/RSL tips and tricks are needed.

To conclude with a financial comparison, words are like money – if we always keep them in the ‘safe’ (be it a notebook or a dictionary) and never ‘invest’ them in concrete contexts of communication, such words are prone to oblivion and thus prove entirely inefficient.

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## GRAMMAR ACQUISITION IN ROMANIAN AS FOREIGN LANGUAGE

MARIA SUCIU<sup>1</sup>

**ABSTRACT.** *Grammar acquisition in Romanian as foreign language.* Learning Romanian as a foreign language includes acquiring the grammar of the language. Teaching the grammar must have regard to all language particularities like gender, plurals, topics and syntax. Translating from Romanian in a language that all students know is not a highly recommended method because every language has it's own way of creating the sentences and this translating process may cause difficulties in the teaching process. This may occur because the students are focused on understanding in L1, then sending it in their mother tongue, and finally the student tries to understand the phenomenon in Romanian language. One of recommended methods is the structural exercises, like imitation and substitution, so the students do not get confused after presenting all the rules. There are also the Deductive approach, the case when the teacher gives the rules and the students have time to become familiar to them, and the Inductive approach, which allows the students to form themselves the rules after they are given the examples. The Deductive approach is recommended in case of irregular patterns and the Inductive approach in case of regular patterns, because is based on analogy. Teaching a grammatical concept should be done by offering examples using relatively simple vocabulary so their attention won't be directed on understanding the vocabulary, but on understanding the new grammatical concept.

**Key words:** *grammar acquisition, teaching process, structural exercises, imitation, substitution, deductive approach, inductive approach, foreign language.*

**REZUMAT.** *Achiziția gramaticii în limba română ca limbă străină.* Învățarea românei ca limbă străină presupune și achiziția gramaticii. Predarea gramaticii trebuie să aibă în vedere toate particularitățile lingvistice, cum ar fi genul, plural, substantivul și sintaxa. Traducerea din limba română într-o limbă pe care toți elevii o cunosc nu este o metodă foarte recomandată, deoarece fiecare limbă are propriul mod de a crea propozițiile și acest proces de traducere poate provoca dificultăți în procesul de predare. Acest lucru se poate întâmpla, deoarece elevii se concentrează pe înțelegerea în L1, apoi traduc mesajul în limba maternă, iar în final studentul încearcă să înțeleagă fenomenul în limba română. Una dintre metodele recomandate este exercițiile structurale, cum ar fi imitația și substituția, astfel încât elevii să înțeleagă conceptul gramatical după prezentarea tuturor

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regulilor. Există, de asemenea, metoda deductivă în care profesorul oferă regulile și studenții au timp să se familiarizeze cu acestea și metoda inductivă, prin care se oferă exemple, ajungând apoi la regulă. Metoda deductivă este recomandată în cazul structuri neregulate, în timp ce metoda inductivă este recomandată pentru structurile regulate, deoarece se bazează pe analogie. Predarea unui concept gramatical ar trebui făcută prin oferirea de exemple folosind un vocabular relativ simplu, astfel încât atenția studenților să nu fie îndreptată spre înțelegerea vocabularului, ci spre înțelegerea noului concept gramatical.

***Cuvinte-cheie:** achiziția gramaticii, procesul de predare, exerciții structurale, imitație, substituție, metoda deductivă, metoda inductivă, limbă străină.*

In this article we will try to present some approaches in grammar acquisition. Because the grammar is one of the most important part of language acquisition, we need to have all the instruments that we need in teaching and acquiring it. We will start our article with defining the grammar competence, we will continue by presenting it according to the Common European Framework of References for Languages. The next part of the article will be dedicated to two different approaches in teaching, the Deductive approach and the Inductive approach, both of them being equally important. The third part of the article will concern the different types of exercises that we can use to practice the grammar in order to acquire it. The main purpose of this paper is to present different parts that we have the process of grammar acquisition, such as teaching, acquisition and practicing.

## **1. Definition**

Language acquisition is a continuous process and we have to start thinking in that language. If we don't start thinking in the new language, all our efforts may be in vain, acquiring a foreign language does not mean we have to forget everything we learned in other languages, but it means that we are not allowed to use the old knowledges. This means that we are not allowed to make any correlations with the native language we speak, or with other language, it means that the only correlations we should make are with the knowledges that we acquired previously. This process does not happen at the early stages of learning, but, in time, it is recommended to stop using the native language and to use only the language we want to acquire.

Language acquisition is a dynamic and subconscious process, similar to the way children acquire their native language. "The result of language acquisition, acquired competence, is also subconscious. We are generally not consciously aware of the rules of the languages we have acquired. Instead, we have a "feel" for

correctness. Grammatical sentences "sound" right, or "feel" right, and errors feel wrong, even if we do not consciously know what rule was violated." (Krashen, 1982: 2) This means that we learn a new language by practicing it, and not by memorizing some rules we find in the grammar books.

## 2. The Framework

The grammar is one of the most important parts in teaching/learning a new language, because it is based on producing and understanding sentences, without memorizing them, in order to communicate with others. "Formally, the grammar of a language may be seen as the set of principles governing the assembly of elements into meaningful labelled and bracketed strings (sentences). Grammatical competence is the ability to understand and express meaning by producing and recognising well-formed phrases and sentences in accordance with these principles (as opposed to memorising and reproducing them as fixed formulae). The grammar of any language in this sense is highly complex and so far defies definitive or exhaustive treatment. There are a number of competing theories and models for the organisation of words into sentences. It is not the function of the Framework to judge between them or to advocate the use of any one, but rather to encourage users to state which they have chosen to follow and what consequences their choice has for their practice. Here we limit ourselves to identifying some parameters and categories which have been widely used in grammatical description" (CEFR: 112-113).

The grammatical aspect of the language is a complex system and, when we teach the grammar, we must have in consideration some aspects of Romanian language such as:

- the genders – masculine, feminine and neutral;
- the plurals - considering the special cases when some morphemes change, like *brad*>*brazi*, *fată*>*fete*;
- the verbs – with some morphemes that change here also: *deschid* – *deschizi*, *merge* – *să meargă*;
- the topics.

Grammar acquisition is made gradually, in conformation with the language levels: A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, C2. These levels are described by Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, which gives us an important perspective of what elements to acquire in our process:

- Level A1: is considered the lowest level of generative language use the point at which the learner can interact in a simple way, ask and answer simple questions about themselves, where they live, people they know, and things they have, initiate and respond to simple statements in areas of immediate need or on very familiar topics, rather than relying purely



on a very finite rehearsed, lexically organized repertoire of situation-specific phrases;

- Level A2: at this level that the majority of descriptors stating social functions are to be found, like use simple everyday polite forms of greeting and address; greet people, ask how they are and react to news; handle very short social exchanges; ask and answer questions about what they do at work and in free time; make and respond to invitations; discuss what to do, where to go and make arrangements to meet; make and accept offers;
- Level B1 (independent speaker): ability to maintain interaction and get across what you want to, in a range of contexts, for example: generally follow the main points of extended discussion around him/her, provided speech is clearly articulated in standard dialect; give or seek personal views and opinions in an informal discussion with friends; express the main point he/she wants to make comprehensibly; exploit a wide range of simple language flexibly to express much of what he or she wants to; maintain a conversation or discussion but may sometimes be difficult to follow when trying to say exactly what he/she would like to; keep going comprehensibly, even though pausing for grammatical and lexical planning and repair is very evident, especially in longer stretches of free production. The second feature is the ability to cope flexibly with problems in everyday life, for example cope with less routine situations on public transport; deal with most situations likely to arise when making travel arrangements through an agent or when actually traveling; enter unprepared into conversations on familiar topics; make a complaint; take some initiatives in an interview/consultation (e.g. to bring up a new subject) but is very dependent on interviewer in the interaction; ask someone to clarify or elaborate what they have just said;
- Level B2: the speaker is able to focus on effective argument: account for and sustain his opinions in discussion by providing relevant explanations, arguments and comments; explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options; construct a chain of reasoned argument; develop an argument giving reasons in support of or against a particular point of view; explain a problem and make it clear that his/her counterpart in a negotiation must make a concession; speculate about causes, consequences, hypothetical situations; take an active part in informal discussion in familiar contexts, commenting, putting point of view clearly, evaluating alternative proposals and making and responding to hypotheses. Secondly, running right through the level there are two new focuses. The first is being able to more than hold your own in social discourse: e.g. converse naturally, fluently and effectively; understand in detail what is said to him/her in the standard spoken

language even in a noisy environment; initiate discourse, take his/her turn when appropriate and end conversation when he/she needs to, though he/she may not always do this elegantly; use stock phrases (e.g. 'That's a difficult question to answer') to gain time and keep the turn whilst formulating what to say; interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without imposing strain on either party; adjust to the changes of direction, style and emphasis normally found in conversation; sustain relationships with native speakers without unintentionally amusing or irritating them or requiring them to behave other than they would with a native speaker. The second new focus is a new degree of language awareness: correct mistakes if they have led to misunderstandings; make a note of 'favorite mistakes' and consciously monitor speech for it/them; generally correct slips and errors if he/she becomes conscious of them; plan what is to be said and the means to say it, considering the effect on the recipient.

- Level C1: What seems to characterize this level is good access to a broad range of language, which allows fluent, spontaneous communication, as illustrated by the following examples: Can express him/herself fluently and spontaneously, almost effortlessly. Has a good command of a broad lexical repertoire allowing gaps to be readily overcome with circumlocutions. There is little obvious searching for expressions or avoidance strategies; only a conceptually difficult subject can hinder a natural, smooth flow of language;
- Level C2: degree of precision, appropriateness and ease with the language which typifies the speech of those who have been highly successful learners. Descriptors calibrated here include: convey finer shades of meaning precisely by using, with reasonable accuracy, a wide range of modification devices; has a good command of idiomatic expressions and colloquialisms with awareness of connotative level of meaning; backtrack and restructure around a difficulty so smoothly the interlocutor is hardly aware of it.

Taking in consideration the description that CEFR gives us, we need to set grammatical items for each one of these levels. We need to teach the grammar gradually, in order to help our students acquire it more easily. Therefore, the *Descrierea minimală a limbii române* comes with a division of grammar for a proper fitting to the framework presented. For level A1 some of the components we teach are the nouns, the articles, the adjectives, the pronouns, the verbs (present tense, future and past), simple prepositions, adverbs and numbers. For Level A2, we add the genitive and the dative form for nouns, articles and pronouns. Concerning the adjectives, the students learn how to make comparisons regarding the qualities of objects/persons. Also they learn the reflexives verbs, another

type of future tense, and how to express the cause, the concession and the purpose using the prepositions.

In level B1 the students learn the vocative, they learn new forms of using comparisons in case of adjectives, they learn the forms of dative reflexive pronouns. In the chapter dedicated to the verb, we add a new past tense form, which is specific to Romanian language. Also, the students learn new conjunctions and preposition to express the place, the time, such as *oricând, oriunde, de pe, în afară de* ('anytime', 'anywhere', 'from the', 'excepting'). Level B2 is closer to the native speaker and introduces more difficult ways in using the nouns, articles that express possessions, interrogative pronouns. Concerning the verbs, this level brings another form of past tense and new prepositions and conjunctions, like *fără să, până să* ('without', 'until').

The grammar competence is evaluated in conformation with the scale offered by Common European Framework of Reference for Languages:

C2	Maintains consistent grammatical control of complex language, even while attention is otherwise engaged (e.g. in forward planning, in monitoring others' reactions).
C1	Consistently maintains a high degree of grammatical accuracy; errors are rare and difficult to spot.
B2	Good grammatical control; occasional 'slips' or non-systematic errors and minor flaws in sentence structure may still occur, but they are rare and can often be corrected in retrospect. Shows a relatively high degree of grammatical control. Does not make mistakes which lead to misunderstanding.
B1	Communicates with reasonable accuracy in familiar contexts; generally good control though with noticeable mother tongue influence. Errors occur, but it is clear what he/she is trying to express. Uses reasonably accurately a repertoire of frequently used 'routines' and patterns associated with more predictable situations.
A2	Uses some simple structures correctly, but still systematically makes basic mistakes – for example tends to mix up tenses and forget to mark agreement; nevertheless, it is usually clear what he/she is trying to say.
A1	Shows only limited control of a few simple grammatical structures and sentence patterns in a learnt repertoire.

This scale is very useful in evaluating the student and also in teaching, because we must teach grammar gradually, according to each one of these levels.

### 3. Approaches in teaching grammar

There are two ways of teaching grammar: the Deductive method and the Inductive method. The Inductive method consists on generalizations about the grammatical rules after seeing and practicing examples in class. This method allows students to make their own assumptions and to form their own mechanisms of

learning and understanding the grammatical system of the new language. In this case, acquisition can occur quickly because the students are more aware of the system and they focus on the grammatical use. This approach is more suitable for regular patterns, because it is based on analogies. It involves students participating actively in their own instruction. In addition, the approach encourages a learner to develop her/his own mental set of strategies for dealing with tasks. In other words, this approach attempts to highlight grammatical rules implicitly in which the learners are encouraged to conclude the rules given by the teacher. (Widodo, 2006)

There are some advantages and disadvantages to this approach and I think it's relevant to take them in consideration in teaching Romanian as a foreign language. One of the advantages is that students are trained to be familiar with the rule discovery; this could enhance learning autonomy and self-reliance and they are not simply participants to the lessons, they are forced to be directly involved in recognizing the pattern and applying them. This approach is based on exercises, because only after practice the students can recognize all the patterns, it's not enough to give two or three examples. A disadvantage is that some students need to see the rules before applying them.

Illustration:

Step 1 – examples: *Îl văd pe coleg.* (m) (I see the colleague - masculine)

*O văd pe colegă.* (f) (I see the colleague - feminine)

*Îi văd pe colegi.* (m) (I see the colleagues - masculine)

*Le văd pe колеge.* (f) (I see the colleagues - feminine)

Step 2 – exercising: *Îl întâlnește pe băiat* (he meets the boy)

*o vede pe fată* (he sees the girl)

*Îi sună pe băieți* (he calls the boys)

*le anunță pe fete* (he tells the girls)

Step 3 – the rule: pronume + verb + pe + substantiv (pronoun + verb + pe 'preposition' + noun)

The second approach, the Deductive method, consists on learning the new concept after being presented the rules. In this case, the students see the rules and, after that, they practice them. This approach is more suitable for irregular patterns, because the students need to see the special cases before trying to use them. This approach is not as fast as the Inductive approach, because the students memorize the rules before practicing them, the acquisition does not occur as quickly as in the case of using the Deductive one. A deductive approach works from the general to the specific. In this case, rules, principles, concepts, or theories are presented first, and then their applications are treated. When we use deduction, we reason from general to specific principles. The deductive approach maintains that a teacher teaches grammar by presenting grammatical rules, and then examples of

sentences are presented. Once students understand rules, they are told to apply the rules given to different examples of sentences. (Widodo, 2006)

There some advantages and disadvantages for this approach, as H. Widodo remarks them in his article. Some advantages consist on the fact that this approach goes straightforwardly to the point and it can be time-saving, because once the student has the rules he can easily apply them on every case. For Romanian language this approach can create problems, because of the irregular patterns, such as the plurals: *fată-fete, sală-săli* (*girl-girls, room-rooms*). An advantage for Romanian language can be the fact that the examples are given right after the teacher explains all the rules, and also the fact that it helps the students who have an analytical style of learning. A major disadvantage for this approach consists in the fact that the students may be driven to the impression that the language is a simple set of rules they can memorize and use them in speaking. The reality is completely different because all of those cases in which we have a lot of irregular patterns.

Illustration:

Step 1 – the rule: pronume + verb + substantiv singular + *lui* (m.) (pronoun + verb + noun + dative case marking)

*ei* (f.) substantiv plural + *lor* (m.+f.)

Step 2 – examples: Prezent (Present tense)

*Îi spun colegului.* (I tell the colleague – masculine singular)

*Îi spun colegei.* (I tell the colleague – feminine singular)

*Le spun colegilor.* (I tell the colleague – masculine plural)

*Le spun colegelor.* (I tell the colleague – feminine plural)

Step 3 - exercise: Pune cuvintele din paranteze la forma corectă:

îmi place răspunsul (copil) \_\_\_\_\_

I-am răspuns (fată). \_\_\_\_\_

Casa (prieten) meu este mare. \_\_\_\_\_

Eu le-am ales (prietene) \_\_\_\_\_ mele aceste cărți.

A major difference between the two approaches is that in the case of Inductive approach, students focus on using the correct form, and not on the meaning of the message they are producing. On the other hand, the Deductive approach is more focused on the message than it is on the rules, because the students already learned the rules and the patterns. The deductive approach is related to the conscious learning process in which this approach tries to place a great emphasis on error correction and the presentation of explicit rules (Krashen, 2002). Such an approach is applied for the reason that it is an efficient and elegant way to organize and present the rule that is already understood. The deductive approach is often used with adult learners. The inductive approach relates to subconscious learning processes similar to the

concept of language acquisition. According to this approach, learners learn the system of language (Widodo, 2006).

For teaching Romanian as foreign language, the linguist Eugen Coșeriu comes with some strategies meant to help both the student and the teacher. These strategies are more suitable for teaching the grammar than are for other competences:

- mark out the phenomenon that must be taught – the students must be aware of what they are learning and their attention has to be set on the new grammatical concept. The new forms need to be integrated in some structures that the students already know, so they can focus on what they are supposed to learn, and not understanding the message of the sentence;
- presenting the reasons why they learn the new phenomenon – the students must be aware of the importance of learning the new grammatical concept, because they need to know in which circumstances they can use it;
- the teacher has to determinate how she presents the new concept;
- the teacher has to determinate what methods uses in teaching – every method has it's downsides and it need to be adapted to each classroom's needs (Coșeriu 1989: 34).

According to Coșeriu, what we teach must be in correlation with something they know, so they can learn it easier. If it is something completely new, it is harder for them to acquire it. In his opinion, in teaching the teacher has to use the student's native language or other language that they both know. Using this method of teaching, in Coșeriu's opinion, it is easier for the student to acquire the new language, because he can make correlations easier with something that he knows in other languages he speaks. In my opinion, this method not completely appropriate, because the student is focused on decoding and translating the message from English to his native language, in case he has other native language than English. Then he has to understand the pattern and then he has to make another effort to translate from his native language to English and then to Romanian. This process is too complicated and it distracts the student form the focus of the class, which is understanding the grammatical pattern. To avoid these situations, the teacher has to give easier examples to demonstrate the pattern, has to use words that all the students know in order to make easier the acquisition. For practicing the patterns, the teacher can introduce some more difficult words, but he has to be sure that those words don't increase the difficulty of the acquisition.

#### **4. Types of exercises**

There more types of exercises that teachers can use in teaching grammar. These exercises are meant for the students to acquire and to fix the new rules they learn. The types can be used in teaching native languages grammar, but also a foreign language, as Romanian.

1. Structural exercises. When we choose to use these exercises, we must exercise only an item, the difficulty must increase gradually and the number of items shouldn't be more than five. The words we use in the exercise must be known so they don't increase the difficulty of the exercise.

Classification (Platon, Burlacu, Sonea 2011: 94-95):

- reproduction exercises: they have the role to familiarize the student in using a precise structure. Their disadvantage is that the student may get bored, because they consist in repeating the same structure until the structure is acquired. The advantage of the exercise is that the students can acquire correctly and supervised the structure.
- replacement exercises:
  1. simple - the students have to replace a word with another one having the same structure: *Am o rochie roșie/neagră/frumoasă* ('I have a red/black/beautiful dress');
  2. expansion – which have the role to enlarge the structure by adding new elements: *Eu am cumpărat o carte + această*

*Eu am cumpărat această carte + interesantă* ('I bought this book + interesting)

*Eu am cumpărat această carte interesantă.*

3. correlation: *Eu mănânc.* ('I eat')

*Noi mâncăm.* ('We eat')

4. three sided – consists in replacement of more elements in the sentence:

*Cumpăr o rochie roșie.+ această*

*Cumpăr această rochie roșie + lungă*

*Cumpăr această rochie lungă.*

- Structural transformation exercises consist on changing the grammatical structure:

*Eu merg la școală.* ('I am going to school')

*Eu am mers la școală.* ('I went to school')

- Structural combining exercises consist on matching two sets of sentences or two parts of a sentence in order to create one:

*A mâncat nu numai merele încât era obosit.*

*A citit atât de mult ci și perele.*

- Structural binding exercises consist on combining all other types of exercises:

*Ai scris tema? Da, am scris tema./Nu, nu am scris tema.* ('Did you write the homework? Yes, I wrote the homework/No, I didn't write the homework').

Other types of exercises are the classical exercises. These exercises are meant to practice and use the grammatical forms that students studied. They have the following characteristics (Platon, Burlacu, Sonea 2011: 95):

- don't follow a pattern;
- what students have to do is well said in the item;
- it is used a meta-linguistic language in creating the items;
- a sentence has only one difficulty;
- they can be done only in writing.

Example: *Puneți verbele din paranteze la forma corectă:* ('Put the verbs in the brackets in the correct form')

*El (a merge) ..... la școală. 'He (to go) ..... to school.'*

*Noi (a mânca) ..... ciocolată. 'We (to eat) ..... chocolate.'*

- This type of exercises can be divided in three categories:
  1. memorizing the forms – the students are asked to put the word in the brackets in a specific form;
  2. transformation exercises – this exercises uses a specific terminology, this being the difference from the structural exercise.
- Functional exercises are based on the context, they can propose more than one solution. In this case, we can solve them in two ways:
  1. vertically: *În geantă (a avea) ..... două (caiet).* 'In the bag (to have) ..... two (notebook)'
  2. horizontally: each part of the exercise is directed to different demand:

*Puneți cuvintele din paranteză la forma corectă:*

*Rochia (galben) ..... e a Mariei. 'The (yellow) ..... dress is Maria's.'*

*Mâine (a călători) ..... la Brașov. 'Tomorrow (to travel) ..... to Brașov.'*

*Eu (a citi) ..... o carte. 'I (to read) ..... a book.'*

Besides these types of exercises, the grammar can be practiced by speaking. This method can help the students to contextualize the grammar, to use it in conversation, because grammar is not limited to a set of rules they can memorize. One type of activity can be based on describing images. The students can receive a set of images and they have to say what the persons in the images are doing. This activity is perfect for practicing the verbs. We can use images also for describing persons when the students are acquiring the nouns or the adjectives.

Another activity can be made of dialogues. The class should be divided in pairs and each pair should represent a typical daily situation, like going to the grocery shop. In this activity, the students can practice more than one grammatical aspect. They have to use correctly the verbs, the plurals and adjectives.

Creating more than one activity in each lesson will help the students to pay more attention, to be more focused on the lesson, and not get bored. It is important for them to participate actively to each activity in order to acquire the grammar.



## Conclusions

The grammar is a very important part of learning a foreign language, because the incorrect use of grammar may lead to difficulties in communication with others. In order to correctly acquire the grammar, we need to pay attention to a set of rules and to practice them by combining the exercises. Also, the approach the teacher uses is very important, because each classroom is different and it is important for the teacher to respond to his class's needs. For example, if we have a class in which the majority of students are more independent, the Inductive approach is more suitable for them. But, on the other hand, if our students need more guidance, it would be better if we use the Deductive approach and give them the rules so they can be more sure in using them.

Another important part is choosing the types of exercises that we use. In this case, it would be recommended to use more types of exercises and to bind them with short conversational situations. No matter what method we choose to use, it is important to give our students all the instruments they need to help them in the process of grammar acquisition.

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## THE IMPROVEMENT OF VERB TEACHING WITHIN ROMANIAN LANGUAGE FOR FOREIGNERS BY USING A VERB GUIDE

VIORICA VESA-FLOREA<sup>1</sup>

**ABSTRACT.** *The improvement of verb teaching within Romanian Language for Foreigners by using a verb guide.* The work presents the need and utility to conceive a verb guide which would help the persons interested in learning Romanian as a foreign language and which would have as target-public not only the preparatory year students, but a wider range of public, meaning any person interested in developing the communication competence in this language in a practical, progressive way and in accordance with the concrete everyday communicative needs.

The structure of such volume should comprise, besides the conjugation tables of the verbs grouped on levels, their translation in several wide-spread languages, their contextualization, summary tables with the verbs used with the Dative, and also models of their prepositional status, this means just the aspects in which the foreign speakers have difficulties. Another perspective for selection and contextualisation of the verbs could be their belonging to a certain semantic sphere, a modality to concentrate, simplify and stimulate the individual and collective progress, reflected in the different competences.

**Keywords:** *Romanian as foreign language, verb guide, contextualisation, practical methods, difficulties.*

**REZUMAT.** *Îmbunătățirea predării verbului în cadrul L.R.S. prin folosirea unui ghid de verbe.* Lucrarea prezintă necesitatea și utilitatea conceperii unui ghid de verbe care să vină în ajutorul celor interesați de însușirea limbii române ca limbă străină și care să aibă ca public-țintă nu doar studenții din anul pregătitor, ci o paletă mai largă a publicului, adică orice persoană interesată să-și dezvolte competența de comunicare în această limbă în mod practic, progresiv și în acord cu necesitățile concrete comunicative cotidiene.

Structura unui asemenea volum ar trebui să cuprindă, pe lângă tabelele de conjugare ale verbelor grupate pe niveluri, traducerea lor în câteva limbi de circulație, contextualizări ale acestora, tabele recapitulative cu verbele care cer Dativul, precum și modele ale regimului prepozițional ale acestora, adică tocmai aspectele în care aceștia au dificultăți. O altă perspectivă de selectarea și

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contextualizare a verbelor ar putea fi apartenența acestora la o anumită sferă semantică, modalitate de a concentra, simplifica și stimula progresul individual și colectiv, reflectat în diferitele competențe.

***Cuvinte cheie:** româna ca limbă străină, ghid de verbe, contextualizări, metode practice, dificultăți.*

## **1. Introduction**

The learning process of a foreign language supposes not only the grammar knowledge or to possess a certain lexical baggage, but also to acquire some actual communication abilities, which means a teaching revolutionizing, an idea which has been talked about lately. The need to conceive such verb guide, which would support those who are interested in reaching the communicative performances as soon as possible, has been more and more felt in teaching Romanian language as a foreign language. For this purpose, following a fine tradition within the Department of Romanian Language, Culture and Civilization, at *Babeș-Bolyai* University, in Cluj-Napoca, we have thought of the need to conceive a verb guide which would replace and would continue at a more advanced level the as known “notebooks of verbs”, used consistently during the class teaching activity. Moreover, such a work tool would have as target-public not only the students of the preparatory year, but a wider range of public, meaning any person interested in developing the communication competence in Romanian language in a progressive, unitary way and in accordance with the concrete everyday communicative needs.

The present work proposes to approach some concrete aspects related to this teaching and learning tool: a.) which objectives the guide must follow; b.) which would be its structure; c.) which benefits could bring to those who are interested; d.) why a verb selection and presentation on semantic spheres is necessary, in accordance with the themes and information from the manuals used in the class. e.) which are the advantages presented by the contextualization of verbs semantically selected on subjects; e.) to what degree is the guide useful in case of self-learning.

## **2. Objectives**

Mastering a foreign language has become at present a necessity for more and more people all over the world. If for little kids it is easy to speak two or more languages simultaneously, only by listening to them, for adults it is much more difficult to learn a foreign language, because it needs time, discipline, a pretty strong motivation and constant efforts. Therefore, the main purpose of teaching is

“to focus on that person who learns”, this idea has been emphasized by the work *The Threshold Level*, the Romanian version signed by the group of authors, which supposes “to take into account all <<the situations>>in which the beneficiary of the teaching act can be surprised, who appears as<<disciple>>, but who is also a communicator, social subject social and person.”(p.3)

The selection from the language vocabulary of a certain number of verbs: 500-700, translated into English and French, would certainly help those who are interested. An appropriate manner of presentation can take the shape of questions-answers, the verbs being used in more diversified statements, corresponding to the levels of competence A1, A2, B1 and B2, related to ***The Common European Framework of Reference (CECR)***, in other words, to the level “beginner”, “false beginner”, “intermediate 1” and intermediate 2”.

The verb guide can be a work useful tool, as it contributes to the development of some specific competences: *linguistics*, by acquainting the speakers with the verbal forms at the different modes and tenses from the conjugation tables, basis models which are repeating. The translation of the verbs in to English and French facilitates the understanding of their meaning, moreover, it saves the time and efforts spent by searching their meanings in other dictionaries or on-line. To the same competence is also related to assume the correct way of verb spelling, so necessary in case of the foreign speakers. To reach the *sociolinguistic competence*, supposes the familiarization with the politeness rules specific to our language and culture for those interested. The guide is useful also to develop the *pragmatic* competence, as is it optimizes the skill of the foreign speaker to arrange the words within a statement in an as natural as possible way, complying with the adequate word order. Difficult aspects can be practiced by easy methods. The stimulation to develop the social-cultural competence concretizes into assimilation of knowledge referring to the Romanian culture, to the interpersonal relations, to the way of thinking, to the cultural values and to the people paremiological richness, reflected in proverbs. This can be presented as models for using the respective verbs any time possible.

### 3. The Structure

Within the foreign students teaching practice it has been proved, in time, how it is necessary a good organization both the material taught in a certain learning unit, usually organized, on subjects, and of the revising material, which would offer the foreign speaker a cumulative perspective, a panoramic view of the whole. Sometimes, the students transmit as a feedback the idea of a not enough understanding and clarification of the correct way for using the verbal forms, especially when it is spoken about those verbs accompanied by personal or reflexive pronouns, in different cases. Besides, the work structure would suppose the presentation of some summary tables

with the representative verbs, conjugated at the finite and non-finite modes, at active, reflexive and passive voices.

A special space is required for the presentation of all the irregular verbs, which are taught in the manual in different lessons and they often constitute difficulty elements at testing.

The pronominal verbs with Dative and Accusative also require a succinct presentation, clarifying to be thoroughly memorized and recognized in the exercises where they are used in different contexts. Likewise, the verbal constructions used impersonal with Accusative and Dative pronouns, the verbs with two pronouns and those with possessive dative must be included in the guide as they keep rising difficulties to the non-native speakers.

The summary tables with the most used verbs in Romanian language are very useful, they are conjugated at Present Indicative, Past Perfect, I-st person, at Present Conjunctive, III-rd person singular and at Imperative II-nd person singular, affirmative.

The basic section must be represented by contexts of verbal use under the form of questions-answers, this part being less approached by the grammar manuals and the verb books existing at the libraries or on the bookstores shelves. Nevertheless, the practical value of the verb contextualization has been proved to be obvious, reflecting into better results in case of testing not only of the conventional strategies specific for speaking, but also in the results obtained at the other competences: listening understanding, understanding of a written text, the vocabulary and grammar section or the creative production of a text. This is the reason why this guide segment needs to be allocated a wider space.

#### **4. The Work Use:**

In order to facilitate finding as soon as possible and memorizing of the correct forms of the verbs, (a visual nature dominant), we could chose for their presentation in alphabetical order. Optionally, the verbs can be noted and grouped by ten as this gives the idea of order and stimulates the wish to make progresses.

The tables with verb conjugations are models for forming other verbs with a similar construction and which, by repeating, become familiar, like a song, heard several times, which you get to hum yourself.

The verb tables with the Dative and Accusative are useful when the foreign speakers are facing the issues of solving some grammar exercises or they want to practice their oral communication competence or that of producing a written text.

The summary tables containing the most used verbs in Romanian language constitute necessary instruments when the forms which especially raise difficulties to the foreign speakers are revised.

The exemplified verbs can be conjugated at the most used modes and: Present Indicative, Past Perfect, Present Conjunctive, III-rd person and at Imperative at the other modes and tenses they will use the introductive tables in which these can be found as conjugation type. For instance, the conjugation model of the verb *a dori(esc)*- (to want, to wish) will be relatively easy to be found in the tables with conjugated verbs at the verb *a citi(esc)* –(to read).

All the verbs will be exemplified with the help of some frequently used formulations, some diversified statements, from which the students can select and memorize what they are interested in and which, later on, they will use in their own expressing. Moreover, where possible, an already experimented aspect, the aphoristic expressions and the proverbs are welcome, as they say much in few words, they can be relatively easy kept in mind and they increase the speaker's trust in himself.

## 5. Possible Benefits

A well known Romanian proverb gives the essence of a truth experienced by each of us and, in addition, by those non-native speakers who have reached the special performances in using Romanian language: *The roots of learning are bitter, but its fruits are sweet*. Indeed, to progress with the help of concrete, practical and at the same time easy methods, could diminish, some of the *bitterness* of efforts made to well master the Romanian language. And what a special satisfaction give the moments when the foreign speaker manages to express correctly an idea, a feeling, thus proving that he has acquired in a certain measure the language of language. For these small victories the examples in the verb guide can prepare him.

The easy and dynamic presentation method of the verbal forms contributes to the memorizing capacity improvement by repeated visualisation of some summary tables or lists. Many persons have ascertained that it is more efficient to learn little, but in a regular way, than to learn much and rarely.

On the other side, the fact that the didactic material can be permanently found at hand of those interested offers them the possibility to keep exercising also after the courses. In case that the learning process is organized, the teacher will work tactfully at the students' attitude, which is not an insignificant aspect. A Polish magazine "Poradnik Domowy" states: "It is absolutely natural to make mistakes when we learn a language. If we accept this fact, this means that we have made the first step." Then, we have to be open "to assume some risks". When we don't know how a certain thing is said "sometimes we have to base on intuition or, simply to guess", which is much better than saying nothing. "We rarely realize that the source of our problems could be the fear or the shame. If we succeed in over passing these weaknesses, we will progress, for sure, more quickly." Under this aspect also, the guide helps the foreign speaker, offering him conversation

models which would improve the communication capacity, supporting him to over pass this fear and thus to progress more quickly.

Being a work tool already experimented, the guide allows to be used in several ways. On one side, the speakers can answer the questions asked by another person not only by repetition, but having the option to choose the wanted version. Then, they have the possibility to formulate themselves questions according to the offered models, to practice the understanding of the meaning in English or French, to write on the book the translation in their own language.

The verb contextualization means an additional support given in solving also the other grammar issues, as it is related to the prepositional regime specific to each verb. The examples give clues also about the use of some prepositions or prepositional phrases either with the genitive, or with accusative or about the cases when we appeal to the prepositions with the dative. Besides, the foreign speaker will notice the special forms which the nouns and pronouns dress up after the verbs which require Dative and Accusative. Thus, the complicated things can become, by practicing, much easier, in other words: "The biggest things need only to be said with simplicity" (Jean La Bruyere).

The guide can be used also similar to a game with cards, in which, on one side a word or a phrase is written, and on the back of the card their translation is written. Speaking of the verbs, this can be carried out by covering the words in the foreign language and checking the knowledge of the Romanian verb or vice versa. Also using the same method the memorising of the verbs or examples can be practised, which confers it a practical value both during the daily didactic activities in the classroom, and also during the homework preparation.

As it is a conversation guide, this tool can contribute to the improvement of the speakers' communication capacity, as they will have at their disposal not only isolated words, but statements and sentences. Besides, it facilitates the creative production, so that they will be able to compose themselves written texts, compositions on a certain theme by appealing the guide section which presents the verbs in a semantic order. These exercises have as result the reduction of the search work in the dictionaries and, obviously, they lead to the gradual enrichment of the vocabulary.

Such a work tool is also a support to reduce the assimilation difficulty of an information avalanche. Sometimes, the foreign speakers go through moments when they are over passed by the too great volume of new words, consequently they lose their patience and they feel like giving up. The fact that they would establish some progressive marks in the assimilation of new words, for instance a certain number of verbs and examples per day, can make them realize about the progress made in time. One student said once: "You don't believe that you made progress only if you think how much you had known before."

This work will offer to the speaker the chance to give not only repetitive answers to some questions, but also to imply in the conversation, to express what

he thinks and what he feels. After all, the objective of each foreign speaker is to think in the respective language, not only to translate some words and phrases from his mother tongue. It will also gratify the tenacious ones by accumulating some unprecedented information about the thinking way, about the customs and traditions of people, about their cultural values, without which it can't be said that somebody masters a language. Some of the proverbs are easy to memorize, being rhymed, and the fact that they are presented next to other examples can help the person interested to wish to understand them and to use them in life concrete situations. The speakers are thus helped to perceive the language with its subtleties, to enrich their cultural horizon and to see the things from new perspectives.

Within the teaching practice for the groups of students we have ascertained that the modest "notebooks of verbs", which do not nearly include the information volume which can be offered by an elaborated work, stimulate the individual and collective progress, reflected into better results at the tests, thing that can be very encouraging and stimulating for those who study Romanian language.

Not least, the guide offers other benefits too: the same as a child who learns to walk sometimes he stumbles and falls, those who make the first steps in learning Romanian "stumble" and "fall" sometimes, figuratively speaking, that is why they need a support, and the guide can be the necessary help offered in time. It can diminish the difficulties of this learning way, conferring the sentiment of safety and emotional comfort in expressing.

As a result of the deep learning of the Romanian language with the help of this tool, the non-native speakers can have also personal benefits: they can improve their relations with the friends from Romania, with their relatives, to whom they couldn't tell very much initially, but with which they will be able to connect much closer.

Learning a new language, in this case, Romanian language, bring benefits not only to young people, but also to elderly, it is said in an international publication, "Wake up", from 05 22/4 28: "The knowledge of two languages helps people not to lose their «quickness of mind» as they grow old", they say in *Toronto Star* newspaper. The psychologist Ellen Bialystok, from York University, has tested the cognitive functions of 104 adults with the age between 30 and 59 years and of 50 adults with the age between 60 and 88 years, all of them having a similar training level and income. In each group, half of the tested people were speaking two languages. Each subject has been asked to fulfil an easy task for which there were two opposite alternatives of solving, measuring his reaction speed. "The bilinguals have been faster than the monolinguals", the newspaper specifies. According to this researcher, those who speak two languages have always a choice between two alternatives, and their brain has to decide in what language to answer. "In time, due to this mind gymnastic, the decision processes do not slow down so quickly, a specific phenomenon for getting older." Therefore,



of this opportunity, offered by learning a new foreign language, the Romanian language, can benefit also those who are not young anymore. We remember with pleasure and with appreciation of the enthusiastic spirit, thirsty of knowledge of some old people, participants at the summer courses of Romanian language, given by “Babeş-Bolyai” University, of their consistent participation to the courses, of their interest in new manuals and materials existing in the bookstores in order to improve the Romanian language performances, of the amazing intellectual sharpness which they were proving. All this shows, one more time, that there is no age limits for learning and that it never ends, on the contrary it is a continuous process, which makes the human being unique, gives it dignity and creates connecting bridges between cultures, races and different languages.

## **6. The Contextualization of Semantically Selected Verbs**

The idea of grouping the verbs from a semantic point of view, according to the competence levels: A1, A2, B1, B2 and, at the same time, their selection in accordance with the subjects approached in the manuals used at the courses means, for sure, an additional support in the stimulation of the linguistic progress. Thus, the verbs could be organized on the following themes: food and drink, accommodation, house, shopping, education, private life and leisure time, weather, tourism, transport, daily activities, feelings and emotions, physical and moral qualities, hygiene and health, treatments, correspondence, jobs, occupations and activity sectors, hobbies and interests, environment protection, geographical environment, flora and fauna, social events, culture, sport, climate and weather, etc.

The semantic organization of verbs on themes represents a way of improving all the linguistic competences and constitutes a working tool both in the classroom, and during the homework preparation and during the self teaching activities. By means of the given examples the individual practise of reading can be tested, insisting on targeting some objectives, such as: correctness, clear articulation, correct pronunciation, fluency, adequate pauses, the appropriate accentuation and modulation, all the more that the statements are relatively short and they allow repeating and memorizing, aspects sometimes superficially followed during the course hours. The verbs can be practised under the aspect of grammatical correctness at the most often used modes and tenses, of understanding and remembering the exact meaning, also as individual production possibility of other examples by the given model. The contextualization is useful also in carrying out some written texts on a certain theme, because it offers cumulatively the lexical baggage, as well as the concrete support necessary to decrease the stress connected to the lack of inspiration and knowledge.

## 7. The Utility in Case of Self-Learning

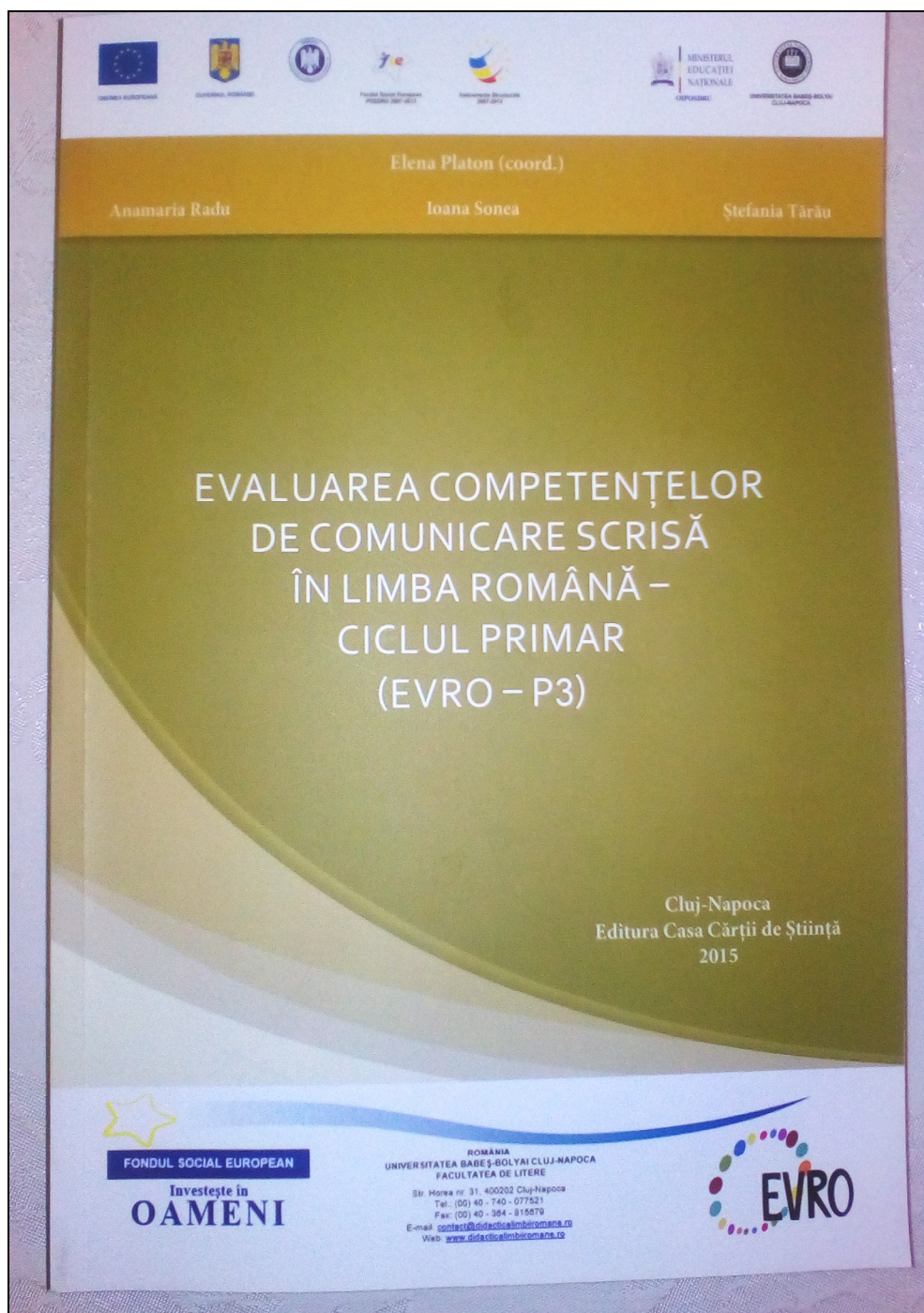
The language is a miracle and a gift, like the human brain, the most mysterious and amazing thing in the universe. As in the case of other gift, the language is impartially available for all people, whatever the culture they are part of or the place they live in. When the self-learning is necessary, the guide can offer some practical suggestions for using some questions related to a certain field of interest, it suggests possible short or more ample answers, which can be selected and noted on a notebook to be memorized according to the person's competence level, making learning possible even when the teacher is missing.

Ion Caraion, in his monograph dedicated to Bacovia's work, "The Continuous End", has noticed the weight and importance of the verb use in this poet's work. A chapter entitled: "Fire Points" was emphasizing the special role of the "horse power" verbs, of incredible force, of "reinforced concrete" stability which these verbs give to the prepositional edifice. (p.47) Applying these observations in the present case, we could extend the verb extraordinary force value also when it is used by a self-learning foreign speaker. Actually, it is known that the sentence can be formed even of a single word: one verb. Therefore, learning by himself of some verbal forms, and of some right examples can mean much for those interested to learn Romanian language.

As the guide will have multiple roles: of a dictionary, of a grammar manual, of possible contextualization of the verbs, of paremiological collection and of cumulative presentation of the verbs on semantic spheres, it will prove its utility also in the case of self-learning persons, in the continuous process of learning with explorations, hesitations, defeats and victories, however, finally generously rewarded.

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**Title:** Review “The Evaluation of Written Communication Competences in Romanian Language – school primary cycle (EVRO-P3)”

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**ABSTRACT.** The work “The Evaluation of Written Communication Competences in Romanian Language – school primary cycle (EVRO-P3)”, issued in Cluj-Napoca, at Casa Cărții de Știință Publishing House, 2015, of 232 pages, has as authors a group of experienced specialists in this field: Anamaria Radu, Ioana Sonea, Ștefania Tărău, under the coordination of Elena Platon. The volume has been elaborated within EVRO project, entitled “The Training of teachers of Romanian language in pre-university education level to assess the pupils' communication competences” (contract POSDRU/157/1.3/S/133900) which is ongoing within the Department of Romanian Language, Culture and Civilization at Letters Faculty of Babeș-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca.

The volume presents new perspectives in assessing the written competences at the school primary cycle, being an authentic guide for teachers. The conception modality is extremely likeable, aerated, practical, with lots of very well carried out drawings and form models of self-evaluation, inter-evaluation and evaluation which will certainly help those who are interested to make similar scenarios and for other types of texts, adjusted to the class needs.

**Keywords:** *written communication competences, school primary cycle, testing, evaluation tools, teacher's form, pupil's form*

**Recenzie:** “Evaluarea competențelor de comunicare scrisă în limba română- ciclul primar (EVRO-P3)”

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**REZUMAT.** Lucrarea “Evaluarea competențelor de comunicare scrisă în limba română- ciclul primar (EVRO-P3)”, apărută în Cluj-Napoca, la Editura Casa Cărții de Știință, 2015, de 232 de pagini, are ca autori un grup de specialiști cu experiență în domeniu: Anamaria Radu, Ioana Sonea, Ștefania Tărău, fiind coordonată de Elena Platon. Volumul a fost elaborat în cadrul proiectului EVRO, intitulat “Perfecționarea cadrelor didactice care predau limba română în învățământul preuniversitar în evaluarea competențelor de comunicare ale elevilor” (contract POSDRU/157/1.3/S/133900) aflat în derulare la Departamentul de limbă, cultură și civilizație românească de la Facultatea de Litere a Universității Babeș-Bolyai, Cluj-Napoca.

Volumul prezintă noi perspective în evaluarea competențelor scrise la ciclul primar, fiind un autentic ghid pentru profesori. Modul de concepere

este deosebit de atrăgător, aerisit, practic, cu multe desene foarte bine realizate și modele de fișe de autoevaluare, interevaluare și evaluare care îi vor ajuta, în mod cert, pe cei interesați să elaboreze scenarii similare și pentru alte tipuri de texte, adaptate la nevoile clasei.

**Cuvinte-cheie:** *competențe de comunicare scrisă, ciclul primar, testare, instrumente de evaluare, fișa profesorului, fișa elevului*

The work “The Evaluation of Written Communication Competences in Romanian Language – primary cycle (EVRO-P3)”, issued in Cluj-Napoca, at Casa Cărții de Știință Publishing House, 2015, of 232 pages, has as authors a group of experienced specialists in this field: Anamaria Radu, Ioana Sonea, Ștefania Tărău, under the coordination of Elena Platon.

The proposed theme is to carry out some new perspectives regarding the evaluation of written communication competences in Romanian language at the primary cycle. The authors present up to date teaching methods and strategies, able to revolutionize the didactic process, following the pupils' awareness “related to the fact that not only the formal learning of reading-writing constitutes the learning object, but, most of all, the acquisition of some reading efficient strategies which would lead them as soon as possible to the meaning”, as it has been noticed by the scientific director of EVRO project, university lecturer doctor, Mrs. Elena Platon in the book *Preface*. To ensure that this perspective change would function, first of all, it is necessary the teachers to master those reading strategies which prepare the pupils to understand exactly the meaning of a text, also to accustom the pupils to offer feedback during the writing of a text, so that they would get solutions to the possible difficulties they meet. The work proposes a change concerning the evaluation perspective and regarding the attitude towards testing act in general, which instead of being accompanied by feelings of fear, of stress, even by emotional blockages, it is better to become a stimulus in acquiring some progressively improved results.

The desire of some essential changes in the teaching and evaluation process are to be found in the formulated objectives of EVRO project, entitled “The Training of teachers who teach Romanian language at pre-university education level to assess the pupils' communication competences” (contract POSDRU/157/1.3/S/133900) ongoing within the Department of Romanian Language, Culture and Civilization at Letters Faculty of Babeș-Bolyai University, in Cluj-Napoca. The general objective of the project was the improvement of the professional competences for many teachers (approximate 1800) who have benefited by the further training programs. “The specific objectives have aimed at the improvement of teachers capacity to evaluate the oral communication competences, (understanding after listening and oral expression) and written

expression (understanding after reading and written expression) of the pupils in Romanian language, by mastering a modern perspective on the evaluation process and by using some objective tools of evaluation (scales, descriptors, general grids, and specific grids, self/inter/datasheets of evaluation etc.), elaborated and used at an European level, in accordance with *CECR*, in order to professionalize the evaluation process of oral and written communication competences and to align this process to the European standards, and in order to create a unique system to evaluate and to grade these competences at the national and even international level." (*Preface*, p. 8, 9)

The work comprises six units and 22 annexes. The first unit offers a general presentation of the evaluation process and formulates some precise objectives such as: "the differentiation of approaches regarding the evaluation", "advantages and disadvantages"; "the identification of evaluation stages"; "the analysis of the evaluation impact on the teaching and learning processes"; "the correlation of the different types of evaluation with the evaluation functions"; "the identification of each type of evaluation"; "the identification of the testing specific issues". The chapter offers clarifying explanations, presents differentiations towards the traditional approaches with the help of tables and particularly suggestive images, it also presents work models in pairs and practical exercises of self-evaluation.

The second unit focuses on the evaluation of written message reception capacity. The objectives of this chapter follow the cognitive processes specific to the reading reception at the age group of 6-11 years, "the correlation of reading operations with the understanding types of the written text", the conception of some adequate items for each type of reading and for the concerned cognitive operations". This unit gives some important suggestions referring to the selection criteria of the texts intended for reading, such as "authenticity", "variety" and the fact that they come from "different fields".

The third unit focuses on the evaluation of the written message reception capacity, on the correct conception of the items, and on the use of a *Competence Grid for the Natives (CLN)*. Work models in pairs are offered for the progressive levels, starting with the precursory group and finishing with the IV-th grade and the items are classified. The information included in the subtitle: "The ten commandments in achieving the items" are to be noted, information which can be also apply to other levels.

The IV-th unit has mainly an applicative character, it also provides the structure of a didactic scenario following the model of Common European Frame of Reference for languages, to support the teachers to get familiar with these types of scenarios. Some frequent mistakes in formulation items are presented, also some evaluation models and work datasheets for inter-evaluation.

The V-th unit makes a general presentation of the written text, following as objectives to develop some very important abilities referring to the way of taking notes, of reading datasheets, of carrying out *a mental map*. The images are highly suggestive, beautifully coloured, which summarize the stages of writing: *I think, I write, I correct myself, I complete*, behaviours which are not of *innate*, but *acquired* type.

The VI-th unit presents different evaluation tools: “self-evaluation, inter-evaluation and evaluation-re-evaluation datasheet, specifying the difference between evaluation, testing and grading”. (*Preface*, p.10)

The annexes include practical didactic materials, presented in a very attractive manner, with a lot of very well carried out drawings, *teacher's datasheet, pupil's datasheet*, tables to fill in with key-words, role games, models of datasheets which will certainly help, those who are interested to carry out similar scenarios and for other types of texts, adapted to the needs of the class.

## THE COMPLEXITY AND ACCURACY OF NOUN PHRASES WITH MODIFIERS IN WRITTEN PRODUCTIONS OF LEARNERS OF ROMANIAN AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

CRISTINA BOCOȘ<sup>1</sup>

**ABSTRACT.** *The Complexity and Accuracy of Noun Phrases with Modifiers in Written Productions of Learners of Romanian as a foreign language.* The paper analyses the complexity and accuracy of noun phrases with modifiers in a corpus of 84 written productions by learners of Romanian as a foreign language of different L1 backgrounds. The analyzed samples are short (70-80 words), descriptive texts written by students at level A2 in Romanian. The adjective constructions present in this corpus are classified according to their complexity as well as to their typology (constructions with descriptive adjectives, with pronominal adjectives, and mixed), while their accuracy is scrutinized from two different perspectives: word order and noun-adjective agreement. A statistical analyses of the frequency of certain types of errors is offered for each group of learners that share the same linguistic background. Moreover, the data obtained from the written productions of an individual group of L1 speakers is compared to that of the others in order to highlight possible implications in teaching and assessing Romanian as a foreign language.

**Keywords:** *noun phrase, modifier, adjective, accuracy, complexity, statistical analysis, Romanian as a foreign language, learners of different background*

**REZUMAT.** *Complexitatea și acuratețea grupurilor nominale cu modificatori în producțiile scrise ale vorbitorilor de limba română ca limbă străină.* Lucrarea analizează complexitatea și acuratețea grupurilor nominale cu modificatori dintr-un corpus de producții scrise aparținând unor studenți de diferite origini și cu diferite limbi materne care învață româna ca limbă străină în România. Mostrele analizate sunt texte descriptive scurte (70-80 de cuvinte) scrise de studenți de nivel A2. Sintagmele adjectivale identificate la nivelul corpusului sunt clasificate în funcție de complexitatea și de tipologia lor (sintagme cu adjective propriu-zise, cu adjective pronominale și mixte). Acuratețea acestora este examinată atât din punctul de vedere al topicii, cât și din cel al acordului. Frecvența anumitor tipuri de greșeli este prezentată statistic atât la nivel global,

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cât și la nivelul subclaselor reprezentate de studenții care au ca limbă maternă araba, albaneza sau o limbă asiatică (= limbile materne cel mai bine reprezentate în corpus). În plus, rezultatele obținute la nivelul subclaselor anterior amintite sunt comparate între ele cu scopul de stabili posibile implicații ale limbii materne în predarea și evaluarea limbii române ca limbă străină.

**Cuvinte-cheie:** *grup nominal, modificator, adjectiv, acuratețe, complexitate, analiză statistică, limba română ca limbă străină, vorbitori de diferite origini și cu diferite limbi materne*

## 1. Introduction

An objective assessment of the language productions of speakers of Romanian as a Foreign Language can only be done, from our point of view, on the basis of a grid capable of distinguishing between these production according to specific criteria, such as: *complexity* (= the range and appropriate use of vocabulary), *accuracy* (= grammatical precision), *coherence*, *thematic development*,<sup>2</sup> etc. Starting from the premise that the more detailed these descriptors are, the more objective the assessment will be, we have attempted to statistically analyse a corpus of written productions and to identify the average number of adjectives (qualifiers and participials) used by A2-level users and the ratio between correct and incorrect adjective forms, considering that these figures could be transposed into descriptors for maximum score as regards the complexity and accuracy of adjective use at this level of linguistic competence.

## 2. Description of the corpus

In order to obtain these statistical data, we have analysed a corpus consisting of 84 productions written by students from 23 different countries: Afghanistan, Albania, China, Korea, Australia, France, Germany, Greece, Jordan, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Italy, Morocco, Russia, Serbia, Syria, Slovakia, Spain, United States of America, Thailand, Turkey and Turkmenistan, enrolled in the academic year 2015-2016 in the preparatory year of Romanian for Foreign Students. The productions were extracted from the written section of the A2-level exam, which they took after 260 course hours. Within the written exam, one of the two topics required the

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<sup>2</sup> These criteria (*range of vocabulary, appropriate use of vocabulary, grammatical accuracy, coherence, thematic development*), taken from the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. Learning. Teaching. Assessment*, Language Policy Unit, Strasbourg, published in a translation coordinated and revised by George Moldovanu, Chișinău, Tipografia Centrală, 2003, p. 146, are considered relevant criteria for the assessment of oral productions, but they can also be applied, in our opinion, in assessing written productions.

students to describe, in 70-80 words, a beautiful area in their own country, indicating where it is located, what landforms, plants and animals can be found there, what the weather is like, and what tourist sites can be visited.

The subject the students approached is, according to *CEFR*, specific to the A2 level, at which, in creative writing activities, the user of a foreign language: “**Can write about everyday aspects of his/her environment**, e.g. people, **places**, a job or study experience in linked sentences. Can write very short, basic descriptions of events, past activities and personal experiences.”<sup>3</sup> Hence, the results concerning the use of adjectives should be relevant for this level of linguistic competence.

### 3. The cases analysed. Work method

The research of the 84 samples of written productions focused, initially, on the range of vocabulary, which is why all the occurrences of a qualifying or participial adjective in the entire corpus were recorded in order to identify the average number of their occurrences in an A2-level descriptive text. Subsequently, the double occurrences of one and the same adjective within a production were eliminated in order to obtain the average number of different adjectives in a text. A comparative analysis of these figures determined the average level of adjective repetition. In the situations that were considered relevant, the same statistical data were offered for the best represented groups of subjects, i.e. native speakers of Arabic (36 subjects), native speakers of Albanian (17) and native speakers of Asian languages, specifically Chinese and Korean (12).

In the inventory of adjectives obtained from research done on the corpus there were included adjectives with four forms (qualifying and participial adjectives because, in teaching, no distinction is made between the two types of adjectives up to the A2 level, only the prototypical class being presented: adjectives with four forms, and not the subclass of participials too),<sup>4</sup> adjectives with three

<sup>3</sup> *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. Learning. Teaching. Assessment*, Language Policy Unit, Strasbourg, published in a translation coordinated and revised by George Moldovanu, Chişinău, Tipografia Centrală, 2003, p. 52.

<sup>4</sup> Elena Platon, Ioana Sonea, Dina Vilcu, *Manual de limba română ca limbă străină (RLS). A1-A2*, Cluj-Napoca, Editura Casa Cărţi de Ştiinţă, 2012, pp. 133-141, Ada Iliescu, Bucureşti, *Manual de limba română ca limbă străină*, Editura Didactică şi Pedagogică, 2012, p. 39. In some textbooks: Cristina-Valentina Dafinoiu, Laura-Elena Pascale, *Limba română. Manual pentru studenţii străini din anul pregătitor. Nivel A1-A2*, third edition, Bucureşti, Editura Universitară, 2005, Olga Bălănescu, *Limba română pentru străini*, Bucureşti, Editura Ariadna '98, 2003 and in *Descrierea minimală a limbii române. A1, A2, B1, B2* (Elena Platon, Ioana Sonea, Lavinia Vasii, Dina Vilcu), Cluj-Napoca, Editura Casa Cărţii de Ştiinţă, 2014, participial adjectives are not mentioned/exemplified in the sections in which the adjective with four forms is introduced. However, in *Limba română ca limbă străină. Dosare pedagogice* (edited by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Andra Vasilescu), Bucureşti, Editura Universităţii din Bucureşti, 2006, there is a theoretical note that makes a distinction between adjectives proper and those derived from other parts of speech: verbal participles and adverbs (p.184).

forms, adjectives with two forms and invariable adjectives. The only situation in which the adjective was not recorded was that in which the phrase from the topic requirement was reproduced as such: “zonă frumoasă” [“beautiful area,” at the beginning of the text, in examples such as: “O zonă frumoasă din țara mea...” [“A beautiful area in my country ...”] (requirement: *Descrieți o zonă frumoasă din țara dumneavoastră* [Describe a beautiful area in your country]).

After this stage, in order to determine the degree of accuracy in the use of adjectives, all correct and incorrect forms were inventoried:

1. nominal groups with a noun head and a:
  - a. *modifier*, consisting in an adjectival group with the head represented by an adjective proper (*vreme caldă* [warm weather]) or a participial adjective (*vreme plăcută* [pleasant weather])
  - b. *possessor*, consisting in the non-clitic possessive (*orașul meu* [my town])
  - c. *quantifier*, consisting in indefinites indicating an unspecified, undefined quantity (*mult, puțin* [much, little]), and indefinites indicating quantity in a global manner (*tot, fiecare* [all, every])
  - d. *determinant*, respectively the deictic of closeness (*this*), prepositioned or postpositioned;<sup>5</sup>
2. verbal groups, with the verb “to be” as the head and a *predicative* consisting in an adjective (*vremea este caldă* [the weather is warm]);
3. degrees of intensity:
  - a. *comparative* (of superiority, equality and inferiority)
  - b. *superlative* (relative and absolute).

Some of the levels listed above, namely: adjectives with four flexional forms, the comparative of superiority, the absolute superlative with *foarte* [very], possessive pronominal adjectives, indefinite pronominal adjectives (*mult, puțin, tot, fiecare* [much, little, all, every]) are, as described in the *Minimalist Description of the Romanian Language. A1, A2, B1, B2*, specific structures of the A1 level, whereas: qualifying adjectives with three forms, those with two forms and invariable adjectives, the comparative of equality and that of inferiority, the relative superlative, the absolute superlative with *extrem de* [extremely] and demonstrative adjectives of closeness are the specific structures of the examined level, i.e. the A2 level.<sup>6</sup> In view of this aspect, it was expected that the structures introduced and assessed at level A1, reinforced through repetition at level A2, would be more frequent and more correctly used than those at A2 level, but the findings did not always confirm these expectations.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. *GBLR*, 2010, p. 80-82, *GALR*, 2005, I, pp. 100-101.

<sup>6</sup> Elena Platon, Ioana Sonea, Lavinia Vasii, Dina Vilcu *Descrierea minimală a limbii române. A1, A2, B1, B2*, Editura Casa Cărții de Știință, Cluj-Napoca, 2014, p.19 și p. 38.

Like in the previous situation, the correct and the incorrect forms identified in the corpus were processed statistically, on the whole and by subclasses (for example, the ratio between the correct and the incorrect forms of nominal groups with a *possessive* adjunct), compared with each other (for example, the ratio between the correct and the incorrect uses of the adjective, in its capacity as a *modifier*, within the structure of a nominal group, or as a *predicative*, within the structure of a verbal group) and restricted to classes of speakers of Romanian as a Foreign Language, who share the same mother tongue (Arabic, Albanian or an Asian language).

#### 4. The range of vocabulary

In terms of range of vocabulary, 76 different qualifying and participial adjectives have been identified in the analysed corpus, amounting, in various flexional forms, to 464 occurrences. Of these, 64 are adjectives with 4 forms: *frumos* [beautiful] (114 occurrences), *cald* [warm] (37), *turistic* [tourist] (21), *interesant* [interesting] (19), *bun* [good] (18), *tradițional* [traditional] (11), *diferit* [different] (12), *minunat* [awesome] (9), *plăcut* [enjoyable] (7), *important* [important] (6), *sălbatic* [wild] (6 occurrences, but only in the syntagm *animale sălbatic* [wild animals]), *extraordinar* [extraordinary] (5), *perfect* [perfect] (5), *ieftin, înalt, special* [inexpensive, high, special] (4), *amabil, amuzant, confortabil, cunoscut, scurt* [friendly, funny, comfortable, known, short] (3), *alb, antic, atractiv, bogat, delicios, gros, normal, periculos, popular, puțin, scump* [white, ancient, attractive, rich, delicious, thick, normal, dangerous, popular, little, expensive] (2), *aglomerat, central, decorat, deschis, domestic, drăguț, entuziasmat, extins, fain<sup>7</sup>, fericit, internațional, istoric, întins, magnific, modern, monumental, natural, neobișnuit, obosit, plin, potrivit, rar, rău, respectiv, romantic, senin, similar, splendid, străin, unic, urât, ușor* [crowded, central, decorated, open, domestic, nice, excited, extensive, cool, happy, international, historical, vast, magnificent, modern, monumental, natural, unusual, tired, full, suitable, rare, evil, respective, romantic, serene, similar, splendid, foreign, unique, ugly, gentle] (1); 5 are adjectives with 3 flexional forms: *mic* [small] (11 occurrences), *lung* [long] (7), *nou* [new] (3), *adânc, roșu* [deep, red] (1); 5 are adjectives with 2 flexional forms: *mare* [large] (54 occurrences), *vechi* [old] (25), *verde* [green] (6), *tare* [hard] (2) and *rece* [cold] (1) and 2 are invariable adjectives: *maro* [brown] (1) and *roz* [pink] (1).

The adjectives *maro* [brown] and *roz* [pink] have been identified, in incorrect forms, in a single written production, as part of an enumeration of

<sup>7</sup> The presence of the adjective *fain* [cool], a synonym of the adjective *frumos* [nice], in a corpus of Romanian as a Foreign Language, A2 level, is probably due to the fact that the subject who used it in the written production learned Romanian in Cluj, hence, in a linguistic environment in which this form has been preserved and it is used with some frequency.

colours: “Parc Majorelle este foarte frumos, el are floare de toți culoare: verde, roșu, **rose**, **maron** și alb” [“Parc Majorelle is very beautiful, it has flower in all colour: green, red, **rosy**, **maroon** and white”]. They were included in the inventory of adjectives identified in the corpus because, from our point of view, the intention of the person who learns Romanian as a Foreign Language is to use them, but because of insufficient knowledge, they mistake the correct forms for their French equivalents.<sup>8</sup>

The very high frequency of the adjective *frumos* [beautiful], 114 occurrences, which accounts for almost one quarter (= 24.56%) of the total situations in which adjectives such as those previously mentioned were used, is explicable by the fact that the topic required the respondents to describe “o zonă frumoasă” [“a beautiful area”]. Therefore, this adjective is present in 68 of the written productions analysed, being doubled, in various circumstances (after or before the noun, after the verb “to be” or in the structure of degrees of comparison), in 24 productions, or tripled in 9 other productions, while in just one case it occurs 5 times in one and the same text. The task, which explicitly required the subjects to state what the weather was like, also clarifies the numerous uses of the adjective *cald* [warm], often identified in examples such as “the weather is warm.” On the other hand, the reduced frequency of the antonym *rece* [cold], which we would have expected to identify in similar examples, is explained by the subjects’ tendency to render the idea of *vreme rece* [cold weather] by using the adverb *frig* [it’s cold], used more or less correctly: “Acolo, vremea e foarte **frig**” [“There, the weather **it’s** very **cold**”], “Veremea aici nu este plăcut. În vara este foart caldă și în iarna afara este **frig**.” [“The wheather here it is not pleasant. In the summer it is ver warm and in winter **it is cold** outside”], “Vremea nu este foarte **frig**, dar nu este foarte cald” [“The weather **it is** not too **cold**, but it is not very warm”], etc. Paradoxically, the only use of the adjective *rece* [cold] does not appear in context of the noun *vremea* [weather], but of the noun *apă* [water]: “Sunt zeci piscine în zonă cu apă *rece*” [“There are dozens of pools in the area with *cold* water ...”].

The higher frequency of certain adjectives like: *frumos*, *mare* [beautiful, large] (54), *cald*, *vechi* [warm, old] (25), *turistic* [touristic] (21), *interesant* [interesting] (19), *tradițional* [traditional] (11), etc., was thus determined by and circumscribed to the type of work task ahead: the *description of a region*. Surely, certain commonly encountered adjectives in this corpus would not have had the

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<sup>8</sup> In addition to the form *maro*, Romanian dictionaries also record the form *maron*, an obsolete variant, rarely used in the contemporary Romanian language. Whereas it is unlikely that the speaker of Romanian as a Foreign Language, level A2, is aware of this variant, we believe that its presence in the text is a direct result of the influence exerted by the French language. We believe, therefore, that the subject made a confusion resulting in an incorrect form.

same frequency in a corpus consisting of written productions that started from a different topic, such as the *description of a person*, where, presumably, adjectives like: *înalt, scund, lung, scurt, gras, slab* [long, short, tall, short, fat, skinny] would have been more frequent than those that we came across in the analysed corpus.

The same frequency was broadly encountered in the written productions of subjects whose mother tongue is Arabic, Albanian or an Asian language: Chinese or Korean – see the table below. Small differences consist in the preference of certain subjects who share the same mother tongue for certain adjectives, which are less used by others. Thus, the subjects whose mother tongue is Arabic use adjective *tradițional* [traditional] more frequently, those whose native language is Albanian have a preference for the adjectives *vechi* [old] and *antic* [ancient], while speakers of Asian languages are the only ones who use the adjective *amuzant* [funny].

<i>The frequency of adjectives according to the criterion of the mother tongue</i>			
	<b>Arabic</b>	<b>Albanian</b>	<b>Asian languages</b>
1	<i>frumos</i> (56)	<i>frumos</i> (19)	<i>frumos</i> (12)
2	<i>mare</i> (26)	<i>vechi, mare</i> (14)	<i>mare</i> (6)
3	<i>cald</i> (21)	<i>bun, turistic</i> (6)	<i>cald</i> (5)
4	<i>turistic, bun</i> (8)	<i>antic, cald, interesant</i> (4)	<i>interesant</i> (3)
5	<i>tradițional</i> (6)	<i>extraordinar</i> (3)	<i>mic, lung, amuzant</i> (2)

In the 84 analysed texts there has been identified a total of 464 cases<sup>9</sup> in which the 76 adjectives enumerated above were correctly or incorrectly used, meaning an average frequency of 5.52 occurrences/text. Albanian speakers and Arabic speakers are situated just above the overall average, with 5.83 occurrences/text and, respectively, 5.69 occurrences/text; by contrast, the speakers of Asian languages fall far below this average, registering only 4.08 occurrences/text.

The elimination of situations in which adjectives are doubled/tripled within one and the same written production, in order to identify the average number of different qualifying or participial adjectives used in the same text, reduces the total number of adjectival occurrences to 364 (compared to 464, the number recorded initially). Therefore, the average of non-doubled adjectives is 4.33/text. In the written productions of Albanian speakers the percentage recorded was, this time too, above average, respectively, 4.94 adjectives/text, while in those of Asian-language speakers, the percentage was well below average: 3.58 adjectives/text. A little under the general average were speakers of

<sup>9</sup> In two written productions there has been identified no adjective, in 40 productions there were recorded between 1 and 5 adjectives, in 40 others there were between 6 and 10 adjectives, and in two texts there were recorded over 10 adjectives.

Arabic, with 4.27% adjectives/text (versus 5.69 occurrences/text), which denotes a greater degree of repetitiveness: 1.33% repeated adjectives, compared to 1.17% repeated adjectives in the case of speakers of Albanian as their native language, and 1.13% repeated adjectives in the case of speakers of Chinese or Korean as their native language.

## 5. Grammatical accuracy

The analysis of the corpus from the standpoint of the accuracy of syntagms which include qualifying, participial and possessive pronominal adjectives, indefinite (*mult, puțin, tot, fiecare* [much, little, all, every]) and demonstrative adjectives (*acest* [this]) indicates 796 occurrences, consisting of 499 correct uses (= 62.68%) and 297 incorrect uses (= 37.31%).<sup>10</sup> In the written productions of the subjects whose mother tongue is Albanian there is a smaller percentage of errors compared to the overall average: 75.26% correct uses vs. 24.84% incorrect uses, while in the texts of Asian-language and Arabic speakers the ratio between the correct and the incorrect forms is almost 1:1 (speakers of Asian languages: 57.44% correct forms vs. 42.55% incorrect forms; native speakers of Arabic: 54.14% correct forms vs. 45.85% incorrect forms).

The general ratio of about 2/3 correct uses – 1/3 incorrect uses is also encountered in the case of the adjectival uses of possessive, indefinite and demonstrative pronouns, where there are identified 332 occurrences, 224 correct uses (= 67.46%) and 108 incorrect uses (= 32.53%). Albanian speakers and the speakers of Asian languages made fewer mistakes than the average at the level of the corpus, namely: 26.25% and 29.43%, while native Arabic speakers recorded a percentage above the average: 39.04%.

The possessive pronominal adjective, used most often in the first person, in fixed structures like “orașul meu” [“my city”], “țara mea” [“my country”], “după părerea mea” [“in my opinion”], memorized through frequent repetition, but also in the other persons, in combination with various nouns: “iubita ta” [“your sweetheart”], “numele lor” [“their names”], “bagajele noastre” [“our luggage”], “ochii noștri” [“our eyes”], etc., is generally correctly used. Of the 100 occurrences, 91 are correct and 9 are incorrect. The mistakes identified are either agreement errors (“țara meu,” “orașul mea”) or spelling errors (“țara mia”), the latter occurring under the influence of other Romance languages and/or of Romanian pronunciation.

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<sup>10</sup> Lavinia-Iunia Vasîu and Antonela Arieșan speak about the accuracy of using certain adjectives in “Romanian as a foreign language-the complexity of grammar and accuracy in speaking, level A1 (case study),” in *Acta Tehnica Napocensis* (volume of the Conference on Cultural Diversity and Plurilingualism), Series Language for Specific Purposes, 2016, vol. 16, no. 4, U.T. Press, Cluj-Napoca, pp. 233-234, but their study refers to a corpus of oral productions, level A1, restricted to only a few categories of adjectives.

Indefinite pronominal adjectives, which are introduced, like the possessive pronominal adjective, also at the A1 level, are correctly used in 69.20% of the cases and incorrectly used in a proportion of 30.79%, with significant differences at the level of subclasses. Thus, although it appears extremely rarely (6 occurrences out of a total of 796 registered at the corpus level) and only in structures of the type: “în fiecare noapte” [“every night”], “în fiecare zi” [“every day”], *fiecare* [every] is always correctly used. On the other hand, the adjectives *mult* [much] and *puțin* [little], well represented at the corpus level (151 occurrences), are recorded 65 times (= 43.04%) with incorrect forms. In all the 65 cases, we deal with agreement errors: “multe deal”, “mulți muzee”, “puțin dealuri”, “mulți personae”. The last of them, *tot* [all], appears much less frequently than *mult/puțin* [much/little] (45 uses), but registers similar percentages in terms of the ratio of correct uses (57.77%) and wrong uses (42.22%). Of the 19 wrong uses of this adjective, 17 feature agreement errors: “toată râu”, “toate timpul”, “tot personi”, “toți lumea”, while 2 are grouped under the generic name of “other errors”, because they are non-existent forms: “toț lucrurile” or forms with multiple errors (agreement + article): “toatele orași”.

The pronominal demonstrative adjective, the only one among the analysed pronominal adjectives introduced at the A2 level, being therefore a representative structure for this level, has been identified 30 times in the corpus: it was properly used in 15 cases and incorrectly used in the other 15. In the case of this adjective, there have been identified both errors of agreement: “țara acest” and word-order errors: “aceasta casa”. Statistically, the demonstrative adjective is the pronominal adjective with the highest percentage of incorrect uses: 50%, a rather high percentage, from our point of view, for a structure that is specific to the assessed level.

Qualifying and participial adjectives have been analysed both globally and by category of inflection, by types of structures: nominal group, verbal group, and in the structure of degrees of comparison. The global analysis, at the level of the entire corpus, reveals that they are used correctly in a percentage of 59.20% and incorrectly in a percentage of 40.79%. In the written productions of the subjects whose mother tongue is Arabic or an Asian language there are more incorrect than correct forms: 48.95% vs. 51.04% (native speakers of Arabic) and 46% vs. 54% (native speakers of Chinese and Korean). The texts produced by Albanian speakers are more correct grammatically, as adjectives are used correctly in 76% of the cases and incorrectly in just 24% of the cases.

In the case of qualitative and participial adjectives, wrong forms were not generally recorded by subcategories, but on the whole. Thus, language mistakes mean here: **agreement errors**: “vremea este rău”, “flori și copaci verde”, “mare hoteluri”, “dacă suntem fericit”, “oameni normal”, “un frumoasă oraș”, etc.,



**spelling errors**, which may be due to the influence of the mother tongue and other languages familiar to the subjects: “diferente tradiție”, “țare diferite”, “Paris este foarte aglomerate”, “loc este emportant”, “grădina zoologică cel mai mure din toată lumea”, “o persoană din Franța foarte cunosc”, “vezie copaci (instead of “copaci verzi””, “piscina deschisa”, **errors of word order**: “tradițională mâncare este foarte bine”; **errors in the structure of degrees of comparison** (of agreement, word order, spelling): “cel mai verde casă”, “cei mai lung munte”, “ce mai frumos loc”, “vremea este fort cald”, “orașul este mult vechi” (în loc de “foarte vechi”) etc. Although errors have not been processed statistically by subcategories, direct observation allows us to state that at the level of the analysed corpus the errors that are best represented are those of agreement, frequently identified within the nominal group: “animale sălbatici”, “grădini splendid”, but also well represented within the verbal group: “vremea este minunat”, “această casă este special”.

An examination of the corpus from the perspective of flexional subcategories highlight the fact that adjectives with a single form and those with three forms are rarely used. In the case of the former, we have identified, as already stated above, only two adjectives: *maro* and *roz*, used incorrectly, in an enumeration of colours: “Parc Majorelle este foarte frumos, el are floare de toți culoare: verde, roșu, **rose**, **maron** și alb.” Adjectives with three forms are somewhat better represented at the corpus level, totalling 22 occurrences. In the verbal group they are always correctly used; by contrast, in the nominal group, the ratio between the correct forms and the incorrect forms is 50%-50%. They never appear in the structure of the comparative and are registered eight times in superlative structures. While the reduced frequency of adjectives with an inflected form is, to some extent, explicable given the nature of the topic: the *description of a region*, the low frequency of adjectives with three forms, a language structure specific to level A2, is more difficult to explain, as some of them: *mic*, *nou*, *lung* [*small*, *new*, *long*] are appropriate for such a topic.

Adjectives with two flexional forms are well represented at the level of the corpus (90 entries, of which more than half are occurrences of the adjective *mare* [large]) and are generally correctly used. The percentage of incorrect uses registered here is far below the overall average: 24.32% compared to 37.31% (the average number of mistakes at the level of the entire corpus) or 40.79% (the average number of mistakes in the case of qualifying and participial adjectives). Based on data extracted from the written productions, we can say that this structure, specific to the A2 level, has been learned by the subjects, being generally correctly used.

As expected, the best represented at the corpus level are adjectives with four flexional forms, taught and assessed since the A1 level. Despite the fact that

they are considered to be assimilated structures, the number of recorded errors is higher than we might have expected. Thus, out of 350 entries, in 195 of the cases (= 55.71%) these adjectives are used correctly, while in other 155 cases (= 44.28%) they are used incorrectly. Similar averages were obtained for the nominal group: 53.28% correct uses – 46.71% incorrect uses. In the verbal phrase, the average number of mistakes is lower: 36.84%.

As regards the degrees of intensity of the adjective, the analysis of the corpus highlights the subjects' preference for the absolute superlative, built with the adverb *foarte* [very]: "locul este foarte interesant și este foarte frumos" ["the place is very interesting and it is very beautiful"], "Apolonia este foarte veche" ["Apolonia is very old"] or with *extrem de* [extremely]: "flori extrem de frumoase" ["extremely beautiful flowers"]. Except for situations of the type: "persoanele sunt foarte bună", "vremea nu este foarte cald", where the adjective belongs to the structure of the absolute superlative, but there is an agreement error, this degree of comparison is generally correctly used. The recorded errors are isolated and are limited to the incorrect spelling of the adverb: "vremea este fort cald", to the use of *mult/multă* [much] instead of *foarte* [very]: "avem o stradă multe frumoasă", "orașul este mult vechi", or to the use in the superlative of adjectives that do not accept degrees of comparison: "mâncarea este foarte delicious". The latter was not registered as a mistake, because at the A2 level no distinction is made between adjectives that accept degrees of comparison and those that do not have this grammatical category.

The relative superlative is used rarely and only in contexts that show superiority: "cel mai interesant stadion" ["the most interesting stadium"], "cel mai mare oraș" ["the largest city"]. Like in many of the situations described above, the most common mistakes recorded here concern agreement. Sometimes lack of agreement is registered only at the level of *cel/cea/cei/cele*: "muntele cea mai mare", "cei mai mare muzeu", while at other times, only at the level of the adjective: "zona mea este cea mai frumos". In some cases, errors are identified at the level of both flecional components: "panda este cea mai drăguți". besides those cases of lack of agreement, there were also recorded isolated word-order mistakes: "zona .... este mai cele frumoasă" or errors concerning the use of *ce*, invariably instead of *cel/cea/cei/cele*: "ce mai lung munte din Africa", "ce mai frumos loc". Though repeated, the mistakes involving the use of *ce* instead of *cel/cea/cei/cele* are encountered in a single written production, being therefore atypical.

The comparative, restricted to the paradigm of superiority, is very rarely used, having been recorded just 10 times in the entire excerpted corpus. The adverb *mai* [more] is correctly used from the point of view of the word order and form, but the second term of comparison is often not introduced properly:

“castele în orașul meu sunt mai vechi i toț Europa”, “mâncarele sunt mai ieftin decât Beijing”. Taking into account the reduced frequency, the absence of the comparative of equality and that of inferiority and the difficulties in expressing the second term of comparison, we believe that this grammatical category has not been sufficiently assimilated. In its case, it is necessary to conduct other studies regarding the frequency and accuracy of its use in level A1 and A2 corpora, to see if it occurs often enough to be declared a representative structure for level A1 (comparative of superiority) and, respectively, A2 (comparative of equality and of inferiority). If the findings resulting from the analysis of this corpus are confirmed, we consider that the assessment of the structure in question should be postponed until level B1.<sup>11</sup>

## 6. Conclusions

In terms of the range of vocabulary, the findings of the analysis conducted on the corpus indicate an average frequency of 5.52 (qualifying and participial) adjectives<sup>12</sup> with multiple occurrences/text and 4.33 adjectives with a single occurrence/text, indicating a degree of repetitiveness of 1.27%. Transposing these data into criteria from the assessment grid, we could say that for maximum score, an A2-level user should use at least five qualifying and participial adjectives in a written production; four of these should be different, while one can be repeated.

Qualifying, participial, and pronominal adjectives (possessive, indefinite and demonstrative) are used correctly in 62.68% of the cases and incorrectly in 37.31% of the cases. The general ratio of about 2/3 correct uses vs. 1/3 incorrect uses registers, however, a significant variation at the level of subclasses. For example, the indefinite pronominal adjective *fiecare* [every] is always used correctly; the possessive pronominal adjective registers 91% correct uses and 9% incorrect uses; qualifying and participial adjectives with four flexional forms are used correctly in 55.71% of the situations and incorrectly in 44.28%, while demonstrative pronominal adjectives account for 50% correct uses vs. 50% incorrect uses.

The contents which are specific to the A1 level and are, in general, correctly used, albeit with great variations as regards frequency, include: the

<sup>11</sup> The *threshold level* registers this structure among those which should be mastered by the independent user, cf. *Nivel prag pentru învățarea limbii române ca limbă străină*, Victoria MOLDOVAN, Liana POP, Lucia URICARU, Departamentul de Limbă, Cultură și Civilizație Românească Facultatea de Litere, Universitatea “Babeș-Bolyai” Cluj-Napoca și Institutul Limbii Române Ministerul Educației și Cercetării București, Consiliul de Cooperări Culturale, Strasbourg, 2001, p. 242.

<sup>12</sup> If we also take into account possessive, indefinite and demonstrative adjectives, the average of adjectives with multiple occurrences is 9.47 adjectives/level-A2 written production.

possessive pronominal adjective, the indefinite pronominal adjective *fiecare* [every] and the absolute superlative formed with the adverb *foarte* [very]. Adjectives with complex inflection (= four forms): qualifying, participial, indefinite pronominal (*mult, puțin, tot* [everything, little, all]) may be well represented in the corpus, but evince an above-average percentage of errors (between 42.22% and 44.28%). The comparative of superiority is used rarely and with mistakes in the introduction of the second term of comparison: “castele în orașul meu sunt mai vechi i toț Europa”.

The structures that are specific to the A2 level are either absent from the excerpted corpus: the comparative of equality and of inferiority, the relative superlative of inferiority, or underrepresented in the corpus and with a higher percentage of mistakes than the average (= 37.31%): qualifying adjectives with three flexional forms, invariable adjectives and demonstrative pronominal adjectives. An exception concerns qualifying adjectives with two flexional forms and the absolute superlative with *extraordinar de* [extraordinarily], which are generally correct and are frequently used.

The analysis of the corpus according to the criterion of the subjects' mother tongue reveals the fact that users whose mother tongue is Albanian are above average as regards both the range of vocabulary and grammatical accuracy: 5.83 adjectives/text (4.94 not reiterated) and a ratio of 75.26% correct uses vs. 24.84% incorrect uses. Arabic speakers also use more adjectives than overall average, but are more repetitive: 5.69 adjectives/text (4.27 not reiterated, which shows a degree of repetitiveness of 1.33%, the highest level recorded at the level of the corpus) and lower grammatical accuracy: 54.14% correct uses vs. 45.85% incorrect uses. The speakers of Asian languages have a poorer vocabulary in terms of the adjectives they use: 4.08 occurrences/text (3.58 not reiterated), but are less repetitive than those who speak Arabic or Albanian as their mother tongue. From the perspective of grammatical accuracy, the results registered in their case are a little above the results of Arabic speakers: 57.44% correct uses vs. 42.55% incorrect uses.

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## STATISTICAL ANALYSIS OF ROMANIAN AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE PRETEST AND EXAM DATA

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**ABSTRACT.** *Statistical Analysis of Romanian as a Foreign Language Pretest and Exam Data.* In the European Union, linguistic policies have gained an essential role within the European policy in its entirety. In this context, in 2014 we started an experiment with the aim of creating an instrument for analysing the quality of tests of Romanian as a foreign language. The instrument thus created contains a succession of statistics tests including factor structure, internal consistency and convergent validity evidence, IRT and ROC analysis for validation. Our creation reached the point where it successfully fulfills the task of Reading the Mind in the process of learning Romanian, also applicable to other languages. The present article shows the manner in which the authors apply the IRT models. It will demonstrate that the IRT models can help improve test scoring and facilitate the development of superior quality tests in Reading Mind applied to the process of studying foreign languages. In the authors' perspective, the present work has a significant contribution to the applicability and usability of IRT models in educational testing, as the presented results show. Furthermore, the paper brings arguments in favour of utilizing IRT and ROC curve models in common, which leads to the conclusion that the achieved results are important in the process of improving the precision of marking and the manner in which the tests are administered through the adaptive use of discriminating elements pertaining to the testing procedure, which saves time, space and impacts on the number of assigned tests.

**Keywords:** *statistical analysis, language examinations, pretest, IRT model, ROC analysis, quality language tests, reading mind aspects*

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**REZUMAT. Analiza statistică a pretestărilor și examenelor de română ca limbă străină.** În Uniunea Europeană politicile lingvistice au câștigat un rol esențial în cadrul politicii europene în ansamblul său. În acest context, în anul 2014 am demarat un experiment cu scopul de a realiza un instrument de analiză a calității testelor de limba română ca limbă străină. Instrumentul care a rezultat este alcătuit dintr-o succesiune de teste statistice, incluzând *factor structure*, *internal consistency*, *convergent validity evidence*, IRT și *ROC analysis for validation*, acesta ajungând să îndeplinească cu succes rolul de *Reading the Mind* în procesul de învățare a limbii române și fiind aplicabil, de asemenea, în cazul altor limbi. Articolul are drept scop prezentarea modului în care autoarele au decis să aplice modelele IRT. Studiul va demonstra faptul că modelele IRT pot ajuta la îmbunătățirea notării testelor și pot facilita crearea unor teste de o calitate superioară, care să corespundă tehnicilor Reading Mind aplicate procesului de studiere a limbilor străine. Din punctul de vedere al autoarelor, instrumentul prezentat aici aduce o contribuție semnificativă la aplicabilitatea și modul de folosire a modelelor IRT în evaluarea educațională, așa cum va reieși din rezultatele prezentate. În plus, în lucrare se aduc argumente pentru utilizarea în comun a modelelor IRT și *ROC curve*, concluzionându-se că rezultatele la care s-a ajuns sunt importante în procesul de îmbunătățire atât a preciziei în notare, cât și a modului în care se administrează testele, prin utilizarea adaptivă a elementelor discriminative ale procedurii de testare, acest proces generând o economie de timp, spațiu și număr de teste administrate.

**Cuvinte cheie:** analiză statistică, examene de competență lingvistică, pretestare, modelul IRT, analiza ROC, teste de calitate, aspecte reading mind

## 1. Statistical analysis. What it stands (and does not stand) for

Among other major things, the world we live in is one in which language abilities have become vital for our social and economic life. The role of language testing has never ceased to grow, making, in exchange, its way towards the central part of our professional, educational and social life. In this context, the need of trustworthiness has only been placing higher and higher pressure on the language tests and on their providers. However, the domain of language testing was never far behind the trends of progress in sciences and technology, keeping pace with new methods in the field of social sciences, adapting and using instruments of measurement, which allowed language testers to ensure objectivity and fairness, validity and impact of their products. Psychometric analysis started to be used in language testing in the 60s, when the most modern model of language assessment was known as 'structuralist-psychometric'. Associated with the format of test based on

discrete items, this model was given credit for objectivity, reliability and validity (Hawkey: 21). Even if things have changed tremendously in time, McNamara shows that practices adopted at that time remained highly influential (McNamara: 14). Statistical analysis, a significant part of psychometrics, which will be - related to tests of Romanian as a foreign language - the main concern of this study, has seen, in the same period, "the blossoming and refinement of techniques for examining many variables simultaneously" (Bachman 1990: 296). Since those times, the importance and influence of statistical analysis in language testing has constantly grown.

Statistics, "a set of logical and mathematical procedures for analyzing quantitative data" (Bachman 2004: 3), has become a tool without which almost no institution of language testing can imagine working nowadays. An example comes from the Cambridge examinations, in relation with which Geranpayeh says: "Measurement theory and practice are now so embedded in what Cambridge English does that it is hard to think of a single process within which is not impacted by them" (Geranpayeh: 4). Some of these processes are as follows: 1) statistical analysis of objective items, which shows how well an item works and also indicates the problems which need to be addressed. The facility value and the discrimination index are two of the most important aspects to be calculated for each objectively marked item. *Item analysis*, together with its interpretation, is, according to Corrigan and Crump, "a cornerstone in appraising item quality and making decisions concerning the use of items in future live tests" (Corrigan, Crump: 4). The facility value and the discrimination index are population dependent (Relating language examinations: 94). Being related to the bio data of the test takers, a correct calculation of these values will ensure fairness to the test taking population and will vouch the proposed items for the live examinations. 2) While construct comparability between different versions of the tests is based mainly on test specifications, *psychometric comparability* is another aspect which can benefit from statistical analysis (Docherty, Corkill: 11). 3) The *marking and grading* of the tests, as well as the *monitoring of assessors* are also subjected to statistical analysis, which provides proof of objectivity, fairness and consistency. 4) *Interpretation of test results*, based on *grading decisions*, impacts directly on the use of the tests "allowing certificate end users, for example potential employers or universities, to draw appropriate inferences and make decisions where appropriate. This is a central aspect of the testing process and one on which its usefulness hinges" (Elliott, Stevenson: 14). Thus, statistical analysis 'has infiltrated' the domain of language testing to the point where designing items and tests, marking and deciding upon results without the use of this tool has become unconceivable. On condition of a fair and correct use of statistical analysis, this can only have a positive impact on objectivity, fairness, validity and reliability of



examinations. The examinations of Romanian as a foreign language applied at the Department of Romanian language, culture and civilization, Babeş-Bolyai University, benefit now from statistical analysis at all the levels presented above, an aspect which, corroborated with the qualitative aspects of the whole process of assessment, increased their validity and reliability to the point of excellence.

However, language test specialists have often pointed out the danger of overemphasizing the importance of statistical analysis over aspects that are also crucial in all the processes of language testing. Thus, according to Cyril Weir, statistical data do not in themselves generate conceptual labels. We can never escape from *the need to define what is being measured* (italics mine), just as we are obliged to investigate how adequate a test is in operation (Weir: 14). Alderson also draws attention to what assessing language involves, and this is not only the technical skills and knowledge to construct and analyse a test – the psychometric and statistical side to language testing – but also a knowledge of *what language is, what it means to ‘know’ a language, and what is involved in learning a language* (italics mine) as your mother tongue or as a second or subsequent language, what is required to get somebody to perform, using language, to the best of their ability (Alderson: 12). In the end, what we need is, according to Bachman, a balance “between language learning (theories) and measurement in language testing: We language testers thus cannot allow ourselves the delusion that current views of language use and language learning can be ignored because this simplifies the problem of measurement. Nor can we afford the luxury of placing all our confidence in the correctness of our applied linguistic theories, in the hope that the measurement issues will thus evaporate. Progress does not lie in the direction of more sophisticated psychometric analyses of theoretically unjustified tests. Nor will we advance if we ignore fundamental measurement considerations in our striving to capture authenticity in our testing procedures. The challenge will be to address the perennial dilemmas of language testing with both an open mind and a healthy respect for the complexity of the abilities we want to measure, and a continued commitment to utilize the best and most appropriate psychometric theories and statistical tools at our disposal so as to assure that we can be held accountable for the uses we and others make of our tests” (Bachman 1990: 352-3).

## **2. The case of Romanian as a foreign language (RFL)**

The process of assessing RFL started to change, at the Department of Romanian language, culture and civilization from Babeş-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca, around 2005. We could also say that it culminated with the years 2013-2015, when the department intensified the preparations for the ALTE

(Association of Language Testers in Europe) audit. Our department submitted a suit of examinations (A1, A2, B1 and B2) to the audit with the purpose of having the quality of our examinations confirmed and becoming, based on the outcome of this audit, members of ALTE.

The clear and stable structure of the evaluation system at our department, which received its present form after consistent and continuous improvement in the period indicated above, was the incentive for the creation and publication of testing materials, for the constant enhancement of the process of item creation and of that of test administration, in the marking and grading of results and in monitoring of assessors (Vîlcu 2014: passim). All along the way, the teaching system was progressively modelled after the evaluation one and after materials designed at the Department.

The second part of this study will be dedicated to statistical item analysis, with a description of the instruments and procedures we apply in pretesting and in examinations. Consequently, we will exemplify here with only one situation the way in which psychometric analysis is involved in other stages of testing, in our examinations. We will also try to illustrate the challenges that this type of exam data processing placed on assessment of Romanian as a foreign language at our department.

### ***2.1. The constitution of the item bank. The basket method***

The items which get to be actually answered by the student in live examination cannot just get in the exam paper directly from the item writer who produced them. They need to run through a process of validation before being used (Vîlcu 2015: 71-72) and need also to be processed after they have been used in live examinations. In our case, this process was developed as follows:

- based on specifications we had previously designed, a team of item writers prepared a large number of items for all the components of our examinations (listening, reading, elements of communication construction, writing, speaking);
- the items were revised within our work team, with feedback from the members of the team;
- we submitted the items to the analysis of a panel of experts, with two purposes: 1) to have the confirmation of the level for each item of every task we proposed; 2) to collect observations from the experts in order to adjust the quality of the items and of the task input (I am going to present here only the part of level appreciation by the experts, the description of the processing of the observations related to the quality of items is shortly described in Vîlcu 2015: 71-72);

- for having the confirmation of the level of the items, we chose to use the basket method (Manual for relating: 75-77); we selected the members of the panel of experts and we invited them to participate in this project;
- we invited the selected experts to participate in a standardisation workshop we organised at the Department, in order for them to re-familiarise with the CEFR documents and to be presented the new assessment instruments we had devised at the Department;
- we placed the items we had produced in separate documents, for each component, in order, from the simplest to the most complicated (from A1 to B2), without giving any indication on the level we had created the items for or on the number of tasks and items we included for every level; we created a document for the experts in which we kindly asked them to place each of the items of each of the tasks on one level (between A1 and B2; if they considered that there were items more difficult than B2, they could write *more difficult than B2*, without having to further specify a level for these cases); the tasks were numbered in order, from the first to the last in the document, without considering the level they had been created for; we placed an empty box next to each of the items of each of the tasks, where the experts were going to write the level they considered that item was adequate for; we placed one empty box for each task, where the experts could comment on other aspects related to the quality of the task/of all items or some items of the task (e.g. the quality of the text used as input);
- we registered the experts' answers concerning the level of the items in an excel document;
- we processed the appreciation of the level by the experts by calculating the degree of deviation for each item; the deviation was calculated first uni-directionally (identifying the items whose level appreciated by the experts was higher than the one we created the item for); the calculations were performed as follows: if, for example, the initial level, the one proposed by the item creators, was A1 and the expert decided on A2, there was one point of deviation, if the expert decided on B1, then there were two points of deviation, etc.; then, the total of the deviation points was divided to the number of the experts who estimated the level (in the case of some of the items, there were experts who did not express any estimation); if the expert gave an estimation which covered two levels (e.g. A1/A2), then one point and a half of deviation was calculated;
- the deviation was then calculated bi-directionally (identifying the items whose level appreciated by the experts was both below and higher than the one we had created the item for); the evaluations below the initial level and the ones higher than the initial level for the same item were not

compensated; the points of deviation in both directions were summed up and then the total number of point was divided to the number of experts who expressed their opinion in relation to that item (Table 1);

- the revision of the items was performed in accordance with the results from the bi-directional calculation of the deviation; a maximum value of deviation of 0.50 points was accepted; after the revision, the items were included into an item bank, from where they are selected for pretesting; only after confirmation of their quality in pretesting or after necessary revision do these items find their way and their place in live examinations.

**Table 1.** Calculation of deviation for proposed items

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
1		task 1.1	task 1.4	task 1.5	task 2.2	task 2.3	task 2.5	task 3.1
2	Expert 1	A1	A1	A1	A1	A1	A1	A1
3	Expert 2	A1	A1	A1	A1	A1	A1	A1
4	Expert 3	A1	A1	A1	A1	A1	A1	A1
5	Expert 4	A1	A1	A1	A1	A1	A2	A1
6	Expert 5	A1	A1	A2	A2	X	A1	A2/B1
7	Expert 6	A1	A1	A1	A1	A1	A1	A1
8	Expert 7	A1	A1	A1	A1	A1	A1	A2
9	Expert 8	A1	A2	A2	A1	A1	A1	A2
10	Expert 9	A1	A1	A1	A1	A1	A1	A1
11	Expert 10	A1	A1	A1	A1	A1	A1	A1
12			0,1	0,2	0,1	0	0,1	0,35

## 2.2. Challenges for RFL examinations

2.2.1. Romanian as a foreign language has been taught and assessed in Cluj-Napoca and in the rest of the country for decades, to thousands of students yearly. However, a preoccupation for the necessary modernisation and promoting of this domain has been noticed rather in the last years. All along the way of the process of preparation for the ALTE audit, this situation placed us in the position in which we had to adopt and adapt new procedures (e.g. item banking, statistical analysis of the items in relation with bio data, monitoring raters (Vasiu, Arieşan: passim), etc.), to strengthen the relating of assessment to the CEFR or to design new materials, theoretical and practical, to explain the fundamentals of our testing system and also to provide this system with the necessary instruments for

assessment (*Descrierea minimală a limbii române, Manual de limba română ca limbă străină. A1-A2*, numerous and various studies dedicated to the process of teaching and assessing RFL, instruments of assessment - grids, samples of assessed oral and written productions), etc. The main points of reference in the new design of the RFL examinations were the systems created for renowned examinations for other languages and the literature in the field. One of the most problematic instruments to develop for our examinations was the system of statistical item analysis. The specialists in our university needed to familiarise with this new field of analysis and to adapt and/or create sub-systems of calculation perfectly adequate to item analysis in RFL exams. However, the statistical analysis has developed into an ongoing process which applies to our examinations and contributes to the relevance of the results we issue.

2.2.2. A problem which we needed to overcome in the development of a new, modern and relevant assessment system for RFL was the fact that in present, unlike decades ago, we have, at Babeş-Bolyai University, a rather small number of foreign students. We developed the system of statistical analysis based on the results of the students in the programme of preparatory year (language year) due to the fact that they have the longest programme of learning Romanian, covering the levels A1 to B2. In present, we have approximately 120 students per year, who get through all these language examinations. Consulting the specialised literature, we concluded that this number would be considered rather small for relevant results of statistical analysis (Manual for relating: 94). In order to compensate for this shortcoming, we decided on a number of measures to make our results as relevant as possible. Thus, we decided to apply statistical analysis both to the items in the examinations, and the ones used in pretesting. The results of the statistical analysis after pretesting give us the chance to improve our items before introducing them into live examinations. Another solution we found was to combine the quantitative methods with the qualitative ones. We apply questionnaires at the end of every examination and we correlate their results with the ones we obtain from the statistical analysis. A third method that we use is the application of statistical analysis every time an item is used both in pretesting and in examinations. The results that are obtained by the test takers are compared and this way the items get through successive stages of validation. For this procedure, the fact that our group of subjects is rather homogeneous from one year to the next is really helpful.

The efforts we have made to overcome the difficulties we had in creating a system of assessment of RFL in our university were significant. However, they only contributed to making this system valid and highly reliable.

### 3. Materials and Method

#### 3.1. Description of the method

The method employed for collecting data in our research is the test. At the end of a 90-120 hour course the students receive and sit an evaluation testing their acquired knowledge. The target audience is represented by students who attend courses where they are taught Romanian. The instrument for measuring their knowledge of the Romanian language is composed of items that have either the 5 step Likert scale or the dichotomous method as an answer. We used the MS Excel application for collecting data in our statistical analysis, whereas for the statistical processing we used the following softs: SPSS13 (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) for Windows, Statistica 7.

The general hypothesis of the study is the Romanian language test, which is a valid instrument, having the power to accurately discriminate the level of knowledge of the person taking the test.

In the process of validating the battery of tests that has the purpose to identify the level of knowledge of the Romanian language acquired by the candidates, we had to create a statistical procedure that would contain the descriptive analysis of data, Item Analysis, Roc-Curve, and cluster analysis. Our demarche was achieved on basis of the already existent results in the specialized literature provided in this field (Baker, 1992), (Birnbaum, 1968) (Bock, 1972). These authors consider that the analysis of the items represents a collection of statistical procedures which allow the description of the relationship between the items of a test as well as that of the relationship between each item and the overall score. The result of the enterprise is a statistical procedure built with the purpose of validating the test as an assessment and testing instrument of the level of knowledge in the field of the Romanian language as well as the aim of creating clusters of participants at the Romanian language course. The steps of the statistical procedure represent an extrapolation of the created nucleus, as it is defined by (Ellis & Mead, 2004), containing the following steps:

1. The descriptive analysis of the items which emphasize the calculation of the difficulty index or parameter of the items. The difficulty index (*Imran Zafar. 2008*) was used to measure how easy or how difficult each item in our test actually is. The reduced value tending towards 0 of the index of difficulty indicates that the item is difficult (Aiken 1994).
2. The evaluation of the capacity to discriminate between the items. The discriminant parameter has the role to measure the level of knowledge of the persons sitting the test. The discriminant index (*Imran Zafar. 2008*) is strictly connected to the difficulty parameter characteristic of the items. A

low difficulty item is solved by the majority of the students, so the discriminating index tends towards 0. This means that it is poor, but if an item with an increased level of difficulty implies an increased level of knowledge for the student and implicitly the discriminating index tends towards 1, then this means that it is *rich* (Imran Zafar. 2008).

3. The evaluation of the internal consistency of the battery formed by tests which are destined for the evaluation of the level of knowledge of the Romanian language was analysed. This supposes the creation of a series of successive evaluations of both the relationships among items as well as the relationship between items and the global score. The purpose of these evaluations is the selection of the relevant items according to their relationship with the global score. The main criterion for this operation is the value of the Cronbach alfa parameter, which has a variation field of 0 to 1. According to the literature in the field (Crocker, Algina, 1986), a scale can be considered consistent in case the value of the Cronbach alfa index is as close to 1 as possible, the level of 0.70 being accepted, as a convention as the minimum limit (McDonald, R. P. 1999). In our study, we have calculated the Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient with the purpose of determining the reliability of the test batteries destined to the correct identification of the level of knowledge of the Romanian language that each participant had. At this stage we had to apply the test measuring validity and reliability. Through reliability we measured the accuracy, stability and coherence of the test results. The reliability (McDonald, R. P. 1999) is a test which is influenced by the characteristics of the students, by those of the test and also by the conditions in which it is administered, tested and graded. The reliability of a test refers to the measure in which the test is able to produce consistent results (McDonald, R. P. 1999), (Crocker, Algina, 1986). The validity of the test allows us to establish and present the level of adequacy of the given test for the studied area. The internal consistency of the test, measured through split-half method, was found to be good (coefficient Guttman split-half, Spearman-Brown). According to the Spearman-Brown results, the number of test items is adequate, no increase in their number is necessary; however, if this happened, the test reliability would not be significantly modified. (McDonald, R. P. 1999) (Crocker, Algina, 1986). The internal consistency of the test was also calculated and the Rasch analysis was used in order to confirm that the test measures the person's capacity to use Romanian. The **Rasch model** of validation of statistic tests (Bond TG, Fox CM. 2001), (Slinde, J, Linn, R.) was put in practice. The null hypothesis was that all the elements are equally discriminating. The *Two-Parameter Logistic model*

(2PL) was applied, considering two parameters: difficulty and student ability. The result was that the test is composed of simple, moderate and difficult items. In the test there are items which ensure discrimination between the students who answer the questions by chance or knowingly. The result was that the test assesses the language abilities of the persons as a whole.

4. The evaluation of the single dimension of the test through which we checked whether the items which form the test in the Romanian language only cover one dimension, a single latent factor. This basic postulate is known under the term of one-dimensionality or single-dimensionality and is linked to a second assumption, namely that of the local independence of items. According to (Hambleton, Swaminathan, & Rogers, 1991), it is mentioned that one-dimensionality does not strictly refer to the presence of a single dimension, but to the existence of a dominant dimension that influences the performance in a test. This dominant dimension is called ability or, more generally, coverage in the latent factor.
5. We achieved the evaluation of the performance model through the receiver operating characteristic curve (Mason & Graham 2002). The ROC analysis was used with the purpose of checking the power of discrimination that the test had. The result of this test offers us the possibility to conclude on whether the organization of the Romanian language test is a discriminative model or not.

### **3.2. Processed data and results**

In what follows we shall present the results that we obtained in 2013-2014. *The total number of participants is of 195 in the A1, A2, B1 and B2 levels of language testing.*

The descriptive analysis of the data considered in the study offered us an image on the profile of the person who studies Romanian: reason/ purpose, time allotted to studying, sex, profession, nationality. For example, in the study of 2013 applied to the A2 level, the obtained results are as follows:

1. An average number of months allotted to learning Romanian is high for the persons who have the purpose of learning Romanian in order to study here, when compared to the persons who learn Romanian for personal reasons, and ultimately when compared to those people who learn for professional purposes.
2. The persons considered in the study have the average age of 21.96 with a standard deviation of 5.876, 95% CI (20.21; 23.70). The minimum age is 18 and the maximum is 44.



3. The persons who take part in the study allow an average of 20.65 hours of learning Romanian, with a standard deviation of 3.267,95% CI (19.68;21.62).
4. The participants know at least one other foreign language (the greatest majority speaks English), apart from their mother tongue and Romanian, having an average level of foreign language knowledge of A2.

The summary of the results obtained in the descriptive analysis stage for each level is as follows:

Level A1: number of participants 54; medium age: 21,80; more than 50% between 18 and 20 years old; almost 70% men; **occupation:** more than 96% students; **studies:** almost 70% high-school graduates; **mother tongue:** more speakers of Arabic and Albanian; **how long they studied Romanian:** more than 50% - 2 months (160 hours); **why they study Romanian:** more than 85% - for studies; **other known languages:** more than 50% speak another language at intermediate level; out of these, more than 50% speak English.

The scenario of the second part of our statistical study is the following: descriptive analysis with coefficient of difficulty for each item of the test, verification of survey's validation, followed by reliability test. Item difficulty is calculated. The minimum value is 1, the maximum value is 3 for Reading and Listening with the minimum value being 1 and the maximum value being 5, for structural competence (elements of communication construction). The elements with p value over 0.90 and under 0.20 were or are to be carefully revised. Some of them are totally replaced and others are modified. The linguistic abilities of the candidates must be moderate to low, usually speaking. The conclusion, for all the levels, for listening, reading and elements of communication construction is that the difficulty of the items is adequate for the knowledge and competence they are meant to measure. Factor analysis is used in both cases, on data reduction and research and it validates the studied issue, namely Internal Consistency Analysis. The analysis consists of Test Chi-Square, the Anova Test, based on Shapiro-Wilk normality test in order to realize the comparisons imposed by the study (Drugan Tigan 2005). We got the following results:

1. The first step of the statistical analysis consisted of the survey's accuracy verification based on the collected data, approach that imposed the following statistical analysis:

1. A1. Level Listening Test

- 1.1. The Internal Consistency analysis method allowed us to calculate the internal consistency coefficient Cronbach's alpha = 0.882, which indicates a unitary moderate structure of the used tool, but one that is sensitive on the measured characteristics, which can provide a correct overview of the statistical analysis. The internal consistency of the test, measured using split-half method is

good (Guttman split-half coefficient = 0,759, Spearman-Brown  $r = 0,863$ ). Thus, we can observe that the loyalty test slightly changes, according to the Spearman-Brown result for loyalty coefficient. The number of test items is appropriate, it does not impose an increase, but if this happens, the test's loyalty would not change noticeably. At this point we calculated the discrimination coefficients. We calculate the coefficient of discrimination for the items in the same three components of the pre-testing. Therefore, the items with the result poor discrimination are revised.

1.2. The outcome confirms that the survey's questions tended to belong to the studied area. If the current study was re-applied, students' appreciations would indicate a little change compared to this test. The study's hypothesis is unilateral, according to the result of the analysis of different groups and interaction effect with the tool made with Anova (Chi-Square=26.680, p-value=0.000). The Anova test as a tool for validating knowledge or validating individuals' overall test can more accurately differentiate between people who merely guess the answer and those who were ready and had thoroughly learnt for the test. The null hypothesis (There is no limited set of factors which determines the students' level of knowledge) is rejected after the ANOVA test and factor analysis and the alternative hypothesis is accepted. According to this, there is a limited set of factors which determines the validity of the instrument.

1.3. The analysis continued with factor analysis. The first step in such a study is to eliminate an item which shows the correlation smaller than 0.3. Within the study there were no such items. Factor analysis is appropriate for our model, confirmed by the result of the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin test ( $=0.717$ ), which specifies how data variability is caused by the tool.

The results of the stage destined for the identification of item discrimination capacity are the following:

1. the test contains items with a high power of discrimination and also items with a moderate to inexistent power of discrimination;
2. the study concludes that the test can be considered an instrument for verifying the students' knowledge, for a group of students with the same level of knowledge;

The results obtained in the stage of calculating the item difficulty coefficient are as follows:

1. from the analysis of the values of the items difficulty index, we conclude that the majority of the items in the study have the degree of difficulty moderate to easy;
2. the linguistic abilities of the candidates must be moderate to high.

#### 2. The A1 level test for Reading Assessment

2.1. The Internal consistency analysis method allowed us to calculate the internal consistency coefficient according to Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.802$ ,

which indicates a unitary moderate structure of the used tool, but one that is sensitive on the measured characteristics which can provide a correct overview of the statistical analysis. The internal consistency of the test measured using split-half method is good (Guttman split-half coefficient = 0,878, Spearman-Brown  $r= 0,935$ ). For the dichotomous data, the level of validity and fidelity was calculated using Kuder-Richardson (KR20) (*Imran Zafar. 2008*). The result in our study is  $r_{KR20}=0.972$ , which means that the level of fidelity of the test items is high. More exactly, it can find and trace the knowledge of the tested persons in that particular domain. The result of the internal consistency coefficient Kuder-Richardson (KR21) is  $r_{KR21}=0.964$ , which implies that the internal consistency of the items measuring the knowledge of that person is very good. On the basis of the results obtained in this stage, we came to the conclusion that the 20 items which form the test and which are destined to testing the level of knowledge of the Romanian language can be used in the testing of persons who are not speakers of our language. As a result, the test has a high level of reliability, demonstrating that the questions in the test had the tendency to form a unity.

2.2. The outcome confirms that the survey's questions tended to belong to the studied area. If the current study were to be re-applied, students' appreciations would indicate a little change compared to this test. Our study's hypothesis is unilateral according to the result of the analysis of different groups and interaction effect with the tool made with Anova ( $F=4.523$ ,  $p$ -value=0.000). Within this process the Levente  $p=0.000$  test rejects the idea that students answer homogenously. The study continued with the discriminative analysis as a predictor: the test can differentiate between the students who learnt and those who didn't. The Wilks parameter is statistically significant ( $\chi^2=76.202, p=0.000$ ). The analysis goes to show that there is a single discriminative function according to which one can differentiate between the students who learnt and those who did not. In conclusion:

1. the number of items is adequate; if the number of items were increased, the reliability of the test would not be significantly modified.
2. reliability is good: the questions in the test tend to constitute a whole.

The results in the stage destined to identify item discrimination capacity are as follows:

1. if a parallel test were developed with similar elements, the relative scores obtained by the students would reflect a small change in comparison with the present test.
2. the test contains items with a high power of discrimination and also items with a moderate to inexistent power of discrimination;

3. the study concludes that the test can be considered an instrument for verifying the students' knowledge, for a group of students with the same level of knowledge;
4. the items whose discrimination type is *poor item* need to be revised (I1, I5).

The results of the stage destined to calculating the item difficulty coefficient, constituted in accordance with (Ghiselli, Campbell, and Zedek, 1981), are the following:

1. there are 6 items with a low level of difficulty, while the others demand higher abilities for being answered;
2. the linguistic abilities of the candidates must be moderate to low;
3. the elements with  $p$  values of over 0.90 and under 0.20 necessitate careful evaluation (I1, I4, I5, I8-I11, I16, I17).

#### **4. A1 Level Test Applied to Elements of Communication Construction**

**4.1.** The Internal consistency analysis method allowed us to calculate the internal consistency coefficient Cronbach's alpha = 0.902, which indicates a unitary good structure of the used tool, but one that is sensitive on the measured characteristics. This can provide a correct overview of the statistical analysis. The internal consistency of the test, measured using split-half method is good (Guttman split-half coefficient = 0,818, Spearman-Brown  $r = 0,901$ ). The conclusion is that the test exhibits a high level of reliability, which means that the questions in the test have the tendency to form a whole. The students who answered correctly at a given question have more chances to answer other similar questions in the same correct way. If a parallel test were created with similar elements, the relative scores of the students would show a slight change when compared to the given present test.

**4.2.** The outcome confirms that the survey's questions tended to belong to the studied area. If the current study was re-applied, students' appreciations would indicate a little change compared to this test. Our study's hypothesis is unilateral, according to the result of the analysis of different groups and interaction effect with the tool made with Anova (Chi-Square=11.842,  $p$ -value=0.000). The Anova test as a tool for validating knowledge or validating individuals' overall test can more accurately differentiate between people who guess the answer and those who were thoroughly prepared and had learned for test in a serious manner. The null hypothesis (There is no limited set of factors which determines the students' level of knowledge.) is rejected after the ANOVA test and factor analysis, so that the alternative hypothesis is accepted. According to this, there is a limited set of factors which determines the validity of the instrument.

**4.3.** The analysis continued with factor analysis. The first step in such a study is to eliminate an item which shows the correlation smaller than 0.3. Within the study there were no such items. Factor analysis is appropriate for our model, confirmed by the result of the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin test ( $=0.303$ ), which specifies how data variability is caused by the tool. The validity of instrument in case of Elements of Communication Construction is as follows:

- the test contains simple, moderate and difficult items; the correct response to items necessitates a medium to high level of knowledge;
- from the analysis of the values of the items difficulty index, we conclude that the majority of the items in the study have the degree of difficulty moderate/optimum; there is a small percentage of difficult items and a small percentage of easy items;

The results obtained in the stage destined to identifying item discrimination capacity are:

1. the test contains items with a high power of discrimination and also items with a moderate to inexistent power of discrimination;
2. the study concludes that the test can be considered an instrument for verifying the students' knowledge, for a group of students with the same level of knowledge;

The results obtained in the stage aimed at calculating the item difficulty coefficient, constituted in accordance with the findings of (Ghiselli, Campbell, and Zedek, 1981), are the following:

1. the test contains simple, moderate and difficult items; the correct response to items necessitates a medium to high level of knowledge;
2. from the analysis of the values of the item difficulty index, we conclude that the majority of the items in the study have the degree of difficulty moderate/optimum, and there is a small percentage of difficult items and a small percentage of easy items as well.

The following step in the statistical analysis is aimed at applying the Roc-Curve test with the purpose of checking the power of discrimination of the test. The result of this Roc-Curve test offers us the possibility to conclude whether the organization of the Romanian language test is a discriminative model or not. In the case of the A1 level test we have provided the following interpretation according to the results offered by statistical analysis: the test presents a high level of reliability, which demonstrates that the questions within the test have the tendency to form a unitary whole. The students who answered one question correctly had more chances to answer other questions in the same way. If a parallel test were created with the help of similar elements, the students' relative scores would exhibit a slight change when compared to the present test. The obtained results in the case of the A1 level test are the following:

- For listening: the studied model is a discriminative one that is perfect for 100% of the cases, so random guessing would register an AUC of approximately 0,247.
- For reading: the studied model is a discriminative one perfect for 100% of the cases, so random guessing would register an AUC of approximately 0,877.
- For elements of communication construction: the studied model is a discriminative one perfect for 100% of the cases, so random guessing would register an AUC of approximately 3.241.

The fourth stage is dedicated to cluster analysis. **Cluster analysis (hierarhical and k-means method)** is applied in order to determine if there are differences between groups of students with different scores. The grades of the students were used as a variable. The conclusion of the study is that the indicators which were included in the study can be considered important for determining if a student has or does not have a certain level in using Romanian appropriately.

**The last step is dedicated to the Rasch model, (Bond TG, Fox CM).** The Rasch model of validation of statistic tests was used in order to verify the results obtained through the above-mentioned statistical procedure. The null hypothesis was that all the elements are equally discriminative. The *Two-Parameter Logistic model* (2PL), considering two parameters: difficulty and student ability, was applied. The result was that the test is composed of simple, moderate and difficult items. In the test there are items which ensure discrimination between the students who answer the questions by chance or knowingly. The result was that the test assesses the language abilities of the persons.

**According to the results,** the tests contain items with a high power of discrimination and also items with a moderate to inexistent power of discrimination. The analyses conclude that the tests can be considered to be appropriate instruments for assessing the candidates' knowledge and competences.

The above-mentioned test was applied also to testing the A2, B1 and B2 levels of language. The obtained results suggest that the tests have a high level of reliability, a validity that proves that the questions in the test had the tendency to form a whole. The students who answered one question correctly had the chance to answer more questions correctly. If a parallel test were created with the help of similar elements, the relative scores of the students would present a slight change when compared to the present test.

## Conclusion

Developing a test that is perfect to assess the level of knowledge in the field of foreign language study is the impossible objective of anyone who is in the position of the evaluator. The statistical procedure we created gravitated

around the difficulty index and the discriminative nature of items within the test. The purpose of the statistical procedure presented in the given material is the significant improvement of the quality of exams that identify the level of knowledge of the Romanian language.

This article creates a general representation of the necessary stages to develop batteries of tests destined to test the levels of mastering foreign languages. The correctly written tests are those that have the role to basically read the mind. This is to say that we need to identify and determine whether the representation of a complex system of words and rules in one single brain of a student is sufficiently similar with a representation of the same system in other brains of other students. Such tests can be viewed as an instrument of checking the knowledge of students belonging to a group that has the same level of knowledge, the same way of thinking.

More limitations would restrict the generalization of our results. First of all, the psychometrical instrument created in this study has carefully selected items, so that in the future we intend to render it better in the domain of functional aspects meant at identifying aptitudes and abilities in order to inform and create a diagnose or in order to predict the performance of individuals applied to real tasks assigned to the participants of this test. The future studies in this domain might eliminate this shortcoming. In the following years, re-applying the batteries and applying statistical analysis as it is presented in this article would aim at refining the instrument in order to obtain a higher level of accuracy in the process of evaluating the level of knowledge and mastering of the Romanian language, irrespective of the mind mapping of each participant.

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## THE CALCULATION OF CUT OFF SCORE IN ROMANIAN AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE PRETEST AND EXAMINATIONS

DINA VÎLCU<sup>1</sup>

**ABSTRACT.** *The Calculation of Cut off Score in Romanian as a Foreign Language Pretest and Examinations.* While our educational and professional lives have been deeply influenced by our language abilities, companies and institutions rely more and more on formal evidence of these. Thus, organisations issuing language certificates have a great responsibility, related to the quality of the tests that they apply and the validity and reliability of the examinations. An essential element in this whole process is the cut off score, which needs to be set in relation with the purpose of the examination, the structure and the input of the test and the characteristics of the test taking population. The calculation of the cut off score in relation with these factors became central to the examination process for Romanian as a foreign language at Babeş-Bolyai University. The way in which this is set was decided in preparation for the auditing process with ALTE (the Association of Language Testers in Europe), an audit which our suit of examinations passed successfully. We apply the method of contrastive groups, based on the expertise of the test takers' teachers and on the students' results for every component of the examination and of pretest. Thus, the limit of passing/failing an examination is not set beforehand and just applied to each examination, all relevant factors being, instead, considered. The procedure we implemented for the calculation resulted in a higher reliability of the test takers' results and also of the tests in the long term.

**Keywords:** *language examinations, pretest, test component, cut off score, contrasting groups, test takers, bio data, data processing.*

**REZUMAT.** *Calcularea scorului cut off în pretestările și examenele de română ca limbă străină.* Parcursul educațional și viața profesională ne sunt profund influențate de abilitățile noastre lingvistice, în același timp, diverse companii și instituții bazându-se tot mai mult pe dovezi formale ale acestora. Organizațiile care emit certificate lingvistice au, astfel, o responsabilitate foarte mare, legată de calitatea testelor pe care le aplică și de validitatea și fiabilitatea examenelor. Un element esențial în tot acest proces este scorul *cut off*, care trebuie să fie stabilit în

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relație cu scopul examinării, cu structura și cu inputul testului, ca și cu caracteristicile candidaților. Calcularea scorului *cut off* în relație cu acești factori a devenit un element central al procesului de examinare a românei ca limbă străină la Universitatea Babeș-Bolyai. Felul în care scorul *cut off* este stabilit a fost decis în cadrul procesului de pregătire pentru auditarea examenelor noastre de către Asociația Testatorilor de Limbi din Europa (ALTE), un audit pe care seria noastră de examene l-a trecut cu succes. Aplicăm metoda grupurilor contrastive, care se bazează pe expertiza profesorilor ce le predau candidaților, ca și pe rezultatele studenților obținute pentru fiecare component al pretestării sau al examinării. Astfel, limita la care un anumit examen se trece sau se pică nu este stabilită dinainte și aplicată fiecărei examinări, toți factorii relevanți fiind, în schimb, luați în considerare. Procedura pe care am implementat-o pentru a calcula scorul *cut off* are ca rezultat o mai mare fiabilitate a rezultatelor obținute de către candidați și, de asemenea, a examenelor pe termen lung.

**Cuvinte-cheie:** *examene de competență lingvistică, pretestare, component al testului, scor cut off, grupuri contrastive, candidați, date personale, procesare de date.*

## 1. The relevance and value of cut off score calculation

The essential role of correctly determining the cut off score in a language examination can only be understood in direct relationship with the importance that language tests and their results have received in our educational, professional and social lives. In so many cases, test takers sit for an examination because the certificate they might obtain is necessary for their studies, for their job or for a dramatic change in their life, like moving to a foreign country. In these conditions, the responsibility of the test providers cannot be enough emphasized (Bachman, Palmer 1996: 99; Principles of good practice: 5; Spolski 2008: 299).

According to the Manual for *relating language examinations to the CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment)*, “the crucial point in the process of linking an examination to the CEFR is the establishment of a decision rule to allocate students to one of the CEFR levels on the basis of their performance in the examination” (p. 11). A formal representation of this decision rule is given in the cut off scores, which define, according to Kane (Kane et al. 1999: 6) “the boundary between adjacent performance categories”. Anticipating the presentation of the way in which the cut off score is calculated for the examinations of Romanian as a foreign language (RFL) at the Department of Romanian language, culture and civilization, Babeș-Bolyai University, I will specify that in the case of our suite of examinations the cut off score we need to determine will make the difference between pass or fail within the level, the examinations being already conceived in accordance with and corresponding to the CEFR levels A1 – B2.

The limitations which a state educational system can impose on the calculation and decision over the cut off score might often function as a rigid point of reference, failing to consider a number of variables which result from the possible - or rather probable - differences from a class of test takers to the next in terms of population characteristics, syllabus followed, teaching methods, priorities, etc. The application of an inflexible, often arbitrarily pre-established cut off score (5 out of 10 in the Romanian system) might impact negatively on the reliability of the test, on decisions taken based on provided results and on the validity of the whole testing procedure. However, even functioning in the interior of an official educational system such as the Romanian one, the limitations mentioned above can be accommodated through the choice and the rigorous application of a method for setting the cut off score, followed by a method of corroborating the calculated cut off score with the official pass mark, a process which will be demonstrated further in this study.

As the literature in the domain reveals, the way to decide upon the cut off score for an examination is to get through a process of standard setting, by choosing one of the available methods and following its procedures. As Kaftandjieva points out (Kaftandjieva 2010: 10) “standard setting does not exist objectively. /.../ Standard setting is simply a summary of interpretations, opinions, beliefs of one or more individuals, authorized for one reason or another (professionalism, official position or at random), to serve to set the cut scores, which at a later point will be used as the basis for interpreting the test results.” Since the process of standard setting has a profound subjective dimension (Horn et al. 2000: 3; Cizek 2001: 266; Kaftandjieva 2010: 10), what we need, in order to make it as reliable as possible, is the “proper following of a prescribed, rational system of rules or procedures” (Cizek 1993: 100) or, in other words, “well-conceived methods for setting performance standards, implementing those methods faithfully, and gathering sound evidence regarding the validity of the process and the result” (Cizek 2004: 46-47 apud Kaftandjieva 2010: 10). The choice of a particular standard setting method (in our case, contrasting groups), the selection of the participants in the panel of experts, the strict or justifiably adapted implementation of the indicated proceedings are all steps in the process and will be shortly presented in this study.

## **2. Method and methodology**

### ***2.1. Requirements of the standard setting method***

Contrasting groups is an examinee-centred standard setting method. In order to apply it, two types of information about each test taker are necessary:

- the person’s test score;
- a judgment of the adequacy of the test taker’s knowledge and skills (Livingston & Zieky 1982: 31).

According to Livingston & Zieky (1982: 31), the judgments used in this method should meet the requirements below, the presentation of which is completed with the modalities in which we answered them in the case of the RFL examinations:

- *The judgments must be made by persons who are qualified to make them.* In our case, the persons selected for being part of the panel of experts are teachers and collaborators of the Department, specialized in teaching and assessing Romanian as a foreign language. Besides being very familiar with the examinees' linguistic knowledge and skills, the experts need to understand extremely well the level of the test which the candidates take. These features are vital for the adequate setting of the cut off score for a particular examination and the effectual accomplishment of this purpose depends on both aspects in equal measure.
- *The judgments must concern the knowledge and skills which the test is intended to measure.* Answering this requirement is quite challenging. In Livingston & Zieky (1982: 33) we find the example of teachers who, being asked to judge their students' skills in English composition, might let themselves influenced by the students' understanding of literature, for instance. In our case, the session of standard setting is organized for each of the skills and components which are part of the pretest and of the examinations (listening, reading, speaking, writing, elements of communication construction), for the levels A1-B2. This helps the experts focus on one particular skill at a time, without being distracted or influenced by various factors. We consider that the organization of the standard setting session for each component of the examination separately instead of the exam as a whole contributes to answering this second requirement of the process.
- *The judgments must reflect the test takers' skills at the time of testing.* Only in this way the estimation made by the members of the panel will justifiably corroborate with the live exam results obtained by the test takers. Our sessions of standard setting are always organized prior to the administration of each pretest and examination. This process is usually accomplished just days before the pretest and the examination, ensuring the appreciation of the test takers' skills at the time of testing.
- We consider as a way to validate our results the calculation of the cut off score also for the process of pretesting. The pretesting is applied to the same population (with a possible but not large variance in number) only days before the actual examination (needless to say, with the use of totally different tasks and items from the ones administered as part of the examination). The procedure of standard setting is applied twice, first in comparison with the results from pretesting, then in comparison with the results from the examination, for two reasons: 1) in order to have an

estimation of the cut off score before the tasks are introduced, in the next examination session (during one of the following academic years), in a live exam; 2) in order to be able to compare the results obtained after pretesting in one year with the results obtained after examination in one of the following years, so that the consistency of the cut off score can be confirmed.

- *The judgments must reflect the judges' true opinion.* Livingston & Zieky (1982: 33) give the example of teachers whose judgment might be influenced by different factors, like the idea that their estimation could be used to judge the value of their teaching. This is why the judges need to be explained as well as possible the purpose of standard setting and their essential contribution to the successful accomplishment of the process.

## **2.2. Standardisation**

The above presentation of the requirements concerning the judgments involved in the process of standard setting through the method of contrastive groups reveals also how important the role of the experts who are members in the panel is in the whole process. The selected experts also need to understand the responsibility of their involvement in the standard setting process and, before taking a final decision on the use of this method, both the coordinator of the process and the experts selected need to be sure that they meet the corresponding requirements. As far as the RFL tests are concerned, the experts selected for the standard setting process are characterized by the following features:

- they are qualified and/or experienced persons in teaching and assessing Romanian as a foreign language;
- they are familiar both with the content standards and with the performance standards involved by these examinations and the standard setting session;
- they are familiar, in a certain measure, with the CEFR and the whole RFL teaching and testing system we built based on it;
- they know very well the level of competence, the abilities and the skills specific to the students at the moment they take the test;
- they willingly participate in standard setting sessions and consider that this is a good exercise for themselves and a welcome addition to the testing procedures we apply;
- every time we apply this procedure we make sure that they are in sufficient numbers to provide reasonable assurance that the results would not vary greatly if the process were replicated;
- they are open to discussion and ready to provide valuable feedback on the procedure of standard setting itself and on the materials used during workshops.

A complete process of standard setting could include the stages presented below. It is recommended to develop this set of operations periodically, according to the needs of the experts involved. However, even if not all the stages are developed every time the standard setting process is applied, the coordinator of this activity must adapt and offer the experts the phases they need to get through.

The members of the panel are usually familiar with the CEFR in different degrees, so organising a complete session of familiarisation, as recommended by the Manual, might be indicated, in order to bring everyone, as far as it is possible, to the same or to a very similar understanding of the CEFR and of the assessment instruments. The stages presented below and developed as part of the standard setting process in our department follow quite closely the structure indicated in the *Manual of relating examinations to the CEFR* (p. 35-57).

2.2.1. Preparation for the workshop. The preparation for the familiarization workshop can begin, for reasons of time save and also of pre-familiarisation, before the actual workshop is developed, for example, with some homework. In our case, the participants in the panel were kindly asked to do, before the workshop, the following tasks:

- The participants had to read Section 3.6 from CEFR (*Content coherence in Common Reference Levels*) and Table 1 from the CEFR (*Common Reference Levels: global scale*) and to identify/mark in Table 1 the features which characterise each level, differentiating it from the adjacent ones.
- Having in view the main category of students they work with (the students in the preparatory year), the level B2 and the most frequent situations in which they thought the students would have to use Romanian, the participants needed to answer questions focused on the main components addressed in the workshop: reading and listening (What kind of texts will the students have to read/listen to? What is the purpose for which they will have to read/listen to these texts? Which are the main abilities the students/candidates need to possess in order to successfully accomplish the reading/listening activities?).

The workshop can open with a group discussion on the homework, during which truly interesting ideas and conclusions will most certainly emerge.

2.2.2. Familiarisation with the CEFR. The stage of familiarization included the following activities:

- Self-assessment in two foreign languages. Each expert assessed their own linguistic abilities in two foreign languages. They used Table 2 in the CEFR (*Common Reference Levels: self-assessment grid*) and the abilities to consider were: listening, reading, oral interaction, oral production and

writing. The activity was done individually, the results being subsequently discussed with the whole group. Many interesting characteristics were discovered and discussed. Some ideas which emerged were: the experts often did not choose the foreign language they spoke the best for self-assessment; there were big differences between the abilities manifested for the same language (always a matter of discussion while assessing candidates); the context in which the language had been learned proved to be extremely relevant; the specialization of the participants in teaching and assessing languages became evident due to some specific points they made (e.g. I am at B2 level in writing in French as long as I am offered the format of the document I need to produce – formal letter, e-mail, etc.).

- Receptive skills. Identification of salient characteristics for the levels A1-B2. Table A2 from the *Manual (Salient characteristics: Reception)* was used in order to identify the main features the receptive skills are defined through at the levels A1-B2 (setting, action, what is understood, source, restrictions). While the table also contains level C1, we usually focus on the levels A1-B2, since they are the ones we usually assess with our candidates.
- Qualitative analysis of the CEFR Scales. Listening, Reading, Elements of communication construction. For Listening, two of the illustrative scales provided in the CEFR were used for the workshop: *Overall Listening Comprehension* and *Listening as a member of live audience*. The descriptors were mixed and the participants needed to arrange them in the correct order. The activity was then repeated for Reading, with the CEFR illustrative scales *Overall reading comprehension* and *Reading for information and argument*. We usually choose these scales because they match the most frequent situations in which our candidates would need to listen to spoken productions or to read texts. For Elements of communication construction the illustrative scales *Vocabulary range*, *Vocabulary control* and *Grammatical accuracy* from the CEFR were chosen. After each activity of qualitative analysis of the scales, the results were discussed with the whole group and the essential, most relevant characteristics in each descriptor were identified.
- Reconstruction of the local grids. The set of instruments we use at the Department as a theoretical support for creating tasks and items includes grids for the receptive skills and for the linguistic competence, which we developed based on the illustrative scales in the CEFR. The reading grid has the following components: general description, tasks and strategies, types of texts and contexts, characteristics of the written text. The descriptors were elaborated for the levels A1-B2. The benefit of using this kind of local instruments during the workshop comes from the fact that



the participants become more familiar with the structure and the characteristics of the tests applied locally, having, at the same time, the possibility of correlating them with the CEFR. A group discussion following the use of these instruments can reveal appreciation of the participants and suggestions for the improvement of the material. During the workshop presented here, the following points were discussed:

- general description, level B1: how exactly we could incorporate in items elements which could reveal the fact that the candidate can identify the arguments and can understand the main conclusion in clearly structured argumentative texts;
- tasks and strategies – descriptors to add to the grid: level A1: the test takers' capacity of identifying anaphoric and cataphoric references; the capacity of understanding detailed information; level B1: the capacity of summarising information for revealing a conclusion;
- types of texts and contexts, level B2: to include the text of a scientific nature;
- characteristics of the written text, level A1: to include the use of punctuation.

The activity was repeated for Listening. The categories in our grid are: general description, tasks and strategies, types of texts and contexts, characteristics of the recorded text.

In order to re-familiarise with the content regularly tested within the component Elements of communication construction, the participants were presented with the detailed specifications of grammar and vocabulary of the examinations.

2.2.3. Training for standard setting. Illustration. In preparation of the illustrative stage of the training, the *Content Analysis Grids* in the *Manual* (Section B1: *CEFR Content Analysis Grid for Listening & Reading*) was used in order to present and describe samples of the Reading and Listening components. In our case, information on the tasks, input texts and items in the examinations are usually provided. A document is assembled for illustrating the level or levels which need to be illustrated. The participants are given time to study the task samples and the grid and to discuss the elements which characterise the component at each level. As for all the other stages of the process of preparation for setting the cut off score, we normally try to relate every activity to the examinations our test takers sit for and to their specific needs in relation to subsequent use of Romanian as a foreign language. Once again, the worksheets used for this stage give the experts the occasion to discuss the contexts the test takers need to show ability in, the communication themes they are expected to meet and get involved with, the communicative tasks, activities and strategies and also the text types the candidates are expected to be able to handle.

Unlike other languages (English, French, German, etc.), no exemplary samples for different skills and levels are available for Romanian. Following consultation with experts, we provided samples in the form of a text with the corresponding task and items.

As indicated in the *Manual* (p. 49), the activity started with the actual solving of the tasks by the participants, whose answers were confronted with the key. The participants then gave their estimation of item difficulty. Their estimations were registered and compared and the differences which resulted were discussed and clarified.

2.2.4. Training for standard setting. Controlled practice and individual assessment. These two stages will be presented here together because the activities they included are the same, the difference being given by the involvement of the coordinator. The worksheets prepared for these stages of the training for standard setting contained: the task (in this case, multiple choice), the input text, the items, a box with numbers of the items for the experts to write their answers, and an adaptation of Form C5 from the *Manual*: a table with four columns (1. the number of each item, 2. the CEFR level the expert attributed to the item, 3. the operationalised descriptor and 4. observations – this last column was meant for notices related to the quality of the item, its clarity, its connection with the part in the text it relates to in order to be solved, etc.).

The sequence of activities and the principles applied for working on every worksheet were as follows:

- The experts were allowed to use plus levels. Even if we do not include in our tests tasks or items for plus levels, the experts could use them in the appreciation of the items first of all because they sometimes felt they could not decide for one or the other of the levels, but also because we considered that the results of the analyses would be more relevant and closer to the real appreciation of the experts.
- For each component approached here (reading, elements of communication construction and listening), there were three phases, organised according to the instructions in the *Manual*: Illustration (for which we chose an exemplary task from the item bank); Controlled practice (for which we chose 4 tasks, one for each level we were interested in, without any mentioning of this approach to the experts) and Individual Assessment (for which we chose three tasks of different levels).
- The task was first solved by the experts individually and then their answers were compared to the key provided by the coordinator.
- The experts attributed individually a level to each item of the task. The options of the experts were written in a table and compared. For each item, a difference in appreciation of two levels was permitted for the first

two phases (Illustration and Controlled Practice). Anyway, the differences in the level attributed were discussed and explained. For Phase 3 (Individual Assessment), according to the indications in the *Manual* (p. 50), a spread of results of no more than one and a half levels was targeted. In case there were greater differences, the results were discussed with the whole group and a new round organised for the task. Then the results were represented in graphs. Each interval in the graph represents half a level: 0,5 – below A1; 1 – A1; 1,5 – A1/A2; 2 – A2; 2,5 – A2/B1; 3 – B1; 3,5 – B1/B2; 4 – B2; 4,5 – B2/C1.

- The experts tried to figure out the operationalised descriptor for each of the items, following the categories in the descriptive grid (general description, tasks and strategies, types of texts and contexts, characteristics of the written text).
- The experts wrote observations on the task and the items.
- There was a group discussion on the results.

2.2.5. Example. In case of Worksheet 13 (Illustration: Reading – Multiple choice; level B1), the results were as follows (Table 1 and Graph 1 below):

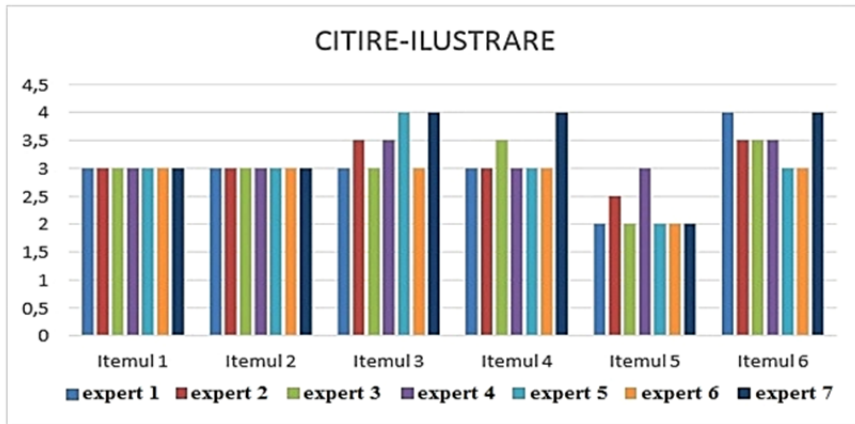
- Solving the task: There was one mistake made by one expert, due to lack of attention, in item 6; no discussions were necessary on the matter.
- Level attributed to the items: Maximum difference among the experts: one level for four of the items;
- The operationalised descriptors were identified in relation with the grid for Reading developed at the Department;
- Some of the qualitative observations related to the items were: item 2: the tense of the sequence of sentences should be present, not past, to be closer to the input text; item 3: would be better replaced because the correct answer depends on the answer to item 2; there were also general observations related to descriptors possible to be added in the descriptive grid (expressing option, consequence; rephrasing; paraphrasing; identifying reference; processing of scientific text).

Once the standardization process is closed, it can be considered that all the members of the panel have the same or a very similar understanding of the levels in the CEFR, of the structure and objectives of the test tasks and also of the process of item writing. The following stage, of standard setting, can now begin. As the real target of the whole process described so far in this study, it needs to be organized very carefully, starting with the preparation of the materials and finishing with the registration and processing of the results. The standard setting method which we chose to use (the contrasting groups method) will be presented below, together with considerations related to the particular case of our examinations.

**Table 1 and Graph 1**

**II. Training pentru standard setting. Citirea  
Etapa 1: Ilustrare**

	expert 1	expert 2	expert 3	expert 4	expert 5	expert 6	expert 7
Itemul 1	B <sub>1</sub>	B <sub>1</sub>	B <sub>1</sub>	B <sub>1</sub>	B <sub>1</sub>	B <sub>1</sub>	B <sub>1</sub>
Itemul 2	B <sub>1</sub>	B <sub>1</sub>	B <sub>1</sub>	B <sub>1</sub>	B <sub>1</sub>	B <sub>1</sub>	B <sub>1</sub>
Itemul 3	B <sub>1</sub>	B <sub>1</sub> /B <sub>2</sub>	B <sub>1</sub>	B <sub>1</sub> /B <sub>2</sub>	B <sub>2</sub>	B <sub>1</sub>	B <sub>2</sub>
Itemul 4	B <sub>1</sub>	B <sub>1</sub>	B <sub>1</sub> /B <sub>2</sub>	B <sub>1</sub>	B <sub>1</sub>	B <sub>1</sub>	B <sub>2</sub>
Itemul 5	A <sub>2</sub>	A <sub>2</sub> /B <sub>1</sub>	A <sub>2</sub>	B <sub>1</sub>	A <sub>2</sub>	A <sub>2</sub>	A <sub>2</sub>
Itemul 6	B <sub>2</sub>	B <sub>1</sub> /B <sub>2</sub>	B <sub>1</sub> /B <sub>2</sub>	B <sub>1</sub> /B <sub>2</sub>	B <sub>1</sub>	B <sub>1</sub>	B <sub>2</sub>



**2.3. Standard setting**

The contrasting groups method is based on the idea of dividing the test takers into two groups, one of which will be considered qualified and the other unqualified. The decision will be taken on the basis of judgments of their knowledge and skills, made by a panel of experts. Livingston & Zieky (p. 35) consider that a choice for determining the passing score would be to place the limit between the two categories at the point where there are just as many qualified test takers as unqualified. This solution would be adequate especially if examinees from all the score range possible for the test are selected. After the procedure has been performed, the proponents of this method recommend a stage of “smoothing” of the data (p. 36-40), since the percentage will not increase steadily from one level to the next. However, we chose to adopt a more reliable procedure from the start, the one recommended in the *Manual* (p. 67-68), of constructing decision tables for several cut-off scores.

Table 6.4 below, from the *Manual* (p. 68) shows an example for setting the standard for the levels B1 (or lower) and B2 (or higher), for a group of 400 students, in relation with a test containing 50 items. The low scores (up to 20) and high scores (from 28 on) are taken together; the other scores are displayed separately, these representing the possible cut off scores which will be calculated (Table 6.5 below).

**Table 6.4: Frequency Distribution Corresponding to Figure 6.1**

Score	B1	B2
0–20	63	9
21	5	2
22	1	2
23	1	6
24	0	8
25	4	14
26	1	16
27	4	8
28–50	9	247

**Table 6.5: Decision Tables for Five Cut-off Scores**

Classified as:	Cut-off = 21		Cut-off = 22		Cut-off = 23		Cut-off = 24		Cut-off = 25	
	B1	B2	B1	B2	B1	B2	B1	B2	B1	B2
Below cut-off	63	9	68	11	69	13	70	19	70	27
Cut-off or higher	25	303	20	301	19	299	18	293	18	285
Total	88	312	88	312	88	312	88	312	88	312
% misclassifications	8.5		7.8		8.0		9.3		11.3	

For each cut off score the number of misclassified students is calculated and the one where the misclassified are the least numerous will be the cut off score. Thus, in the case presented above, according to Table 6.5, the cut off score will be 22.

Given the fact that we chose to calculate the cut off score for each test component and that we grant a total of 20 points for each of these components, we construct decision tables between the limits of 8 and 12. If the number of misclassified students is the same for more than one cut off score, resulting, thus, in two possible scores, we decided to choose the one which is the closest to 10, half the number of points which can be awarded for a test component. After calculating the cut off score for each component, in the case of the examinations we aggregate the results and obtain the cut off score of the examination for that particular test and for that session of administration, adapting, thus, as much as possible to the test taking population through the consideration of all the elements involved: basically the structure and estimated difficulty of the items, on the one hand, and the characteristics of the test takers, on the other hand. The cut off score is situated at one of the values between 46 and 54, which is equivalent to 5, the mark specified in the law of education as the passing mark for an

examination in the Romanian educational system. We do not aggregate the cut off scores from all the components in the case of pretesting because the components applied in pretesting might not be administered in exactly the same combination for a future live examination. Their items are submitted to modifications after the results obtained by the candidates are statistically processed, and included into an item bank from which they will be selected for live examinations.

An element which increases reliability of the method we chose is the fact that we include in the calculation of the cut off score not only a representative proportion of the test takers, but actually all of the participants in the case of pretesting and at least 90% in the case of examinations. This representativeness is made possible by the fact that currently we have a rather reduced number of test takers for every session of pretesting and of examination (about 120). This aspect is seen, from a statistical point of view, as a shortcoming, since the relevance of statistical calculations grows with the number of subjects involved. In the case of our examinations, the rather reduced number of participants allows us to involve all or almost all of them in our calculations, maximizing, thus, the relevance of the results and, consequently, of the cut off score.

#### ***2.4. Advantages and disadvantages of the contrastive groups method***

“There is no one method that is best for all testing situations” (Livingston & Zieky 1982: 53). Judging the particular case of our suite of examinations, the application of the contrasting groups method has advantages and disadvantages. They come from the characteristics of the method itself, but also from the specific situation of our examinations. The advantages of using this method in general and also in the case of our examinations in particular are the following:

- “...people in our society are accustomed to judging other people’s skills as adequate or inadequate for some purposes – especially in educational and occupations settings /.../ therefore, making this type of judgment is likely to be a familiar and meaningful task.” (Livingston & Zieky 1982: 31); the teachers and collaborators of our department, involved as experts in the standard setting procedure, are particularly accustomed to making judgments on the knowledge and skills of their students, since they need to assess them periodically during the academic year, to give them feedback and to adjust the educational process according to results;
- we had the chance of using the test scores of real test-takers (which cannot be applied for all methods of cut off score calculation): for receptive skills and for elements of communication construction (grammar and vocabulary) we used also the results from pretesting; we could be reasonably sure that the judges would base their judgments on the same qualities of the test takers that the test measures; for productive skills we used results from real examinations, being able to present to the

experts samples of written productions for a large part of the participants in the examinations; the experts being teachers of the candidates whose results were used for the process of standard setting, they had direct access to the students' written productions and were familiar with their capacity of producing oral discourse (Cf. Livingston & Zieky 1982: 53);

- the cut off score derived using this method has “a high degree of stability and adequacy” (Kaftandjieva 2010: 34);
- in the case of our examinations, the experts (one or more) knew very well the capacity of the specific examinees who were classified.

The disadvantages of applying this method and also the modalities in which we tried to compensate for them come as follows:

- the specialized literature registers common practical difficulties in applying this method, like bringing together teachers of students from different centres, schools, different institutions; as far as our examinations were concerned, this was not the case, given the fact that the students whose results were subjected to the standard setting procedure study in the same institution, the Faculty of Letters, and the fact that the teachers are members or collaborators of the same Department;
- the number of judges is usually limited to one for each examinee (Cf. Kaftandjieva 2010: 34); however, in our case, this did not apply – for each examinee, at least two experts and more often more than two experts could emit judgments, have a discussion and agree on a verdict; given the structure of the academic programme the students are enrolled in (our students have 25 hours of general Romanian course per week in the first semester and 15 hours in the second semester, completed with classes of specialized language and culture and civilisation), each group has normally two to four teachers, who get to know the students in a consistent measure; in plus, there is another teacher (or sometimes two teachers per semester) who replaces teachers when they are not available for classes; this person (these persons) also offer(s) extra tuition for students whose results in studying are not as expected to be at certain moments during the course; moreover, they can sometimes be part of the assessment commissions for oral examinations; thus, one, two or three extra opinions are available for deciding on each student during the standard setting session, the number of experts expressing judgments for every student being, normally, between 2 and 4; in case the experts cannot agree on a verdict concerning a student, the main teacher(s) of the group the student is part of emits the final opinion.

Every stage of a language examination process needs to be validated, starting with the test construction and finishing with the standard setting. According to the *Manual* (p. 90) “Validation concerns the body of evidence put forward to convince the test users that the whole process and its outcomes are

trustworthy.” We considered validation very carefully in relation with every stage of the testing process and, as standard setting is a crucial part of the whole testing process, we chose to provide evidence for every step on the way. Without entering into details here, I will just specify that the stage of standardization for cut off score was validated from different points of view: explicitness, practicability and implementation. Intra-judge consistency and inter-judge agreement were also calculated.

### 3. Conclusions

The procedure of standard setting proved very useful for the process of developing and administering examinations at the Department of Romanian language, culture and civilization. The advantages of applying this procedure were multiple and some of them are presented below:

- The most important advantage of the procedure of standard setting is the contribution it has for the quality, validity and reliability of our examinations. Besides offering the basis for cut off score in the case of each examination we apply, this procedure represents a supplementary filter which can confirm the value of our tasks and items or can reveal problems in their quality.
- The session of standard setting proved to be an extremely welcome occasion for the members of the expert panel, employees or collaborators of the Department of Romanian language, culture and civilization, to refresh and improve their knowledge of the Common European Framework of Reference and related documents. This was a very helpful exercise of reflecting on our examinations and proposing solutions for making them better. All the participants were involved in the process, there were numerous discussions on various topics (which determined us to extend the duration of the session with one more meeting) and many valuable suggestions were made.
- The procedure of standard setting was an occasion to discuss with our colleagues newly designed instruments describing the components of listening and reading (illustrative grids with descriptors) and to get feedback on them.
- The session of standard setting represented an occasion for every teacher to reflect on the relationship between the examinations and their teaching methods. This even had implications on the organization of the courses in our Department. The students who came late in the preparatory year and missed a portion of the teaching programme were the most problematic to evaluate, their performance being most of the times extremely fluctuant and unpredictable. We concluded that



situations like these, in which the students need to take an examination without having a sufficient number of hours of study should definitely be avoided and we took measures to accomplish this.

- The first time when we applied the procedure of standard setting, on the occasion of the preparation for the ALTE audit, gave us the opportunity to learn a lot of new things related to assessment, including at the level of data processing, which proved extremely useful in our activity.

The procedure of standard setting became current practice for each of our examinations, proving to be an instrument of great value in the process of quality assurance for our students and bringing more certainty in relation to our work of creating and developing examinations and assessing candidates' language abilities for ourselves.

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## THE ADEQUACY OF THE TEST OF ROMANIAN AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE TO THE TEST TAKERS

ANAMARIA RADU<sup>1</sup>

**ABSTRACT.** *The Adequacy of the test of Romanian as a foreign language to the test takers.* Since the interest in learning Romanian as a foreign language has increased a lot in the past few years, language testers have endeavored to design the most accurate and efficient tests. Thanks to the concerted efforts made by experts in this field, Romanian language testers have succeeded in developing the most up to date tests. The present study is aimed at addressing the issue of the adequacy of the tests of Romanian as a foreign language designed at the Faculty of Letters, Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, established on the content and construct validation employing a qualitative and a quantitative analysis based on questionnaires regarding all sections of the test (listening and reading comprehension, grammar and vocabulary, speaking and writing).

**Keywords:** *examinations, adequacy of the tests, test takers, qualitative analysis, language testers*

**REZUMAT.** *Adecvarea testului de limba română ca limbă străină.* Deoarece interesul pentru limba română ca limbă străină a crescut considerabil în ultimii ani, testatorii s-au specilaizat în crearea celor mai obiective și mai eficiente teste. Grație eforturilor experților în domeniu, testatorii au reușit să relizeze teste standardizate. Studiul nostru analizează adecvarea testelor de limba română ca limbă străină create la Facultatea de Litere, Universitatea Babeş-Bolyai, Cluj – Napoca, stabilind validitatea de conținut a acestor teste din punct de vedere calitativ și cantitativ, în urma interpretării chestionarelor ce au vizat răspunsurile candidaților referitoare la toate secțiunile testului (ascultare, citire, gramatică și vocabular, vorbire și scriere).

**Cuvinte-cheie:** *examinare, adecvarea testelor, candidați, analiză calitativă, testatori de limbă*

The fairness of language assessment has been the subject of analysis and critique in the field of language testing. The main goal of our paper is to address the issue of the adequacy of the tests of Romanian as a foreign language designed at the Faculty of Letters, Babeş-Bolyai.

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Test paper development and research related to the test validity and assessment reliability are the responsibility of the members of the language department. The interest in learning Romanian as a foreign language has increased significantly, as a result language testers improved the quality and the efficiency of the tests.

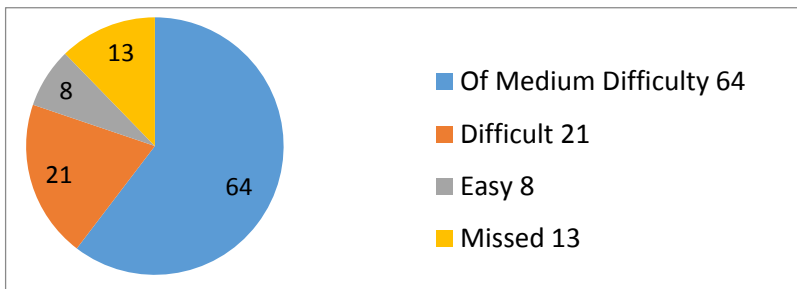
The members of the Department of Romanian Language, Culture and Civilisation, Faculty of Letters, Babeş-Bolyai University have succeeded in designing a prestigious test that responds to the standards of international proficiency testing criteria certified by the Association of Language Testers in Europe (ALTE), successfully passing the auditing process of examinations.

Testing and assessing Romanian language at the Faculty of Letters, Babeş-Bolyai University is done in relation to the CEFR and to the standard European policies. In order to check the validity and the adequacy of these high-stakes tests in what the test takers are concerned, the members of the department used questionnaires that the test takers had to fill in.

The questionnaire consists of 12 questions, plus one extra section for *other comments*. All test takers were asked to fill in the questionnaires. Based on their answers we will measure the adequacy of the B2 examination.

The first question is concerned with an overview of the degree of difficulty of the B2 examination. The test takers were asked to say if overall the exam was *easy/of medium difficulty/difficult* – out of 106 respondents 8 candidates answered easy, 64 participants answered of medium difficulty, 21 of them answered difficult and 13 skipped or missed this question. We can see that out of 106 respondents, 64 rated the test as being of medium difficulty, see the chart below *Overview of the test*.

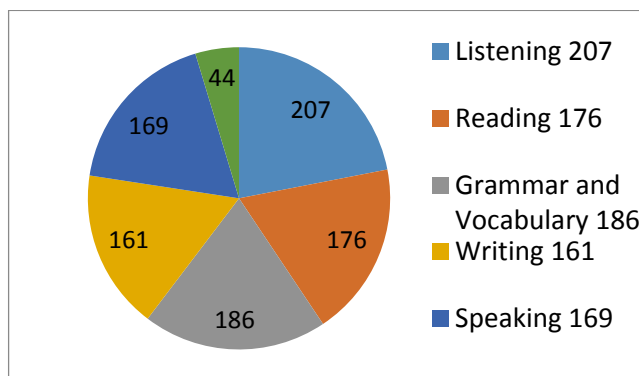
### Overview of the test – Total of 106 respondents



The second task was for the test takers to order the sections of the test (Listening, Reading, Grammar and Vocabulary, Writing, Speaking) having in mind their degrees of difficulty, giving them values from 1 to 5, where 1 means the easiest section and 5 the most difficult one. First of all, we have to mention

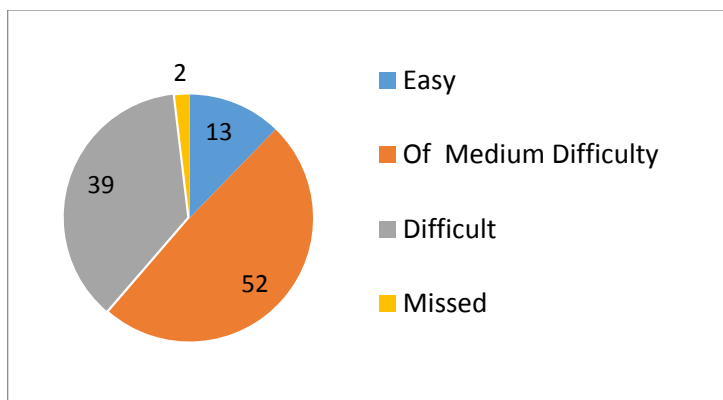
that 44 respondents did not answer correctly the task. Nevertheless, all the other results show that there are not huge differences between each section. As the chart below (*Overview of the test sections*) shows there is a high degree of equilibrium between the sections, as perceived by the test-takers.

### Overview of the test sections



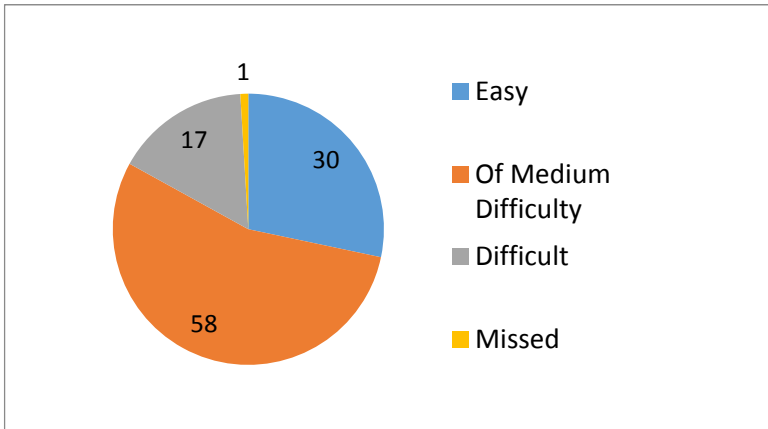
In order to get a closer look to all sections of the examination, the questionnaire contains questions regarding them separately. *How would you rate the Listening section?* is the third question the respondents were asked to answer. As shown in the chart *The Listening section* almost half of the respondents found the listening section as being of medium difficulty, while 13 participants rated the section as easy.

### The Listening Section

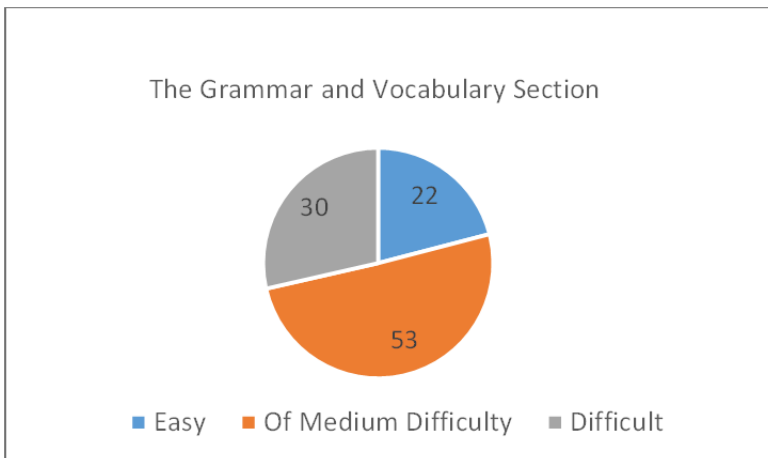


Analyzing the reading section, we obtained similar results. *How would you rate the Reading section?* is the fourth question in our set of questions. 58 respondents rated the section as being of medium difficulty, while 30 rated it as easy, only 17 answers indicated that the section was difficult. See chart below – *The Reading Section*.

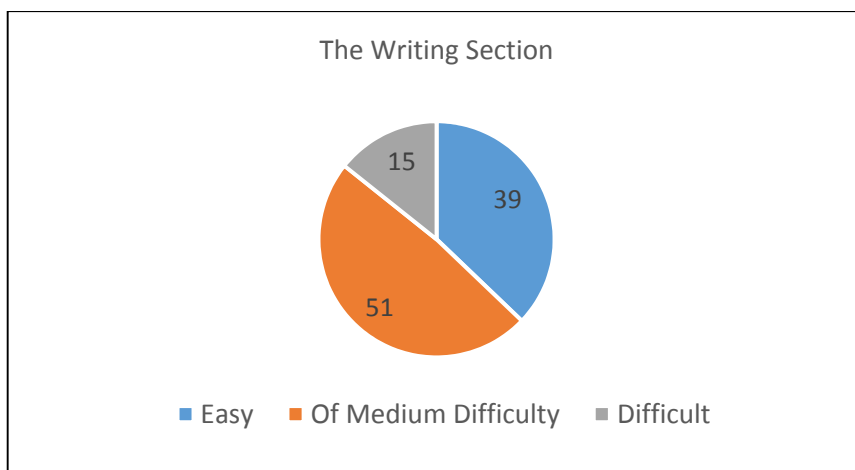
### The Reading Section



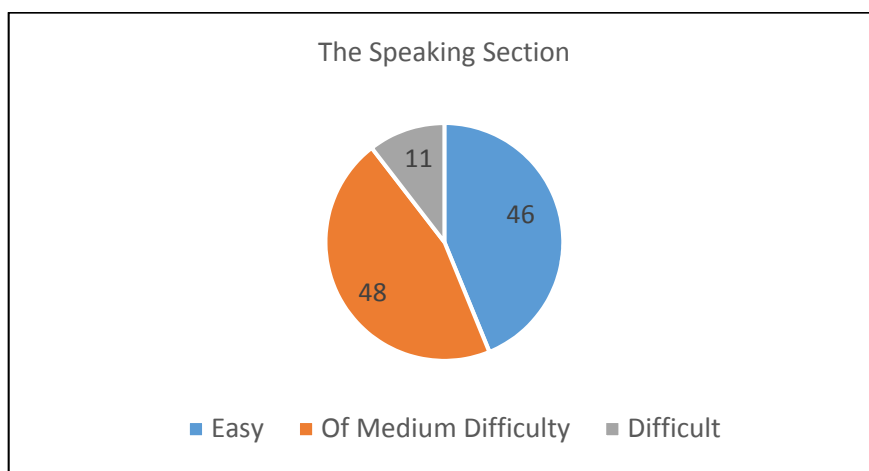
In what the Grammar and Vocabulary section is concerned, the outcome is also relevant. 53 of the responses show that the section is of medium difficulty, 22 show that the section is easy and 30 represents the number of the respondents who found the section difficult, as represented in the chart *Grammar and Vocabulary*.



The answers regarding the writing section are similar to the previous ones. 51 test-takers rated the section as being of medium difficulty, 39 respondents said the section is easy and 15 of them said the section is difficult, as represented in the chart below.

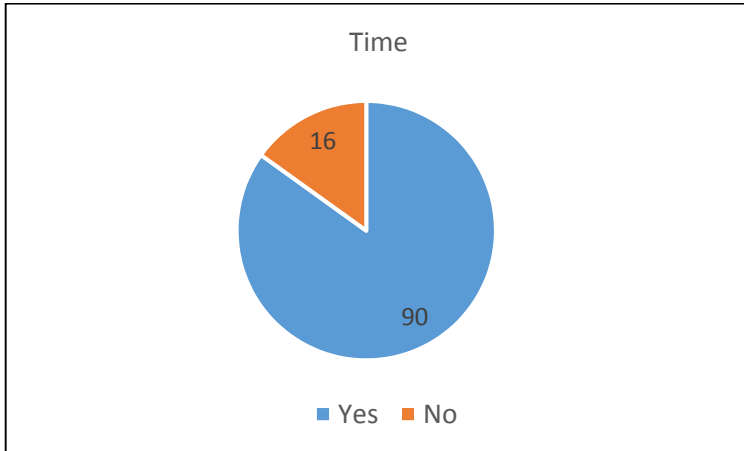


The speaking section was rated as difficult only by 11 test-takers, 46 participants considered this section easy, while 48 of them said it was of medium difficulty. Comparing the 5 sections and taking a closer look to the second chart of our analysis, we came to the conclusion that the speaking part is considered the easiest of the sections, however the results show that there were not relevant discrepancies between the five sections.

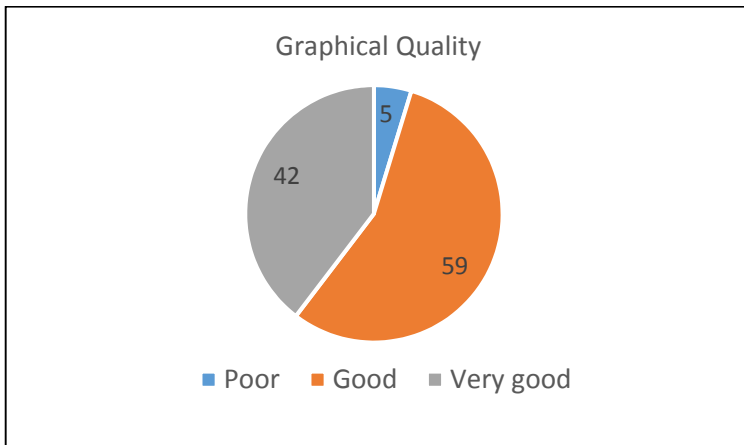


The questionnaire contains questions regarding the amount of time, the quality of the paper and the audio file used during the examination.

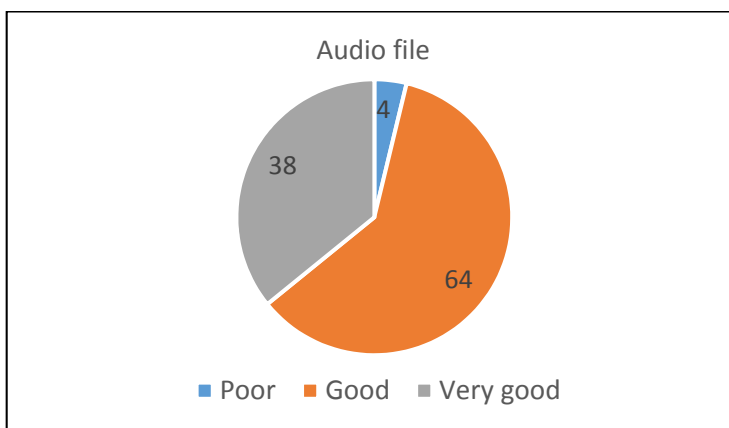
Out of 106 respondents, 90 answered that the time they had at their disposal was enough to solve all the tasks in the examination.



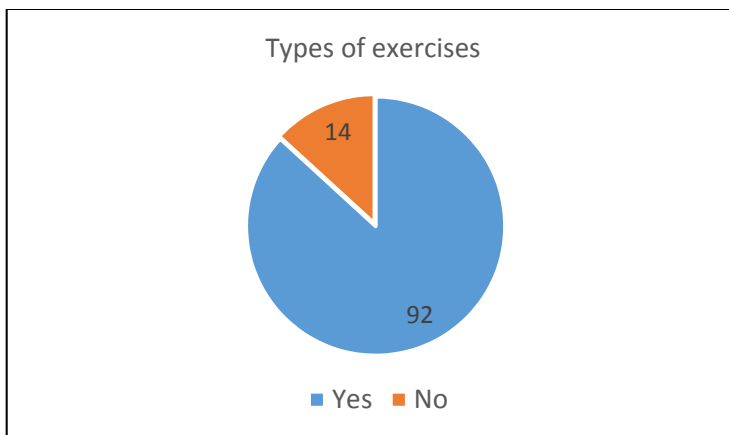
In what the aspect of the graphical quality of the papers is concerned, only 5 of the test takers rated the papers as being of poor quality. 42 persons rated this aspect as being very good and 59 as being of good quality.



Similar results were shown for rating the quality of the audio files in the listening section. Only 4 of the test takers rated the audio file as being of poor quality, 38 persons rated this aspect as being very good and 64 as being good.



In order to ensure that all the test-takers are familiar with the examination tasks, we have sessions of pre-examinations. Participants in the final exam are given a set of pre-tests that they are asked to solve as if they were at the actual exam. All patterns are the same, the types of exercises, tasks and items, except for the inputs which are different. This way we provide all test takers support and we cover also one scaffolding method, necessary in the evaluation process. The respondents were asked if they were familiar with all the types of exercises and, as shown in the chart below, only 14 answered they were not familiar with all the types of the exercises.



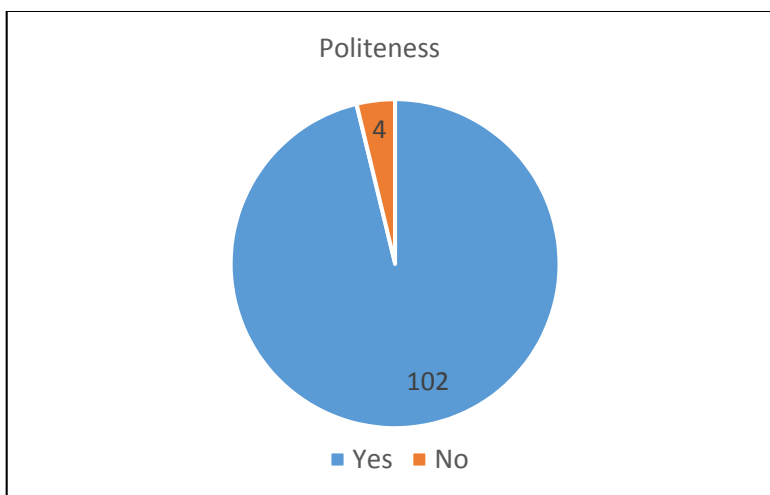
Being one of the most stressful part of the exam for almost all the candidates, we decided to take a closer look to the speaking part of the examination. A series of homogeneous factors could affect the quality of their



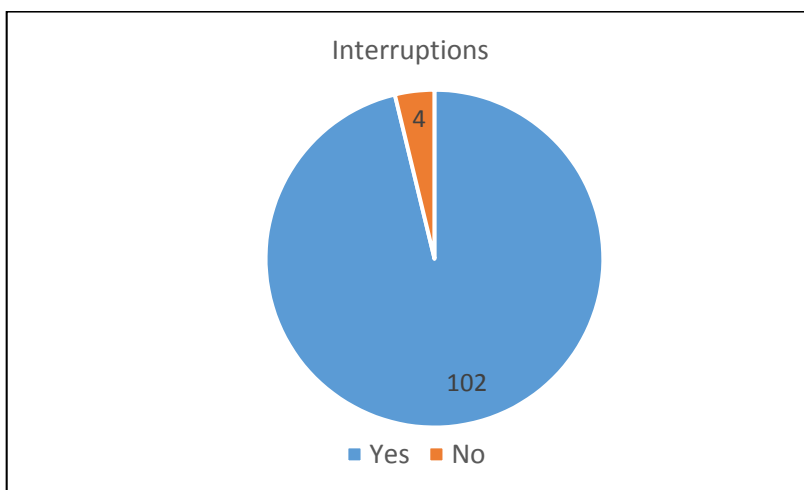
produced discourse. That is why we consider that the examiner could reduce their stress by having an appropriate attitude during the examination. The first question was - *At the Speaking examination, the examiner gave you clear instructions?* Only 2 of the respondents' answers were negative.



The second question was - *At the Speaking examination, the examiner was polite?* Out of 106 responses, only 4 were negative.



The last question regarding the examiner's attitude - *At the Speaking examination, the examiner spoke enough, without interrupting the candidate several times?* – has similar results - out of 106 responses, only 4 were negative.



The last section of the questionnaire should contain other comments or suggestions that the test-takers have. The majority of the respondents don't fill in this part. Some of them (approximately 10) have comments such as: *Thank you!* or *It was a good exam*, or *It was not too difficult*. Very few of the test takers have commented upon the speaking part, explaining that if they have a less skilled colleague for the spoken interaction that is in their disadvantage, or that they are really stressed at the spoken examination and they sometimes "forget words".

The examinations of Romanian as a foreign language designed and administered at The Department of Romanian Language, Culture and Civilisation the Faculty of Letters, Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, have gone through several processes of revisions and development. As the results of the questionnaire show, these examinations are adequate and are reliable instruments for measuring the test-takers' competences in Romanian language. From the point of view of the test-takers, the examinations constitute efficient and fair instruments for measuring their skills, as shown in the results and charts of our present study.

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## THE PROCESS OF SETTING THE TIME FOR A1-B2 RFL EXAMS

ANTONELA ARIEȘAN<sup>1</sup>

**ABSTRACT.** *The process of setting the time for A1-B2 RFL exams.* In this paper we approach the issue of setting the time for each of the four RFL exams (A1-B2), administered by the Department of Romanian Language, Culture and Civilisation, from Babeș-Bolyai University, as part of the academic programme specific to the preparatory year, by presenting the stages this process was put through. In order to establish the total time interval for each exam, it was necessary to find a way to determine how much time is needed for each of the test's components. Therefore, starting with an estimated timeframe decided beforehand in the specifications document, we have tried to confirm it or adjust it with the help of the pretesting and the actual examinations. During this process, attention was paid to the three parts of the written exam, *Reading, Elements of the communication construction and Writing*, excluding from the analysis the *Listening* and the *Speaking* component, which already had a set time for each test. We have doubled our analysis with the help of a qualitative method, the analysis of the feedback questionnaires, and the results obtained can be found in the last section of our paper.

**Keywords:** *setting the time, exam component, pretesting, live examination, test takers.*

**REZUMAT.** *Procesul de stabilire a timpilor pentru examenele RLS, A1-B2.* În acest studiu abordăm problema stabilirii timpului alocat pentru fiecare dintre cele patru examene de limba română ca limbă străină (RLS), A1-B2, administrate la Departamentul de limbă, cultură și civilizație românească, de la Universitatea Babeș-Bolyai, pe parcursul programului academic intitulat *Anul pregătitor de limba română*. Pentru a putea stabili cu exactitate timpul total pentru fiecare examen, o metodă de măsurare și înregistrare a timpilor pentru fiecare component al testului în parte a fost necesară. Așadar, s-a început cu un interval de timp stabilit anterior în documentele de specificații pentru examene, care a fost, după caz, confirmat, infirmat sau ajustat, în funcție de rezultatele obținute la pretestări și la examene. Pe parcursul acestui proces, o atenție sporită s-a acordat componentelor: *Citire, Elemente de construcția comunicării și Scriere*, excluzând din analiză *Ascultarea și Vorbirea*, pentru care există timpi fiși. În demersul nostru, am încercat să dublăm analiza cantitativă printr-o analiză calitativă, efectuată cu ajutorul chestionarelor de feedback, administrate la finalul examenului.

**Cuvinte-cheie:** *stabilirea timpilor, component, pretestare, examen, candidați.*

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## 0. Introduction

Even though we've been constantly interested in offering an objective and well developed exam, at the Department of Romanian Language, Culture and Civilisation from Babeș-Bolyai University with the occasion of the process of auditing of our examinations by the Association of Language Testers in Europe (ALTE) we've revised our procedures on test development and administration, situation that benefited greatly our department, including in the case of the allotted time for each component of the exam. The aim of this paper is to present, by the help of both the quantitative (statistical analysis) and the qualitative (ques. analysis) methods, the process that has been conducted in order to decide the time needed by the candidates to take the test of *Romanian as a foreign language (RFL)*, for A1-B2 levels. Thus, we will describe the three stages that this process was put through. In order to refer to them more easily, we will name them *the preliminary phase, the pretesting phase, and the validation phase*.

## 1. The Preliminary Phase

Since the academic year of 2010-2011, the RFL examinations we apply have had the same structure, assessing candidates' receptive and productive skills, and also the structural competence. For each level, the 100 points allotted are divided equally between the five components of the exam: *Listening, Reading, Elements of communication construction (ECC), Writing and Speaking*. As said, providing our test takers with the necessary time to solve the exam at each level represents an important part of the process of developing and administering the exams. The first step taken in this direction was the analysis of the other exams, for other foreign languages that have already had a long term tradition in administering tests<sup>2</sup>. After comparing the tests' duration for these examinations at each level, as well as the length of the texts and of the exercises given, an approximated time value for each of the four exams resulted. These values have been confirmed and adjusted with the help of the most experienced teachers of our department. Therefore, for each exam there was set a timeframe that had to be adjusted after every session of examinations depending on the feedback from the test takers and the observations provided by the teachers. The exam's duration, as described above, was: for A1 of 1 hour and 40 minutes; for A2 of 2 hours; for B1, 2 hours and 15 minutes; for B2, 2 hours and 30 minutes. The next step taken in the direction of a more standardized time for the examinations was in the academic year of 2013-2014, where these periods had been analysed again,

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<sup>2</sup> Mainly Cambridge, IELTS, TOEFL, Goethe and DELE exams.

then compared and adjusted in the same way, based on the feedback and direct observation during the live exams, on the experience of the teachers and on the allotted time for the other languages exams. The new time values for each of the 5 components of the exam can be found in an internal document named *Specifications for Romanian as a foreign language test developers* at our Department.

Despite the fact that these time intervals have been discussed and modified repeatedly, there wasn't at any point an actual statistical analysis on this topic. This is the reason why starting with the academic year of 2014-2015 it has been decided that a more efficient and clear procedure had to be considered.

Consulting the bibliography on this issue we've been able to identify three different ways of achieving this goal:

- a. The first direction, described by the specialists from Carnegie University, is the intuitive one in which the language tester has to "think how long it will take students to complete the exam."<sup>3</sup> Except the situation in which our goal is to assess how they perform under stress (which is not our concern), it is recommended that we take the test ourselves and "allow students triple the time it took us – or reduce the length or difficulty of the exam."<sup>4</sup> As described above, this, in fact, is very similar to the procedure that we've embraced at the beginning and from which we've drawn the conclusion that it is not sufficiently accurate, mostly because of the very different categories of test takers involved.
  
- b. The second way of determining the necessary time for the exam is described by Lyle F. Bachman and Adrian S. Palmer, in *Language Testing in Practice: Designing and Developing Useful Language Tests*<sup>5</sup> by reference to a German language exam for an introductory German language course. The authors show that "the time allotted for the example task needs to be adequate for test takers to read and listen to the instructions, think about their responses, and record their responses to the task. This will be determined by pretesting the task on three students, one from each of three ability levels: high, medium and low."<sup>6</sup> Clearly this procedure could be more efficient in our case, but we've continued to search for a more clear example, that requires the implication of more than just three students.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.cmu.edu/teaching/assessment/assesslearning/creatingexams.html>

<sup>4</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>5</sup> Lyle F. Bachman and Adrian S. Palmer, *Language Testing in Practice: Designing and Developing Useful Language Tests*, Oxford University Press, 1996.

<sup>6</sup> Lyle F. Bachman and Adrian S. Palmer, *Language Testing in Practice: Designing and Developing Useful Language Tests*, Oxford University Press, 1996, p. 341.

- c. The procedure described in the *Manual for Language Test Development and Examining. For use with the CEFR*<sup>7</sup>, produced by ALTE, is the closest to what we've needed because it already implies the other two situations described. Thus, it is shown that "enough time should normally be allowed for an average test taker to complete all the items without rushing. The most important consideration is that the test takers have sufficient opportunity to show their true ability. At first this may need to be estimated by an experienced language tester<sup>8</sup>. After the test is trialled, or used in a live context, the timing might be revised."<sup>9</sup>

As we can easily observe in each of the three descriptions the key idea is pretesting the exam and/or the task with the help of the candidate(s) or of the actual language tester. Even though all three options could give reliable results, we've considered that the procedure described in the *Manual for Language Test Development and Examining* suits better our case, because it already involves the other two, and even more, the first alternative was already tested at our department.

## 2. The Pretesting Phase

During this stage we've developed a set of procedures for collecting and analysing the time needed to solve the tasks given at each of the three components taken into consideration: *Reading*, *ECC* and *Writing*. The pretesting phase refers to the first stage of pretesting the A1-B2 exams, applied during the academic year of 2014-2015 in order to compare and obtain reliable values for the needed time by the candidates to solve each component.

The pretesting took place about a week before the actual exam in that level, in strict conditions of examination. The three components of the pretesting were given, when possible, on separate days in order to delimit and to give candidates time to rest and consequently get more reliable results. There wasn't set a time limit, each student handed the paper when he or she finished the task.

The teachers were instructed to record the time each student needed for completing the tasks in one section (except for *Listening* and *Speaking*, that already have a set time), in order to monitor the time needed for completing each task and to make necessary adjustments in the time allotted for solving the tasks in the examination. After each session of pretesting during the academic year of

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<sup>7</sup> *Manual for Language Test Development and Examining. For use with the CEFR*, produced by ALTE on behalf of the Language Policy Division, Council of Europe, Strasbourg, 2011.

<sup>8</sup> Which, in fact, represents our first step, the preliminary step.

<sup>9</sup> *Manual for Language Test Development and Examining. For use with the CEFR*, produced by ALTE on behalf of the Language Policy Division, Council of Europe, Strasbourg, 2011, p. 22

2014-2015 the correspondence between the allotted time from the *Specifications for Romanian as a foreign language test developers* and the needed time resulted from the analysis of all the recorded time in pretesting were compared. An average of all the values recorded during the pretesting was done for each of the three components taken into consideration in our analysis.

For each component of the RFL exam, the results of these calculations are presented in the table below.<sup>10</sup>

**Table 1.** The comparison between the allotted time in the specifications and the needed time in the pretesting (Pretest.), during the academic year of 2014-2015

	A1		A2		B1		B2	
	Spec.	Pretest.	Spec.	Pretest.	Spec.	Pretest.	Spec.	Pretest.
<b>Reading</b>	30 min.	27,6 min.	35 min.	34,44 min.	45 min.	39,36 min.	55 min.	45,35 min.
<b>ECC</b>	30 min.	26,44 min.	35 min.	30,85 min.	45 min.	39,02 min.	45 min.	44,33 min.
<b>Writing</b>	30 min.	27,93 min.	40 min.	37,37 min.	50 min.	50,27 min.	60 min.	65, 66 min.
<b>Supplementary time given for revision and for transcription from the draft copy</b>	10 min.		10 min.		10 min.		10 min.	
<b>Listening (already established)</b>	15 min.		15 min.		20 min.		30 min.	
<b>Total amount of minutes for the writing exam</b>	<b>115 min.</b>		<b>135 min.</b>		<b>170 min.</b>		<b>200 min.</b>	
<b>Speaking</b>	<b>10 min.</b>		<b>10 min.</b>		<b>15 min.</b>		<b>15 min.</b>	

As the calculations show, the students were able to solve the tasks within the time set in the *Specifications* document, fact that confirmed the values set in the mentioned document. A difference between the two values was seen, but it was too small to determine us to modify the allotted time at that point.

In the case of *Reading* component (B2) we've decided not to modify the values in the *Specifications* document even though the difference between

<sup>10</sup> The results offered here consist also the *Appendix 1 to Technical Report on the process of relating the examinations of Romanian as a foreign language (RFL) to the CEFR, at the Department of Romanian language, culture and civilisation, Faculty of Letters, Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania, Volume I*, written by Lecturer Dina Vilcu.

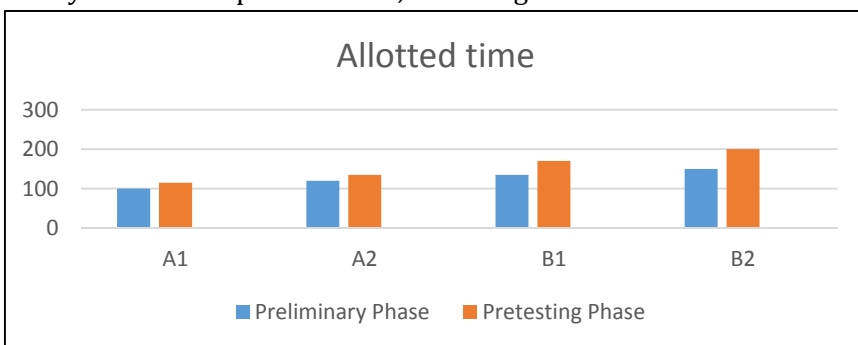


the allotted time and the needed time in the pretesting was of 10 minutes, due to the fact that the texts the candidates have to read are of an extended length. On the other hand, there is a difference at this level at *Writing* component that can equate the proportions until a new analysis will be done. Needless to say for this case, for example, the next phase, that of validation is necessary.

Using the pretesting into deciding the allotted time for the exam was intended to confirm or to show the need to adjust the time already set in the *Specifications* document for each exam component, without offering a value for the entire test.

Besides the set times there are some exceptions that we've been able to introduce during the same year in the department's regulations. Therefore, "extra time is given in the case of *permanent disabilities (demonstrated with a medical certificate)* for dyslexia – more time is given to the students with this condition for solving the tasks (30 minutes for A1 and A2 exams; one hour for B1 and B2 exams, in case of moderate dyslexia diagnosis; if it is necessary, in case of a more severe diagnosis, the time can be supplemented with at most an hour and a half) or for vision problems – special exam papers are produced, with larger letters (between 16 and 20), according to the student's request; if there are students for whom these arrangements are not sufficient, the exam can be adapted, the tasks being transferred from written to listened form; the writing of the results after dictation can also be arranged;"<sup>11</sup>.

The comparison between the allotted time at the beginning (2010-2011) with the results of our statistical analysis (2014-2015) reflects that for each level substantial extra time was added: 15 minutes for A1 and A2, 35 minutes for B1 and 50 minutes for B2. The high amount of time added at B1 and B2 can also be justified by the fact that one of the exercises at *Reading* was replaced by a more complex exercise, with longer texts.



**Figure 1.** – Comparison between the allotted time in the preliminary phase and in the pretesting phase

<sup>11</sup> *Regulation of exam administration. Romanian as a foreign language, internal document.*

Even though the allotted time set in the *Specifications* document has been confirmed by the pretesting phase, we consider that a new analysis of the recorded values in the academic years 2015-2016 and 2016-2017 is needed in order to validate the values decided in the pretesting phase.

### 3. The Validation Phase

At this stage we aim to validate the time allotted in the pretesting phase, during the academic year 2014-2015. So, following the same steps as described above (recording the time for each student and analysing the results), we examined the information gathered both at pretesting and at the actual exams in the academic years 2015-2016, and 2016-2017. A very important aspect to take into consideration is the fact that after a component is pretested, analysed and modified according to the results, the following year it becomes part of the exam. Therefore, the same subject was submitted for pretesting, one year and the following year, for validation, situation that could provide relevant information for our analysis:

During the academic years of 2015-2016, and 2016-2017 the time needed to solve the tasks during the pretesting was again recorded. Thus, for the first year, we've been able to analyse for this paper the information at all the four sessions of pretesting, and for the second year only at A1, and A2. The results are registered in the table below:

**Table 2.** The results for the needed time in the academic years of 2015-2016, and 2016-2017, Pretesting

	A1		A2		B1	B2
	2015-2016	2016-2017	2015-2016	2016-2017	2015-2016	2015-2016
<i>Reading</i>	19.6 min.	19.92 min.	25.88 min.	27.19 min.	35.48 min.	46.8 min.
<i>ECC</i>	28.9 min.	23.6 min.	27.1 min.	31.04 min.	41.1 min.	41.2 min.
<i>Writing</i>	33.64 min.	28.09 min.	32.99 min.	39.45 min.	45.75 min.	57.04 min.
<i>Specifications</i>	30 min. 30 min. 30 min.		35 min. 35 min. 40 min.		45 min. 45 min. 50 min.	55 min. 45 min. 60 min.

We can easily observe that there isn't any case in which the values set in the *Specifications* to be exceeded. So, after analysing the results, and taking

into consideration the fact that there are many other factors<sup>12</sup> involved in the process, we consider that there should be three time intervals relevant for our procedures, and for our further actions. Thus:

1. if there is a difference of *less than 5 minutes* between the value in the specifications and the one in our analysis, the value could be validated without further analysis because it is common to be a slight difference from a session to the other and from a person to another.
2. if the difference is *between 5 and 10 minutes* we consider that this section and the time allotted should be further recorded, and another analysis should be done in the following year.
3. if the difference is of *more than 10 minutes*, a modification of the allotted time should be taken into consideration, if there isn't a very clear reason why this difference appeared.

Thus, observing the values in *Table 2* we are able to validate the time values set in the specifications and checked before in the pretesting phase in almost all the cases for *ECC* and *Writing*. It only exists a situation, in the case of the time needed for A2, in 2015-2016, that the value obtained is in an interval of 5-10 minutes, but during the following year the values have increased and moved in the next section, that with a difference of less than 5 minutes. This is the reason why we do not believe that it is a concerning situation, and that a modification of the time set in specifications document should be modified in the case of *ECC* and *Writing*.

On the other hand, the needed time for solving the *Reading* component seems to be very different, and some results could show concerns:

a. In the case of A1 exam, the time set in the *Specifications* (and confirmed in the Pretesting Phase) is with more than 10 minutes longer than the one resulted in our analysis, for both years taken in account. **In this case, a reduction of the time allotted or another validation of this value is needed to be taken into consideration.**<sup>13</sup>

b. For A2 exam another significant difference can be seen, but it is of less than 10 minutes, which cannot be considered a concerning situation, as we have decided before.

c. As in the case of A2, at B1 the difference is of approximately 8 minutes.

d. In the case of **B2, Reading**, at this point we had to validate the time value set in the *Specifications* because, as shown in the Pretesting Phase, there

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<sup>12</sup> Here, the reading speed could be taken into consideration as well as the fact that maybe the students could be less motivated than in the live examinations. Also, we believe that another type of analysis should accompany this one, an analysis of the results of the pretesting, because sometimes more minutes do not mean higher points.

<sup>13</sup> A comparison with the values recorded during the live examinations could be helpful.

was a difference of 10 minutes between the interval in specifications and the one in pretesting. At this stage a slight increase of the needed time by the students to solve the task can be seen, compared to the one in Pretesting Phase. This is the reason why **we recommend not to modify the value yet, but to keep it under observation for another stage.**

Therefore, in all the mentioned cases, it is easily to realise that the significant differences appear in the case of *Reading*, probably because of a different reading speed or a different language level of the students.

Relevant results for our analysis, but also for the issues that appeared at *Reading*, can be obtained by analysing the time needed by the candidates to solve the same subject, but in conditions of live examinations. Thus, the task pretested during 2014-2015 was submitted to live examinations in the year 2015-2016, and the results are presented in *Table 3*.

**Table 3.** The comparison between the average time intervals needed at the pretesting, and at the exam for the same tasks

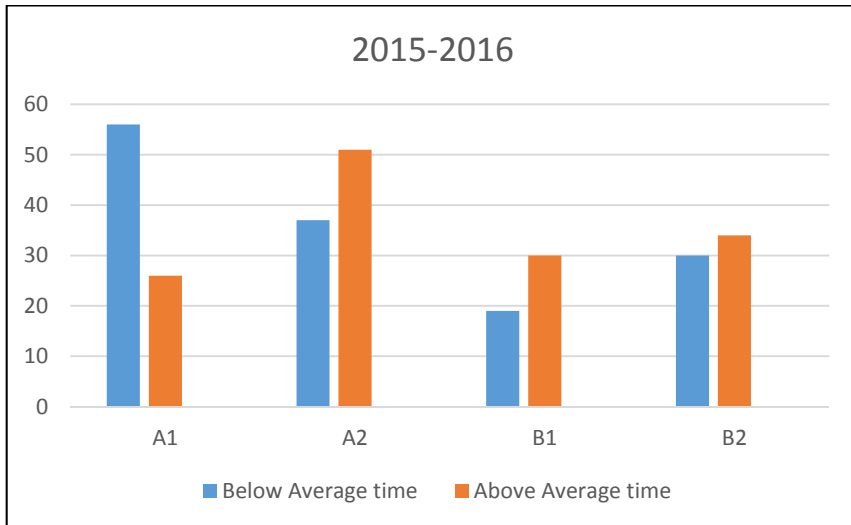
<b>2015-2016 Exams</b>	<b>A1</b>	<b>A2</b>	<b>B1</b>	<b>B2</b>
The average time needed to solve the written exam	87 min.	107 min.	136 min.	173 min.
The results from <i>Pretesting Phase</i>	106 min.	127 min.	158 min.	195.34 min.

We can easily observe that there is a difference of twenty minutes between the results in the Pretesting Phase and the ones after the analysis of the exams, even though we are discussing about the same tasks, but solved by different test takers in slightly different conditions<sup>14</sup>. But we do not have to forget that this time is the average time and there are many students that are very slow and others that maybe did not completely reach the language level tested. For all these categories the extra time is needed. In all the other cases, the majority of the candidates have enough time to solve the exam within the timeframe given.

After analysing all the time values we observed that:

- in the case of A1 there were more students that finished the exam before the average time of 87 minutes. So, from the total of 96 students that took the exam only 26 needed more time than the average.
- In the case of the other three exams, there were more students that needed the time above the average.

<sup>14</sup> Despite the fact that we've tried to assure the same situation as in the live examinations, the pressure of the exam, that most of the times determines the student to focus more, cannot be there.



**Figure 2.** – The proportion of the students that completed the written exam within the average time or above it

This findings confirm the ones obtained before at *Reading* component, for A1. They show us that it might be the case to reduce with 5 or 10 minutes the time allotted for this exam, taking into consideration the fact that there were two times more students to finish the exam within the average interval than above it. Another argument on this modification could be given by the qualitative analysis in the next section of our study.

#### **4. The qualitative analysis with the help of the feedback questionnaires**

In order to reveal useful results, besides the quantitative method of analysis we've considered a qualitative method, as well, the questionnaire. The form administered to the test takers is meant to give us feedback regarding the exam, at the end of the examination. In this document there is a question regarding the time allotted for the exam. The candidates are asked to choose *yes* or *no* depending on the answer they provided to the question: *Was the allotted time sufficient for you?* We've started to administer this questionnaire in the year 2015-2016. Therefore, we've calculated the number of candidates that stated they didn't have enough time. They are registered in the table below:

**Table 4.** The number of respondents to the feedback questionnaire

2015-2016	Respondents	Candidates that answered <i>No</i>	2016-2017	Respondents	Candidates that answered <i>No</i>
A1	122	7 (5,73 %)		84	22 (26,19)
A2	90	20 (22,22 %)		77	12 (15,58%)
B1	Data was not collected	-			
B2	106	16 (15,09 %)			

Even though this stage was meant just to double the statistical analysis, the results obtained determined us to take a step further and to consider the analysis of the exam papers as well. We can easily observe the percentages obtained, that in a first step could be considered concerning. After analysing the actual paper exams we've come to the conclusion that there is a substantial difference between the candidates that stated they didn't have enough time and the ones that actually didn't have the needed time<sup>15</sup>. Due to this situation, we have expected that if the test takers said they lacked the time, we should find unfinished paper exams or tests in which we can easily see they have been finished abruptly. But this was not the case. Even more, we have been able to observe that none of the students that scored high at the exams for all the components (more than 15 points out of 20) does not have at least one of the components unfinished. Except this case, we've been able to identify several situations that could justify the answers at the questionnaires:

- a. There were candidates that completed the subjects but didn't finish transferring their texts from the draft to the exam paper, mainly because their writings were more extensive than it was expected at that level (at *Writing* component the students are asked to write two texts on a given topic, with specified number of words<sup>16</sup>).
- b. Some candidates didn't finish the writing part. Here we've been able to identify only one case in which the lack of time could be considered. It is the case of a paper exam from the A2 session, in 2015-2016. We've come to this conclusion because the candidate scored high at all the other components and even more, for the one text he/she wrote got the maximum score. Except this case, we have been able to observe that it is usually the case of the students that didn't score high at all the components (less than 10 points) to not complete the tasks given. So, it could be possible that they didn't have the necessary language level

<sup>15</sup> This situation probably appears because of the fact that this questionnaire is given exactly after the exam and because of the pressure of the exam they might "feel" they didn't have enough time.

<sup>16</sup> The number of words the students are expected to write at each level are known, and they are specified in the document, entitled *Detailed Specifications for the Stakeholders*, which is available on our department's website ([www.romaniandepartment.com](http://www.romaniandepartment.com)).

(vocabulary, grammar, etc.) to solve the task, instead of putting the blame on the lack of time. Among this papers some weren't even on the subject, even if they were asked to write about their activities during a day or to write a short letter to somebody, they wrote a description about themselves, which is usually taught during the first week of A1 classes.

- c. There was a third category of test takers, the ones that didn't write anything at the last part, the *Writing* part, and scored very low at all the other components. We've identified two candidates in this situation (one at A2, 2015-2016, and one at B2 2015-2016). They haven't got more than 30 points for all the components, so probably here it is again the case of low language level not lack of time.
- d. We couldn't identify even one paper that has not been completed at the other two components (*Reading* and/or *ECC*).

Further we will present the number of exam papers we've been able to identify as unfinished (for different reasons), and that could be included in one of the three cases described above (a-c).

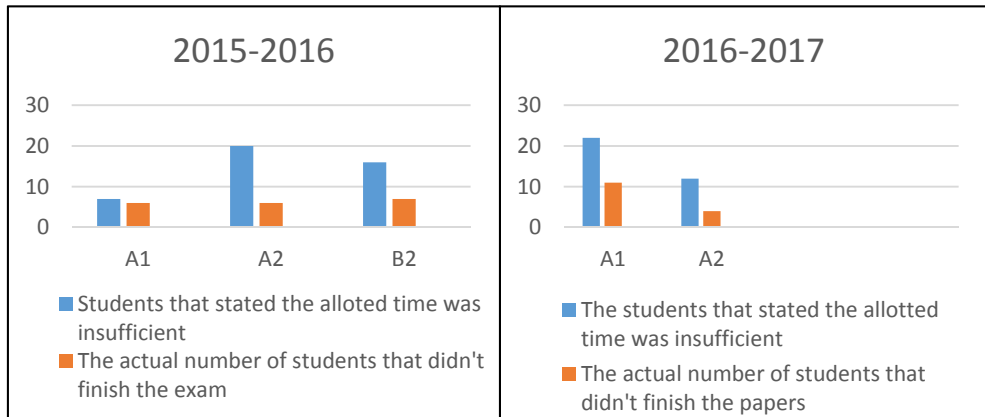
**Table 5.** The number of candidates that stated the allotted time was sufficient and the actual number of them that didn't complete the exam

2015-2016	Stated they didn't have enough time to complete the exam paper	Actually didn't complete the exam paper	2016-2017	Stated they didn't have enough time to complete the exam paper	Actually didn't complete the exam paper
A1	7	6		22	11
A2	20	6		12	4
B2	16	7			

A comparison between the values included in the table can be found in the charts below (*Figure 3*).

The findings shown in *Figure 3* sustain the ones obtained in the Validation Phase regarding the A1 exam (especially the *Reading* component). There were only 7 candidates that stated the allotted time was insufficient, by comparison with the other exams where the number was larger, situation that might reveal us the fact that we cannot talk about not enough time at this exam, maybe the contrary. Thus, we can conclude that with the exception of A1 exam, in 2015-2016, for all the other exams there more candidates that stated that the allotted time was insufficient for them to complete the paper exams than the actual test takers that have not finished. In almost all the cases taken into consideration there is a difference of 10 answers between the two vales considered. A clear reason for this situation cannot be found by just analysing the questionnaires and

the exam papers. This is why we believe that a more complex feedback form could be given after the exams, in which the candidates should explain why they chose the *No* answer. If possible, an on-line questionnaire could be even better, so that the results could be collected easier.



**Figure 3.** – The comparison between the number of candidates that stated they lacked the time to complete the exam and the actual unfinished papers

## 5. Conclusions

After analysing all the time vales and the exam papers for the three academic years taken into consideration (2014-2015, 2015-2016, and 2016-2017), we've reached to a sum of conclusions:

- a. In most of the cases, the set time in the *Specifications* could be validated, except the time needed at *Reading* component. In this case, but not only, a more complex analysis is required. We aim to continue our study with a correlative analysis of the results at pretesting, exams and the needed time for each candidate to complete the task, and to obtain a certain grade. We are confident to get relevant results from this type of examination.
- b. There could be taken into consideration the reduction of the allotted time for A1 exam with five or ten minutes, based on the findings both in the pretesting phase and in the validation phase.
- c. A confirmation of the allotted time in the exams is certainly needed especially when our candidates are coming from such different places, have different ages and a different level of studies. This is the reason why we want, and we should continue this type of analysis periodically.



- d. A box for observations should be added to our feedback form so that the students could explain why they stated the allotted time was not sufficient. Depending on their answers, and coordinating them with the other types of analysis, in the future we could modify, if needed, the set time for each exam component.

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*Regulation of exam administration. Romanian as a foreign language.*  
*Detailed Specifications for the Stakeholders.*  
*Specifications for Romanian as a foreign language test developers.*  
*Technical Report on the process of relating the examinations of Romanian as a foreign language (RFL) to the CEFR, at the Department of Romanian language, culture and civilisation, Faculty of Letters, Babeș-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania, Volume I.*

### Online Resources:

- Cambridge exams: <http://www.cambridgeenglish.org/exams/>.
- Carnegie University, Eberly Center for Teaching Excellence, *Whys and hows of assessment*:  
<https://www.cmu.edu/teaching/assessment/assesslearning/creatingexams.html>
- DELE: <http://www.dele.org>.
- Goethe Institut: <http://www.goethe.de/lrn/prj/pba/enindex.htm>.
- IELTS: <https://www.ielts.org>.
- TOEFL: <https://www.ets.org/toefl>.

## CONSIDERATIONS ON CONVERSATIONAL COMPETENCE. THE CASE OF ROMANIAN AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE (RFL), LEVEL A1

LAVINIA-IUNIA VASIU<sup>1</sup>

**ABSTRACT.** *Considerations on conversational competence. The case of Romanian as a foreign language (RFL), level A1.* The study focuses on several aspects of L2 conversational competence in Romanian, at level A1. A learner corpus formed of spoken productions of students with different linguistic backgrounds is analyzed. Initiating and responding moves are calculated in the case of each student in order to determine what type of discourse each task generates. Communication strategies (message abandonment, approximation, word-coinage, literal translations, appeal for help, use of fillers, etc.) as well as means of giving feedback in conversation (continuers, collaborative completions, assessments, etc.) are also identified and investigated and possible implications in developing and assessing conversational competence in Romanian as a foreign language at level A1 are issued.

**Keywords:** *learner corpus, conversation analysis, communication strategies, initiating moves, responding moves, passive role, active role, feedback in conversation.*

**REZUMAT.** *Observații privind abilitatea conversațională în cazul limbii române ca L2, nivelul A1.* Lucrarea de față prezintă câteva aspecte ale abilității conversaționale în limba română ca L2 la nivelul A1, pe baza analizei unui corpus format din producții orale ale vorbitorilor nonnativi, din medii culturale diferite și cu diverse L1. S-au calculat, în dialog, *replicile de răspuns (responding moves)* și *replicile de inițiere (initiating moves)* în vederea identificării tipului de dialog rezultat (*echilibrat, simetric, asimetric* etc.). De asemenea, au fost identificate și analizate strategiile comunicative folosite (*abandonarea mesajului, aproximarea, traducerile literale, repetițiile* etc.), precum și mijloacele de oferire a feedbackului în conversație (*completările colaborative, evaluări ale mesajului* etc.). În final, se propun descriptori pentru evaluarea abilității conversaționale pe trei benzi diferite, la nivelul A1.

**Cuvinte-cheie:** *corpus cu producții ale vorbitorilor nonnativi, analiza conversației, strategii comunicative, replici de inițiere, replici de răspuns, rol activ, rol pasiv, feedback în conversație.*

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## INTRODUCTION

The test of Romanian as a foreign language developed by the Department of Romanian language, culture and civilization (Faculty of Letters, Babeş-Bolyai University) consists of five parts: listening, reading, elements of communication construction, writing and speaking. With respect to marking and grading, it is a well-known fact that the productive skills raise more issues. In spite of the existing metadocuments as test specifications, syllabuses, grading scales and grids and despite the workshops and training sessions organized regularly by the Department, there still are some matters of concern regarding the grading of productive skills. Fairness, reliability and accuracy of test scores are objectives still rather difficult to fully accomplish, mainly in the case of grading speaking performance. Although each performance is graded by two assessors according to especially designed grids<sup>2</sup>, the assessors' comments<sup>3</sup> suggest that it is not clear for them what to pay attention to when it comes to the conversation task of the oral component of the examination<sup>4</sup> aside from the linguistic aspects which are quite well defined in the case of three criteria of the grid: *accuracy*, *complexity* and *cohesion and coherence*. Regarding the conversational competence there doesn't seem to be consensus. On the one hand, the descriptors in the grid for the communication efficiency criterion are vague - they only mention two aspects relative to the conversational competence: the ability to carry out a simple conversation and the ability to understand the interlocutor's message or to ask for help otherwise. On the other hand, the comments from the assessors' sheets suggest that they interpret these vague descriptors in different ways: "only one of the two students addresses the questions, the other one's contribution is limited to answering the other's questions" or "students don't relate their turns to the interlocutor's previous line, it's like they are engaged in parallel discourses" or "the student helps the other in case he doesn't understand his contribution to the dialogue or in case he cannot find the proper word" or "the dialogue was too short, but this was due to the dry topic or to the students' cultural background". Therefore it is only natural for one to ask himself what is actually important when awarding points for the conversational task, apart from the linguistic features of the discourse: the ability to address questions, to give feedback in the dialogue or the communication strategies?

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<sup>2</sup> The grids used in grading the spoken performance focus on the following criteria: complexity, accuracy, cohesion and coherence and communication efficiency.

<sup>3</sup> The assessors use a blank grid to justify the points given for each criterion.

<sup>4</sup> The oral component of the examination includes three tasks: an interview with the examiner, a monologue about some images on a given topic and a conversation/a role play between the two candidates.

Taking all of the above into account, the research questions were:

- Is the student's performance influenced by the topic of the dialogue or by his cultural background?
- Are there tasks that demand one passive and one active role? If so, should this be considered an issue?
- What kind of communication strategies should we expect the candidates to use and which of them should be highly rated?
- What kind of feedback in conversation should we expect from the candidates and how can that be measured in the process of rating?

In order to try to find answers to these questions, we grounded our research on a small corpus containing the transcripts of 40 A1 conversations on 6 different topics. The students were recorded during the A1 examination and the transcripts were analyzed placing emphasis on several aspects: *the number, the length and the type of moves, the means of giving feedback in conversation and the communication strategies.*

## DATA COLLECTION

As mentioned above, the study focuses on a learner corpus formed of spoken productions of 80 students with different first languages (L1): 27 – Arabic, 12 – Arabic and French, 14 – Romance languages, 5 – German, 5 – Slavic languages, 6 – Albanian, 6 – Chinese, Turkish, Indonesian, etc. The students were recorded during the A1 examination of Romanian as a foreign language in three different sessions (2014, 2015, 2016) while performing 40 conversations on the 6 possible A1 topics: *planning a day off together* (7 conversations), *organizing a party for a friend* (6 conversations), *planning a holiday together* (6 conversations), *at the grocery store* (7 conversations), *at the restaurant* (7 conversations), *buying an apartment/a house* (7 conversations).

## ANALYSIS

In the study, both qualitative and quantitative methods have been used. In the first phase, in order to find out whether the discourses were *symmetrical* (both candidates contribute equally to the dialogue) or *uneven* (one candidate contributes more to the dialogue) and whether the candidates had a more *passive* (mostly responding) or a more *active role* (mostly initiating), different types of moves were identified and counted in the case of each student. Also, the length of each move was considered.

Each utterance in a conversation can be regarded as a *move* (Martin 1992) or, more specifically, a move represents the basic semantic unit in interaction that selects for speech function (Eggins and Slade 1997). There are

two types of moves: *initiating moves* and *responding moves*. Halliday and Mathiessen (2004) identify four basic initiating moves that correspond to the four primary speech functions: *command*, *statement*, *offer*, and *question*. All four types were taken into account in the study. Responding moves too can be divided into *expected responses* (which tend to close the exchange) and *discretionary responses* (which tend to open out the exchange)<sup>5</sup>. Martin (1992) and Eggins and Slade (1997) talk about two types of discretionary moves: *tracking moves* (which check or clarify the content of the previous moves) and *challenging moves* (which challenge the speaker's initiating move). Below, we summarize the aspects we considered when analyzing each student's contribution:

- Initiating moves (statement, question, offer, command)
  - long (number)
  - short (number)<sup>6</sup>
- Responding moves
  - Expected responses
    - long (number)
    - short (number)
  - Discretionary responses
    - long (number)
    - short (number)

The mean of moves and the mean of long moves were calculated in the case of each task and results were compared in order to establish whether there are more productive tasks or not. Moreover, in this stage we inspected the content of the conversations trying to determine whether there are some features that were determined by the candidates' cultural background and whether these features make any difference when judging the quality of the performances.

Another type of information that was gathered from the collected data regarded feedback in conversation. Gardner (1994) lists seven means of giving feedback in conversation: using *continuers* (mark the speaker's right to continue), *acknowledgements* (mark agreement with the speaker or signal understanding of the previous turn), *assessments* (signal appreciation of what has been said), *news markers* (mark the speaker's turn as new), *questions* (marks interest by asking for further details or for repairing misunderstandings), *collaborative completions* (finishing or repeating the other's turn), *non-verbal vocalizations* (laughter, sighs, etc.). From Gardner's list, in our study, we kept the following categories:

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<sup>5</sup> It is said that casual conversations are expected to have more discretionary responses, as they are aimed at maintaining social relationships, while transactional interactions tend to have more expected responses, since they aim at completion and closure (Thornbury and Slade 2006).

<sup>6</sup> Moves (initiating/responding) which consisted of one word (*Da./Nu./Acasă. – Yes./No./Home.*, etc.) or of repetitions of previous words were regarded as short ones.

- continuers/acknowledgements,<sup>7</sup>
- assessments,<sup>8</sup>
- news markers,<sup>9</sup>
- collaborative completions<sup>10</sup>.

This part of the analysis was performed in order to draw some conclusions with respect to the ways in which candidates relate their contribution to the dialogue to the interlocutor's turn.

The last phase of the analysis was meant to reveal to what extent students "help" themselves and each other in conversation. In order to inspect this aspect, we considered the *communication strategies* which aim to make up for deficiencies in the speakers' linguistic systems or to facilitate communication<sup>11</sup>. There have been many attempts to classify communication strategies<sup>12</sup>, but we worked with Dörnyei's typology (1995) (apud. Thornbury and Slade 2005):

- Avoidance/reduction strategies (message abandonment and topic avoidance)
- Achievement/compensatory strategies
  - circumlocution (describing/exemplifying/paraphrasing)
  - approximation (using an alternative term with the closest meaning)
  - use of all-purpose words (using a general lexical item instead of specific words)
  - word-coinage (creating a non-existing L2 word based on a supposed rule)

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<sup>7</sup> We calculated them in the same category as they were usually expressed the same way: *aha, îhî, îhâm, da, bine*.

<sup>8</sup> E.g.: *Perfect!, Ce interesant!, Ce idee bună! – Perfect!, How interesting!, Good idea!*

<sup>9</sup> E.g.: *Aaa? Serious? – Seriously?*

<sup>10</sup> We left the questions out only because we took them into account when analyzing initiating moves. Also, non-verbal vocalizations were neglected as we were interested only in the verbal means of giving feedback in conversation.

<sup>11</sup> Tarone (1981) differentiates between *communication strategies* and *production strategies*, the former being used by L2 learners for compensating lack of knowledge and the latter being common in the case of native speakers who "use their linguistic system efficiently and clearly with a minimum of effort" (p. 419). In a like manner, Bygate (1987) sees production strategies as means of facilitating (simplifying structure, ellipsis, formulaic expressions, fillers, etc.) and of compensating (rephrase, false starts, repetitions, rephrasing) (p. 15). We believe that there is a high degree of overlap between communication and production strategies and as it is rather difficult to determine what motivates strategy use, we put them together in our study under the umbrella of communication strategies.

<sup>12</sup> For example, Tarone (1981) divided communication strategies into *avoidance strategies* (giving up a topic), *achievement strategies* (approximation, circumlocution, word-coinage), *conscious transfer* (literal translation), *appeals for assistance*, and *mime*. Bialystock (1990) separated *knowledge-based strategies* (used for adjusting the message by manipulating the knowledge of a concept) from *control-based strategies* (used for keeping the original content of a message and shaping the means of expression by going outside L2).

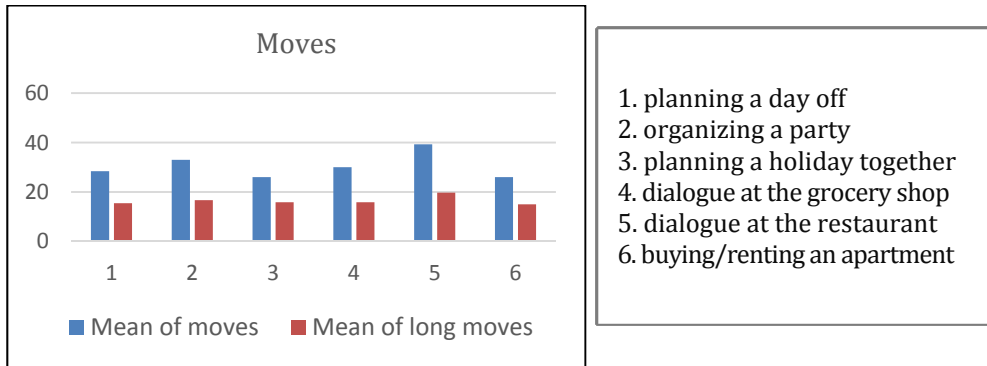
- literal translation (translating literally a word or a structure from L1 or from another foreign language to the target language)
- foreignising (using an L1 word by adjusting it to L2 rules)
- use of non-linguistic means (mime, gestures, facial expressions, sound imitations)
- code switching (using an L1 word with L1 pronunciation)
- appeal for help (directly or indirectly)
- Stalling/time gaining strategies
  - fillers/hesitation devices
  - repetitions

We examined the strategies used and we discussed them in relation to the candidates' L1 in order to determine to which extent students rely on strategies, which strategies are most frequent at level A1 and if the results are influenced by the candidates' linguistic/cultural backgrounds.

## RESULTS

### Productiveness of tasks

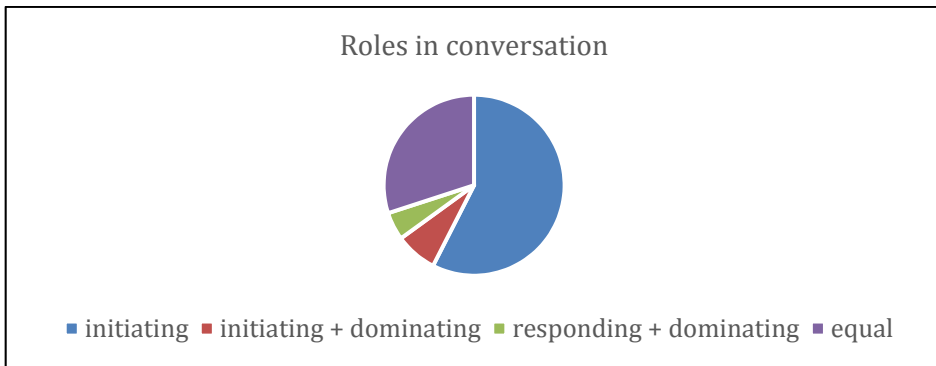
By analyzing the number, the length and the type of moves in each conversation, we found some interesting results. Apparently (Fig. 1) all task types seem to be productive. However, there are three task types which appear a little more productive than the others: dialogue at the restaurant (a mean of 39.28 moves and of 19.71 long moves), organizing a party (a mean of 33 moves and of 16.66 long moves), at the grocery shop (a mean of 30 moves and of 15.85 long moves). In our opinion this is due to the fact that all three task types focus on a very familiar subject: *food and drink*. Moreover, two of them (the restaurant and the grocery shop conversations) imply simple transactions to which candidates are exposed every day in real life situations. Nevertheless, the difference between the values calculated for these task types and the average (30.45 – moves; 16.41 – long moves) is minor and allows us to state that all task types are equally productive. Thus, the task choice does not influence the length of the performance. Another interesting fact we found out while investigating task impact on performance was that even if in theory transactions aim at closure and therefore discretionary responses are rare in this kind of interactions, in our corpus, most of the discretionary responses (30 out of 45) were identified in the conversations produced for the transactional tasks. However, this had no repercussion on the discourse length neither.



**Fig. 1.** – Mean of moves and long moves per task type

### Role impact on performance

The analysis showed that 32 out of 40 conversations implied equal contributions from both participants, on the whole. Most of the discourses were symmetrical (in terms of number and length of moves). Thus, the role assigned to the candidate does not influence the length of his performance. However, the study of move types revealed that in 26 out of 40 dialogues one of the two participants was mostly initiating, in 2 cases one candidate was mostly responding and in 12 cases candidates were both initiating and responding (Fig. 2).



**Fig. 2.** – Types of conversational behavior

There are three task types in which the roles tend to elect one type of "behavior": mostly initiating or mostly responding. In 6 of the 7 dialogues we



analyzed for the grocery store task, the candidates who were assigned the customer's role produced significantly more initiating moves than their interlocutors. With respect to the restaurant task, in 5 of the 7 dialogues, the waiter had a more active role by producing most of the initiating moves. In 6 of the 7 dialogues about buying/renting an apartment, those who were assigned the client role created considerably more initiating statements and questions than their partners. It seems that the transactional tasks (as opposed to the ones which mainly have a social, interpersonal function) tend to assign one definite active role (the waiter, the customer, the client) and one definite passive role (the client, the shop assistant, the owner). However, this does not mean that the candidates' contributions are uneven. In fact, there were only symmetrical discourses (length and number of moves) in the case of the grocery store task, there were two dominating discourses in the case of the restaurant conversation task out of which only one belonged to a more initiating participant, and, in the case of the buying/renting an apartment task, only one discourse was dominating (length and number of moves). This proves that even though some tasks require one candidate to produce more initiating moves than the other, they do not elect unsymmetrical discourses, so they shouldn't be excluded from the examination item bank and the assessment of the candidate's conversational competence should not be affected by the role assigned.

### **Cultural background impact on content**

It is worth mentioning here that we identified very few cases when the cultural background seemed to have some kind of influence on the content of the dialogue:

- negotiating at the grocery store (L1 = Arabic)
- responding to the restaurant conversation task with a friendly dialogue on the street while ordering fast-food (shaorma) (L1 = Moroccan Arabic)
- understanding the relationship between the waiter and the client as a more intimate/relaxed one (L1 = Arabic): at some point, the client asks the waiter to recommend the cheapest thing he can serve, as he – the client – is very poor and he does not have money to spend.

These aspects did make the conversations funnier, but they did not affect the dialogues in any other way. Thus, the assessment of the performances should not be more problematic because of some superficial cultural influences.

### **Feedback in conversation**

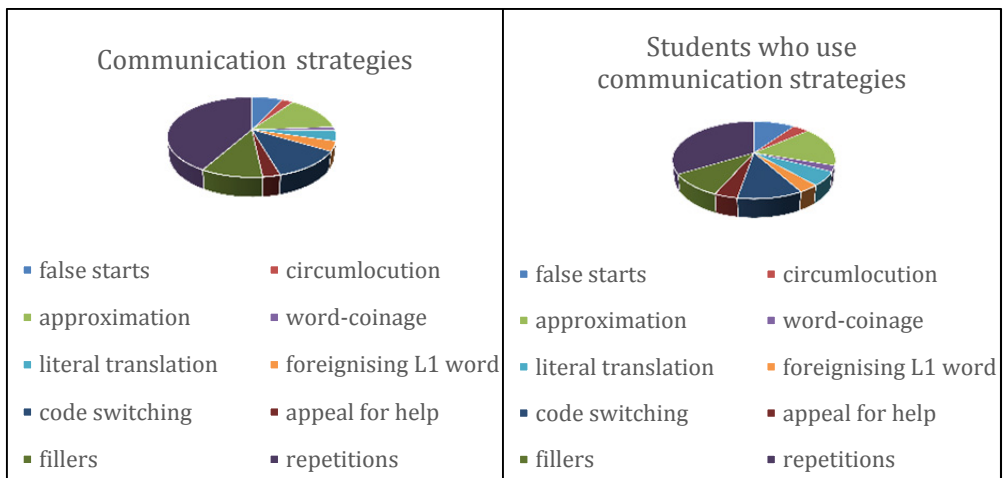
The study proved that the most common way of giving feedback in conversation at this level (besides asking for further details) is the use of

continuers and acknowledgements like *Bine., Da., Aha, Înțeleg., Îhâm, Foarte bine.* (*Good., Yes., I see., Very well.*), or of repetitions of the interlocutor's words. There were 153 continuers/acknowledgements identified in the discourses of 48 students (out of 80). Each of the 48 used such continuers in their discourse with a frequency that ranged from 1 to 12 continuers per discourse. Assessments like *Daaa!, Ce idee bună!, Ce interesant!, Ooo!, 20 de lei?! (Yesss! Such a good idea!, How interesting!, 20 lei?!)* and so on were identified in the case of 24 out of 80 students (between 1 and 5 such assessments per production).

There were only 5 students who produced collaborative moves and only three who used news markers in their dialogues. Only 20 students (out of 80) used 5 or more feedback moves and half of them were Europeans, 6 were Asian and 4 were Africans and Middle East Arabs. We strongly believe that feedback in conversation is culturally bound and we consider that means of giving feedback in a conversation in Romanian should be one focal point when practising conversations in class.

### Communication strategies

There is a mean of 4.4 communication strategies per student and one of 2.67 different communication strategy type per student. There are 30 students who use more than 5 strategies in their performance and all of them speak a Romance language either as L1 or as a foreign language. The chart below summarizes the distribution of communication strategies and of students who use them in the learner corpus we analyzed (Fig. 3 and Fig. 4).



**Fig. 3.** – Distribution of communication strategies

**Fig. 4.** – Distribution of students who use communication strategies

**Repetition** seems to be the most frequent strategy students at level A1 use (40% of the communication strategies used, 87.5% of the students who use them). Candidates repeat *their own words* in order to buy time or to gain fluency or their partners' words with different functions and purposes. In the latter case, they use repetitions:

- as fillers, in order to buy time,
- to signal the fact that they didn't understand what has been said (appeal for help),
- to ask for confirmation of understanding (they want to make sure that they understood the message correctly),
- as continuers/acknowledgements (they certify they understood the message and give the interlocutor the right to continue),
- as news markers,
- as assessments.

**Approximation** is the second most preferred strategy (13.81% of the communication strategies used and 43% of the students who use them): *seara* for *noaptea* (evening instead of night), *bine* for *bun* (well instead of good), *după* for *după aceea/apoi/mai târziu* (after instead of later), *a închide* for *a termina* (to close instead of to finish), *a prefera* for *a recomanda* (to prefer instead of to recommend), *pentru?* for *de ce?* (for? instead of why?), etc. Approximation is sometimes used strategically (= intentionally, to compensate for a gap in one's linguistic system) and it is, in this case, usually followed by circumlocution. In other situations, approximation is used as a consequence of some automatized mistakes: *după/după aceea, bine/bun*.

28.75% of the students selected **code switching** as a strategy in 42 cases. Interestingly, only 5 students switched to L1, 12 appealed to a foreign language for help whereas 2 students switched to both L1 and a foreign language. Here are some examples of code switching: *este zi* (Spanish *este* for the Romanian *această*), *am nevoie de un altra cosa* (Italian *altra cosa* for the Romanian *altceva*), *just o cameră* (English *just* for the Romanian *doar*), etc.

Another rather used category of communication strategies is the one that includes **fillers** (9.66% of the communication strategies used and 25% of the students who used them). When analyzing this aspect we did not consider vocalizations like *ăăă, îîî, mmm*, and so on. Fixed phrases like *nu știu* (*I don't know*) or *cred că* (*I think*) used repeatedly and sequence-fillers like *Ce mai faci?/Bine, mulțumesc. Și tu?* (*How are you?/Fine, thanks. How about you?*) used inappropriately (= when they are not necessary) were calculated here.

25% of the students start one, two or three sentences they finally abandon in their productions. Usually, these **false starts** are followed by

circumlocutions (*Sunt... ăăă... scur-... ăăă... nu am bani (I am... ăăă... sho-... ăăă... I don't have any money.)* and they represent 6.9% of the total number of communication strategies.

**Literal translations** like *o idee mult bună* (Italian: *molto buona*), *este mai timp* (Spanish: *mas tiempo*), *nu problemă* (English: *no problem*) constitute 4.14% of the total number of communication strategies. Only 15% of the students appeal to literal translation and usually they do not use L1, but another foreign language they know.

We also found 14 situations (3.86%) of **foreignising an L1 word** in the case of 7 students (8.75%): *diferente* (English *different* + *e* for the Romanian *diferite*), *producte* (English *product* + *e* for the Romanian *produse*), *altravea* (Italian *altra* + *ceva* for the Romanian *altceva*).

Only 8 students (10%) **appealed for help** not because help was not needed, but because in most cases, students don't even realize they misunderstood the question and do not consider asking for help – they just continue the dialogue however they think it's appropriate until the partner realizes by himself that he needs to rephrase the question/statement in order to help his interlocutor. However, we identified three ways in which students expressed their need of help:

- using sounds with raising intonation: *ăăă↑, ooo↑, îîî↑, aaa↑,*
- code-switching: *Repeat! Say again!,*
- repeating some of the interlocutor's words.

With respect to **circumlocutions** (2.48% of the communication strategies used and 10% of the students who use them), we identified two main situations when students use them:

- out of necessity:
  - to compensate for a lexical gap
  - to make the message clear for the interlocutor (offering help in understanding)
- as fillers (most of them) – *Ce mâncați? Ce faceți de mâncare? (What will you eat? What will you cook?).*

As anticipated, the least common strategy is **word-coinage** (1.38% of the communication strategies used and 6.25% of the students who use them): *noi nu arăm mult timp* (instead of *noi nu avem mult timp* – the verb *a avea* does not get the *-em* termination to the root, but the *-ăm* termination to an incomplete form of the third person singular *are*), *plictisoară* (instead of *plictisitoare* – the verb *a se plictisi* + the feminine suffix *-oară*). The candidates do not use this strategy a lot due to the fact that at this level, their lexis and the grammatical structures they know are too limited to serve as starting points for generalizations.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The dialogue tasks for the A1 exam are equally productive. We consider they should be kept as such in the item bank.

2. The transactional tasks might pick out definite roles (more initiating/more responding), but they have no impact on the discourse length. The fact that one candidate has more initiating moves than the other should not affect grading in this kind of tasks, at this level.

3. We consider that it would be a good idea for the teacher to draw attention on the function of discretionary responses when practicing conversations in class.

4. Feedback in conversation is culturally bound. Europeans tend to use more feedback giving devices. We consider that some techniques for giving basic feedback at this level could be discussed and practiced in class and elementary assessment fixed phrases and some basic continuers/acknowledgements should be valued when grading dialogues at this level.

5. Communication strategies are absolutely natural at this level and, in fact, communication would not be possible without them at level A1. In the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages*, the descriptors regarding oral interaction at A1 ("Can introduce him/herself and others and can ask and answer questions about personal details such as where he/she lives, people he/she knows and things he/she has. Can interact in a simple way provided *the other person talks slowly and clearly and is prepared to help*."<sup>13</sup> and "I can interact in a simple way provided *the other person is prepared to repeat or rephrase things at a slower rate of speech and help me formulate what I'm trying to say*. I can ask and answer simple questions in areas of immediate need or on very familiar topics."<sup>14</sup>) focus on the necessity of **rephrasing**, **repeating** and **offering help** for a dialogue to actually take place at this level. If the interlocutor is a native speaker (e.g. the examiner), rephrasing, repeating and offering help raise no special problems. However, when the interlocutor is another speaker of Romanian as a foreign language at level A1 (as in the case of the last part of the oral examination – the conversation/the role play), communication strategies are essential for rephrasing, repeating and offering help. We consider it is desirable for teachers to try to teach their students how to use more strategies like approximation, circumlocution, appeal for help, which relate to the target language. Otherwise, students will still rely on strategies in conversations, but they will mostly rely on those connected to their L1 or to another foreign language (literal translations, code-switching, foreignising L1 word, appeal for help in L1 or in another foreign language).

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<sup>13</sup> Table 1. *Common Reference Levels: global scale* (p. 24).

<sup>14</sup> Table 2. *Common Reference Levels: self-assessment grids* (p. 26)

6. Taking all these aspects into account, below we suggest some descriptors for conversational competence for three stages at level A1:

CONVERSATIONAL COMPETENCE (level A1)	
	<p>Can interact in a very simple way on familiar and concrete topics.                      Can <b>initiate</b> and <b>respond</b> and generally uses <b>long moves</b> in order to do that.                      Can <b>ask for help</b> when needed by using <b>fixed phrases</b> or <b>repetition</b> of the interlocutor's words.                      Can <b>help</b> his partner when needed using <b>communicative strategies</b> which mostly rely on the <b>target language</b> (circumlocution, approximation).                      Can use <b>basic fixed phrases</b> and words in order to give <b>feedback</b> in conversation (<b>continuers/acknowledgements</b> and <b>assessments</b>).</p>
	<p>Can interact in a very simple way on familiar and concrete topics.                      Can <b>initiate</b> and <b>respond</b> and generally uses <b>short moves</b> in order to do that.                      Can <b>ask for help</b> when needed by using <b>code-switching</b> or <b>repetition</b> of the interlocutor's words.                      Tries to <b>help</b> his partner when needed using <b>communicative strategies</b> which mostly rely on <b>L1</b> or on another <b>foreign language</b> (code-switching, literal translation, foreignising L1 words).                      Can use <b>words</b> and <b>sounds</b> in order to give <b>feedback</b> in conversation (mostly <b>continuers/acknowledgements</b>).</p>
	<p>Can interact in a very simple way on familiar and concrete topics.                      Can <b>initiate</b> and <b>respond</b> but <b>only</b> uses <b>short moves</b> in order to do that.                      Can <b>sometimes ask for help</b> when needed by using <b>sounds</b> or <b>non-verbal means</b>.  <b>Rarely</b> succeeds in <b>helping</b> his partner and only by using <b>communicative strategies</b> which only rely on <b>L1</b> or on another <b>foreign language</b> (code-switching, literal translation, foreignising L1 words).  <b>Does</b> generally <b>not</b> provide <b>feedback</b> in conversation.</p>

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## DEVELOPING AN ANALYSIS GRID FOR B1/ B2 READING TASKS AND ITEMS

ADRIANA TODEA<sup>1</sup>

**ABSTRACT.** *Developing an Analysis Grid for B1/ B2 Reading Tasks and Items.*

A test analysis grid is a useful tool in the process of test design/ writing and test validation as its development can help both set up guidelines for test writers and provide a means of checking whether these standards are met, not only by test tasks globally, but by test items individually. Assessing reading abilities in a foreign language on CEFR standards requires that test analysis grids adapt to CEFR descriptors. The question is whether the CEFR model of language proficiency may prove particularly successful at building quantifiable scales of selected assessment criteria that can be used to work out scores of test tasks, and test items individually, which can then translate into CEFR levels. The purpose of this research is putting in place an effective algorithm to measure, on the CEFR scale, the various input text characteristics, item characteristics, and problem-solving strategies of reading test tasks in interaction. The present paper focuses specifically on the development of a test analysis grid that can provide an accurate tool to measure/ validate B1 and B2 reading test tasks and items of the Romanian language tests developed at the Babeş-Bolyai University by the Romanian Language, Culture and Civilization Department.

**Key words:** *test design, test validation, input text, rubric, task, item, expected response, reading strategies, problem-solving strategies.*

**REZUMAT.** *Conceptul și structura grilei de analiză pentru testele de înțelegere-citire de nivel B1 și B2.* O grilă de analiză a cerințelor unui test de competență lingvistică este un instrument util în procesele de concepție, structurare, creare și validare a testului, ea putând fi folosită atât ca un mijloc de îndrumare a creatorilor de teste prin setul propriu de standarde și specificații, cât și ca un instrument de evaluare a cerințelor și itemilor creați de către experți în procesul de validare. Evaluarea competenței de înțelegere-citire pe baza standardelor CECRL (*Cadrul European Comun de Referință pentru Limbi*) face necesară adaptarea grilei de analiză la descriptorii cadrului european, în măsura în care acest model european standardizat al competenței lingvistice într-o limbă străină poate susține cu succes dezvoltarea unui sistem de evaluare cuantificabil

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și discriminatoriu între nivelurile de competență lingvistică. Scopul acestei cercetări este de a concepe un algoritm eficient de măsurare, pe scala CECRL, a caracteristicilor componentelor unui test de înțelegere-citire (textul sursă, textul itemului/ întrebării și strategiile de procesare a informației pentru identificarea răspunsului fiecărei întrebări) în interacțiune. În mod specific, acest demers are ca finalitate conceperea unei grile de analiză a testelor de înțelegere-citire dezvoltate de către Departamentul de Limbă, cultură și civilizație românească a Universității Babeș-Bolyai în cadrul evaluării la limba română a studenților străini înscriși în anul pregătitor.

**Cuvinte cheie:** *designul testului, procesul de validare, textul sursă, explicația și instrucțiunile cerinței, cerința, itemul, răspunsul preconizat, strategiile de lectură, strategiile de rezolvare a problemei.*

The assessment of language competence in relation to communicative skills, such as reading, is inherently dependent on correlating language knowledge thresholds with effective or successful task performance. Such an endeavor requires clear, contrastive and positive qualitative descriptions of what task success means for each grade on the assessment scale. The Common European Framework for Languages (2000), from this point forward CEFR, offers a language-independent assessment scale of language proficiency, complete with full descriptors of what effective performance means in relation to communicative skills, strategies, language knowledge and targeted content. As such, CEFR has been selected as the assessment theoretical framework for the L2 Romanian language tests developed at the Babes-Bolyai University by the Romanian Language, Culture, and Civilization Department, in order to bring into agreement the Romanian language assessment of L2 Romanian students with European standards of language assessment and, consequently, increase the national and international acceptability of the language certificates issued.

One of the first stages in the process of test validation is to establish test specifications in correlation with CEFR scales and descriptors as a basis for test design. Developing test analysis grids for the assessment of specific communicative skills is a constructive stage with multiple effects. Firstly, a test analysis grid constitutes a coherent and professional blueprint for test developers and designers by drawing clear dynamic correlations between test profile, test content, language thresholds, information processing operations, test solving strategies, background knowledge, etc, whose analysis results in an in-depth understanding of the detailed processes underlying the expected response, and, therefore, can support the development of a reliable,

documented system of discrete measurement. Secondly, the expert test validation and test verification processes can adapt the test analysis grid to a system of quantifiable criteria for measuring the conformity or non-conformity of tasks and items to test specifications. Ultimately, a reading test analysis grid explains how the interaction between input text features and the corresponding item features provides an effective and reliable framework for evaluating processes that occur naturally in authentic reading experiences.

### **Input text features**

The features of the input text constitute the first criterion to decide the appropriateness of the reading task to the proficiency level it targets as a testing device. A successful reading experience relies on both knowledge of language (vocabulary, grammar) and reading skills, and therefore, testing reading should consider the appropriate thresholds for both language knowledge and reading abilities. As the L2 Romanian language tests are designed for adult learners who, at the very least, have completed a highschool education and are undergoing a Romanian language preparatory year in order to enroll in Romanian- medium universities, concerns relating to the reading skills threshold can be safely dropped, as candidates are expected to transfer their fully developed reading skills from L1 to L2. As such, candidates are not expected to have difficulties in dealing successfully with any type of text whose basic genre features and generic linguistic conventions are part of any L1 secondary education curricula. Furthermore, candidates are expected to make use of the reading strategies they have already developed in L1 in solving L2 reading tasks, such as skimming, scanning, or using context to understand an unknown word, in other words, to be fluent L1 readers. Thus metalinguistic and metacognition thresholds are not independent factors to be considered in test design, unless they are significantly impacted by language knowledge thresholds and task specificity.

### **Overall comprehension: skimming**

As a form of expeditious reading at the global level of a text, skimming is a selective reading strategy that targets an overall comprehension and, as such, it is the means by which readers make first contact with the text. Skimming relies on our ability to recognize and understand the significance of text layout, text organization, paragraph organization and genre conventions. Successful skimming should provide an overall understanding of what the text is about and how the information is organized, that is, allow the reader to build a mental *framework to accommodate the whole text* (Weir, Huizhong & Yan, 2000: 25).

## Text organization

CEFR gives one important description as to the B1 appropriateness of level of text organization in two of its reading scales:

B1: "Can read *straightforward* factual texts on subjects related to his/her field and interest with a satisfactory level of comprehension." (Overall reading comprehension scale)

B1: "Can identify the main conclusions in *clearly signaled* argumentative texts. Can recognize significant points in *straightforward* newspaper articles on familiar subjects." (Reading for information and argument scale)<sup>2</sup>

*Straightforward ... and clearly signaled ... text* are descriptions of text clarity, of which text organization is a key component. Taking into account that in the same scales CEFR provides contrastive text qualifiers such as *simple* (A2) and *complex* (C1-C2), the required straightforward clarity of text organization is a property of B2 as well, by virtue of its hierarchical inclusiveness of B1). Thus, comprehensible skimming at B1/B2 would require a *standard or conventional* organization of the text according to genre conventions and text layout.

## Skimming and lexis

Skimming relies primarily on language knowledge, though. The overall understanding of the text depends, first and foremost, on its lexis. The adequate comprehension of any text relies on the understanding of 95% of the words in the text (Alderson, 2005: 35), with the meaning of the remaining 5% being worked out from context. Skimming, though, does not mean the full, detailed, careful reading of the whole text, but the mostly expeditious, occasionally careful, selective reading of text parts such as: title, subtitles, headings, introduction, conclusion and topical sentences (Weir, Huizhong & Yan, 2000: 40). Therefore, for establishing a general understanding of a text, the lexical and morpho-syntactic difficulty appropriate for the target level should not be judged in terms of overall percentages, but evaluated specifically in the parts of the text targeted by skimming.

## Text content: complexity and familiarity of topic

The appropriateness of the input text should be judged as well in terms of its content: comprehensibility of content relies on a balance between the complexity of information and the familiarity of the subject matter. According to Weir, Huizhong & Yan (2000: 25-28), activating background knowledge acts like a

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<sup>2</sup> CEFR, pp. 69-70, emphasis added.

coping mechanism for readers with poor language knowledge, and improves the comprehension of highly specialized texts for readers with good language knowledge. Similarly, particularly for B1 and B2 levels, CEFR balances comprehension of complex content against its familiarity, whereas the A2 and C1 descriptors lack such a degree of complexity- degree of familiarity correlation. In other words, A2 comprehension is restricted to texts that lack any degree of complexity (*short simple texts*), and C1 comprehension lacks any degree of familiarity caveat (*whether or not they relate to his/ her own area of speciality*).

A2: "Can understand *short simple texts* on familiar matters of a concrete type which consists of high frequency everyday or job-related language" (Overall reading comprehension scale)

B1: "Can read *straightforward factual* texts on *subjects related to his/ her field and interest* with a satisfactory level of comprehension." (Overall reading comprehension scale)

B2: "Can understand articles and reports concerned *with contemporary problems* in which the writers adopt *particular stances or viewpoints*." (Reading for information and argument scale)

B2: "Can obtain information, ideas, and opinions *from highly specialized sources within his/ her field*. Can understand *specialized articles outside his/ her field*, provided he/ she can *use a dictionary* occasionally to confirm his/ her interpretation of *terminology*." (Reading for information and argument scale)

C1: "Can understand in detail a *wide range of lengthy complex texts* likely to be encountered in social, professional or academic life, identifying points of detail including *attitudes* and *implied as well as stated opinions*." (Reading for information and argument scale)

C1: "Can understand in detail *lengthy, complex texts, whether or not they relate to his/ her own area of speciality*, provided he/ she can reread difficult sections."<sup>3</sup> (Overall reading comprehension scale)

B1 comprehension allows complexity at the level of factual, concrete information provided the content is familiar, whereas B2 allows comprehension of both factual and abstract information (*specialized articles, articles and reports concerned with contemporary problems, highly specialized sources*) by degrees, as follows: partial spontaneous comprehension (*use a dictionary*) of complex texts (*specialized articles*) *outside his/ her field*, but full comprehension of *information, ideas, and opinions* on familiar topics *from highly specialized sources* or on topics of general interest (*contemporary problems*). It is at these two particular levels, according to CEFR, that background knowledge or subject matter knowledge can facilitate comprehension provided the threshold language knowledge is reached

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<sup>3</sup> CEFR, pp. 69-70, emphasis added.

(Alderson, 2005: 102-106). According to the CEFR descriptors above, the language knowledge threshold for spontaneous unaided successful comprehension of unfamiliar factual and abstract content is C1. If assisted comprehension (*use of dictionary*) is not a test specification, then text selection in B1/B2 reading tests should be restricted to those of familiar content (either specialized or of general interest).

To sum up, a B1/B2 test analysis content scale should present increasing content complexity, but only on familiar topics.

### Lexis

Providing an appropriate scale for levels of knowledge of grammar and vocabulary required to support successful comprehension is not one of the CEFR's strengths. Both the General linguistic range and Vocabulary range scales are language production and not language comprehension oriented. The Vocabulary range scale quoted below describes lexical competence in terms of successful linguistic expression that balances, in particular for A2, B1 and B2, degrees of complexity against degrees of familiarity of various kinds of communicative interactions.

A2: "Has sufficient vocabulary for coping with simple survival needs; for the *expression* of basic communicative needs; to conduct routine, everyday transactions involving familiar situations and topics."

B1: "Has sufficient vocabulary to *express* himself/ herself with some circumlocutions on most topics pertinent to his everyday life such as family, hobbies and interest, work, travel and current events."

B2: "*Has a good range of vocabulary* for matters connected to his field and most general topics. Can *vary formulation to avoid frequent repetition*, but lexical gaps can still cause *hesitation* and *circumlocution*."

C1: "Has a good command of a *broad lexical repertoire* allowing gaps to be readily *overcome* with *circumlocutions*; little *obvious searching for expressions* or *avoidance strategies*. Good command of idiomatic expressions and colloquialisms."<sup>4</sup> (Vocabulary range scale)

As linguistic comprehension constantly outpaces production, knowledge, the above scale is not particularly useful in designing a language level scale appropriate for testing reading skills, aside from suggesting that we might give a description of active reading vocabulary based on the content complexity descriptions in the reading scales themselves.

The Overall reading comprehension scale provides some clearly stated vocabulary comprehension descriptions, though not consistently, as follows:

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<sup>4</sup> CEFR, p.112, emphasis added.

A2: "Can understand short simple texts on familiar matters of a concrete type which consists of *high frequency everyday or job-related language*"

B1: "Can read straightforward factual texts on subjects related to his/ her field and interest with a satisfactory level of comprehension."

B2: "Can read with a large degree of independence, adapting style and speed of reading to different texts and purposes, and using appropriate reference sources selectively. Has a *broad active reading vocabulary*, but may experience some *difficulty with low-frequency idioms*."

C1: "Can understand in detail lengthy, complex texts, whether or not they relate to his/ her own area of speciality, provided he/ she can reread difficult sections."<sup>5</sup> (Overall reading comprehension scale)

Level A2 and B2 descriptors are the only ones that contain specific language/ vocabulary descriptions, that is level A2 understands *high frequency everyday or job-related language*, whereas B2 has a *broad active reading vocabulary* and, by inference, has no *difficulty* understanding *high-frequency idioms*. Significantly, the B2 description of lexical comprehension correlates with the C1 Vocabulary range descriptor quoted above:

-- *broad active reading vocabulary* vs. *broad lexical repertoire*;

-- no *difficulty* understanding *high frequency idioms* vs. *good command of idiomatic expressions and colloquialisms*;

and not with its corresponding B2 Vocabulary range scale descriptor: *Has a good range of vocabulary for matters connected to his field and most general topics*.

By extrapolation, A2 and B2 reading comprehension descriptors can be used as reference points for assigning comprehension vocabulary values in between the two, B1, and above B2, C1, in correlation with text content descriptions. Hence, we can construct a *reading vocabulary scale* as follows:

A2: Can understand the *high frequency* vocabulary of texts consisting of *simple familiar* factual information;

B1: Can understand the *frequent* vocabulary of texts consisting of *complex*, but *familiar*, facts;

B2: Can understand the *broad vocabulary range/ low frequency vocabulary* and the *high frequency idioms* of texts consisting of *complex* facts, ideas and opinions on *familiar* topics;

C1: Can understand the *extended vocabulary range* and the *low frequency idioms* of texts consisting of *complex* facts, ideas and opinions on *unfamiliar* topics.

In this case, the C1 vocabulary descriptor can logically expand the B2 *broad range* qualifier to the C1 *extended range* and the B2 *high-frequency idioms* to the C1 *low-frequency idioms*. On the other hand, the A2 *high frequency* qualifier

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<sup>5</sup> CEFR, p. 69, emphasis added.

can generate two more scale values as *frequent* B1 and *low- frequency* B2. But B2's low frequency vocabulary cannot include specialized vocabulary *outside his/ her field*, which, according to the B2 descriptor in the Reading for information and argument scale, would require the use of a dictionary. Therefore, reading vocabulary descriptors need to combine, correlate and generate degrees of

- *language use* (vocabulary frequency scale);
- *language domains* (general vs. idiomatic, general vs. specialized);
- *background knowledge* (familiarity);
- *content complexity* (abstract vs. factual, information complexity).

	A2	B1	B2	C1
words and expressions	high frequency	frequent	some low frequency	many low-frequency
idioms	--	--	high frequency	low frequency
vocabulary range	limited	good	broad	extended
concrete information	concrete	concrete	mostly concrete	some concrete
abstract information	--	--	some abstract	mostly abstract
specialized information	--	low degree of specialization	highly specialized	highly specialized
information complexity	simple	complex	complex	complex
degree of familiarity	only familiar	mostly familiar	rather familiar	rather unfamiliar

### Items as independent problem-solving tasks

Reading processes may very well vary depending on their specific purpose: pleasure, information, or learning. Reading tests, as components of L2 language competence examinations, though, would invariably turn the reading experience, in the evaluation process, into a problem-solving task, that would explicitly or implicitly require that the test-takers use their reading abilities to process information in very specific ways, such as

- follow instructions (invariably in every rubric text);
- identify gist, structure, main ideas, definitions, supporting details, points in a line of argumentation, specific details, relevant data or evidence, viewpoints, opinions, purpose, motivation, underlying theme or concept;
- infer attitudes; feelings, moods, purpose, motivation;

- compare data, facts, evidence, ideas and understand how they relate to one another as cause, effect, solution or purpose;
- draw logical inferences;
- reach a conclusion;
- evaluate attitudes, moods, overall purpose.

Testing reading abilities through specific operations of information processing like the ones above are nonetheless perfectly compatible with real life goals and motivations underlying general or specialized reading activities. In this respect, items designed on such operations have an appropriate degree of authenticity. There are two criteria that can narrow down the selection of an operation in item design: one is the language threshold necessary for successful task completion, the other is the integration of language knowledge, content and skill in ways that would make a language certificate particularly relevant to the needs, requirements and standards of stakeholders who may require general language proficiency or academic/ professional language proficiency certification, with various degrees of specialization. The B2 Romanian language test developed by the Romanian Language, Culture, and Civilization Department is specifically designed as an in-house exit test for students enrolled in the Romanian language preparatory year, and the certification is required for access to university programs with Romanian as language of instruction. As such, its general purpose is testing language knowledge and skills that are relevant to coping with university life and instruction. Although the B1 Romanian language test is administered to the same L2 Romanian students as a midterm exam, its general focus is language testing for communicative autonomy and social integration.

With respect to language thresholds that can support specific item operations, CEFR provides significant details in its Reading for information and argument scale, as follows:

A1: “Can *get an idea of the content* of simpler informational material and short simple descriptions, especially if there is visual support.”

A2: “Can *identify specific information* in simpler written material he/she encounters such as letters, brochures and short newspaper articles describing events.”

B1 “Can *recognise significant points* in straightforward newspaper articles on familiar subjects.”

B1: “Can identify the main conclusions in clearly signalled argumentative texts. Can *recognise the line of argument* in the treatment of the issue presented, though *not necessarily in detail*.”

B2: “Can *understand* articles and reports concerned with contemporary problems in which the writers adopt particular *stances or viewpoints*.”

B2: “Can *obtain information, ideas and opinions* from highly specialised sources within his/her field. Can understand specialised articles outside his/her



field, provided he/she can occasionally use a dictionary to confirm his/her interpretation of terminology.”

C1: “Can understand in detail a wide range of lengthy, complex text likely to be encountered in social, professional or academic life, *identifying finer points of detail including attitudes, and implied as well as stated opinions.*”<sup>6</sup>

Providing that such information processes as described and highlighted above are understood in strict correlation with the degree of text complexity, and that the hierarchical organization of CEFR levels presupposes that the higher levels are inclusive of lower level abilities, we can correlate language thresholds to item problem-solving operations as follows:

	Problem solving operations	CEFR descriptors (excerpts)
C1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• identify underlying theme or concept;</li> <li>• infer attitudes; feelings, moods, purpose; motivation;</li> </ul>	<i>identifying finer points of detail including attitudes, ... implied ... stated opinions</i>
B2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• identify supporting details, viewpoints, opinions, purpose, motivation;</li> <li>• compare and relate ideas;</li> <li>• evaluate attitudes, moods, overall purpose;</li> </ul>	<i>understand ... stances ... viewpoints; obtain information, ideas and opinions</i>
B1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• identify main ideas, points in a line of argumentation, relevant evidence;</li> <li>• compare and relate evidence;</li> <li>• reach a conclusion;</li> <li>• draw logical inferences;</li> </ul>	<i>recognise significant points; recognise the line of argument ...not necessarily in detail</i>
A2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• follow instructions, identify definitions, specific details, relevant data;</li> <li>• compare and relate data, facts</li> </ul>	<i>identify specific information</i>
A1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• identify gist, structure</li> </ul>	<i>get an idea of the content</i>

Thus, each reading test item becomes an assignment, which requires the use of one or more calibrated problem-solving operations, is to be undertaken mostly independently of others, and requires that test-takers identify and process relevant information from the input text, according to overt instructions stated in the rubric, and by means of procedures and processes which are part of the knowledge and skills under evaluation.

### Phrasing the item

A successful completion of an item assignment depends, first and foremost, on a complete understanding of its requirements. Whereas some gaps in the comprehension of the input text may not hinder a successful

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<sup>6</sup> CEFR, p.70, emphasis added.

completion of specific item tasks, the full comprehension of the rubric instructions and item text is absolutely essential. In this respect, the phrasing of the item and rubric instructions should be fully and easily comprehensible to the candidate, and therefore, should rigorously conform, in their entirety, to the descriptors of the language level targeted by the reading test or to the level immediately below, in both their lexical and morpho-syntactic components.

## Scanning

Scanning is the reading strategy of selectively and expeditiously looking through a text in search for clues that will locate specific information, or the segment of the input text where a specific answer can be found. This strategy prevents the repeated, time consuming careful reading of the full text in order to complete the problem-solving assignment underlying each item. Scanning will pick key words (numbers, dates, names, words or phrases from the item text and find appropriate matches for them in the input text. The purpose of this reading strategy is not comprehension, but locating information (Weir, Huizhong & Yan, 2000: 25; 41). Effective scanning relies as well on the ability to capitalize on skimming, that is, to use the knowledge of textual features and organization to narrow down the areas of the text that need to be scanned.

Scanning can have different degrees of difficulty based on whether

- there is a perfect match in *form*, *morphological category*, and *meaning* between the key words selected from item text and their matching correspondents in the input segment (numbers, dates, and names);
- there is an imperfect match in *form*, but a perfect match in *morphological category*, and *meaning* between the key words selected from item text and their matching correspondents in the input segment (use of synonyms);
- there is an imperfect match in *form*, and *morphological category*, but a perfect match in *meaning* between the key words selected from item text and their matching correspondents in the input segment (a key part of input segment has been rephrased in the wording of the item; use of antonyms);
- there is an imperfect match in *form*, *morphological category* and *overt meaning* between the key words selected from item text and their matching correspondents in the input segment (the matching meaning has to be inferred from larger segments such as clauses, sentences, or paragraphs, or via related semantic fields).

Scanning features as a reading strategy/ ability in the CEFR Reading for orientation scale, although it is clear from the descriptions that the term is used inclusively for both scanning and search reading. Still, the CEFR descriptors below are relevant for establishing that both B1 and B2 test-takers are expected to be competent at it.

B1: “Can *find and understand relevant information* in everyday material, such as letters, brochures and short official documents.”

B1: “Can *scan longer texts* in order to *locate desired information*, and gather information from different parts of a text, or from different texts in order to fulfil a specific task.”

B2: “Can *scan quickly through long and complex texts, locating relevant details.*”<sup>7</sup>

Thus, whatever scanning difficulties may occur at these levels, they are expected to arise from the size and language complexity of the targeted segments of the input text, rather than from incompetent scanning.

### **Search reading**

Once the relevant segment is located in the input text, information is processed through search reading: a careful reading at a local level, within the target segment, but guided by the “predetermined topic” which results from the item’s problem-solving assignment (Weir, Huizhong & Yan, 2000: 25, 38). The reading process at this level has to be thorough enough to generate an accurate representation of the segment. In this respect, the language level of the input segment has to be both relevant and accessible enough to the targeted level, although not exclusively so. Provided the segment is large enough, unknown words and expressions, or unfamiliar meanings could be worked out from the context. In other words, the phrasing of the input segment has to generate full accessibility to information by balancing any challenging language against input segment size and coherence.

As discussed in the scanning section, the CEFR Reading for orientation scale treats scanning and search reading inclusively, as a composite strategy/ability measuring full reading comprehension at a local level. And, as stated there, the B1 and B2 descriptors assume full search reading competence in correlation to appropriate degrees of text complexity.

### **Conclusion**

The present paper focuses on breaking down the dynamic interdependence between underlying strategies, operations, and linguistic knowledge in L2 reading experiences, in relation to text specificity. These analyses attempt to build reading task/ item feature scales, both evaluative and descriptive of general and/ or academic reading performance. Such scales could

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<sup>7</sup> CEFR, p. 70, emphasis added.

constitute the basis for developing reading test specifications, test design, and expert test verification and validation. The annex below summarizes these results in what we consider to be a functional test analysis grid.

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## Annex

### ***Test analysis grid for B1/B2 reading tasks and items in L2 Romanian language certification tests***

- = the variant is listed for contrastive purposes, but it is *not eligible*;  
= *eligible* variant, providing it matches the required level, if specified.

#### **Input text features**

**Text source:** [*specify*]

**Text genre:** [*specify*]

**Text type:**

- mainly descriptive/ expository;
- mainly narrative;
- mainly argumentative.

**Text consists of:**

- mostly *complex* facts, ideas and opinions on *unfamiliar* topics;
- mostly *complex* facts, ideas and opinions on *familiar* topics B2;

- mostly *complex*, but *familiar*, facts B1;
- only *simple familiar* facts.

**Text length:**[*specify*]

**Text and paragraph organization**

- complex/ sophisticated/ unconventional;
- standard/ conventional;
- simplified/ rudimentary.

**Most of the vocabulary in introduction, conclusion and topical sentences is within**

- an *extended* range of vocabulary, including *many low-frequency words* and *some low-frequency idioms*, which can convey both *complex concrete* and *abstract* information, *rather unfamiliar* and possibly *highly specialized*;
- a *broad* range of vocabulary, including *some low-frequency words* and *high-frequency idioms*, which can convey both *complex concrete* and *abstract* information, *rather familiar* and possibly *highly specialized*; B2
- a *good* range of *frequent* vocabulary which can convey *complex concrete* information, *mostly familiar* and possibly *slightly specialized*; B1
- limited* range of *high frequency* vocabulary which can convey only *simple, concrete, familiar* information.

**Item features**

**Item type**

- multiple choice;
- True/ False;
- multiple matching.

**Item's wording is within**

- an *extended* range of vocabulary, including *many low-frequency words* and *some low-frequency idioms*, which can convey both *complex concrete* and *abstract* information, *rather unfamiliar* and possibly *highly specialized*;
- a *broad* range of vocabulary, including *some low-frequency words* and *high-frequency idioms*, which can convey both *complex concrete* and *abstract* information, *rather familiar* and possibly *highly specialized*; B2
- a *good* range of *frequent* vocabulary which can convey *complex concrete* information, *mostly familiar* and possibly *slightly specialized*; B1/B2
- limited* range of *high frequency* vocabulary which can convey only *simple, concrete, familiar* information B1

**Item's underlying problem-solving operations**

- follow instructions;  
*identify*
- gist of (part of) text;

- structure;
- main idea of paragraph;
- definition;
- supporting detail(s), B2
- point(s) in a line of argumentation;
- specific detail(s);
- relevant data or evidence;
- viewpoints; B2
- opinions; B2
- purpose; B2
- motivation; B2
- underlying theme or concept;
- infer/ evaluate*  attitudes;
- feelings;
- moods;
- purpose;
- motivation;
  
- compare*  data;
- facts;
- evidence;
- ideas; B2
- identify information relationships:*  cause;
- effect;
- solution;
- purpose;
- draw logical inferences;
- reach a conclusion.

**Scanning locates segments in the input text that match most item key words in**

- form, morphological category, and meaning;
- morphological category, and meaning;
- overt meaning;
- related meaning;
- inferential meaning.

**Input segment's vocabulary is mostly within**

- an *extended* range of vocabulary, including *many low-frequency words* and *some low-frequency idioms*, which can convey both *complex concrete* and *abstract* information, *rather unfamiliar* and possibly *highly specialized*;
- a *broad* range of vocabulary, including *some low-frequency words* and *high-frequency idioms*, which can convey both *complex concrete* and *abstract* information, *rather familiar* and possibly *highly specialized*; B2

- a *good* range of *frequent* vocabulary which can convey *complex concrete* information, *mostly familiar* and possibly *slightly specialized*; B1
- limited* range of *high frequency* vocabulary which can convey only *simple, concrete, familiar* information

**Input segment size:**

- one or more nonadjacent sentences from different paragraphs;
- one or more nonadjacent sentences within the same paragraph;
- one complex sentence/ more than one adjacent simple sentences;
- one clause/ simple sentence.

## **BEING ON GUARD VS BEING IN BLINKERS: PERSPECTIVES ON THE INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE WITH FOREIGN MEDICAL STUDENTS IN ROMANIA. ASPECTS OF EVALUATION**

**ANCA URSA<sup>1</sup>**

**ABSTRACT.** *Being on guard vs being in blinkers: perspectives on the intercultural competence with foreign medical students in Romania. Aspects of evaluation.* The development of intercultural competence (IC) in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is a clear necessity, and not a socio-political trend. If in the United States circumstances have imposed for decades the establishment of a new discipline, Europe sees itself now confronted with the emergency of establishing intercultural teaching principles, in the face of massive immigration and an explosion in educational and occupational mobility. If we relate to the second category, foreign medical students in Romania respond to a double wager of understanding Romanians: the street and the hospital medium. From a pedagogical perspective, the work group is homogeneous, so that teaching transcultural knowledge, attitudes and abilities does not raise major problems. However, evaluation represents a challenge: it is not a question of knowledge, where there already are multiple instruments that have been verified, but about attitudes and abilities, which are monitored in time and in specific contexts, and the RFL teacher rarely benefits from such circumstances. In the present study, „*Being on Guard Vs Being in Blinkers: Perspectives on the Intercultural Competence with Foreign Medical Students in Romania. Aspects Of Evaluation*”, we try to build some evaluation activities and exercises that are specific for each component of the intercultural competence, and which are adapted to the students’ curriculum and schedule.

**Keywords:** *intercultural competence, evaluation, attitudes, abilities, integrated activities.*

**REZUMAT.** *Cu ochii în patru vs. cu ochelari de cal: perspective asupra competenței interculturale la studenții medici străini din România. Aspecte ale evaluării.* Dezvoltarea competenței interculturale în secolul XXI este o

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necesitate clară, nu un trend sociopolitic. Dacă în Statele Unite circumstanțele au impus de câteva decenii deja constituirea noii discipline, Europa se vede acum confruntată cu urgența constituirii principiilor didactice interculturale, în fața imigrației masive și a exploziei mobilităților educaționale. Dacă ne raportăm la a doua categorie, studenții străini mediciști din România răspund unui dublu pariu al înțelegerii românilor: strada și mediul spitalicesc. Din perspectivă pedagogică, grupul de lucru e omogen, deci predarea cunoștințelor, atitudinilor și abilităților transculturale nu ridică probleme majore. Însă evaluarea e o provocare: nu e vorba de cunoștințe, unde deja există instrumente multiple și verificate, ci de atitudini și abilități, care se monitorizează în timp și în contexte specifice, iar profesorul de RLS dispune rareori de asemenea circumstanțe. În studiul de față încercăm să construim câteva activități și exerciții de evaluare specifice pentru fiecare componentă a competenței interculturale, adaptate la curriculumul și orarul studenților noștri.

**Cuvinte cheie:** *competență interculturală, metode de evaluare, atitudini, abilități, activități integrate.*

## 1. Introduction

In the academic environment, the intercultural competence (IC) is generally associated with communication competences. European language policies have initially included it in the *Common European Framework for Languages*, and subsequently assigned it an individual space that is still directly associated with the levels and grids from the aforementioned document. In the past years, the stress has been less on the teaching methodology and more intensely on the ICC evaluation, both in the European space and in the American educational environment. The creation of evaluation grids that are specialised and adjusted in accordance with the present socio-historic needs determines a constant process of re-thinking the teaching and the types of activities that can be evaluated with the new instruments. We will review the stage of the results within the Western space: the directions outlined in Brussels, from their present early stage, and the American instruments of evaluation, with wider experience time-wise, which allowed them validation and diversification within specialized contexts. This diversification is especially useful for the present study, since we will follow the evaluation process of the IC in foreign students from medical schools in Romania.

What are the risks that the medical personnel exposes itself to if it neglects or ignores the intercultural competence? Firstly, to the same risks as in other fields and contexts: deformed or blocked communication,

stereotyping, generalization, racism. Furthermore, in the clinical environment what can arise are inequalities in treating patients and a discriminating treatment based on race, culture, language, religion, social status etc.

As a result, the usefulness of teaching and evaluating the IC of the over 10.000 foreign medical students in Romania<sup>2</sup> is beyond any doubt. We consider that, if there are no classes exclusively dedicated to the abilities in questions, although these would be equally useful for Romanian students, this competence could be included within the Romanian language course that future doctors take either during the Preparatory year or during the first two or three years of medical studies, in accordance with the academic curriculum. Our previous studies had as a central point the development of the curriculum for IC (Ursa & Mărcean, 2006/1, 2006/2), but the present article begins a new series of content analysis and development in the evaluation process, especially in the medical context.

## **2. Methods of evaluating the intercultural competence. A comparative presentation**

As mentioned above, multicultural education, whether general or medical, has a longer experience in the United States, through the force of historic circumstances. In Europe, without it being something new, multiculturalism has only recently begun to be built on a separate curriculum, with objectives that are evaluated quantitatively or qualitatively. In what follows, we will present and compare two monitoring models of the IC, one American and one European, which are probably the most popular in the literature. The models in questions are the DMIS and the INCA belonging to Bennett (1993) and Byram (1997), respectively, which have subsequently generated replicas, extensions, and sets of tests. Still in this section, we will discuss the evaluation instrument that is specific to interculturality within the clinical environment. The Association of American Medical Colleges created the TACCT, which is a set of items that help every institute of medical education in the United States to more easily integrate the ICC in their own academic programmes.

**2.1. The DMIS** (Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity). Doctor Milton Bennett's model describes six stages of development which allow an objective observation of the evolution of a person from ethnocentrism (denial, defense, minimization) to ethnorelativism (acceptance,

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.rfi.ro/social-85336-numarul-studentilor-straini-romania-s-dublat-zece-ani-interviu-audio>; <http://www.zf.ro/profesii/educatia-la-export-pesto-20-000-de-studenti-straini-invata-in-facultatile-romanesti-14978309>

adaptation, integration). One cannot speak of a grid, but rather of a scale, but it is a useful instrument in the evaluation of the sensitive reaction of a person in an encounter with another person or a group that is culturally different. We have summarised the details of the stages in an explanatory table, which allows for a rapid check.

**Table 1.** Bennett's Model (1993: 25)

↑ E T H N O R E L A T I V I S M	6. Integration	One interprets the behaviour of the interlocutor from multiple cultural perspectives. One recognises that the perspective on the world is a collective construct.
	5. Adaptation	One uses the knowledge about one's own culture and about different cultures in order to make a rapid switch from one paradigm to another. One can empathise with values and behaviours that are different from one's own.
	4. Acceptance	One enjoys recognising and analysing cultural differences. One does not agree with all of them, but respectfully and curiously accepts them.
E T H N O C E N T R I S M	3. Minimization	One believes that one's reference points are universal. One has the tendency of vulgarizing and romanticising other cultures.
	2. Defense	One observes the differences between one's own culture and that of others, but attaches negative epithets to the latter. The tendency is of considering oneself as a cultural reference point, while ' <i>the other</i> ' is 'underdeveloped', 'inferior'.
	1. Denial	One considers that one's own culture is the only one that validates reality. One avoids observing and confronting oneself with different perspectives.

The biggest benefit of the proposed grid is announced by the author himself: by being very practical, it determines the accurate placing of individuals or groups in the adequate intercultural stage and allows the trainers to appropriately adapt the contents, namely the rhythm of the activities, so as to facilitate the students' crossing to the next stage (Bennett, 1993: 68). According to the theoretician, the students who take modules on interculturality can get from the first stage to the fifth stage within two years at the minimum.

**2.2. The INCA** (Intercultural Competence Assessment). The name of professor Michael Byram is associated with the construction of the educational scaffolding for the intercultural communication competence – the ICC, as he legitimizes it in the literature – within the European language policies from the past 20 years. In his 1997 study, he takes over interculturality from the CEFL, chapter 5, which is dedicated to general competences, and transforms it from a minor objective into a star of modern European education. That is when he also built the first specific grid, with content elements in the learning process of the ICC. Subsequently, he will also supply an attainment grid with six components (see Annexe), used by the evaluator, and an assessee grid with three sections: openness, knowledge and flexibility.

The ICC project followed the model of the European Language Portfolios (ELPs), with its three components – Passport, Biography and Dossier – which were adapted to intercultural learning are easy to download from their respective sections of the website of the European Council (<https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/librarydoc/the-inca-project-intercultural-competence-assessment>). First, there is a *Passport* that includes evaluation and self-evaluation grids. For that matter, the textbooks associated with it have developed differently, from the perspective of the evaluator and of the evaluated subject. Byram and his team's INCA project started in 2004 with the declared purpose of offering instruments that are easy to use in appreciating the intercultural competence of those who communicate in diverse contexts, while the main grip offers transparency, coherence and compatibility between the evaluated elements (see Annexe). Then, the *Biography* section records relevant personal intercultural experiences, self-reflection upon the encountered behaviours, journal entries about the encounters with individuals from different cultures. Finally, the *Dossier* encourages participation through personal accounts about the direct experience with the proposed evaluation grids, from the perspective of the teacher or of the student.

The grids evaluate attitudes, knowledge or skills on three levels of intercultural performance, *basic*, *intermediate* and *full* competence, reminiscent of Bennett's scale. One starts off from the idea that there is no zero level of ICC, and that by the nature of the present civilization, the home, educational and social environment has already modelled, whether programmed or not, the minimal level.

**Tabel 2.** Scala INCA simplificată (INCA 1: 7-8)

Basic competence	The individual is reasonably tolerant, with the intention of reacting well, but responds spontaneously, not planned.
Intermediate competence	The person offers a neutral response to difference, but there is the intention of preparing a reaction that is socially adequate for unfamiliar situations.
Full competence	The person is ready at any time to make use of a wide repertoire of strategies, knowledge and skills in order to efficiently manage the difference.

In the evaluation, one of the above levels is chosen for six constitutive elements of the ICC (tolerance of ambiguity, behavioural flexibility, communicative awareness, knowledge discovery, respect for otherness and empathy), which are combined in pairs to form three sections: openness / respect for others, knowledge / empathy and adaptability / flexibility.

Last but not least, it is important to know that the INCA has a standardised structure, comprised of 4 distinct parts. The first two have the role of collecting biographical data and of understanding the intercultural profile of the person who is evaluated. The third part proposes a *scenario*, for which items are constructed, in order to appreciate the student's reaction. The last exercise from this section is always a role-playing game, with the offering of indications. In the fourth part what appear are generally specific questions that are based on a text or on a video recording, plus a collective role-playing game, in which the student interacts with several colleagues while he/she is being observed and evaluated according to the attainment grid. For the first three sections the items constructed are of the T/F, multiple choice, open-ended questions type, in order to separately verify each of the six components of the ICC. For the fourth part, the performance of the person who is evaluated is each time measured in a table with the six components of the competence and according to the criteria from the grid. The combined efficiency of the type of test and the exhaustive grid determines us to personally opt for such a model within university practice. As a result, in the last section we will propose a concrete evaluation on an INCA model.

**2.3. The TACCT** (Tool for Assessing Cultural Competence). This grid is different from the previous ones, firstly because it is created for institutions and not for individuals. In the year 2000, the committee that dealt with the accreditation of the departments of medical education from the United States and Canada introduced new standards in the process of institutional evaluation, both referring to the doctor-patient communication, respectively to preconceptions and blockages generated by the low level in the competence in question. As a result, there is no scale, no grid for evaluating the individual competence, as in the previous models, but a series of closed items of the YES / NO type that refer to what was and was not covered in the first three years of medical studies, i.e. an evaluation of the institutional curriculum. However, for the undergraduate medical education, it is a valuable resource of educational objectives that ensure a correct and complete access to learning / evaluating the cultural competence. The authors (Lie et al., 2008) have prepared series of five domains for a pre-clinical year and a clinical year (clerkships):

- Domain I: Cultural Competence Rationale, Context, and Definition
- Domain II: Key Aspects of Cultural Competence
- Domain III: Impact of Stereotyping on Medical Decision-Making
- Domain IV: Health Disparities and Factors Influencing Health

### Domain V: Cross-Cultural Clinical Skills

Each domain includes between 8 and 18 closed items. Below there is an illustrating example for domain V, in which the results that need to be reached by the students are preceded by the symbol letter for knowledge, skills and attitudes. Beyond indicating the ideal path, as the authors themselves state – we know little about implementing the evaluation and its objectivity.

K1. Identify K1. Identify community beliefs & health practices

K2. Describe cross-cultural communication models

K3. Understand physician-patient negotiation

K4. Describe the functions of an interpreter

K5. List effective ways of working with interpreter

K6. List ways to enhance patient adherence

S1. Elicit a culture, social, and medical history

S2. Use negotiating and problem-solving skills

S3. Identify need for & collaborate with interpreter

S4. Assess and enhance patient adherence

S5. Recognize and manage the impact of bias

A1. Respect patient's cultural beliefs

A2. Acknowledge the impact of physician biases

Before finalizing this section dedicated to presenting the evaluation grids, we need to underline certain shortcomings that we have observed in all of the mentioned models. Firstly, their validity is relative. Certainly, each of the three models have been implemented in varied contexts. However, we have not encountered, in the literature, any study that is relevant through the investigated sample, meaning through a large enough number of participants to allow an empirical re-evaluation of the criteria that were initially proposed. The second vulnerability, which for the moment cannot be prevented by IC tests, stems from the fact that the persons who are tested display a simulated behaviour when it comes to attitudes. There are individuals who, for a positive feedback and a high grade act *as if* they were curious, open and tolerant. Fortunately, there are two possible remedies that minimise the dishonest behaviour: either an attitude centred questionnaire at the end of the test or an optimistic presupposition that the person who is being evaluated is capable to perform, by simulating just as efficiently, in both real and spontaneous contexts (Lenz & Berthele, 2010: 29). We consider however that the greatest danger can come from the conviction of the individuals involved in teaching and evaluating the IC, trainers and trainees, that there is a supreme position of the sensitive tolerance towards others, a centre of the world, whether it is white, Western, heterosexual or of a certain religion etc. (Wear, 2003: 550). There one can in no way talk about interculturality, but about centre-culturality. The models of intercultural evaluation that have already been proposed or that are being created should reflect on the fine line between types of tolerance, and maybe even on the exclusion of the term itself.

We stop here with the presentation of the instruments for evaluating the ICC, although they are numerous and almost each of them brings, beside an increase in the objectivity and measurability within evaluation, ideas for a correct re-modelling of the taught contents as well. BASIC, ICSI, CCAI or IDI are just some of the models that bring us professional criteria. Paula Garret-Rucks offers a useful comparative analysis, without it being exhaustive (Garret-Rucks, 2012: 13-14). However, the mentioned models all follow the path of evaluating based on quantitative criteria. Or, for a soft competence, such as interculturality, we consider that the qualitative descriptors are more nuanced and apt to capture the differences in performance, especially in the case of attitudes and skills. As a result, in the last section of the paper we will return to the suggestions from the INCA grid, which we consider to be both the most complex and the most adapted to the evaluation of the targeted objectives, in order to identify efficient ways of constructing the items in evaluating the IC.

### 3. Constructing a test model in the process of evaluating the IC

#### *3.1. Components, objectives, teaching activities and instruments of evaluation for IC*

Since we have not yet found syllabi or teaching instructions for the intercultural competence in the curriculum associated with teaching foreign languages, especially with teaching Romanian as a foreign language (RFL) and Romanian for specific purposes (RSP), we propose below two simplified instruments that are useful in forming and evaluating the IC. If the first table is more general, with a more general addressability, the second one is conceived especially for medical students. Beside the sources discussed in the previous section, we have used recommendations and taxonomies from the specific bibliography (Betancourt & Cervantes, 2009: 472).

**Table 3.** Component elements and general techniques in IC

Attitudes	Knowledge	Skills
Modesty; Empathy; Curiosity; Respect; Sensitivity; Being aware of the interlocutor's cultural influences.	Knowledge about attitudes, values, beliefs and behaviours of cultural groups.	Skills to communicate with patients from different cultural groups.

Useful techniques for IC		
Self-reflection; Expressing an opinion about preconceptions, tendencies of stereotyping; Appreciation of personal values, of beliefs and of behaviours.	Models of avoiding lists of traits, thus of an over-simplification; Being aware of the cultural fluidity, of the traits that are changing for groups.	The capacity to manage the communicational situation after finding out the information; The capacity to solicit the explanatory model of the interlocutor / patient.

**Table 4.** Exercises and activities in teaching and evaluating IC

Exercises and activities for TEACHING-LEARNING IC for medical students		
Open conversations about the impact of racism, sexism and other types of discrimination in healthcare; A discourse about how they felt to be seen as 'different'; The determination of one's own reaction before picture with different races and ethnicities; Discussing the manner in which the members of one's own family interact with the healthcare system.	Receiving written or audio texts about the specificity of the community with which they will enter in contact; Ethnopharmacology exercises: the incidence and prevalence of diseases, the compliance with the treatment, specific practices of healing that can interfere with the recommended treatment, historic factors.	Exercises for identifying the explanatory model of the patient for his/her disease; Opinions about the patient's dependency on the family / doctor in taking decisions; Dialogues about the patient's perception of alternative medicine; Techniques of surpassing the problems of the patient's mistrust in the doctor / the healthcare system.
Exercising and activities for EVALUATING the IC for medical students		
Role-playing game (doctor-patient); Structured interview; Self-evaluation; Presentation of a clinical case; Video with a recorded consultation.	Pre-testing and post-testing; True / False, multiple choice; Presentation of a case study.	Recording of a consultation (video or audio); Role-playing game: offering indications; Presentation of clinical case.

### ***3.2. The intercultural challenges of the foreign medical student in Romania***

Before being confronted with the cultural differences of Romanian patients during clinical semiology in the 3<sup>rd</sup> year, foreign students from Romanian university cities already go through several stages of getting along and needing to communicate with individuals who are not only culturally different but also very diversified. There is foremost an immediate medium that is profoundly multicultural, that of they class colleagues. Just at the University of Medicine and Pharmacy from Cluj-Napoca there are students from over 90 countries who come together. Then, the temporary residence imposes from the start negotiation and adaptability for minimal needs: accommodation, shopping, relations with the authorities or with administrative institutions. As a result, assuming



interculturality is not optional, but not intuitive either. The challenges faced are diverse. Leaving aside the relationships with the colleagues who come from different cultures, foreign students enter a several year immersion into the reality of the Romanian society. We present below a typology of Romanians, which is possibly useful for foreigners, even if only to generate its deconstruction. This typology is exhaustive and belongs to psychologist Daniel David and opting for such a reference represented the novelty of the investigations and of professional sampling. The list below presents a possible portrait for Romanians, which has been simplified here due to obvious issues of space:

1. a personality that is usually defensive, centred on negative aspects (e.g. scepticism, misanthropy, pessimism);
2. a behaviour that does not easily respect norms and rules;
3. major reference points: work, family and religiousness;
4. mistrusting people, foreigners or strangers, with the exception of family;
5. using power in a feminine paradigm, characterised by discussions and the search for consensus, which are sometimes burdened by disputes / disagreements;
6. small scores with regards to values such as universalism, benevolence, hedonism, searching for the new and self-determination;
7. the simulation of the importance of Western values in order to create a good impression;
8. contempt, doubt and relativism are lower, while conformism is high, which makes them predisposed to give in to dogmas (in this case religious). (David, 2015: passim)

How can this information be used in a course on interculturality or in an evaluation test? We will capitalize a part of the information in the last section of this study, but for now we can say how such data can NOT be used: lists with ethnic traits should not be encouraged, they cannot be used as a reference point in forming an intercultural position, absolute credit should not be given to sources, negative or positive positions regarding a trait/list of traits should not be demanded, they can at most be discussed within different reference systems.

### ***3.3. Standardised test for evaluating the IC according to the INCA model***

As we have elaborated above, the INCA model proposes a standardised test variant that evaluates the level of the intercultural competence. In the following table we have unfolded the structure proposed in the evaluator's Textbook (INCA 1, 2004: 18-39). Each time, an example of an item from the INCA textbook is followed by a personal example of an item adapted to the evaluation of the cultural competence of 3<sup>rd</sup> year foreign medical students in Romania.

**Test for the evaluation of the intercultural competence**

**1. Biographical information:** 14 items of the fill in information type, answers to open-ended questions, an evaluation on the Linkert scale, filling in / expressing one's opinion.

*E.g. 1: In what countries have you been so far?*

*E.g. 2: How often have you completed the anamnesis of a Romanian patient?*

**2. Intercultural profile:** 21 statements on intercultural situations. The person being evaluated needs to tick one of the options – Completely applicable / Perhaps applicable / Not applicable.

*E.g. 1: When my interlocutors use gestures or words I do not understand, I ignore them.*

*E.g. 2: When I hear that a patient dies in hospital, in Romania, I think that he/she is unlucky.*

**3. Intercultural encounters:** 4-5 scenarios that can arise when a person lives and works away from home or when in his/her environment new, different colleagues appear. For each scenario there are open-ended questions, with the exception of the last one. This is an invariable role-playing game in which the person who is evaluated needs to give indications related to the evaluator's work, the latter playing the role of a colleague who does not know the language of the place well.

*E.g. 1: Given that one of the reasons for which you have decided to work abroad is to find out more about a new country and the life there, analyse your options for accommodation. There is no one correct answer, each variant having its own advantages and disadvantages. Arrange the options in the order of preference and then explain your reasons for your first option.*

*a) A place in a hostel, with some of your conationals.*

*b) With a family from the new city, paying rent.*

*c) alone in a small flat.*

*a-b-c-..*

*The reasons for my choice are the following:*

*E.g. 2: You are in semiology. You have a diabetic Hungarian patient who speaks little Romanian and no other foreign language. You have to explain the procedure of daily injecting insulin to him.*

**4. a. Text/video:** Students watch a short film (with the script visibly written) or they read a text in which two individuals from different cultures communicate. Then they answer questions about the debatable cultural aspects.

*E.g. Why is Mr. Wang interested in the family situation of Mr. Parker?*

**b. Group role-playing game:** Several participants in the evaluation form a work-group in which they have pre-established roles.

*E.g.1: A team of engineers from Great Britain must build a truck with native engineers in a country from the Middle East. Each of them has essential parts of the truck that the other team does not have. Communicate within the group so that to build a truck together.*

*E.g. 2: Work in groups of 3 individuals with different religions / without religion. You have a complicated case. A single mother dies after giving birth and her last wish is for you to baptise the child, before the authorities take him/her away. Find together the proper solutions for the religion of the baptism, the person who officiates, the clothing, the ceremonial objects etc.*

## 4. Conclusions

Unlike other communication competences, interculturality had not been turned into teaching instructions until the last 2-3 decades. Thus, it benefits from teaching and evaluation methods that are less numerous and less validated by institutionally educational experience and results.

Even less so in the case of interculturality within the clinical environment. In this study we have reviewed, with both advantages and disadvantages, the most known grids of evaluation, which would allow one to identify the level of interculturality with foreign medical students in Romania and would stimulate the gathering of skills, knowledge and attitudes that are relevant for a clear and observable evolution. If in scientific terms evolution is found on the highest levels on scales or on the grids of professional criteria, in one's daily behaviour it still means an obvious change from a static vision to a dynamic one, in spontaneous or programmed cultural encounters, and from the lists of identity traits to an open mind, capable to change the paradigm of reading reality according to the interlocutor.

### Annexe: The INCA evaluation grid (for the evaluator)

Level ⇒ Competence 3)	1 'Basic'	2 'Intermediate'	3 'Full'
General profile	The candidate at this level is on the ladder of progression. They will be disposed to deal positively with the situation. Their responses to it will be piecemeal and improvised rather than principled, even though mostly successful in avoiding short term difficulties. These will be based on fragmentary information.	The candidate at this level has begun to induce simple principles to apply to the situation, rather than improvise reactively in response to isolated features of it. There will be evidence of a basic strategy and some coherent knowledge for dealing with situations.	The candidate at this level will combine a strategic and principled approach to a situation to take the role of a mediator seeking to bring about the most favourable outcome. Knowledge of their own culture and that of others, including work parameters, will be both coherent and sophisticated.
i) Tolerance of ambiguity	1T Deals with ambiguity on a one-off basis, responding to items as they arise. May be overwhelmed by ambiguous situations which imply high involvement.	2T Has begun to acquire a repertoire of approaches to cope with ambiguities in low-involvement situations. Begins to accept ambiguity as a challenge.	3T Is constantly aware of the possibility of ambiguity. When it occurs, he/she tolerates and manages it.
ii) Behavioural flexibility	1B Adopts a reactive/defensive approach to situations. Learns from isolated experiences in a rather unsystematic way.	2B Previous experience of required behaviour begins to influence behaviour in everyday parallel situations. Sometimes takes the initiative in adopting/conforming to other cultures' behaviour patterns.	3B Is ready and able to adopt appropriate behaviour in job-specific situations from a broad and well-understood repertoire.
iii) Communicative awareness	1C Attempts to relate problems of intercultural interaction to different communicative conventions, but lacks the necessary knowledge for identifying differences; tends to hold on to his own conventions and expects adaptation from others; is aware of difficulties in interaction with non-native-speakers, but has not yet evolved principles to guide the choice of strategies (metacommunication, clarification or simplification).	2C Begins to relate problems of intercultural interaction to conflicting communicative conventions and attempts to clarify his own or to adapt to the conventions of others. Uses a limited repertoire of strategies (metacommunication, clarification, simplification) to solve and prevent problems when interacting with a non-native-speaker.	3C Is able to relate problems of intercultural interaction to conflicting communicative conventions and is aware of their effects on the communication process; is able to identify and ready to adapt to different communicative conventions, or to negotiate new discourse rules in order to prevent or clarify misunderstandings; uses a variety of strategies (metacommunication, clarification, simplification) to prevent, to solve, and to mediate problems when interacting with a non-native-speaker.

iv) Knowledge discovery	1K Draws on random general knowledge and minimal factual research about other cultures. Learns by discovery and is willing to modify perceptions but not yet systematic.	2K Has recourse to some information sources in anticipation of everyday encounters with the other cultures, and modifies and builds on information so acquired, in the light of actual experience. Is motivated by curiosity to develop his knowledge of his own culture as perceived by others.	3K Has a deep knowledge of other cultures. Develops his knowledge through systematic research-like activities and direct questioning and can, where this is sought, offer advice and support to others in work situations.
v) Respect for otherness	1R Is not always aware of difference and, when it is recognised, may not be able to defer evaluative judgement as good or bad. Where it is fully appreciated, adopts a tolerant stance and tries to adapt to low-involving demands of the foreign culture.	2R Accepts the other's values, norms and behaviours in everyday situations as neither good nor bad, provided that basic assumptions of his own culture have not been violated. Is motivated to put others at ease and avoid giving offence.	3R Out of respect for diversity in value systems, applies critical knowledge of such systems to ensure equal treatment of people in the workplace. Is able to cope tactfully with the ethical problems raised by personally unacceptable features of otherness.
vi) Empathy	1E Tends to see the cultural foreigner's differences as curious, and remains confused about the seemingly strange behaviours and their antecedents. Nonetheless tries to 'make allowances'.	2E Has the beginnings of a mental checklist of how others may perceive, feel and respond differently to, a range of routine circumstances. Tends increasingly to see things intuitively from the other's point of view.	3E Accepts the other as a coherent individual. Enlists role-taking and de-centring skills, and awareness of different perspectives, in optimising job-related communication/interaction with the cultural foreigner.

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## LE DON DE L'AMOUR ET DE L'AMITIE DU POEME. LES ENVOIS DE PAUL CELAN A NINA CASSIAN

GIOVANNI ROTIROTI<sup>1</sup>

**ABSTRACT.** *The poem's gift of love and friendship. The letters sent by Paul Celan to Nina Cassian.* The present article is about letters that Paul Celan sent to Nina Cassian and reveals the metaphors used by the poet in his communicating to Nina. There are the metaphors taken from Urmuz, this ground-breaking avant-gardian not only of the Romanian Literature, and so dear to him, there is all the irony of the surrealists' jokes, the medley of foreign languages used for their secret sonority. And finally, there is the union of "You" and "Me" within the common grief for the loss of their mothers. The magic of the water and its poetical ambivalence will bring Nina towards the life connected with the sea, and Paul towards the death.

**Key words:** *Urmuz, Paul Celan, Nina Cassian, Gherasim Luca, Romanian Literature, Surrealism, Desire, Comparative Literature.*

**REZUMAT.** *Darul de iubire și de prietenie al poemului. Scrisorile lui Paul Celan către Nina Cassian.* Prezentul articol se referă la scrisorile trimise de Paul Celan către Nina Cassian și dezvăluie recuperările figurative la care recurge poetul în comunicarea cu Nina. Regăsim metaforele preluate de la Urmuz, acest avangardist atotcuprinzător, nu numai al literaturii românești, și atât de scump pentru el, găsim apoi toată ironia glumelor suprarealiste, nuclee din limbi străine folosite pentru sonoritatea lor secretă. Și, în final, există unirea dintre "Tu" și "Eu" în durerea comună pentru pierderea mamei lor. Magia apei și ambivalența ei poetică îi vor aduce pe Nina spre viața legată de mare și pe Paul spre moarte.

**Cuvinte cheie:** *literatură română, suprarealism, dorință, literatură comparată, Urmuz, Paul Celan, Nina Cassian, Gherasim Luca.*

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Me voici donc, te parlant brièvement... Crois-moi, tout ce que j'ai raconté sur mon cas est très vrai. Cependant, vu de loin, en dehors du contexte, cela doit te paraître invraisemblable. Quand même... Je voudrais, les saisons se succédant, comme tu le dis, pouvoir te parler de vive voix de tout cela, un beau jour, te montrer, noir sur blanc, que tout ça ne sort pas de mon imagination de poète, de «ma susceptibilité de solitaire». La Poésie n'est-elle pas une progression vers le Réel, qui se déroule au milieu de tout ce qui nous entoure et nous capture ? S'engager ne signifie pas en premier lieu, répondre ? Je n'ai d'ailleurs jamais su *inventer* – j'ai effectivement vécu ce que j'ai écrit et vice versa. Je n'aime pas la métaphore. J'aime en revanche parler, t'adresser ces quelques lignes. Comment te convaincre que je n'exagère pas ? Je te prie de me croire, en attendant de voir de tes propres yeux, que toute cette histoire – incroyable – est parfaitement vraie. Continue à me faire confiance...<sup>2</sup>

À partir de l'œuvre de Paul Celan, la problématique de l'envoi, du renvoi, de la restance, de la destinée, de la destination qui est essentielle se retrouvent dans la pensée et la poésie, si étroitement liée à la théorie de l'écriture de Jacques Derrida. Tout texte est destiné à finir en cendres, en fumée. Dès son émission, il se détache de son expéditeur, s'éloigne de la certitude d'un sens et d'une vérité. On peut éventuellement le rattacher à une date, à un auteur, mais la destinée de cette date est de s'effacer, elle aussi. L'événement qui a donné lieu à la lettre est oublié. Elle n'a plus de trajet propre et même sa langue lui échappe. C'est le lieu qui fait don du langage, d'une singularité, d'une signature, d'une promesse et d'une responsabilité. Chaque texte raconte l'histoire d'un don dans lequel cette instance restera encryptée, silencieuse, secrète, presque indéchiffrable, mais en même temps elle assurera la survie du texte, de la lettre ou de l'œuvre par une opération qui n'est ni une reproduction, ni une réception, mais une traduction<sup>3</sup>.

Petre Solomon est l'auteur d'un livre-témoignage fondamental sur son ami Paul Antschel où sont de nouveau parcourus les moments plus importants des années 1946-1947 de l'écrivain bukovin, au moment où le jeune traducteur de russe en roumain naît comme poète à Bucarest avec le pseudonyme de Paul Celan, donnant à l'éditeur la première version de *Todesfuge* en roumain avec le titre *Tangoul Morții (Le Tango de la Mort)* et en publiant ses premières poésies en allemand sur la revue littéraire «Agora»<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> Lettre de Paul Celan envoyée à Nina Cassian, le 25 avril 1962 et rédigée en français. Cf. Petre Solomon, *Paul Celan. L'adolescence d'un adieu*, trad. du roumain par Daniel Pujol, Castelnau-le-Lez, Éd. Climats, 1990, p. 170.

<sup>3</sup> Cfr. Jacques Derrida, *La carte postale. De Socrate à Freud et au-delà*, Paris, Flammarion, 1980.

<sup>4</sup> Cfr. Petre Solomon, *Paul Celan. L'adolescence d'un adieu* et Mircea Țuglea, *Paul Celan și avangardismul românesc. Reactualizarea sensului*, Constanța, Pontica, 2007.

*Agora. Collection internationale d'art et littérature* («Agora. Colecție internațională de artă și literatură»), dirigée par Ion Caraion et Virgil Ierunca, était une revue littéraire dans laquelle confluèrent non seulement des textes en roumain, mais aussi en français, allemand, italien et russe. Il fut immédiatement censuré par le régime communiste qui en craignait l'importance culturelle internationale. Comme l'écrit Solomon: «Une autre conséquence importante de l'amitié entre Paul et Sperber fut la publication de trois de ses poèmes dans le numéro unique de la revue *Agora* paru en mai 1947, tirée à mille exemplaires plus 26 tirages de tête. Les trois poèmes en question, *Das Gastmahl*, *Das Geheimnis der Farne* et *Ein wasser farbenes Wild* ont été portés à la rédaction par Sperber. Ils faisaient partie du cycle *Der Sand aus dem Urnen* et devaient être repris par le poète dans son recueil *Mohn und Gedächtnis*, le dernier d'entre eux ayant pour titre *Die letzte Fahne* au lieu de *Ein wasser farbenes Wild*. On peut donc dire que les débuts de Celan naissent au mois de mai 1947 à Bucarest»<sup>5</sup> avant sur *Contemporanul* avec *Tangoul Morții* (le Tango de la Mort) et tout de suite après *Agora* avec les trois poésies en allemand.

Dans son livre, Solomon raconte que Celan pratiquait avec son groupe d'amis, poètes et artistes, parmi lesquels le même Solomon, Nina Cassian et d'autres poètes à Bucarest, des jeux d'inspiration surréaliste comme «Questions-réponses», «*Ioachim*», une variation bucarestine du célèbre «Cadavre exquis» de Breton, Celan contribuait activement à ces «soirées musicales», chantant avec sa voix grave et vibrante parfois en chœur et aussi en «solo». Son répertoire varié et très riche comprenait de nombreux chants révolutionnaires de la Guerre Civile d'Espagne et aussi certains chants allemands du Moyen-âge d'une beauté insolite. En outre, Solomon reconnaît que Celan, lors de sa période bucarestoïse («cette belle saison des calembours»), non seulement attestait une bonne connaissance du roumain, mais témoignait, pour un poète généralement considéré triste, un certain «bonheur de l'esprit» en jouant avec les paroles de la langue roumaine, comme le faisaient Urmuz et les surréalistes.

En effet ces «jeux», selon Solomon, doivent être considérés comme des exercices qui correspondent à sa vocation profonde qui comprend aussi l'esprit ludique; ainsi, les poésies, les poèmes en prose et les «jeux» écrits en roumain ont une valeur qui n'est pas seulement documentaire parce qu'ils offrent, sous un autre registre linguistique, le sceau du génie poétique de Paul Celan. Solomon écrira:

Dans les vingt ans passés à Paris, Celan n'a pas écrit un seul vers en français, une langue qu'il connaissait parfaitement et qu'il chérissait, car ses écrits roumains se situent dans un territoire spirituel qu'on ne peut ignorer,

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<sup>5</sup> Petre Solomon, *Paul Celan*, p. 65-66.



ils se trouvent uniques, dans le voisinage immédiat de l'espace lyrique construit par le poète dans la langue allemande

Sans être adepte du «bilinguisme», il a su jeter des ponts délicats mais durables par-dessus plusieurs littératures. La spiritualité roumaine est l'une des dimensions secrètes, qui n'est pas encore découverte et déchiffrée comme il se doit, de la poésie de ce grand bukovin, qui vivait à Paris et fertilisait l'œuvre allemande comme personne durant la période d'après-guerre, post-auschwitzienne, et qui a honoré toutes ses patries, en méritant par là d'être à son tour honoré par chacune d'elles<sup>6</sup>.

En passant en revue les «amis poètes» de Celan à Bucarest, Petre Solomon nomme d'abord Nina Cassian:

Je ferai ici une sélection, fatalement subjective, en ne m'occupant que de ceux de ses amis que j'ai moi-même bien connus. Je commencerai par Nina Cassian, personnalité féminine dominante de notre cercle. [...] Même si elle n'avait pas encore publié ses vers en recueil, sa signature dans différentes revues roumaines de l'époque avait commencé à imposer sa voix lyrique, une voix distincte, dont les dissonances mêmes étaient en subtile harmonie avec toute une génération iconoclaste.

À sa grande intelligence s'ajoutait un don inimitable de l'expression tranchante ou percutante. Douée à la fois pour la poésie et la peinture – elle avait pris des cours avec les peintres Loewendal et Maxy, Nina avait également un talent authentique d'actrice qui se manifestait aussi bien en public, au cours de nos veillées littéraires, que dans le cercle de ses très nombreux intimes.

La présence de Nina dans un groupe d'individus, agissait comme facteur d'unité, comme «liant» social immédiatement efficace. Il suffisait qu'elle apparaisse dans une réunion pour que celle-ci prenne âme, en découvrant des affinités électives.

Improvisant au piano, jouant des morceaux de Debussy, Bartók et Constantin Silvestri, Nina s'épanouissait au milieu de ses amis qu'elle fascinait aussi par d'autres moyens, avec sa conversation étincelante. Complexée par son profil dantesque, elle tenait à affirmer sa supériorité intellectuelle d'une manière souvent agressive afin de désarmer ceux qui s'en seraient tenus à sa laideur, d'ailleurs plutôt imaginaire. [...]

Paul était fasciné par la personnalité de Nina Cassian, et dans cette fascination entraînait également une bonne part de crainte. S'il y avait de grandes différences entre Nina et Paul, elles trouvaient leur source aussi bien dans leurs biographies que dans leurs tempéraments respectifs, ce qui ne les empêchaient ni de communiquer ni de communier, sous le signe d'une profonde parenté spirituelle. [...] J'allais souvent avec Paul dans l'appartement que Nina et son mari Colin partageaient avec les parents de celle-ci, au premier étage d'un immeuble de la rue Poènaru Bordea. [...] On faisait des

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. XI-XII.

jeux surréalistes, comme «questions et réponses» ou bien «Joachim», variante bucarestois du «Cadavre exquis» de Breton [...].

Quant à l'amitié de Paul avec Nina, j'ajouterai qu'elle s'était renforcée sur la base du respect réciproque qu'ils avaient pour leurs talents littéraires. Les connaissances solides de la langue et littérature allemande de Nina faisaient d'elle une interlocutrice avisée et compétente dans un domaine où Paul était comme un poisson dans l'eau. Ses traductions de Kästner et de Morgenstern étaient des merveilles de rigueur. Ils avaient presque les mêmes goûts poétiques: Apollinaire, Desnos, Éluard, Essenine, Rilke, Arghezi, Ion Barbu.

En présence de Nina, Paul devenait très bavard et le contact se réalisait tout de suite, sans lourdeurs protocolaires, même si derrière cela se cachait toujours certaines peurs et certains complexes. Il y avait en permanence entre eux une espèce de coquetterie, expression d'une attirance réciproque et en même temps d'une distance qu'ils devaient malgré tout admettre. Par exemple, la lettre de Paul à Nina de l'été 1947, lorsque celle-ci passait ses vacances au bord de la mer, et que j'eus pris l'initiative de lui écrire avec Paul:

« Ingrate !

Noble et arborescente comme toujours, lorsque je pense à toi, ma main arborescente se hâte pour t'offrir, à toi, mon tapis endormi que j'ai tendu aux marées, ce miroir de suie blanche et d'encre de Chine rythmée pour que tu puisses comme Ibis t'y reconnaître (ce qui te donne la possibilité de te voir enfin réalisée dans ta double hypostase d'oiseau adoré et de porte-plume) et afin que les bouches malveillantes de la postérité ne puissent pas dire que nous ne nous sommes pas aimés. Que les marées nous submergent et que les requins-frères nous avalent !»

*Paul*

(plus africain que jamais)<sup>7</sup>

Au-delà de l'ingratitude moqueuse donnée à la destinataire, «Paul» en écrivant cette singulière preuve d'amour a voulu offrir ce don poétique en se servant volontairement de certains syntagmes qui appartiennent aux premières compositions de Nina intitulées *Autoportret (Autoportrait)*, *Cei ce devoră (Ceux qui dévorent)*, *O pasăre (Un oiseau)*<sup>8</sup>, là, il a indiqué la mer comme élément naturel où Nina semble ondoyer dans l'imaginaire poétique. Toutefois, en composant et en offrant ce surréel «O.O.O.: Objet Objectivement Offert»<sup>9</sup>, le poète du monde des «submergés» de la Shoah s'est inspiré non seulement au texte de Gherasim Luca publié en 1945, mais surtout à un morceau d'Urmuz, extrait d'*Algazy & Grummer*, concernant l'Ibis dans lequel a Nina Cassian devrait se reconnaître à travers l'inquiétante description du personnage cruel appelé *Grummer*. Nous reportons ici le texte d'Urmuz dont le titre en est l'exemple.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 31-34.

<sup>8</sup> Cfr. Nina Cassian, *C'è modo e modo di sparire. Poesie 1945-2007*, a cura di Anita Natascia Bernacchia e Ottavio Fatica, Milano, Adelphi, 2013.

<sup>9</sup> Cfr. Gherasim Luca, *Le Vampire passif*, Paris, José Corti, 2001.

Grummer a aussi un bec en bois aromatique...

Caractère renfermé et tempérament bileux, il reste toute la journée allongé sur le comptoir, le bec fourré dans un trou sous le plancher...

Dès que vous pénétrez dans leur magasin, une odeur délicieuse vous chatouille les narines... Vous y êtes accueilli dans l'escalier par un garçon honnête qui, sur la tête, à la place des cheveux, a du fil de coton teint de vert; puis vous êtes salué avec beaucoup d'amabilité par Algazy et invité à vous asseoir sur un tabouret.

Grummer attend et guette... Perfide, le regard de travers, il montre d'abord seulement le bec qu'il promène de manière ostentatoire de haut en bas dans une rigole expressément creusée dans le comptoir, puis il apparaît dans sa totalité... Par toutes sortes de manœuvres il amène Algazy à quitter le local, puis, insinuant, il vous attire sans vous en rendre compte dans toutes sortes de discussions – surtout à propos du sport et de la littérature – jusqu'au moment où, se trouvant à son avantage, il vous frappe le ventre deux fois de son bec, en vous obligeant à courir dehors dans la rue, hurlant de douleur<sup>10</sup>.

«Grummer», comme on le voit, «a aussi un bec en bois aromatique», il appartient à la catégorie urmuzienne des personnages composés matériellement d'attributs qui se rapportent à des oiseaux sous l'ombre de l'archétype de l'Ibis. Le bec, selon Celan, est aussi l'extrémité du porte-plume, taillé en pointe et généralement doué d'une fente centrale, à travers laquelle l'encre en réserve dans le bâton coule vers le support. Le nom Grummer évoque une mémoire allemande. On s'en rend compte à peine on entre dans ce magasin spécial où l'on est capturé par ce parfum agréable: alors, vient à notre rencontre – vers nous lecteurs – «un garçon honnête (*ein grüner Junge*), qui, sur la tête, à la place des cheveux, a du fil de coton teint de vert» ce n'est autre que la traduction matérielle du nom propre de Grummer dans la rime allemande *grün* (vert). Le jeu de renvois au signifiant graphique ne s'arrête pas là. Nous savons que Grummer a un «caractère renfermé et tempérament bileux», donc est *grimm*: sombre, féroce, coléreux; il est courbé, tordu, il regarde de travers, donc *krumm*; et en outre il est insinuant parce qu'il attire les interlocuteurs, les «clients du magasin» (et aussi le lecteur) «dans toutes sortes de discussions» sur le «sport et la littérature», conformément à ses origines et attributions culturelles déchuées. Il se met facilement en colère (*grimmen*), frappe du bec le ventre du client, en lui procurant de fortes douleurs abdominales (*Grimmen*). Toutefois, lui aussi est humilié (*krummen*) à travers la compression de la vessie grise (*Grau*) de caoutchouc (*Gummi*), «ce qui le fait sauter dans le magasin sans bouger les genoux, en émettant des sons inarticulés»<sup>11</sup>, des sons éparpillés par la course continuelle des signifiants,

<sup>10</sup> Urmuz, *Pages Bizarres*, traduit par Benjamin Dolingher, Lausanne, Ed. L'Age d'Homme, 1993, p. 69-70 (traduction légèrement modifiée).

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 70.

proie du vertige textuel du nom propre Grummer, de ses «rimes» allemandes encryptées dans la langue roumaine.

À partir de Grummer, selon Paul Celan, grâce à «ce miroir de suie blanche et d'encre de Chine rythmée», offert comme don de la main de l'amant végétal, Nina Cassian devrait réussir finalement à se reconnaître dans l'image d'un oiseau. Non pas d'un oiseau quelconque, mais en Ibis. L'Ibis est un oiseau assez grand qui a un bec en forme de faucille, il se déplace dans les terrains marécageux et donne l'impression sans fin de chercher et de creuser dans la boue. Ce n'est pas un symbole solaire, mais plutôt lunaire, séléniqque comme le «halo Paul Celan», «partisan de l'absolutisme érotique», tel se définissait le poète bukovin dans son «poème en prose» écrit en roumain<sup>12</sup>. La courbure du bec de l'Ibis rappelle la faucille de la lune. Dans la cosmologie c'est une signature lunaire. Celan connaît bien la tradition culturelle de cet oiseau qui remonte à l'antique Egypte, il sait que l'Ibis était consacré au dieu de l'écriture Theuth considéré sa manifestation terrestre. Sur la stèle égyptienne on voit le dieu Theuth dans la barque divine avec la tête d'Ibis. Dans la culture mosaïque, au contraire, l'Ibis représente un symbole négatif, un «animal impur». Dans le texte paléochrétien *Le Physiologus* on lit: «Mais le pire de tous, l'Ibis, ne sait pas nager. Des pécheurs peuvent naître seulement des péchés»<sup>13</sup>.

Celan est conscient de cette ambivalence symbolique de l'Ibis. Pour cela il précise entre parenthèses dans la lettre: «(ce qui te donne la possibilité de te voir enfin réalisée dans ta double hypostase d'oiseau adoré et de porte-plume)». Cet indice de Celan est une allusion cryptique, peut-être dans l'ordre du «délire de l'interprétation» surréaliste, que le poète avait fait des personnages d'encre d'Urmuz composés d'une manière hétéroclite d'attributs symboliques qui se réfèrent aux oiseaux féériques qui sont à l'ombre du divin Theuth. Peut-être les mêmes, avec des draperies étranges et des becs d'oiseaux provenant des illustrations de la Bible de Philippon, représentant les bas reliefs sépulcrales égyptiens, qui visitaient avec angoisse les rêves du petit Freud, quand il avait sept ou huit ans, qu'il immortalisera successivement dans son *Die Traumdeutung*<sup>14</sup>. Le rappel célanien est toujours vertigineux, et l'infini de la langue est indiqué par la mise en abîme fixée dans le nom, comme on le verra mieux successivement.

Mais «la possibilité» pour Nina Cassian de se voir « enfin réalisée » dans sa « double hypostase d'oiseau adoré et de porte-plume » est visible à travers

<sup>12</sup> Cfr. *Addenda: Les poèmes roumains de Paul Celan*, in Gisèle Vanhese, *La parole en exil*, Roma, Il bagatto, 1990, p. 220.

<sup>13</sup> *Il Fisiologo*, a cura di Francesco Zambon, Adelphi, Milano 1975, p. 76.

<sup>14</sup> Cfr. Giovanni Rotiroti, *Il piacere di leggere Urmuz. Indagini psicanalitiche sui fantasmi letterari delle "Pagine bizzarre"*, Napoli, Torcoliere, Università degli Studi di Napoli "L'Orientale", 2010.

l'indication de Celan, grâce à l'icone sonore du «nom» de Grummer, tout comme la signalisation suggérée poétiquement par Ilarie Voronca dans le vers de *l'Invitation au bal (Invitație la bal)*: «un cri comme celui d'un oiseau ou un porte-plume» («*un țipăt ca o pasăre sau stilou*»)<sup>15</sup> – avec la différence que «l'objet objectivement offert»<sup>16</sup> par le sujet poétique, au-delà de la fiction néo-surréaliste de Luca, n'est pas simplement un objet concret, empirique ou sensible, mais un don très précieux pour Celan. C'est un «miroir de suie blanche et d'encre de Chine rythmée», c'est le don du poème, de l'amour et de l'amitié, comme promesse de ce vide de parole qui reflète asymptotiquement l'empreinte subjective du «halo Paul Celan», «partisan de l'absolutisme érotique» à Bucarest<sup>17</sup>. Comme dans un jeu scintillant de réfractions sonores et d'images, cet objet non objet, tout en étant le don de la parole et de l'absence dans la polémique de l'amour, est fondamentalement un miroir fait de restes, de fragments, de résidus de combustion. Ce n'est pas du charbon, ou des substances goudroneuses comme celles des personnages d'Urmuz, mais ce sont des dépôts organiques comme un miroir fait de ce qui reste de l'humain. C'est un miroir de «sue blanche» peut-être semblable à celle horriblement retrouvée dans les cheminées des camps de concentration d'Auschwitz, dont Celan connaissait l'existence à travers les milieux très informés de *Scânteia* où il avait trouvé son premier emploi à Bucarest<sup>18</sup>.

Voilà le poème en prose de Celan intitulé par Petre Solomon *Partisan de l'absolutisme érotique* :

Partisan de l'absolutisme érotique, mégalomane réticent même parmi les scaphandriers, messenger, en même temps, du halo Paul Celan, je n'évoque les physionomies pétrifiantes du naufrage aérien qu'à intervalles d'une décennie (ou même plus) et je ne patine qu'à une heure fort tardive, sur un lac gardé par la forêt géante des membres acéphales de la Conspiration Poétique Universelle. Il est facilement compréhensible qu'ici on ne pénètre pas avec les flèches du feu visible. Un immense rideau d'améthyste dissimule, à la lisière vers le monde, l'existence de cette végétation anthropomorphe, au-delà de laquelle je tente, d'une façon lunaire, une danse qui me stupéfie. Je n'ai pas réussi jusqu'à présent et avec les yeux déplacés aux tempes, je me regarde de profil, en attendant le printemps<sup>19</sup>.

<sup>15</sup> La poésie de Ilarie Voronca è contenue en *Poesia romana d'avanguardia. Testi e manifesti da Urmuz a Ion Caraion*, a cura di Marco Cugno e Marin Mincu, Milano, Feltrinelli, 1980.

<sup>16</sup> Cfr. Gherasim Luca, *Le vampire passif / Vampirul pasiv (manuscrit facsimilé)*, Édition établie par Petre Răileanu et Nicolae Tzone, Bucarest, Editura Vinea, 2016.

<sup>17</sup> Cfr. Giovanni Rotiroti, *La passione del Reale. Emil Cioran, Gherasim Luca, Paul Celan e l'evento rivoluzionario dell'amore*, Napoli-Salerno, Orthotes Editrice, 2016.

<sup>18</sup> Cfr. Ovidiu Sache Crohmălniceanu, *Paul Celan et la mélancolie*, in Andrei Corbea-Hoisie, *Paul Celan. Biographie und Interpretation*, Iași, Polirom, 2000, pp. 70-71.

<sup>19</sup> *Les poèmes roumains de Paul Celan*, traduits par Gisèle Vanhese, p. 220.

Le «messenger» Paul Celan, le «Partisan de l'absolutisme érotique, mégalomane», entre en dialogue avec les contenus hyperboliques de *Dialectique de la dialectique* de Gherasim Luca et Trost<sup>20</sup>, mais dans ce poème, la voix du poète dit d'être «réticent» par rapport à telle évidence, presque comme s'il ne voulait pas faire émerger les aspects plus visibles de sa passion secrète à partir de l'évènement imprononçable de la Shoah. À Luca et Trost – que le jeune Antschel avait connu personnellement durant leurs deux expositions de cubomanies artistiques dans la Bucarest de ces années-là – Celan renvoie, à travers son “medium”, ce “message mystérieux” en forme inverse, quasi à témoigner sa distance infranchissable de ce genre d'expérience conforme au programme du “merveilleux” surréaliste, distant de la “vérité” de l'extermination. En effet, on lit dans ce poème en prose: «je n'évoque les physionomies pétrifiantes du naufrage aérien qu'à intervalles d'une décennie (ou même plus) et je ne patine qu'à une heure fort tardive, sur un lac gardé par la forêt géante des membres acéphales de la Conspiration Poétique Universelle». Le sujet poétique semble dire que, bien qu'il soit «Partisan de l'absolutisme érotique» comme eux, il ne veut pas évoquer «les physionomies pétrifiantes du naufrage aérien». Dans ce contexte allusif du poème, Celan emploie d'un ton critique le mot “naufrage” qui apparaît à l'ouverture du Manifeste de Luca et Trost. Celan se rapporte à un autre naufrage, cette fois aérien, comme expérience liminaire sous voix dans les physionomies pétrifiantes du monde silencieux et glacial des massacrés de la Shoah, desquels il veut donner témoignage avec les lames ou les couteaux affilés de son patin, donner témoignage à «une heure fort tardive sur un lac gardé par la forêt géante» de la poésie. L'«halo Paul Celan» semble indiquer à Luca et à Trost que ses coordonnées poétologiques sont très différentes des leurs. Son «méridien» n'est pas le même que celui des «membres acéphales de la Conspiration Poétique Universelle», – offrant «un message mystérieux» de contenu polémique. Seulement tardivement, «à intervalles d'une décennie (ou même plus)», ils font appel au mouvement de Breton, qui est désormais dans une phase de déclin avancé. Peut-être, n'est-il pas inutile de souligner, dans ce contexte, que Celan utilise les paroles «membres acéphales de la Conspiration Poétique Universelle» en faisant allusion à la revue *Acéphale* de Georges Bataille, apparue en 1936, qui marque la fin de la militance en projets plus directement politiques, le nom de la société secrète qui accueillait, d'une manière un peu initiatique, autour de Bataille, certains de ses amis et collaborateurs, auraient même, dans une «conspiration sacrée», sacrifié une victime humaine consentante. Donc Luca et Trost arrivent trop tard au rendez-vous avec la poésie, qui, suivant le penchant lyrique du libellé kafkaïen, si cher à Celan dans ces années confuses à Bucarest, devrait

<sup>20</sup> Cfr. Gherasim Luca – Trost, *Dialectique de la dialectique*, in M. Mincu, *Avangarda literară românească. De la Urmuz la Paul Celan*, Constanța, Editura Pontica, 2006, p. 564-574.

avoir surtout le devoir éthique et révolutionnaire de témoigner le réel de la catastrophe, la violence horrible de la Shoah et célébrer clairement dans le chant la mémoire des victimes sans nom sur le fond historique de l'extermination commise par les nazis, les légionnaires et l'armée roumaine sur le peuple juif en Bukovine. Paul Celan attend que son poème *Le Tango de la Mort* soit publié au plus tôt à Bucarest. Il écrit: «Je tente, lunairement, une danse qui me stupéfie».

Revenons maintenant à la carte postale de Paul Celan expédiée à Nina Cassian – en dehors de sa polémique personnelle avec «les requins-frères» du surréalisme de Bucarest<sup>21</sup>. Si la parole résiste encore dans le poème – c'est pour le nom – alors, on peut se demander, quel est le changement entre la relation imaginaire établie entre Nina Cassian et Paul Celan dans la narration allégorique à la Urmuz de la carte postale dans laquelle l'enjeu était le déchiffrement de l'Ibis, comme nom «juste» pour la poétesse ? En réalité la relation imaginaire entre le couple de poètes ne change pas, ce qui change c'est l'interprétation que chacun d'eux donnera aux possibilités théoriquement infinies du signifié du nom. La reconnaissance ne peut se produire seulement à travers un «miroir rythmé», comme l'a suggéré Paul Celan dans son don épistolaire à Nina Cassian, mais dans le désir du nom, de ce qui reste de ce nom. Le désir du nom ne peut trouver aucune satisfaction sous une forme quelconque de réciprocité imaginaire entre les deux Moi. Parce que la question du désir n'est pas le désir d'être soi-même. Le Soi du désir n'est pas identique à soi, mais est autre chose de soi-même. Pour Celan le désir de ce qui reste du nom sera surtout ce qu'il a d'unique et d'irremplaçable. Un nom n'est rien d'autre que ce qu'il en reste. Il ne serait autre que, dans l'*après-coup* de la catastrophe, que ce reste originaire, ce reliquat de l'origine, sans lequel il n'aurait jamais été possible de penser la chose dans la langue et encore moins un avenir possible dans la poésie. Ici, dans l'expérience d'écriture de Paul Celan émerge l'évènement d'une singularité absolue et irréductible, qui se manifeste avec le nom, qui se déclare dans le nom, le nom en s'imposant à la vue s'expose dans la poésie, indiquant l'insaisissable du nom comme tel, l'insaisissable comme indicible, quelque chose qui, s'annonçant dans le nom, résiste à la possibilité même d'une nomination quelconque, quelque chose qui est au-delà de la différence même entre le nom et la chose. Toutefois, ce qui reste du nom, chez Paul Celan, laisse entrevoir à l'horizon – que l'on perçoit dans l'ombre spectrale mais infiniment désirable – le mirage lumineux d'une autre langue qui résiste et qui s'entrecroise dans la résonance d'autres langues.

La carte postale de Paul Celan expédiée avec Petre à Nina Cassian terminait ainsi: «Que les marées nous submergent et que les requins-frères

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<sup>21</sup> Cfr. Giovanni Rotiroti, *La passione del Reale*, p. 127-155.

nous avalent !». Celan, en utilisant la métaphore emineschienne de l'eau comme signe mortel de l'étreinte amoureuse du «nous», indique allusivement dans les «requins-frères», avec Gherasim Luca, comme guide, les poètes néo-surréalistes de Bucarest leurs antagonistes et rivaux sur le plan poétique qu'ils avaient depuis peu publié l'*Éloge de Malombra*<sup>22</sup>.

Comme l'écrit Marin Mincu à propos des poèmes de Celan rédigés en roumain: «le topos de se noyer ou de la noyade est présent presque dans tous ses textes roumains. Dans la lettre adressée à Petre Solomon, le 18 février 1962, le poète se montre très impressionné du suicide par noyade dans la Mer Méditerranée de son ex compagne Lia. L'obsession de cette mort s'est résolue, peut-être avec son propre suicide dans les eaux de la Seine»<sup>23</sup>.

Dans cette direction de l'imaginaire poétique de Celan, toujours à partir des poèmes roumains, Gisèle Vanhese affirme, à travers Poe, qu'en Celan «l'image de l'eau nocturne est associée à celle de la mère morte et à la mort»<sup>24</sup>. «C'est dans le symbolisme aquatique que viennent se condenser toutes les images de la féminité nocturne et inquiétante. L'eau nocturne se présente comme une épiphanie de la mort mais qui, sous sa moire changeante, aurait le visage maternel»<sup>25</sup>. Mais c'est un autre aspect singulier, digne d'intérêt, à propos de cet évènement inquiétant qui se joue, dans le temps, dans la relation entre Celan et la Cassian, lié au désir du poème comme lieu phantasmatique de la noyade amoureuse. Voyons de plus près la question.

Dans un entretien en 2004, Carmina Popescu demande à Nina Cassian, résidente désormais depuis de longues années aux États Unis: «Madame Cassian, dites-moi, vous avez souvent éprouvé "le goût de la noyade". "Le goût du poème" en est peut-être l'antidote?». Nina Cassian répond: «C'est vrai que j'ai pensé parfois de disparaître pour toujours dans la mer (ou, encore, dans le lac Ohrid de Macédoine), après une longue nage. Mais, "le goût du poème" a vaincu "le goût de la noyade". Même si deux grands poètes roumains, Paul Celan et Gherasim Luca, se sont jetés et noyés dans la Seine... de toute façon, la mer est un élément mystérieux qui nous appelle dans le profond, peut-être parce que je suis née d'elle, avec les algues»<sup>26</sup>.

Dans cet entretien il y a une autre question qui peut illuminer *a posteriori* le sens profondément amoureux de la lettre de Paul Celan expédiée

<sup>22</sup> Cfr. Marin Mincu, *Avangarda literară românească. De la Urmuz la Paul Celan*, p. 600-602.

<sup>23</sup> Marin Mincu, *Il ritratto del poeta in giovinezza*, in Paul Celan, *Scritti romeni*, Pasian di Prato, Campanotto, 1994, p. 12.

<sup>24</sup> Gisèle Vanhese, *La parole en exil l'itinéraire roumain de Paul Celan*, Il bagatto, Roma 1990, p. 40.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 38-39.

<sup>26</sup> Cfr. Entrevue à Nina Cassian: *Nu m-am despărțit nici o clipă de cultura mea* de Carmina Popescu en «România Literară», n. 46, 2004 [[http://www.romlit.ro/nina\\_cassian\\_nu\\_m-am\\_desprit\\_nici\\_o\\_clipă\\_de\\_cultura\\_mea](http://www.romlit.ro/nina_cassian_nu_m-am_desprit_nici_o_clipă_de_cultura_mea)].



de Bucarest en 1947 avec l'ami Petre. «Madame Nina Cassian, la mer n'est-elle pas l'archétype de son être?». Réponse de la Cassian: «Depuis longtemps j'ai cru (ou bien j'ai su) que la mer est mon élément essentiel. Je l'avais connu à Constanța, quand j'avais cinq ans, quand j'ai appris à nager. Elle m'a attirée et bouleversée par sa texture dans laquelle j'entrais vraiment comme dans une force aveugle de la nature, par son odeur, par ses couleurs changeantes de la rive et du large, son agitation et son calme, les coquillages différents qui s'incrustaient dans le sable humide, le littoral. Je l'ai adoré, non pas dans l'adolescence tourmentée de la guerre, mais dans la première jeunesse, quand je l'ai goûté une nuit, en me baignant dans le champagne doré tracé par la lune. J'ai écrit une dizaine de poésies sur la mer»<sup>27</sup>.

En conclusion de son bel essai sur Celan intitulé *Romania Celaniana*, Camilla Miglio reporte le fragment d'une lettre de Celan à Nina Cassian. Voilà le commentaire: «La dernière lettre à Nina, datée du 6 avril 1970, quelques jours avant le suicide de Paul dans la Seine, ressemble à un dernier salut. Celan écrit une réponse à la nouvelle de la mort de la mère de Nina. On y retrouve la mémoire de son drame: la mort de sa propre mère. Celan souhaite à Nina de retrouver "son orbite et ses excès". Ce souhait qui est pour son amie, n'est pas pour lui. On entend presque l'écho de Kafka qui se déclarait certain d'"une espérance infinie, mais qui ne sera pas nôtre". Malgré les projets de lecture à septembre en Allemagne référés à Nina, quelques jours après il mourra. [...] À Nina, Celan laisse une phrase mystérieuse en héritage: "Les choses diminuent, les choses augmentent – Sorry for these 'Words of wisdom' – ton regard les éclairera d'un sens. Je t'embrasse Paul". "Les choses diminuent, les choses augmentent". Sentence gnomique d'une envie sans frein de ne pas prendre au sérieux, de s'en moquer, exprimée dans une langue franque et libre d'hypothèques, l'anglais (comme avant avec Solomon) *Sorry for these "Words of wisdom"*. Quelle sagesse? La sagesse de quelque chose qui va et vient, qui grandit et diminue, comme les marées, comme le souvenir? Comme la douleur? Va et vient, comme les jours. Mais pas pour Paul Celan»<sup>28</sup>.

Cette lettre de Celan à Nina Cassian peut-être n'est pas forcément une lettre d'adieu mais un autre don d'amour et d'amitié, un peu comme ce témoignage épistolaire, des années passées expédiée de Bucarest à Constanța avec la présence discrète de Petre Solomon. «*Les choses diminuent, les choses augmentent*» immédiatement après on lit: «*ton regard les éclairera d'un sens*». Il y a, en effet, ici pour la Cassian une invitation du poète à illuminer avec le

<sup>27</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>28</sup> Camilla Miglio, *Romania celaniana*, in *Quaderni del Premio Letterario Giuseppe Acerbi. Letteratura della Romania*, San Pietro in Cariano (Vr), Il Segno dei Gabrielli Editori, 2005, p. 127-128.

regard le sens mystérieux de ces paroles insérées: «*Sorry for these "Words of wisdom"*». L'attention de Nina doit donc être posée sur ces phrases en anglais. Le «*"Words of wisdom"*» pour Celan elles ne sont pas seulement "paroles de sagesse", mais "choses" très mouvantes (car «*diminuent*» et «*augmentent*») elles doivent être illuminées par un regard qui appartient au «toi». Pour un poète comme Celan, quel genre de sagesse peut faire face à la perte irréparable d'une mère? «*Wisdom*» n'est pas simplement la sagesse, mais c'est une question de sagesse dans le domaine de l'amour, après un temps passé qui, au fond n'a jamais passé complètement, puisqu'il se rattache peut-être, dans l'*après-coup* épistolaire, à leur amour de Mangalia consommé sur les eaux de la Mer Noire dans le miroir de l'écriture. «*"Words of wisdom"*», en outre, ce sont des paroles écrites entre guillemets, perceptibles au regard, qui renferment, dans l'espace du secret partagé (ce n'est pas par hasard qu'on y voit ici la trace d'Urmuz!) la sonorisation de deux paroles en roumain *vis* ("rêve") et *dom'* ("monsieur") quasi homophones avec l'anglais *wisdom*.

Nous ne saurons jamais avec certitude si Nina Cassian aura recueilli le message amoureux crypté savamment dans la lettre. Nina Cassian comme Petre Solomon, dans leurs écrits qui se croisaient secrètement à partir du souvenir de Celan, démontrent de toute façon de connaître les *schibboleth* de l'ami à partir d'Urmuz, car le poète originaire de la Bukovine ne fait autre que de les répéter et de les remettre en jeu dans la poésie en langue originale.

Ce que l'on peut noter, dans cette lettre singulière de condoléances envoyée à Nina Cassian, est que *wisdom* ne se définit pas à partir de son sens en anglais, mais de sa faculté mimétique dans l'écriture qui produit des ressemblances sonores en langue roumaine déterminant ainsi une intention subjective de communiquer, donc un désir d'amour. Tout en continuant l'expérience impossible transpositive entre les langues, à la limite fétichisant le signifiant, nous pouvons traduire *Wisdom* en français – à travers le *mot de passe* roumain: *vis* ("rêve") et *dom'* ("monsieur") – avec «Monsieur Le Songe». Il s'agit donc d'un *calembour* typiquement celanien, un jeu de mots en roumain entre les langues étrangères, qui attestent dans leur mystérieuse résonnance à «langue unique», peut-être celle des «noms» selon Walter Benjamin<sup>29</sup>, qui rappelle aussi, au point de vue existentiel, la «belle saison des calembours» et des «Cadavres exquis» de Paul Celan passée avec les «amis poètes» et traducteurs de Bucarest, dans le secret amoureux de la rencontre.

La référence cryptée dans l'intention de Paul Celan concerne la poésie écrite en allemand qui s'intitule *Souvenir de France* dans laquelle le protagoniste est indiqué en français comme si c'était un nom propre. Celui-ci

<sup>29</sup> Cfr. Walter Benjamin, *Il compito del traduttore*, in *Angelus Novus*, tr. it. di Renato Solmi, Torino, Einaudi, 1962, p. 39-52.

est un petit homme mince qui s'appelle «*Monsieur Le Songe*». Le destinataire amoureux de la poésie est justement Nina Cassian; c'est ainsi que Paul a voulu "lui faire voir" («ton regard les éclairera d'un sens») – comme il le fit avant avec l'Ibis de la carte postale roumaine –, et donc "il a juré" de "lui faire croire" («Les choses diminuent, les choses augmentent»), dans la lettre de condoléances envoyée pour la mort de sa mère, que le «Souvenir de France» est un signe indélébile de leur amour ou comme pour Freud un «souvenir de couverture» de la «belle saison des calembours» passée et jamais abandonnée entre Bucarest et Mangalia.

*ERINNERUNG AN FRANKREICH*

*Du denk mit mir: der Himmel von Paris, die große Herbstzeitlose...*

*Wir kauften Herzen bei den Blumenmädchen:*

*sie waren blau und blühten auf im Wasser.*

*Es fing zu regnen an in unserer Stube,*

*und unser Nachbar kam, Monsieur Le Songe, ein hager Männlein.*

*Wir spielten Karten, ich verlor die Augensterne;*

*du liehst dein Haar mir, ich verlors, er schlug uns nieder.*

*Er trat zur Tür hinaus, der Regen folgt' ihm.*

*Wir waren tot und konnten atmen<sup>30</sup>.*

Comme l'indiquent, à la manière d'Urmuz, les points de suspension, cette poésie d'amour est toute centrée sur «*Herbstzeitlose*» la fleur rêveuse et empoisonnée de la méditation et du regret d'un temps sans autre temps, qui rappelle l'atmosphère automnale du *Poème pour l'ombre de Marianne* (*Poem pentru umbra Marianeii*) et d'autres compositions de trame amoureuse de Celan. La Colchique – indique dans l'homonymie la Mer Noire des *Tristia* d'Ovide l'exilé – est cette petite plante herbacée aux fleurs rose-violet<sup>31</sup>. Dans l'*Erinnerung an Frankreich* de Celan, *Herbstzeitlose* c'est une parole en allemand qui indique un «nom»; et un nom c'est ce que les hommes (ou les créatures) donnent aux choses. La langue des hommes est un nommer, alors

<sup>30</sup> Paul Celan, *Poesie*, a cura di Giuseppe Bevilacqua, Milano, Mondadori, 1998, p. 41.

<sup>31</sup> Comme écrit Vanhese: «Traducteur de Apollinaire, Paul Celan a été fasciné par *Le pont Mirabeau* et *Les Colchiques*. Dès *Mohn und Gedächtnis*, *Erinnerung an Frankreich* (Souvenir de France, M G, 57) propose un vers *Du denk mit mir: der Himmel von Paris, die große Herbstzeitlose* (*Le ciel de Paris, le grand Colchique d'automne*) où il fait allusion à la fleur "hors du temps", qu'il nommait déjà dans un poème de jeunesse (*ICH WEISS vom Fels, in den ich mich nicht traue*). Parmi toutes les fleurs, qui ont rayonné dans la poésie de Celan (on pense au cycle *Blumen* des poèmes de jeunesse), le colchique est celle qui s'est chargée de plus de résonnances symboliques. Sous l'influence des *Colchiques* d'Apollinaire, et en particulier du vers "*Ils cueillent les colchiques qui sont comme des mères*", le nom renvoie au symbolisme maternel, comme dans *Die Silbe Schmerz*. [...] Surtout, le terme français "*colchique*" évoque une région mythique pour l'imaginaire celanian: la Colchide. [...] Par la référence à Ovide, la Colchide tend à se confondre avec le pays natal au bord de la mer Noire» (Gisèle Vanhese, *La parole en exil*, p. 42).

dans le nommer on communique le souffle (ou l'essence) de la langue des créatures. La relation de Celan à la langue des noms n'est pas instrumentale mais éthique, il s'adresse toujours à l'Autre. Les noms de Celan sont les paroles de sa mémoire et de son silence, ils demandent au destinataire de la lettre l'attention d'être interrogés et la complicité implicite de comprendre, à partir du déchiffrement du "message" contenu dans le poème, l'intention désirante du sujet. Il s'agit de comprendre, à travers le chiffrement du message contenu dans le poème, l'intention désirante du sujet.

Il s'agit d'une traduction "à la lettre" du nom qui se confronte avec l'origine étrangère des langues qui le reconduit à leur affinité plus profonde: donc une langue qui essaie de «refaire les ponts» comme le dit Solomon. Le pacte de la traduction est constitué par le double lien de traduisible et d'intraduisible – fidélité et trahison – qui s'efforce en dernière instance d'offrir à la langue pure attachée à la vérité le nom exact à donner aux choses, comme devoir éthique de toute traduction qui se base paradoxalement sur la possibilité de l'impossible et de l'intraduisible en relation avec un nom sans nom ou d'un nom innommable dont on rappelle encore le souvenir après l'événement catastrophique d'Auschwitz. Une autre manière pour s'approcher encore à l'amour des noms dans la langue poétique de Celan, en passant par le *non* dit ou le *quasi* dit, garantissant ainsi au moins une partie de ce qu'il désirait dire, à travers tous ses envois aux amis poètes de Bucarest, les seuls peut-être capables, selon lui de le comprendre vraiment.

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## A HERMENEUTICAL READING OF A POSTMODERN BRITISH NOVEL. TIME AND NARRATIVE IN DAVID LODGE'S "THINKS..."

ALEX CIOROGAR<sup>1</sup>

**ABSTRACT.** *A Hermeneutical Reading of a Postmodern British Novel. Time and Narrative in David Lodge's "Thinks..."*. The present paper investigates two aspects of a postmodern British novel. From a narratological perspective, we will examine the ways in which time - as a theme, on the one hand, and as a fictional issue, on the other - is constructed in David Lodge's "Thinks...". Leaving behind post-structuralist instruments of analysis (deconstructive reading practices), the article will argue in favor of a more nuanced approach by showing the advantages of utilizing hermeneutical and phenomenological instruments in exploring postmodernist techniques of emplotment.

**Keywords:** *hermeneutics, time, narratology, postmodernism, reading, phenomenology.*

**REZUMAT.** *O lectură hermeneutică a unui roman britanic postmodern. Timp și narațiune în romanul "Thinks..." semnat de David Lodge.* Lucrarea de față investighează două aspecte ale unui roman britanic postmodern. Adoptând o perspectivă naratologică, vom examina modurile în care timpul - atât ca temă, dar romanul și ca problematică literară - e construit în romanul "Thinks..." semnat de David Lodge. Lăsând la o parte instrumentele post-structuraliste (și, în special, lectura deconstrucționistă), articolul demonstrează avantajele utilizării unor instrumente hermeneutice și/sau fenomenologice în vederea explorării tehnicilor de compoziție postmoderniste.

**Cuvinte cheie:** *hermeneutică, timp, naratologie, postmodernism, lectură, fenomenologie.*

### Introduction

The present paper investigates - as the abstract clearly shows - two aspects of a postmodern British novel. We will examine, from a narratological perspective,

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the ways in which time - as a theme, on the one hand, and as a fictional issue, on the other - is constructed in David Lodge's book. Outweighing post-structuralist instruments of analysis (namely deconstructive reading strategies), the article will argue in favor of a more nuanced approach by highlighting a series of advantages understood as the result of utilizing hermeneutical and phenomenological concepts in exploring postmodernist techniques of emplotment. In the first part of the paper, we will draw an outline of David Lodge's account concerning the topic of novelistic consciousness. After identifying the main features as to why this volume could be regarded as a postmodern novel, the last part will, of course, consist of a series of close readings. Before offering some final conclusions, we will also look at how time and narrative work together in order to represent/reproduce the so-called effect of consciousness.

### Consciousness and the Novel

Without any sort of hesitation, David Lodge clearly indicates that the renderings of the mind (or, more simply, consciousness) could easily be included in a long list of stylistic devices and narrative methods which communicate meaning. In fact, he equates the totality of semantic strategies with a poetics of fiction<sup>2</sup>. Viewed as a virtual machine, consciousness is an information processor. However, the interface between this virtual machine and our real flesh-and-blood bodies (and the morality adjacent to that flesh) erects consciousness, in his view, into something that will be forever impossible to simulate in a computer program<sup>3</sup>. Although he may prove to be forever careful not to slip into simple Cartesian dualism, the author can't be easily enlisted on the side of the skeptics either. However, Lodge records that V. S. Ramachandran, a famous neuropsychologist, argued that the barrier between mind and matter is only apparent and arises as a result of language usage<sup>4</sup>. Unsurprisingly, he seems to agree by further invoking two other definitions of consciousness (the first belonging to Daniel C. Dennett, best known as a philosopher of mind, whilst the second is attributed to the linguist Steven Pinker): "consciousness is a kind of illusion or epiphenomenon" and "the mind is a machine, an on-board computer of a robot made of tissue"<sup>5</sup>. Without getting into any details about the subtle differences between mind, brain, and consciousness, we will, however, show, in Dennett's words, that consciousness is a "fundamental tactic of self-protection, self-control, and self-definition"<sup>6</sup>. If telling stories deals with the illusion of

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<sup>2</sup> David Lodge, *Consciousness and the Novel. Collected Essays*, Penguin Group, London, 2002, p. x.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 290-291.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 3-6.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

consciousness, we can easily conclude that the act of narration, or narrating (a) consciousness, becomes an actual process of self-fashioning.

If, for a large period of time, psychology (mainly behaviorism) viewed consciousness as a “black box”, contemporary science (like quantum physics) demonstrated that an event is inseparable from its observation. By simple analogy, this means that consciousness cannot be observed outside the thing observing it, and, at the same time, not be influenced by it. Clearly enough, the problem is, in the case of consciousness, that the consciousness being observed is, in its turn, observed by a more or less similar consciousness. It is fascinating to observe that literature (or, to be more precise, prose fiction) has always dealt with describing a like-minded situation: a setting in which one consciousness (*e.g.* an author, a narrator, or a character) reflects on another (*i.e.* the author, a narrator, or a character) through language. Surely, we can additionally (and truthfully) observe that this phenomenon develops some sort of third-degree dimension when including the actual reader in the circuit. Indeed, Lodge also maintains that fiction is “a record of human consciousness”, while lyrical poetry could be regarded as an effort to describe qualia through metaphor. We are only interested in the novel which, in David Lodge’s view, could be understood as a fictional model of life or as an effort to describe the experience of individual human beings moving through time and space<sup>7</sup>. In a sense, novels give us a convincing taste of what Theory of Mind (the fact that other people have different interpretations of the world) is actually all about. The narrative nature of human consciousness allows us to represent and possess the continuum of experience in a way we are never able to grasp in reality<sup>8</sup>. Heisenberg’s uncertainty principle gave way for the development of quantum physics which argues (by simplification) that light can be seen, at the same time, both as a wave and as a particle. Again, by simple analogy, we can infer that the ways in which Lodge decided to present the problem of consciousness are, in a sense, similar to the findings of contemporary science. Be that as it may, it is easily observed that his understanding of the poetics of fiction (as the totality of semantic strategies) and of the novel (as a virtual model for understanding life as change within a time-space continuum) rapidly transforms into an anthropology of fiction (or literature for that matter), even though he does not emphasize this fact. This is an important aspect because, as we will see, it can easily be coupled with Paul Ricoeur’s descriptions of time and narrative.

In order to show the means by which the novel is capable of unifying first-person discourses with third-person discourses, Lodge offers readers clear examples of what the direct, indirect, and the free indirect speech/es

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<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 10-14.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 30-32.



look like<sup>9</sup>. From Descartes' works onwards, the evolution of literature has come to define the essence of human beings through consciousness containing such elements as memories, the free association of ideas, or emotions<sup>10</sup>. Nonetheless, the critic warns us that there are several limitations involved in a narrative's representation of consciousness. The linearity of language doesn't always allow a clear representation of consciousness because it is simply not linear<sup>11</sup>. This is why, speaking, as it were, inter-medially, Lodge declares: "I don't think visual and electronic media will make reading and the book obsolete. But the interaction between them will increase"<sup>12</sup>. Consequently, we always run the risk of trying to describe the conscious self by representing "something that is constantly changing"<sup>13</sup>.

"His literary creation represents the literary tendency of the post-war British neo-realism and his literary criticism reflects the successive impact of New Criticism, Structuralism and Bakhtin's theory of fiction on British critical circles"<sup>14</sup>. Within this context, "Thinks..." (published in 2001) is a novel about the relationship between two people: an atheistic cognitive scientist and a novelist lapsed but not entirely skeptical Catholic<sup>15</sup>. There's no secret to it: "I like seeing both sides of a problem and then make up characters to represent them: for example, consciousness as it is scientifically studied and consciousness as a literary form of representation"<sup>16</sup>. For instance, Helen (the novelist) is torn apart between the desire for privacy and the desire for intimacy, while Ralph (the cognitive scientist) is an honest, independent and egotistical man. Phillip Tew has argued that David Lodge reflected on the nature of fiction by comparing narratives to the nature of cognition itself using irony as his main tool<sup>17</sup>. Undoubtedly, he actually confessed that "my novels are full of irony ... there is also a softer, more emotionally tender (and some of my critics would say, sentimental) aspect to my work. I don't see any contradiction in this [...]. In my later works particularly the ironic posture of the implied author towards the story is qualified by a more sympathetic ('tender', if you like) attitude towards the characters"<sup>18</sup>. What's more, the author explains that "If you understand your negative experiences as being ironical, it means you have

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<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 40-41.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 62.

<sup>12</sup> [http://lidiavianu.scriptmania.com/david\\_lodge.htm](http://lidiavianu.scriptmania.com/david_lodge.htm) - Accessed: 06.01.2017

<sup>13</sup> Lodge, *op. cit.*, p. 91.

<sup>14</sup> <http://journal.acs-cam.org.uk/data/archive/2010/201002-article13.pdf> - Accessed: 05.01.2017.

<sup>15</sup> Lodge, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

<sup>16</sup> [http://lifestyle.ele.ro/Vedete/David-Lodge-interviu\\_--a3563.html](http://lifestyle.ele.ro/Vedete/David-Lodge-interviu_--a3563.html) - Accessed: 05.01.2017.

<sup>17</sup> Phillip Tew, *The Contemporary British Novel*, Continuum Publishing Group, Norfolk, 2004, p. 11.

<sup>18</sup> [http://www.e-scoala.ro/lidiavianu/novelists\\_david\\_lodge.html](http://www.e-scoala.ro/lidiavianu/novelists_david_lodge.html) - Accessed: 05.01.2017.

already distanced yourself from them, in a certain degree, and that you are ready to see them as subjects that can become fictional elements”<sup>19</sup>. According to Lodge, Ralph establishes the constraints for the truthful representation of consciousness as a first-person account: “lyric is first-person discourse, and I have used first person narration a lot in my last three novels (including the forthcoming *Thinks...*) perhaps in order to deal with the ‘tender’ emotions associated with love and death”<sup>20</sup>. Helen, on the other hand, is a “metafictional novelist...and therefore a very self-conscious novelist”<sup>21</sup>. Lodge wanted Ralph to experience a real shock in order to challenge his self-confidence and his rather arrogant materialist ideology by representing his self-acknowledgement as a media don trapped in his own philandering mold. Applying a biographical reading, we can understand the reasons behind why Lodge did this: “death has become a primary subject ... in my work, simply because the fact that one is getting older. When you are young, you really don't think you are going to die. As you grow old, you realize that you are”<sup>22</sup>. Consequently, it comes as no surprise that Lodge believes, much as McEwan does too, in the power of ending a story<sup>23</sup>, because it “crucially affects the impression it leaves on the reader about the implied author's attitude to life. I am fascinated by this question of endings and have written about it in several critical essays. As modern literary novelists go, I think I am more drawn than most to the old-fashioned ‘happy ending’, and have sometimes been criticized for it [...] I tend to leave my characters in an open-ended situation, but a hopeful one, with the major problems they have confronted in the story resolved”<sup>24</sup>.

The pluralism invoked above betrays Lodge's involvement with postmodernism. If Ralph represents the scientific community, Helen is a representative of the novelistic world. Without adopting any “grand narrative”, the novelist plunges directly into what one may call an anti-modern aesthetic. Mocking William James' definition of the stream of consciousness (“a bird flying through the air and the perching for a moment then taking wing again”<sup>25</sup>), this ironic comment with regard to modernists' experiments represents a clear stultification of their writerly efforts. Using a recording device, Ralph transcribes his thoughts while, in the meantime, making comments on what a

<sup>19</sup> [http://lifestyle.ele.ro/Vedete/David-Lodge-interviu\\_--a3563.html](http://lifestyle.ele.ro/Vedete/David-Lodge-interviu_--a3563.html) - Accessed: 05.01.2017.

<sup>20</sup> [http://www.e-scoala.ro/lidiavianu/novelists\\_david\\_lodge.html](http://www.e-scoala.ro/lidiavianu/novelists_david_lodge.html) - Accessed: 05.01.2017.

<sup>21</sup> Lodge, *op. cit.*, p. 296.

<sup>22</sup> <http://journal.acs-cam.org.uk/data/archive/2010/201002-article13.pdf> - Accessed: 05.01.2017.

<sup>23</sup> Ricoeur writes: “an inconclusive ending suits a work that raises by design a problem the author considers to be unsolvable”, Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, Vol. II, translated by Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer, The University of Chicago Press, London and Chicago, 1985, p. 22.

<sup>24</sup> <http://referaty.atlas.sk/cudzie-jazyky/anglictina/19620/?print=1> - Accessed: 04.01.2017.

<sup>25</sup> David Lodge, *Thinks...*, Secker and Warburg, London, 2001, p. 1.

painstaking and boring process this is. These remarks all point to a postmodern way of subverting literary conventions. It is also obvious that Ralph's recordings are symptomatic of a characteristically postmodern series of internal ruptures and fragmentations<sup>26</sup>. As Nietzsche placed aesthetic experience above science and rationality, so does Helen in her diary<sup>27</sup>. According to most theoreticians, postmodernism revealed several new ways of structuring narratives. To be sure, Lodge's novel is a wonderful example of unfamiliar ways of structuring narratives. His use of the recorder as a device for capturing the wanderings of the mind, for example, or Helen's electronic diary, or even the direct transcription of e-mails are all beautiful examples of unusual means of concocting brand-new types of narratives. And what do all these narrative strategies represent, if not the acute problem of communication which is highly distinctive of postmodernity? Lodge wants us to realize that, even if Ralph's consciousness is mechanically recorded, the only way in which he, or anybody else for that matter, can understand it is by (re)reading it. That is to say, by way of hermeneutics. We are thus easily led to conclude that, even if one disapproves of Helen's account of consciousness, one always comes to the realization that a genuine, objective account of consciousness is not necessarily impossible, but more or less identical to what novelists have always done in a subjective, fictionalized manner. Likewise, Ralph's transcriptions, Helen's diary, the students' essays, and the e-mails are all great examples of simulations (in Baudrillard's terms) and the ways in which they compose the "hyper-reality" of the novel. In this respect, one can identify at least four levels of interferential consciousness: a scientific one (Ralph's recordings), a technical one (Helen's diary), a fictional one (the students' essays) and a virtual one (the e-mails). A combination of such various narrative strategies could easily be validated if one takes into account the functioning (and the role) of what R usen described (in Clifford Geertz's footsteps) as the process of a "thick description"<sup>28</sup>. Without him being conscious of the fact, Ralph's efforts are clearly and ironically indicative of Derrida's deconstructive actions: showing the instability of language systems, they are, at the same time, the absolute embodiment of postmodern pastiche. Bridging the gap between high and low forms of art through the use of irony, postmodernism has no use in distinguishing between scientific and artistic discourses. Nonetheless, as we have already declared, we will not be giving into a deconstructionist reading of the text.

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<sup>26</sup> David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, Blackwell Publishing, Oxford, 2004, p. 12.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>28</sup> J orn R usen, "Historical studies between Modernity and Postmodernity" in Sorin Antohi (ed.), *Modernism  i antimodernism: noi perspective interdisciplinare (Modernism and Antimodernism: New Interdisciplinary Perspectives)*, Cuv ntul, Bucharest, 2008, p. 97.

## Time to Think

The Augustinian theory of time could be read, as we have already shown<sup>29</sup>, as a psychological solution to the paradoxes of time. Since we've already described Ricoeur's theory at some length, we will refrain from unfolding the same arguments again. We will, instead, swiftly review some of the most pertaining issues (this article represents a second - and last - part of a larger effort in suggesting that a structuralist, phenomenological, and hermeneutical reading of postmodern texts should readily be applied before giving into to post-structuralist or deconstructions interpretations). Consequently, one has to acknowledge that memories and expectations represent different modes of viewing the present. The question, of course, is how can one relate the Augustinian theory of time to David Lodge's novel? First of all, we read Ralph's consciousness, as it were, in the moment of its' recording (which is also its genesis) in the same way we read Helen's consciousness as she is writing her diary. Their perceptions of the present moment are, however, transcribed in the past tense. Sometimes, Ralph speaks in the present tense, allowing us to see the world through his eyes, while Helen's diary entries are basically retrospective (the e-mails could undeniably be interpreted as the fragments of a modern, technologically altered epistolary novel). It goes to show that Lodge's desire not to intervene as a mediator in order to produce a more realistic effect of what has really happened (it is well known that the use of such documents offers the impression of immediacy): the novel's action consists, as we have already mentioned, in portraying the relationship between a recently bereaved novelist (Helen Reed) and a cognitive scientist, Ralph Messenger. The process of emplotment consists not only in the exploration of the tensions between two different types of consciousness but also in the use of a third-person narrative (an omniscient narrator), thus revealing its artificiality to the reader. According to Ricoeur, a narrative will always deploy two types of temporal configurations: a chronological dimension which reveals the episodic dimension of a narrative (linear representation of time) and the configurational dimension in which the plot transforms a series of disparate events into a full-blown story<sup>30</sup>. The conceptual network functioning on the paradigmatic axis and its complementary synchronic order (syntagmatic axis) are easily observed by any reader. The latter (the syntagmatic order of the discourse) is very important because it implies an irreducible diachronic

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<sup>29</sup> See Alex Ciorogar, "Time and Narrative: Reading Ian McEwan's *Atonement*", in *Philobiblon. Transylvanian Journal Of Multidisciplinary Research in the Humanities*, vol. xxi, no-2, 2016, pp. 147-149.

<sup>30</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, Vol. I, translated by Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer, The University of Chicago Press, London, 1984, p. 66.

character, while, at the same time, allowing us to grasp the paradigmatic order of action.

The novel is composed of a number of 34 chapters. The action of the novel begins on Monday, the 17<sup>th</sup> of February, even if it opens up with Ralph's recording dated Sunday, the 23<sup>rd</sup> of February. The action ends on the 4<sup>th</sup> of June. We are then dealing with several events which took place in a five-month interval. Ralph's recordings are usually very brief and ambiguous. For example, his first recording lasts only 50 minutes, as it begins at 10.13 a.m., quickly ending at 11.03 (a.m.). In contrast, Helen's first entry expands from the 17<sup>th</sup> to the 23<sup>rd</sup> of February when Ralph sees Helen for the first time as she was walking across the campus. Ralph's recordings are full of narrative "gaps" which the reader must fill in after reading Helen's journal. Although Helen basically resumes what has happened, her account is that which typically carries the story forwards (one tends to say that her chapters represent a series of discontinuous "monumental scenes"). Uniting different but subjective accounts of consciousness, the omniscient narrator also accounts for the reasons behind their endeavors: Ralph records his thoughts as he is scientifically interested in researching the phenomenon of consciousness, while Helen views it as a good way of exercising her novelistic skills. Ricoeur has argued that narratives possess the property of being split into utterances and statements and that the act of configuration determines different temporal levels. Swiftly analyzing Ralph's recordings, we quickly realize that his utterances are simple tools used for representing consciousness (and not for narrating events). According to the French theorist, the fictional past is a narrative tense described by an attitude of relaxation or detachment. On the contrary, what we seem to observe in Lodge's novel is a gradual development of temporal anxiety. Although language is linear, the only way in which one can actualize consciousness is through language. While recording his thoughts, Ralph also remembers various events and expresses future desires. The duration of different chapters varies according to the number of their lines and pages. Succession is seen in the development of each chapter. Some of them move the story forwards, while others could be described as rather static. Coexistence is applicable where their thoughts are recorded on the same day, but also in the parts in which the omniscient narrator brings them together. In the first case, simultaneity refers to the day in which they write or record their thoughts, and, in the second case, simultaneity consists in their physical presence in one and the same space. Finally, the feeling of contemporaneity is shaped by the relationship between the private time of the individuals (Ralph and Helen) and the public time of history (the third-person omniscient narrator).

Mark Currie argued that the postmodern experience of time is understandable as the relationship between the phenomenological experience of time and the way it is presented to collective consciousness<sup>31</sup>. This means that the postmodern experience of time is a relationship between the internal time-consciousness of different characters in the novel (Ralph and Helen) and the overall experience of the time. The postmodern experience of time is thus shaped by the way in which society is altered by scientific, cultural, and political changes. Currie emphasizes the fact that the present is seen as the object of a future memory. This is exactly what Ralph is doing when recording his thoughts, because, by doing this, he projects the present as the future data for his objective analysis of consciousness. As we have anticipated, time is both a theme of narratives and an essential part of the temporal logic of storytelling<sup>32</sup>. However, the experience of time in consciousness is identical to narrating itself. Consequently, we can confidently argue that temporality, in Lodge's novel, is the storytelling itself because the narrative is the expression of Ralph's thoughts and consciousness. Currie emphasizes the impossibility of separating the mind from the world. As a result, temporality (brought about by the narrating of consciousness) also represents the configuring power of the story itself<sup>33</sup>: "literature may provide, for example, a case study in internal time-consciousness ...it can capture something which escapes systematic knowledge"<sup>34</sup>. When discussing the novel in terms of modes of representation, we can recall Linda Hutcheon's distinctions between the four types of narcissism: overt, covert, diegetic, and linguistic<sup>35</sup>. It is obvious that "Thinks..." is a linguistically self-aware text, conscious of its limits and powers - a covert form of narcissism in which the reflexive processes are structuralized or internalized.

Anthropomorphic time is narrative time (it displays the temporal aspects of every human experience)<sup>36</sup>. Moreover, the organization of events is always inseparable of the representation of events<sup>37</sup>. In other words, *mimesis* is not the imitation of life (nature or reality), but a modality of representation (*i.e.* different literary genres)<sup>38</sup>. The process of imitating different types representations (or narratives) is, according to Ricoeur, a dialectical undertaking: the first step consists in recognizing that action is always

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<sup>31</sup> Mark Currie, *About Time. Narrative, Fiction and the Philosophy of Time*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 2007, p. 80.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 76.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 110.

<sup>35</sup> Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, University Printing House, Cambridge, 1992, p. 204.

<sup>36</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *op. cit.*, p. 52.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 31-33.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 34.

grounded in the understanding of a pre-narrative world of action (we are interested only in its temporal aspects of life or experience); the second step is, of course, that of configuring actions through narratives, while the final step rests in the hands of the reader who must mediate between time and narrative or between fiction and reality<sup>39</sup>. This last process is important because it signifies the intermingling of writing and history<sup>40</sup>. Also called refiguration, the last phase allows us to grasp the real-life effects of fiction: "the key to the problem of refiguration lies in the way history and fiction, taken together, after the reply of a poetics of narrative to the aporias of time brought about phenomenology"<sup>41</sup>. Fiction merges with the reader through interpretation<sup>42</sup>. Mark Currie, on the other hand, believes that a reverse temporality is always employed in any type of narrative<sup>43</sup>. If all narrative is retrospective, Currie argues that anticipation is a mode of existence which enables us to engage the present as nothing more than a memory to come<sup>44</sup>. Consequently, *prolepsis* (the anticipation of retrospection) is not only our fundamental characteristic of real-time experience but an essential dimension of any type of representation (the organization of events)<sup>45</sup>. This second-dialectic between text and reader projects a temporal picture<sup>46</sup>. The relationship between time and narrative is an indirect relationship between life and representation<sup>47</sup>.

## Conclusions

Instating a third degree or, if you will, a reader-oriented type of meta-consciousness, "Thinks..." shows - at the end of a hermeneutical reading - how the ways in which the conformations of the fictional state of affairs (or, simply put, the story) contribute in developing not only a time pattern but also in elaborating a design of/for consciousness. The soon-to-be quality of mindfulness (the awareness associated with conscious experience) and the rearwards migration of narratives, validates our hypothesis that applying phenomenological instruments of analysis to postmodern texts is more useful than deconstructing entire passages of texts while fully ignoring the real-life

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<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 46.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 70-71.

<sup>41</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, Vol. III, translated by Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, London, 1988, p. 101.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 165.

<sup>43</sup> Mark Currie, *op. cit.*, pp. 4-5.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 5-6.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 97.

aspects of both fiction and literary studies. The formation and legitimation of different types of discourses (scientific or fictional) are deeply enmeshed with issues such as the constitution and evaluation of temporality.

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## Sitography

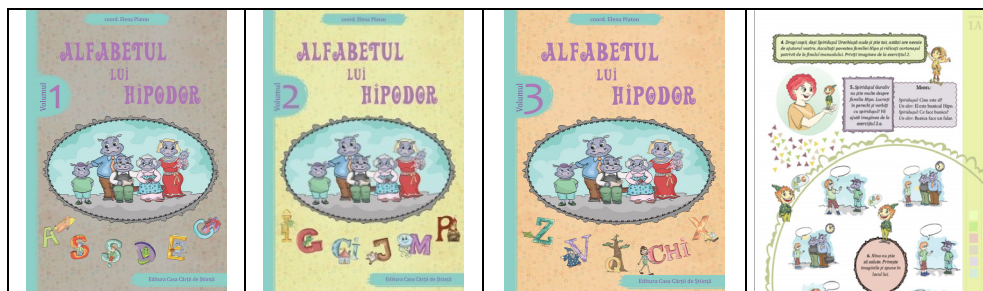
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## BOOK REVIEW

***Alfabetul lui Hipodor. Limba română ca limbă nematernă. Clasa a II-a (Hipodor's Alphabet. Romanian language as Second Language. Second Grade), by Antonela Arieșan, Anda Bratu (coord. Elena Platon), vol. I-II-III, Editura Casa Cărții de Știință, Cluj-Napoca, 2014-2016, vol. I - 174p., vol. II - 196p., vol. III - 162p.***



How would you like for the textbook your child is learning the letters from to look like? Which would be the eligibility criteria if you had several variants before you? Would it be the playful aspect or the exactness of the content? Colourful and airy pages or pages that are filled with useful activities? A rich vocabulary or an authentic one? Humour or efficiency? *Alfabetul lui Hipodor (Hipodor's Alphabet)*, which appeared in three volumes at the Casa Cărții de Știință publishing house in 2014, aims to satisfy all of these expectations and, to a great extent, it actually succeeds in doing so. The ABC is part of a more ample project, coordinated by Elena Platon, of producing a series of textbooks for Romanian, for primary and middle school, specially designed for children who are non-native Romanian speakers. This undertaking is not a new one, there have been other course materials that were created

and that specifically addressed national minorities, but this is a new communicative and friendly approach to learning, which is essential for the children's subsequent approach to reading and learning in general. Information about the series as well as the audio support for the listening exercises can be found on the project's website, [www.invatam.ro](http://www.invatam.ro).

Although the learning process is done exclusively through game and story, the teaching concept of this ABC is built on solid scientific principles, which can be found in the teaching instructions for second language teaching and evaluation. In the theoretical scaffolding what is evident is the presence of the communicative model from the *Common European Framework for Languages*. The initiation and the establishment of competences from there is adapted to the capacities and skills from the school syllabus for 2nd graders, after the students

with other mother tongues have already learnt the ABC in their first language during their 1st grade. The situations of communication and the lexical field are kept in areas that are familiar for the children – leisure activities, family, food, adventure, circus etc. – while the learning of the sounds and letters is done in an integrated, authentic and coherent manner. The exercises are alternated and diverse, so that neither boredom nor the minimization of any of the capacities would interfere. There is space given to reading, speaking, vocabulary and indirect grammar, but the major and very useful novelty stems from the presence of listening activities. The supporting recordings are done by professional actors and are explored through humorous and useful exercises. For class teachers there is also the advantage of the teaching scenario that has already been created, in orderly stages, but also the possibility of doing differentiated work, since the activities have a progressive difficulty level and are very diverse. At a quick glance, there are at least twenty types of exercises: to identify, to regroup, to explain, with multiple choice, with binary choice, to compare, to replace, to fill in, to transpose, to dissociate, to correct, to build a narrative discourse, to pronounce, to associate etc. In the first units the exercises use especially images while, in the second half, they use words or sentences. Still related to the typology of the exercises, it is worth mentioning the consistent introductions of the TPR (Total Physical Response) method, a metaphor of the teaching undertaking proposed by the textbook. The student is even physically involved in the progression of the lesson, since he/she reacts through indicated gestures – applause,

raising one's hand, leg tec. – when he/she achieves a cognitive operation of the type of distinguishing sounds or associating words.

As aforementioned, the true success of the textbook, beyond the solid theoretical support canvas, is the playful and humorous teaching method, which is supported by a graphic aspect that is rich in beautiful and dynamic images. The authors, Antonela Arieșan and Anda Bratu, seem to have inexhaustible sources of creativity. The three volumes, with six units each, tell the story of Nino, a little boy who wants to learn how to speak and write in Romanian. As a matter of fact, Nino and his curiosity represent the red thread that crosses all the textbooks from the series, from the preparatory grade to the 4<sup>th</sup> grade. He is accompanied by his friend Lila, who is a funny little purple sheep. In the 1<sup>st</sup> grade they happen to end up with a family of friendly hippopotami, who accompany them in the learning adventure. As a result, mother Hipodora prepares surprises for them, while friend Hiporici seconds him in the adventure. Students, in turn, can win hippo-points if they are well prepared. Furthermore, Nino encounters a band of leprechauns who initiate him into listening, reading, speaking and writing.

In this outline scenario, there are constant games that appear and that, through their graphics and how they engage children, remind us of the adventures from fairytales or the Piticot game: the characters need to overcome challenges, find treasures, search for clues, identify the best solution, go through labyrinths and dominoes etc. Everything is transformed into a story. For instance, when it is introduced, the letter *ă* is said to be the sister of *a*, but it cannot stand

the sun and that is why it always wears a hat on her head; we must always put its hat on because otherwise it has terrible headaches. When the students have to tell a story, a summary, or reproduce something they are invited in a magical armchair of sorts, the chair of the narrator, which gives weight to the message.

The story scenario respects the teaching principle of progressiveness. In the first volume the activities are almost exclusively oral, while the messages involved in receiving and producing are usually short and authentic dialogues about daily situations: at the market, at the bus ticket booth, at the movies, in the kitchen etc. In the second volume there are short texts that appear, which are generally retellings of certain books that are already known by the children, which is pretext for listening or reading: *The story of the giant radish*, *The story of Pinocchio* or *Alice in Wonderland*. Each time, beside the activities of direct exploration, of comprehension, these pieces of text are preceded by pre-listening/reading exercises, by exercises meant to familiarise one with the theme and the vocabulary of the text, and are followed by post-listening/reading exercises, in order to process and produce personal messages. In the last volume there are grammatical exercises that appear as well, especially ones connected to the problems that a non-native speaker has in Romanian: feminine agreement, the plural, the article, irregular verb forms etc. However, meta-linguistic terms do not appear at any moment, so that the correct forms are

learnt as an integral part of the story covered in the classroom. For instance, for the correct use of a verb form, the students must create cat sentences, meaning they have to associate the pronouns written on the head of the cat with the verb forms written on its body.

From the point of view of the structure, each unit respects the same teaching path. Each of them is preceded by objectives that are announced on the first page, just as some adventures that are about to take place. Then there are three sections that have similar, interconnected themes, while the new letters are introduced as an integral part in the second section, after the vocabulary and the narrative outline have already been prepared. At the end there are two useful boxes that appear: 'ideas to take home' – a summary of 6-10 lines of the contents covered and a short test that allows a practical (self-)evaluation of the last things that were learnt. A special form of evaluation-revision is represented by the last unit from the textbook as well, since it resumes through a story and exercises everything that has been learnt throughout the school year.

Although it was conceived for the classrooms where Romanian is not a native language, *Alfabetul lui Hipodor* (*Hipodor's Alphabet*) can be used just as well in native Romanian 1<sup>st</sup> grades too, as a support for the mother tongue. The quality of the concept, the creativity, the diversity of the activities, the integrated learning, the humour, the captivating graphic aspect make it, by far, the most state-of-the-art and pleasant ABC on the present Romanian textbook market.

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## BOOK REVIEW

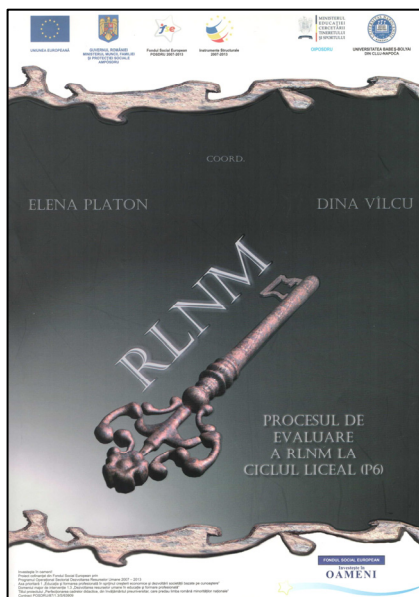
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***RLNM – Procesul de evaluare a RLNM la ciclul liceal (P6) (Romanian as Second Language - The Evaluation Process of RSL During the High School);* Coord.: Elena Platon and Dina Vâlcu; Editura Casa Cărții de Știință, Cluj-Napoca, 2011. 434p.**

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After writing five chapters from the novel *Accidental (The Accident)*, Mihail Sebastian lost his manuscript or it was stolen from him. This is the most frequently invoked metaphor-episode from the Romanian culture when it comes to the fragility of writing or rather of the scriptural support, maybe also as a result of the depressing confessions made by the journalist Sebastian about the episode. *Mutatis mutandis*, something similar happened

with the volume we are dealing with: it is not about literature or about an actual loss, but about a reduced and incoherent reception of a revolutionary work for the present domain of Romanian language teaching, mainly owed to a weak diffusion of the book. As a rule, in the teaching process there is more attention given to teaching than to evaluating, which makes the book already interesting through the chosen topic. However, the related data, Romanian as a foreign language and the alignment of its evaluation with the *Common European*



*Framework for Languages*, turn the 434 pages into a stepping stone for the field. This is the reason why I considered that the volume still deserves to be promoted, even though more than five years have passed since its publishing.

Before justifying its inherent value, we consider that some information about the context of its creation is useful. The title references back to a national project, whose acronym

– RSL (RLNM) – summarises its target: Romanian as a second language. Taking place during 2010-2013, this was a mammoth project, with over 1500 individuals being involved, who were trainers and trained professors. The premise was built on the idea that tens of thousands of students who belong to national minorities are annually learning and are being evaluated in Romanian according to the same standards and textbooks as native speakers, which leads to an inequitable imbalance. The team from the *Depart-*

*ment of Romanian language, culture and civilization* from the Faculty of Letters from Babeş-Bolyai University have proposed, based on their experience in teaching/evaluating Romanian to foreign students, a rethinking of the field, according to a new paradigm that combine the accessible with the useful. Each teaching cycle – primary school, middle school and high school – was represented by a training programme for teaching and evaluating. As result, the volume in question is the last one of the series (P6) and represents the course material for evaluating the RSL in high school.

The absolute novelty consists in approaching an important pre-university subject from positions that are different from the ones that have been used so far. It is known that, in high school, Romanian language and literature is in fact almost exclusively literature. Yet, for both non-native and native speakers possessing a high language level should prevail baring in mind the formed competences that will be useful throughout one's life. In the P6 volume, the evaluation of literature does not receive more space than the evaluation of the other competences: receiving an oral message, receiving a written message, producing an oral message, producing a written message. Moreover, the same scale is maintained in the model-test proposal for 12<sup>th</sup> grade, in the presentation of the types of exercises and in the exemplification of writing items.

The structure of the volume is a type of *mise-en-abîme* of the object of interest itself, of the textbooks for Romanian language and literature, not of how they are at present but of how the authors of the project wish them to be. The three units reflect in a fractal manner not only

the contents that are to be evaluated but especially the interactive drawing and the active implication of the student in what is presented to him/her. Each subunit has numerous exercises, topics for reflection and concentrated revisions of the 'retain' type. Furthermore, the sections of the units are preceded by operational objectives that can be found, in an individualised form, in the 'ideas to take home' at the end. Last but not least, the tests at the end of the sections represent another chance for students to remember, to systematize and affix the freshly covered contents. From the point of view of the information that is presented in the three units, the exhaustive theory about the evaluation of Romanian as a second language is happily complemented by the practical part, namely by the analysis and construction of the evaluation activities.

The first unit, as we have mentioned, brings, from a starting point, a detailed theoretical picture of the methods, the types of evaluation and of the impact methods in RSL. Then, each communicative competence, namely the competence of receiving a literary text / of producing the text of literary analysis, is presented through the same understanding grid: the models and the approaches from the present bibliography, the descriptors corresponding to the CEFL – which, according to the authors, during high school correspond to the C1-C2 levels – the cognitive processes involved in receiving or producing, according to the targeted age, types of texts / messages that are adequate to the evaluation of the given competence, the difference between the first and the second language, the variables that affect the evaluation. Almost without exceptions, there are clarifying examples given,

some negative, which are consistently represented in the educational environment, some innovative by filling in gaps. This is, for instance, the case of the exercises for oral comprehension, which do not exist in the accredited textbooks or tests, but which are useful and necessary in learning Romanian by non-natives. The second unit offers a large space to the process of producing texts, with all its stages, from establishing the purpose, going through the methodology of writing items and ending with the testing *per se*, the dissemination and the (self) evaluation of the tests. The exhaustive list of exercises from here is useful not only as a bank of ideas, but also as a model of diversity in evaluating the same contents. In addition, in the second unit, there is a series of analyses that are applied and argued on the types of evaluation activities from the textbooks that most often encountered during high school, in classrooms of both native and non-native speakers. At the end of the critical analysis there is a test proposal that appears and that could verify, at the end of the 12<sup>th</sup> grade, all of the five competences. The third unit, which is shorter, deals with the evaluation criteria for oral and written production, where problems regarding subjectivity and disagreement between evaluators can arise. The presentation of the models of grids and scales underlines the idea that external criteria of evaluation are not compulsory, they can be individualised as long as they verify their functionality. However, it is clear that one cannot accept the lack of a standardised grid that offers the evaluator sufficient objectivity and strong arguments in defending a grade. The third unit, as well as the volume, concludes with a plea for the appli-

cation of the benchmarking process, which is useful in evaluating groups, whether we are talking about a classroom or an entire community of non-native speakers of Romanian.

It is easy to observe the model of deconstruction-deconstruction adopted by the authors in creating the units. There is an active dynamic between the analysis of what the textbooks offer, namely the standardised national tests, and the manner in which the evaluation based on competences, of the CEFR type, would be directly and immediately adapted to the needs of non-native students who are learning Romanian language and literature in high school. Since the percentage of functional illiteracy is quite high in Romania, and not only with non-native speakers, since the results from international tests such as PISA and PIRLS are poor, the alternative proposed by the authors of RSL P6 are worth taking into account. Even though the literary contents can be maintained, the comprehension exercises could be constructed differently, with visual schemes, with diagrams or circuits of the cause-effect-cause type, which will not turn entire generations into literary critics but will certainly allow a more correct closeness to the received or produced message.

Beside the need to align with the European teaching-evaluating standards, the team of the project has the legitimacy to propose to the Ministry of Education the change in approach in the field through the legitimacy that is given by their full-fledged member status within ALTE (Association of Language Testers in Europe), probably the most important body from the continent in the field of language testing. In the same train of thought, although in the above descrip-



tion of the structure of the book there is an evident inclination toward the practical examples of the authors, the theoretical construct on which they build their ideas is one accurately created, by relating to the most current and credible theoretical sources that exist presently in the field of language testing. Names such as Buck, Bachman, Palmer, Hughes, Weir are invoked in each section of the volume.

At the end, we reaffirm what we stated in the first lines: such a book, which is rich in information, models and ideas that can change mentalities, de-

serves a better publishing fate. Maybe the ten writers will decide to republish the book, even if not in graphic conditions that are as impressive, but with a better diffusion. The evaluation methods proposed on competences not only allow for an increased degree of objectivity, but are also closer to the present European language policies, while for the students that these are applied to, it represent a more authentic and present-day contact with one's mother tongue or second language.

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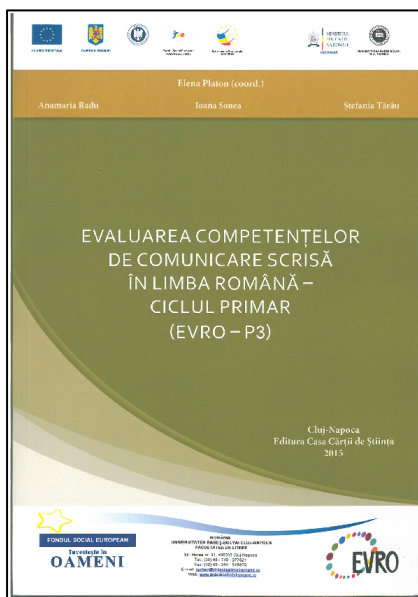
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## BOOK REVIEW

### **“The Evaluation of Written Communication Competences in Romanian Language – school primary cycle (EVRO-P3)”, 233-235 p.**

The work “The Evaluation of Written Communication Competences in Romanian Language – primary cycle (EVRO-P3)”, issued in Cluj-Napoca, at Casa Cărții de Știință Publishing House, 2015, of 232 pages, has as authors a group of experienced specialists in this field: Anamaria Radu, Ioana Sonea, Ștefania Tărău, under the coordination of Elena Platon.

The proposed theme is to carry out some new perspectives regarding the evaluation of written communication competences in Romanian language at the primary cycle. The authors present up to date teaching methods and strategies, able to revolutionize the didactic process, following the pupils' awareness “related to the fact that not only the formal learning of reading-writing constitutes the learning object, but, most of all, the acquisition of some reading efficient strategies which would lead them as soon as possible to the meaning”, as it has been noticed by the scientific director of EVRO project, university lecturer doctor, Mrs.Elena Platon in the book *Preface*. To



ensure that this perspective change would function, first of all, it is necessary the teachers to master those reading strategies which prepare the pupils to understand exactly the meaning of a text, also to accustom the pupils to offer feedback during the writing of a text, so that they would get solutions to the possible difficulties they meet. The work proposes a change concerning the evaluation perspective and re-

garding the attitude towards testing act in general, which instead of being accompanied by feelings of fear, of stress, even by emotional blockages, it is better to become a stimulus in acquiring some progressively improved results.

The desire of some essential changes in the teaching and evaluation process are to be found in the formulated objectives of EVRO project, entitled “The Training of teachers who teach Romanian language at pre-university education level to assess the pupils' communication competences” (contract POSDRU/157/1.3/S/133900) ongoing

within the Department of Romanian Language, Culture and Civilization at Letters Faculty of Babeş-Bolyai University, in Cluj-Napoca. The general objective of the project was the improvement of the professional competences for many teachers (approximately 1800) who have benefited by the further training programs. "The specific objectives have aimed at the improvement of teachers capacity to evaluate the oral communication competences, (understanding after listening and oral expression) and written expression (understanding after reading and written expression) of the pupils in Romanian language, by mastering a modern perspective on the evaluation process and by using some objective tools of evaluation (scales, descriptors, general grids, and specific grids, self/inter/datasheets of evaluation etc.), elaborated and used at an European level, in accordance with *CECR*, in order to professionalize the evaluation process of oral and written communication competences and to align this process to the European standards, and in order to create a unique system to evaluate and to grade these competences at the national and even international level." (*Preface*, p. 8, 9)

The work comprises six units and 22 annexes. The first unit offers a general presentation of the evaluation process and formulates some precise objectives such as: "the differentiation of approaches regarding the evaluation", "advantages and disadvantages"; "the identification of evaluation stages"; "the analysis of the evaluation impact on the teaching and learning processes"; "the correlation of the different types of evaluation with the evaluation functions"; "the identification of each type of evaluation"; "the identification of the testing specific issues". The chapter offers clari-

fying explanations, presents differentiations towards the traditional approaches with the help of tables and particularly suggestive images, it also presents work models in pairs and practical exercises of self-evaluation.

The second unit focuses on the evaluation of written message reception capacity. The objectives of this chapter follow the cognitive processes specific to the reading reception at the age group of 6-11 years, "the correlation of reading operations with the understanding types of the written text", the conception of some adequate items for each type of reading and for the concerned cognitive operations". This unit gives some important suggestions referring to the selection criteria of the texts intended for reading, such as "authenticity", "variety" and the fact that they come from "different fields".

The third unit focuses on the evaluation of the written message reception capacity, on the correct conception of the items, and on the use of a *Competence Grid for the Natives (CLN)*. Work models in pairs are offered for the progressive levels, starting with the precursory group and finishing with the IV-th grade and the items are classified. The information included in the subtitle: "The ten commandments in achieving the items" are to be noted, information which can be also apply to other levels.

The IV-th unit has mainly an applicative character, it also provides the structure of a didactic scenario following the model of Common European Frame of Reference for languages, to support the teachers to get familiar with these types of scenarios. Some frequent mistakes in formulation items are presented, also some evaluation models and work datasheets for inter-evaluation.

## BOOK REVIEW

The V-th unit makes a general presentation of the written text, following as objectives to develop some very important abilities referring to the way of taking notes, of reading datasheets, of carrying out *a mental map*. The images are highly suggestive, beautifully coloured, which summarize the stages of writing: *I think, I write, I correct myself, I complete*, behaviours which are not of *innate*, but *acquired* type.

The VI-th unit presents different evaluation tools: "self-evaluation, inter-evaluation and evaluation-re-evaluation

datasheet, specifying the difference between evaluation, testing and grading".(Preface, p.10)

The annexes include practical didactic materials, presented in a very attractive manner, with a lot of very well carried out drawings, *teacher's datasheet*, *pupil's datasheet*, tables to fill in with key-words, role games, models of datasheets which will certainly help, those who are interested to carry out similar scenarios and for other types of texts, adapted to the needs of the class.

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## BOOK REVIEW

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### Platon, Elena, Sonea, Ioana, VasIU, Lavinia, Vîlcu, Dina, *A Minimalist Description of the Romanian Language (A1, A2, B1, B2)* Cluj-Napoca: Editura Casa Cărții de Știință, 2014, 95 p.

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In what follows, we shall review the *Minimalist Description of the Romanian Language (A1, A2, B1, B2)*, a document that was drawn up on the basis of thorough and long-lasting studies on the teaching and assessment of Romanian as a Foreign Language (RFL)/as a Second Language (RSL), undertaken by the research team of the *Department of Romanian Language, Culture and Civilization* from the Faculty of Letters of “Babeș-Bolyai” University in Cluj-Napoca, Romania.

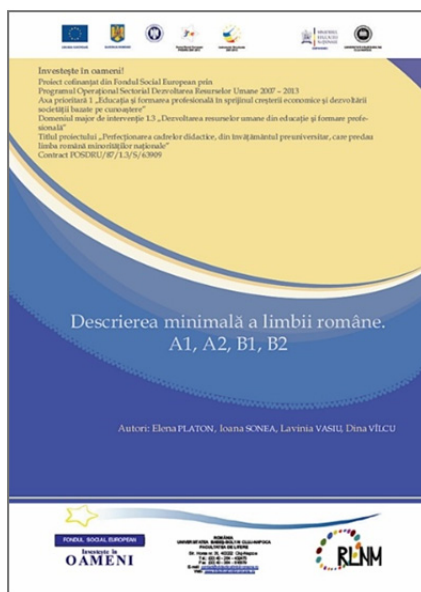
The work, totalling 95 pages, includes the following sections: a *Foreword*, signed by Elena Platon, wherein are briefly presented: 1. *The necessity and usefulness of the work* (p. 1-3), 2. *A brief sentimental history...* (p. 3-5), 3. *The structure of the work* (p. 5-8); the actual *description* of the Romanian language for each of the four levels: A1, A2, B1, B2 (p. 9-92), the document ending with the *Bibliography* (p. 93-94) and the *Contents* (p. 95).

In recent years, especially considering the need to issue Romanian language proficiency certificates that are also valid

abroad, the study of Romanian at international linguistic standards has been made possible by professionals who have developed teaching / assessment methods and techniques that have also been used for scholars working on other languages and having a considerable, vast experience in the field. At this moment, apart from the most important instrument drafted by the Council of Europe's *Language Policy Division*, namely the already consecrated

*Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFR), there are no other scientific instruments that would justify the teaching and assessment of Romanian in accordance with the common reference levels and ensure the international recognition of Romanian language certificates.

In this context, the establishment of a set of common standards, by which EU Member States can produce “transparent and coherent language policies” (Platon: 1) and of a “code of communication between those directly involved in the teaching/learning/assessment of a language other than the mother tongue” (Platon: 1)



is acknowledged by the authors of this work as one of the fundamental premises of the *Framework*.

Regardless of the language and the role assumed in the teaching process, the unanimous acceptance of the language proficiency levels proposed in the CEFR (namely the well-known A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, C2 levels, with thorough descriptions of rigorously delineated competences in various stages of foreign language acquisition) and of all the other principles set out in the *Framework* confirms two complementary aspects: on the one hand, practitioners in the field should relinquish purely intuitive approaches; on the other hand, there is a mandatory need for a descriptive schema, outlined on the basis of objective, correct parameters. Only thus can the standardization of the teaching process be achieved, on the basis of a credible and efficient measurement of every learner's progress in language acquisition.

However, contradictory attitudes about the usefulness and authority of this document were not long to emerge (in the Romanian academic milieu, in any case), affecting the production of teaching materials and bearing major implications for the proposed assessment instruments. The emergence of this "teaching discomfort" within the area of Romanian as a Foreign Language/Second Language conceals, in fact, a "delicate" reality: the alignment did not pursue a natural course, *from* the drafting of a description of each specific level pertaining to the *Common European Framework* to the elaboration of teaching materials; on the contrary, the process followed the opposite direction, as the proposal of teaching materials for a certain level preceded the clarification of the particular proficiency level to which reference was made.

Moreover, those who teach RFL/RSL generally admit that there is an

obvious lack of consensus with regard to the profile of each level: a minimal control over the exploited vocabulary and speech acts, or the lack of precise delineations concerning the lexical-grammatical classes that are employed on each level within the system of the Romanian language.

Against this equivocal background, which lacks a description of the levels within the framework of the Romanian language, the authors from the *Department of Romanian Language, Culture and Civilization* have responded to the imperative need for determining, specifically, the "demands" imposed upon learners in various stages of Romanian language acquisition and embarked upon the project of writing the *Minimalist Description*, in the hope that the document would ensure the quality of the entire teaching process: the adequate planning of the curricular activity; the correct assessment of the learners' level of competence, regardless of their status; the appropriate selection of the necessary materials for the development of oral and written communication skills; the much more accurate drafting of tests for each level, with a view to obtaining a certificate for a certain proficiency level.

The usefulness of the aforementioned working instrument is no doubt attested by the rather broad range of potential recipients: authors of textbooks and auxiliary teaching materials in the field of RFL/RSL; authors of tests organized by CEFR levels; teachers of RFL/RSL and all those who begin teaching in this field; candidates wishing to obtain a language proficiency certificate in Romanian, for a particular CEFR level; pupils and students (non-native speakers) who wish to assess themselves; researchers interested in approaching the Romanian language from the perspective of non-native speakers.

The authors' concerns for designing an instrument that could support the en-

tire process of teaching RFL/RSL, on each of the proficiency levels, were outlined, for the first time, 10 years ago, when the affiliation with the *Association of Language Testers in Europe* (ALTE) took place and when certain exchanges of experience and opinions were occasioned within the framework of various conferences and meetings organized by this well-known organization. Thus, the *Minimalist Description* began with the proposal for developing a simplified guide, comprising sections exclusively devoted to morphosyntax, lexicology and speech acts.

Considering that the document could not remain unvalorized, given its very high stakes and the considerable effort made up to that point, its improvement occurred, naturally, along several complementary coordinates: the authors' teaching experiences, the students' results, the tests on each level, the suggestions made by the professors from the universities in the country and abroad who participated in the training courses organized by the *Institute for the Romanian Language as a European language*, coordinated by the *Department of Romanian Language, Culture and Civilization*.

As the outcome of all these authentic barometers in the field and of the feedback provided by almost 3500 specialists with vast experience in the teaching of RSL to non-native speakers, from all age groups, the final version of the document is certainly one of the most important achievements of the project under whose aegis it was compiled: "Improving the Training of Secondary Education Teachers of Romanian to the National Minorities", SOPHRD/87/1.3/S/63909 contract.

The descriptive structure of the Romanian language complies, very thoroughly, with the fundamental objective of studying any language: *developing oral and written communicative skills in the*

*target language*, so much so that, under these circumstances, the *communicative-functional perspective* remains the only one able to guide the relevant delineations within such a document. Within the description itself, on each individual level A1, A2, B1, B2, there are three major sections, each with a series of specific subsections: **1. Communicative functions:** (A) *Social conventions*, (B) *Information exchange*, (C) *Expressing attitudes*, (D) *Expressing moods and feelings*, (E) *Influencing actions*, (F) *Remedial acts*; **2. Communication structures:** 2.1. *Grammar classes*, 2.2. *Lexical items*, 2.3. *Expressing circumstances*, 2.4. *Sentence construction*; **3. Types of texts.**

In the first section, dedicated to *Communicative functions*, the authors have tried to present, as comprehensively as possible, "what can be done with language" in different communication situations. To give one example, under (B) *Information exchange*, the following utterances are proposed for the function of *requesting the identification of someone / something*: **A1:** *Who are you? / Who is he? / What is on the table?*; **A2:** *What is his name? / Who is that man? / What book is he reading?*; **B1:** *Do you happen to know who this gentleman is? / Can you recognize this woman? / Do you happen to know what this woman is reading?*; **B2:** *Do you, by any chance, know who this gentleman is? / Can you recognize this woman? / What is the woman holding in her hand?*

The next section, *Communication structures*, which is also the most extensive, proposes a rigorous organization of the linguistic tools the speaker has to use in order to accomplish the functions presented above. As regards the first subsection, 2.1. *Grammar classes*, all the parts of speech in the Romanian language, along with the specific grammatical categories – where necessary, of course – are gradually



and traditionally divided by level. The distribution is made into two columns placed in parallel, demonstrating, according to the model above, “*how language works morphosyntactically*”. The second subsection, 2.2. *Lexical items*, observing this logical thread, is dedicated to the vocabulary, in the absence of which the materialization of the communication process becomes impossible. The proposed vocabulary is organized systematically, based on delimitations into 20 lexical spheres, which are easy to keep under control and manage: *weather, personal features, education, professions and the professional sphere, body parts, personal hygiene, health, etc.*

Thus, depending on the level, the lexical spheres “expand” gradually, in terms of their inventory, the distribution of the vocabulary being made according to certain “variables”: the RFL-RSL textbooks available on the market, the basic word-stock of the Romanian language, teaching experience and, last but not least, intuition. For example, for the lexical sphere *apparel/footwear/accessories*, there are inventoried words such as: **A1:** *trousers, shirt, t-shirt, sweater, skirt, dress, cap, gloves*; **A2:** *overcoat, coat, jacket, suit, socks, stockings, shorts, etc.*; **B1:** *long/short-sleeved topcoat, pocket, poncho, waistcoat, etc.*; **B2:** *leggings, collar, jumper dress, tunic, etc.*

The third subsection, 2.3. *Expressing circumstances*, indicates how one can express in Romanian fundamental notions related to *time, space, place, manner, cause, etc.* These are entirely devoid of lexical-grammatical classifications, the emphasis being laid exclusively on their pragmatic aspects. For example, *rela-*

*tions of posteriority* are expressed as follows: **A1:** *then, after, next year*; **A2:** *after, afterwards, later*; **B1:** *right after (wards), after that*; **B2:** *subsequently*.

The last section of the description is reserved for the *types of texts* that non-native speakers ought to be able to comprehend and/or produce both orally and in writing: on the one hand, according to the teachers’ and the learners’ actual needs; on the other hand, depending on the correspondence between a particular text and the skill best suited to it.

To conclude, we may state that, unlike in the case of teaching, where the limits are “much more relaxed”, being directly dependent on the language students’ needs, it is recommended that in developing tests on the basis of which certificates of language proficiency will be issued, the degree of compliance with the description put forth should be as high as possible, out of a desire to comply with the following fundamental principle: the validation of a standardized, objective evaluation process, especially in the context in which the description in question is also made available to the students.

Without aiming to impose any restrictions on the teaching process, given that communication itself is a phenomenon with an actual propensity for change, the *Minimalist Description of the Romanian Language* should be considered a flexible working tool, which may “contribute to the professionalization of the entire process of Romanian language teaching” (Platon: 8), in light of the *overall objective of informing the interested parties about the order in which it is recommended that language structures should be gradually taught*.

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**LIVRES : Prix Goncourt 2016**  
**(coord. Andrei Lazar)**

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**Metin Ardi, *L'enfant qui mesurait le monde*,  
Paris, Grasset, 2016, 304 p.**

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Le dernier roman de Metin Ardi, *L'enfant qui mesurait le monde*, nous plonge dans l'espace chargé d'histoire de Kalamaki, une petite île grecque où la beauté de la nature et la tranquillité quotidienne des habitants sont menacées par deux grands projets : la construction d'un hôtel qui prétend pouvoir relancer l'économie locale et la construction d'une école dont le but est de restaurer l'image éclatante de la Grèce

d'autrefois. Le choix final est difficile, d'autant plus que de nombreux intérêts politiques y sont engagés. Cette atmosphère gouvernée d'incertitudes révèle la rencontre de trois solitudes : Eliot, un architecte retraité, Yannis, un fils autiste enfermé dans sa boule de silence et sa mère, Maraki, qui fait d'immenses efforts pour l'élever.

Les thèmes développés dans le roman sont divers : la globalisation et ses effets négatives sur les petites communautés, l'amitié, la crise économique, la crise familiale, l'histoire.

Eliot est un architecte grec qui vit en Amérique, mais qui revient en Grèce



pour enterrer sa fille, morte dans un accident. Débarquée sur l'île pour étudier les anciens monuments grecs bâtis selon les règles du Nombre d'Or, elle est poursuivie par le malheur : en jouant avec un chien au milieu du théâtre antique, la fille d'Eliot perd son équilibre et meurt en se heurtant la tête contre une pierre. Coïncidence ou pas, en même temps à Kalamaki un enfant spécial, Yannis, venait de voir le jour. Après l'enterrement,

l'architecte a du mal à dépasser son chagrin : comment résister à la perte de l'être le plus cher ? Grâce aux conseils du père Kosmas, Eliot se décide à continuer le travail commencé par sa fille et s'installe définitivement sur l'île. Sa démarche est assez difficile, mais douze ans après il réussit à publier trois recueils, un vrai hommage à sa fille disparue.

Pourtant, dans son âme il reste un vide impossible à combler. Ainsi, il se rapproche du petit Yannis et devient son appui, son professeur, son ami. Malgré les problèmes de comportement de l'enfant, Eliot réussit à gagner sa confiance et se faire accepter par lui. L'architecte montre

beaucoup de patience dans l'éducation du garçon, ils passent la plupart du temps ensemble et peu à peu il réussit même à lui enseigner à lire. Il lui raconte des épisodes de la mythologie grecque qui l'aident à mieux comprendre l'ordre du monde et à accepter les changements. Ainsi, Eliot aide Yannis et s'aide lui-même. Une leçon de vie, résumée par le père Kosmas en quelques mots simples : « Extraire quelqu'un des enfers, c'est s'en extraire soi-même. » (p. 50)

Yannis, de son côté, a une intelligence particulière : il aime les chiffres et compte en permanence tous les événements afin de mesurer l'équilibre du monde. Grâce à lui, Eliot découvre que même l'amphithéâtre de Kalamaki a été construit selon les règles du Nombre d'Or. Par conséquent l'amphithéâtre est déclaré monument du patrimoine national et l'initiative des autorités locales de construire un hôtel sur l'île sera abandonnée.

Le titre fait référence à l'habitude de l'enfant autiste de compter les choses autour de lui : les bateaux qui arrivent dans le port, la quantité de poissons apportés par les pêcheurs, les clients du restaurant local. C'est sa manière à lui d'équilibrer le rythme accéléré des changements du monde qui l'entoure. À la fin du roman on comprend mieux la signification profonde du titre, le fait que c'est grâce à l'intelligence particulière et à la passion pour les chiffres de cet enfant que la petite île grecque réussira à préserver son identité culturelle, son spécifique local et la vie tranquille des habitants.

Écrit à la troisième personne, le roman porte toutefois, dans quelques frag-

ments, les traits de la littérature engagée, de l'« éco-littérature ». Le narrateur semble désapprouver complètement les initiatives de modernisation de l'île et les investissements étrangers. En outre, il milite pour garder le paysage autochtone inaltéré. Si l'on regarde la formation professionnelle de Metin Ardit, on se rend compte que les idées véhiculées par le roman y sont fortement liées. En tant que professeur il enseigné la physique, l'économie et l'écriture romanesque. En outre, il est également le président d'une fondation qui soutient l'éducation des jeunes.

La construction des personnages principaux est complexe ; le narrateur surprend leur évolution sur un itinéraire initiatique. Par exemple les trois personnages principaux, Eliot, Yannis et Maraki, réussissent à surmonter la solitude à l'aide de l'amour, de la patience et, surtout, parce qu'ils choisissent à profiter de la deuxième chance que la vie leur a offerte.

Les problèmes de la société contemporaine sont si hétérogènes qu'il est presque impossible de les retrouver tous en même lieu. Ainsi, l'espace imaginé par l'auteur, la petite île grecque, réussit à réduire au niveau d'une microsociété des aspects divers, comme la globalisation, le divorce, l'autisme, la solitude, le renversement de l'échelle des valeurs et les difficultés des petites communautés de préserver leur unicité. Cette perspective ample, décrite à l'aide d'un langage accessible et clair, nous assure une lecture agréable et rend plus poignante la signification de l'épigraphe du roman : « À chaque instant, l'être recommence » (Friedrich Nietzsche).

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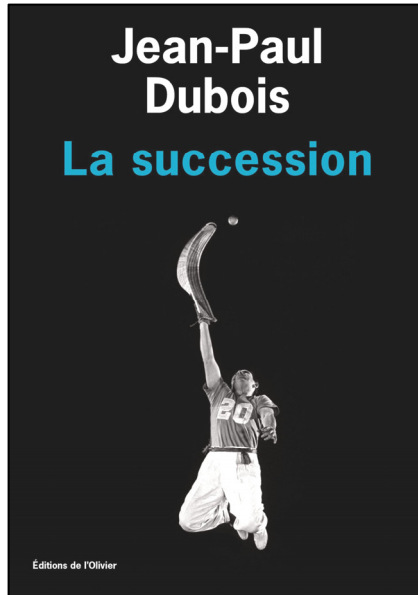
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**Jean-Paul Dubois, *La Succession*,  
Paris, Éditions de l'Olivier, 2016, 240 p.**

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*La succession* présente le portrait d'une famille troublée qui laisse un héritage maudit à Paul Katrakilis. Joueur de *cesta punta* à Miami, mais originaire de France, Paul évite de succéder à son père dans le métier de médecin. Sa vie change quand il apprend que son père est mort de la même façon que son grand-père, son oncle et sa mère : en se suicidant. Paul revient en France et prend la place de son père dans le cabinet de consultations. Il ne s'y sent pas confortable et n'aime pas la médecine. Il se trouve trop lié à son passé et à sa famille et les dernières images sinistres des suicidés, qu'il garde dans la tête, le hantent. On pénètre dans l'esprit malade d'un docteur qui est devenu patient. Un destin funeste et implacable pèse sur lui.

Le lecteur est immergé dans la vie du protagoniste, racontée dans un présent toujours interrompu par un passé que le protagoniste ne peut pas effacer. Paul nous confie des informations intimes concernant sa famille. Il analyse sa vie et celle de ses proches; il tombe malade et son esprit est envahi par des pensées qui le consomment. Le malade essaie de les chasser en vadrouillant pendant la journée. Plus il réfléchit, plus son discours se concentre



sur ses pensées mêmes plutôt que sur sa carrière. Bien que le discours macabre fût présent dès le début dans les descriptions des suicides, le narrateur-personnage semble raconter seulement des faits. C'est vers la fin du roman qu'il est véritablement envahi par l'atmosphère mortuaire, intériorisée sous la forme de petites créatures qui le traversent. En fait, c'est la tournure du langage qui frappe le plus : le langage usuel, parfois comique, avec des

comparaisons et des appellatifs familiers, devient plus expressif et plus profond grâce aux métaphores utilisées pour décrire l'espace préfigurant la mort. L'espace clos prend ainsi l'ampleur de l'abîme de la mort : « Les plafonds grimpaient au ciel et chaque bruit prenait une ampleur déplaisante » (p. 227)

En fin de compte, *La Succession* se propose comme un livre facile à lire, qui abonde parfois en détails dans la description des automobiles, des bateaux, des sports et activités typiquement masculines, mais qui se remarque par la capacité de l'auteur de combiner l'humour et le drame, la trivialité de la vie et la complexité psychologique.

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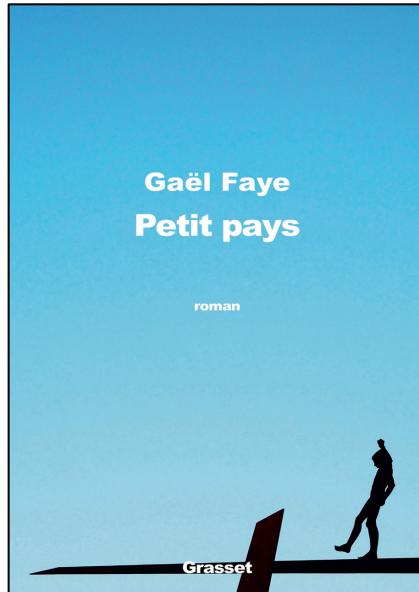
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**Gaël Faye, *Petit pays*, Paris, Grasset, 2016, 224 p.**


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Gaël Faye, né en 1982 à Bujumbura au Burundi, est un auteur compositeur interprète qui filtre la réalité à l'aide de l'art, créant un univers imaginaire avec de fortes teintes d'autobiographie mélangées avec des séquences idylliques. Sa chanson intitulée *Petit pays* annonce son premier roman qui porte le même nom symbolique et les mêmes images vivantes de son pays natal, Burundi. Ce microcosme de l'auteur lui offre un riche matériau épique qui est transposé dans ce livre comme le souvenir d'une enfance violentée par une Histoire accablante. Le lecteur devient le témoin du récit émouvant d'un enfant qui habite à Bujumbura dans les années 1900 et qui vit le drame collectif de la guerre entre Burundi et Rwanda.

Dans le prologue du roman, Faye explique aux lecteurs, non sans une fine ironie, comment les valeurs fondatrices de sa société sont rapidement annulées par l'absurdité, la violence et les préjugés que cette atmosphère conflictuelle véhicule. Une fois que le lecteur comprend la mentalité installée à Burundi et à Rwanda, il ne peut plus être étonné qu'une guerre civile éclate entre deux ethnies (Hutu et Tutsi) « parce qu'ils n'ont pas le même nez » (p. 10). Le livre nous propose de regarder les événements historiques par les yeux d'un enfant, Gabriel, qui sera le garant de la plus



sincère et touchante confession : comment l'enfant aperçoit la guerre, la séparation de la famille et la mort ? Après le « Prologue », on retrouve une autre partie importante de l'incipit, une brève confession en italiques appartenant à un personnage-narrateur arrivé à la maturité. À vingt ans, Gabriel est installé en France, mais les souvenirs de l'enfance et l'idée de retourner dans son pays natal le hantent. L'analyse de ses pensées, son discours divagant et le désir inconscient de redécouvrir le monde heureux de l'enfance annoncent les grands thèmes du roman : l'inadaptation, la quête de soi et la pulsion de retrouver ses origines. Ainsi, l'incipit a les fonctions d'indiquer le registre affectif, de dévoiler le style de l'auteur et d'énoncer le conflit romanesque.

Le roman est structuré en deux grandes parties qui reflètent deux stades de la vie : l'enfance avec son innocence et son insouciance et la maturité qui arrive plus tôt à cause de la guerre. Dans la première partie du texte on fait connaissance avec Gabriel, à l'aide de qui l'auteur transpose sa vision de la vie et ses expériences. Le fait d'avoir une triple culture est à la fois un bonheur (trois mondes différents appartenant à un seul être) qu'une malédiction (il ne peut pas s'y adapter). L'auteur nous permet ainsi

d'observer une famille multiculturelle, dans laquelle les deux enfants sont métis, la mère est Rwandaise et le père Français. Toutefois, la différence d'opinions et d'ethnies semble être inacceptable dans ce pays étouffé d'idée-reçues et de la rigidité politique. Les disputes et la séparation des parents provoquent le premier drame dans la vie des enfants. Restés avec le père, leur existence est encore un plaisir : la nature, les amis, les jeux, l'école nourrissent l'enfance et le bonheur. Un symbole pour cette période tranquille est le Cabaret – un lieu sans hiérarchies, sans masques sociales, où la voix du peuple se fait entendre. La démocratie, la justice et l'appartenance ethnique sont les principaux sujets de discussion. La peur d'exprimer sa propre opinion dénote l'abolition de l'identité par le système politique. Au fond, on peut comparer le Cabaret avec l'inconscient de la théorie freudienne, le un lieu où s'accumulent les idées refoulées.

La deuxième partie commence avec les élections présidentielles et la victoire de Frodebu, ce qui crée une forte illusion de démocratie. Après le coup d'Etat de l'armée et l'assassinat du nouveau président, la guerre civile éclate au Burundi. Gabriel a juste huit ans et il vit déjà une réalité effrayante. La guerre signifie tout d'abord violence, massacres, mort, haine, ennemis, mais aussi villages ravagés, exécutions dans la rue, terreur imposée et maintenue par des policiers. Il y a même un phénomène « ville morte » qui suppose l'interdiction de circuler pendant plusieurs jours. Dans ces conditions la radio reste le seul moyen d'information. Trois mois de guerre et l'agressivité affectent irrémédiablement

tout le monde, sans excepter les enfants. C'est pourquoi Gabriel veut s'échapper de cet univers atroce. Une voisine lui prête des livres qu'il trouve très attirants dont les pages énigmatiques lui permettent de retrouver son « moi » véritable et d'oublier le réel insupportable. Gabriel et sa sœur ont la chance d'être rapatriés en France, pendant que leur père trouve la mort dans ce pays qu'il avait aimé tant. À la fin, l'auteur lance une projection de l'avenir « vingt ans plus tard », quand Gabriel revient à Burundi pour récupérer la bibliothèque de sa voisine, mais il retrouve aussi sa mère et décide de la soigner.

La familiarité, la simplicité et la violence de la réalité contenues dans ce roman nous attirent peu à peu en évoquant l'innocence de l'enfance en contraste avec la cruauté de la guerre et de la mort. L'auteur remémore son passé, il veut redécouvrir son pays et sa douce enfance, ce qui crée une tonalité nostalgique. Il utilise l'écriture dans un but cathartique, pour se libérer de cet événement traumatique qu'il avait vécu il y a une vingtaine d'années. Le livre est très court pour que le lecteur moderne puisse le traverser rapidement et se former une opinion sur ce qui signifie l'Afrique et son lourd passé. Mais la nature abondante, les animaux sauvages, la belle amitié qui se lie entre ces gamins dynamiques et joyeux, nous font rêver en même temps à notre enfance ; c'est pourquoi le livre propose une double redécouverte. Donc, préparez-vous de plonger dans le passé pour découvrir l'Afrique et vous-même!

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**Régis Jauffret, *Cannibales*, Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 2016, 192 p.**


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Régis Jauffret, imagine par *Cannibales* un récit épistolaire dont l'enjeu suppose un changement d'horizon pour le lecteur. Les lettres ne représentent plus un prétexte pour échafauder une histoire crédible, mais le lieu textuel où s'ouvre une brèche par laquelle le pacte fictionnel est brisé. Les personnages abandonnent le langage traditionnel, mimétique, pour se placer ainsi dans une sorte de fantastique langagier qui brouille les repères de la réception afin de glisser dans l'absurde.

Noémie, Jeanne et Geoffrey sont des personnages de papier qui mènent une existence purement verbale. L'enchaînement de leur propos devient à la fois objet d'une esthétique du roman et objet d'une analyse du processus du dérèglement psychique qui va s'installer progressivement. D'ailleurs, même le titre suggère l'existence des deux plans contigus, d'interprétation. On peut déceler ainsi un plan du concret par la description d'un repas où le mets principal sera le cadavre de Geoffrey et un plan symbolique où le cannibalisme devient métaphore du désir de vengeance qui relie dans son image l'amour, la haine et la mort, Eros et Thanatos.

Quant au rapport entre l'incipit et l'excipit, les premières lettres échangées laissent entrevoir des « évènements » langagiers qui vont se consommer à la fin



du roman. Même si elle essaie de dissimuler ses sentiments, Noémie, une jeune peintre de 24 ans se sent abandonnée, humiliée dans son amour pour Geoffrey, son ancien amant, fait qui entraîne le début d'une correspondance acide entre elle et Jeanne, vieille dame seule, veuve et mère du même Geoffrey. Dès le début, on observe, dans le cas de Noémie, une certaine frustration qui se révèle par un langage sarcastique

par rapport à Geoffrey. Son style « précieux » cache l'insatisfaction de ne pas avoir fait souffrir l'autre et dévoile, d'une manière indirecte, la rage de se sentir moins aimée et délaissée par son ancien amant. Ainsi, par exemple, sa répugnance pour le lit partagé auparavant est transcrite dans un registre comique « [i] me rappelle Geoffrey et sa manière de tirer la langue. » (p. 8.) Le discours subversif de Noémie montre qu'au fond, elle passe par un processus de *démystification* de l'objet aimé. Si dans l'amour on s'extasie devant le plus insignifiant détail physiologique, ces mêmes détails deviennent maintenant objet de dérision par l'incompatibilité affective créée entre les termes : « J'étais séduite infiniment par son poil gris et ce ventre qui me servait d'oreiller en voyage. » (p. 14.) Toujours dans un registre subversif, qui traduit le désir de détachement et de réappropriation du moi, Noémie fait l'éloge de la solitude. Si dans

l'amour on se dissout dans l'autre, on vit dans une proximité ontologique avec l'objet aimé, la rupture, le désenchantement implique, par contre, une façon de se refermer dans sa coque, de rester recroquevillé entre les « murs » de son propre moi : « La solitude, c'est l'absolue beauté de se sentir incomparable dans une coquille ou rien n'est beau que vous, puisqu'en fait d'humaine dans cette conquête il n'y a que vous ». (p. 23.) À partir de cette position de rupture, aimer devient pour Noémie objet de parodie et de simulacre : « [I]a plaisanterie de l'amour, ce théâtre de marionnettes où tel Guignol dans la femme, l'homme donne du bâton. » (p. 7.) Jeanne essaie, elle aussi, de cacher son aversion pour un fils indésirable, indifférent envers sa mère, en proférant des louanges et faisant semblant de prendre le parti de son fils : « Je vous crois folle. Quitter mon fils ne peut être le fait d'une personne jouissant de toutes ses facultés. » (p. 18.) Mais, malgré cette sensation première de dissemblance entre la mère et l'amante, les phrases échangées montrent déjà une sorte de sympathie mutuelle. Le débat de Jeanne sur l'amour répond en écho à celui de la jeune Noémie, autant au niveau du style, que du point de vue du sens. Aimer implique pour elle l'idée d'un dédoublement, d'une ambivalence innée, d'un combat qui maintient toujours les pôles (amour et haine) en tension : « L'amour est une picoterie, une démangeaison dont on ne saura jamais si le plaisir du soulagement que nous procure la caresse de l'amant vaut les désagréments de son incessant prurit. » (p. 20.)

Au fur et à mesure que la correspondance avance, il semble qu'une lettre incite toujours l'autre à la « dépasser », à augmenter le cadre des fantasmes où les paroles se sont placées. Le désir d'excès de ces deux femmes orgueilleuses, intelligentes, théâtrales,

ingénieuses et notamment passionnelles, commence à prendre contour pour arriver à la fin à une sorte de dépendance morbide. Jeanne commence à aimer Noémie, mais l'amour de ce genre ne peut pas exclure la haine due à l'impuissance de garder près d'elle l'objet du désir. Dans cet espace déréalisé, du délire verbal, les deux femmes cherchent à projeter un besoin du meurtre. La perte de l'objet aimé a mené non pas à l'oubli, mais au désir de vengeance. L'amante accepte enfin l'humiliation d'avoir été quittée et que seule l'idée du crime puisse annihiler sa rage. La simple existence de Geoffrey hante d'une manière négative ses pensées. Ce déplacement centrifuge vers l'objet de la haine persécute comme une manie la conscience de Noémie qui, peu à peu, arrive à avouer son désir : « Le silence de votre fils m'humilie. En moi la femme bafouée crie vengeance. [...] Je ne connaîtrai la paix de l'âme qu'après avoir contribué peu ou prou à son assassinat. » (p. 64.) De son côté, Jeanne, non seulement contribue au plan de tuer Geoffrey, mais affirme d'une manière tranchante la nécessité de ce plan qui pourra les aider à retrouver la joie de vivre : « Terrasser le monstre, voilà notre projet et la perspective pour nous de connaître dans la vengeance tout le bonheur du monde » (p. 40.) Le cannibalisme vient ainsi unir sémantiquement les deux façons d'être relié à l'autre et admet du point de vue psychologique l'existence d'une couche qui fait référence à la fois à une forme du *complexe œdipien* (le cas de Noémie et Geoffrey) qu'à une variante du *complexe de Médée* (le cas de Jeanne). Savourer l'autre passe du plan figuré à celui du concret et Geoffrey est imaginé « grillé à la broche », « autour d'un tonnelet de vin » ou « entreposé dans un local frais et aéré » afin que sa dépouille « se faisande ». D'ailleurs, le langage devient un contrepoint dans l'univers meurtrier créé par les



personnages. La manière de décrire ce genre des fantasmes nous place dans la zone du comique. Les détails gastronomiques créent un fort contraste avec le sérieux et la gravité du thème. La même distance entre la forme et le contenu est gardée dans la lettre où Jeanne analyse son propre fantasme « fillicide » : « Manger son enfant ? Je crois bien que c'est le fantasme enfoui de beaucoup de mères. Ingurgiter ce que nous avons un jour expulsé, rendre à la nature le fruit de nos entrailles. Elle en fera des fleurs, un arbre ou de minables orties. Ne laisser derrière soi aucune trace de son passage éphémère [...] » (p. 68.) Par conséquent, le sérieux et le ludique s'entremêlent si profondément, que même un aspect psychique comme celui qui puise ses significations dans le mythe de Médée ou dans celui d'Œdipe, devient peu vraisemblable. Jeanne, la « sorcière » qui tue son enfant par vengeance contre le père de Geoffrey, Poutine, qui l'avait déconsidérée, mais aussi par velléité suicidaire (effacer toute trace d'elle), rencontre un Œdipe-femme, Noémie, qui tue en Geoffrey l'image d'un père, en ce cas-ci, l'oncle qui l'avait violée. À son tour Geoffrey souffre du même complexe œdipien dirigé vers la figure autoritaire de la mère qui l'avait tant persécuté pendant son enfance et affirme dans une lettre, adressée à elle, son désir de la voir morte. Mais l'in vraisemblable de ce triangle psychotique est suggéré par un récit « inattendu », voire impossible. On peut, de cette façon, observer que tous ces « effets du réel » sont minés par l'impression d'une « action » langagière qui nous fait penser qu'on doit prêter attention, non pas à « l'histoire », mais aux mots, à l'enchaînement des phrases, à cette

possibilité langagière de sublimer les fantasmes par l'écriture. En conséquence, la haine, idée directrice du récit, devient anamorphosée et sublimée par une esthétique du langage dont la forme achevée devient le roman *Cannibales* : « [h]aïr, c'est être relié à l'élite de l'humanité, celle qui crée, dirige, façonne l'avenir avec un saint mépris de ses contemporains courants comme des enfants après les hochets qu'on agite devant leurs yeux naïfs avides de rogatons. » (p. 157.)

On peut dire que le lieu évènementiel de ce roman est l'espace d'écriture, c'est-à-dire un espace notamment fictionnel où le conflit est développé en vue d'un paroxysme qu'on doit toujours atteindre par les mots, mots qui créent la vision d'une vengeance, mais qui sont aussi le gage d'une puissance accrue des deux femmes. D'ailleurs, le roman met l'accent notamment sur ce manque de frontière entre l'imaginaire / le fictionnel et le réel où la folie langagière déclenche une folie réelle : les deux femmes se rencontrent, construisent en détail leur plan, arrivent à coucher ensemble, Jeanne devient une opiomane dont le sadisme et le délire ne cessent de s'étaler. La fin nous montre comment cette « littérature » épistolaire peut apaiser la souffrance, comment la parole crée un espace de défense contre le désespoir du silence, du mutisme. Écrire reprend une valeur cathartique par laquelle l'imagination peut trouver son accomplissement dans la réalité créée par le langage. Ainsi, Noémie, à son tour, doit mourir d'une façon grotesque et Jeanne peut lui écrire dans le monde des ombres.

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**Luc Lang, *Au Commencement du Septième Jour*,  
Paris, Stock, 2016, 537 p.**

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Luc Lang propose pour la rentrée 2016 un roman « spatial », où la destinée de l'individu s'effrite et se reconstruit « en marche » à travers de grands espaces : l'océan, le bassin de la Seine, les Pyrénées et l'Afrique noire. Le roman met en cause des enjeux très percutants de la vie actuelle : le monde du travail corporatiste et ses dérapages, la famille et ses grands secrets destructifs, la nécessaire quête identitaire qui permet de refaire la hiérarchie de ses options de vie, le retour à la tradition pour se ressourcer.

*Au Commencement du Septième Jour* est un roman de longue haleine divisé en trois volets et ayant pour personnage principal Thomas Texier, informaticien de succès qui, à ses 37 ans, semble avoir accompli tous ses rêves. Mais le très grave accident subi par sa femme dévoile que cette existence accomplie est fondée sur le mur de silence protecteur bâti par la famille (son frère, Jean, sa sœur, Pauline et sa femme, Camille). Un mur qui s'effondre et qui l'oblige à retrouver rapidement ses repères, à se reconstruire comme entité, vu qu'il a à sa charge deux enfants encore petits. Dans une contemporanéité où la



vie déroulée à grande vitesse ne favorise plus les relations interhumaines, le silence fait plus de mal que de bien parce qu'il permet de se construire une fausse identité et, donc, une fausse vie.

Luc Lang demande à son protagoniste de ralentir la cadence de son existence, de se raccorder au rythme ancestral, incompréhensible jusqu'alors, adopté par son frère et sa sœur. Du tumulte de la vie parisienne, en passant par la crise profonde déclenchée par l'accident et le décès de sa femme, Thomas retrouve une cadence de vie paisible, biblique – celle de la vie dans les montagnes ou du désert africain. Les résonances bibliques sont évidentes tant dans les noms des trois frères (Thomas, Jean et Pauline – comme les apôtres du Nouveau Testament), que dans le titre du roman. Chacun va assumer, à des âges différents, des convictions mises au service de l'humain, malgré l'opposition de leur entourage. Le septième jour de la semaine, jour du repos, s'avère dans la trame de l'histoire le jour des révélations : c'est le jour où Thomas parle aux enfants du coma de leur mère. Le commencement du septième jour est aussi le

moment précis où le protagoniste, après une folle aventure en montagne, qui frôle le désastre, reprend son souffle pour continuer son existence dans un rythme extérieur atténué qui laisse la place libre à la réflexion identitaire, au repositionnement dans « la vraie vie ». Le septième jour est donc le premier jour d'une vie totalement assumée.

L'action du roman se déroule chronologiquement (avec beaucoup d'analepses) et a au centre un protagoniste qui se déplace de manière significative dans l'espace : du milieu familial de son domicile et de son poste de travail sur les traces de sa femme – entre Paris et Rouen ; au foyer familial en Pyrénées, où il met à l'épreuve ses propres forces dans une escalade très dangereuse des montagnes ; à la recherche de sa sœur Pauline en Afrique pour élucider de très graves secrets de famille. L'espace est parcouru dans tous les sens et a une importance sensible dans l'évolution du protagoniste du roman. Parcourir des espaces de plus en plus vastes revient à s'accorder un temps de réflexion plus grand, à retrouver sa propre humanité.

L'excellent choix que fait l'auteur d'impliquer le lecteur dans la construction même du roman me semble fort appréciable : pas de portraits de personnages, pas d'arrêt sur les faits marquants – tout se construit allusivement, après

coup, grâce aux dialogues ou aux actes des personnages. Ne pas décrire les événements très importants, mais les suggérer plutôt est un enjeu risquant si non compris, car le lecteur pressé a des attentes que la suite du roman ne comble point, comme, par exemple, l'augmentation du mystère suivie par trop de digressions lors du voyage en Afrique, ce qui produit de la frustration. L'entrée brusque dans l'histoire et dans le rythme alerte d'une vie au bord de la crise attire le lecteur et le colle aux pages, tandis que le ralentissement du rythme, les digressions, ainsi que l'excipit un peu trop idyllique, peu convaincant si l'on ne prend pas en compte la tournure biblique du roman, peuvent rendre la lecture décevante. Partir d'une écriture alerte qui nous implique à 100% en tant qu'Européens pressés par le temps pour arriver en pleine Afrique noire et vivre dans un tout autre rythme, voilà le défi jeté par Luc Lang.

L'accent sur les problèmes réels de notre siècle avec des solutions courageuses, exemplaires et, surtout, inattendues est à saluer. Si Luc Lang met le lecteur sur la piste fausse du roman policier, la qualité de l'écriture et les thèmes graves traités dissipent vite la confusion et invitent à une lecture appliquée et satisfaisante.

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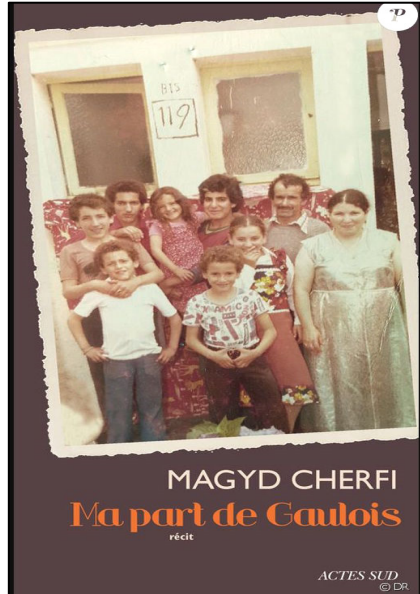
**Magyd Cherfi, *Ma Part de Gaulois*, Paris, Actes Sud, 2016, 272 p.**


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Connu et reconnu surtout comme chanteur et acteur, Magyd Cherfi devient aussi, avec la participation au Goncourt 2016, un écrivain qui enrichit le panorama littéraire français d'une voix très vive et fort originale. Il nous fait part avec son récit autobiographique d'une perspective problématique sur la France actuelle : l'intégration de l'Autre – représenté ici par les successeurs des immigrants beurs.

L'auteur propose comme exergue du livre une formule qui résume tout le récit et jette le défi au lecteur : « L'exception française c'est d'être Français et de devoir le devenir » et permet d'entrevoir la fêlure identitaire du protagoniste, Magyd. Une fêlure qui dérive du fait d'être Français sans avoir des ancêtres Gaulois et l'apprendre après avoir assumé l'identité française enseignée sans nuances à l'école laïque. De graves questions surgissent : Qu'en est-il de toutes ces belles intentions d'égalité et fraternité promues par la Révolution Française ? Est-il si difficile d'accepter l'Autre dans toute sa complexité ?

Le jeune beur Magyd, élève en Terminale, se confronte avec des défis beaucoup plus grands que tout autre Français du même âge. Passer le Bac est un vrai exploit car il doit tout sacrifier à



ce but. Depuis son enfance il se retrouve dans un monde scindé où ce n'est pas facile d'avoir sa place en tant que jeune Arabe. Il se confronte avec les préjugés des deux parties : entre l'ambition de sa mère et le mépris de son entourage arabe, d'une part, et la difficulté de s'affirmer parmi les Français qui ne lui accordent pas aussitôt de la confiance, d'autre part, l'espace de manœuvre reste extrêmement restreint.

Cette « grande saga des quartiers » qu'est *Ma Part de Gaulois* nous immerge dans la « France profonde », actuelle, qui est bouleversée par le phénomène de l'immigration et encore plus par celui de l'insertion des enfants des immigrés. Les voix qu'on entend dans le livre sont multiples : à part Magyd, il y a le personnage collectif identifié comme « la rue Raphaël » (d'un quartier de Toulouse), il y a sa famille dominée par la figure de la mère, il y a Samir, le militant, et Momo, « l'artiste de la tchatche », ses meilleurs copains, et il y a le groupe « des filles Arabes cadenassées par leur familles » auxquelles Magyd accorde du soutien moral pour se libérer de leurs conditionnements.

« Habité par deux histoires qui se faisaient la guerre, deux familles hostiles, deux langues irrémédiablement oppo-

sées », le jeune beur arrête de se considérer une victime expiatoire et agit : il lutte pour trouver et imposer sa « part de Gaulois ». Il est poussé par les autres à se mettre à écrire, à rendre compte de leur isolement comme groupe. « Isolement » est un mot-clé pour comprendre Magyd : après s'être lui-même isolé de la « jungle des hommes » lors de son enfance à cause de ses complexes d'infériorité, il est isolé par les Arabes qui se sentent trahis par sa trop parfaite adaptation au système scolaire français et, ensuite, il se voit isolé par la culture française même qu'il adore, d'ailleurs, mais qui, dans certains de ses bouquins n'arrête de le dénoncer comme sauvage.

Le déroulement de l'action du livre est très dynamique. Les dialogues sont truffés de l'argot des quartiers, un langage vivant, inouï, très cru, parfois pauvre et monotone à force de recourir trop facilement aux mêmes jurons. Néanmoins, un langage très créatif quand il s'agit de restituer les paroles du protagoniste et celles d'autres jeunes ayant mieux bénéficié de l'impact des deux cultures si différentes.

Bien que la tonalité empruntée soit pleine de verve, d'humour et d'autodérision, le registre thématique est très grave et atteint bien de points névralgiques. En voilà quelques-uns : être femme, et surtout jeune femme, dans une société libre, mais être surveillée de

près par une famille qui entend garder toutes les coutumes du pays d'origine ; être un jeune Arabe, assez brillant, mais peu ou point compris par son entourage et ayant à endosser toutes les frustrations de sa caste ; se forger difficilement une identité (après avoir été fier dans sa jeune enfance d'être successeur des Gaulois, se voir ensuite dénoncé comme successeur des sauvages) ; le désarroi de voir l'incapacité des siens de dépasser leurs complexes d'anciens pauvres, de ne plus se sentir « génétiquement coupables » et, donc, de vivre en permanente opposition au système d'accueil français.

Comme une scène immense, la rue Raphaël attend tout du jeune brillant, le seul ayant dépassé sa condition : plus que du soutien scolaire pour les autres enfants et soutien moral pour les filles, Magyd doit devenir le porte-parole de tous, écrire pour faire entendre leurs voix et pour faire comprendre ce qui entrave leur intégration et, finalement, permettre la rencontre de la France avec la banlieue... Car ce n'est qu'en s'acceptant avec toute la richesse de son passé qu'on peut vraiment s'intégrer et « récupérer sa part de Gaulois » : « Comme le monde s'ouvrirait à moi j'ai fait de mon fardeau des ailes, de mes blessures un bouclier, de mes fêlures identitaires deux richesses dans lesquelles s'est engouffrée la seule idée qui vaille, l'universel. » Un récit alerte et bien écrit qu'on lit d'un seul trait!

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**Romain Slocombe, *L'Affaire Léon Sadorski*,  
Paris, Robert Laffont, 2016, 496 p.**

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L'histoire n'arrête pas de nous donner des leçons et la littérature se prête parfaitement à cet exercice. Le nouveau roman de Romain Slocombe nous offre un plongeon dans une époque noire de l'histoire de France, le Paris de 1942, vu depuis la perspective d'un vrai salaud : l'inspecteur de police Léon Sadorski... Le titre n'a rien d'accrocheur et peut attirer seulement l'attention des passionnés d'histoire pour lesquels le nom de Sadorski en dit long sur l'attitude honteuse des collaborationnistes français. Mais le prestige du romancier qui avait déjà dédié quelques bonnes années au roman noir et les recherches minutieuses qu'il effectue avant de concevoir un roman, le recommandent d'emblée.

Le protagoniste a un correspondant réel autour duquel Slocombe a tissé son histoire en ravivant toute une époque où la mauvaise conscience collaborationniste a fait de nombreuses victimes. L'inspecteur de police Sadorski devient la cible du Gestapo allemand en 1942. Il n'a rien à se reprocher car très dévoué à la cause antisémite. Il le sera encore plus après son séjour « initiatique » dans les prisons de Berlin. De retour à Paris en tant qu'informateur du



Gestapo au sein de la préfecture de police, Sadorski devient le bourreau absolu car il n'a plus de limite dans sa cruauté. Il est si odieux que la moindre ombre d'humanité tourne toujours, dans son cas, dans la plus atroce bassesse. Il aide, par exemple, Julie, jeune fille juive de 14 ans, après avoir lui-même écarté sa mère avec un dénonce infondé... pour accéder un jour à ses fa- veurs. Le portrait de

Sadorski semble être la raison même du roman : un mari attentionné qui fait tout ce qu'il peut pour assurer le bien-être de son petit ménage, y compris extorquer de l'argent aux Juifs ou « potentiels Juifs » qu'il rencontre grâce à son métier d'inspecteur. Mais son comportement deviendra encore plus cruel après s'être vu soi-même victime : ses actes féroces et ses décisions inhumaines dépassent tout ce qu'on pourrait imaginer. Son surnom, « Sado », en dit long...

Les autres personnages sont caractérisés brièvement et avec beaucoup d'efficacité. Chaque personne que Sadorski rencontre, et surtout les femmes (qu'il affectionne de manière particulière), bénéficient d'un portrait physique permettant à l'inspecteur la comparaison avec d'autres victimes ou femmes

rencontrées dans les chambres d'interrogatoires ou dans la rue.

Le roman propose une entrée inspirée dans l'histoire avec des alternances entre des notes administratives sur le protagoniste et le récit à la troisième personne du quotidien d'un policier collaborationniste. N'était-ce la note sur la déportation du tout début, que pourrait annoncer de mal un roman qui commence par décrire le matin d'une épouse, très belle femme, qui « émerge des brumes du sommeil animée d'une envie immodérée de faire l'amour » et « se blotit contre l'inspecteur principal adjoint Sadorski » ? Sinon de petits signes comme la mise ensemble de la fonction du mari avec une scène de couple...

L'action du roman se déroule chronologiquement (à part quelques analepses édificatrices liées aux interrogatoires d'Allemagne) en suivant le trajet Paris-Berlin-Paris de l'inspecteur Sadorski. Imbu d'idéologie hitlérienne, ce dernier agit en conséquence et considère les Juifs comme des sous-humains, la lèpre de la société dont il faut se débarrasser le plus vite possible. Rien ne peut arrêter le zèle d'un vrai fidèle, ni même le soupçon que celui qui se trouve devant lui n'est pas Juif. Le récit à la troisième personne ainsi que les documents adminis-

tratifs nous permettent de prendre distance par rapport aux actes odieux d'un tel personnage ; par contre, les témoignages à la première personne nous font voir au travail les rouages de la pensée du protagoniste, toute la haine et la cruauté qu'il peut manifester gratuitement.

Comme il s'agit d'un texte réaliste, les symboles se trouvent cantonnés surtout dans le prénom et le nom du protagoniste et sont assez transparents : Léon, du signe zodiacal du Lion, donc né pour dominer les autres ; même dans la position de victime il garde un mépris souverain par rapports aux Juifs, victimes comme lui, et les dénonce sans raison réelle. Quant à Sadorski ou « Sado », cela renvoie de manière évidente au fait qu'il agit sans pitié chaque fois qu'il a devant soi une victime.

Le roman apporte une perspective troublante et bien documentée sur la France de Pétain et l'Allemagne de Hitler vues dans leurs coulisses les plus horribles. Un tel texte pourrait offrir au lecteur la chance d'une catharsis qui lui permettrait de repousser toute tendance d'intolérance par rapport à l'Autre. Pas du tout hermétique et ayant une action bien dosée pour capter l'attention, *L'Affaire Léon Sadorski* est certainement un livre-événement.

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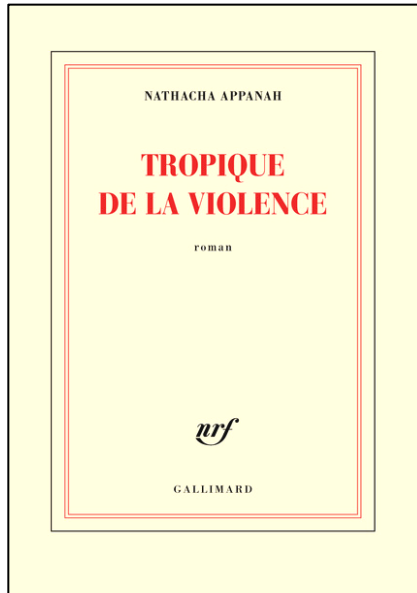
**Nathacha Appanah, *Tropique de la violence*,  
Paris, Gallimard, 2016, 192 p.**

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Le dernier roman de Nathacha Appanah, *Tropique de la violence* nous introduit dans un espace où l'injustice, la misère et la violence dominant. Un espace à la fois cauchemardesque et paradisiaque où les jeunes « clandestins » se mêlent aux « mzungus » : l'île de Mayotte située à la frontière de l'enfer et du paradis. Un roman qui va exposer la cruauté de la réalité et qui, en même temps, va exposer l'inégalité des chances des êtres humaines.

Les thèmes développés dans le roman sont divers : la maternité, l'immigration, le conflit culturel, l'amitié, l'homme duplicitaire, les traditions et les croyances locales, l'orphelin, la pauvreté, la mort et l'adolescence.

Le roman commence avec le récit de Marie, la mère adoptive de Moïse, un récit d'outre-tombe qui vient en écho des souvenirs brefs de sa vie regroupés autour de son désir d'être mère et de l'accomplissement de ce désir. Infirmière, Marie rencontre Cham originaire de l'île de Mayotte où ils vont s'établir après le mariage. Mais, dans la joie quotidienne un drame surgit : l'impossibilité d'avoir un enfant, raison pour laquelle le mariage se déchire. Cham la quitte pour une



autre et Marie mène une vie de plus en plus solitaire jusqu'à un soir où un *kwassas* sanitaire vient des Îles Comores et amène parmi les passagères une jeune fille avec un bébé. La mère veut abandonner son enfant parce qu'il est « l'enfant du djinn ». Marie, qui a oublié de « fermer son cœur », va accepter l'enfant avec un œil vert et un œil noir et va l'éduquer comme un blanc. Tout se passe bien dans la nouvelle famille jusqu'au jour où Marie tombe morte dans sa maison et le pire commencera pour Moïse.

Nous apprenons que le jeune Moïse, voulant s'arracher à la vie protégée des blancs, va s'infiltrer dans la bande de Bruce, le leader d'un ghetto surnommé Gaza. C'est ici que le petit enfant connaîtra les pires expériences : le viol, la drogue, la peur, les punitions physiques, la perte de soi et la solitude.

L'intrigue se complique au moment où Bruce est tué par Moïse. Il ne s'agit pas ici d'un meurtre camusien même si on a pour un moment cette impression à cause de la deuxième partie du roman où Moïse décrit le meurtre. Après la mort de Bruce, les habitants de l'île se soulèvent contre Moïse et organisent une véritable guerre. Dans cette



situation même les policiers ont été incapables de le protéger. La seule voie de se sauver a été la même qui l'avait amené dans les bras de Marie : l'océan qui a essuyé toute la souffrance. On constate ainsi une sorte de cyclicité dans toute l'aventure du protagoniste sur l'île de Mayotte. Dans ce sens, Moïse affirme : « Sans ralentir, je fis alors comme tous les enfants de Mayotte au moins une fois dans leur vie, je fais décoller mon corps au bout de l'embarcadère, ma poitrine se bombe, mes jambes et mes bras se soulèvent. Je plonge dans la rade de Mamoudzou, je fends l'océan de mon corps souple, mon corps vivant, et je ne remonte pas. » ( p. 175.)

En plus, le lecteur peut ressentir le paradoxe qui reflète le problème de l'île de Mayotte : on est sur terre française, mais la vie menée là-bas ne ressemble en rien à la civilisation de France. L'île de Mayotte est l'espace de la misère, du chaos, de la délinquance, en un mot un « no man's land » comme l'appelle Oliver (p. 51.) Pour Bruce, également, l'île est un espace paradoxal : « C'est Mayotte ici et toi tu dis c'est la France. Va chier ! La France c'est comme ça ? En France tu vois des enfants traîner du matin au soir comme ça, toi ? En France il y a des gens qui vivent toute leur vie

dans les bois ? En France les gens chient et jettent leurs ordures dans les ravines comme ça ? » (p. 97.)

Le titre relève à son tour la double perspective sur l'île de Mayotte : un paradis tropical et une zone de conflit permanent à tous les niveaux de la vie – religieux, politico-social et culturel.

En fin de compte, *Tropique de la violence* est un texte polyphonique où une multitude de perspectives s'imbriquent pour créer à la fin le panorama d'une société bizarre définie par le chaos et la violence. Si tout au long du roman chaque personnage a sa voix et son autonomie, à la fin toutes les voix résonnent en écho à cause d'un destin commun. Tant Moïse que Bruce ont des caractères forts ; même s'ils sont très différentes, ils se ressemblent car chacun est à la fois victime et bourreau.

Pour conclure, l'écriture d'une grande sensibilité de Nathacha Appanah renvoie par le ton de la phrase et par le choix de la première personne à une sorte d'élégie qui provoque le mystère et l'inattendu. En plus, construit sur une sorte de parallélisme entre les voix qui résonnaient du monde d'outre-tombe et celles des vivants, le roman renie l'idée de véridicité et semble refuser la recherche des « effets de réel ».

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