



ORIGINAL PAPER

Text and Intercultural Context in the Teaching of the of the Romanian Language as a Foreign Language

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Abstract:

The formation of communicative skills as part of reading a text in a foreign language involves an activity whose purpose is the semantic representation of the given information. Reading a text is influenced by three factors: the reader, the text and the context, the teacher having the obligation to interact with these factors. Reading remains the most effective tool through which the ability to communicate between people is developed, training thinking and language capacities. Current methodological suggestions encourage the exploitation of texts in modern language classes because they can prove to be authentic teaching resources, having a positive impact on the development of foreign language communication competence and critical thinking skills of foreign students.

Keywords: *text, context, intercultural, terms, Romanian language.*

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Introduction

Teaching and learning Romanian as a foreign language should be viewed from an intercultural perspective. By means of the Romanian language course as a foreign language, a bridge can be created between cultures through which foreign students have the opportunity to discover other values, mentalities and facets of life. In this sense, a new vision should be considered, in which the teacher naturally and harmoniously combines linguistic and cultural elements in the educational process during all types of lessons, regardless of the topic covered or whether they focus on grammar or vocabulary issues. The notions of culture and civilization should not be considered separately, but integrated in different intercultural contexts, and in the activities aimed at developing students' linguistic competences, "the knowledge necessary for learning two languages, for adequate communication in different communicative contexts and for knowing the limits, taboos and sanctions applied for their non-compliance in intercultural communication" (Lesenciuc, 2017: 235).

Intercultural communication is primarily a group communication, and the person who does not belong to the group is perceived as a "foreigner". Each group will develop norms and customs that reflect not only the culture of the members but also a new culture of the group, leading to intercultural communication in a group context. So, this intercultural communication takes place in a framework / context, in a group where the foreign student is forced by circumstances to adapt through attitude, behavior, knowledge to complex cultural and linguistic circumstances.

Foreign students come from different cultures and backgrounds from which they interact with others. Due to the fact that language and culture are closely related, teaching and learning Romanian as a foreign language is an intercultural dialogue during which the ground for a possible encounter with a different world is prepared and the negative consequences of the impact of the culture shock produced by this encounter are avoided. Romanian language courses as a foreign language provide the conditions for analyzing and interpreting the existing differences between the native culture and that of foreign students, leading to the discovery and integration of them step by step, and the understanding of these differences not only through the simple clichés that were formed regarding some nationalities over the years (for example: Arab students).

In order to communicate, it is not enough to know the language, the linguistic system and to produce grammatically correct statements - a fact that researchers, such as Chomsky, call linguistic competence. We must know how to use the right text depending on the social and intercultural context, because we do not speak to all interlocutors in the same way, but differently depending on the various intentions we have and the place where we are.

What you perceive in communication with others is influenced by your culture, native language and your worldview. As the German philosopher Jürgen Habermas put it, "Every process of coming to understanding takes place against the background of a culturally rooted pre-understanding" (Habermas, 1984: 100).

Intercultural dialogue, based on tolerance, through its practices that ensure freedom of expression and choice, equality, tolerance and respect for human rights, is an instrument of social cohesion, aiming at integration and mutual acceptance, while fighting, at the same time, against discrimination, stereotypes, racism, xenophobia and conflicts that can arise at the cultural and social level in classes of foreign, multicultural students.

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The concept of "intercultural communication" is closely related to our existence as humans, and then as a society, due to the fact that human beings and communication are interdependent, and interculturality comes in the context of an intense fusion between cultures and peoples. Intercultural communication begins with communication with yourself, with that intrapersonal communication also called "self-talk" (Wood, 1997: 22). Your intrapersonal communication can be positive or negative and directly influences how you perceive and react to situations and communication with others. As Dale Carnegie says: "There are only four ways in which we come into contact with others. We are evaluated and cataloged through these types of interaction: what we do, how we look, what we say, and how we say it" (Carnegie, 2019: 34).

Therefore, the purpose of learning a foreign language is also to learn to think and behave in the language of the respective people: "Language is a means of promoting culture and, therefore, knowing the language of the host society ensures the openness necessary to live in the new culture and curiosity about other cultures. Language learning is a motivating element for social participation and to promote communication between cultures. This communication with individuals of other cultural origins provides the opportunity to understand that interacting with these people is a pleasant experience that enriches the cultural identities of citizens. With each interaction, layers are added to the cultural identity, which takes on new dimensions, thus enriching the life experience of both the immigrant and the people with whom he comes into contact" (Pricope, Nistor, Sălvan, 2021: 12-13). Teaching Romanian as a foreign language is more than acquiring grammar or assimilating an impressive number of words, it is a cultural mediation at the level of communication. Thus, the need to develop communicative skills appears.

The components of communicative competence: linguistic, verbal or discursive competence, sociolinguistic competence (linguistic means in accordance with the communicative situation), sociocultural and strategic competence - the selection of the appropriate strategy in carrying out the communicative task is very important in the development of an educational strategy in the framework of the formation of communication competences. The intercultural communication skills of teachers of Romanian as a foreign language, as mediators, and the ability to use English as a transitional language can be the key to real success in teaching Romanian as a foreign language. For, "The teacher as mediator was seen as someone who needed to intervene in problems emerged in intercultural communication that appeared in the social realities of the classroom" (Liddicoat, 2018: 21).

The training of foreign students' communicative skills in reading a foreign language text involves an activity whose purpose is to form the semantic representation of the given information. "In general, by communication competence we understand the integrated structure of the capacity to receive and produce-interpret meaning/messages. While socialization with the mother tongue is achieved through the verbal patterns perceived by the speaker, dynamically, spontaneously, in his immediate environment, through real speech situations, in the context of acquiring a language different from the mother tongue, the qualitative stages of internalization aim at a transition oriented (more or less consciously) from the level of knowledge of and about the language to that of their use, application in the practice of communication, to the contextualization and pragmatization of the acquired content" (Tódor, 2020: 35). Reading a text is influenced

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by three factors: reader, text and context, the teacher having the obligation to interact these factors. Also, reading a text means encountering some difficulties to be resolved. The success of reading a text is based on practicing and developing the vocabulary.

Traditionally, reading is considered a tool for intellectual development. Although it is very important in studying a foreign language, reading is not enough to speak that foreign language. Reading skills are formed in the given context, by acquiring the vocabulary and grammar of the studied language. These foreign language skills are formed on the basis of the reading experience obtained when learning the mother tongue. In teaching the reading of a text in Romanian as a foreign language, certain objectives are pursued (Constantinovici, 2003: 78):

- acquisition of technical tools (sound, letter, word, statement, text, etc.);
- correlating the spoken word with the written version (establishing the relationship between spelling and sound);
- understanding the structure of a sentence;
- understanding the organization of the text;
- conscious, correct, cursive and expressive reading of texts;
- enrichment of vocabulary and grammar knowledge;
- deducing the meaning of unknown lexical units from the context;
- acquiring the language as a means of expression and communication;
- receiving messages sent explicitly and implicitly;
- cultivating thinking, the intellectual and cultural horizon;
- analysis and evaluation of what was read;
- the transfer of what has been read to new situations;
- the logical and succinct presentation (oral or written) of the facts presented in the text;
- stimulating the formation of a personal opinion;
- confronting and correlating one's own opinions with those of others, etc.

The difficulty of a text in a foreign language lies, rather, in the relationship between the foreign student/reader and the text. The text belongs to the author and offers the continuation of a personal intention in a context that is his own. The study of a text leads the reader / the foreign student to look for the traces of this intention and this context in the text. So, "The implicit nature of textual representations allows for specific, specialized allocations of linguistic resources that are specific to professional act of communication" (Chirișescu, Păunescu, 2021: 100).

The interculturality resulting from the approach of a text in Romanian, by a foreign student, is done on three levels:

- linguistic – by trying to find the differences and common parts between languages (phonetic system, vocabulary, etc.);
- aesthetic – by examining the ways and stylistic choices that the author of the text in Romanian uses to convey images and emotions and to describe situations;
- intercultural – by realizing the intercultural foundation of the text in Romanian, because it raises questions that can be constituted in true initiatory journeys in different cultural realms.

Texts written in the mother tongue and then translated into Romanian through the transition language, English, can complicate the final result. This attempt to translate into Romanian, texts and contexts from the mother tongue of each foreign student in the preparatory year, becomes a rather complex operation, given the fact that you are somehow caught between cultures (as a condition of being in-between) where something

can be lost but something else can be gained. So, when you think you've lost something, you begin to appreciate what you've actually gained, a new sound-word combination with meaning that gives you new approaches and perspectives not only on translated texts but on our own perception and positioning in relation to these. For example, the text of poetry in different languages can become an opportunity for the foreign student to reflect on words in general and on our language and dialects from the perspective of different languages (to make the familiar unfamiliar) to see how the content and style are closely related and how this relationship changes as we change our use of language.

Professor Anthony Liddicoat aptly draws attention in his linguistic study to the fact that: "Lev Vygotsky argues that learning is guided by culture and interpersonal communication and that higher mental functions develop through social interactions with more competent others. Through interactions, a person comes to learn the habits of mind of a culture, including spoken and written language, and other forms of symbolic knowledge through which people derive meaning and construct knowledge" (Liddicoat, 2018: 22).

"Differences in societies mean differences in socialization, too". (Georgis, 2018: 15), said Paola Georgis in her book: "Meeting Foreignness". This leads "(...) to a critical view on how intercultural interactions are, first and foremost, an opportunity to consider our own stories and observe what we take for granted from a different perspective" (Georgis, 2018: 16).

The communicative method is an effective means of intercultural integration of foreign students, focusing not only on the language as a medium of communication but also on the participants in the dialogue: "Participants in the act of communication do not include only the people who exchange messages with each other, but all those present, participating actively or passively in the act of communication. Certainly, in interpersonal communication, the message does not only oscillate between sender and receiver. Co-participants fit into the communication context, play social roles and intervene, verbally and non-verbally, in the exchange of messages. All actors of communication, as parts impossible to cut out of the whole, interact through meanings, each with himself and with the others, by calling for a social behavior of compliance with the norms, respectively for a creative behavior of reception, negotiation of meanings and of the institution of symbols. Within the procedural limits of studying interpersonal communication, there are at least two communication actors, having distinct roles, derived from the status of sender/source and single or multiple receiver (audience), passing between them a message dressed in a form on which it was agreed". (Lesenciuc, 2017: 242)

Traditional activities of learning Romanian as a foreign language, such as a grammar lesson or a deepening of Romanian culture and civilization, can be organized in such a way as to explore larger questions of identity and interesting possibilities to link the microstructures of the text with the macrostructures of society. Language is a means of promoting culture and, therefore, knowledge of the Romanian language ensures the openness necessary for foreign students to live in the new culture and the curiosity towards other cultures. Therefore, "studying a foreign language is more of a necessity than a tendency or a preference. The interest in learning and speaking it is determined by world trends: globalization, interculturality, the need to educate personalities who agree to live in a diversified, multicultural and tolerant society, to understand people who represent different cultures, while ensuring progress and prosperity of national cultures. Learning a foreign language consists not only in

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acquiring phonetic, morphological, grammatical, semantic vocabulary and structures, but also in new ways and ways of thinking, reflecting, visions and philosophies about contemporary civilization" (Lăpădat, L, Lăpădat, M-M, 2020: 144).

The learning of the Romanian language by foreign students is an important factor for adaptation and social integration, but also for better communication at a multicultural level. This communication with students of other cultural backgrounds provides the opportunity to understand that interacting with these people is a pleasant experience that enriches everyone's cultural identities. With each interaction, layers are added to the cultural identity, which acquires new dimensions, thus enriching the life experience of both the foreign student and the people with whom he comes into contact.

The cultural and social differences that foreign students encounter when they come to study in Romania sometimes have a devastating impact on their integration, and then the teacher's role is also that of a good psychologist, to be able to minimize any kind of negative effects of the foreign student's separation from mother tongue and family language. Here are some of the impressions and opinions of some foreign students who came to study in Romania, about tolerance and acceptance of others, about language, about customs and traditions, about social adaptation, etc.:

"The strength of any society is reflected in its acceptance of diversity. One thing that all people have in common is that we are all different. We differ by customs, beliefs, opinions, skills, values, languages, nationalities, how we look, dress and so on. Each person must have the right to be different, because each of us is special, each person is valuable in his own way. It is not okay for someone to judge someone because they are different. We cannot all be the same, because it would not be normal and natural for everyone to behave and think the same. The earth and the whole world would be monotonous and boring. (...)

I believe that the human race is not yet ready to fully understand what it means to respect other religions, nations and cultures. Intolerance can be used as a very powerful weapon (religious wars, for example), which we have seen throughout history. Knowing other people, understanding different values, we become better and richer. Acceptance and understanding are the basis of better communication and the quality of life of the entire community. The wealth is in diversity".

(Andrej Anđelović, Serbia)

"The Romanian language is said to be difficult, but beautiful. Some students say that they learned it quickly, but for others the Romanian language is still difficult to learn. (...) Studying in Romania is an excellent opportunity not only to get a European education and learn the Romanian language, but also to improve the English language, since there are no strict requirements for a certificate of knowledge of a foreign language.

The study of the Romanian language takes place in the preparatory year in groups of 15-20 students. For example, students from Uzbekistan, Israel, Iraq, France, Albania and Jordan learn Romanian with me. Most people go to Romania to study medical specialties. These programs are also taught in English. It should be remembered that the preparatory year is a rather difficult program to manage from the perspective of the course participants, as the students come from very varied social and cultural backgrounds and different from the Romanian ones. They have different mentalities, different traditions and customs, different religions, a different education from country

to country or from one student to another, sometimes evident even among students belonging to the same national cultural space, they come from conflict zones or marginalized areas, and all of them, at the group level, the teacher has the duty, in addition to teaching them to communicate in writing and orally in Romanian, to train them in the spirit of tolerance and acceptance of the other person with everything he has, good or bad, to make them to know the specifics of the Romanian space and to acquire it correctly in order to be able to live and study in Romania. Students from the Balkan countries, having cultural elements similar to the Romanian ones, but also a language close in structure to the Romanian language, and we are thinking here of Bulgarians, Greeks, Albanians, Macedonians, Serbians, will certainly adapt much easier in Romanian cultural space than their colleagues coming from countries such as Africa, Asia and even some European countries. (...) The first month has already passed. A new environment, a language barrier, an unfamiliar environment – in general, stress after stress. However, such changes perfectly mobilize forces and resources internally and although I have been here for a short time, there is already a feeling of familiarity with life in Romania. But I still have to make important efforts".

(Dikusar Kateryna, Ukraina
Tamara Njagulovic, Serbia)

"A comparative analysis of the Arabic and Romanian languages with the aim of helping both native speakers learn the other language, highlighting the differences between them.

Arabic and Romanian are very different languages and throughout history there was no such great interaction between the two cultures except through the Ottoman Empire and Al-Andalus (Al-Andalus was the Muslim-ruled territory in the Iberian Peninsula in Middle Ages), so there aren't many similarities, from how to write letters and connect them to form words, diacritics, direction of writing, to grammar. (...) the exploration and study of vocabulary and grammar in the Romanian and Arabic languages highlights the diversity and inclusiveness of human languages. Understanding our differences and similarities can help us broaden our horizons and foster a spirit of unity in our global community."

(Zein Alabideen Darwish, Siria
Mohsen Darwish, Siria)

"There is a big difference between the customs and traditions of Yemen and those of Romania. So there are many customs and traditions in Yemen and in Romania that the population adheres to and they include all members of society and all aspects of life in the city, such as family, children, husband and wife, and these customs are represented in marriage, in clothing and in many other important aspects (...).

The separation of women and men in Yemen is practiced on various occasions and places, such as schools and wedding halls. (...) In Romania, the events are mixed for both girls and boys, they are together both in schools and universities, performances or in wedding halls. (...) It is not usual for women to wear trousers. There are some women who cover their faces completely in Yemen.

In Romania, girls and boys wear long and short pants, shirts and blouses, and girls go out with their hair exposed on the streets and everywhere.

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Yemeni food is influenced by some foreign societies such as Indians and Ottomans. Yemen is famous for making Yemeni bread using a circular oven. Yemeni bread is eaten with salt, vegetables or eggs.

Romania has been influenced by both its conquerors and its neighbors when it comes to traditional cuisine. Traditional Romanian dishes have accents from Turkish, Hungarian, Austrian and other cuisines, but over the years, these dishes have become as traditional as the oldest traditional Romanian dishes. (...)

In conclusion, I would like to emphasize that, despite all the differences in customs and traditions between Yemen and Romania, I always try to integrate into Romanian society and adapt to life here".

(Sally Fadhl AL-Jaboobi, Yemen)

"Salaries in Serbia and Romania differ depending on many factors, including industry, education level, experience and geographic location. In general, salaries in Romania are higher than those in Serbia, but there are also significant regional variations in salary levels in both countries. (...) Serbia's problem is that it's not in the European Union, so probably wages are low because of that. People depend on the jobs they find, and the work is usually 8 hours, both in Serbia and Romania. in both countries there are days off, and those days are paid. (...) As foreign students, it was not so hard to adapt, because there is not such a big difference between the countries, because we are neighbors. At first we thought it would be difficult to manage the money because there is a difference, prices are higher in Romania and the currency exchange is not favorable for us (1 leu is 25 dinars), but we got used to it".

(Nina Marjanovic, Serbia
Jovana Todorovic, Serbia)

The opinions of foreign students from the preparatory year of the University of Craiova are relevant for the importance of their step-by-step adaptation to the realities offered by a foreign country and colleagues from other parts of the world and the efforts made for a good integration into the new culture and society. Given the diversity of factors that can damage or facilitate a quick adaptation to the realities encountered in the adopted country during the studies, sometimes even further, the "friendship" of foreign students with the environment is primarily done in Romanian language courses. Knowing and learning the Romanian language is a very important vehicle for the integration of the foreign student, because it ensures the gaining of autonomy and personal development necessary for his participation in society. We must not forget that once they come to a foreign country, students lose their familiar and family context, as well as the friends and social roles they had in their country of origin, which makes it difficult for them to adapt. The integration of foreign students aims at an identity reinvention, where the adopting society is also involved, but also colleagues belonging to other cultures, thus creating a common space to live together that offers those involved the opportunity to expand and enrich their identity through new linguistic and cultural dimensions, being able to speak of such interculturality.

Conclusions

Communication in Romanian as a foreign language depends on the knowledge and skills of the foreign student to understand and produce messages in a language other than the mother tongue. We must understand that an important feature of language "is its

connectivity to its speakers, as the speakers grow and evolve or even possibly devolve, so does the language. Complex and specialised language is the concrete manifestation of a powerful and diverse society. The living, transformational nature of language should be approached systemically based on merging social evolution with geographic and cultural proliferations” (Chirițescu, Păunescu, 2021: 94).

The use of texts and contexts in the approach to learning Romanian as a foreign language by foreign students has an important universal cultural role. The power of the text studied / read and its placement in different life contexts, has the gift of engaging the learners, stimulating their imagination and broadening their experience, sympathies and understanding for a new culture and civilization in which they have to integrate for a good chunk of time. The advantages in the decoding of a foreign language by foreign students and in their multicultural integration through the study of texts is evident through an expansion of the vocabulary and hence the ability to understand, through a clarification of the differences between written and spoken language and through a conceptual transformation of knowledge about the world. Learning a foreign language can also be done from an intercultural perspective, as the teacher in a multicultural classroom becomes a mediator in the emergence of problems in intercultural communication between students, being, in fact, more of a facilitator of learning.

The increasing flow of foreign students to Romanian universities and their intercultural interaction leads to a mix of national cultures. Thus, an important duty of modern education is to prepare students for successful interaction with members of other cultures, that is, to be open to the demands, challenges, and opportunities inherent in intercultural situations. The foreign student should strive to improve interpersonal relations, understand different cultures and their traditions for faster integration into the study group and society, show tolerance in communication and respect for universal, cultural values, i.e. show the ability and willingness to engage in cross-cultural cooperation. Teaching and learning the Romanian language as a foreign language and Romanian culture and civilization is not only to form certain knowledge to foreign students, but also to educate them as active actors in intercultural communication.

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