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THE DEVELOPMENT OF CULTURAL COMPETENCE IN TEACHING ROMANIAN AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

ABSTRACT: In the context of the phenomenon of accentuated mobility in today's globalised world, mastering linguistic skills is no longer sufficient since our students face situations in which they have to identify, recognize and interpret some concrete attitudes and behaviors adopted by their interlocutors in speech. The present article is centred around the development of cultural competence in foreign students learning Romanian as a foreign language. Our aim is to suggest the methods which would ensure the creative character of the language learning process, motivate our students and better integrate them into Romanian society. The case study presented in the paper describes various didactic activities organised with the help of cultural activists and university professors from Iasi, TVR Iasi, Radio Iasi, and Iasi press.

Key words: Romanian as a foreign language, language teaching, language learning, cultural competence, communication skills, language learning activities, economics, economic language, interdisciplinary reconciliation.

РАЗВОЈ КУЛТУРНЕ КОМПЕТЕНЦИЈЕ У НАСТАВИ РУМУНСКОГ КАО СТРАНОГ ЈЕЗИКА

АПСТРАКТ: У контексту феномена наглашене мобилности у данашњем глобализованом свету овладавање лингвистичким вештинама више није довољно. Наши ученици се суочавају са ситуацијама у којима морају да идентификују, препознају и тумаче неке конкретне ставове и понашања која су саговорници усвојили у говору. Овај рад је усредсређен на развој културне компетенције код страних ученика који уче румунски као страни језик. Наш циљ је да предложимо методе, које би процес учења језика учиниле креативним, које би мотивисале ученике и боље их интегрисале у румунско друштво. Студија случаја представљена у раду описује различите дидактичке активности организоване уз помоћ културних активиста и универзитетских професора из Јашија, ТВР Јаши, Радио Јашија и штампе из Јашија.

Кључне речи: румунски као страни језик, настава језика, учење језика, културна компетенција, вештине комуникације, активности учења језика, економија, економски језик, интердисциплинарно помирење.

1. INTRODUCTION

The present paper tackles the vast issue of teaching Romanian as a foreign language. We aim at concentrating upon the key problems linked to language learning and teaching, inviting the reader to further ponder on the subject (Cristea et al. 1982: 46). The paper explores the activity component of the didactic material through the prism of contextualisation of activities, as well as their importance for language learning. In what follows, the paper will discuss the problems that might appear in the classroom for both students and teachers, as the initial plans of learning activities turn into an efficient learning practice. It goes without saying that it is absolutely necessary to ensure the creative character of the process of teaching and learning Romanian as a foreign language. Modern research in the field of linguistics sees language from the perspective of its creativity. In the context of the phenomenon of accentuated mobility in today's globalised world, mastering linguistic skills is no longer sufficient since our students face situations in which they have to identify, recognise and interpret some concrete attitudes and behaviours adopted by their interlocutors in speech. Otherwise stated, what we see is the growth of awareness of new cultural skills which presupposes opening towards others, different worldviews, (self-)reflection, analysis and comparison, as well as towards our common human background. The achievements in the sphere of education include those in teaching Romanian as a foreign language. Moulding an active Romanian language speaker, with real skills of inclusion in social life as well as in professional activity, is one of today's imperatives. The peculiarities of didactic communication and the definition of the respective skill with a view to developing more efficient teaching methods have already become the topic of scholarly research by a number of researchers (see e.g. Titone 1979; Slama-Cazacu 1980; Cristea et al. 1982; Platon 2009, etc).

As far as the present paper is concerned, it is aimed at suggesting some ways to improve teaching the target language – a vast activity that poses some specific and interesting problems. The main objective of learning Romanian is developing communicative skills – the process ensured by quite a few factors, one of which is the formation and the development of speaking skills. Thus, considering numerous ideas that define the efficiency of the process of formation and development of oral and written speech as didactic notions, our goal is to present some of the methods through which our students, together with learning the target-language as a means of expression and communication, acquire knowledge on their future profession. The most important element in the development of the communicative skills remains the text as an essential means of work which performs the function of the transmission

of information, a very-well organised message in order to ensure an optimal relationship between text and communication.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

It is a well-known fact that languages are not simple linguistic systems – they are true vectors of communication between cultures. To learn a foreign language today, according to Denis (2000), means to enter in contact with a new culture. The stakes of multiculturalism are manifold and the teacher faces them daily in his/her teaching practice: how to help students coexist, how to create a community, what cultural differences should be accepted or rejected (Doytcheva 2018 : 12). Therefore, the main aim of our teaching activity is, on the one hand, to teach students a common language that enables them to participate actively in the public sphere and, on the other hand, to encourage respect for each other's linguistic and cultural peculiarities.

This perspective obliges us to no longer approach teaching the Romanian language for foreign students from the standpoint of the old teaching/learning methodology based on the mechanical assimilation of vocabulary and the appropriation of the rules and grammatical forms. The new methodologies invite communication and action, and the competence that students will acquire is not purely linguistic but also communicative. Educator Sophie Moirand (Moirand 1982: 57) describes communicative competence as encompassing four components: linguistic competence (the ability to use phonetic, lexical, grammatical models of the target language system), discourse competence (knowledge and approximation of different types of discourse and their organisation according to the given situation), referential competence (knowledge of domains of experience, of objects in the surrounding world and the relations between them) and socio-cultural competence (knowledge and appropriation of social rules, norms of interaction, historical and cultural knowledge). Of the four segments presented, we have focused our attention on the cultural component. Therefore, one of the clearly defined objectives of our teaching activities is to help students to be able to extrapolate the acquired knowledge concerning the functioning of the language system, but also of the Romanian culture in real communication, by recombining pre-existing structures into new forms, determined by a given situation (Titone 1979: 146) and to use a discourse and a conduct appropriate to the given situations.

In other words, by stimulating students' creativity, we should encourage them to open up to one other, formulate hypotheses and discuss values, as well as ensure the effectiveness of the act of real communication, which requires that the foreign student not only simply receive, but also contribute as an active factor in the teaching

process. This means that the educational process must be permanently organised as an activity of continuous solving of verbal-excogitative tasks, which are of great interest for all learners, even going as far as borrowing ideas from the sources read or listened to (any information is welcome) and noting what is used in the speech of others, adopting appropriate attitudes to cultural differences and particularities. In this way, the foreign student is prepared, psychologically, to overcome ethnocentrism and to decentralise it, by becoming aware of the relativity of values, by restructuring his or her world view, which allows the other person's reality to no longer be cut off by limiting characterological grids or the use of stereotypes. In this way, the foreign student can be prepared, psychologically, for independence of thought and expression, which does not come by itself, but is achieved through systematic and well-designed activity.

3. DIDACTIC STRATEGIES

Our teaching practice demonstrates that speaking skills can be formed from the first week of contact with the target language, which gradually leads to the development of a separate system of thinking in the target language through laborious work of both the teacher and the student. The second stage of learning Romanian in the framework of the preparatory year for foreign students takes place in the second semester; it presupposes the study of specialised texts and materials. The aims of these activities are manifold: to nurture foreign students' skills to understand and extract general meaning from the informational or scientific sources, to write and present a synthesizing speech, to participate in a dialogue in an academic or professional context, to teach students the terms specific for the sphere of advertising, to form abilities of the correct use of the structures typical of advertisements which, on the one hand, have to contain the maximum of information and, on the other hand, to be laconic and visual, demonstrating marketing strategies in today's economic relations.

Following the positive results of modern didactics[1] (in which continuity and change are caught in a game of complementarity) and those of our own practice, we aimed to create, within a carefully elaborated communicative strategy (Denis 2000: 62), as many situations as possible that would facilitate the fulfillment of communicative and interactive functions, the development of competence and

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[1] Studies about learning Romanian as a foreign language and cultural competences in Serbia: Ivanić 2020; Ivanić and Popović 2021; Janjić 2015a, 2015b, 2017; Janjić and Badesku 2012; Janjić and Popović 2015a, 2015b; Janjić and Sabo, 2012.

cultural performance in the process of directed teaching and learning of the Romanian language by foreign students.

This constantly pursued objective was successfully achieved as we had the chance to work with a group of Albanian students – very conscientious, with a wider openness to knowledge and determined to form skills and abilities in speaking and writing Romanian and to acquire socio-cultural knowledge. In these privileged circumstances, we were able to reach, with these students, an advanced level in the transmission and reception of the communicative act, in the acceptance of non-universality of their own culture.

As far as language proficiency levels are concerned, at the elementary level (A1-A2 according to CEFR – Common European Framework of Reference), it is known that activities represent, to a greater extent, a control of the acquired language mechanisms. At the intermediate level (B1), more autonomy is given to the learner, in order to train verbal language automatisms. At the advanced level (B2, C1, C2), the activity carried out in the course is no longer based on someone, on someone's actions (the student at home, at university, on a visit, at the train station, in a restaurant, etc.), but on some sound or visual material, a cultural event, a scientific excursion, a newspaper text, a film, etc.

This advanced level, acquired by the Albanian students after several months of learning the Romanian language system, allowed us to carefully organize activities that would ensure a wide variety of communicative and cultural content. We turned to the field of Romanian culture and civilisation, because, even in the age of technology, the student – be he/she a foreigner or not – has to exercise his/her inclinations towards spirituality, towards the system of scientific and artistic values, which would provide him/her with a behavioral model, while civilisation is, above all, according to Henry Besse, the language of this civilisation (Stanciu 1988: 103) and culture is the language of this culture.

It is well known that there are different ways of learning new language. To mention why conversations are one of most important instruments to learn is explaining, exercising and fixating grammatical and lexical structures, as the discursive activity has a reproductive character. We give special attention to such combinations in syntagmas, sentences and phrases, i.e. syntactic units, since communication is not realized through separate words, but by means of the above-mentioned combinations. Students should know how to build sentences, no matter how elementary these might be. In order to achieve this goal, the teacher's questions should be formulated in such a way that the answer would require the formulation of sentences and even phrases. For example, we will suggest an imagination exercise.

This task will create the illusion of a dialogue and students will approach the situation of real communication as much as possible. The illusion is further fortified if students not only answer the teacher's questions, but also ask other students. The collective form of work and the adequate use of group and pair activities increase Student Speaking Time, so important for the development of the communicative skill.

Calling on cultural activists and university professors from Iasi, TVR Iasi, Radio Iasi, and Iasi press, we organized one-month-long exhibitions in the fields of history, philosophy, art, literature, music, theatre, librarianship (manuscripts and rare books from "Mihai Eminescu" University Library), events which aroused the interest of listeners and provided them with models of how to use and handle a diversified and more complicated language, new grammatical structures, expressions and formulas, which convey various spiritual and emotional attitudes in linguistic terms. The presentations were informative, explanatory-discursive, activating and of great emotional impact.

Of all traditional and innovative instruments, the text remains the main means of teaching through which we refer, when necessary, to phonemes, morphemes, words, word combinations, and utterances. The text is the basis of the whole process of teaching Romanian as a foreign language. Even in the modern era, when the educational process becomes more and more digitalized, and more and more lessons are held in virtual classrooms, teachers still use traditional text materials as one of the most valid teaching tools (Chirilă 2020: 258).

If we were to divert from Albanian students that this study was based on and take our economics student for example, the studies would overlap, therefore we can connect both studies. Based on the theoretical discussion about advertisements, we ask our students to comment and to express their own opinions: if advertisements influence their choice of a product, how this happens, if they are aware of this influence, how we react when we are assaulted by advertisements, etc.

We ask students to comment on the presented information and to express their opinion on the means used to create advertisements, to recall an advertisement that they liked or disliked. Communication will be generated by numerous speaking situations around the central topic, which will not exclude divagations and approaching secondary subjects, but would force students to use some words and expressions from our thematic group: *a comercializa, mediatizare, comerţ, a face reclamă, produs, spot publicitar, marketing, marketolog, detailist, angrosist, consumator, cerere, ofertă, piaţă, preţ, capital, bani, concurenţă, producător, consumator, utilitate, costuri, salariu, profit, consum, economii, investiţii, inflaţie*

etc. We show our students an advertisement (preferably an audio-visual one) and then try to discuss the way it is perceived by the audience. This exercise is aimed at checking the efficiency of fixation of the acquired linguistic knowledge based on expression (rather than repetition) – verbal reactions of spontaneous and natural character. Teachers rely on a transfer from the direct discourse to the reported one and, in what follows, to the narrated one. Another possible activity which satisfies this last criterion is a debate on the basis of an advertisement. Free (situational) conversation can be alternated and "eliberated" (term introduced by Joseph Pihnolet) by directing discussion in a certain direction with various questions posed by the teacher.

The final (and most creative) stage of the lesson would be creating an advertisement. Students can be separated in groups and discuss what they would advertise, how they would do that, what means they would use, etc. By doing so, we would not only put into practice the ideas expressed during the previous stages of the lesson, but also increase Student Speaking Time, thus contributing to the development of communication skills.

In the present study we are going to discuss the use of specialized texts in the framework of the Romanian language course for foreign student. It has to be mentioned from the very beginning that specialised texts have a number of specific features. As a scientific material, they are characterized by a logical exhibit of facts and the lack of emotional and figurative aspects. They do not operate with allegories, metaphors and other means of artistic expression. The author of a scientific paper addresses, first and foremost, the reader's reasoning rather than his/her feelings. He/she operates with well-defined and established notions, rules and exact data. A scientific text turns us to logical, analytical and abstract thinking. This thought was expressed by Bally, who affirmed that even a mathematical text can impress with their harmonious structure and logical sequence (Bally 1965: 75).

Apart from the general vocabulary, scientific texts largely use abstract words and specialised terms. The latter are meant to precisely name a special notion from the chosen sphere of activity, providing compact and concise expression. Scientific style also differs due to a special structure of the phrase. We necessarily choose authentic didactic texts and materials on the specialized topic. Their use remains to be decided by the teacher who knows the objectives to fulfil in the classroom. Therefore, the activities with specialized texts can include:

- activities for the enrichment of vocabulary;
- activities centred around grammar;

- activities aimed at one of the four components – reading, writing, listening and speaking;
- activities for acquiring knowledge in the specialized field.

An important imperative of the materials used for teaching Romanian for special purposes is that of authenticity. Students should immediately notice that they are taught authentic Romanian, with real expressions, words and grammar notions; they should be involved into the process of learning which consists not only in a mechanic repetition of knowledge, but also in the creation of a new savoire dire. By doing so, the teacher will ensure that his/her students are motivated since they complete meaningful and useful tasks (Chirilă 2021: 203).

The dynamics of students' communication included two main activities: speaking and listening. Those who listened – heard information, explanations, arguments, but also a correct and fluent, expressive and convincing Romanian language, as long as those who used it were concerned not only with the values that were not directly informational, but also with the formative ones. With these cultural models in mind, in the days following these events, students were put in predominantly communicative situations, where, in a relaxed and pleasant atmosphere, they were encouraged to recount what they had heard and remembered, communicating in the form of monologues or resorting to dialogic communication (in groups). In this way, the aim was to make directed use of new linguistic and cultural knowledge by reusing it in new situational contexts, with the intention of moving from reproductive to free, productive speech (Slama-Cazacu 1980 : 79). Communication was focused on various topics concerning the issues of Romanian and Albanian culture and civilization in order to highlight similarities, differences, original peculiarities, etc., which did not exclude digressions or addressing secondary topics with a view to achieving free speech. A wide variety of communicative content was thus ensured and students learned how to logically construct a discourse (speaking being an intellectual act, which stimulates mental effort), how to find their way in a certain situation, how to select information and express it, as well as how to highlight the cultural element in the act of communication. By selecting, dividing and transforming, they became aware of the content of the data they heard and saw. It is an effective way that helps us to evaluate how the speaker has received the material offered to him/her, how he/she has understood it, how he/she has reported it, so that he/she can become, in turn, a speaker (transmitter), who can react appropriately to the otherness.

The final stage of the method under description, aimed at the development of the communicative competence and its socio-cultural dimension, consisted in the writing of small texts by our students, after having acquired a greater knowledge and a richer linguistic and cultural background. The topics of these texts included various issues of Romanian and Albanian literature (legends and folk songs, childhood memories, comments on writers with similar literary destinies, poems, translations, etc.). The pieces written by our students illustrate their creative capacity, their imagination, their possibilities to articulate arguments, to defend their opinions, to build a logical, coherent and well-structured whole, to make connections between different cultures, to be aware of plurality and, finally, to culturally internalise the other's way of being.

The reason for this choice is not difficult to see: we rely on the fact that speaking activity is an intellectual act, thus our information will constitute a superior semantic unit with a view to stimulating mental effort so that, later on, we would have the possibility to develop various types of argumentation:

- explanatory-developmental (to determine the link between phenomena, to accumulate experience, to mobilize for action, etc.);
- explanatory-discursive (to deny false opinions, to formulate correct points of view, etc.);
- explanatory-affective (to convince somebody of a necessity, to demonstrate the inadequate character of some ideas, etc).

To mention the forms of communication, they can be:
- oral;
- verbal;
- non-verbal (by means of signs, gestures etc);
- mixed.

If the pragmatic value of a language is recognised, its cultural dimension must also be recognised, and this liberation of expression in writing by our Albanian students demonstrates this convincingly.

In order to understand an issue as complex as that implied by cultural competence, we have focused on its different components, namely the transcultural component, the metacultural component, the intercultural component, the pluricultural component and, finally, the co-cultural component.

Regarding the transcultural component, we found that our subjects recognize universal values in the different contexts we created. In short, both in the proposed

situations and in their productions, the learners were able to appeal to that common ground of humanity of which Durkheim speaks, in other words, to demonstrate the ability to recognize one's fellow human being in any human being (Durkheim 1995: 97). Moreover, they sensed that any culture could be susceptible to enriching another (e.g. the text produced by Erla Dëma and Kristaq Nita refers to the works of Ion Creanga and Ismail Kadare, which evoke the childhood of humanity).

The second component, namely the metacultural component, was present through their ability to mobilize previously acquired cultural knowledge and to extract new cultural knowledge from the different situations they were confronted with. They were able to identify, analyse, interpret, extrapolate, react, judge, compare and transpose knowledge.

Regarding the third component – the intercultural one (Windmüller 2010: 137) – our group of learners demonstrated the ability to manage the contact between their culture and Romanian culture very well. In the framework of the organised meetings, they either had the opportunity to revise their horizon of expectation, in which they already had some prior representations of our culture, or they could discover some aspects by passing them through the filter of their own cultural referentiality (e.g. the text written by Orjada Lapaj and Klodi Bombaj about George Coşbuc and Naim Frashri fits into this category).

The fourth component, the pluricultural one, came to the fore when the subjects were open to cohabitation, willing to manage the cultural aspects of living together in the Romanian society.

As for the co-cultural component, learners showed themselves to be good social actors. They became aware of the fact that a society imposes its own behaviour rules determined by the culture of the community and relativized their own cultural referential in order to be prepared to engage in joint actions and projects with people from the Romanian culture (Puren 2015).

As a brief observation, it is difficult to quantify the presence of one component or another in the oral or written productions of the subjects. They intertwine, overlap, together supporting the development of cultural competence. Moreover, although subjected to the same input, each subject had a different intake and output from the others, so we cannot statistically standardise observations.

Based on our own experience, we aimed to highlight, through this intervention, a methodological procedure that helped us in our teaching practice to shift the focus from the abstract appropriation of linguistic and cultural models to their contextual-situational integration. Without absolutizing it, we believe that it contributes to the development of verbal activism, independence in oral and written

communication, intellectual receptivity, curiosity, flexibility and diversity of expression.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The modern school paradigm does not recommend lecturing. Teaching and learning are correlative and co-evolutionary processes. The success or failure of teaching is due to both teaching and learning. Last but by no means least, the effectiveness of the instructional-educational process is also enhanced through testing and evaluation, which, through its constructive role, leads to the improvement of teaching and learning, providing the basis for the value judgement needed for progress. Continuous testing and evaluation are an integral part of work inside and outside the classroom, rather than a periodic or final sanction, which is increasingly rejected by current docimology for its negative effects. Ongoing evaluation makes the difference between success and failure, makes teachers aware of progress and of where they have failed, and serves both the teacher, who learns about the effectiveness of his or her work, and the learners, who in turn become aware of the shortcomings. Testing is accompanied by the processes of transmitting knowledge, forming skills and influencing conduct (Krasnaseschi 1976: 7), which leads, we should add, to emphasizing the social and moral meaning of the act of instruction and education. Verification, assessment and sanctioning are carried out by means of tests, which are numerous in type and also lead to the improvement of the instructional-educational process.

By testing and evaluating – also in the way presented in this paper – we can find relevant solutions and guidelines, capable of achieving, through the precious combination of art and technique, the aim of our professional activity, that of effective and lively communication, being able to train our students in a means of communication free from that of their mother tongue, helping them to practise, by extending the situations, the strategies of communication in the new language with which they come into contact.

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РАЗВОЈ КУЛТУРНЕ КОМПЕТЕНЦИЈЕ У НАСТАВИ РУМУНСКОГ КАО СТРАНОГ ЈЕЗИКА

Резиме

Препознавањем прагматичне вредности језика препознајемо и његову културну димензију. Да бисмо боље разумели културну компетенцију, фокусирали смо се на

њене различите компоненте, односно на транскултуралну, метакултуралну, интеркултуралну, плурикултуралну и кокултуралну компоненту. Тешко је квантификовати присуство једне или друге компоненте у усменој или писменој продукцији субјеката. Оне се преплићу и преклапају, заједно подржавајући развој културне компетенције. Иако је сваки субјекат био подвргнут истом инпуту, имао је другачији унос и излаз од осталих, тако да не можемо статистички стандардизовати своја запажања. Студија случаја представљена у раду описује различите дидактичке активности организоване уз помоћ културних активиста и универзитетских професора из Јашија, ТВР Јаши, Радио Јашија и медијских догађаја у Јашију, који су изазвали интересовање слушалаца. Коришћени материјал пружио им је нове моделе усвајања и коришћења језика, начине на које могу користити разноврсније и сложеније језичке изразе, нове граматичке структуре, изразе и формуле, који преносе различите духовне и емоционалне ставове у лингвистичком смислу. Свака појединачна комуникација ученика обухвата две главне активности: говор и слушање. Завршна фаза описане методе, усмерена на развој комуникативне компетенције и њене социокултурне димензије, састојала се у писању кратких текстова од стране наших субјеката, након стицања већег знања, на основу богатије лингвистичке и културне подлоге. На крају рада износимо закључке о корисности предложених наставних метода и техника.