

ISSUES OF LEARNING THE ROMANIAN LANGUAGE AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE AMONG SERBIAN STUDENTS¹

PROBLÈMES D'APPRENTISSAGE DU ROUMAIN COMME LANGUE ÉTRANGÈRE PARMİ LES ÉTUDIANTS SERBES

PROBLEME DE ÎNVĂȚARE A LIMBII ROMÂNE CA LIMBĂ STRĂINĂ ÎN RÂNDUL STUDENȚILOR SÂRBI

Ivana JANJIĆ

Faculty of Philosophy, University of Novi Sad
Dr Zorana Đinđića 2, 210000 Novi Sad
E-mail: ivana_janjic@yahoo.com

Rodica URSULESCU- MILIČIĆ

Faculty of Philosophy, University of Novi Sad
Dr Zorana Đinđića 2, 210000 Novi Sad
E-mail: rodika1969@gmail.com

Laura SPĂRIOSU

Faculty of Philosophy, University of Novi Sad
Dr Zorana Đinđića 2, 210000 Novi Sad
E-mail: lauraspariosu@gmail.com

Abstract

The aim of this paper is to present the main issues of learning the Romanian language as a foreign language among Serbian students of the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Novi Sad. It is the intention of the authors to detect and discuss the common errors made by students taking the final test. The testing has been done on a sample of thirty students and the target group were A1, A2, B1, B2 level students. The test consisted of reading comprehension, writing and use of language. The language courses have been held twice a week and last ninety minutes each.

Rezumat

Scopul acestei lucrări este de a prezenta principalele probleme de învățare a limbii române ca limbă străină în rândul studenților sârbi de la Facultatea de Filosofie a Universității din Novi Sad. Intenția autoarelor este de a detecta și a discuta greșelile comune făcute de studenții care s-au prezentat la testul final. Testarea a fost efectuată pe un eșantion de treizeci de studenți, grupul țintă fiind nivelul A1, A2, B1, B2. Testul a constat în înțelegerea unui text scris, partea scrisă și utilizarea limbii. Cursurile au avut loc de două ori pe săptămână, în durată de nouăzeci de minute.

Keywords: *the Romanian Language as a Foreign Language, Serbian Students, Issues, Errors*

Cuvinte-cheie: *limba română ca limbă străină, studenți sârbi, problem, greșeli*

Introduction

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Language is one of the central activities for interaction among humans. People use language for sharing ideas, information, opinions etc. Therefore, it is necessary among people to know as many languages and to improve their communication.

Language learning motivation is a complex, composite construct, and although past research has identified a number of its key components, the interrelationship of these components has often been a subject to debate. Similarly, the exact contribution of the various motivational components to learning behaviour and learning achievements has also been interpreted in different ways (Csizér and Dörnyei 2005). Language learning is a very important topic in the study of human cognitive abilities. Although people can communicate beyond the categories of language, the language is the primary, and the most complex means by which we get to know other people's thoughts (Janjić 2011). Language learning is not only a cognitive task but more a social activity where the process is participating in knowledge – building community, a community of practice, or a community of second language learning (Kern & Warschauer, cited in Xiangui 2005:123).

Educational function is one of the characteristics of learning language, besides educational goals: socialization, self-improvement and cultural relativism. Students are usually motivated by a desire to communicate with other people who use that language.

Communicative function is the basis of language socialization, and it is in formal language learning stimulated through interaction with others by teaching techniques such as role-play, by listening and reading original texts, answering questions etc. (Diadora, cited in De Marco 2000)

But, what it means to learn a foreign language? Is it joining a second culture and seen as a process of group socialization, where language is a tool for teaching group traits, values, and beliefs (Xiangui 2005:124) or by learning the characteristics of different languages, we are trying to find the similarities among these languages and the differences between them. What if that also means learning to think in that language or is it just our desire? There are several questions teachers should ask themselves: why does one want or need to learn a foreign language, what should they learn, how are they going to achieve their goal, and finally how to motivate students for better language learning? It is important to mention that students have various motives and reasons for learning languages. Also, their linguistic needs vary.

Foreign or Second-language (L_2) is a language that is not native and can be learned by attending courses, in an environment in which this language is a communication tool (Vučo 2009). It is any language of the environment that one learns after the native language.

There are various factors (internal and external) which have influence on language learning process. We will mention only few: age, motivation, cognitive style, environment, atmosphere, lifestyle, linguistic input etc. All the factors are equally important and it is necessary to follow them. Teachers have an important role in motivating students. There are pedagogical techniques by which teachers influence the attitude of the students and the groups in which the learning takes place. The role of parents in motivating children for foreign language learning is also very important (Janjić 2011). Gardner (1985) suggests that parents often play an active role in the language learning process by encouraging, supporting, and monitoring the curricular activities of their children. Parents also may play a passive role by modelling and communicating attitudes related to the learning the second language and the second language group (Gardner *et al.* 1999).

Studies dealing with both student and teacher roles within an instructional setting normally compare their beliefs and attitudes towards a specific phenomenon (Jovanović 2009). In order for a language course to be considered successful, teachers must make an effort to identify the language needs of their students and adapt the course to their needs and profiles (Janjić 2011).

Numerous studies show that people who speak more than one language achieved significantly higher results on tests of both verbal and nonverbal intelligence. (e.g., Gardner 1985; Gardner, Masgoret & Tremblay 1999, Csizér & Dörnyei 2005).

A review of the existing body of literature shows a growing interest in these issues, although the attention of the researchers is mainly directed to separate parts of the puzzle. Although most authors emphasize the highly dynamic nature of the aspects of teacher's and learner's mental lives

and their interrelatedness, the number of studies exploring the mutual influence of teachers and students in naturalistic setting remains fairly limited. (Jovanović 2009)

Material

The main intention of this paper is to present the issues of learning the Romanian language as a foreign language among students of the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Novi Sad. Centre for languages organises lectures in foreign languages and languages of national minorities that are studied at the Faculty of Philosophy. Group is consisted of 30 students, 19 to 24 years old, from following study groups: History, German Language and Literature, French Language and Literature, Philosophy, Sociology, Serbian language and literature, Journalism, Psychology. All four basic levels of language learning, A1, A2, B1 and B2 are included - 4 hours per week. The material we have used in the research was a corpus of tests consisted of grammar exercises, translations and essays.

Results

Phonetic errors

Consonants are rarely a problem when students learn Romanian as a foreign language. A much larger number of errors occur when it comes to vocals, especially those that are specific to the Romanian phonetic system: *ă, î, â*. Often, there is confusion among students between the vowel "ă" and "î/â", which does not exist in their native language. Another example, in the case when it comes to vocals is the letter "i" which indicates plural. When pronounced, it is mistakenly replaced by: "i" - which is definite article. So, in the example *niște elevi* (some students) plural nouns with the indefinite article in front, where "i" only softens the consonant, often is pronounced as *elevii* - where we have a noun in plural with definite article for masculine.

The accent in Romanian language is unstable and volatile, but there are some examples of wrong accentuation of our students: *suntem, pijama, profesor*, instead of *suntem, pijama, profesor* (are, pajamas, professor).

Also, there are errors such as writing initial capital letter of names of people and institutions, where only first word is capitalized, others small, which is influence of the Serbian language. In Romanian language names of people are not capitalized, but each part of the name of institution (except for proposals) is always capitalized. Wrong examples: *Sârbi, Români, Francezi, Facultatea de filozofie, Institutul limbii române*. (Serbs, Romanians, French, Faculty of Philosophy, Institute for Romanian language)

Morpho syntactic errors

A common mistake is absence of definite or indefinite article. The definite article is usually omitted in those cases where we need it to determine a noun, to give the noun the idea of definiteness, the familiarity. Avoiding using it, which is characteristic of students who study Romanian as a foreign language, can be regarded again as the impact of the Serbian language, considering that there is no article in Serbian language, and students initially tend to pass this characteristic on Romanian language. Mistakes of our students are: *copii se joacă, studenți sunt harnicii, studente merg la bibliotecă* (corect: *copiii se joacă, studenții sunt harnici, studentele merg la bibliotecă*).

Analyzing the tests, we spotted mistakes in use of Present tense forms of verbs. Examples: *ei locuiește*, instead *ei locuiesc* (III person sing. Present tense instead of III person pl. in Present tense), then errors in the use of irregular verbs in Present tense: *ei scriesc/ei scriu; ei luez/ei iau; ei lucră/ei lucrează*.

It is an interesting example of a verb *a duce - a se duce - a aduce*. These verbs are similar in their phonetic structure but have different meanings, it happens that students mistakenly use it in a given context. So, we recorded example: *Eu duc la facultate* instead of *Eu mă duc la facultate* (I go

to college). In the first example we have a verb *a duce* instead of *a se duce*, which is reflexive verb and always has to go with reflexive pronouns.

In addition to the wrong use of present, most errors are related to the use of verbal forms in subjunctive present (Third person) Examples: (*să cumpără* instead of *să cumpere*, *să vede/să vadă*, *să merge/să meargă*, *să ajunge/să ajungă*, *să accepte/să accepte*).

When it comes to present form of the verb *a mânca*, students have difficulties with it. Verbs of I conjugation, which includes this verb too, have in continuation- *a* in the infinitive form. If the verb is regular, construction of the present tense form in first person, is consisted of dismissal of continuation *-a* and as I person form remains the root of word (eg, *a termina - termin*). The problem occurs with verbs which change their phonetic structure in I person singular, Present tense form, (*a mânca – mănânc*, not *mânc*).

Errors in case of future tense are rare, but we found there, too, a few examples. Future tense in Romanian is constructing with an auxiliary verb *a voi* (to want) and infinitive. The problems do not occur with verbs of the I, II and III conjugation, but only with verb in IV conjugation. Often, students add another- *i* on the infinitive form, and we can see examples: *vom călătorii*, *vei iubii*, *vor vorbii*.

Prepositions are another problematic aspect in learning languages. In the following examples we will see which the most common problems are, and which verbs involve creating doubts with prepositions. Eg. *De ce nu urcați din mașină?* – *De ce nu urcați în mașină?/Noi coborâm în tramvai.* – *Noi coborâm din tramvai.* Verb *a urca* has a meaning to climb, so in this case should be used preposition - *în*. Preposition *din* is going with verbs *a pleca*, *a ieși*, *a coborî* (to leave out, to get out). Also, preposition *în* is often replaced by a preposition *la*. In Romanian language, with verbs of motion, *în* is going with names of states, and preposition *la* with names of city.

However, students often use the sentence types *Merg în Belgrad* or *Merg la România* (Go to Belgrade or Go to Romania). Another problem with proposition *în* and *la* is in those cases where they stand in front of a noun denoting some institutions, buildings, etc. For example, *Andrei a fost în poștă* instead *Andrei a fost la poștă* or *Radu a fost în muzeu* instead *la muzeu*. We observed the example of changing the proposition *la* with *pe*, which has meaning *on*, and the error occurs under the influence of the Serbian language: *Urc pe etajul trei* instead of *Urc la etajul trei* (Climb on the third floor).

With nouns, problems often arise with neuter nouns. Specifically, Romanian neuter nouns, in the singular, have extensions same as masculine nouns and in the plural as a feminine nouns. This leads to errors like: sg. *cuvânt-* pl. *cuvinți* instead of *cuvinte* (words), sg. *bulevard – bulevarzi/bulevarde* (avenues). There are some errors with feminine nouns, too, in plural that instead of characteristic ending-*e* for pl. have continuation - *i*, which is the most common for masculine nouns. For example: sg. *mașină – pl. mașine* instead of *mașini* (cars); *sală – sale* instead of *săli* (hall); *biblioteca – bibliotece* instead of *biblioteci* (libraries).

When it comes to numbers, there are not many examples of errors but there are two exceptions. Students often use number two- *doi* which is masculine and rather feminine – *două*, in examples which are specified. Students write *la ora doi* instead of *la ora două* (at two o'clock) and making the mistake again under the influence of the Serbian language.

One of the main problems of the order of words in the sentence represents the position of adjectives in relation to the noun. Also under the influence of the Serbian language, many students put the adjective before the noun, while in the Romanian language is proper to put the adjective after the noun, except in certain cases, when we want to emphasize an adjective (eg, in some literary works) and it has a semantic value. For example: *Sinaia e foarte frumos și mic oraș*(wrong) correct form will be *Sinaia e un oraș foarte frumos și mic* in the meaning *Sinaia is a very beautiful and small city*. Here we have recorded two errors, lack of indefinite article before the noun *oraș* and the adjective before the noun, the mistakes that we have already mentioned. Or, sentence *Vin le trei ore*

instead of *Vin la ora trei* (I come at three o'clock), was written on the serbian language model of word.

Lexical errors

When students write short compositions sometimes they use English instead of Romanian words. For example: *diferent* instead of *diferite* (different), or one more interesting example *Governmentul* instead of *Guvernul* (Government). On English word *government* students added definite article *ul*).

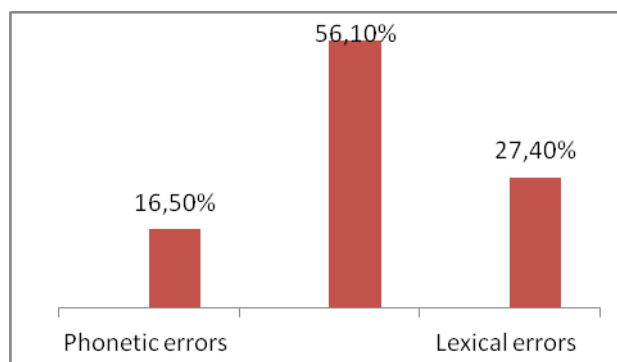
What we have also observed by analyzing the students tests, is the fact that they sometimes use a word from the other Romance languages that they know, in the sentence in Romanian language. For example: *Eu vin la semana viitoare* instead of *săptămâna* (I come next week). Or *A mers com Maria* instead of *A mers cu Maria* (He went with Mary); *A fost mui frumos* instead of *A fost foarte frumos* (It was very nice).

In Essay we founded errors: *Am văzut tablouri din București*. (Wrong) – *Am văzut fotografii din București* (correctly) meaning: *I saw pictures of Bucharest*. Nouns *tablou* and *fotografie* have a different meaning. *Tablou* has a meaning in Romanian language paintings, and in this example student used it in the wrong context.

Cel mai frumos localitate este Parlamentul din București (wrong) - *Cel mai frumos loc din București este Parlamentul* (correctly), in the meaning *The most beautiful place in Bucharest is Parliament*. In these example nouns *localitate* and *loc* can be translated as place, but in Romanian *localitate* applies only in the meaning of word town.

Conclusion

In this paper we have tried to present what are the common mistakes that students make in learning Romanian as a foreign language. We looked all elements of the Romanian language which are problem for our students. These errors serve us as indicators of condition of a foreign language, and as evidence of students' creativity while creating a hypothesis about the way of functioning of the target language, in this case, the Romanian. Based on the analysis of errors we could see that students are generally applied the strategy of transfer from mother or some other foreign languages that they already know, then simplification, addition or omission.



As we have seen from the presented examples and percentages of errors, morpho syntax is the source of most errors. The obvious is the largest number of errors in linguistic categories and structures that do not exist in Serbian. It is primarily the use of article, students often leave it out, because in Serbian language does not exist, and students seek to transfer this characteristic in Romanian language, too. Then, wrong plural noun, then lexical errors, but at least phonetic errors occur, albeit often on the level A1, but on the next levels of learning they are reduced to a very small percentage. It should be noted that students who speak Romanian in this period of learning as a foreign language, a more or less presents a mixed system, with variety of interference, as on phonetic, and so on the morpho syntactically level. It is, therefore, very important work of teachers and teaching assistants with students, and foreign language instructor, the choice of teaching

materials and setting clear goals in their work. Of course, we are aware of the fact that the errors in learning a foreign language can not be eliminated completely, but the use of special exercises and methods can be reduced, which is the ultimate goal for students who want to learn the Romanian language, and teachers who work with them.

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