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TEACHING ROMANIAN AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE AT THE BUCHAREST UNIVERSITY OF ECONOMIC STUDIES. A BRIEF HISTORICAL VIEW

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Abstract

This paper aims to briefly present the history, as well as the current situation, of teaching Romanian as a foreign language (RFL) at the Bucharest University of Economic Studies, more specifically by the academic staff members of the Department of Modern Languages and Business Communication (DLMCA), as reflected in the instructors' interest in RFL-related research. For this purpose, we shall look at two of the Department's journals, Synergy and Dialogos, and at the proceedings of the Department's conference, Synergies in Communication. The outcome will be a historical view/ statistics of the research in the area of teaching RFL, carried out by our academic community.

Keywords: Romanian as a Foreign Language (RFL); language teaching; historical view.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Teaching Romanian as a foreign language (RFL) has a long history in the Bucharest University of Economic Studies. As we read in *The History of Modern Languages in the Bucharest University of Economic Studies* (2015), Romanian has been one of the compulsory subjects taught at the Academy of High Commercial and Industrial Studies, i.e. the former name of the University, since it was founded in 1913, when a significant percentage of the enrolled students, approximately 17% (107 of 603) were foreign students (Șerban M., 2015, 68). This was a result of the University's policy regarding foreign languages, the students' communication skills being of utmost importance: apart from Romanian, students were taught two foreign languages, a compulsory and an optional one.

Throughout its history, the University consistently offered RFL in its curricula, although during the Communist regime the course was "turned into an instrument of propaganda" (Șerban M., 2015, 69). Since the 1989 Revolution, RFL has been a subject targeting foreign students exclusively, and the courses have been offered by the Department of Modern Languages and Business Communication. Despite its long history, as we read in the same source, Romanian for Business Purposes "is still

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searching for its theoretical foundation” (Şerban M., 2015, 70). Precisely this lack of “theoretical foundation” has struck us as something worth investigating and captured our attention: Romanian as a Foreign Language has been taught in our university since its beginnings, but research into teaching RFL is far more recent. Moreover, the members of our academic community are partly involved in these teaching activities, so it would be interesting to see if there is a correspondence with research into the taught subject, i.e. RFL.

For a more systematic view, we embarked on the project of analyzing the research publications of the members of the Department of Modern Languages and Business Communication, with a special focus on those published in the two Department journals, *Dialogos* and *Synergy* and in the proceedings of the Department’s conference, *Synergies in Communication*, to see if there has been a consistent interest in researching the process of teaching/learning RFL.

1.2. Research Questions

The initial question, “Has there been a consistent interest in research related to teaching/learning RFL to match the teaching of RFL?”, had to be refined as it was too general and data was insufficient and very difficult to find, so it soon became “In recent years, i.e. the last 2-3 decades, has there been a consistent interest in research related to teaching/learning RFL to match the teaching of RFL?”. Moreover, it gave rise to additional questions, such as: “Is there a trend in the publishing of papers related to the process of teaching/learning RFL?”, and if so, “Is there a rising trend in the numbers of the papers published?”, “Is there/ Has there been a shift in the researchers’ interest?”

All these questions shall be looked at and answered in the next few pages. All of them are important, as their answers will help provide a more systematic view of the teaching and research into the teaching of Romanian as a Foreign Language at the Bucharest University of Economic Studies in recent years.

1.3. Research Method and Bias

The paper owes to some extent to quantitative methods, as the articles related to RFL published in the two journals and conference proceedings of the Department of Modern Languages and Business Communication will be identified in order to see the proportion in the total number of articles and a possibly ascending trend in their number. A second method would be qualitative, close reading of the selected articles, to see if there is/has been a shift in the authors’ interest and in the way they relate to and write about RFL.

Bias, however, is likely to arise from the mere selection of the corpus of the research, as we could not focus on all the writing and all the research of our academic community, throughout the history of the University.

1.4. Generalizability Issues and Relevance of Findings

Due to the fact that this project only analyses a limited number of research papers, published only in two journals and the conference proceedings mentioned above, our conclusions may not have a high degree of generalizability. Yet, our findings have the potential to prove valuable for the members of our academic community, especially for those of us involved in teaching RFL currently, as they will help both the professors and the researchers to position themselves more easily in the context of their colleagues’ endeavor to study the process of teaching/learning RFL and to identify best practices to be referred to in the years to come.

1.5. Paper Structure

Apart from the introduction, the paper will be divided in two chapters, Research findings and their analysis, where we shall try to see if the findings help us answer (all) the research questions. They will

be followed by brief conclusions. The last part of the paper, no less important, consists of two appendices, listing articles on Romanian culture and language, including RFL, published in DLMCA journals and RFL Textbooks and other materials published by DLMCA professors (targeting especially APLR students, i.e. The Preparatory Year of Romanian Language for Foreign Citizens).

2. Research findings: Papers focused on teaching/learning RFL published in *Dialogos*, *Synergy* and *Synergies in Communication* conference proceedings

In this chapter, we shall briefly present the papers focused on teaching/learning RFL that we could identify in our Department's journals, *Dialogos* and *Synergy*, and in *Synergies in Communication* conference proceedings.

Of the 39 *Dialogos* issues today, more than half, i.e. 21 issues, deal with linguistic aspects of foreign language teaching, with a special focus on FLE (French as a foreign language) and FOS (French for specific objectives). Although the foreign languages taught in our department in the last decades were present (English, French, German, Italian, Spanish, Russian, Romanian), French (FLE, FOS) is best represented, as most authors focused on aspects, on particularities of teaching/learning French as a foreign language, or, more recently, French for specific objectives.

Although a lot of issues were dedicated to foreign language learning, RFL was not present. We expected it to be better represented in issues dedicated to "Communication interculturelle" (1/2000), "Foreign Language Teaching" (6/2002), "Theoretical Foundations of the Communicative Approach" (8/2003), "Linguistic Models in Language Teaching" (12/2005), "Professional Communication" (16/2007), or, more recently, "Professional Communication and Language Teaching" (20/2009), or "Multilingualism and Multiculturalism" (36/2019). However, only two of these issues, 6/2002 and 36/2019 met our expectations of finding some papers about RFL.

If we scan the contents of all 39 issues, the key word "Romanian" reveals that only 14 articles have so far dealt with either cultural, or linguistic, aspects of the Romanian language. Teaching/learning RFL is even less present, only 4 papers having it as their main focus. We expected Romanian and of RFL to be under-represented, as interest in teaching/learning Romanian as a foreign language has developed only recently. However, one paper contradicted our hypothesis, namely Rusiewicz-Wozny and Struzinska's article on acquiring RFL, published as early as 2002. The other three papers we could identify, authored by Ioniță, Dima et al, and Mihăilă, were all published in 2019, in issue 36, dedicated to multilingualism and multiculturalism.

When we analyzed the 34 *Synergy* issues released since 2005 to the present day, we found that key word "Romanian" appeared in 14 titles. Yet, none of these papers deals with Romanian as a foreign language. They focus on "Romanian business negotiations" (Ghiga, 2008), "Romanian economic language" (Tălmăcian, 2013), "lexical borrowings from English into Romanian" (David, Tălmăcian, 2013), "Romanian political discourse" (Enache, 2009), the "Romanian language of Marketing" (Ciolăneanu, 2014), or "Romanian online advertising" (Tălmăcian, 2018). Some focus on cultural or literary issues: "Adapting the Communication strategies for the COVID-19 vaccination campaign to the Romanian cultural mindset" (Câmpian, Malos, 2022), or "Contemporary Romanian novels by women writers" (Marinescu, 2022). Some interestingly analyze the "Rhetorical Incompatibilities in Academic Writing: English versus the Romance Cultures" (Bennett, Mureșan, 2016), but no single paper has RFL as its research interest.

In the *Synergies in Communication* (SiC) conference proceedings we identified only 9 papers that dealt with issues related to Romanian culture and language, as it can be seen in Appendix 1. Interestingly, a big proportion of these articles, namely one third, 3/9, had RFL as their main focus. To confirm our initial hypothesis, the papers authored by Șerban, M. (2016, 2021), Chiriac *et al.* were published in recent years.

The current year's conference *Synergies in Communication*, i.e. 27-28 October 2022, had an entire panel dedicated to teaching/learning Romanian, that included 6 paper presentations and a round table that focused on "Teaching Romanian as a Foreign Language in Romania and abroad – Challenges, solutions, best practices". Not only did the round table reunite researchers/teachers of RFL, but 5 out of 6 papers, i.e. an overwhelming 80%, were also related to RFL particularities. All this seems to confirm our hypotheses that there is a rising trend in the researchers' interest in RFL teaching methodology, and that attention shifted from Romanian language and cultural aspects to RFL teaching methodology.

Moreover, the program that our university has offered for almost a decade now, the Preparatory year for Romanian language for foreign citizens - APLR, generated renewed interest not only in researching this field, but also in the production of teaching materials, adjusted for the needs and particularities of our students. 9 such learning materials/textbooks are listed in Appendix 2, and with one notable exception (Stoian, 1997), all the others were published in the last few years.

The textbooks reflect the curriculum of the APLR program, and they range from a view of Romanian culture and civilization (Stamatescu, 2017), or general aspects of (business) communication in Romanian (Șerban, R., 2016; Șerban, M., 2017a), to the more specific terminology and aspects of economic science, e.g. finance-accounting (Dima, Hurduzeu, 2019), management (Dima, Hurduzeu, 2019), marketing (Dima, Hurduzeu, 2019), anatomy (Șerban M., 2017b) and medical vocabulary (Militaru, 2018). Although always perfectible, they represent an important first step that, coupled with the authors' interest in RFL teaching methodology and best practice, lays the foundation for further significant research in this field.

Last but not least, although not the direct target of this paper, we should mention the fact that there are additional materials, listed in Appendix 2, authored by members of our academic community, namely of our department, published in other journals (and that were not part of our corpus), that study Romanian as a foreign language in a variety of aspects, ranging from more general aspects of RFL teaching methodology to more particular linguistic or terminological aspects. RFL is seen, among other perspectives, as a game meant to boost student development and learning (Șerban, M., 2018), or as an essential mix of theory and practice (Ciolăneanu, 2017).

3. Interpretation of Research findings

Our findings confirm our research hypothesis, namely, that the teaching/ learning of Romanian language has been studied increasingly in recent years. Although Romanian culture and even some linguistic aspects were looked into constantly throughout the last 20 years, interest in Romanian as a foreign language (RFL) is definitely more recent.

This interest has possibly been fueled, at least in our academic community, by the new program offered since 2014 by our university to foreign citizens, the Preparatory year for Romanian language for foreign citizens - APLR. Our academic community, more precisely, the members of the Department of Modern Languages and Business Communication involved in this program have naturally, though gradually, developed an interest in research in this domain, i.e. both in RFL as such, and in the particular aspects of teaching/learning RFL, in other words, in RFL teaching methodology. Indeed, there is a trend, namely a rising trend, in the number of papers on Romanian as a foreign language teaching methodology, as well as a qualitative shift from more general, cultural, literary and linguistic issues to very specific RFL teaching methodology aspects.

This is partially reflected by the papers published in the analyzed journals and conference proceedings. As we could see, this year's conference had an entire panel dedicated to research into Romanian language, where 80 per cent of the papers focused on RFL, and a round table on RFL teaching challenges, solutions and best practices. Additionally, 9 textbooks for APLR students were published soon after the beginning of the program, as listed in Appendix 2, while other papers of the members of

the department appeared in different publications or volumes, with the same RFL interest (Appendix 2).

Moreover, the fact that 4 out of 7 papers identified by us with a RFL focus were written by members of the DLMCA department involved in teaching in the APLR program only proves that getting involved in teaching RFL to foreign students represents the most important incentive to the theoretical study of RFL.

4. Conclusions

To sum up, 37 papers were identified that looked into different aspects of Romanian culture and language, 14 in *Dialogos*, 14 in *Synergy* and 9 in *Synergies in Communication – conference proceedings*. Out of these 37 papers, only 7 specifically deal with Romanian as a foreign language and, with one notable exception (1 paper appeared as early as 2002), 6 them were published in the last 6 years (2016 – 1 paper, 2017 – 1 paper, 2019 – 3 papers, 2021 – 1 paper).

As these findings led us to believe, the constantly increasing interest for research into RFL and different linguistic or terminological aspects related to Romanian language, as well as a persisting interest in Romanian culture and its influence on teaching/learning foreign languages or on doing business/learning to do business recommend the Bucharest University of Economic Studies and particularly the Department of Modern Languages and Business Communication as one of the best suppliers of RFL programs in our country. This is only confirmed by the increasing number of foreign students who graduate from APLR and who are able to adapt, quickly and effectively, to studying in different Romanian universities or even to the Romanian labor market.

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- Ciolăneanu, Roxana (2017) „Teaching Romanian to foreigners – between theory and practice”, în Marinescu, Roxana-Elisabeta, Bârlea, Roxana-Magdalena (coord.). 2017. Learning is Fun: Teaching methodology for plurilingual education and a balanced life, București: Editura ASE., pp. 102-120
- David, Irina, Elena Tălmăcian (2013) “Linguistic and Cultural Dimensions of lexical borrowings from English into Romanian”, *Synergy* Vol.9 no.1/2013
- Dima, Viorela-Valentina, Hurduzeu, Raluca Elena (2019) *Limba română pentru străini. Științe economice*, vol. 1 *Domeniul financiar-contabil*, vol. 2 *Domeniul management*, vol. 3 *Domeniul marketing*, București: Editura ASE.
- Dima, Viorela-Valentina, Raluca-Elena Hurduzeu, Zinaida-Tamara Fedot (2019) “Developing Competences in Romanian as a Foreign Language in an Economic Context”, *Dialogos*, 36/2019
- Enache, Antonia (2009) “The Strategy of Counterattacking in Romanian Political Discourse”, *Synergy* Vol.5 no.2/2009
- Ghiga, Georgeta (2008) “The Phatic Function of Communication in Romanian Business Negotiations”, *Synergy* Vol.4 no.2/2008
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- Șerban, Mihai (2017a.) *Curs practic de limba română. Comunicare orală și scrisă*, București: Editura ASE.
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Appendix I
Articles on Romanian culture and language, including RFL,
published in DLMCA journals and SiC Conference proceedings

Dialogos

3/2001

1. Gulea, Michaela, “Résistances identitaires Roumaines à la mondialisation, illustrées par des stéréotypes et slogans”

6/2002

2. Rusiewicz-Wozny, Krystyna, Struzinska, Justyna, „Înșuşirea unei limbi străine (româna) în fața problemelor de interferență lingvistică”

22/2010

3. Pecican, Anca, “Metaphor in Specialised Economic Texts: The case of Romanian Central Bank Reports”
4. Bara, Mariana, “Anglicismes dans la terminologie médicale actuelle en Roumain”
5. Ivan, Mihaela, “La terminologie financière-bancaire du roumain a la fin du XIXème siècle”

25/2012

6. Oprescu, Maria Ana, “L’intertextualité dans la publicité roumaine et française”

29/2014

7. Iftimie-Toporaș, Paula, “Lutter contre le stéréotype. Les efforts pour positive l’image des tziganes dans la mentalité des roumains au XIXe siècle”
8. Șerban-Oprescu, Anca-Teodora, “Patterns of living with and through technology in America. The Romanian diaspora”
9. Mihăilă, Silviu, “Modele de conduită umană în literatura română veche. Un posibil scenariu didactic”

31/2015

10. Ureche, Ancuța-Maria, “Business Negotiation between Romanians and Germans. A cross-cultural perspective”

33/2016

11. Pruteanu, Mădălina, “Business Communication for Romanian Millennials in Great Britain”

36/2019

12. Ioniță, Anamaria, “L’analyse des représentations de la langue roumaine des étudiants et des médecins étrangers en Roumanie”
13. Dima, Viorela-Valentina, Hurduzeu, Raluca-Elena, Fedot, Zinaida-Tamara, “Developing Competences in Romanian as a Foreign Language in an Economic Context”
14. Mihăilă, Silviu, “Predarea perfectului compus studenților străini din anul pregătitor de limba română. Probleme teoretice și didactice”

Synergy

Vol.3 no.2/2007

15. Pecican, Anca, “A Cross-linguistic Analysis of Conceptual Metaphors in Romanian and English Central Bank Reports”

Vol.4 no.2/2008

16. Ghiga, Georgeta, “The Phatic Function of Communication in Romanian Business Negotiations”

Vol.5 no.1/2009

17. Nicolae, Mariana, “Leadership for Romanian Business Students”

Vol.5 no.2/2009

18. Enache, Antonia, “The Strategy of Counterattacking in Romanian Political Discourse”

Vol.9 no.1/2013

19. David, Irina, Tălmăcian, Elena, “Linguistic and Cultural Dimensions of lexical borrowings from English into Romanian”
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Vol.10 no.2/2014
21. Ciolăneanu, Roxana, “Semantic Variation in the Romanian Language of Marketing”
Vol.12 no.1/2016
22. Bennett, Karen, Mureșan, Laura, “Rhetorical Incompatibilities in Academic Writing: English versus the Romance Cultures”
23. b, “Some Theoretical Preliminaries to Designing a Bilingual (Romanian-English) Dictionary of Religious Terms”
Vol.12 no.2/2016
24. Conea, Sorina, “The Portrait of the Romanian Negotiator”
Vol.14 no.2/2018
25. Tălmăcian, Elena, “Impact of Teaching Business English upon Romanian online advertising”
Vol.15 no.1/2019
26. Ciolăneanu, Roxana, Villalva, Alina, “The Influence of English on Morphological Compounding in Romanian and Portuguese”
Vol.18 no.1/2022
27. Marinescu, Roxana Elisabeta, “Aborted motherhood and traumatic history. An analysis of some contemporary Romanian novels by women writers”
28. Cămpian, Veronica, Malos, Sonia, “Adapting the Communication strategies for the COVID-19 vaccination campaign to the Romanian cultural mindset”

Synergies in Communication – Conference proceedings

2016

29. Condruz-Băcescu, Monica, “English Influence on the Economic and Business Language in Romania”
30. Maftei, Mara Magda, Georgiev, Georgi Marinov, “Assessment methods. A study for Romania and Bulgaria”
31. Șerban, Mihai, “Limba română sahariană în *Oedip rege* de Pier Paolo Pasolini”

2017

32. Chiriac, Argentina, Vîntu, Victoria, Trebeș, Tatiana, “Dificultăți de predare și asimilare a limbii române ca limbă străină”
33. Militaru, Marina, “Strategii argumentative în campania pentru referendum din 2007”
34. Pegulescu, Anca Mariana, “Business through English proverbs and their Romanian translated equivalents”
35. Rusu, Olivia Cristina, “Translating video games into Romanian: Yay or nay?”
36. Tălmăcian, Elena, “Economic noun-anglicisms in Romanian online media”

2021

37. Șerban, Mihai, “Poietica predării-asimilării limbii române ca limbă străină”

Appendix 2

RFL Textbooks and other materials published by DLMCA professors (for APLR students)

Textbooks for APLR students:

1. Dima, Viorela-Valentina, Hurduzeu, Raluca Elena. 2019. *Limba română pentru străini. Științe economice*, vol. 1 *Domeniul financiar-contabil*, vol. 2 *Domeniul management*, vol. 3 *Domeniul marketing*, București: Editura ASE.
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