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A View on Grammar Teaching and Practice for Communicative Activities in Romanian as Foreign Language Acquisition in Online Classroom

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Abstract: Throughout the years, the literature showed that the L2 teachers have struggled to establish whether it is not better for students to acquire the grammar rules intuitively, through communicative activities, rather than to learn them with the help of traditional exercises. Our research focuses on the importance of teaching Romanian language as a foreign language to achieve proper communicative skills. The questionnaire methodology applied led to a brief analysis on teachers' adaptability to the most effective, interesting and interactive methods of teaching grammar, which gave us suggestions on how the practice of grammar for communicative activities can motivate and involve students to interact and to participate in online classroom activities in a friendly virtual learning environment. Our target group involved the Romanian language teachers whose role is to become the key factor in delivering the grammar rules instruction, in choosing the methods and interactive communicative activities, which will allow students to manifest interest and to perform each task accordingly.
The study shows that communicative activities give students the possibility to practice their knowledge, to use creativity and to improve their general knowledge and communicative skills better than using traditional methods. In conclusion, such a learning experience becomes challenging in the virtual environment. Moving to the online classes and changing the interaction paradigm, as well as the necessity to adapt the teaching methods/activities, recommends the teachers to engage themselves to ensure that the learning environment is made efficient and that teaching still offers the students the means for limitless linguistic creativity.

Keywords: *Grammar teaching, grammar practice, communicative activities, online classroom, Romanian as a foreign language.*

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1. Introduction

Our research based on the questionnaire method will reveal that L2 teachers can help students develop grammatical knowledge for spontaneous communication by sequencing online classroom teaching techniques and activities. We particularly address to Romanian as a foreign language, as an increased number of international students chose Romania to continue their studies in the last decade. There is a particular way through which the teacher can structure the lessons of Romanian as a foreign language that will maximize the international students' potential for developing grammatical knowledge for spontaneous communication. The teaching materials/exercises should facilitate the L2 learning in a very short time and should be more interactive, dynamic and especially efficient, determining the international students' progress from the first online classes. As all international universities are encouraged to use online teaching models, the international students are stimulated to be actively involved in lessons, to ask questions, to communicate. The individual exercises, in pairs or in groups, simulate real situations, determining the students' performance. The classes occur in a pleasant interactive communication environment and aim to develop the five fundamental conversation skills in order to actively use the Romanian language in concrete situations.

2. Literature Review

In the past decade, research has focused on emphasizing the complementarity between traditional grammar teaching and spontaneous communication: "usage feeds into the creation of grammar just as much as grammar determines the shape of usage" (Bybee, 2006, p.730) while this new view is called the "sociolinguistic revolution" as L2 continues to be used more traditionally, rather than as a language to be mastered by teachers. A theoretical framework for communicative competence was developed, embracing four aspects, of which grammatical competence is only one: the grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence and strategic competence (Ariel, 2009; Canale & Swain, 1980, p.46)". In a successful online system, the teachers' real-time response to interaction with students is an indispensable element for the success of online learning (Sun et al., 2008, p. 1184). The students will be able to survive (linguistically speaking) in temporary contacts with the foreign language speakers in everyday situations and to establish and maintain social contacts. The

research reveals that the students' accuracy is less fluent after being ***taught*** a set of L2 ***grammar*** rules in a ***traditional*** way than the use of daily spontaneous exercises. Thus, L2 teachers/trainers should decide to what extent the young learners are experiencing daily learning challenge and respond with appropriate instruction in spontaneous communication.

3. Case study

The data analysis used for this study started from the professional training background of the 12 teachers of Romanian as a foreign language within the University of Pitesti which can be addressed in subsequent studies. All prospective participants gave informed consent before entering our research. The questionnaire conducted online revealed that although modern communicative skills are required for language acquisition in an online environment, only some teachers approached this side in their teaching activities in the last years. We opted for a qualitative approach which was established on the basis of a main criterion: the status of the teacher of Romanian as a foreign language/L2, to the detriment of the quantitative criterion, involving much more teachers in the research. The questions used tried highlighting the experience of teaching Romanian grammar through spontaneous communication. We mention that 2 of the respondents graduated the Faculty of Romanian Language and Literature-Theology, 2 of the respondents The Faculty of English Language and Literature-French Language and Literature and 8 respondents-The Faculty of Romanian Language and Literature-English/French Language and Literature. Before highlighting the contrasts between the data provided by teachers, it will be mentioned that to familiarize with the data provided by the respondents and to be able to interpret them correctly, a reading grid of the questionnaire was established and organized: the data were intended to compare the experience of teaching Romanian as a foreign language/L2. It also faces the teacher's experience for the use of spontaneous communication in teaching grammar.

To facilitate the data analysis phase, we developed an analytical framework that we applied in the questionnaire and various tables designed to summarize teachers' situations around variables such as teaching experience or variety of teaching materials used. The teachers' experience was considered a comparison element and an explanatory variable for some of the data collected. It was found that only 5 teachers (T.4, T.6, T.1, T.11 and T.9) have a high teaching experience, while 4 teachers have a medium

teaching experience (T. 2, T.3, T.7 and T.8) and the others 3 (T.10, T.12 and T.5) have a low experience in teaching Romanian as a foreign language. This is why traditionally teaching material is most used in spite of students' abilities for spontaneous communication use. The teachers of Romanian as a foreign language felt confident about their students' ability to understand grammar rules and use them both in traditional grammar exercises and for the purposes of real-time oral communication, but used instinctively. More, 80% of the teachers state that they use communication in their practice of teaching Romanian and 20% say that they do not use it. One of the reasons given by the two teachers is the lack of digitized equipment in the faculty where they teach. We conclude that the pedagogical experience is not decisive in teaching grammar through spontaneous communication if we refer to the fact that each teacher should use new technologies in the teaching activities. As related to the variety of the digital materials used in the classroom according to the teaching experience shows that one hundred percent of the respondents use various multimedia techniques in their pedagogical activity. Simultaneously, we noticed that the use of multimedia techniques is not a function of pedagogical experience: the two elements are not directly proportional. According to data collection, all the teachers agree that brainstorming helps the international students in preparing their activities/tasks, generating ideas separately or in groups.

4. Conclusions

The findings of this study clearly show that teaching L2 for spontaneous communication ensures the best progress of the learners in practicing a foreign language through more dynamic and motivating teaching techniques and innovative exercises; we consider the new dynamics of the teaching is part of a communicative approach according to which L2 represents a means of communication and social interaction, although teachers do not feel powerless about this aspect of language teaching, they do not feel as confident as they arguably should. In accordance with the scientific literature, teachers recognize the value of providing traditional explanation of grammar rules and more so the value of practice, as the time allocated to practice activities was more than double the time allocated to the provision of grammar rules.

The data used for this study clearly shows that the teachers are well aware of the role practice plays in the development of spontaneous communication. One explanation for this is that the new students' generation focus on innovative ICT technologies. In this sense, spontaneous

communication brings authentic innovative results in teaching/learning activities; the use of ICT generates a new innovative approach, the aim of which is to learn to speak and communicate in a foreign language in common situations; familiarizes teachers of Romanian as a foreign language with teaching procedures that can help students develop grammatical knowledge for spontaneous communication.

All authors planned the study, collected the data, and wrote the present study. All authors listed have made a substantial, direct and intellectual contribution to the work, and approved it for publication.

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