THE HISTORY OF ROMANIAN AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE: TEXTBOOKS AND THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE ACADEMICS AT OVIDIUS UNIVERSITY IN THIS FIELD

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Abstract: *Ovidius University of Constanta promotes a sustained policy of internationalization which leads to a raise of the number of foreign students who have decided to attend this university. This policy is not very easy to sustain, but based on the common efforts and determination of all teachers, the results can easily be seen.*

The majority of these students will attend courses in Romanian, so they need to learn and pass the examination of a one-year course of Romanian Language for Foreign Students. In order for this course to be better liked and more accessible for foreign students coming from all over the world, the teachers from the Preparatory Year have published very useful coursebooks to be used by the foreign students of the Romanian language. Over time, these instruments have been permanently improved and adapted to the first level A1-A2.

So, creating and publishing new and attractive courses that use new methods of teaching Romanian as a Foreign Language is a permanent and constant interest for all the academics involved, with a new useful and loved course of B1-B2 level being prepared to be published soon.

The article presents the evolution of all the existing courses created and published by academics teaching at "Ovidius" University of Constanța used for teaching Romanian as a foreign language, and analyzes the methods used by their authors.

Key-words: *Romanian as foreign language, textbooks, foreign students, Preparatory Year, language level, Ovidius University, methods*.

The policy of internationalization adopted recently by the majority of Romanian universities, involves, among many other aspects, attracting a larger number of foreign students to enroll in various programs of study. This general trend includes Ovidius University of Constanţa, where year in year out the number of foreign students has increased considerably, although this project of attracting such students is not easy at all.

Among the foreign students coming to study at Romanian universities, the majority will attend programs of study in Romanian, which involves learning a new language, often totally unknown to them; and so as the language to be quickly and easily mastered, academics from the departments of Romanian language as a foreign language have tried over the years various teaching methods and developed materials to support learners.

In this article, we intend to introduce a brief overview of the history of the occurrence of pedagogical materials for teaching Romanian as a foreign language and present their evolution over the years, also showing the contribution of the academics at Ovidius University of Constanţa in this area.

Thus, the history of teaching Romanian as a foreign language in Romanian universities started in 1974, when due to the political regime of the time, the first groups of foreign students, particularly from Arab countries, came to study here. On this occasion, the great Romanian universities in Bucharest, Cluj, Iaşi, Craiova started a preparatory year for Romanian language that foreigners had to attend before gaining access to university studies in Romania, and the first collectives of academics for Romanian language teaching as a foreign language were formed. It was then for the first time that the issue of Romanian language teaching materials for this course was

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considered, especially since the number of foreign students was high and it was a completely new field for all linguists.

Thus, at the initiative of a group of young academics then (Grigore Brâncuş, Adriana Ionescu, Manuela Saramandu) in 1975, the first Romanian textbook for foreign students in the preparatory year appeared, *Limba română, manual pentru studenţii străini,* known at the time as the "pink textbook," which would become later, the "Brâncuş textbook," as it is still called to the present. This work would endure in time and would be used successfully in the following forty years by all the staff involved in teaching Romanian as a foreign language. It is still used today by many colleagues who teach in this area, both at home and abroad. The textbook, very well structured in three sections of language (phonetics, vocabulary, grammar), starts the teaching of Romanian from simple elements to the complex ones, so the non-native speaker, forced to learn a language which is quite difficult for them and in a very short time, will be able to make statements in the new language quite soon. For this reason, the work has reached the fifth edition, without any change to its content. Only the pictures of the first edition were deleted. The 38 lessons follow the same pattern: text, vocabulary, grammar exercises. It is true that today the texts of this textbook, which describe realities of the time, are outdated, but the grammar remains a reference point for current works. On the other hand, the exercises in the textbook that never make reference to the lexical problems in the text are monotonous and concern only the grammatical issue discussed in that lesson, without reverting to previous problems, often the exercises being done mechanically without any questioning from the learner.

Another textbook published before 1989 in the same vein as the previous, but this time with all the explanations of grammar and the exercises tasks in English is *A Course in Contemporary Romanian* published in 1980 and having as authors Boris Cazacu, Matilda Caragiu Marioţeanu, Clara Georgeta Chiosa and Valeria Guţu Romalo. The work contains a total of 30 lessons, the last of which, the review, comprises a number of additional texts of Romanian literature. The content of the manual, which besides grammar and exercises, includes texts of Romanian culture and civilization, is completed by a series of photographs of Romanian writers or reproductions of different Romanian artists. Also, following the English model in the first lessons, both texts and new words are accompanied by phonetic transcriptions.

If in the textbook by Gr. Brâncuş the emphasis is on grammar, in this course the elements of Romanian culture and civilization are those accompanying the learner at all stages, and the topics are chosen in such a way that a foreigner should have the opportunity to receive sufficient information about the Romanian culture and civilization. The feeling is that learning Romanian remains in the background. These two textbooks are joined by a series published at Editura Didactică şi Pedagogică, *Limba română, manual pentru studenţii străini,* the preparatory year, Semester II, which consists of volumes with the same explanations of grammar, but the theme of the lessons varies by profile: medical, technical, agronomic, economic etc.

In time in the field of teaching Romanian as a foreign language things have evolved, and today the Romanian market comprises many more materials that support those who for various reasons want or need to learn Romanian.

The novelty lies in the fact that with the introduction by the Council of Europe (in 2001) of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages aimed to define the levels of mastery of a foreign language, most textbooks for learning the Romanian language have been designed based on the requirements of this regulatory document.

Although some textbooks announce from the title the audience targeted by the content, very few of them manage to meet this requirement, in that often the works go beyond the limits announced. Besides the varied content, the strengths of the textbooks today are that most are printed in color, with good quality graphics , and are accompanied by CDs and / or workbooks, making them more attractive to target public.

Wishing to facilitate learning Romanian as a foreign language, some authors have opted for the choice to translate the vocabulary of the lessons or the tasks of the exercises or even the text of the lessons (Olga Bălănescu, *Limba română pentru străini*) in various international languages, hoping that this method will be more successful among those interested. Of the many works

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published on the Romanian market in recent years, we will mention only a few, which have drawn our attention through the variety of the content and of the methods of teaching / learning Romanian as a foreign language suggested by their authors: *Româna, Seria Autodidact*, published in Cluj after a research project coordinated by Liana Pop, which includes a textbook for A1-A2 levels, accompanied by a volume of exercises and a textbook for B1-B2 levels; *Manual de limba română ca limbă străină* (RLS), authors Elena Platon, Ioana Sonea, Dian Vîlcu, levels A1-A2, which focuses on the conversational method and is accompanied by an exercise book and a CD; *Româna cu sau fără profesor*, author Liana Pop; *Limba română de bază (Essential Romanian) vols. 1 and 2* authors Ana Dorobăţ, Mircea Fotea; *Salut, România! Manual de limba română*, author Mircea Mârza, translated into English, French and German; *Puls. Manual de limba română pentru străini. Curs*, author Daniela Kohn, which comprises two volumes aimed at levels A1-A2 and B1-B2, respectively, accompanied by workbooks and CDs; *Limba română pentru străini: Learn Romanian / Apprenez le Roumain*, author Mona Pologea, where the vocabulary of each lesson is fully translated in the two foreign languages; *Limba Română ca limbă străină, dosare pedagogice*, coordinated by Andrei Vasilescu, in which the words of the semantic field of each lesson are translated into English; *Apprenons le roumain, COURS pour les français qui veulent apprendre le roumain*, author Mircea Goga, a work that is intended, as its title promises, for French speakers who want to learn Romanian; *Limba română pentru străini. Manual pentru avansaţi (C1-C2)*, author Ionuţ Geană, and many more. Some of these works have been republished over time.

To these textbook we can add a series of works, such as *Limba română pentru: bulgari/ greci/ sloveni* etc, published in the countries of origin of the target audience.

There have been attempts to publish textbooks of Romanian as a foreign language at Ovidius University of Constanţa, where in 2004 a group of academics at the Faculty of Letters worked on the *Gramatica aplicată a limbii române, pentru cursurile internaţionale de vară de limbă, cultură şi civilizaţie românească*, leaving the material in the project stage. The work should have been a bilingual one, with the translation of the vocabulary of each unit into French and English.

In 2006, with the publication of *Să învăţăm limba română! Manual pentru străini. Nivel 1* (*începători*), our colleagues and Ana Marin and Veronica Nedelcu responded to the need of having their own teaching materials at Ovidius University of Constanţa, as the first authors of a work of this kind. The textbook is divided into 21 lessons of gradual complexity, from simple to more complex, which the student goes through within a month of intensive study; it is the first of "a series of three textbooks for the three levels: beginning, intermediate and advanced", as stated by the authors. The texts suggested are varied and modern, with an accessible vocabulary that can be mastered by the learner alone or with a teacher.

A year later, in 2007, this book appeared in a bilingual Romanian-Turkish edition, translated by our colleague Ciden-Sena Menabit, to support the Turkish students in the preparatory year who did not know any international languages. The structure of the textbook is the same as the one mentioned previously, except that the vocabulary, grammar explanations and exercises tasks are translated into Turkish.

In 2005, the publishing house of Ovidius University of Constanţa issued a new work, *Et si on apprenait la roumaine? Manual de limba română pentru debutanţi francofoni,* authored by Sergiu Miculescu and Florica Hrubaru, two academics teaching French at the Faculty of Letters. As the authors mention, the textbook addresses the Francophone participants in the International summer courses held annually at the OUC. The organization of the work follows the structure of a traditional textbook. Each didactic unit of the 12 includes a dialogue text, followed by the vocabulary specific to the communication situations in the text of the lesson, grammar problems, "placed in the order of the priority imposed by the specific nature of Romanian language" (Hrubaru, 2005:10), according to the authors, and the exercises are aimed at all aspects of the lesson. Given the target groups addressed, the vocabulary and grammar issues of each unit are translated and explained in French. At the end of this textbook, the authors include revising exercises, an appendix with texts in Romanian, a summary of the nominal flexion and a table of 100 conjugated Romanian verbs. In our view, this part is especially welcome, for it offers students the opportunity to practice

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reading in Romanian on short but well chosen texts, and the list of verbs includes paradigms of the most common verbs in Romanian, of great use of those who want to utter the first words in Romanian.

Now in its second edition, the work *Limba română. Manual pentru studenţii străini din anul pregătitor (Nivel A1-A2)* of the authors Cristina Dafinoiu and Laura Pascale is addressed first of all, as announced in the title, to foreign students in the preparatory year coming to Romania to attend Romanian universities in different specializations, in Romanian.

The work is meant to be an applied one, with a content tailored for the speaking needs in Romanian A1-A2 levels, and it is built on the classic textbook model. Therefore, the 18 teaching-learning units of the work are structured as follows: text (always on topics from various fields), vocabulary, grammar and various exercises aimed at all elements of language (vocabulary, morphology and syntax). Each unit is designed so that it covers a total of about 10-15 classes, depending on the specific group of students. The content of each lesson is announced in the introductory box. Every five units of study include one revising lesson that aims to bring back the attention of the learners to all the lexical and grammatical problems discussed in the previous units and to reinforce the knowledge acquired by the students through various models of exercises combined so as not to bore the student but to challenge them to keep an active participation throughout the lesson. At the end of the textbook the authors have included a summary of the grammar issues discussed along the learning units so as to facilitate an easy retrieval of grammatical information that for various reasons the students do not remember.

To make the work accessible to a broad range of learners, who are known to come from diverse socio-cultural backgrounds and most often have no linguistic training, the authors have limited the use of the specialized language at the elementary level, considered generally known.

The textbook structure has been designed so that, through a balanced distribution of all problems proposed for discussion, to obtain a comprehensive view and the communication skills in Romanian for non-native speakers (understanding a written / oral message and the production of written / oral messages) to be quickly and easily acquired.

Although the content of each lesson is supported as much as possible by suggestive images to exemplify different aspects, the weak points are that that it is not printed in color and it also lacks an audio CD. The reasons for the shortcomings are purely economic, the cost of the textbook having to remain low.

The latest addition is *Limba română pentru străini. Nivel începător*, authored by Cristina Dafinoiu, Veronica Nedelcu, and Laura Pascale, published in 2014. Developed for Romanian as a foreign language courses within the project F-ERA-EC, under the EILC program (Erasmus Intensive Language Course), the work is mainly aimed at students who come through Erasmus programs, and proposes the student to reach a level of Romanian of A1- A2 in just three weeks through intensive study. This crash course comprises 12 lessons designed to fit the universe familiar to the speaker. The texts, grammar and practical applications presented in the book range from simple to complex and are structured to help the student handle various communication situations in Romanian. From our point of view, the content is attractive and well organized, not raising problems of understanding for those who want to go through them, and allows learners to acquire the basics in Romanian quickly and thoroughly, so that in a short while they are able to engage in short dialogues on various major topics (personal presentation and family, orientation in time and space to find various tourist attractions or of cultural interest, receiving and providing useful information etc.) The work ends with a test series of Romanian levels A1 and A2, through which the learner can evaluate their own knowledge acquired.

Conclusion

In teaching Romanian as a foreign language, the teacher/ academic must take into account many aspects that cover not only theoretical levels and training (of specific methods and procedures), but also the social and/or cultural background of the learners. This viewpoint has triggered this article, which reviews a range of materials (books/textbooks of Romanian as a foreign

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language) published by the academics of the Faculty of Letters at OUC and used for courses of Romanian as a foreign language conducted in the preparatory year, for international summer courses or crash courses aimed specifically at Erasmus students.

From our own experience of many years of teaching Romanian as a foreign language, we consider that the formula of the perfect textbook has not been found yet, although in recent years the Romanian market has offered many works in this field. The large volume of such works leads, in our view, to a certain confusion of the target audience, placed in the difficult situation to choose the best guide to their expectations. Each work addresses the teaching-learning method which the author finds most appropriate for Romanian to be quickly and easily acquired by non-native speakers. Most textbooks address A1-A2 levels of language, to a lesser extent B1-B2 levels, and very few works address the levels of language proficiency C2- C1. A possible explanation could be that an A1-A2 one includes the basics of Romanian and is probably more easily conceived by textbook authors.

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