# *ENGLISH vs. ROMANIAN – LEXICAL AND GRAMMATICAL AREAS*

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***Abstract:*** *Learners always come across difficulties when acquiring a new language. It is necessary for them to understand that language is a living organism involving permanent changes. The understanding of any language mechanisms at all its levels requires familiarity with pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar in order to avoid confusions with other languages.*

***Key words****: living organism, mechanism, confusion*

The teaching practice as well as the teachig theory has demonstrated the necessity of comparing the native language (i.e. the source language) and the foreign language (i.e. the target language). The words of a foreign language influence the student's conscience in a different way than a native language does. In teaching English language we should take into account several factors such as:

a. the purpose of learning the respective language
b. specific age or individual features
c. the choice of the most suitable teaching methods

The child's acquisition of his mother tongue coincides with the development of his thinking capability, whereas at school, the improvement of his native language is in accordance with his intellectual developent. When a student begins the study of a foreigh language, the habits of correct expression he has already acquired in his mother tongue will obviously exercise an important influence upon the new habits he is expected to acquire in the foreign language.

On the one hand, students will make numerous pronunciation, lexical and gramatical mistakes, under the negative influence of the native language and on the other hand, certain common sounds, words and grammatical structures in both languages will have to be turned to good account through their shift from the native to the foreign language.



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The background of foreign language learning consists of certain linguistic habits formed during the acquisition of the mother tongue. One should also keep in mind that in the process of learning a second language, two linguistic systems are struggling against each other in the student's mind: the old system, deeply rooted in his mind, which is used in the communication process in his native language and the new system of the foreign language under study.

The idea is that old habits which can facilitate the acquisition of new linguistic habits should be transferred, whereas influences of the native language should be avoided. At first, the foreign language learner endeavors to approach the foreign language starting from the characteristic phenomena of his mother tongue. The greater the number of similarities between the two languages, the easier the transfer of linguistic knowledge and habits.

A contrastive study of two languages should not confine itself to the major differences between two given languages. It is obvious that no section of the foreign language can be acquired as an isolated entity, especially if we take into account the modern perspective on language regarded as a system in which the sounds, words, intonation patterns are always interdependent.

Therefore, the choice of the learning material should not only be made on the basis of its frequency, but also in the light of a contrastive analysis of the two languages. The whole linguistic material should be graded in such a way as to ensure a more rapid assimilation of the target language.

The contrastive study of the target and source language should precede the teaching process, laying the foundations of the teaching material. The analysis will show the language teacher the best procedures and techniques he/she must make use of in each concrete instance in order to prevent possible false analogies inherently established by the student in his mind during the learning process.

The easiness or difficulty to learn any pattern of a foreign language does not rest upon the intrinsic characteristics of the foreign language itself, but rather upon the structural characteristics of the source language which the student has acquired first and used in his thinking.

The role of comparison is also important on account of the fact that by studying a foreign language, we contribute to a better understanding of the phenomena and rules specific to the source language.

On the other hand, unless we appeal to comparison, we won't be able to understand the source of the many mistakes present in the respective language and



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to correct them. The phenomenon of interference can be avoided by explaining the specific features of the English language.
When students are to translate into English a sentence like *Am citit romanul pe care mi l-ai imprumutat*, they should be explained that there is no preposition in English, in this case. In order to eliminate this phenomenon we should use as many synonyms and antonyms as possible. Talking about mistakes, people should pay more attention to the communication act. As Manser (1994) states "Failure to communicate effectively is at the root of many social ills and misfortunes, from war to missed career opportunities, from industrial strife to broken relationships".

We are fully aware that language is a living organism that keeps changing but the rich means of rapidly receiving information about such changes, help us discover the mistakes and make the differences between languages. The process of getting aware of one's own mistakes should start in the foreign language class, with the teacher as a source of information or as an organizer of activities meant to sensitize learners as to the most frequent mistakes they make; however, the concern for self-improvement should continue autonomously, after the course, with a permanent interest of the person in identifying and correcting their errors by means of various sources, such as dictionaries, books of grammar, tests, and so on.

When we discuss the level of *acceptability* of errors we should realistically mention the influence of e-mail writing and chat rooms, where 'correctness' is simply disregarded. It is not before these users of the language come across a formal situation requiring a high standard of oral or written communication that their speaking or writing skills are attentively analyzed. Spoken language is not so much in the centre of attention, unlike written language which definitely requires a lot more accuracy, from the grammatical, lexical and stylistic perspective.

It is the teacher's mission to raise the learners' awareness of the importance of level of formality, register and other options they should be able to make from in order to communicate in various types of situations. We generally attempt to reveal the possible errors students make and classify them.

a. „False friends" aim at the interference of source language with target language: *library – librarie, arm – arma, advertisement – avertisment, actual – actual etc.*

*b.* Word confusion in target language itself: *lend / borrow, cast / throw, rob / steal / burgle etc.*

*c.* Confusion of structures in the target language itself: *must / had to / should*



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In other words, mistakes may be related to vocabulary, grammar, spelling and pronunciation. Students usually disregard the subject-predicate agreement, discreet vs continuous, generic vs specific etc.

As regards the grammatical issues, when we have to teach Past Tense vs Present Perfect we should explain the differences between them as clearly as possible. Students should make the difference between sentences such as: What have you eaten this morning?, Whom did you meet last night?

The words' translation is a means of checking, some sort of help in the teachers' professional work. There is an impressive list list of 'false friends', *vocabulary* confusions due to the resemblance of some words with Romanian words which do not mean the same thing: *realize for accomplish or carry out, library for bookshop, eventually for possibly* etc. The verb *to realize* has been transferred into Romanian with the wrong meaning *a realiza*, and is often used by educated and uneducated persons alike.

Grammatical errors frequently appear among Romanian learners: *He is working for Orange Company* (wrong aspect), *she has slept good* (adjective instead of adverb), *The students are hard-working* (incorrect determination).

Phrasal verbs cause confusion among students due to the various combinations with prepositions which trigger a different meaning: *to bring about – a determina, to bring up – a creste, to bring off – a salva* etc.

Certain idiomatic phrases create obstacles for Romanian learners since no or little connection can be made between the component elements. Students find it difficult to translate idioms like: *to have a good time – a se distra, to do one's best – a face tot posibilul, to rain cats and dogs – a ploua cu galeata, as poor as a church mouse – saract lipit pamantului* etc.

In terms of proverbs, some may have Romanian equivalents, even if seldom perfect ones: *Better late than never – Mai bine mai traziu decat niciodata, Barking dogs seldom bite – Cainii care latra nu musca*, others have no direct translation, therefore, they should be paraphrased: *Birds of a feather flock together – Cine se aseamana se aduna, East or west, home is best - Nicaieri nu-i mai bine ca acasa, Ignorance is bliss – Prost sa fii noroc sa ai* etc.

At the morphological level, the usage of the article in English is quite different from that in Romanian. There are cases when the article is translated as in: *You have written a good paper – Ai scris o lucrare buna* or it may not be translated as in: *What a pleasure! – Ce placere!*

The nouns is a special case in forming the plural. There are certain nouns whose plural form requires two different meanings: *cloth – stofa, cloths – stofe, clothes – haine, scale – solz, taler, scales – cantar, balanta*. Nouns like *means* or



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*news* use the predicate only in the singular, therefore, their translation should be done contextually.

Another aspect is related to the substantivization of certain parts of speech (adjectives, verbs, adverbs): *the poor – saracii, grown-ups – adulti, over-all – salopeta, good-for-nothing – bun de nimic* etc. Unlike Romanian, some adjectives in English have double comparative forms: *older-elder, later-the latter, the latest-the last*.

The verb makes up the most complex chapter of the English grammar, having a series of differences icompared to Romanian. The impersonal phrases *there is / there are – exista, se afla*, are easily mistaken for the adverb *there*, confusions being avoided by means of translation practice: *There is an old oak in the garden – Acolo in gradina este un stejar batran*.

The continuous aspect, which is not specific to Romanian, always creates difficulties to students. They should get the ability to perceive the continuous aspect as opposed to the indefinite form, unless the former is specified by an adverb: *They learn English at school, We are learning the new poem now.*

Modal verbs provide a special interest in their particularities and usage. The frequentative function of aspect *would* must be emphasized in order to differentiate it from the modal-auxiliary form*: He would bathe in the river* is identical with *He used to bathe in the river*.

The passive voice in English is not always properly translated into Romanian: *She showed me the way to the post-office* (active), *The way to the post-office was shown to me by her – Drumul la gara mi-a fost aratat de ea* (passive)

The subjunctive mood in Romanian is rendered in English by means of infinitival constructions: *The boys were not allowed to bathe in the river, He is reported to have written good novel*.

The English Gerund is usually translated with the Romanian Perfect Compus: *After passing through the park he went to the market – Dupa ce a trecut prin parc, a mers la piata.*

In order to successfully notice the similarities as well as the differences between two languages students should handle both of them skillfully. This is the only way they should assimilate and improve their reading and writing skills.

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