TEACHING ROMANIAN LANGUAGE AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE USING MEDICAL ARTICLES FROM MAGAZINES

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Abstract:This article presents some interesting interactive teaching activities for foreign students who learn Romanian, aiming at developing reading and speaking skills as well as improving their grammar knowledge. The activities are meant for medical students in the 2nd academic year, but not only. The material used is a magazine article which is about the properties of fruits and vegetables in preventing or healing various health problems. The text chosen from the magazine is very rich in medical terminology which is of great interest for medical students.

Keywords: medical terminology, symptoms and diseases, the noun, the verb.

Learning Romanian language is a 'must' for any foreign student who comes to study in Romania. The process of learning Romanian can be a big challenge for any student and this is because this language is a Latin language with lots of conjugations, declinations, different verbal endings for each tense and for each personal pronoun and in addition, there are many exceptions to the rule. These language characteristics can be quite intimidating for anybody, no matter how committed the person is to learn Romanian.

Many universities offer students the possibility of learning Romanian during a whole 'preparatory year' in which the only subject of study is Romanian language. For one year, the students learn a lot of grammar and vocabulary and develop reading, writing and speaking skills in different fields. They learn how to use the language in different situations: in restaurants, hotels, shops, transport, rentals and many others. They also learn how to write on different topics, using literal, non-literal or scientific register, going from easier and shorter texts to more complex, challenging ones.

The purpose of this preparatory year is to get students ready to attend university courses, to understand different subjects or topics, to be able to write from dictation or take notes by extracting the most important ideas from a speech.

Some universities do not offer the students the possibility of attending a preparatory year in Romanian language. Such is the case of universities in which there are specialties where the teaching language is English. For Example, at the University of Medicine, Pharmacy, Science and Technology of Tîrgu-Mureș, students can study general medicine and stomatology in English, meaning that all subjects are taught in English. There are people from all over the world who choose to come to study in this university. Besides subjects in English, the curriculum also includes Romanian language because during the 3rd academic year students have to attend medical training courses in hospital, where they come into contact with Romanian doctors and patients.

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Students have to be able to carry on conversations or dialogues with the patients, ask questions about their health problems, about their complaints, symptoms, medical history, about other possible medical treatments they may have followed prior to being hospitalized, about possible side-effects that the pills may have had on them, about allergies or intolerance to some chemical substances etc.

All students have to attend training courses, not only those who study general medicine, but also those who study dentistry. The latter have to be able to engage in dialogues with patients suffering from different dental problems, such as tooth aches, dental fillings, overlaps, bridges, dental braces and other dental issues that are common to stomatology.

Teachers of Romanian have to start their lectures by teaching the basic elements of grammar and speech, then gradually move to more difficult grammatical structures, always keeping in mind that the final goal of their course is to give their students all the necessary 'tools' for feeling confident in using the language and use it correctly. Moreover, when referring to the University of Medicine of Tîrgu-Mureș, the teachers' ambition should be to teach medical students the vocabulary they need to know and use in their field of study, general medicine or stomatology, in other words to prepare them for real life situations in hospital.

There is a number of books on Romanian Language for Foreigners written by members of different universities in the country, organized on different levels A1, A2, B1,B2 and C1, C2, such as the European language certificates or diplomas are structured: *Manual de limba română ca limbă străină (RLS). A1-A2*[1]written by Elena Platon, Ioana Sonea and Dina Vîlcu, *Româna cu sau fără profesor*[2], by Liana Pop, *Puls. Manual De Limba Română Ca Limbă Străină*, level A1/A2[3]and also B1/B2[4], by Daniela Kohn, but also other Romanian language learning books for foreigners that contain CDs and complementary handbooks with exercises meant to complete the books, helping the students test or improve the knowledge gained by going through the units of the volume. These books are very thorough and helpful to students and teachers as well.

During Romanian classes I use the above mentioned language materials, especially the first one written in Cluj by Elena Platon, Ioana Sonea and Dina Vîlcu, but I also bring my students some other texts from other volumes. These books are really helpful for my 1st and 2nd year students, but still, starting with the second year of study I try to help my students in acquiring a medical vocabulary.

Besides talking about anatomy, parts of the human body, internal organs, most common diseases, common complaints, describing symptoms, I try to bring my students written medical texts that I find in magazines and journals because I believe they are a very good example of the way we use the language in a given context, offering medical information at the same time.

A great source for medical information which is proper for 2nd year general medicine students can be found in magazines available at any newsstand. I have dozens of such journals at home and I carefully choose from them many materials that I use at the university with my students. Two very resourceful journals are „Femeia"[5], which appears monthly and has a very long tradition in Romania and „Farmacia Ta"[6], which is focused entirely on health issues.

[1] Elena Platon, Ioana Sonea, Dina Vîlcu, *Manual de limba română ca limbă străină (RLS). A1-A2*, Editura Casa Cărții de Știință, Cluj Napoca, 2012.
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[4] Daniela Kohn, *Puls. Manual De Limba Română Ca Limbă Străină*, B1/B2, Editura Polirom, Iași, 2012.
[5]*The Woman*, author's translation .
[6]*Your Pharmacy*, author's translation.

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My article describes how a text from a journal can be used in a number of teaching activities. The text is taken from „Femeia" magazine and it is called „Imunitate în culori"[7]. The text is divided into two parts. The first part talks aboutvegetables. These are grouped according to their color: green, red, yellow, violet, orange and for each category there are several paragraphs in which the authors talk about the active ingredient that they contain, about their fibers, vitamins and their possible help in treating different diseases. For example, they write about red vegetables:

„**Legumele roșii** consumate zilnic previn bolile cardiovasculare, protejează tractul urinar, îmbunătățesc memoria și combat dezvoltarea celulelor cancerigene. Ardeiul și cartofii roșii sunt bogați în fitochimicale cu agenți activi antiîmbătrânire, precum luteina. Roșiile conțin mai mult de 20 de nutrienți vitali, vitamine și minerale, iar ridichile roșii protejează ficatul și stomacul, purificând în același timp și sângele"[8].

On the other side of the page, as if seen in a mirror, the article refers to fruits which are as well grouped according to their color. Each group of fruits is presented in a short text in which the authors underline the health properties they possess, the diseases they may cure or prevent and so on.

The violet colored fruits are described as follows:

„Strugurii, coacăzele, smochinele și alte **fructe mov** sunt vedetele descoperirilor medicale din 2010. Specialiștii de la Universitatea din Manchester spun că pigmenții coloranți ai fructelor mov reglează nivelul fierului din organism, încetinind îmbătrânirea celulară. Fructele mov previn bolile degenerative precum Alzheimer, scleroza multiplă sau Parkinson într-un mod incomparabil mai inteligent decât suplimentele alimentare de fier"[9].

Each student receives a copy of the article and then students are asked to read the text given in Romanian and translate it into English. As there are not many students in a group, everyone has the chance to read and translate.

During the reading-translating part of the course students are given the opportunity to see and understand how we, the native speakers, use different structures of the Romanian language, they see how various expressions are used in a diversity of contexts and they improve their vocabulary.

This first part of the course aims at developing reading skills by reading a printed text with medical terminology. The role of the teacher is to help the students with explanations on the unknown words and also with the pronunciation of the Romanian language, as many of the students experience difficulties in pronouncing some groups of sounds, such as: 'ce', 'ci', 'che', 'chi', 'ge', 'gi', 'ghe', 'ghi'.

After the students have read and understood the text, the following step, **step 2**, is to elicit vocabulary describing diseases and medical conditions. Students will mention some terms, such

[7] „Imunitate în culori" in „Femeia", nr. 2(51), februarie 2011, pp. 92-93.

[8] „Red vegetables, if consumed daily, help in preventing cardiovascular diseases, protect the urinary tract, improve memory and fight against cancer cells. Red pepper and red potatoes are rich in fitochemicals with active anti-aging agents, such as lutein. Tomatoes contain more than 20 vital nutrients, vitamins and minerals and red radishes protect the stomach and the liver, purifying the blood as well", from the above mentioned article, p. 92, author's translation.

[9] „Grapes, blueberries, figs and other **violet fruits** are the VIPs of the medical discoveries of 2010. Specialists of Manchester University say that coloring pigments in violet fruits regulate the iron level in blood, slowing down the aging process. Violet fruits prevent degenerative diseases such as Alzheimer, multiple sclerosis or Parkinson in a much more clever way than iron supplements do", from the above mentioned article, p. 93, author's translation.

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as: cataractă, boli cardiovasculare, depresie, anxietate, insomnie, migrene, obezitate, boli degenerative, boli ale stomacului, boli ale ficatului etc.

The students make a list with all the medical terms describing diseases.

The next step, **step 3**, is again a reading-for-gist activity. Students have to find and name nouns denoting organs of the human body as well as words referring to different organisms and substances in the human body, as they appear in the text, such as: tract urinar, ochi, ficat, stomac, sânge, organism, retină, celule canceroase, țesuturi, microbi, colesterol, viruși, radicali liberi, capilare, serotonină, vitamine, minerale, fibre etc. The students make another list with these words.

The two lists the students have written in their copybooks should be learnt. They can be encouraged to use the terminology in their own sentences or contexts, in writing. The teacher could gather the papers, correct them and bring them to the next course, with the notes and explanations needed.

After these activities have been completed, the last part of the course is focused on grammar.

There are many nouns in the article, so a repetition of the noun would be proper for the next activities in the class. The group of students should pay attention to:

- Gender of nouns
- Definite article
- Indefinite article
- Number (singular or plural)

The teacher could name students asking them to tell the gender of a given noun, to use the articles according to the gender and number.

Another grammatical issue that can be repeated with the students is that of the verb and its conjugations. There are four conjugations in Romanian, they are rather difficult, there are a lot of exceptions to the rule and these are enough reasons for the teacher to try to repeat the conjugations with the students as many times as possible. The conjugation of the verb in the present tense is the most difficult grammatical part in the Romanian language and it is essential that the students understand and know the conjugation, as many other tenses are built up by using the forms of the verbs in the present tense. I always encourage my students by telling them that if they know the present tense, then they have learned the most difficult part of grammar and everything else that comes next will be a lot easier.

The teacher could help the students by asking them to conjugate verbs that belong to the same conjugation: verbs ending in ‘a’ – verbs belonging to the first conjugation, verbs ending in ‘ea’ – verbs belonging to the second conjugation and so on. If the group of students in the class is very good at Romanian, then the teacher could ask them to conjugate any verb in the text, no matter which conjugation group it belongs to. Otherwise, the teacher could ask the students to group the verbs in the text according to their conjugation and they will come up with verbs belonging to each of the four conjugation groups.

This is a challenging task even for 2nd year old students because the verbs in the text are already conjugated and in order to group them, they have to find out which is the root of each verb. They can organize the verbs in columns and they should come up with the following columns:

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- 1st conjugation verbs: a mânc**a**, a stimul**a**, a consum**a**, a protej**a**, a dezvolt**a**, a purific**a**, a regl**a**, a arăt**a**, a inhib**a**, a acțion**a**, a form**a**, a lupt**a**, a consider**a**, a curăț**a**, a stabiliz**a**, a rezolv**a**, a stimul**a**, a ușur**a**, a lupt**a**, a regl**a** etc.;

- 2nd conjugation verbs: a av**ea**, a scăd**ea**, a ved**ea**, a apăr**ea** etc.;

- 3rd conjugation verbs: a fac**e**, a conțin**e**, a susțin**e**, a umpl**e**, a spun**e**, a mențin**e**, a reduc**e**, etc.;

- 4th conjugation verbs: a fi, a găsi, a potoli, a prelungi, a încetini, a muri, a îmbunătăți, a preveni etc.

These verbs are not given in alphabetical order, but in the order they appear in the text. A very good practice activity, as I have already mentioned, is to ask students to conjugate several of these verbs.

These are some teaching-learning activities that can start from a magazine article. They are challenging and entertaining as well as useful for the students.

During the reading and translating part of the course the students become familiar with a rich vocabulary, containing a lot of common words and expressions that Romanians use on a daily basis, but also with medical terms referring to a variety of diseases and health problems, to substances needed by the human organism such as fibers, minerals, vitamins, or substances secreted by our organs such as lutein, melatonin, serotonin and others. The medical terminology present in the article used in class is of great interest for medical students as they are very keen on finding out and learning as much as possible in their field of study.

The second part of the course aims at improving grammar knowledge. The activities are focused on the noun with its definite and indefinite article, as well as on the verb in present tense which is quite a difficult part in Romanian grammar, each person of the verb showing a different ending.

The two parts of the course combine perfectly in an interactive two hour class during which the students do not lose their interest in performing the tasks they are asked to do. The activities motivate the students to become involved in understanding a Romanian text, in discussing on different topics in the text and they also become more confident in their learning skills.

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