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**PHD THESIS**

**THE DYNAMICS OF THE ACQUISITION OF ROMANIAN  
AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE. DIFFICULTIES OF  
WRITTEN EXPRESSION**

**- PHD THESIS ABSTRACT -**

PhD Supervisor:

Prof. univ. dr. EMILIEA-DOMNIȚA TOMESCU

PhD Student:

BADEA MIHAELA-GABRIELA

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**Keywords: RFL (Romanian as a foreign language), errors, written messages, spelling, morphology, syntax, vocabulary, written discourse, error analysis, language acquisition**

The present PhD thesis whose title is the *The Dynamics of the Acquisition of Romanian as a Foreign Language. Difficulties of Written Expression* represents a study of applied linguistics with an interdisciplinary horizon aimed at the way in which the process of acquisition of the Romanian language by foreign students takes place. Starting from the lexical and morphosyntactic linguistic acquisitions necessary for receptive and productive communication skills in Romanian, the theoretical and analytical approach, the conceptual apparatus and the application approach of the thesis were constituted according not only to the principles of applied linguistics, but also to the framework theoretically provided by other related fields such as sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics and didactics of language teaching.

Currently, most of the students studying in the preparatory year (PA) in Romanian universities come from various parts of the world, therefore, their mother tongues are different and some of them have insufficient knowledge of English, which is considered to be the support language in learning Romanian. The purpose of the program is to reach, according to the CEFR, the minimum level B1, called intermediate level or threshold level, this presupposing the understanding of all the basic elements of RFL in usual situational contexts, respectively the production of simple and coherent oral and written messages in ordinary life situations, speakers having the ability to express and argue their opinions and points of view. This level involves sufficient vocabulary, grammatical (morphosyntactic) and cultural knowledge to enable learners to carry out their normal daily activities in the new language environment. Regarding the production of written messages, which is the object of the analysis of the present paper, from the perspective of CEFR, at the end of the preparatory year, students should be able to produce cursive and clear texts on various familiar topics or topics related to their own interests, relate personal experiences and imaginary or real events, describe people, places and events, argue their points of view and produce functional texts. Despite the complexity of the linguistic notions that help to form the competence to write in Romanian, the vast majority of students manage to reach the required level.

The purpose of this paper is to identify and explore the various categories of errors that can be identified in the process of learning Romanian, to analyze the determining

factors of these errors and to offer suggestions and recommendations in order to correct, prevent and reduce them, the aim being to improve the foreign students' ability to produce written and, implicitly, oral messages. Also, the paper aims to analyze in detail the dynamics of the RFL acquisition process, revealing the students' difficulties in written expression in a deductive and inductive analytical approach, following the path from cause to effect and vice versa.

As for the main objectives of the paper, they aim to cover the grid of criteria necessary to achieve the purpose and these objectives are:

1. classifying the types of errors produced by foreign students in vocabulary and grammar tasks and in written messages, according to their frequency;
2. establishing and classifying the main causes that determine the occurrence of errors;
3. analysis of the perceptions of teachers involved in teaching RFL and of foreign students related to the types of errors, their frequency and significance, the causes of errors, as well as the correction methods used;
4. identifying correction strategies adapted to the specifics of errors produced by foreign students;
5. proposing some optimal didactic strategy elements, aimed at reducing and preventing the number of errors in the RFL teaching-learning process.

Încercând să atingă aceste obiective, lucrarea își propune să extindă cunoașterea specificului achiziției LRLS, pentru a fi în beneficiul atât al studenților, cât și al cadrelor didactice implicate în acest proces.

Trying to achieve these objectives, the paper aims to expand the knowledge of the specifics of the RFL acquisition in the benefit of both students and teachers involved in this process.

In order to achieve its purpose and proposed objectives, the structure of the paper follows a theoretical and analytical approach that contains an introduction, five chapters, conclusions, bibliography and appendices.

The *Introduction* offers a general framework of the issues dealt with in the paper, specifying its fundamental components, namely the current state of research on the topic of RFL acquisition and the difficulties involved and the originality of the investigated subject, the purpose and objectives proposed within research. In addition, the sources used in the paper, the research methodology and the terminology specific to the investigated field are described.

The paper is organized in the following chapters:

The first chapter, *Theoretical background*, addresses the theoretical aspects related to the acquisition of a foreign language, its purpose being to establish the theoretical framework that will guide the approach of the subsequent chapters aimed at applied analysis. This chapter, with an interdisciplinary content, discusses various sociolinguistic, psycholinguistic and linguistic concepts, as well as theories and strategies for teaching and learning the target language. A detailed presentation of errors at the theoretical level is carried out, reviewing the fundamental contributions of linguists (Lado, 1957, Corder, 1967, Selinker, 1972, James, 1998, etc.) concerned with the field of error analysis, including the specific stages involved, the causes of occurrence of errors and their classification, as well as ways of correcting and reducing errors.

The sub-chapter considering sociolinguistic aspects examines how sociolinguistic factors influence the acquisition of a foreign language, based on important theories discussed by Lenneberg (1967), Krashen (1981), Vygotsky (1991), Ellis (1994), etc. Aspects such as the social and cultural context are analyzed, emphasizing the importance of the context in which the language is learned, the influence of the linguistic community and cultural identity, social interaction and the role of interactions with native and non-native speakers in the process of learning the respective foreign language, in our case Romanian.

Based on certain psychological theories about foreign language learning (Veresová, 2015, Mutlu, 2018, Molinuevo, 2013, Gardner, 2010, Lambert, 1974, etc.), the next subsection focuses on psycholinguistic elements specific to the cognitive and psychological processes involved in learning a foreign language, taking into account the impact of motivation and attitude towards the target language and community on learning success.

Given the interdisciplinary nature of the paper, the following subsection presents the main theories and strategies used in foreign language teaching and learning, including some of the traditional and modern teaching methods used by teachers in RFL classes, with the aim of highlighting their diversity and the flexibility of teaching staff in the teaching process.

Chapter one also includes a subchapter that explores specific linguistic aspects of language acquisition, with a focus on contrastive analysis (CA) and error analysis (EA). Given the fact that the paper focuses especially on EA, the characteristic stages of this method are deepened, from a theoretical perspective, such as: identifying errors,

classifying them into categories, analyzing the possible causes of errors and evaluating and reducing them. Moreover, some terminological aspects from the specialized literature are discussed, insisting on clarifying the terminological difference between *mistakes* (which are occasional and can be corrected spontaneously) and *errors* (which are systematic and indicate a misunderstanding of the rules of the language).

Furthermore, the different causes of error production are analyzed, as they are identified from a theoretical point of view in the specialized literature, among them mentioning the lack of sufficient knowledge about the structures of the target language, the overgeneralization of some grammatical rules, hypercorrectness, linguistic interferences and contaminations, etc. A classification of errors based on different criteria is also considered, of which, according to the linguistic one, errors can be pronunciation, spelling, punctuation, grammatical (morphological and syntactic), semantic/vocabulary and discourse errors, in accordance with the opinions of some researchers in the field of EA (Lado, 1957, Corder, 1987, Krashen, 1981, Dušková, 1990, Selinker, 1992).

Finally, the chapter devoted to review of literature focuses on ways to correct errors, the aim being to reduce the frequency of errors produced by students in learning RFL and to provide a useful methodological framework for teachers involved in the teaching process, as the advantages and the disadvantages of the correction methods that can be used are also discussed.

The second chapter, called the *Coordinates of the corpus*, as the name suggests, aims to identify, describe and classify the empirical material obtained that forms the basis of the analysis in the present research. The chapter, although it presents the contents of the data in a strictly synthetic form, is indispensable for the validity and replicability of the study, providing the context and foundations on the basis of which the analyzes are carried out and the conclusions of the paper are reached.

At the same time, the chapter presents some theories related to the concept of corpus in linguistic research, helping to delimit the notion of corpus in the present research. Thus, a brief presentation of the structure of the corpus is made, divided into subcorpus A (grammar and vocabulary tasks, level A2 and B1) and subcorpus B (written messages produced by students, level A2 and B1), explaining the reason for choosing this type of corpus and its usefulness for achieving the objectives of the paper.

The third chapter of the paper, *Practical aspects regarding the acquisition process of RFL. Qualitative analysis*, focuses on the practical aspects of the language acquisition process through the qualitative analysis of the corpus. This chapter examines in detail the

errors produced by students in grammar and vocabulary tasks, but also in written messages, investigating the difficulties encountered in various areas of language acquisition. The causes of these errors are also identified and analyzed to provide a deeper understanding of the learning process.

In the first part of the chapter, an attempt is made to analyze as fully as possible the errors identified in the corpus, focusing on their classification and description, as well as a discussion on the difficulties encountered by students in particular in written expression. Thus, the series of errors identified includes: students' difficulties in rendering the word form and in rendering the punctuation (spelling and punctuation errors), the difficulties encountered by them in the acquisition of morphosyntactic structures (grammatical errors), the difficulties present in the acquisition of the vocabulary of the Romanian language (vocabulary/lexical errors) and difficulties in producing written discourse adequate to the requirements (discourse errors). The reason why grammatical errors are discussed first and then lexical errors is that, based on direct observation and teaching experience, the first category has more frequent occurrences than the second. Each separate category is exemplified with errors collected from the corpus and, in the second part of the chapter, the possible causes of the errors identified in the qualitative analysis of the written messages are highlighted, taking into account the theoretical aspects discussed in the first chapter, putting emphasis on the linguistic, cognitive and contextual factors that contribute to the occurrence of errors.

Chapter Four, entitled *Practical aspects regarding the acquisition process of RFL*. *Quantitative analysis* considers the presentation of the quantitative aspects of the errors produced by foreign students in the process of acquiring RFL, based on the corpus. Using a statistical approach, the chapter investigates the frequency and types of errors in different language activities, as well as the relationship between quantitative and qualitative data.

In the subchapter dedicated to the quantitative analysis of errors in subcorpus A, which contains grammar and vocabulary tasks, the errors are quantified, then they are classified into categories and subcategories specific to grammatical classes and categories, but also encountered in the case of lexical confusions, creating a hierarchy. In addition, the discussion of the significance of the results obtained regarding the major difficulties also considers the identification of the causes generating errors.

The next sub-chapter examines sub-corpus B, which consists of written messages produced by students, with the aim of assessing the complexity and appropriateness of written expression by: classifying errors into specific types (e.g. spelling, punctuation,



morphosyntactic structures, vocabulary, discourse), the statistical analysis of the frequency of errors in each category, the presentation of the results in the form of tables and graphs and the interpretation of the results obtained, the identification of the main difficulties and possible causes, comparisons with the results of subcorpus A.

In the last subchapter, a comparative analysis of quantitative and qualitative data is carried out to highlight the interferences and correlations between these two types of data, considering the following aspects: comparing the frequency and types of errors identified in subcorpora A and B, identifying and analyzing correlations between quantitative data (frequency of errors) and qualitative data (difficulties and causes of errors), identifying common trends and significant differences between qualitative and quantitative results, as well as the implications of comparative results for understanding the dynamics of the RFL acquisition process.

The fifth chapter, entitled *Error assessment: perception and correction*, presents the perceptions and opinions of teachers and students regarding the RFL acquisition process. The analysis is based on the data obtained from the administered questionnaires and examines the independent and dependent variables of the research.

Subchapter 5.1 interprets data collected from the questionnaires administered to teachers, exploring their perceptions of student errors and correction strategies. The following variables (V) are considered: V1 - the general view on the errors produced by students in the opinion of teachers and their importance in the learning process, with the aim of analyzing them statistically to identify major trends; V2 - the types of errors that teachers consider frequent and significant, the results considering the presentation of the frequency and types of errors mentioned by teachers; V3 - the causes of the errors occurrence and their frequency, which aims to investigate teachers' perceptions of the causes that determine the occurrence of errors; V4 - error correction, the subsection discussing the presentation and evaluation of the correction strategies mentioned by the teachers.

Subchapter 5.2 reviews the data obtained after the administration of the questionnaire to the students, analyzing their perceptions of the RFL learning process and the errors produced. As in the case of the questionnaire intended for teachers, the analyzed variables are the following: V1 - the general perception on learning Romanian and on the errors produced to statistically evaluate the students' opinions on the learning process and the errors produced; V2 - perception of the types of errors, their frequency and significance; V3 - the influence of the mother tongue on the acquisition of RFL; V4 - the

perception of the correction strategies used by teachers, with the aim of evaluating the students' opinions on the effectiveness of the correction strategies used by teachers.

In the case of both questionnaires, the statistical validation of the answers obtained for some of the items included in the questionnaire is considered by representing the deviations of the calculated averages of the answers compared to the theoretical average, which represents a statistical index that provides relevant information in such situations.

Subchapter 5.3., *Suggestions and recommendations on correcting and reducing language errors*, discusses the importance of error correction in the process of learning Romanian, presenting suggestions and recommendations for the correction and reduction of language errors in non-native speakers, based on both the qualitative and quantitative analysis of the corpus, as well as of the answers obtained following the administration of the questionnaires. For each of the types of errors identified in the corpus subjected to the analytical approach, in addition to correction methods, types of tasks, exercises and teaching activities are proposed, aimed at helping students improve their linguistic skills.

The chapter concludes with a synthesis of the main ideas and recommendations, underlining the importance of a systematic and adaptable approach to students' needs in order to correct and reduce language errors.

The *Conclusions* section is a synthesis of the major aspects and ideas presented in the paper regarding the dynamics of RFL acquisition and the errors involved in this process, pointing out the utility of EA. Thus, the main results of the research are discussed from a comparative point of view, offering new study perspectives in the field of RFL teaching. Also, the practical implications of the research conclusions for teachers are revealed, emphasizing the importance of flexibility and adaptability of teaching strategies in the teaching activity. In addition, the findings reflect on some limitations of the study, providing suggestions for future research directions aimed at deepening the understanding of EA and helping to reduce language errors in the learning process of RFL. Therefore, the section dedicated to the conclusions aims to provide a holistic view of the entire theoretical and research endeavor, to emphasize not only the importance of foreign students' RFL language acquisition, but also their academic development, which would be possible if the significance of language errors produced in the RFL acquisition process was taken into consideration.

The paper can be of real use to teachers of Romanian as a foreign language, offering them a theoretical and practical framework regarding the difficulties of written

expression of foreign students, a useful framework in the teaching process, which will provide them with linguistic information to support a clearer understanding of the dynamics of the RFL acquisition process by foreigners, regardless of their country of origin.

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