

TEACHING ROMANIAN AS L2 GRAMMAR WITHIN THE PREPARATORY PROGRAMME OF ROMANIAN LANGUAGE FOR FOREIGN CITIZENS THROUGH SPONTANEOUS COMMUNICATION

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Abstract: Our research was inspired by the difficulties the teachers faced in the last 2 years during the pandemic period in teaching Romanian as a foreign language to international students online. The main problem the teachers faced was the lack of interactive teaching materials within the Preparatory programme of Romanian language for foreign citizens that could have eased the transition from face-to-face to online teaching. When teaching Romanian as a foreign language, teachers should involve the majority of the international students in the activities. Thus, they have the chance to meet new people, learn with them, and they have the opportunity to be involved in all activities. In our article, we develop a set of 10 activities for spontaneous communication as we consider that the aim of such activities is to create a strong connection between the international students' ability to understand Romanian language and the language grammar structure. Each activity will be assessed accordingly. By achieving these objectives, we demonstrate that spontaneous communication helps our international students to formulate correct statements in Romanian after 9 month intensive classes. The completion of this article could not have been possible without the contribution of the desk research we developed in TGSC (Teaching Grammar for Spontaneous Communication) Erasmus+ project that is mentioned in the article content with acknowledgement.

Keywords: Romanian language as L2, international students, TGSC (Teaching Grammar for Spontaneous Communication), assessment

The COVID pandemic represented a real challenge for the teachers within the Preparatory programme of Romanian language for foreign citizens. Many teachers have access to the Internet and a smart phone to allow them a basic level of interaction with international students but this is not enough. The problem that teachers have raised in this period is related to the lack of online tools – not all teachers have access to specific tools to help them conduct their online classes successfully. Similarly, not all international students have access to tablets and laptops, and the phone is not a solution. Too small screens cannot keep the international students focused on learning during a 4-5 hour course daily and this causes quick loss of their interest.

Our one year-research conducted within the Preparatory programme of Romanian language for foreign citizens led us to the conclusion that behind a screen, it is very difficult for the international students to understand all grammar explanations, perceive the inflections of teacher's voices, or even appreciate the exact information content. All these small elements are essential in teaching grammar for L2 intensively to

provide the international students' good communication skills that are required after one academic year. Other researchers demonstrated that "the lack of these nonverbal elements in communication increases the feeling of fatigue, the so-called zoom fatigue" (Fosslien, West Duffy, 2020). To keep the international students focused on lessons, traditional teaching must interfere with spontaneous communication skills in an online environment, in a specific period of time.

Due to the fact that the effectiveness of the learning environment created within the context of an online course or seminar is also highly influenced by the lesson structure, communication plays an important role. It is well known that communication in our own native language involves unconscious communication, we usually do not think about what we want to say next. But for communication of L2, we develop a very different kind of understanding. A clear and simple course or seminar organization can help international students overcome this communication challenge. Well-organized lesson contents can be very helpful for international students for being successful in the second language acquisition. As a result of our research, we developed a series of Romanian language activities that help international students not to memorize grammar rules anymore. Our activities emphasize that spontaneous communication is effective both outside and inside the classroom, the moment when the international students have acquired considerable knowledge of grammar rules. Grammar knowledge is acquired in time and spontaneous activities allow the international students repeat them in an innovative way, even if mistakes are very likely to occur at this stage of practice. Corrective feedback appears and help international students consolidate their language understanding.

The ultimate goal of teaching grammar would not be to develop an understanding of the complex rules encoded in a difficult language. What language teachers look for in grammar lessons is to help learners achieve a good level of oral fluency together with grammatical accuracy so that they can speak fluently and correctly when using the second foreign language and -expresses ideas correctly and spontaneously, especially outside the classroom. Most experts consider that in L2 acquisition, students need a lot of practice. "Is L2 learning possible without rules? In the absence of rules, low-level associative learning that draws on information driven processes supported by memory is possible but does not lead to knowledge of a systematic rule. Future research should investigate whether all aspects of a second language are equally learnable by implicit means or whether more complex aspects of the second language may require more conceptually driven processing in order for associations to be formed (Ellis, 2002, p. 145)

The authors of this article developed a series of activities within the project entitled Teaching Grammar for Spontaneous Communication (<https://tgsc-erasmus.site>), that represent models of spontaneous communication for native languages taught as L2, with different levels of difficulty. Each such activity is followed by an assessment. Below, we would like to emphasize 5 such grammar activities that can be developed by L2 teachers in grammar teaching activities that aim to facilitate new language learning techniques.

Activity 1: B1 Level

Target Feature: Present Simple

Material: “Read the following short texts and try to remember as many details as possible. Cover the texts and try to reproduce as much information as possible about each of them. Use only present tense verbs.

1. My name is Mary, I’m 15 years old and I like to spend my free time painting. Every day, except for weekends, I paint at least 5 hours. My favorite colors are blue, green and purple. Do you know that purple means you are a perfectionist who requires emotional security in life, and that you are a good humanitarian who helps others in need? I also consider myself that I have the ability to observe things that go unnoticed by other persons around me.

2. My name is John, I’m 16 years old, I’ve been passionate about travelling. I love to travel abroad by airplane, I’ve already been abroad in many countries, but I’m looking forward to coming back to Ireland. I find it very special.

3. My name is Paul, I’m 16 years old and I like playing football. I am part of the national junior team. I consider myself a talented football player but I need training all the time. I train daily for 4 hours and I also work on weekends. I’m looking forward to the new world championship.”

The assessment of the attentional requirements for such an activity are made with the help of the following assessment grid:

Activity	Attentional demands		
	low	medium	high
Time pressure			X
Planning time			X
Degree of spontaneity		X	
Information for the target feature			X
Activity focus			X
Range of linguistic features			X
Speech level			X

We consider the classification for the attentional demands of this activity 1 **high**.

Activity 2: B1 Level

Target Feature: Past Tense

Material: “Tell your best friend where you spent your last Christmas holiday. Take into consideration the following:

1. When you arrived there.
2. What you did there.
3. How many days you stayed there.
4. What did you like the most there.
5. A situation / event that you remember the most.

Use only the Perfect Compound tense when talking to your best friend. Then switch roles.”

Activity	Attentional demands		
	low	medium	high

Time pressure			X
Planning time		X	X
Degree of spontaneity	X		
Information for the target feature	X		
Activity focus		X	
Range of linguistic features		X	
Speech level			X

We consider the classification for the attentional demands of activity 2 **medium**.

Activity 3: C1 Level

Target Feature: Indirect Speech

Material: "Read the following sentences and try to remember the order in which they happened. Then, play the event in indirect speech, in the third person.

1. Last week I went to the park.
2. I met my friends there.
3. After we ate ice cream, we played tennis for two hours.
4. I won 3 consecutive matches.
5. I was very happy that I spent my free time with friends.
6. One moment, an old lady passed by us.
7. She asked us if we saw a white dog.
8. We left the park and we searched for the dog.
9. We found the dog in front of the cafeteria.
10. It had ice cream on his muzzle."

Activity	Attentional demands		
	low	medium	high
Time pressure	X		
Planning time		X	
Degree of spontaneity	X		
Information for the target feature	X		
Activity focus	X		
Range of linguistic features	X		
Speech level	X		

We consider the classification for the attentional demands of this activity 3 **low**.

Activity 4: B1 Level

Target Feature: Future Tense

Material: "You are making plans for your next vacation. Consider the following: the weather, the travel, accommodation, places to visit, the restaurants, the food, etc.

Explain your choice; give arguments; give examples."

Activity	Attentional demands		
	low	medium	high
Time pressure			X
Planning time			X
Degree of spontaneity		X	
Information for the target feature		X	

Activity focus		X	
Range of linguistic features		X	
Speech level		X	

We consider the classification for the attentional demands of this activity 4 **medium-high**.

Activity 5: B1 Level

Target Feature: Frequency adverbs

Material: "Quickly answer the following questions using adverbs of frequency:

1. How often do you answer classes?
2. How often do you answer wrong?
3. How often do you answer correctly?
4. How often do you interrupt your colleagues when they are talking?
5. How often do you go to school by bus?
6. But by bike?
7. How often do you take notes?"

Activity	Attentional demands		
	low	medium	high
Time pressure		X	
Planning time	X		
Degree of spontaneity	X		
Information for the target feature			X
Activity focus		X	
Range of linguistic features	X		
Speech level	X		

We consider the classification for the attentional demands of this activity 5 **low-medium**.

In conclusion, the specialty literature reports that a well-structured online content is one that stresses interaction and active participation of the international students to facilitate a higher level of language learning and acquisition while maintaining students' flexibility. Researchers recognize the importance of developing grammatical knowledge for spontaneous communication (Ellis, N., 1993). Such content should be structured by teachers in a clear and consistent manner as shown in the 5 activities previously described. Through these activities, the online courses and seminars can use an active, innovative and engaged pedagogy that promotes L2 learning and assessment in a correct medium.

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