

REGULAR TESTING IN TEACHING ROMANIAN FOR FOREIGNERS

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Motto: Testing shows the presence, not the absence of bug. (Edsger Dijkstra)

Abstract:

This paper attempts to present the importance of regular testing in teaching Romanian as a foreign language. As we know, the Romanian preparatory year is dedicated to foreigners who come here to study different scientific domains. We are going to illustrate some theoretical aspects about testing and some information about types of tests according to the moment of the teaching process. The result of any test is aimed at both teachers and students.

Keywords: purpose, assessment, communication, teaching, result

1. Introduction

As we know, the preparatory year is designed for foreign students who come to Romania to pursue various academic programmes (undergraduate, master's, or doctoral studies) and represents the starting point of their academic life in the country. The acquisition of the Romanian language is essential for the subsequent years during which they will engage with various scientific disciplines.

The present study aims to examine several aspects pertaining to the role of regular assessment within the teaching/learning process. These tests are, first and foremost, periodic evaluations whose primary function is to measure the level of knowledge acquisition and application at a given stage of the teaching/learning process — a process that spans approximately ten months in the case of the preparatory year. In practical terms, this refers to a learner's communicative competence, that is, their ability to interact meaningfully with an interlocutor to a degree commensurate with the stage at which the assessment takes place.

The result of a periodic assessment is relevant for both the teacher and the learner:

- in the case of a satisfactory result, the teacher will proceed with the teaching process and the learner will continue along the path of language acquisition;
- in the case of unsatisfactory results, a review of the subject matter becomes necessary, employing varied pedagogical approaches in order to achieve the specific improvement required at that particular stage of the learning process.

From a pedagogical perspective, periodic assessments serve as conclusive indicators that enable the teacher to identify which teaching method or strategy yields the most effective outcomes.

2. Method

We shall now turn our attention to tests as periodic evaluations of both the quantity and quality of the linguistic structures acquired. The expectations associated with such assessments concern the degree of practical application of the linguistic system characteristic of Romanian as a Foreign Language (RFL). The requirements of a periodic test must be relevant to the purpose of the assessment, and the level of difficulty should be moderate, so that the test results may provide an accurate reflection of the group's actual proficiency level. In this way, the teacher can determine what content needs to be revisited, to what extent, and for how many learners, with regard to the linguistic material that has been previously taught and incorporated into the test. It is of considerable importance to analyse the distinction between individual errors and common errors, to identify their underlying causes, and to devise an appropriate pedagogical strategy for addressing both categories. Generally speaking, the learners' native language exerts a significant influence on the process of Romanian language acquisition and accounts for a considerable number of errors — errors that are remediated both through theoretical revision and, more notably, over time, towards the end of the preparatory year, when one may also speak of a growing familiarisation with the target language.

3. Findings

Viewed from multiple perspectives, assessment modalities may be classified as written or oral, and as traditional or modern, each being employed according to the stage at which the assessment takes place or according to the type of linguistic competence being evaluated. The scoring criteria must also be established, including the allocation of points for each item as well as the total score for the test. A broad scoring scale (100 points) is advisable, as it allows for the differentiation of distinct proficiency levels: advanced, intermediate, and beginner. Based on the proficiency level indicated by the test at that particular stage, the teacher selects the most appropriate instructional approach going forward. Furthermore, it is recommended that a comparison be made with the results of previous assessments.

Furthermore, before any assessment, it is essential that learners be familiarised with the types of items likely to be encountered, as well as with the methodology required for completing each exercise type.

Periodic tests must have clear content and may address a variety of objectives:

- **Phonetics and Phonology** — the degree of adaptation of the audiophonatory apparatus. Reading as a skill may also be incorporated here, given that it begins to develop from the very first lessons through initial exposure to the specific features of RFL, although the phonological dimension perceived as orality and reading cannot be considered equivalent. For these assessments, audio and video materials will be employed, and the items may require: the identification of vowels, semivowels, and consonants; the determination of the number of letters and sounds in a given word; the differentiation between letters and sounds; the reproduction of words with emphasis on correct pronunciation; the identification of phrases following a listening exercise; and reading aloud.
- **Orthography** — writing, as well as basic semantic comprehension. Given that the RFL alphabet contains several language-specific letters (ă, â/î, ș, ț), the difficulties encountered by learners in both reproducing and writing these characters are to be expected. In addition, the consonant clusters *ce/ci*, *che/chi*, *ge/gi*, and *ghe/ghi* also present considerable challenges in the acquisition process. The pronunciation and spelling of the letter *e* should likewise be noted. Tests targeting this objective may include classical exercises (selecting the correct letter, completing the missing consonant cluster, selecting the correct form in words requiring a hyphen) and/or functional exercises (error correction, short dictation).
- **Grammar and Lexical Structures and Automatism** — progressively structured exercises whose results provide the teacher with clear indications regarding the learners' accumulation of linguistic knowledge and the development of the skills necessary for comprehending and using RFL. These tests may incorporate classical exercises (correct nominal and pronominal forms for the genitive and dative cases, the correct verb form for a given mood and tense, degrees of comparison for adjectives and adverbs), functional exercises (supplying the correct form of words given in brackets, filling in appropriate words, multiple-choice tests, word formation from a given root, completing sentences with prepositions, conjunctions, and discourse connectors), or structural exercises (converting a verb tense, changing grammatical number, transforming active voice into passive voice, supplying appropriate endings for given utterances).
- **Speaking Skills** — minimal or complex conversation and fluency of expression, depending on the stage at which the assessment takes place. This objective requires the use of specific teaching materials: static visual materials (photographs, posters, product presentation materials) or the viewing of documentaries, films, or short dramatic scenes. Additional tasks may include the commentary of a text (presenting the main theme, sequencing of events, identification of key ideas, and summarising) or the response to a given statement (with justification), as well as written text composition.

4. Discussion

By way of illustration, we present an activity that took place towards the end of the preparatory year, involving a group in which the majority of students were native Arabic speakers. At the end of a class held on a Muslim holiday — an occasion we acknowledged during the lesson — we took the learners to a park and asked them to write a short text about the day's lesson. It should be noted that the participants had begun the preparatory year at four different points in time: the 1st of October, the end of October, the middle of November, and the beginning of February. Below we present several instances in which errors attributable to the learners' native language or to the transfer language — in this case, English — can be observed: the substitution of *a* for *ă*; the use of an incorrect adjectival form; the use of the singular form in place of the plural; the placement of the adjective before the noun; the omission of the article preceding the possessive adjective; and the omission of the reflexive pronoun. The

following learner-produced examples are illustrative of these phenomena: (*Astazi a fost lecția foarte bun și am simțit fericit pentru că am vorbit despre sărbători./....mult oamenii sunt aici pentru plimbare./....vorbit despre foarte frumoasă sărbătoare/Am făcut foarte frumoase poze/Colege mele sunt foarte bine și foarte draguțe/Acest oraș este calm și are mulți spații verde/Am prietene nouă și abia aștept următorii ani*). We consider all of the aforementioned errors to be a natural occurrence, given both the relatively short period of RFL study and the influence of the learners' native language or transfer language.

5. Conclusions

We may consider that periodic assessments are highly beneficial for both teachers and learners enrolled in the preparatory year. The primary argument in support of this claim lies in the intensive nature of the course, which necessitates a considerably more frequent measurement of acquisition and progress compared to courses extending over a longer period of time. As noted above, due to objective circumstances, some learners arrive later and find it difficult to catch up, while the teacher faces the considerable challenge of working with multiple proficiency levels within a single group. Our experience indicates that at any given point, a group may comprise as many as four, five, or even six distinct proficiency levels, depending on the stage at which each learner joined the preparatory year. Consequently, learners who begin their study of RFL at a later date are required to assimilate a greater volume of information within a shorter period of time, compared to those who arrive in Romania at the beginning of the academic year. Periodic assessments determine, to a considerable extent, the direction of instruction at any given stage of the RFL course for foreign learners. The preparatory year will always be a distinctive academic experience, and as suggested by our chosen motto, we believe that periodic assessments constitute an important indicator in the teaching of Romanian as a Foreign Language.

6. References

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Abbreviations:

RFL – Romanian as a Foreign Language