



Intercultural Approaches in Teaching Romanian as a Foreign Language: From Structural Knowledge to Social Competence

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Abstract: This article explores the need for an intercultural paradigm in teaching Romanian as a foreign language (RFL), highlighting the limitations of structuralist approaches that focus solely on grammar and vocabulary. The study argues that linguistic accuracy, when detached from social and cultural context, produces learners who are formally correct but communicatively fragile. By examining recent theoretical frameworks and practical strategies, the article proposes a shift toward intercultural competence as a core objective in language education. The author presents five key principles for curriculum transformation: continuous cultural infusion, the use of authentic materials, comparative cultural dialogue, metacognitive reflexivity, and holistic assessment. These principles aim to transform language learning into a socially relevant, reflective, and identity-forming process. The teacher is redefined not as a transmitter of rules, but as a cultural mediator who facilitates meaningful interaction and fosters empathy, critical thinking, and openness toward otherness. The study concludes that integrating interculturality into RFL teaching is not an optional innovation, but a pedagogical necessity in today's global academic landscape. This approach enables not only functional integration into Romanian society, but also contributes to reshaping Romanian cultural identity through pluralistic, dialogic practices.

Keywords: interculturality; language teaching; Romanian as a foreign language; cultural competence; language education

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The accelerated transformations of global society have radically transformed the way we look at language teaching. First of all, international mobility makes Romanian universities and educational institutions multicultural spaces, in which the Romanian language is a vehicle of integration, not just an object of study. Secondly, the current socio-professional dynamics presuppose real, interdisciplinary and intercultural interactions, which means that any language learning process must develop meaning-negotiating capacities, adaptability and cultural intelligence. Thirdly, language is no longer perceived as an isolated formal system, but as an instrument of social participation, and this perspective transforms the status of the teacher, the student and the curriculum as a whole (Council of Europe, 2000). Therefore, the teaching of the Romanian language as a foreign language cannot remain confined to a structuralist paradigm, but must be open to the identity and intercultural dimension that any language implies in the act of communication.

Recent studies confirm that didactic approaches focused exclusively on grammatical and lexical notions produce language users who are formally correct, but fragile from the perspective of managing social situations and cultural nuances (Obilișteanu & Niculescu, 2018). This dissociation between linguistic correctness and cultural appropriateness creates a gap between declared competences and competences that can actually be used in practice. Moreover, such an approach risks reducing language to an artificial code, with no roots in socio-cultural reality, which prevents the transfer of skills in real contexts. Consequently, the need to integrate the intercultural perspective is not a theoretical luxury, but a pedagogical imperative that derives from the realities of today's education.

This article demonstrates that teaching Romanian as a foreign language implies a paradigm shift: from the accumulation of information to the formation of authentic discursive practices. This change involves not only the modification of textbooks and teaching materials, but also the reconceptualization of the role of the Romanian language in education, seen as a means of access to identity, history and social space. In addition, by adopting an intercultural vision, language training becomes a reflective process that stimulates self-awareness and understanding of otherness — essential in a society marked by cultural plurality.

The idea that language represents a social practice and not just a system of abstract signs has major implications in didactics. First of all, the use of language is always contextualized, which means that meanings are not fixed, but negotiated through interaction, social status, intentions and power relations (Coșeriu, 1988). This implies that language learning must include authentic situations, not just prescribed

exercises. Secondly, language becomes a tool for constructing identity: speech, accent, linguistic registers reflect social belonging, but can also create symbolic barriers between cultural communities. Thirdly, language, once detached from the textbook, functions as a vehicle of cultural memory: texts, idiomatic expressions, metaphors, proverbs are carriers of collective values and representations, which the foreign learner cannot access without an adequate intercultural framework.

Intercultural competence is a multidimensional construct that integrates knowledge, skills, and attitudes (Dervin, 2010). First, it involves understanding cultural differences not as obstacles, but as communication resources, which changes the way social interactions are evaluated. Secondly, intercultural learning involves the development of cognitive and affective empathy: the learner not only knows rules of politeness, but understands the affective and symbolic logic behind them. Third, intercultural competence involves managing ambiguity and tolerating uncertainty—indispensable attributes in a flexible, mobile, and unpredictable world where cultural difference becomes the norm, not the exception. Consequently, without this dimension, communication is vulnerable: formally correct, but socially unusable.

Language teaching has evolved from a transmissive model to an interactive and relational one, oriented towards the construction of meaning. First, the structuralist paradigm—focused on rules, classifications, and repetitive exercises—favored declarative skills, ignoring the social dimensions of language. Secondly, the paradigm shift was driven by the global socio-economic context, which imposed the need for dialogic, transdisciplinary and reflective skills. Thirdly, the new paradigm states that language is not a closed entity, but a network of practices and interpretations, and linguistic training becomes inseparable from the cultural dimension that sustains it (ProDidactica, 2017). This conceptual shift forces educational systems to abandon the “teaching-assessment” logic and adopt models centered on learning, meaning and identity.

The role of the RLS teacher becomes multiple and transformative. First of all, it functions as a **cultural mediator**, capable of facilitating the transition of students from perceiving Romanian culture as an exotic phenomenon to understanding it as a coherent system of values, practices and symbols. This mediation implies not only knowledge of the language, but also the willingness to interpret mentalities, behaviors and social codes. Secondly, the teacher becomes a **trainer of reflective skills**, stimulating the learner’s ability to question their own biases and analyze cultural differences non-evaluatively. Thus, the process is not limited to accumulation, but becomes introspection and identity reconstruction. Thirdly, the

teacher becomes an **ethical actor** of intercultural education: he models dialogic behaviors, avoids cultural stereotypes and manages the tensions resulting from the contact between different norms (Schauer, 2024). Therefore, the teacher does not transmit information, but produces spaces for dialogue in which identity is negotiated and transformed.

The proposed model is structured around five dynamic principles:

1. Continuous cultural infusion eliminates the old conception that separated grammar from civilization. First of all, culture becomes a transversal element, present in any lesson, regardless of the linguistic objective. Secondly, this type of teaching transforms language into a contextualized phenomenon, avoiding the artificiality of textbooks that present structures without real situations. Thirdly, cultural infusion creates links between the learner's mental universe and the Romanian one, allowing not only the learning of the language, but also the internalization of cultural meanings.

2. Using authentic materials involves exposing learners to the real language, not to artificial versions created for textbooks. First of all, authentic materials develop pragmatic linguistic sensitivity and the ability to operate with registers, ironies, ambiguities and cultural allusions. Secondly, they allow the integration of multiple discursive identities — urban/rural, academic/colloquial, generational, etc. Thirdly, contact with the real language produces participation, not just reproduction, and the learner becomes a co-author of the meaning.

3. Comparative cultural dialogue puts the learner in the situation of interpreting differences without hierarchizing them. First, comparison reduces stereotypes and prejudices, as values become explainable, not exotic. Second, comparison develops metacultural thinking, helping learners reflect not only on each other's culture, but also on their own culture. Thirdly, this dialogue produces relational knowledge: the Romanian identity becomes intelligible through the mirroring in otherness.

4. Metacognitive reflexivity transforms the learning process into a critical act. First, intercultural diaries and self-assessments put learners in a position to explain what they understood and how. Second, reflexivity helps to become aware of one's own cognitive filters, which reduces cultural tensions. Third, this component produces intellectual autonomy—meanings are not given, but discovered.

5. Holistic assessment does not only quantify knowledge, but measures discursive transformations. First of all, the evaluation includes affective, attitudinal and ethical

dimensions. Secondly, the results can be seen in the ability to operate with diverse cultural norms. Third, this type of evaluation confirms that language is a process, not a product.

The implementation of the intercultural approach generates positive consequences at an educational, social and identity level. First of all, it produces functional learners, capable of actively participating in the Romanian context, interpreting social norms and avoiding cultural collisions. Second, this approach facilitates the emotional and symbolic integration of learners, reducing the sense of alienation specific to strangers in the early stages of learning. Thirdly, intercultural interaction produces new meanings, generating hybrid identities and innovative discursive practices, which contributes to the diversification of the Romanian cultural space.

However, there are structural challenges. First of all, the Romanian educational system does not yet have a coherent national strategy for the intercultural teaching of the Romanian language, which produces fragmentary practices. Secondly, teacher training remains insufficient: many teachers dominate the linguistic dimension, but not the intercultural one. Thirdly, the existing textbooks and materials are predominantly oriented towards normativity and correctness, not towards real communication situations, which limits the development of learners' autonomy.

Despite these difficulties, the opportunity is obvious. Romania is becoming an internationalized educational space, and Romanian universities attract students from multiple cultures. This reality requires a pedagogical mutation: the teaching of the Romanian language must reflect the complexity of the real world, not a static ideal. Interculturality, from a methodological perspective, is not an option, but a condition of educational relevance.

The study demonstrates that the teaching of the Romanian language as a foreign language cannot remain in the transmissive paradigm, but must adopt an intercultural vision. First of all, the Romanian language is not just a code, but a social practice that builds identities and meanings. Secondly, the teacher becomes a cultural mediator, responsible for managing otherness and creating dialogic learning spaces. Thirdly, intercultural competences are not additions, but constitutive dimensions of communication in contemporary society.

Therefore, the integration of interculturality in the teaching of Romanian as a foreign language is a strategic necessity, not just a didactic innovation. It transforms learning from a reproductive process into a creative, productive and reflective process. The article provides theoretical evidence and methodological directions for a real reform of language teaching, which can contribute to the repositioning of the Romanian

language in the international academic space and to the consolidation of its cultural identity.

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