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# Discrepancies between CLT Principles and the Romanian Language and Literature for Hungarian Minority Curriculum and Its Implementation

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**Abstract.** The study of the Romanian language and literature is a compulsory subject for students of Hungarian minority in Romania. However, the most effective language learning methods and paradigms take into account and exploit students' language awareness and linguistic repertoire. Such a didactic approach builds on students' language skills and teaches children to use their language resources through teaching situations embedded in everyday school life that focus on observing and comparing different languages. In recent years, there have been several attempts to bring about a paradigm shift in the teaching of the Romanian language and allow Hungarian students to learn Romanian as a foreign language. However, a significant shift can be observed between the levels and contents of the 4th- and 5th-grade textbooks, causing serious difficulties for 5th graders. Our study presents the initial stage of a textbook analysis. We examine the extent to which the available textbooks for the 5th grade follow the methodological changes in communicative and post-communicative language teaching and the extent to which they take advantage of the language opportunities provided by students' linguistic repertoire.

**Keywords:** CLT principles, Romanian language, Hungarian minority, curriculum, textbook

## 1. CLT: Method, paradigm, principles

Communicative language teaching (CLT) has become increasingly influential since its appearance as a methodology (Richards 2006). The Council of Europe has also played an important role in the introduction of the communicative approach in second and foreign language teaching by "promoting methodological innovations and new approaches to designing teaching programmes".[1]

Any language teaching and learning activity can be considered communicative if it motivates students to interact with each other in the target language. According to Richards (2006), communicative activities can include information gathering, task completion, information transfer, opinion sharing, reasoning, and role plays in the form of pair work or group work.

The fact that foreign language teaching has started to shift towards post-communicative language teaching proves that CLT is an innovative approach that still displays some weaknesses. Among these, we mention the following (cf. Nagy 2019: 130–131):

– CLT textbooks (for example, English teaching textbooks) – however appealing and interesting they may seem to be – have quite a lot of flaws as well, such as too many visual aids, which sometimes make pages rather chaotic and disorganized;

– little emphasis on language accuracy and more on appropriacy;

– no bilingual wordlists, mini-dictionaries, which are actually needed by learners;

– cultural aspects are quite out of reach and are often non-familiar, and thus sensitization towards interculturality is often false and artificial;

– replication of real-life situations is sometimes awkward;

– authentic texts are frequently uninteresting, dull and lack relevance from the viewpoint of learners in audio, audiovisual, and printed versions alike.

The post-communicative approach aims to correct these flaws of CLT by:

– presenting the forms of grammar and vocabulary: grammar still tends to be taught inductively, but grammar explanations should be based on contrastive and comparative approach;

– introducing task-based classroom activities, pair and group work, collaborative dialogue between learners, individual work with the Internet;

– reintroduction of mother tongue and translation tasks in the language classroom;

– the use of all good and effective teaching practices established in every previous approach that proved to be efficient;

– return of long forbidden techniques such as repetition or drilling in case of structures, as drills facilitate memorization, especially with adult learners;

1 https://www.coe.int/en/web/common-european-framework-reference-languages/level-descriptions.

– rehabilitation of essay writing, texts about cultural and intercultural issues and literature – (cf. Nagy 2019: 134, Molina et al. 2006: 27, Celce-Murcia 2014: 9, Erdei 2002: 48).

## 2. The communicative shift and the shortcomings of the communicative curriculum in teaching Romanian to Hungarians

The topic of teaching Romanian language to children of Hungarian minority is a controversial and much-debated topic among teachers, parents, and researchers involved in the process. Tódor (2020), for example, encourages teachers and teacher trainees to contemplate on the efficiency of the teaching-learning process of Romanian language in classes of national minorities, especially Hungarians. She uses the term "non-native language" for Romanian to highlight the complex situation of Hungarian minority language learners, emphasizing the fact that it has a different status from foreign languages. On the other hand, Pop (2020) points out the need to teach Romanian to Hungarian pupils as a second or a foreign language, given the social realities in areas where the majority of the population is of Hungarian origin.

The main principles and guidelines of teaching Romanian for the Hungarian minority are described in the Romanian language and literature curriculum for schools where the language of teaching for other subjects is Hungarian.[2] The most notable shift in the teaching of Romanian language to Hungarians came in 2012 when the new curriculum was issued for first-grade pupils. This new curriculum was meant to promote a functional approach to language teaching, based on the principles of communicative language teaching.

The methods and strategies used to implement such a course are those borrowed from modern language teaching. The curriculum is correlated with the European Language Portfolio, an instrument based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages.[3]

The curriculum states that learning the Romanian language as a second language of communication for the Hungarian minority begins at birth and continues throughout life, being the means of expressing thoughts, feelings, and personal experience.[4] However, in reality, the learning of Romanian for most children born in Hungarian families does not start at birth. Their first encounters

2 http://programe.ise.ro/Portals/1/Curriculum/2017progr/02Limba%20si%20literatura%20romana%20pentru%20minoritatea%20maghiara.pdf.

3 https://www.coe.int/en/web/common-european-framework-reference-languages.

4 http://programe.ise.ro/Portals/1/Curriculum/2017progr/02Limba%20si%20literatura%20romana%20pentru%20minoritatea%20maghiara.pdf.

with the official language may depend on the demographic and ethnic structure of the area where they live and the social relations of their family. A large number of children rarely hear Romanian until their first school years because in the family and among friends they hear and speak their mother tongue. In elementary school (the first five school years),[5] they study Romanian as a foreign language, starting with the development of the listening and speaking skills and building basic vocabulary and grammar knowledge in the first two years. Later, from the 2nd grade, basic (A1-) level development of the four main skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) follows. Starting with the 5th grade, the development of the communicative skills according to the children's language level and previous knowledge is suppressed by the study of theoretical knowledge related to language structures and literature. Children who barely reach A2 level when they start the 5th grade and who have serious difficulties in forming correct and acceptable sentences in Romanian are suddenly faced with texts that are not simplified and adapted to their level, containing a large amount of new vocabulary rarely used in current everyday language.

Some of the teaching principles enlisted in the national curriculum do not seem to be reflected in the textbooks and teaching practice. For example, the curriculum states that the interactive character of language acquisition should be emphasized, considering the imposition of the language approach not as an abstract system of signs but as a "working language", in its oral and written variants, as an instrument of expression and self-expression. In reality, students have to learn and understand theoretical concepts and definitions, facing a lack of listening comprehension practice and speaking opportunities. It is also stated that an active, playful practice of the language should be implemented. Textbooks do not seem to offer many ideas for such activities, which would not be a problem in itself because teachers could create, plan, and introduce them based on their group's level and interests. But in classes with large numbers (25-30) of learners the use of playful practice and games may be very difficult, often leading to chaos, therefore most teachers tend to avoid them. A creative capitalization of previous linguistic experiences would be expected, based on the curriculum, by designing didactic scenarios related to the capitalization of life experience and language knowledge, by developing linguistic sense and linguistic awareness. This may also be very challenging with large groups of learners because very little time can be dedicated to verbal interaction; therefore, it is mainly restricted to written tasks and homework, often done by students with the help of their family or the Internet, precisely because they lack the necessary "prior" linguistic experience.

The teaching principles state that in the constitution of meaning through reading a gradual familiarization with the text should be followed, starting from the global understanding of the text (the constitution of the global meaning) and

5 Prior to the first grade, there is a preparatory class in the Romanian educational system.

arriving at the analytical reading (the constitution of meaning at the lexical level). It is also stated that texts must comply with the following criteria: accessibility, attractiveness, formative character, adequacy to the age peculiarities and to the linguistic specificity of the students for whom Romanian is the non-native language.

Another mentioned didactic principle is the stimulation of linguistic consciousness, of metalinguistic and metacognitive thinking, by capitalizing on mother tongue acquisition based on the contrastive (comparative) approach of language and culture phenomena.

## 3. Textbook analysis

Our study was inspired by feedback received from parents and children regarding the difficulties they face in studying Romanian language in the fifth grade. This interview is the topic of another study; therefore, here we summarize only some of the main problems they described:

– The reading texts and the texts from different exercises contain too many unknown/new words and expressions.

– The explanations related to grammatical concepts and structures are too complex and difficult; students at this level find them very complicated and difficult to comprehend.

– Explanations and definitions are not always demonstrated with sufficient examples.

– Texts from literature are not adapted, simplified to the level of the students.

– Fifth graders learn notions of literary and communication theory, whereas they understand and speak the language on approximately pre-intermediate or intermediate (A2/B1) level.

– Children find learning Romanian difficult and frustrating compared to learning other languages (for example, English).

In search of answers to these problems, in this study we propose to analyse the first two chapters from two accredited textbooks published for the 5th grade, also examining the way in which CLT principles are applied:

1) Maxim Andreia-Nicoleta, Kibédi Nemes Ildikó, Militar Adela, Bărbos Liana-Cecilia. 2017. *Limba şi literatura română pentru şcolile şi secțiile cu predare în limba maghiară. Manual pentru clasa a V-a*. Bucharest: Editura Corint. (Textbook A – TA)

2) Hedwig Bartolf. 2017. *Limba şi literatura română pentru şcolile şi secțiile cu predare în limba maghiară. Clasa a V-a*. Deva: Editura Corvin. (Textbook B – TB)

Our analysis is based on the following viewpoints: application of CLT principles, age characteristics, and methodological aspects.

### 3.1. First exercises of the textbooks, first impressions

In Romania, children in the fifth grade start studying subjects with different teachers, and this brings significant changes for Hungarian students in studying Romanian language as well. Therefore, a revision or introductory unit, or at least some speaking activities related to finding out more about their classmates and the new teacher would be definitely welcome. TA, however, starts with a sudden dive into the world of Romanian literature. TB starts with three speaking exercises related to mountains, which contain questions about students' opinion and preferences related to their country, travelling, and holiday. These exercises involve group discussions and group work, descriptions of different pictures, expressing opinions and giving arguments. The CLT principles are definitely better followed in TB, and they offer more possibilities for using the language related to everyday life and topics than the introductory exercises in TA.

### 3.2. Literary texts

Both textbooks contain literary texts and numerous exercises based on them and theory related to the characteristics of literary and non-literary texts.

#### *3.2.1. The pre-reading tasks*

The first unit of TA starts with reading exercises related to a literary text. The first, rather simplistic pre-reading task (*Imagine a story that begins like this: One morning, after waking up, the child discovered that all the objects around him were talking. Suddenly...*) might be more efficient from a communicative viewpoint if it were personalized, such as *I woke up/I discovered*.

The first literary text in TB is in the second unit. Pre-reading tasks in TB rely on students' personal experience, by asking them to talk about domestic animals that live in the countryside and recognize different cereals and talk about them in groups. The pre-reading activities rely on communicative principles of language teaching based on integrated skills. They include a listening task (a fragment from the reading text to come, *Păcală* by Ion Creangă) combined with two vocabulary exercises and an oral communication exercise. The level of difficulty is gradually increasing.

#### *3.2.2. The reading tasks*

In TA, the literary text is an extract from the story *Băiet sărac* 'Poor Boy' by Ioan Slavici, and in TB the text is *Păcală*, an anecdote by Ion Creangă.

The literary text to be covered in TA is longer than the text in TB, and it contains more unknown vocabulary. The number of archaic words is significant though

the story may work due to its message (the role of bravery and faith in good). The text is only a fragment from the original text signed by Slavici, and because of its difficulty, it should have been tailored to pupils' skills and needs. Adapting literary texts for didactic purposes is nevertheless seldom used by textbook writers though the simplification of the text and some stylistic refashioning would have been permitted and welcome.

**Table 1.** *Example 1*

| | |
|---|---|
| „Ajungând la codrul de al şaptelea, unde se sfârşea împărăția bosoarcei, mânzul cel răpciugos se scutură o dată şi pe nesimțite se prefăcu într-un frumos cal înaripat, cum nici mai înainte de aceea, nici după aceea n-a mai fost altul." (Maxim et al. 2017: 13) | 'Arriving at the seventh forest, where the kingdom of the witch ended, the wicked colt shook himself once and suddenly turned into a beautiful winged horse, like no other before or since.' |

Such a text seems rather difficult to decode, as some terms such as *bosoarca* 'witch' and *răpciugios* 'wicked' are dialectal terms, very rarely used these days and not part of the lexical inventory 5th-grader pupils need. An adapted and simplified version of the same fragment, which would probably make the reading more enjoyable, would look like:

**Table 2.** *Example 2*

| | |
|---|---|
| Ajungând la codrul de al şaptelea, unde se sfârşea împărăția bosoarcei (boszorkány), mânzul (csikó) se scutură o dată şi se transforma într-un frumos cal cu aripi. | Arriving at the seventh forest, where the kingdom of the witch ended, the colt shook once and turned into a beautiful winged horse. |

Archaic and dialectal lexical units are perceived as very difficult to deal with, therefore their usage should be restricted in the 5th grade. In case their presence is absolutely necessary, a proper translation in the mother tongue within the body of the text would make the message clearer.

The vocabulary of the text is provided at the end of the lesson only under the form of a monolingual word list though a bilingual Romanian–Hungarian glossary of new lexemes would have been more useful.

The literary text in TB is shorter, and though it belongs to the same literary epoch as the text from TA, it displays fewer vocabulary problems. It contains archaic and dialectal units (*păpuşoi* 'corn', *iaca* 'here it is', *aista* 'this', *bucate*

'dishes', *terciu* 'porridge', *fert* 'boiled', *văleu* 'alas') as well, but the reading task is followed by an exercise that is meant to make pupils understand the difference between standard and sociolectal versions of words.

### *3.2.3. Post-reading tasks*

The literary text in TA is followed by 15 diverse exercises (matching words with their definitions, true/false, fill in the sentences, summarize, retell, question/answer, continue the story). One non-communicative feature is that most of these exercises rely on writing (write a paragraph, write a short text, bring arguments in writing).

The authors of this textbook have designed a set of exercises that hardly take into account the age characteristics, the specific level of spiritual and social maturity of the students, using quite often language and style that is not appropriate for the age of the Hungarian students aiming to learn a foreign language.

One such example is the exercise that asks students to select from the given list the main meaning they associate with the text and justify their answers in a text of 30–50 words (page 15, Exercise 2). The list of characteristics contains a series of Romanian words Hungarian pupils might have difficulty with (e.g. *senzațional* 'sensational', *amuzant* 'funny', *emoționant* 'touching', *instructive* 'instructive'), which raises doubts regarding the motivational power of an exercise like this.

The lesson displays a remarkable amount of information related to literary theory embedded in texts with a series of unfamiliar words not suitable for the age group.

**Table 3.** *Example 3*

| | |
|---|---|
| „Literatura înseamnă şi invenție, plăsmuire, adică ficțiune. Scriitorul inventează o altă lume care este inspirată din realitate. Aşadar, autorul se inspiră din realitate, dar nu o copiază. El selectează elemente din lumea reală şi le îmbină după propria sensibilitate pentru a transmite idei, gânduri şi sentimente. (…)" (Maxim et al. 2017: 16). | 'Literature is also invention, i.e. fiction. The writer invents another world that is inspired by reality. So, the author is inspired by reality but does not copy it. He selects elements from the real world and combines them according to his own sensibility to convey ideas, thoughts and feelings (…)' |

The principle of transdisciplinarity is also neglected here as such elements of literary theory are included in the Romanian lesson, without having studied these concepts in the mother tongue. These concepts are also inserted in highly

non-communicative tasks such as Exercise 6 on page 16, in which pupils are asked to read some statements implying concepts of literary theory and decide whether they are true or false such as: *textul reflectă realitatea, precum ştiința* 'the text reflects reality, like science'; *textul are scopul de a sensibiliza cititorul* 'the text is intended to make the reader aware'.

One peculiarly unsuitable exercise is nr. 7 on page 16, which literally asks some 5th grader minority pupils struggling to get acquainted with the Romanian lexicon to transcribe two terms that are spatial indices (*Transcrie doi termeni care constituie indici de spațiu*). An instruction like this makes us wonder why they did not use instead a speech act like: *Găsiți în text cuvintele care se referă la locul acțiunii* 'Find the words in the text that refer to the place of the action'.

The pompous fragments regarding literary theory and stylistics are followed by more theory based on Roman Jakobson's drainpipe model of communication.

In TB, the literary text is followed by 20 exercises, among which there are pronunciation exercises, vocabulary exercises (fill in, find the plural of nouns, find the synonyms, find the antonyms, make up sentences, etc.), and classical reading comprehension tasks (multiple choice, find the mistake, summarize, true/false, role play based on the text, dramatization, etc.). The last two exercises also focus on students' evaluation of the text and their personal opinion on the usefulness of reading Romanian tales. One exercise integrates listening skills as well (listen to the full text of the tale), and for most of the exercises organization tips are provided (individual work, pair work, group work).

### 3.3. Further reading

In TA, the literary text proposed for further reading is Mircea Sântimbreanu's *Poştaşul* 'The Postman', while in TB it is *Boierul şi Păcală* 'The Boyar and Păcală' by Ioan Slavici.

In TA, all the exercises that accompany this short fragment are meant to practise the theoretical information presented previously. Most of these exercises are themselves rather theoretical.

**Table 4.** *Example 4*

| | |
|---|---|
| "Precizează cele patru elemente ale comunicării pe care le identifici în următoarea secvență: – Nu-i nimic, Lică, zisei, uite un leu. Te duci la Alimentara şi iei halva pentru vrabie. Nu-i aşa?" (Maxim et al. 2017: 21) | 'Specify the four elements of communication that you identify in the following sequence: "It's nothing," Lică, said [s/he], "here's a coin. You go to the Alimentara and get the halva for the sparrow. Isn't that right?"' |

There are two assignments following the principles of CLT, namely a dramatization exercise and a role-play (continue the dialogue). The text has only one illustration, whereas the first text has two illustrations.

In TB, the exercises accompanying the second literary text follow the same pattern as the previous set of exercises – there are pronunciation exercises, vocabulary exercises (fill in, find the plural of nouns, find the synonyms, find the antonyms, make up sentences, etc.), and classical reading comprehension tasks (multiple choice, find the mistake, summarize, true/false, role-play based on the text, dramatization, etc.).

The students' social surrounding is replicated with the help of two exercises, which ask them to write an email (fill in) and an SMS (invite Păcală to dinner). Role-plays and dialogues are also exploited. Intercultural elements are present in Exercise 49 on page 39, which asks students to find similar characters in Hungarian tales. The practising of different past tenses and conditional structures follow the onomasiological approach (Exercise 50 on page 39).

The literary theory fragment is short and selects the most important items of information, focusing only on the concept of literary character (definition, classification). The information is further applied to the main character from the text they have just read, in the form of a post-reading discussion about what kind of character Păcală really is.

After the first non-literary text, some additional information is provided regarding the text typology, but these theoretical elements are also replicated in exercises and discussions that do not exceed students' level of linguistic competence and age characteristics.

We believe that understanding concepts of literary and communication theory can be very strenuous and frustrating for pre-intermediate or intermediate language learners at the age of 11–12. They should study and understand these concepts in their native language, presented with a more interesting, playful, communicative approach, and not in a second language.

### 3.4. Non-literary texts

In TA, the first non-literary reading text is in the second unit, which is a text adapted from a blog related to animals: *Bucefal, un cal demn pentru Alexandru cel Mare*[6] 'Bucephalus, a horse worthy of Alexander the Great'. There is one pre-reading exercise, asking students whether friendship is possible between humans and animals. It is not specified if this question should be discussed in pairs, groups, or the whole class.

The text relates the story of how the young Alexander the Great managed to tame Bucephalus, a horse that nobody else managed to master. It would be an

6 https://blog.pentruanimale.ro/bucefal-un-cal-demn-de-alexandru-cel-mare/.

interesting story to read for 11–12-year-old children, but there are too many possibly unknown words that can make the reading experience frustrating (words such as *străvechi* 'ancient', *călăreț* 'horseman', *şa* 'saddle', *a stăpâni (un cal)* 'master (a horse)', *aprig* 'fierce', *încrezător* 'confident', *nesăbuire* 'recklessness', *pariu* 'bet', *prinsoare* 'catch', *da dovadă* 'prove', *căpăstru* 'halter', *blândețe* 'gentleness', *armăsar* 'stallion', *elimina* 'eliminate', *încordat* 'tense', *răsuflare* 'breath', *măreție* 'greatness').

There are nine exercises related to the text, three of which are vocabulary exercises where students are asked to search the meaning of some of the above-mentioned words in dictionaries, write sentences with them, and fill in the gaps with the given expressions from the text. Such exercises are useful in practising and memorizing new vocabulary items and can be found in many communicative language textbooks. These are followed by two comprehension check exercises (answer the questions, fill in) related to the text and three exercises that focus on theoretical issues related to the differences between literary and non-literary texts. One of these is particularly difficult although introduced as a playful activity, asking students to compare the literary text *Poor boy* and the text *Bucephalus, a horse worthy of Alexander the Great* using a chart:

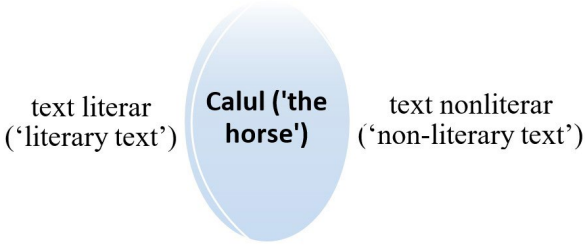



**Figure 1.** *Comparing literary and non-literary texts*

The last exercise is a writing task, asking students to give arguments why they should remember this story, which they also have to present in front of the class. For this, students need to understand the global meaning and the message of the text, and also be creative in expressing their opinion.

The language and wordings of the instructions of most exercises are complicated, and it may be difficult for students to understand what they are asked to do.

In TB, there are three speaking exercises and three listening exercises that serve as pre-reading tasks, because they are all related to the topic or the text itself. All these exercises follow the principles of CLT, but one of the problems is again the level of difficulty of the reading text, which contains a large number of vocabulary items related to mountains, geography, and hiking. Children who are unfamiliar with this type of activity may not know them (e.g. *ienuper/jneapăn*

'juniper', *şa* 'saddle', *chei* 'gorge', *împrejurimi* 'surroundings', *ochi de mare* 'lake', *mare de pietre* 'sea of stones', *vale glaciară* 'glacial valley', *pragul glaciar* 'glacier threshold', *regiunea alpină* 'alpine region', *trepte glaciare* 'glacial steps'). The other issue may be the topic itself because not everyone (especially children) is interested in planning hiking trips.

There is also a monolingual vocabulary after the text and ten various short vocabulary, spelling, and pronunciation exercises related to the new words. These are followed by two comprehension check exercises (multiple choice, answer the questions) and creative exercises related to planning trips (what objects, equipment, and food students would take on a hiking trip). Nineteen other exercises follow, all related to vocabulary and activities related to hiking and geography, some of them interactive, encouraging discussions, pair work and group work.

This unit contains two other texts related to mountains and mountaineering: one of them is the story of an expedition to Mount Everest and the other a text about the Ice Castle at Bâlea Lake, a popular tourist attraction in Romania. Altogether, there are 83 short exercises connected to the topic, practising and developing various skills. The language and wordings of the instructions of all the exercises are simple and easily understandable. At the end of the unit, there is also a short test related mainly to the new vocabulary introduced in this unit.

Comparing the use of non-literary texts and the related exercises in the first two units of the two textbooks, we can conclude that TB follows more closely the CLT principles. The texts are more interesting and inspiring, the exercises more diverse, and the instructions more understandable for fifth graders. The new vocabulary is more thoroughly practised, interactivity and creativity are encouraged, the illustrations are more inspiring, colourful and diverse, and the pages are less crowded. There is less theory related to characteristics of literary and non-literary texts and less exercises related to theoretical concepts. Based on our observations, the texts and tasks in this book suit better the needs and level of the students.

### 3.5. Listening tasks

In the first unit of TB, there are three listening exercises related to the topic of planning a trip and hiking in the mountains. In the first one, students listen to a text they will later read, but this time without seeing and reading it, and they have to identify from a list of words the ones that can be heard in the recording. Then, while listening again, they have to write down the mentioned numbers. In the third task, they have to choose from pairs of expressions the ones they could hear in the recording. The other two recordings of this unit contain the other two reading texts – in each case, the students first listen to the recording, do one or two related exercises, and then read the text. The same voice reads the texts, which is rather monotonous. In the second unit, there are two listening exercises for

pronunciation practice, and again all the reading texts are recorded, and there are exercises based on listening to them as well. The same monotonous voice reads these texts as well, which makes the listening activities a less authentic experience.

In TA, there are no exercises based on listening. Some of the reading texts are recorded, but there are no tasks based on listening to them.

### 3.6. Videos

Both textbooks have digital versions as well and video materials. However, the videos from TA and some of those from TB may seem strange to children because most of them are in fact audio recordings of the reading texts or explanations of theoretical concepts related to literary and non-literary texts or grammatical structures. This means that the children are looking at still images and written definitions while listening to a voice reading or explaining something. Children who are used to watching real films, scenes, and animations in other language classes (for example, in the digital version of their English textbook) may find these videos strange and boring, and not authentic at all.

### 3.7. Intercultural elements

In TA, intercultural elements are discussed separately in a subunit, and they are introduced based on reading another literary text – this time, two short fragments taken from the tale *Şoricelul cel bun la suflet* 'The little good mouse' by Marie-Catherine de Jumel de Bernaville, translated into Romanian.

The pre-reading exercise consists of a question asking students what super power they would like to have and why. This is followed by a multiple-choice question referring back to *Poor boy*, asking which of his characteristics helped him to overcome the difficulties he faced. After reading the texts, there are exercises related to describing the main characters and comparing the extracts from the studied literary works also with similar texts from Hungarian literature. The last exercise from this subunit is a game aiming to develop students' vocabulary, creativity, and ability to work in a team, but not intercultural competence.

The subunit dedicated to intercultural elements from the second unit of TA focuses on comparing three films, based on writings from Romanian, Hungarian, and American literature. This subunit does not focus on developing intercultural communication, but instead they focus mainly on comparing literary works from different countries.

In TB, very few cultural and intercultural elements can be found in the first two units, and they are not discussed in separate subunits.

### 3.8. Grammar

In the first two chapters of TA, the main grammar focus is on Romanian phonetics. The amount of theoretical information is tremendous and complicated:

**Table 5.** *Example 5*

| | |
|---|---|
| „De obicei, cuvintele terminate în consoană sunt accentuate pe ultima silabă (felinàr), iar cuvintele terminate în vocală sunt accentuate pe silaba penultimă (feméie). Atunci când ultimul sunet al cuvântului este *a* (cu excepția cazurilor în care *a* este articol, ca în casa), accentul cade pe ultima silabă (musacà, tremurà). Cuvintele accentuate pe silaba antepenultimă sunt mai puțin frecvente, iar cele accentuate pe cea de-a patra silabă începând de la cea finală sunt extrem de rare: vèveriță.” (Maxim et al. 2017: 28) | ‘Words ending in a consonant are usually stressed on the last syllable (*felinàr*), and words ending in a vowel are stressed on the penultimate syllable (*feméie*). When the last sound of the word is *a* (unless *a* is an article, as in *casa*), the stress falls on the last syllable (*musacà*, *tremurà*). Words stressed on the antepenultimate syllable are less frequent, and those stressed on the fourth syllable from the final syllable are extremely rare: *vèveriță*.’ |

The exercises focus on ordering, selecting words that contain certain sounds, pronouncing words, etc.

In the first chapters of TB, the grammar items that are practised are related to the plural of nouns, present and past tenses, synonyms and antonyms, and, most importantly, elements of the Romanian sound system. TB replaces the old semasiological approach (name, concept>>object, meaning) with an onomasiological approach (object, meaning>>name, concept), as grammar explanations are completely absent, and elements of phonetics and morphology are dissipated in exercises of the following type: copy the words containing the groups *ge/gi*, find the nouns, recognize the singular/plural forms, provide the plural of the nouns, etc. What seems a rather non-communicative approach is the integration of grammar exercises among post-reading tasks, in the sense of asking pupils to put different past structures into other two past tenses and do further *if clause* exercises though no explanation is provided regarding any of these grammar items. The curriculum for 3rd and 4th graders does not include the teaching of these tenses, nor does it include any conditional structures. What is even more surprising is that these curricula referring to the previous two years of study permit reference to morphological or syntactic issues only by intuition, strictly forbidding overt usage

of grammar terminology. The textbook for the 5th graders, nevertheless, displays a lot of grammar-related terminology, as if all these items had been studied by pupils before: asking pupils to transform structures according to the model presupposes that they are familiar with aspects of verb conjugation, which they are not.

## 4. Conclusions

Teaching Romanian to minority students should be based on post-communicative principles. However, as our study shows, the textbooks published and accredited often fail to respect them.

Authentic texts are not always the best option to introduce lexis or grammar. Authenticity is not equal to appropriateness or pedagogical relevance, therefore text selection in Romanian textbooks should also include texts adapted to or constructed for didactic purposes.

Appropriacy cannot replace accuracy, as relying on appropriacy only may end up in not teaching enough lexis for later real-life communication. What is more, focusing on appropriacy may lead to problems in the sense that exams and tests usually measure accuracy, which is of secondary importance in classroom situations. The over-generalization of appropriacy does not solve the paradox that children need words and rules for communication, not instructions in strategies for communication.

Replacing traditional grammar categories and the focus on structures with teaching of functions and the pragmatic approach to language may prove to be a dead-end in a couple of years. Functional categories around which textbooks are built may be too abstract, and sometimes it is difficult to establish what to teach: functions without vocabulary are not better than grammar structures without vocabulary. Efficient language teaching should combine communicative teaching with focus-on-form teaching. Simply replacing the teaching of rules of grammar with the teaching of rules of communication is not a solution. Romanian textbooks are filled with theoretical notions related to literary theory or theory of communication. These explanations are quite long and teach notions that are useless for 11-year-old pupils. Is it more useful to learn information about the Saussurean communicative theory or notions related to text typology and literary theory at the expense of teaching grammar structures?

It is questionable whether the focus on pragmatic concepts such as *utterance* or *structure* instead of using morpho-syntactic structures such as *sentence* or *word* will further students' knowledge of Romanian.

Transdisciplinarity is another principle that fails to be implemented, in the sense that the teaching of Romanian language should be harmonized and coordinated with topics taught in pupils' mother tongue.

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