The Challenge of Adapting the Way of Teaching Romanian as a Foreign Language to the New Generations' Learning Styles

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ABSTRACT: The development of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages determined the creation of a general system for the assessment of language skills in the teaching and assessment process of a native or non-native language, which blurred the linguistic and cultural features of the language in the process of language acquisition. Thus, in language teaching, one could observe some general trends, at the European level, such as: highlighting the relation between the culture and civilization that is being studied to one's own national culture, but also to other known cultures; the diversification of academic strategies by combining traditional and modern methods; diversifying the forms of assessment of foreign language learning through complementary methods; the use of new information and communication technologies in the process of teaching - learning - assessment focusing on the needs, interests, capabilities and skills of the learner.

KEYWORDS: teaching, gen Z, millennials, language, linguistics, academic

The article at hand explores this new learning context, in which the entire educational system should be adapted to the needs and requirements of a generation of young people who will face the economic and social challenges of an era filled with digital technology and artificial intelligence. The art of teaching Romanian as a foreign language belongs to the field of modern linguistics intended for non-native speakers. The theoretical elements from which we started our approach were provided by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, most recognizably socio-educational studies regarding the changing generations in the education system by the new academics of the Romanian language and literature (Sâmihăean 2014) in the field of RLS.

The activity of an educator always invokes an interaction between two generations: that of the educator and that of the educated, the purpose of learning being twofold. Teachers happen onto many challenges, such as teaching a generation of digital natives, combining traditional teaching-learning-assessment strategies with those of modern language academics, which are based on the training and development of language skills, from A1 level (beginner) to level C2 (professional), according to CECRL (2003).

Generational changes have prompted researchers from various fields, especially those in the field of sociology. Howe and Strauss did an extensive analysis of the generational changes that occur every 20 years as each generation reaches adulthood. The recent generational changes and, promptly speaking, differences have attracted the attention of many researchers in a variety of fields, most importantly in that of sociology. Howe and Strauss did an extensive analysis of the generational changes that occur every 20 years as each generation reaches adulthood, study that can find paramount in understanding the subject. Howe N. & Strauss have coined the term "Millennial Generation" in 1991 while also furthering the academic knowledge in the generational differences field.

Generation Y or "Millennials" (1980-1996) has become the subject of many specialized studies, which start from the characteristics attributed to them. Sociology studies established a personality profile for them: sociable, irresponsible, narcissistic, inattentive to rules and processes, they get bored quickly and have constant need for stimulation and variety. In

addition, we must take into account the fact that they are unstable and emotionally fragile, being called by Claire Fox the "Snowflake Generation" (Millennials@ Work 2016) .

Generation Z (1997-2012) is considered a digitally native generation because they use social media platforms very well and live in a virtually connected world. Scientific research has shown that there are changes in the brain, being structured differently to respond to the new reality. The main challenge in today's academic filed is to make the transition from traditional teaching-learning-evaluation strategies to other teaching methods that can stimulate the interest, imagination and creativity of this generation.

The phrases "Digital Natives" and "Digital Immigrants" belong to Prensky, when in 2001, at a conference, he argued that teachers (digital immigrants) must strive to find new teaching strategies to adapt to the demands of learning of digital natives (Prensky 2001). If in 2001, he believed that educators should change and accept the challenge of new technologies, in 2009, he qualifies his position and says that their role is to show "digital savvy". A mutually beneficial partnership between the teaching staff and the student is mandatory in order to more efficiently achieve the process of language acquisition. Traditional teaching methods have been dethroned in favor of a whole new array of approaches all centered around active learning using many instruments such as project based learning (Prensky 2001, 1-11).

Generation Z, called by Tapscott (2008) the "Net Generation", share values such as: freedom and integrity, which drives collaboration and speed of reaction, being accustomed to rapid changes, which makes digital natives constantly expect to innovations, the desire to choose the right way of life or work. At the same time, they are familiar with multiple choices, leading to detailed investigations in selecting information. Also, any work must involve a fun and interactive side. The author of the study finds, however, that these young people have better visual acuity and spatial orientation, but poorer memory and lower ability to focus attention.

An important name comes to mind when arguing about how the digital era has impacted the teaching sphere of influence. Bennet et al. (2008) invokes in his studies that most young pupils have access to new technology. However, according to him, they only use such instruments for video-editing, e-mailing and other recreational purposes, notwithstanding the fact that they could be used for far more intellectually profitable activities. The teacher, since its' genesis, has become more to the student than a mere information database. A teacher can be a mentor, a pseudo-parent, a guide through the world's infinite crossroads. Perhaps now is the time when the teacher should take upon itself the duty of training his pupils on how to use our era's digital vastness in order to profit their academic development without hindering themselves to useless information and recreational activities.

Lately, native or non-native language didactic studies lead a unitary linguistic policy, coherent at the European level. Efforts have been made to provide a scientific basis for this field of research. Modern perspectives on knowledge and the impact with new media technologies have also had consequences on the aims and contents of teaching-learning-assessment of LRS. The purpose of this discipline coincides with the global aims of education, which has a personal role (to develop individual talents and sensitivities), a cultural role (to understand the world in which one develops) and an economic role (to form the skills necessary for winning existence) (Robinson 2011). Specialized studies in the field of educational policies generally refer to several models (Rotaru 2021a, 87-92), which we will mention below.

In the Report for UNESCO, 1996, Delors proposes "the model of the 4 pillars of education": learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together, learning to be. In 2001, this model was added to the one proposed by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFRL), which aims at four areas of knowledge competence, skills, existential competence, and ability to learn.

In 2010, Prenski would develop another model, according to the principles expressed in his studies, through which he emphasized the need to adapt to the needs of the 21st century generation, which must develop a series of metacognitive skills, essential for the century in which we live. He draws attention to the fact that the new generations live in a different horizon and at a different pace, which education should take into account (digital natives vs digital immigrants).

The goal is to be able to follow your passions as much as your own abilities allow. For the 21st century, it mentions the following essential meta-skills: critical thinking, planned action, interactive collaboration using technology and artificial intelligence, creative and long-term thinking, prudent risk-taking, and continuous improvement through study.

The three models do not differ much from each other and are in line with the language policies of the Council of Europe – the development of plurilingualism, through the formation of communication skills in a coherent framework, where students can capitalize on all linguistic and cultural experiences (Sâmihăian 2014, 26).

The current trends in learning a native or non-native language are to find integrative models that rely on the development of communication and cultural skills. The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (2001) defines this discipline, describes the practices of language teaching, learning, assessment, establishing a common basis for assessment. The paradigm of studying Romanian as a foreign language is communicative-utilitarian (see Ongstad et al. 2004) because it defines communication as the transmission of messages, and its purpose is to prepare the student for a certain career and for permanent education ("learning to learn"). It has become an indispensable tool for teachers who create textbooks, various teaching materials or assessment tests or who want to organize and plan curriculum activity.

One of the main challenges in learning Romanian as a foreign language is adapting to the individual needs of students. Each student has his own learning style, preferences and interests, and the teaching of the Romanian language must take into account all these aspects. It is also important to provide a variety of teaching resources and materials, such as textbooks, online exercises or mobile apps, so that they can choose the learning method that suits them best. In addition, the development of digital technology and new communication media has created new opportunities in language teaching. For example, the use of online platforms and mobile applications can improve the accessibility and interactivity of learning the Romanian language. Also, machine translation tools can be useful to facilitate the process of learning Romanian vocabulary and grammar, but students are not encouraged to rely on them or abuse them. Technology can also be a valuable tool in building receptive skills for today's youth. For example, students can be encouraged to use language learning apps, participate in webinars or listen to podcasts in Romanian. These resources can provide additional opportunities for practice and exposure to the language. Its use leads to: maintaining interest through varied and short-term activities, using modern communication techniques, games, images and even activities outside the classroom space; avoiding overloading with new elements; offering easy-to-understand language elements, along with supporting audio and video materials: images, objects, songs, gestures, mimicry); creating a friendly and relaxing learning environment (Platon, Burlacu, and Sonea 2011, 33).

Modern didactics try to bring some changes in terms of objectives and teaching methods. The main objective is to get students to maintain their motivation throughout the learning process. The teacher must resort to active methods, always find attractive topics that arouse the interest of the students; it is he who gives students suggestions, teaches them to notice certain details, construct statements, organize them, urges them to be creative, to use all their previously learned knowledge and put it into application. He must discover their potential and encourage them to prepare them for communication (oral and written) in Romanian, for various academic purposes or for personal use (Rotaru 2021b, 190-196). One

of the modern perspectives, adapted to the new generations, is the communicative one of teaching the Romanian language as a foreign language, which requires a contextualized learning of language facts, because the purpose of learning is to understand and produce an oral and/or written message. The teacher must know how to combine theory with practice, considering the fact that the student will be able to correctly use all the notions acquired in the Romanian language courses. In this context, teachers, most of whom are "Digital Immigrants", are forced to constantly adapt to the challenges of contemporary society. The success of the process of teaching, learning and evaluating the Romanian language as a foreign language will largely depend on the effective implementation of modern learning strategies and methods, through technology and digital resources, which are an integral part of the lives of new generations.

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