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Newsletter

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The RSAA Newsletter is published twice a year.

RSAA YEAR BOOK: Dr. Paul Teodorescu, Editor in Chief
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REMINDER: All RSAA members who have changed their mailing address and institutional affiliation, or who now also have an e-mail address, are kindly requested to update these data by contacting the editor. He is also collecting the dues (\$10.00) for 2001: please send him your checks (payable to RSAA) as soon as possible!

EDITOR'S NOTE

The new and improved version of the RSAA Newsletter has been made possible through the generous financial support of the Center for Slavic, Eurasian, and East European Studies of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. The funds needed for the production of this newsletter have been provided from the Center's Title VI budget allocated by the U.S. Department of Education.

I would like to reiterate and strongly encourage my invitation that every one of our readers send in materials concerning their current work and research (presentations of events relevant to Romanian studies, work in progress, books recently published or in print, shorter scholarly papers or their abstracts, academic initiatives, etc.). Their publication in the Newsletter will faithfully mirror the rich and diverse preoccupations of the RSAA members and, at the same time, may turn this periodical into a forum of frank and constructive discussion to the benefit of all. So far, I have had to face a disarming scarcity of materials to include in the newsletter. I hope to be able, with your help, to fill the pages of the next issue with interesting readings. Therefore I appeal to you to send me such materials. Please accept this challenging invitation!

Season's Greetings! La multi ani!

Nicolae Harsanyi
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

RSAA on the Web

<http://www.uwo.ca/modlang/RSAA/index.html>

Since the beginning of 1999, thanks to Professor Călin-Aureliu Mihăilescu, RSAA has a home page maintained at the University of Western Ontario. You can have easy access to the RSAA by-laws, to the panels at the MLA conventions in Chicago (1999), as well as to past and present issues of the Newsletter. Please bookmark this site.

2000 MLA Convention, Washington, DC, 27-30 December 2000

Panel # 282 Romanian and East European Drama: Connections and Contexts

Panel arranged by RSAA

Thursday, 28 December, 1:45-3:00 p.m., Edison, Washington Hilton

Chair: Ileana A. Orlich, Arizona State University, Tempe

1. "Dilemma of Identity: Ranetti Roman's Manasse and Victor Ion Popa's Take, Ianke and Kadâr," Jeanine Teodorescu-Regier, University of Illinois, Chicago
2. "Opacity, Transparency, and Entropy in Marin Sorescu's Historical Plays," Anca V. Munteanu, Morningside College
3. "Realism, Fantasy, and the Tragic Impasse in Caryl Churchill's *The Mad Forest*," Ileana A. Orlich, Arizona State University, Tempe
4. "Tragicomic and Performative Dimensions in Romanian Theater after the 1989 Revolution," Domnica Radulescu, Washington and Lee University

Panel # 472 Symptoms of Theory: Nation, Enjoyment, Critique

Panel arranged by the Discussion Group on Romanian Studies

Friday, 29 December, 10:15-11:30 a.m., Georgetown East, Washington Hilton

Chair: Christian Moraru, University of North Carolina, Greensboro

1. "Lacan or Lenin: The Styles of Slavoj Žižek," Tomislav Z. Longinovic, University of Wisconsin, Madison
2. "Žižek after Marx: Enjoyment as the Historical Factor," Todd McGowan, Southwest Texas State University
3. "'Not That There's Anything Wrong with That'; or, Enjoying the Virtual Subject," Joanna Mackin, University of Pennsylvania
4. "Fantasy.com: Textualizing Otherness in the Digital Age," Thomas Lavazzi, Savannah State University

Panel # 787 Minorities' Literature and Politics in Romania

Panel arranged by RSAA

Saturday, 30 December, 12:00 noon-1:15 p.m., Map, Washington Hilton

Chair: Jeanine Teodorescu-Regier, University of Illinois, Chicago

1. "Multiculturalism at the Babes-Bolyai University," Andrei Marga, Bucharest, Romania
2. "Mihail Sebastian and the Totalitarian Temptation of the Romanian Intelligentsia," Radu Ioanid, U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum
3. "Hungarian and German Minority Literatures and Cultural Politics in Communist Romania," Nicolae Harsanyi, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill
4. "Ioan Budai-Deleanu and the Concept of 'Tiganiada' (Gypsyad)," Lucia Cherciu, LaGuardia Community College, City University of New York

RSAA Business Meeting at MLA

The RSAA and the Discussion Group will convene a joint business meeting on Thursday, December 28, at 3 p.m., immediately after the panel presided by Dr. Ileana A. Orlich.

BOOK ANNOUNCEMENTS

Dr. Călin Andrei Mihăilescu is the editor of Jorge Luis Borges, *This Craft of Verse* (Charles Eliot Norton Lectures), published by Harvard University Press in September 2000. ISBN 0674002903. These lost lectures given in English at Harvard in 1967-1968 by Jorge Luis Borges return to us now, a recovered tale of a life-long love affair with literature and the English language. Transcribed from tapes only recently discovered, the volume captures the cadences, candor, wit, and remarkable erudition of one of the most extraordinary and enduring literary voices of the twentieth century. In its wide-ranging commentary and exquisite insights, the book stands as a deeply personal yet far-reaching introduction to the pleasures of the word, and as a first-hand testimony to the life of literature.

Dr. Nicholas Catanoy's novel, *Indian Summer*, was published by Editura Paralela 45 in 1999. ISBN 973943343X. It can be ordered directly from the publisher through fax at the following number: 011-40-48-647470.

Teaching Romanian From A Communication Education Perspective

Noemi Marin, Ph. D.
Florida Atlantic University

Educational preparation has always been a constant tenet of the teaching processes involving foreign languages. Different acquisition theories, teaching techniques and learning processes have been emphasized primarily from a foreign perspective in extensive scholarship in the United States. For a large number of years, communication studies have also contributed to the enhancement of salient processes involving language acquisition. The communication education field approaches a wide variety of communication problematics involving teaching foreign languages. However, what are the actual goals and learning techniques for foreign language acquisition? And what is the impact of these educational goals from a communication competence perspective?

Teaching Romanian at the University of California, Los Angeles, some time ago, I realized there is a need to approach educational purposes in language acquisition from a communication competency perspective. Such an integrative move between educational and communication positions offers a better understanding of the educational process of learning a foreign language, in this case, Romanian. Accordingly, this paper argues that there is a need for a different approach in teaching Romanian as a foreign language. More specifically, I contend that teaching Romanian needs to be approached from a communicative stand, aside from the traditional ESL (English-as-a-Second-Language) position. In order to demonstrate the need for such a perspective, I look at the benefits the communication viewpoint brings to this discussion, in terms of [a] communicative goals, and of [b] intercultural communication differences in the classroom climate.

Teaching a foreign language, in this case Romanian, can claim similar goals both from a general educational perspective and a communication standpoint. According to Sprague (1990), the basic goals of education are: transmitting cultural knowledge; developing students' intellectual skills, providing students with career skills, and reshaping their social values. The same four goals are applicable from a communication education position. However, the emphasis differs, as these objectives carry with them tensions of communication. The difference lies in the emphasis on such goals in the classroom climate, when developing skills while transmitting cultural knowledge can compete to become loci of communication competence.

Along the same lines, Spitzberg (1983) analyzes the debate between communication competence and performance as a tension between theory and practice. Although these two concepts appear to be similar, at first sight, they are, however, different. Sprague (1990) explains that "teachers have to decide how much stress to place on knowing about communication, and how much to place on being able to communicate effectively" (p.26).

Applying this tension to teaching Romanian, a major question arises: when teaching Romanian are we, as educators, creating opportunities for students to perform or to become competent? Which of the two mentioned concepts becomes central to the specific educational processes of teaching a foreign language? Accordingly, I contend that, from a communicative standpoint, this question remains an important area for further debate. Let us look at the educational goals from a communicative perspective, in the process of teaching a Romance language such as Romanian.

Thus, in teaching Romanian, for example, a teacher/instructor needs to express clearly whether he or she intends to focus on the acquisition of the language as a primary goal of the class or on the students' competence within it. One of the major obstacles I encountered in the UCLA classroom was the heavy load of grammatical knowledge that students need to acquire versus the effective usage of all these grammatical concepts. It becomes useless for a student to learn all the different verbal tenses such as imperative, past tense, past perfect, and perfect simple (an obsolete tense that even Romanian students do not use anymore in their own country), and not understand how she or he can apply any of them effectively. Romanian grammar is very difficult to grasp for an American-English speaker. Consequently, an educator needs to make strategic choices in setting the educational and communication competency goals for the student body.

Especially in American society, the emphasis on effective communication is a strong reasoning behind

acquiring a foreign language such as Romanian. When facing difficult challenges of Romanian grammar, all my students made clear they needed reinforcement of motivation in order to continue and acquire it. The students constantly reiterated their need to create effective communication in the sense that they wanted to understand not only how, but also why they have to know different verb tenses. Here again, educational goals and levels of competence seem to create a tension that has, somewhat, to be addressed in such course teaching.

In particular, Romanian past tense forms: imperfect (duceam/am dus) vs. past tense and reflexive past tense (ma duceam/m-am dus) had to be most clearly presented for the benefit of language acquisition. And yet, students responded much better to the motivational appeal of becoming effective communicators in the process of learning the entire verbal tenses sequence.

Along the same lines, the tension between process goals and product goals constitutes a major difference when it comes to communication practices and learning skills. Sprague (1990) writes that, "products are easier to evaluate, but processes are what the students will reuse after the class is over" (p. 26). I consider that the balance between processes and products represents an extremely significant issue for effective communication in Romanian language. Although the teacher/instructor looks for the educational goal of acquiring knowledge as a product of learning, the students need also to reutilize the concepts acquired on a regular basis, if they are to speak Romanian fluently. Consequently, the processes of learning Romanian become as important as the finalized actions of using the knowledge of Romanian language acquired. During this process, and from a communication competence perspective, the students were able not only to assimilate what I asked them to know (for this example, I will use again the verbal tenses of Past Tense in Romanian); they were constantly aware of the process that enabled them to remember and use again these tenses in different contexts. Needless to say, that due to my background in ESL and as a communication educator, I provided throughout the entire class the why, the reasons to motivate my students in understanding the distinctions among the Romanian past tenses from a cultural competency standpoint. Hence, by explaining that the imperfect vs. the past simple come to be used situationally, in narratives vs. accomplished actions, and by providing the motivational impetus to challenge the students in their performance, I was able to activate the competence process so needed when teaching a foreign language in college.

Most likely, the major distinction in setting goals between educational/learning perspectives and communication ones is represented by the content vs. presentation goals for students. Whenever a course involves student performance, one is confronted with the problem of content delivery. In particular, when foreign languages are taught, communication apprehension follows as a natural reaction. How does communication apprehension impede performance or competence?

Communication apprehensive students are the particular participants who experience a high level of anxiety or fear in response to real or anticipated communication with other persons. Richmond and McCroskey (1989) note that approximately 20% of the world population falls into one of the several categories of communication apprehension from high to low levels. Thus, low communication apprehension students may not experience anxiety in situations where they need to perform; while high communication apprehension students experience discomfort in virtually all oral communication contexts, even when there is no rational reason for such feelings or attitudes.

Consequently, the concept of communication apprehension needs to be taken into consideration when students are asked to perform in a foreign language. In the case of teaching Romanian, where the pronunciation of words necessitates the usage of accents creating a vast departure from American English styles of delivery, communication apprehension, most likely, comes into play and can make students become very uncomfortable with their oral communication skills in front of a classroom. Nobody likes to know they might be pronouncing "funny" or using an inappropriate accent that makes, sometimes, the other participants in the process smile or react promptly to the mentioned performance. Therefore, in setting goals of content vs. presentation, a teacher/instructor is able to emphasize the gradual move from an acquisition level, that is,

when students learn Romanian words, into the level of presentation, where the participants focus more on the speaking action, using correct Romanian pronunciation and accent.

Accordingly, let us see how by shifting the pedagogical emphasis from content to presentation, students are able to become culturally competent participants in the process of learning Romanian. In Romanian, the sounds of consonants like [Ō], [Ū], [r] or vowels like [i], [î] or [â] make a large number of students uncomfortable with their own performance in the beginning. Words such as "b|trîn" ("b|trîn|," or even "b|trân," differently spelled), "coŌmar" and many more, present difficulties for American students as the accents and the pronunciation emphasize all sounds, without leaving out any of the letters. I selected these three words at random, without any particular significance attached to them. Rather, I remember the complex feelings of discomfort, anxiety, and fear of failure that my students showed when reading the Romanian vocabulary list provided by the textbook. In this sense, the students were demonstrating high levels of communication apprehension, fearful to be placed in a position of inapt performance. Consequently, I contend that all these educational goals showing tensions between theoretical and practical training on language acquisition, between process and product, and/or between content and presentation offer the opportunity to teach Romanian as a foreign language in a better way, if supplementing educational goals with a communication perspective.

Another benefit of the approach of teaching Romanian from a communicative standpoint relates to the student differences in learning styles and in the classroom climate. As stated earlier in this paper, communication apprehension is part of every student's fears and anxieties in relation to performing oral presentations in a different language. Most students in foreign language classes are comfortable with larger, lecture-type classrooms, lacking multiple opportunities to perform in a direct and constant teacher/instructor-student interaction.

Although language acquisition classes are not necessarily labeled as performance classes, they definitely require constant student participation. In these classes, students have to speak, and demonstrate on a weekly basis their acquisition of vocabulary and grammar necessary in order to communicate in the particular language. Most significantly, students are asked to master, aside from differences in pronunciation and accents, various syntactical and morphological settings for the words learned. Accordingly, participants in such endeavors can become very nervous when asked to perform "the other" language in front of others. To my recollection, whenever I called a particular student on the usage of the Romanian verb *a fi* ("to be"), s/he could not use it properly. Initially, when getting familiar with the meanings and usages of this extremely important verb for Romanian simple conversations, the student would mix *a fi* ("to be") with yet another, equally important verb, *a avea* ("to have"). As the confusion started early, and realizing s/he was uncomfortable to express the difference between these two Romanian verbs in front of her/his colleagues, throughout the class the student could no longer perform any of the exercises involving the verb *a fi* ("to be"). Unfortunately, since all the beginning level examples used in Romanian textbooks utilize the verb *a fi* abundantly, during the entire quarter I was put in a position to work individually with the student in order to reduce the level of communication apprehension creating such a blockage. In addition, I had to provide the student with multiple reasons and motivational appeals in order to assist her/him in overcoming the fear of feeling inapt in a classroom.

Yet, aside from communication apprehension and mastering process goals and product goals when teaching a foreign language, communication styles contribute another dimension of the communication perspective necessary in language acquisition. Communication styles play an important role in foreign language acquisition, revealing the distinction between learning-oriented students vs. grade-oriented ones. Gorham (1990) addresses this distinction as one of the central tenets of education. In other words, there will always be students that get motivated to learn by the content of knowledge acquisition, while others are motivated to study mostly by the grades they obtain. Either way, teaching a foreign language like Romanian (a most rare foreign language class, offered by very few universities) raises such problems of knowing how the students in the classroom function, from a motivational standpoint, that is, from a communication perspective. The

linguistic exercises students had to respond to (namely, 'fill in the blanks,' 'place the correct form of a verb/noun/article, etc.,' or any of the grammatical drills I considered necessary for class purposes) had to take into consideration both the learning-oriented participants as well as the grade-oriented class members. Could I afford, as a teacher/instructor of Romanian language, to lose any of the students interested in this language class? Unlike many of the classes taught as part of core programs or popular majors, Romanian courses depend on the continuous student interest in the program. The communication style of the teacher/instructor is as important as the motivational goals of the students participating in the class offered.

Since throughout this paper I advocate that communication competence needs to be added to the language acquisition perspective, I also would like to examine some of the benefits such addition bring to the teacher along with the student body. In accordance with studies in intercultural communication authored by Kim and Gudykunst (1990), the instructor needs to utilize a vast array of instructional methods in order to achieve effective communication. Such methods listed are: audiovisual aids and "effective group discussions in which instructors help students participate in the learning process and personalize the concepts and ideas presented" (p. 152). Such an approach appeared productive in my experience with teaching Romanian, as I allotted specific class times for group discussions both on grammatical and lexical usage of the language along with other class discussions on the Romanian values invoked by the texts read. My students learned not only the verbs *a fi* or *a avea* and their proper usage, they were also extremely interested in understanding the ways Romanian people live and think, and in the cultural values shared by all Romanians all over the world. Such group discussions became excellent opportunities for students to lower their communication apprehension levels, to participate more actively, and to compare and contrast different ways of cultural and social existence. By the end of the academic year, the students were able to discuss how to utilize adjectives, nouns, and verbs in sentences as well as to converse (briefly) on Romanian topics. They changed from a language-acquisition group, into a Romanian-oriented little community, sharing interests in Romanian food or culture, able to explain (to others) who Count Dracula was, knowledgeable of Romania's bordering countries, or describing some historical events on that particular territory. Overall, the students' communication apprehension was lowered and their conversational levels increased. No longer shy to speak in front of their peers, they even requested more homework not to forget the concepts learned in class. Such discussions, in my view, supplement the educational needs of foreign language classes with the students' actual communication needs to know the cultural context in order to better create a mental picture of the Romanian linguistic scene.

Similar to the intercultural perspective of interaction mentioned, Andersen and Nussbaum (1990) contend that environmental dimensions, such as moral disposition, supportive climate, and student-centered teaching supplement competent enactments of discussion skills. Thus, questions with different degrees of difficulty, a good selection of support statements and a good intercultural relationship between instructor and students create the optimum setting for the communicative acquisition of a foreign language. In my personal case, as an instructor, the fact that I was aware of the complex intercultural demands on classroom communication certainly assisted me in achieving the goal to teach Romanian effectively.

In conclusion, I want to emphasize the position of teaching Romanian as a foreign language with more than the acquisition process in mind. I argue that communication concepts and skills, when applied to Romanian language courses, can offer beneficial results. A major benefit, in my view, is the lowering of the participants' communication apprehension levels. In addition, students' objective to master a foreign language, such as Romanian, is supplemented by the desire to become effective communicators. Accordingly, when teachers/instructors add to the educational and linguistic approach a communication perspective, they are able to implement the interactional skills of all participants in an intercultural classroom. Consequently, teaching Romanian from an interdisciplinary position can transform the foreign language acquisition process into a unique experience where students and instructors alike learn the benefits of effective interactions, ready for new challenges in a new millennium.

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