

Habilitation thesis

Pragma-rhetorical approaches to Romanian. Synchronic and diachronic aspects

Abstract

This thesis, *Pragma-rhetorical approaches to Romanian. Synchronic and diachronic aspects*, is divided in two main parts. The first part synthesizes my academic and scientific activity since the defence of my PhD thesis in 2011. The second part outlines my research plans and projects aimed to develop my academic profile and to provide research suggestions for doctoral candidates. Both my academic and research activities belong to the functional paradigm of linguistics, and are characterized by openness to inter- and transdisciplinarity.

The first part of this thesis summarizes my academic activity, in section 1, as well as my professional activity in various committees at the level of the Department of Linguistics, of the Faculty of Letters, or of the University of Bucharest, in section 2. Within the area of functional linguistics, my academic activity covers a wide range of courses, at the BA and MA level, at the Faculty of Letters and at the Faculty of Foreign Languages and Literatures (pragmatics, stylistics, variational linguistics, Romanian as a foreign language, discourse analysis, rhetoric, professional practice). The courses are adapted to the specific requirements of the academic programs in which the students are enrolled.

Section 3, the largest in this first part, presents my research activities in both joint projects and individual projects. My researcher profile mirrors my academic interests: synchronic and diachronic pragmatics, discourse analysis, the pragmatics of Romanian as a foreign language, synchronic and diachronic stylistics, rhetoric and argumentation.

Section 3.1 presents the joint projects: I was member in two CNCS grants (2007-2008, 2009-2011), I coedited several volumes, and I am coauthor to some important volumes. For example, I am co-editor and coauthor to the first volumes written entirely by Romanian authors addressed to an international readership; the volumes discuss discourse practices (*Exploring Discourse Practices in Romanian*, Andra Vasilescu, Mihaela-Viorica Constantinescu, Gabriela Stoica, Jonathan White eds., Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2020), Romanian humour (*Romanian humour*, Mihaela-Viorica Constantinescu, Stanca Măda, Răzvan Săftoiu eds., Tertium, Cracovia, 2020), present-day Romanian political

discourse (*Insights into Romanian Political Discourse*, Andra Vasilescu, Mihaela-Viorica Constantinescu, Ariadna Ștefănescu, Șerban Hartular eds., Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2024). I am coauthor to the recently appeared *Dictionary of pragmatics and discourse analysis* (DPAD, Liliana Ionescu-Ruxăndoiu coord., 2023, Institutul European). I am coauthor to one of the first learner corpora of Romanian (Mihaela-Viorica Constantinescu and Gabriela Stoica), published in 2020. At present, I am co-editor and coauthor of a volume in press at De Gruyter (Andra Vasilescu, Mihaela Gheorghe, Mihaela-Viorica Constantinescu, Răzvan Săftoiu, Șerban Hartular eds.), *Pragmatics of Romanian*; for this volume, I have written chapters about expressive speech acts, politeness, impoliteness and verbal aggressiveness, and humour. I am also part of an international project involving 17 European universities and 8 institutes, museums, and professional associations – *Developing humour literacy: analysing production, content and reception of humour to bring positive change in the public sphere* (HUMLIT, Grant agreement ID: 101182860), Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA)¹, January 1, 2025-December 31, 2028.

My individual research activity is presented in section **3.2**. I focus first on my research in diachronic pragmatics (**3.2.1**) which is connected to my postdoctoral project; then, I move on to the studies in which I used either a synchronic or a diachronic pragmatic perspective on humour and political discourse (**3.2.2**). The studies using conceptual/cognitive metaphor theory are presented in **3.2.3**. The studies on the pragmatic competence of foreign students learning Romanian are presented in **3.2.4**.

My research developed around core topics such as (im)politeness; humour (political humour, satirical press, stand-up comedy, multimodal humour – cartoons, memes); argumentative strategies in parliamentary discourse; conceptual metaphors on (im)politeness, humour, political ideologies, prison; non-native speakers' pragmatic competence.

The main contribution of my studies to the development of the above-mentioned research domain can be summarized as follows:

(a) I am a pioneer in Romanian linguistics in the field of historical pragmatics (see for example my volume *Romanian Principalities between East and West: The dynamics of cultural models of politeness and impoliteness in the 19th century*, 2016, or the articles “Ritual and modern “politeness” in the Romanian Principalities during the Phanariot period”, *Journal of Historical Pragmatics*, 24 (1)/2023; “The Historical Variation of the Pragmeme ‘Greeting’ in Romanian”, *Revue Roumaine de Linguistique*, LXIII, 1–2/2018, “A Perspective

¹ <https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/101182860>.

on “Impoliteness” in Early Modern Romanian Court and Diplomatic Interactions”, *Journal of Historical Pragmatics*, 19 (1)/2018). I have drawn the profile of Romanian (im)politeness from the 17th to the late 19th century; I have focused on the impact of foreign models on Romanian linguaculture and on the differences which distinguish the social elite from the individuals with a lower social status in accepting verbal and nonverbal behaviour change. I have also pinpointed the ritual dimension of politeness, aimed at protecting the individual, the gradual transition from the importance of relational and collective selves to the prominence of the individual self, as well as the importance of the emotional aspects for (im)politeness and speech acts (mainly expressives).

(b) Concerning the study of humour, after authoring a PhD thesis on the linguistics of humour (applied to political humour during the communist regime), I have moved on to the analysis of the mechanisms preferred in the old and new satirical press, in the parliamentary debates (1866-1938), in online social media pages, in stand-up comedy, as well as in cartoons and memes. I have mapped the mechanisms and the humorous styles used to create particular amusing *personae*, and to exploit ethnic stereotypes.

(c) I have identified some basic argumentative features of the Romanian parliamentary discourse (1866-1938), some specific strategies for gaining agreement or enhancing disagreement, as well as some interactional patterns of exploiting insults in present-day debates and how insults can be used to block deliberative processes.

(d) I have written one of the few articles (in the international bibliography) on the conceptualisation of humour, approached in a pragmatic perspective, using conceptual metaphor theory: “Conventional metaphorical scenarios of humor in Romanian”, *Humor. International Journal of Humor Research*, 37 (1)/2024, p. 87-108 (most studies focus on humorous metaphors, not on the way humour is conceptualised in a linguaculture, as reflected by more or less conventional metaphors used to illustrate this conceptualisation). I have also drawn attention to the conceptualisation of *face* in Romanian, based on the same theoretical approach, stressing the importance of self- and other-monitoring in social interactions, in general, not only in connection to politeness (“Remarks on the folk-concept *face* in Romanian”, 2025, in *FACE – (New) facets of a sociopragmatic concept*, Gudrun Held ed., Brill).

(e) I have coauthored one of the few learner corpora of Romanian, containing both written and oral productions, a corpus which allows transversal studies. I also authored articles focusing on the pragmatic competence of non-native speakers of Romanian, an area under-researched.

The second part of this thesis outlines my research projects and the way they are connected to my academic activity. My research plans continue some of the topics that have been important to my previous work: (a) humour – mainly humour literacy, in connection with the international project I am part of, exploring post-communist nostalgia in various discursive forms; (b) speech acts from a diachronic perspective (such as the main speech act verbs and their evolution, the illocutionary force indicating devices for a speech act category mapped onto text types, etc.); the pragmatics of Romanian as a foreign language.

The final section presents courses that can be offered to BA and MA students in humanities and social sciences, and that can provide topics for doctoral projects: the evolution of humorous mechanisms in the Romanian satirical press, metapragmatics and metaphorical scenarios (such as the conceptualization of *irony*, *sarcasm*, *argument*, or *argumentation*), diachronic pragmatics of Romanian, cyberpragmatics, and the pragmatics of Romanian as a L2.

The thesis concludes with the comprehensive list of references and of sources for the examples that support some key aspects of my research.

