TWO SOLUTIONS FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE IN LEARNING-TEACHING ROMANIAN – UNITARY CONTENTS AND AN OFFICIAL ROMANIAN GRAMMAR

Cipriana-Elena PEICA*

*Department of Romanian Language and General Linguistics Faculty of Letters, Babeş–Bolyai University, Cluj–Napoca, Romania

Abstract: *School textbooks do not clearly define grammar and its parts, leaving it to teachers to formulate them or not; and, if they find it useful to define them, the way they (Romanian language and literature teachers in general) do it is not unitary, which is understandable given that we do not have an official grammar. The fact that the Academy Grammars represented by default the official grammar that could be found, theoretically and practically, in school textbooks is obviously outdated for the reasons that we will present and argue. Consequently, given the current situation, our proposal is that an official grammar of the Romanian language should be established. As shown in this paper, our opinion is that there is no compatibility between the contents of the school grammar and the new academic treaties which are, on the one hand, inhomogeneous and sometimes contradictory in terms of both content and terminology and, on the other hand, sometimes insufficiently adapted to the very specificity of the Romanian language. Therefore, at present and in this form, they are not applicable in the pre-university didactics, which is why a decision must be made regarding the contents which will be of reference for textbook authors, teachers who are free to select the contents that they will teach, and students or any other person interested in studying the grammar of contemporary Romanian.*

Keywords*: Official Grammar, Morphology, Syntax, Romanian language, academic treaties.community; intercultural context; communication.*

1. INTRODUCTION

In Antiquity, *grammar* was included in philosophy and logic, and it gradually detached itself and became an autonomous subject. This may be one of the reasons why this term still defines, on the one hand, the grammatical structure of a language, distinct from vocabulary, which puts thinking, written discourse and oral speech in order, and, on the other hand, all linguistic branches.

Undoubtedly, *grammar* (*grammatica* in Latin, *grammatiké* in Greek) –"the science of letters" or "the art of reading and writing" - is also related to vocabulary, word formation, phonetic structure of words, spelling and punctuation, morphosyntax, stylistics, pragmatics, rhetoric, logic, and any other science that deals in some way with words; however, we must not forget that, of all the fields listed above, only grammar has the primary role to take into account the morphological and syntactic rules according to which any speech in any field is built.

Therefore, a definition of grammar without referring primarily to its most important parts, *morphology and syntax*, cannot be conceived correctly and completely, especially since *grammar* has been divided into *morphology* and *syntax* ever since ancient times.

Further proof in this regard is the majority of the definitions offered to us by the most important specialised publications which follow, with appropriate nuances, the direction established since the earliest times.

2. THE TEXT OF THE PAPER

2.1 According to the 1963 *Academy Grammar*, *grammar* is "a set of rules for modifying words and combining them into clauses and sentences" (GLR, 1966:11). The definition given in GLR (Romanian Grammar) is short, but comprehensive; the references to the two main branches of grammar are obvious:"for modifying words" clearly means *morphology*, and "combining" words into clauses and sentences refers to *syntax*.

Another feature of grammar resulting from the above definition is its accuracy, for it is a summation of "rules" underlying the construction of any discourse and which are characterised by logic and generally by invariability. Therefore, it is our opinion that the definition given by GLR is

consistent with what we understand by the concept of *grammar*; on the one hand, this definition is sufficient and comprehensive from a semantic point of view, and, on the other hand, it clearly sets grammar apart from all the other related branches.

2.2 As regards the concept of *grammar* in other specialised books, each author's definition is nuanced, but *overall* the essence of the definition given by GLR is preserved in each of them.

Iorgu Iordan states that: "Grammar is the study of a language's grammatical level, system and structure" (Iordan, 1956:325). The author emphasises that any grammar is *prescriptive*, i.e. it establishes a set of rules for the organisation and functioning of a language's system and structure, but this does not exclude the division of grammars into normative, descriptive and generative grammars (Iordan, 1956:325-328).

Mioara Avram uses a working definition according to which *grammar* includes two types of rules corresponding to its components - *morphology* and *syntax*-"a set of rules regarding the form of words and the changes in their form, on the one hand and, on the other hand, the combination of words in the communication process" (Avram, 1986:9).

Corneliu Dimitriu believes that "by *grammar* we understand the science dealing with word inflection and the combination of words into syntactic units" (Dimitriu, 1999:1).

Ion Coteanu is of the opinion that *grammar* is a "series of rules" based on which words are linked; it resembles a "…clockwork mechanism", for grammar must be organised according to a "pattern ... which lists, in a general and abstract form, all the rules of a grammar [...] and the concrete applications of the rules in the pattern and how to use them" (Coteanu, 1982:8).

Dumitru Irimia presents a relationship between the *grammatical system* and the *lexical system*, stating that: "The grammatical system consists of: 1. a network of coordinates and coordinate relations which, in terms of semantics and expression, it manifests itself by including the lexical system in the morphology-syntax interdependence relationship [...] 2. a network of grammatical signs, which ensures the relationship between semantics and expression, either within the morphemic and syntactic levels, in a relative (or absolute) autonomy, or in the interdependence between the two levels: *morphemes, relationship elements*, etc." (Irimia, 2008:16-17). By presenting the four levels -i.e. *semantic, morphological, syntactic* and *deictic* - at which parts of speech

reveal their identity in the *system-structure* dynamic, the author distinguishes the *morphological and syntactic perspective* from the other two (*semantic* and *deictic*), saying that it is described by "the position of linguistic units in the grammatical system" (Irimia, 2008:17).

2.3 There is a *somewhat* different situation in the new academic treaties.

GALR does not provide a clear, precise definition of grammar. In the *Introduction,* it is stated that the proposed description places the grammatical structure of the Romanian language between *system* and *discourse* and views *word* as a unit of the *system* but also of the discourse, and *statement* as a unit of the *discourse,* constructively dependent on the *system* (GALR, 2005:1). As a result, the first volume deals with *word grammar*, and the second volume deals with *statement grammar*.

GBLR is presented to us as a *grammar* which, according to its authors, is "open for didactic use", a (profoundly innovative!) *grammar* of lexical-grammatical classes, a *grammar* in which each part of the speech is presented from three perspectives: inflection, syntactics and semantics (GBLR, 2010:VII-XL). In the section dedicated to lexical-grammatical classes, it is stated that this new grammatical approach offers

> the most clear example of perspective correlation and, in essence, of the difficulty, even the impossibility, for many phenomena, of being divided between morphology and syntax. (GBLR, 2010:4).

It is obvious that the *new grammars* combine what we call *traditional grammar* with *semantics and other branches dealing with word*, the importance given to them being, in our view, exaggerated. In addition, the principle according to which the study of the contemporary Romanian language must not lose sight of the "normative and pedagogical character of the future Romanian teachers' higher education" (Iordan, 1956:21) and which underlay the 1963 grammar does not seem to have been taken into consideration by the authors of the *new grammars*, although they state that the book is open *for didactic use* and that they have conceived those treaties with information to be introduced in the future curricula and text books for the Romanian language (GBLR, 2010:VII-XI).

In 1956, Iorgu Iordan pointed out the importance and the necessity of distinguishing between descriptive grammar, normative grammar, and generative grammar:

Descriptive grammar refers to sample and structures made as such, hence it is limited in terms of material and due to the finite number of formulated rules; he opposes both the normative and the generative grammars which, since they follow generic structures, aim at the creativity of the language. (Iordan, 1956: 327).

We refer to this distinction for we believe that GALR and GBLR do not take into account the systematic character that grammar description and analysis should have; on the one hand, this character gives grammar, as a science, the systematic feature, and, on the other hand, it facilitates both the learning and the application of grammatical rules. These should be well understood and properly assimilated so that, after learning, exceptions may be properly identified and addressed. However, what GALR offers us is a far too long line of exceptions, too few rules, and many of them with no practical applicability. We appreciate the *modern* character of the new grammar, but we cannot help noticing that, in terms of *didactic use*, applicability in the pre-university education, the difference between GLR and, implicitly, GALR and GBLR is way too big. That is why we ask ourselves: to what extent can this grammar be reflected in the theory and practice of pre-university grammar (and not only), to what extent can students improve their grammar and, implicitly, improve their written and oral communication, based on the information provided by GALR and GBLR?

Mioara Avram noted in 1986:

Grammar improvement is the gradual learning of secondary rules, which ensure both full correctness and enrichment and nuances of grammatical expression. [...] Hence, attention should be paid to the proper learning of grammatical rules in all their details! (Avram, 1986:12).

Our opinion is that this caution applies even today, but it seems that the authors of the *new grammars* are not of the same opinion.

The GBLR authors state: "The GBLR thus conceived supports the following categories of readers: (a) Romanian language and literature teachers [...]; (b) philology students from the Faculty of Letters and Foreign Languages [...]; (c) middle school and high school students who are interested in studying grammar [...]; (e) linguists and non-linguists who are interested in "updating" their knowledge on the grammatical description of the Romanian language; (f) foreign readers who are interested in studying and learning Romanian,

as well as in comparative research, since one advantage of this book is the description made from the perspective of the generally recognised modern grammatical theories." (GBLR, 2010:X-XI). We believe that the target audience of GALR and GBLR must obviously be a specialised one (although, as we can see, the authors say otherwise!), which is why, among other things, we consider even title *Romanian Grammar* to be inappropriate, since a Romanian grammar should represent the Romanian language, define this language, relate to and be reflected in this language, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, reflect the peculiarities of this language and have a unitary character. Given that even the authors refer to the content of this academic treaty as a *proposed description*, we cannot help wondering why they did not call it *A Romanian Grammar*. The question is legitimate because the title and the publication year actually send an erroneous message, namely that this is the *new* grammar that can and must replace the *old one*. The reality is obviously different. The *New grammar* is meaningless without the *old grammar*. The leap is too high, too many stages have been skipped and, in its current form, it cannot narrow the existing gap between school grammar and university grammar. On the contrary, the gap has become larger because, from our point of view, school grammar should have been updated even with GLR concepts (for example, we consider it unjustified not to include the theoretical and practical elements of the *floating predicate* in school textbooks and curricula), and obviously this is no longer a priority, given that the new academic treaties, seen by some as the new grammatical approach, aim at a completely different direction.

3. CONCLUSIONS

Under these circumstances, we believe it is a great problem that, in the absence of a grammar declared as the Official Grammar, over time the *custom* was to consider the treaties published under the aegis of the Romanian Academy to be the reference theoretical and practical material for the authors of school curricula, textbooks, and for methodologists. The existing reality entitles us to state that, for unity and coherence purposes, we need to formally establish which is the *grammar of the Romanian language* because, although the authors of the new academic treaties state that these treaties are open for didactic use, it is obvious that, at this point and in their current form, this statement can only be…a mere statement.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Avram, A., (1986). *Gramatica pentru toţi.* Bucharest: SR of Romania's Academy Publishing House.
2. Coteanu, I., (1982). *Gramatica de bază a limbii române.* Bucharest: Albatros.
3. Dimitriu, C., (1999). *Tratat de gramatică a limbii române. Morfologia.* Iaşi: Insitutul European.
4. Guţu Romalo, V. (ed.). (2005). *Gramatica limbii române* (GALR), vol. I. *Cuvântul.* Bucharest: Romanian Academy Publishing House.
5. Dindelegan, G.-P. (ed.). (2010). *Gramatica de bază a limbii române* (GBLR). Bucharest: Romanian Academy Publishing House.
6. Graur, Al., Avram, A., Vasiliu, L. (eds.) (1966). *Gramatica limbii române* (GLR), vol. I, 2nd edition. Bucharest: Romanian Academy Publishing House.
7. Iordan, I., (1956). *Limba romînă contemporană.* Bucharest: Ministry of Education's Publishing House.
8. Irimia, D., (2008). *Gramatica limbii române,* 3rd edition. Iaşi: Polirom