

'HE IS A CRIMINAL IN SERIES': A FORAY INTO ERRORS BY ROMANIAN LEARNERS OF ENGLISH.

Loredana PUNGĂ, Hortensia PÂRLOG
West University of Timișoara, Romania

Abstract: The paper contains a qualitative and quantitative analysis of errors resulting from the interference between the learners' mother tongue (Romanian) and English as a foreign language. The errors have been identified in a sample corpus of argumentative essays (cca 15,000 words) written on general topics, by native Romanian students learning English as a foreign language, at university level; the essays belong to the Romanian corpus of learner English assembled by Mădălina Chitez. They are classified, the type of L1-L2 transfer involved in their production is explained and their interpretation is complemented by quantitative considerations. The aim of the research is clearly pedagogical.

Keywords: aspect errors, cross-linguistic transfer, error analysis, function words errors, L1-L2 transfer, lexical-semantic errors, syntactic errors.

1. Introduction

The theoretical concepts that lie at the basis of contrastive linguistics, formulated as early as the 40's and the 50's in the works of linguists such as Fries (1945), Weinreich (1953), Haugen (1953) or Lado (1957), start from the idea that the acquisition of a foreign language is a largely mechanical process that relies on "the formation and performance of habits" (Brooks 1960, 49) and that it can be influenced by (a) previously acquired language(s), especially one's mother tongue. "Already learned habits interfere with the learning of new habits as a result of proactive inhibition. Thus, the challenge facing L2 learners [...] is to overcome the interference of L1 habits" (Ellis and Barkhuizen 2005, 54). Fries (1945) and Lado (1957) pointed out that one way of achieving this was by making learners aware of the similarities and the differences between the two languages; it is mainly the latter that were said to be the source of interference or deviation from the norm of the foreign language system. One must therefore compare the native and the foreign language systems, identify the areas of conflict, and predict possible learner errors - what contrastive analysis, in its "classical", traditional form, aims to do.

Fries' and Lado's approach came to be criticized later, as many linguists and teachers considered it simplistic and rejected its validity and necessity¹. It was pointed out that not only the differences, but also the similarities between two languages can be sources of errors. Many errors may also have other sources, linguistic or extralinguistic, like overgeneralization or false analogies, random use, psychological factors or pedagogical ones, such as the transfer of training – i.e. influences that arise from the way learners are taught the foreign language or the particular developmental sequence they follow in learning an L2; errors may have sociolinguistic sources (Rampton 1987), such as the deliberate employment of non-standard forms as a way of managing the impression the speaker wants to create on his/her interlocutor. Thus,

an analysis based exclusively on the description and comparison of abstract language systems cannot reveal all possible errors and is insufficient.

Consequently, several linguists (Corder 1967, 1977; Wardhaugh 1970; Gradman 1973) proposed an approach known as “error analysis”, which, instead of predicting difficulties, studies interference phenomena and the linguistic behaviour of the foreign language learners. Such errors may be simply occasional performance errors, while others may be part of the learner’s approximative systems (Nemser 1971) or interlanguage (Selinker 1972) and may occur repeatedly; learning a foreign language is a dynamic process: the initial learning stages may influence subsequent stages and vice-versa.

Some linguists considered that contrastive analysis and error analysis complement each other (James 1971, Nemser 1971), as the results of the former may contribute to the latter, by facilitating the classification and explanation of learner errors.

Previous research on errors produced by Romanian learners of English combined contrastive analysis and error analysis and was carried out on a rather small scale, mainly within the Romanian-English Contrastive Analysis Project, launched by the University of Bucharest and the Centre for Applied Linguistics, Arlington, Virginia, in the early 1970’s. The few studies published deal mainly with lexical errors (Hodgdon and Popa 1976) and errors in the use of prepositions (Pârlog and Popa 1978); more recently, Horezeanu (2009) gives a classification of grammatical and lexical errors based on linguistic interference, which he exemplifies with excerpts from papers by a number of first-year English majors.

The present analysis focuses on L1-driven errors made by intermediate Romanian learners of English. The approach to errors embraced here seems to be generally accepted in error analysis: they are, as Lenon (1991, 182) points out, “linguistic forms or combinations of forms which, in the same context and under similar conditions of production, would, in all likelihood, not be produced by the speakers’ native speaker counterparts”.

The aim of our investigation is doublefold. First, we sought to identify, analyze and quantify learner errors caused by L1; their enumeration is accompanied by explanations about the kind of L1 – L2 cross-linguistic influence that has led to their production. Any other types of errors encountered were not taken into account in our analysis. The investigation ends with considerations regarding the frequency of these errors. Second, we attempted to highlight the role that the identification and description of such errors might have in teaching English to native Romanians.

The errors, belonging to grammar, semantics, and the lexicon, have been collected from a sample of ten argumentative essays (approximately 500 words long each), written on topics of everyday concern, by students at six major universities in Romania. They belong to a much larger corpus, the Romanian Corpus of Learner English (RoCLE), totaling about 200,000 words, which Mădălina Chitez compiled and then used in a recently published book (see Chitez 2014). We based our judgements of (in)correctness in language use on the information given in two basically descriptive grammars of educated, standard English (Quirk et al. 1991, Cobuild 1990) and a prescriptive/pedagogic grammar (Swan 1980), as well as in Avram (2001) for Romanian.

The collected errors illustrating the Romanian learners’ performance in English that may be ascribed to the influence of their mother tongue structures and rules will be grouped here under four headings: function words, aspect, syntactic, and lexical-

semantic problems. The findings concerning each of these categories are detailed upon below.

2. Findings: areas that seem to be sources of errors

2.1. Function words

2.1.1. The article

Though there are similarities between the English and the Romanian article systems, as both languages have definite, indefinite and zero articles, the actual use of the articles in the two languages does not always match, in spite of comparable contexts.

2.1.1.1. Misuse of the English definite article

In both languages, the zero article is used with nouns which, in certain contexts, have a generic reference:

- (1) În fața acelei case sunt ∅ *copaci*.
In front of that house there are ∅ *trees*.
- (2) "∅ *Carte*" este un substantiv care are plural.
"∅ *Book*" is a countable noun.

The rule, however, does not always apply in Romanian. In sentence (3) below, the Romanian nouns are used generically, but they take the definite article, while the zero article remains a must in the equivalent English sentence:

- (3) În general, îmi place vinul, muzica, jocurile.
Generally speaking, I like ∅ *wine*, ∅ *music*, ∅ *games*.

This kind of incongruence between the two languages is the source of a frequent error in our corpus, caused by cross-linguistic transfer – the employment of the definite article before English nouns used generically; in similar contexts, the Romanian corresponding nouns are accompanied by definite articles. The examples below are decontextualised for space constraints, but in their original context, they were indeed problematic:

- (4) *This is what *the women* did when they started the feminist movement.
Asta este ceea ce au făcut femeile când au început mișcarea feministă.
- (5) **The politicians* should think about the reduction [...]
Politicienii ar trebui să se gândească la reducerea [...]
- (6) *In the towns and cities, *the cars* are really a problem.
În orașe și metropole, mașinile sunt într-adevăr o problemă.
- (7) *But *the air* isn't the only one that is polluted.
Dar aerul nu este singurul poluat.
- (8) *If *the economic agents* spend money on improvement of *the labour conditions* [...]
Dacă agenții economici cheltuiesc bani pentru îmbunătățirea condițiilor de muncă [...]

2.1.1.2. Misuse of the English zero article

The use of the definite article *the* is compulsory in English for certain nouns which, in Romanian, depending on the context, may be employed either with the zero or the definite article (*-ul* appended to masculine and neuter singular nouns, and *-a* added to feminine singular nouns). An example is that of the nouns that refer to unique entities: these should be used with the definite article in English, while in Romanian, this rule does not always apply. The choice of the English zero article instead of the required definite article as a determiner of the noun *Moon* in: **no form of life on the Moon* is most probably the result of its use with the Romanian equivalent noun, *lună*, in the corresponding Romanian phrase: *nici o formă de viață pe the Lună*.

Nouns used with specific reference, as one of a class, always take the indefinite article in English, while, in Romanian, the application of this rule is context-dependent. Hence, the questionable use of the zero article instead of the indefinite one with the English noun *problem* in (9), as an equivalent of the Romanian zero articulated noun *problemă*:

- (9) *Pollution as the global *problem* is the prerogative [...]
Poluarea ca the *problemă* globală este prerogativa [...]

2.1.1.3. Misuse of the English indefinite article

Sometimes the indefinite article is erroneously used with uncountable nouns because their Romanian equivalents are countable, and may be determined by the indefinite article.

- (10) *The reduction of ozone's concentration happens with *a faster speed*.
Reducerea concentrației de ozon se produce cu *a viteză* mai mare.

2.1.2. The preposition

English prepositions represent a part of speech that non-native speakers, irrespective of their L1, hardly ever manage to master to perfection; it is often difficult for them to decide what preposition would be correct in a certain context, either in terms of form, or in terms of meaning. On the one hand, it is not an easy task to choose between a simple and a complex preposition; on the other, there are many words and expressions that are followed by specific prepositions that would simply have to be learned by heart. To complicate things for learners even more, one and the same preposition may have several meanings and uses (e.g., *Hornby's Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* lists eighteen meanings for the prepositions *on*), and several prepositions may have similar meanings and uses (e.g., to indicate location higher than something, one may use, for instance, *above* and *over*: e.g. *We have a beautiful painting **above** the fireplace; There was a chandelier hanging **over** the table*). Thus, the number of errors in this area is, unsurprisingly, very great.

The misuse of prepositions in our corpus takes two forms: substitution and omission, the former being more frequent than the latter.

2.1.2.1. Substitution

→ *OF* (replacing *for*)

(11) * [...] tried to find the reasons *of* their crimes.

In Romanian, the equivalent of the noun *reason* ('motiv') may be followed by a noun in the genitive, as illustrated in (12); hence the use of *of* in English, where it marks the analytical genitive, in cases such as (11) above:

(12) Care este motivul solicitării tale?
 What is reason+the request+Gen your?
 What is the reason for your request?

→ *AT* (replacing *of, on, to*)

(13) *There are few people that think *at* this aspect.
 *[...] without thinking *at* the consequences.

The reason behind the wrong choice of preposition in the examples under (13) is that the Romanian verb *a gândi* ('to think') is followed by the preposition *la* ('at'):

(14) Mă gândesc la fericirea ta.
 Me think at happiness your.
 I'm thinking of your happiness.

While in Romanian the preposition *la* ('at') occurs in the phrase *la scară*, indicating measurement, English makes use of the preposition *on* ('on a scale'):

(15) Suprafețele împădurite continuă să scadă *la* scară mondială.
 The wooded areas continue to diminish *on* a global scale.

Structura Universului *la* scară mare...
 The structure of the Universe *on* a large scale...

Under the influence of their mother tongue, the students used the translation of the Romanian *la* into English, in the examples under (16), quoted from our corpus:

(16) *The strategies of preservations should be accepted *at* the world's scale. [on a global scale]
 *(...) are not produced *at* a large scale. [on a large scale]

Romanian *la* ('at') may introduce a noun phrase which indicates the direction or the goal or purpose of an action:

(17) Mă duc *la* școală / *la* ore dimineața.
 Me go at school / at classes morning+the.
 I go to school / to my classes in the morning.

As a result, very often, the English motion verb *to go* is erroneously used with the preposition *at* by Romanian students:

(18) *People [...] may use bicycles to go *at* work.

→ *IN* (replacing *into, at*)

(19) *[...] our world would be transformed *in* a world dominated by chaos.
 *Feminism has infused lots of ideas *in* this society.
 *[...] a simple, but *in* the same time a modest life.
 *[...] *in* the moment we feel oppressed ('*în momentul în care ne simțim oprimați*').

The mistakes illustrated in (19) are the consequences of the use in Romanian of the preposition *în* ('in') after the verbs *a transforma* ('to transform into'), *a insufla*, *a*

introduce ('to infuse into'), and in the phrases *în același timp* ('at the same time'), *în momentul* ('at the moment'), *în momentul în care* ('at the moment when' or simply 'when'); for example,

(20) Broasca se transformă în prinț.

The frog *transforms itself into* a prince.

(21) Televiziunea le-a insuflat în conștiință acest ideal de femeie slabă.

The television *has infused* this slim woman ideal *into* their conscience.

(22) Ai și munte și apă în același timp.

You have both mountains and water *at the same time*.

(23) N-au chef de vorbă în momentul în care începe competiția.

They don't feel like talking *(at the moment) when* the competition starts.

→ *FOR* (replacing *to*)

(24) *Pollution is a problem of great concern *for today's people*. [EXPERIENCER]

(25) * [...] [they] seem to be more and more harmful *for* all living *creatures* on Earth. [AFFECTED ENTITY]

(26) * [...] even if they seem so unharmed *for us*. [AFFECTED ENTITY]

The phrase *of major/ great/ no concern (to)* and the adjective *(un)harmful (to)* are followed by an indirect object, marked by the preposition *to*, and denoting the experiencer as in example (24) and the affected entity as in sentences (25) and (26).

The choice of preposition in English is often determined by the semantic role of the object required by the prepositional noun phrase. Compare, for instance, (27) to (28):

(27) The children were encouraged to express their concern *to their father*. [RECIPIENT]

(28) The children were encouraged to express their concern *for their father*. [AFFECTED ENTITY]

The preposition *for* is used in (24) – (26) under the influence of Romanian, as its equivalent *pentru*, is common in the language, irrespective of the semantic role of the object, as seen in (29) and (30):

(29) Situația din Transnistria constituie *o mare preocupare* nu doar *pentru Ucraina*, ci și *pentru Europa*. [EXPERIENCER]

The situation in Transnistria is *of great concern* not only *to the Ukraine*, but also *to Europe*.

(30) Aerul pe care în respirăm este *din ce în ce mai dăunător pentru noi*. [AFFECTED ENTITY]

The air that we breathe is *more and more harmful to us*.

→ *OTHER PREPOSITIONS*

(31) * [...] have a great difficulty *to understand*. [in understanding; understanding]

(32) * The future generations are in danger *to inherit* a sick world. [of inheriting]

The verb following the Romanian equivalents of the abstract nouns *difficulty* ('dificultate') and *danger* ('pericol') is in the infinitive, which is marked by the preposition *a*, preceded by the preposition *de*:

(33) Dislexia este *dificultatea de a învăța* scrisul și cititul.

Dislexia is *the difficulty in learning* to write and read.

- (34) România nu este în pericolul *de a fi atacată*.
Romania is in no *danger of being attacked*.

In English, the form of the verb following the two nouns should be the gerund, governed by the preposition *in* in the case of the former, and by the preposition *of* in the case of the latter. In (31) and (32), the Romanian students transferred the Romanian pattern into English.

2.1.2.2. Omission

- (35)*I'll explain *you* why.

In both English and Romanian, verbs like *to explain / 'a explica'* or *to suggest / 'a sugera'* take two objects - a direct and an indirect one; no preposition is needed in Romanian to mark the dative case of the indirect object, while in English the use of *to* is compulsory:

- (36) *Îți* voi explica *totul* mai târziu.
To you will explain everything later.
I will explain *everything to you* later.
- (37) *I-* am sugerat *câteva soluții*.
To him have suggested several solutions.
I suggested several *solutions to him*.

2.2. Grammatical aspect

Romanian does not have the category of aspect. The Romanian compound perfect tense ('perfect compus'), formed just like the English present perfect (the present indicative of the auxiliary verb *a avea / have* + the invariable participle), is used to refer to an action characteristic of the English indefinite aspect of a past tense verb, as in (38):

- (38) În luna iunie anul trecut, *am terminat* facultatea.
I *graduated* from the university in June last year.

but may also imply an action characteristic of the English perfective aspect, as in (39) and (40):

- (39) *Am fost* de două ori la Paris până acum.
I *have been* to Paris twice so far.
- (40) *Tocmai am închis* fereastra.
I *have just closed* the window.

The result is that learners frequently overlook the existence of the English present perfect, and replace it with the simple past:

- (41)* I hear everyday that a crime *happened* somewhere.
Aud în fiecare zi că *s-a întâmplat* o crimă undeva.
- (42)* Since man began to fight against nature, the area of deserts *increased* considerably.
De când a început omul să lupte împotriva naturii, suprafața deșertului *a crescut* considerabil.
- (43)* Since man fell the first tree, forests *were reduced* by half.

De când a doborât omul primul copac, pădurile *au fost reduse* la jumătate.

- (44)*The number of people around the world *increased* thousand times.
 Numărul oamenilor în lume *a crescut* de mii de ori.

Though not in the corpus analyzed on this occasion, there are numerous other contexts in which we have come across the reverse type of present perfect-simple past levelling that Kortmann (2014), for example, regards as a learning-induced error which learners of English as an L2 tend to produce, i.e. the use of the present perfect for the Standard English simple past. However, in the particular case of Romanian learners of English, due to the above mentioned similarity in form between the 'perfect compus' and the present perfect, the erroneous use of the verb in (45) may be interpreted as a mother tongue triggered error rather than a learning-induced one:

- (45)*They *have discovered* the cave hundreds of years ago.
 Ei *au descoperit* peștera cu mii de ani în urmă.

2.3. Syntactic errors

2.3.1. Word order

Word order in Romanian is relatively free, so most of the sentence parts are not necessarily placed near the word they modify. Romanian makes use of nominal inflections, of agreement, of the preposition *pe* as marker of the accusative, of the unstressed forms of the personal pronoun that double the direct and the indirect objects; they all contribute to making the grammatical and the semantic meaning of a sentence clear. When an object or an adverbial is fronted, it is given a certain amount of prominence.

- (46) Ion a citit articolul *ieri*.
 John have read article-the *yesterday*.
 (47) Ion a citit *ieri* articolul.
 John have read *yesterday* article-the.
 (48) *Ieri* Ion a citit articolul.
Yesterday John have read article-the.
 (49) *Articolul* l-a citit ieri Ion.
Article-the it have read yesterday John.

It is well-known that English observes a rather strict SVO word order, i.e. the subject precedes the verb, while the object follows it, and adverbials usually come after the object. The adverbial of definite time may also occur before the subject, while the adverbial denoting indefinite time is placed between auxiliary and lexical verb or, in the case of a simple tense, between subject and predicate.

As for attributes, with very few exceptions, their place in the Romanian noun phrase is after the modified term, so that, in most cases, the usual order is head noun + qualifying adjective + prepositional attribute + noun in the genitive case:

- (50) casa veche de la țară a bunicii
 house-the old from countryside of grandmother-the
 my grandmother's old countryside house

In English, noun pre-modification is frequent. There is no restriction on the number of items that may pre-modify a noun and the length of these items may vary between a single word and a whole clause, longer modifiers occurring particularly in the written

discourse. This is the result of what Leech (2013, online) calls “densification”, i.e. “packing more meaning in less space”:

- (51) Britain’s first woman international airline pilot
a don’t tell-me-what-to-do attitude

These rules are often flouted by Romanian learners of English, under the influence of their mother tongue, as exemplified in the following subsections.

2.3.1.1. Position of the adverbial

One of the frequent errors in our corpus concerns the object (be it direct or prepositional), which is separated from the verb by an adverbial: → *V + Adverbial + DO:

- (52) *He will have *all his life* a loaded awareness. (adverbial of time)
*Owners of its has *often* close relationships [...] (adverbial of indefinite time)
- (53) *[...] evaluate *very well* your wishes. (adverbial of manner)
*Humanity began *couragely* [sic!] the work of transformation. (adverbial of manner)
*Decisions [...] can change *for the better* our future (adverbial of manner)
- (54) *Feminism has installed *in the mentality* of this society both good and bad ideas. (adverbial of place)

A *cleft (split) infinitive* is sometimes used in English to avoid ambiguity, allowing the direct object to occur in the immediate proximity of the verb that requires it. Under the influence of Romanian, the adverb is placed after the infinitive, separating the latter from its direct object:

- (55) *This might help us to realize *better* the importance of protecting our environment.

An adverbial may also be erroneously used when it separates the verb from its prepositional object: → *V + Adverbial + Prep O:

- (56) *We hear people talking *everyday* about pollution.

The adverbial of indefinite time is sometimes incorrectly placed at the end of the sentence: → *V + DO + Adverbial of indefinite time:

- (57) *We should remember this *always*. (adverbial of indefinite time)

We have also come across instances when the Romanian learners separated an auxiliary from the lexical verb by inserting an adverbial (which is not an adverb of indefinite time) between them, mirroring a type of word order that is perfectly acceptable in their mother tongue: → *Aux + Adverbial + Past Participle:

- (58) *Tones of ashes, dust, gases are *yearly* spread [...]

2.3.1.2 Position of the object complement

In English, the object complement should follow the object, not precede it. In Romanian, their place in the sentence is interchangeable, which explains the following word order choices identified in our corpus: → *V + Object Complement + DO:

- (59) *[...] with the result of getting *sick* a large number of people.
*There are a lot of shows that have *as main theme of discussion* pollution.

*We can take as an example the movie "Mona Lisa Smiles".

2.3.1.3. Nouns and their modification

Although not an error proper, the use of *of noun phrases* as postmodifiers is typical of Romanian learners of English. While in English the use of the preposition *of* as a marker of the genitive seems to be decreasing in frequency (Leech 2013), it is still preferred by Romanian learners, as it allows them to follow the Romanian pattern, where the noun in the genitive follows the head-noun that it modifies (head noun + postmodification).

(60) ?[...] people trying to explain the consequences of this pollution: *the destruction of the ozone layer [...] the melting of the icebergs, the rising of the ocean level*. (instead of the more common - *ozone layer destruction, iceberg melting, the ocean level rise*)

(61) ?All these things are caused by *the clearing of forests*. (instead of the more common - *forest clearing; deforestation*)

If the noun in the Genitive has a [+human] feature, English prefers the synthetic genitive, preceding the head-noun (*their husbands' salary, women's emancipation*). Under the influence of their mother tongue, Romanian learners of English prefer the use of postmodification:

(62) ?[...] not depending on *the salary of their husbands*.
 ?[...] this is the only negative aspect in *the emancipation of women*.

An unusual error occurs in (62): → *N + preposition (of) + possessive adjective. In Romanian, in neutral, non-emphatic word order, the possessive adjective in the Genitive follows the noun it modifies (*proprietarul ei* 'its owner', *casa lor* 'their house', *mașina mea* 'my car'). Pre-modification is possible, but the result is an emphatic construction – *a mea casă, al lor fiu*). In English, the possessive adjective precedes the head-noun (e.g. *its owner, their house, my car*) and only possessive *pronouns* may occur as post-modifiers – *that car of mine, that friend of yours*.

(63) *[...] main factory and *the owner of its*.
 [...] principala fabrică și *proprietarul ei*.

The type of error → *Head-noun + noun (used attributively) is also produced under the influence of the Romanian head-noun + postmodification structure.

(64) *If *the image-symbol* of air pollution are the acid rains. (Ro. *imagine-simbol*)
 *[...] the man that has killed her child in *an accident car*. (Ro. *accident de mașină*)

2.3.1.4. Subject position

2.3.1.4.1. Subject position in indirect questions

A typical error committed by Romanian learners of English is the use of the word order characteristic of English direct interrogative sentences in indirect questions (interrogative pronoun + auxiliary BE + subject), influenced by the word order acceptable in their mother tongue. The cause of the error may also be overgeneralization: students became familiar with the pattern of direct questions and applied it to indirect questions as well:

(65) *We can have an idea of *what can be the main causes of the conspiracy*.

2.3.1.4.2. The empty subject “there”

The surface structure slot of the subject must be filled in all English sentences, whether the grammatical subject coincides with the logical subject or not. In Romanian, this is not a compulsory rule – the slot of the surface structure subject may be left empty and, if this is the case, it is either the context or the verb ending that indicates who/what the subject is. Sentences like those in (66),

(66) **There* have been made even movies [...]
 **There* were founded many organisations [...]

found in our corpus, may have been produced by overlapping two sets of rules. The student started from the Romanian sentence in whose surface structure the subject is absent, and most probably transferred it into English. Then the English rule requiring the empty word *there* as grammatical subject of the sentence was overgeneralized and wrongly applied, as such sentences must have an intransitive verb (of motion, of inception, of stance), while in (66) the verbs are transitive.

2.3.2. The sequence of tenses

There are hardly any rules for the use of tenses and moods in Romanian sentences, the verb forms being dictated by the logic of the actions. The relations of anteriority, posteriority, simultaneity or continuity are sometimes suggested by various conjunctions or adverbs.

(67) Am spus că îmi plac fructele. (compound perfect + present)
 Have said that to me like fruit.
 I said that I liked fruit.

(68) Eram sigură că n- am lăsat cartea acolo. (imperfect + compound perfect)
 Was sure that not have left book-the there.
 I was sure that I had not left the book there.

(69) Mi -a promis că mă va suna de îndată ce va primi rezultatul. (compound perfect + future + future)
 Me have promised that me will call as soon as will get result-the.
 He promised me that he would call me as soon as he got the result.

(70) Dacă nu va lua măsuri, totul va fi pierdut. (future in ‘if’ clause + future)
 If not will take steps, everything will be lost.
 If he doesn’t take steps, everything will be lost.

Under the influence of this flexible correlation of verb tenses in Romanian, learners of English make mistakes of the kind exemplified below:

(71) *The terrorist became a killer because he *lost* his family. (relation of anteriority: *had lost*)
 *A mother killed the man that *has killed* her child. (relation of anteriority: *had killed*)

(72) *She did that without thinking that this *will not resolve* the situation. (relation of posteriority: *would not solve*)

(73) *If he *will not be imprisoned*, he will have all his life a loaded awareness. (no future in the ‘if’ clause)

2.4. Lexical-semantic errors

2.4.1. Lexical creations

Some English and Romanian words that have similar meanings also have very similar forms. Based on the perception of such semantic equivalence and closeness in form, and, at the same time, as a consequence of insufficiently solid knowledge of the foreign language, learners sometimes produce hybrid lexical items that usually combine a Romanian-like base form with an English bound inflectional morpheme – either the plural ending –s or the past participle particle –ed. Here are some examples:

- (74) *[...] release the chemicals and *particulates* in the atmosphere. (Ro. *particule* ‘particles’)
 *The air isn’t the only one that is *polluated*. (Ro. *poluat* ‘polluted’)
 *millions of hectares of ground are *devorated* by cities. (Ro. *a devora* ‘devour’)
 *[...] do not pay attention on the *avertisements* (Ro. *avertisment* ‘warning’).

False friends or words that have resembling forms in the two languages but differ in meaning are also a source of errors. *Combustible*, *avidity*, *dispose*, and *advertisement* in the sentences given under (75) are wrongly believed to have the same sense as the Romanian words *combustibil*, *aviditate*, *a dispune* (i.e. *a avea la dispoziție* ‘to have at one’s disposal’), *avertisment*, to which they are very close in form, but very different in meaning:

- (75) *[...] burning almost eight billion tones of *combustible*. (Ro. *combustibil* (noun) = ‘any material that may be burnt, fuel’; E. *combustible* (adj.) = ‘able to burn easily’);
 *People tend to destroy the source of their life out of ignorance, *avidity*. (Ro. *aviditate* = ‘avarice’; E. *avidity* = ‘eagerness’, ‘enthusiasm’)
 *[...] but the population can *dispose* only of 1 per cent of it [of the water]. (Ro. *a dispune* = ‘to have at one’s disposal’, ‘to possess’; E. *dispose* = ‘to get rid of’, ‘to remove’)
 *There are a lot of *advertisements* even on the cigarette packages of smocking [sic!]. (Ro. *avertisment* = ‘warning’; E. *advertisement* = ‘publicity’)

There are also instances when two English words correspond to one Romanian word, and this misleads learners: for example, *make* and *do* mean “*a face*”, *let* and *leave* mean “*a lăsa*”:

- (76) *even a dead man could *let* a message (i.e., leave)
 Chiar și un mort poate *lăsa* un mesaj.
 (77) * Other people kill others that have *made them a bad thing* (= i.e., done sth. bad to them)
 Alți oameni omoară pe cei care *le-au făcut ceva rău*.

2.4.2. Calques

Under the influence of Romanian, the analyzed essays contain a number of phraseological calques – English lexical units that adopt both the structure and the meaning of corresponding Romanian lexical units. Such calques are faulty constructions in the foreign language:

- (78) *a person who is known as *a criminal in series* (← *un criminal în serie*, ‘a serial criminal’)
 *one is obviously *in loss* (← *în pierdere*, ‘the loser’, ‘at a loss’);
 *not only *people of science* should be interested (← *oameni de știință*, ‘scientists’)
 *we see the effects even *in nowadays* (← *în zilele noastre*, ‘nowadays’)
 *The criminals will be jailed [...] *for all their life* (← *pentru toată viața*, ‘for life’)

* the victims *have no guilt* (←*nu au nici o vină*, 'are not guilty')

2.5. Quantitative results

As opposed to the three studies in error analysis mentioned in the introduction, which merely present error types and exemplify them, the current study also contains a quantitative analysis, which allowed us to establish a hierarchy of the errors occurring at this level of English acquisition, and which reveals that equal attention must be paid to both grammar and lexis when teaching a foreign language. Of the 103 L1-triggered errors identified, the most numerous are, in decreasing order of their frequency, those connected to word order (27, i.e. 26.21 percent), followed closely by the misuse of articles, particularly of the definite article (26, i.e. 25.24 percent); vocabulary errors (20, i.e. 19.42 percent) and errors in the use of prepositions (17, i.e. 16.50 percent) are also well represented. Errors connected to aspect (8, i.e. 7.77 percent) and the sequence of tenses (5, i.e. 4.85 percent) (two areas which teachers usually expect their students to find difficult) rank at the bottom of the list.

Category of error	Total number of occurrences/category	Percentage
Word order errors	27	26.21%
Adverbial position	10	
Noun modifiers position	10	
Object complement position	4	
Subject position	3	
Misuse of articles	26	24.24%
Misuse of the definite article	16	
Misuse of the zero article	8	
Misuse of the indefinite article	2	
Vocabulary errors	20	19.42%
Lexical creations	14	
Calques	6	
Misuse of prepositions	17	16.50%
at	6	
in	4	
for	3	
other prepositions	2	
of	1	
no preposition	1	
Errors connected to aspect (present perfect vs. past simple)	8	7.77%
Errors connected to the sequence of tenses	5	4.85%

Table 1. Distribution of L1-triggered errors

3. Conclusion

The ten essays analysed contain many more errors, but, as pointed out, we have concentrated here only those whose source was deemed to be the students' mother tongue.

We are aware that the present analysis is not a comprehensive study, but it provides at least some indications of the categories and frequency of mother-tongue triggered errors that Romanian learners of English tend to make as intermediate-level users of the foreign language. The analysis of a larger part of RoCLE would, of course, have allowed us to add further details to our small-scale research. At the same time, RoCLE itself might need to be enlarged, to include not only free compositions on a given topic (argumentative essays), but also guided compositions (essays based on a sequence of images presented to the informants, for example), as well as translations from Romanian into English, which would induce informants to employ specific grammatical structures or specific words, not just those that they know or think they know.

Keeping in mind that further, more thorough error analyses will hopefully be carried out, some final remarks should be made concerning the relevance of such studies for the teaching of English to Romanians.

On the one hand, once a certain typology of errors is obvious, it may become a useful issue to consider when designing teaching materials. Disregarding the students' mother tongue may lead to the creation of some kind of "universal" teaching materials that address German, Romanian or Chinese learners, as if they were a homogenous audience. On the other hand, taking mother tongue into consideration and paying attention to the kind of cross-linguistic influence that is activated in each particular case may contribute to designing materials that would better fit the needs of a particular group of learners.

Of course, the question remains as to how awareness of errors caused by mother tongue influence may actually be raised through teaching aids. Comparing structures of the students' native language with those of the foreign language seems to be the traditional way of doing it, though its effectiveness has been acknowledged by some, but questioned by others, as Odlin (1989) observes. Other methods and appropriate tasks and activities may prove helpful in this respect.

Once the students' attention is drawn to the kind of mother-tongue driven errors they are likely to make, the chances of their exerting some degree of self-control in order to avoid them increase along with the chances of their not being identified as native speakers of a particular language - Romanian, in our case - when they use English. This would trigger their confidence in their linguistic performance and motivation to improve their language skills.

An overview of errors such as those we have concentrated on may play a role not only in teaching, but also in the evaluation process. As long as their typology and frequency are familiar to teachers, they will know the best way to approach such errors when designing assessment grids. Once they are able to make a difference between a trend characteristic of a larger group of learners and isolated cases of faulty language performance, their marking system and the feedback they provide their students with would be more relevant.

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¹ Pit Corder (1967, 162) states: "Teachers have not always been very impressed by this contribution from the linguist for the reason that their practical experience has usually already shown them where these difficulties lie and they have not felt that the contribution of the linguist has provided them with any significantly new information. They noted, for example, that many of the errors with which they were familiar were not predicted by the linguist anyway".