Buletinul Ştiinţific al Universităţii Politehnica Timişoara
Seria Limbi moderne

Scientific Bulletin of the Politehnica University of Timişoara
Transactions on Modern Languages

Vol. 23, Issue 1 / 2024

Development of Written Communication Skills Through Creative Writing - level A1

Maria SIMINA-SUCIU*

Abstract: Written communication skills are one of the most important parts of language learning, starting with level A1, the most important level, in our opinion, as this is where the language learning process begins. To develop this skill, students should write as many and as varied texts as possible. To this end, we would like to bring to your attention the creative writing method through which our students can practice writing texts. Although we refer to Romanian as a foreign language, these methods can be applied to any foreign language.

Keywords: language teaching, creative writing, writing skills, Romanian as foreign language.

1. Introduction

In this article we want to present some didactic methods to use creative writing in language teaching class, more precisely in the development of written communication skills in Romanian as foreign language, level A1. The purpose of the paper is to show some examples of activities that we consider useful. The article will have four parts, beginning with the theoretical framework concerning A1 level and the writing skill, the second part will be focused on describing creating writing and why we think it should be used in the language class, while in the third section we'll present three activities that can be adapted to each class. The las part will contain the conclusions. Also, the references will be placed at the end of the paper.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1. A1 level – short description

Level A1 (introductory) is the most elementary level of language use with elements of production, at which the learner is able to participate in simple interactive activities;

* PhD, Department of Romanian Language, Culture and Civilisation, Babeș-Bolyai University / Department of Modern Languages, Technical University, Romania, mariasuciu2509@gmail.com

BUPT

can answer simple questions about him/herself, where he/she lives, the people he/she knows, the things he/she owns and can formulate the same type of questions; can intervene with simple statements in areas which concern him/her or which are known to him/her and answer these questions, without limiting him/her to the simple reproduction of typical expressions and phrases. " (CECR, 32)

The lexical items of this level are basic ones designed to meet immediate communication needs, not a varied vocabulary. Communication will be through short, sometimes fragmented sentences, with many mistakes that can lead to misunderstanding of the message. At this level, the learner will be able to discuss in a painful way concrete things that are in the immediate reality.

According to Minimal description of the Romanian language, the lexical items used are part of the family, shopping, colors, they are able to express what they do constantly. They can also construct negative, affirmative sentences and express how an action occurs. At the same time, they can minimally describe places for travel and holidays, sports, name some media and name some dishes.

The students who acquired this level can ask for information regarding places, time, description of spaces or quantities. In speech they can make various correlations, mention an option, an opposition (but), express a condition (if). Also at this level, speakers are able to ask for information about certain abilities (Can you speak Romanian? Yes, I can.), about something (Where is the Faculty of Letters?), are able to identify someone (She is my colleague), justify an answer using the connector "because". They are also able to consider facts to be true or untrue (It is true that...), or to consider facts to be necessary (I have to go). They can express pleasure or displeasure, ask for help they need and ask permission. Conversations are short, including elements such as:

- greeting (on meeting and parting): Hello, Maria! Goodbye!
- addressing (direct or by phone): How are you? Hello! Hello!
- initiating and maintaining a conversation: How are you? /Good, thank you.
- introduction: My name is Iulia. /This is Ionuț. /How do you do?
- greetings: Happy birthday! /Have a nice holiday! /Welcome! thanks, congratulations!
- apologies: Thank you! /Goodbye! /Happy birthday!

As morphological elements, they learn within this level are: noun (gender, number and case), article (definite and indefinite), adjective (four-form qualifier, possessive, non-unquote pronoun, interrogative pronoun), pronoun (personal - nominative, accusative, genitive, dative - reflexive, negative, interrogative), the verb (present indicative, future literal, perfect compound, present conjunctive for 1st and 2nd persons, future popular for 1st and 2nd persons, adverbs and adverbial locutions (of tense, mode, place, interrogative), cardinal numeral, place prepositions, conjunctions and conjunctive locutions (coordinating and subordinating) (Platon, Sonea, Vasiu, Vîlcu 2014).

BUPT

The types of texts are not very varied, they are as simple as possible to understand. Thus, for the reception of the oral message, we will choose texts such as short and simple informal dialogues (2 participants), short and simple informative texts (TV program, weather report, promotions, announcements at the station and airport, daily program, etc.), simple descriptions of people, messages on the answering machine. Texts for receiving written messages will be short and simple descriptions (personal information, home, places, professions, etc.), information texts, personal letters, short and simple messages.

In the case of message production, students will be able to produce oral messages based on simple descriptions of topics specific to the level (daily life, holidays and free time, professions, shopping, home and family, natural environment), to have simple conversations (at a restaurant, travel agency, doctor, etc.). The written message will contain descriptions (people, homes, places, etc.), narratives (daily schedule, holidays, free time), informal correspondence (message, postcard) (Platon, Sonea, Vasiu, Vîlcu 2014).

2.2. Writing skills in Romanian as a foreign language

Communication competence is one of the most important parts as a bilingual/multilingual because it represents the ability to interact with other people, speak or write, in different circumstances. The act of writing is defined as being more complex than that of speaking, as it does not happen spontaneously and takes longer to complete. The advantage of writing is that we can go back at any time to correct what we have written, we can rephrase and edit. Also, the written message is tidier and more organized than speech because in speech we can have those long pauses, the text is more fragmented because of the lack of time to think and correct.

The development of writing skills must also follow certain principles, including a communicative approach. Writing a message is also a form of communication through which we can convey different information, relate a story, or create an imaginary story. In this sense, the activities we devote to writing should not be carried out in isolation, but in permanent connection with real facts that can be related (Platon, Burlacu, Sonea 2011).

As with the other skills, feedback from the teacher is important in correcting mistakes. After a text has been written, it is advisable to correct it by reading it in front of colleagues, or the teacher can take the texts for correction and bring them back later with remarks on mistakes or appreciation of a good text. During the reading of a text, it would be advisable for the teacher not to interrupt the student, with feedback being given at the end. Even if the text contains many mistakes, the teacher should offer encouragement in order to motivate his/her students.

The production of a written text should follow a well-thought-out plan and contain well thought-out arguments. In producing written texts, students should be clear about why they are writing, to whom their text is addressed (if they are asked to produce a message for someone, it is important to be appropriate to the situation), they should know the subject they are writing about. The choice of subject is

BUPT

important here too because a subject they do not know much about would make the writing process more difficult. The length of the text we ask for and the requirements we have should be appropriate to the level of language the student has at that moment. The assignment should be clear, contain all the information the students need to write the text and we should mention, in the case of class work, how many minutes we are giving them to write the text.

3. Creative writing and the reason to use it in language class

3.1. What is creative writing?

Teaching strategies that can be used to develop written communication competence are varied and teachers for different activities even include technology in the teaching process. These strategies include creative writing. Creative writing is a form of written content based on imagination, often associated with literature, and depicting unreal events.

In language learning, creative writing can also occur in exercises where students are asked to imagine they are on holiday and must write messages to friends or family about what they are doing there. In this case, even if stylistic devices are not used, students must imagine a different situation from the real one.

3.2. Why should we use it?

During the learning process, students must be able to form simple sentences, write texts, starting from simple grammatical and lexical structures, reaching simple but complete sentences. In other words, they need to practice writing from the beginning, when they start learning the new language, until they acquire high levels. Regarding level A1, the base of language acquisition, it's the most important level, in my opinion, because it contains the basics and all errors must be corrected, otherwise students form automatisms, and they keep making the same errors in levels B1 or B2.
The main reason to use creative writing as a method to practice writing is the fact that it is a good way to practice verbs and vocabulary, and writing rules, such as using capital letters, or punctuation signs. Also, the writing exercise is more complex than the structured grammatical exercises or answering simple questions.

Furthermore, writing texts is a good way to keep track of progress, by creating a dossier with all the text written by the students, and seeing how their writing improves. Also, it's a good way for students to revise what they wrote to see the mistakes they made and to help them study. In this case, the feedback from the teacher is very important. A good way is to mark the mistakes and, below the text, to explain, using examples, why the students' version was wrong, and what is the correct one. This way, when the students revise, they can better understand and learn.
Using creative writing is a way to make language classes more dynamic and diverse, than asking students to write only about the things they do and see. Also, it challenges the students to find new communicative strategies to fulfill the task. This way, the course is less 'boring' and keeps them active and engaged throughout the language learning process.

BUPT

Creative writing has another major advantage: the fact that doesn't imply too many strict rules to follow, besides the language rules. This way, it's more motivating for students. Dornyei (2001) enunciates some characteristics, which we consider relevant:

- "create a pleasant and supportive atmosphere.
- promote the development of group cohesiveness.
- increase the students' expectation of success in particular tasks and in learning in general.
- make learning more stimulating and enjoyable by breaking the monotony of classroom events.
- make learning stimulating and enjoyable by increasing the attractiveness of tasks.
- make learning stimulating and enjoyable for learners by enlisting them as active task participants.
- present and administer tasks in a motivating way.
- provide students with regular experiences of success.
- build your learners' confidence by providing regular encouragement.
- increase student motivation by promoting cooperation among the learners.
- increase student motivation by actively promoting learner autonomy.
- increase learner satisfaction.
- offer rewards in a motivational manner." (Dornyei 2001, 138-144).

Dornyei (2001) refers to motivation in his argument, which is one of the most important facts in learning, also creating a more relaxed environment can be beneficial for our students because it releases the pressure and the students can focus more on the task, so their texts will be better written than when they are 'stressed'.

It's important to mention that the length of the texts must be adapted to our students' level, and most importantly to the characteristics of level A1, so the texts should not exceed 10 lines. Another fact that must be considered is that not all the students are creative when it comes to writing texts in another language, especially when their vocabulary is limited, therefore we need to be considerate and to give tasks that don't require too much imagination.

Creative writing can be done individually, or the teacher can divide the class into pairs or even groups. As in the case of any other type of text, the teacher must give the students clear instructions, so they know exactly what they have to do and how many minutes they have.

4. Type of activities

To integrate creative writing into the language class, we can use three activities, equally useful and fun, requiring different methods as well.

BUPT

4.1. Comic strips

The first one, using technology, can be done on www.pixton.com that can be used both during the course, in the classroom, and for writing homework. Here, students can create comics or graphic novels where they choose what their characters look like, who they are, and where they are. The platform provides them with a set of possibilities that they can combine to create the story they want. Also here, they will find the necessary tools to be able to write the lines of the outlined characters, in the form of speech bubbles. To integrate pixton in the teaching activity, the teacher needs to create a class on the platform, and the students have access to it through a link. The usefulness of the site lies in the playful nature of creating comics, through which we can develop the students' communication skills, because they can create dialogues between two or more characters.

Needing a minimal vocabulary, students can imagine dialogues between imaginary characters that they create with the help of the platform, which provides background, speech bubbles and numerous character options. An example would be to create a short dialogue between a child and Santa Claus about the gift list. For this activity, the students need verbs such as to want, to need, or to like, which in Romanian language belong to different conjugations and follow different structural patterns, the plurals, and definite/indefinite articles. It could be a good activity to revise the verbs in present tense, and to add more vocabulary to the students' repertoire.

This kind of approach is beneficial for the students and for the teacher at the same time. For students, they are useful, as they create a more comfortable learning environment for them, as they are familiar with the Internet and technology. Another benefit offered to students is connectivity, as they can create social networks where they can communicate without the pressure of being monitored by the teacher, so they can cooperate more easily and develop not only their language skills but also their social skills, the class becoming a more cohesive group. The third benefit is that they can customize their materials, and a more attractive work environment can be created for them.

As for teachers, they can benefit from access to more teaching materials and tools to easily create new materials (images, diagrams, drawings). At the same time, the platform can shorten the time spent on correcting assignments and providing feedback, helping to monitor student progress. Also, through a platform, class monitoring becomes easier, as all assignments, assignments and projects are uploaded to the same database.

Another activity created around comic strips but for this activity the teacher needs to provide the images. If in the case when using an online platform, students have preset pictures ready to use, for this example the teacher needs to bring the pictures printed out and hand them to students. The task will be to imagine a dialogue or a conversation, and to fill the speech bubbles according to what they see in the pictures. It would be important to give them pictures that do not limit their lines, so

BUPT

they can create more complex and diverse conversations. The point is to let them interpret what they see there and write whatever they want.

This exercise can be done by dividing the class into teams. It is more effective this way because the teacher can create unity in class and can teach students how to work together.

4.2 Create a story

The second activity we propose is done with the help of notes on which the teacher writes five to seven random words and with which the students must create a short story. The aim is to integrate as many lexical elements as possible and create a link between them. It is important to mention that the words do not have to be from the same sematic field, except for two. The teacher will write the words on the notes and fold them so that the words cannot be seen. Then he will put all the notes in a box or bag and each student will draw a note. The teacher should mention how many minutes the students have for the text, and they will work individually. When they have finished writing, they will read the texts in front of their classmates.

An example of a word group could be giraffe, zoo, umbrella, shoes, popcorn, laptop, and friends. This way, students can practice the present tense and the past tense.

4.3 Roll a story

This is another good strategy for which we either need a physical die or we can use a virtual die. We can choose to divide the class into pairs or groups of three or four students and we need to make a table with four columns and six rows corresponding to the faces of the dice. On the first column we put the characters, on the second the place where the action takes place, on the third the moment, and on the fourth the context that triggers the story. On each row we write different characters, time, place, and context, so we will have six different characters, six different places, six different times and six different contexts. Students must roll the dice four times, and the numbers drawn will correspond to the elements the students used to create the story.

For example, on column 1, row 4 the character is a princess, on column 2 row 3 the place contains an amusement park, on column 3 row 6 the time is written 3 days ago, and on column 4 row 2 the context is a lost puppy, and a student "gets" the numbers 4, 3, 6, 2 the student must use those elements to build their story.

Roll a story is a great way to practice the past tense and we can give them thematic stories, such as Christmas or Halloween.

5. Conclusion

This paper presented the ways in which we could integrate creative writing into a Romanian language class. In our opinion, creative writing is a great way to practice writing skills because it creates a funnier, friendlier, and less formal environment that can be very beneficial for our students. Through creative writing, we can practice

BUPT

many grammatical categories, such as verbs, adjectives, nouns, or prepositions of place.

References

1. Cadrul Comun European de Referință pentru Limbi: Învățare, Predare, Evaluare, Diviziunea Politici Lingvistice Strasbourg.
2. Dornyei, Zoltan. 2001. *Motivational Strategies in the Language Classroom,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
3. Platon, Elena, Burlacu, Diana, Sonea, Ioana (coord.). 2011. *Procesul de predare-învățare a limbii române ca limbă nematernă (RLNM) la ciclul primar. RLNM: P1 - ciclul primar,* Cluj-Napoca:Casa Cărții de Știință.
4. Platon, Elena, Burlacu, Diana, Sonea, Ioana (coord.). 2011. *Procesul de predare-învățare a limbii române ca limbă nematernă (RLNM) la ciclul gimnazial. RLNM: P2 - ciclul gimnazial,* Cluj-Napoca: Casa Cărții de Știință.
5. Platon, Elena, Sonea, Ioana, Vasiu, Lavinia, Vîlcu, Dina. 2014. *Descrierea minimală a limbii române. A1, A2, B1, B2,* Cluj-Napoca : Casa Cărții de Știință.

Site

www.pixton.com

BUPT