

Romanian Language: A New Life as Heritage Language for Diasporic Communities

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Pentru a cita acest articol: Marin, I., 2021, "Romanian Language: A New Life as Heritage Language for Diasporic Communities". *Romanian Studies Today*. V, p. 79-91.

Abstract. After 2000, American linguists and language instructors have introduced the distinction between dominant (English) and heritage languages (other languages spoken at home) in order to approach teaching more effectively. Most recently, Romanian has become a heritage language of diasporic communities in the US and recognized as such by state and federal authorities. I claim that Romanian as a heritage language needs to be addressed as a major component of Romanian studies in order to help maintain the Romanian language speaking communities outside the territory of Romania. Considering the substantial differences in learning practices and experiences between second generations of Romanian-Americans and their fellow Z-ers raised in Romania, I also argue that Romanian-American students cannot use textbooks conceived in the country by Romanian language specialists unfamiliar with the American school system expectations and requirements; consequently, new research paths have to be explored by Romanian language instructors active outside the country. Since education systems are different on the old continent from those across the Atlantic it is necessary that Romanian language instructors design teaching strategies following the system in which their students are enrolled and adopt the principles of Heritage Language Learning.

Keywords: dominant language, heritage language, Romanian, diaspora, World Affairs Council

1. Old and New Challenges of Maintaining Heritage Languages

In today's global world, people choose to immigrate because of a combination of push and pull factors: among the major push factors that make Romanians decide to immigrate are low salaries, lack of professional opportunities for further development, frustration with the slow rhythm of social and political change, corruption, and disregard for the rule of law; among the most attractive pull factors are better working environments, greater education and research opportunities, fairer assessment of professional knowledge and skills, and more efficient state institutions. Romanian migration – permanent or temporary – has a huge impact on the Romanian language as it loses its status as a dominant language and becomes a family, community, or minority language surrounded by another dominant language. In the United States, maintaining Romanian, and for that matter any other heritage language, is a challenge. This may be correlated with the fact that in 2017, the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services agency changed the phrasing of its mission emphasizing the legal and administrative aspects of the immigration system to the detriment of the individuals who chose or were forced to apply for immigrant status. As such, the USA was not any longer a “nation of immigrants” to whom the USCIS agency was “granting immigration and citizenship benefits, promoting an awareness and understanding of citizenship, and ensuring the integrity of our immigration system.”¹ Instead, USCIS became the administrator of “the nation’s lawful immigration system” whose role has been to protect American citizens, homeland, and values by “efficiently and fairly adjudicating requests for immigration benefits,” which seems to suggest that all applicants may potentially represent a threat to American life. Furthermore, the word “applicants,” previously used on all the agency documents, was replaced by “customers,” a term which for Director L. Francis Cissna was supposed to function “as a reminder that we are always working for the American people.”² Suddenly, the immigrants applying for citizenship found themselves artificially separated from the rest of the Americans, former immigrants themselves or descendants of immigrants. Under such circumstances, second language learning to the level of bilingualism or

¹ Several opinion articles in central and local newspapers, institution blogs, as well as radio and TV shows analyzed the Trump administration’s decision to change the not so old statement of the Bush administration from 2005. See Mary Giovagnoli. “Removal of ‘Nation of Immigrants’ from USCIS Mission Ignores Agency’s Mandate and American History.” *Immigration Impact*, 26 Feb. 2018, www.immigrationimpact.com/2018/02/26/removal-nation-immigrants-uscis-mission/. Accessed 28 Sep. 2020.

² Richard Gonzales reported on Cissna’s new vision of USCIS on the National Public Radio on 22 Feb 2018, www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2018/02/22/588097749/america-no-longer-a-nation-of-immigrants-uscis-says. Accessed 1 Sep. 2020.

maintaining the language of the first-generation Americans brought back to language instructors' attention the century-old issue of ideology and identity.

During the huge wave of migration from Eastern and Southern Europe between 1880 and 1920, the government declared the 4th of July 1915 the "Americanization Day (Dominika Baran, 5) in an attempt to protect the American identity whose defining element was speaking fluent English as a result of cultural assimilation. The beginning of WWI did not help either, since in 1917, the Congress passed the Espionage Act that required, among other things, that all ethnic community newspapers published in a foreign language – the targeted language was German – have English translations.³ One of the consequences of the Espionage Act was that German-language schools were closed, English became the only language for instruction, and, in some places, like Findlay, Ohio, local authorities went as far as passing a resolution against the citizens who were heard speaking German in public. In the article "Radicalization and Language Policy," Ronald Schmidt mentions that German-speaking Americans actually risked \$25 fine in 1916 (qtd. in Baran 36). One year later, the Bureau of Naturalization launched the slogan "One language, one country, one flag," which had a predictable impact: cultural and linguistic assimilation reached unprecedented heights. At the same time, employers and public schools felt the pressure to provide English language instruction to the newly arrived employees. In less than a decade, a reversed education phenomenon took place: the second-generation, even though they were children, started teaching English to their parents, forcing them to abandon speaking their native language. As a result, both generations lost their heritage language and contributed to the consolidation of monolingualism. Aneta Pavlenko, Professor of Applied Linguistics, specialist in bilingualism and the history of bilingualism, documents extensively both the educational and societal barriers that were raised at the beginning of the twentieth century to prevent bilingualism (2002). This phenomenon coincided with the unsubstantiated attack on bilingualism, launched by psychologists (Carl C. Brigham 1923, George Thompson 1952, Anne Anastasi and Fernando Cordova 1953, 1980) and specialists in education (Florence Goodenough 1926, J.G. Yoshioka 1929, Madorah Smith 1931, 1939) who tried to prove that bilingual students could not reach higher intellectual development (Hakuta 1986). Administering tests mostly in English, sometimes both in English and in the students' heritage language, these researchers looked for a correlation between intelligence and bilingualism, ignoring social and economic factors which had played a much greater role in the acquisition of language and learning skills, and the amount of knowledge retained by learners. One of the leading researchers in experimental psycholinguistics,

³ David Asp gives an extensive analysis of the *Espionage Act of 1917* in his article from *The First Amendment Encyclopedia*. May 2019, www.mtsu.edu/first-amendment/article/1045/espionage-act-of-1917#. Accessed 20 Sep. 2020.

Kenji Hakuta, Professor of Education Emeritus at Stanford University, has documented thoroughly the debate over bilingualism. His works – *Mirror of Language: The Debate on Bilingualism* (1986) and *In Other Words: The Science and Psychology of Second Language Acquisition*, the latter co-authored with Ellen Bialystok, (1994) – address the benefits of bilingualism. Building on Elizabeth Peal and Wallace Lambert’s seminal study “The Relation of Bilingualism to Intelligence” of 1962, as well as on experiments run in multilingual countries, Hakuta succeeded in creating awareness on the importance of second language acquisition and/or maintaining heritage languages spoken by minority students. Nonetheless, in spite of the fact that many studies have proven wrong that bilingualism may be an impediment in a student’s intellectual development, even in 2020, it is hard to counter the rejection of bilingualism, mainly among heritage speakers who strive to present themselves as Americans in order to avoid discrimination and who believe that complete cultural and linguistic assimilation is the only answer to their turmoil.

Under such circumstances, both learning a second language and maintaining a heritage language have been perceived as an unnecessary, if not counterproductive, enterprise. Besides, in recent years, the emphasis on STEM disciplines – Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics – and the Great Recession of 2009 led to rapid decline of the second language programs.⁴ Once colleges and universities dropped second language requirements from three to two years of language learning, the loss of second language programs across the US continued and reached its lowest point between 2013 and 2016 when 651 language programs closed. I argue that this diminished interest in a foreign language or second language acquisition creates an opportunity for heritage languages in the US (Stein-Smith 2019).

2. Heritage Language Maintenance or Second Language Acquisition

According to Anne Kelleher from the Center for Applied Linguistics at the University of California, Davis, a heritage language is any language other than English that is used by members of an ethnic community to identify themselves through cultural connections and proficiency in their community language.⁵ It is precisely because of the cultural connection and emotional attachment to a

⁴ More about the STEM education, its implementation and fast development offers Judith Hallinen in her article “STEM Education” from *Encyclopedia Britannica*. www.britannica.com/topic/STEM-education/STEM-education. Accessed 1 Sep. 2020.

⁵ See the pdf document compiled by Anne Kelleher, “Heritage Briefs”, for *Heritage Languages in America*. www.cal.org/heritage/pdfs/briefs/What-is-a-Heritage-Language.pdf. Accessed 1 Sep. 2020.

community language, irrespective of the level of competence, that languages like Spanish, Chinese, Arabic, Russian, Romanian, and many others cannot be defined as “foreign”. As the language of a family, community, or an ethnic group, a heritage language is acquired at home as the first language, practiced within a larger community to whom the family belongs, and is used mostly before the speaker is exposed to the dominant language in school. With the increased exposure to the dominant language, which initially is learned as a foreign or second language, the heritage language starts fading away if it is not maintained through an encouraging, rewarding, and an emotionally engaging education system. In some (liberal) states of the US, several heritage languages have entered the regular curriculum. Yet, Romanian is not one of them. Even though students are not encouraged to take proficiency exams in their heritage languages for High School credits, more and more students take the ALTA exam and have their knowledge of the heritage language officially recognized. Romanian is among the languages tested by ALTA and this academic recognition gives Romanian heritage students a great advantage both in High School as they gain credits for second language with a little effort and later in College when they prove to have met foreign language requirements and thus can enroll in their field of choice classes for credits.

In the US, Romanian is taught as a second language through the Romanian Language Institute at the college level only in a couple of universities – Columbia, New York; Arizona State University, Phoenix – where most of the students who enroll are of Romanian descent. Consequently, the mission to maintain a bilingual Romanian-American community has fallen on nonprofits and churches. Heritage Romanian programs, more than the French, Italian, Spanish, Russian, and Chinese Heritage programs, are faced with two major challenges: first, the reluctance of Romanian families to continue speaking their native language at home as they want their children to blend into the American society as Americans (I would say as white Americans since most of Romanians do not have any racially distinguishable features), not as Romanian-Americans; second, the lack of Romanian language programs and teaching materials that approach Romanian as a heritage language.

At the root of the first challenge it is more often the parents’ traumatic experience that goes back to their life in Romania. For those who left the country during communism, this trauma leads to a total rejection of their native language, Romanian identity, and even of their family history and culture. In many cases, because Orthodox or Pentecostal churches are still perceived in diaspora as institutions worthy of trust, immutable in scope and service, reliable, and, more importantly, outside the reach of political pressure, pre-1989 immigrants reconnect with their origin through church. They suffered from communist oppression, food shortages, controlled blackouts, lack of career opportunities and

freedom, all which left deep emotional scars. The post-1989 immigrants, however, have gone through a different set of traumas as they lost hope in a profound change of the country after the two Mineriads of the 1990s: they also had to survive systemic corruption and social inequality, while they felt betrayed by the series of Romanian governments who delayed the lustration law and the official condemnation of communism until 2006, and who were incapable to implement a national strategy for reconstruction that would create jobs in highly specialized fields. As Danyika Leonard & Alex Vitrella with Kaying Yang (2020) emphasized in their article “Power, Politics and Preservation of Heritage Languages”, the refusal to pass onto the next generation a heritage language is caused by the avoidance to “re-live painful trauma” (p. 11). Without an informed understanding of the benefits of bilingualism and a proper consideration of the hyphenated or hybrid identity of the second generation in the US, this group of Romanian Americans will seek complete assimilation to the detriment of their children’s career, professional success, and personal fulfillment, which actually may be enhanced by bilingualism.

While the first challenge has obvious psychological and emotional ramifications, the second challenge is economic and logistic. To press the legislature of a state to consider introducing a heritage language in the curriculum of public schools takes effort and strategy. At the end of the 2020 census, Washingtonians, for example, hoped that more minorities have declared their ethnic origins and that their growing numbers compared to the previous census would urge the state government to change the attitude toward these groups’ cultural and educational needs since they are taxpayers and contributors to the local, state, and federal welfare. As the US education system relies heavily on a huge number of nonprofits which usually take care of completing K-12 education, several nonprofit organizations, among them American Romanian Cultural Society, started teaching Romanian as a heritage language and encouraged students of Romanian descent to take the ALTA test in order to have an official certification of their proficiency in Romanian.⁶

⁶ Out of 1,8 million nonprofits currently registered with the IRS, 188,513 have an explicit education and research mission and 110,165 that focus on arts, culture, and humanities have an implicit artistic and cultural education. The figures are provided by GuideStar, Directory of Charities and Nonprofit Organizations. See more at www.guidestar.org/NonprofitDirectory.aspx?cat=2. According to a 2006 monograph of nonprofit cultural heritage organizations, more than 28,500 also contribute to the promotion of bilingualism and cultural diversity. See Carole Rosenstein. “Cultural Heritage Organizations: Nonprofits That Support Traditional, Ethnic, Folk, and Noncommercial Popular Culture.” Washington, DC: The Urban Institute, March 2006 at www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/42976/411286-Cultural-Heritage-Organizations.PDF. Accessed 1 Sep. 2020.

3. Teaching Romanian as a Heritage Language in the US

Silvina Montrul draws attention to the fact that a heritage language, although it represents the first learned language of the second generation, is “weaker” than both the dominant language of the country in which heritage speakers currently live and the native language of their or their parents’ homeland. Even though she does not address the heritage speakers’ emotional attachment to their heritage language and culture which may lead to some progress or language retention, Montrul notices the difficulty to maintain an increasing level of proficiency and to stabilize the variant of the heritage language closer to its literary standard. It is the awareness about this difficulty that has made several Romanian heritage language instructors to choose an integrative method of teaching that does not rely on grammar (drills and explanations), over a method similar to that of teaching a second language.⁷

Teaching heritage Romanian means more than teaching language skills – speaking, listening, reading, and writing – and grammar. Teaching heritage Romanian is an interdisciplinary endeavor that includes presentations of customs, traditions, history, geography, pop-culture, Romania’s stand on global issues such as climate change, population migration, discrimination, and social justice. As such, neither Romanian language textbooks for Romanian native speakers, nor those for foreign students should be used for teaching heritage speakers. Not only do they lack the topics of interest mentioned above, but they are organized on the premise that all students who would use the textbook have about the same level of proficiency in Romanian. This is not the case with heritage students who may have better speaking and listening skills, and almost no knowledge of Romanian orthography and consequently are unable to read and write. Furthermore, these students live in a context of a dominant language – English – and the contact with Romanian is sporadic and informal. Even though some speak Romanian quite fluently and understand it very well, their vocabulary is reduced to the necessity of communicating with the immediate family about daily routine, sometimes in a dialect of Romanian. Most of these students do not have any idea that there is a standard, literary, or academic Romanian since their only encounter with Romanian is within the confines of their homes and/or at community events in which their parents participate.

In their capacity as heritage speakers, Romanian heritage students, who want to improve their language skills in order to pass the ALTA examination and/or to be able to communicate with their relatives in Romania, apply their understanding of grammar as it is shaped by a bilingual experience according to which the two linguistic systems inform each other at the cognitive level. Defined

⁷ More in Silvina Montrul and Maria Polinsky. “Heritage Languages and Their Speakers: Opportunities and Linguistics.” *Theoretical Linguistics*. January 2013: 39 (3-4) 129-181.

by Montrul and Bateman in “Vulnerability and Stability of Differential Object Marking in Romanian Heritage Speakers” as “early bilinguals whose first language is a minority language learned before or in conjunction with the majority language of the broader society”, they present several inconsistencies regarding the usage of clitic doubling and the preposition *pe-marking* that differentiates generations’ idiom. The younger the second generation members, the more likely for them to miss such features in the context of a dominant English since they are not consistently exposed to monolingualism as Romanian speakers in Romania are and they have limited access to a standard Romanian via their immediate or extended family. Another interesting finding of Montrul and Bateman is that the second generation of Romanian heritage speakers is actually less influenced by the older Romanian speakers in the USA; in fact, they are more influenced by the “computational difficulties and differential access to linguistic representations due to cognitive load” (10) than by the language they are exposed to, or as Montrul and Bateman put it, “the input” they receive from the older generation, the first generation Romanian Americans.⁸

A common characteristic shared by US students of any heritage language is their rudimentary knowledge of grammatical metalanguage. They do not have the tools to talk about language, grammar, or their experience as speakers of two languages. The basic grammatical concepts students learn in school in English classes or Language Arts classes – subject, object, verb, adverb (I am fully aware of the combination of sentence parts and speech parts; yet it is part of a lax system of references to grammatical terms in the US) – and the rules they more or less follow to write their compositions are overwhelmingly considered tools which do not need much attention outside the task at hand (writing intelligibly, communicating effectively), and consequently are not taught separately. However, more grammar is taught by instructors of foreign language classes and in English Composition classes. As Constance Weaver put it in her 1996 book *Teaching Grammar in Context*, “only very few of the frequently occurring errors in the Connors-Lunsford study (1988) and only a few of the status marking, very serious, or serious errors in Hairston’s study (1981) require their elimination for an understanding of grammatical concepts commonly taught. And these few kinds of errors can be understood by comprehending only a few grammatical concepts” (115). This approach that advise instructors to address grammar issues as they occur is still very much the current practice in spite of the fact that meanwhile important professional groups – the National Council of Teachers of English, Assembly for the Teaching of English Grammar, New Public Grammar – have proposed new and more engaging methods of teaching grammar eliminating both the drill and memorization of forms. The lack of grammatical metalanguage

⁸ In Silvina Montrul and Nicoleta Bateman. „Vulnerability and Stability of Differential Object Marking in Romanian Heritage Speakers.” *Glossa: a Journal of General Linguistics* 5 (1): 119. 1-35.

makes it even more difficult to teach heritage students which bring unlevelled skills into a heritage language class.

While this situation is common to all heritage language learners across the US, more research has been done on Latino communities who are by far the most numerous. According to Guadalupe Valdés “An individual who is raised in a home where a non-English language is spoken, who speaks or merely understands the heritage language, and who is to some degree bilingual in English and the heritage language” is a heritage speaker (2001, p. 38). Focused on proficiency, Valdés’ definition seemed too narrow for Maria Carreira, who, in her 2015 conference “Attending to the Needs of Heritage Language Learners in Mixed Classrooms”, preferred a broader definition of heritage language learners (HLLs).⁹ Carreira, one of the most reputed experts in heritage education, cited Hornberger and Wang’s study “Who are Our Heritage Language Learners” (2008), where they described HLLs as individuals with “familial or ancestral ties to a particular language and who exert their agency in determining whether or not they are HLLs (heritage language learners) of that HL (heritage language) and HC (heritage culture)” (p. 27). Depending on which of these two definitions instructors choose, they will adjust their teaching. For example, if instructors prefer Valdés’ narrow definition, they will address exclusively the students’ linguistic needs; if instructors prefer Hornberger and Wang’s broad definition, they will try to connect the two worlds, that of the dominant language and that of the heritage one, to create a same-age community of HLLs, and to discuss issues of identity.

While the strategy derived from the narrow definition is almost identical to the strategy of teaching a foreign or a second language that ignores emotional affinities with the language, the strategy derived from the broad definition, by taking into account students’ emotional engagement, will empower HLLs by giving them agency and making them partners in the teaching process. In order to reach a high command of their HL, HLLs need to decide for themselves whether they want to own their ancestors’ language. In this case, the instructor’s role is to help students understand the value of communication with their relatives abroad, the importance of discovering their identity through language, and to take pride in their hybrid identity. Thus, HLLs will become aware that by maintaining their cultural and linguistic heritage, they contribute effectively to the diversity of the US which prides itself for promoting, defending, and valuing diversity.

Trying to find a middle ground between the two strategies of teaching HL, ARCS instructors – myself, alongside Otilia Baraboi – teach Romanian to Romanian HLs using texts (literary and nonliterary) that can contribute to the

⁹ For “heritage language” and “heritage language learner” I propose the Romanian “limbă moștenită”, respectiv “elev la limba moștenită” sau “cursant la ora/clasa de limbă moștenită”.

“classroom discourse.” This does not mean that these texts do not incorporate relevant grammar; it means that the grammar is not the main focus. Nonetheless, these texts also elicit / prompt grammatical explanations and beg for further grammar exercises, even drills, but camouflaged under the guise of games. I cannot underline enough the importance of the criterion of selecting texts for a HL class in accordance with their topic’s relevance for HLLs’ age, interests, and cultural sensibility. Since it was coined in 1988 by Courtney Cazden (1988), the notion of “classroom discourse” has been extensively discussed by American education experts. Most recently, Malinda Hoskins Lloyd, Nancy J. Kolodziej, and Kathy M. Brashears (2016), relying on a quantitative study, designed a progressive approach to a “discourse-intensive community of learners” (p. 1). For them, classroom discourse is “an essential component of instruction” that goes through three phases: facilitate – listen – engage. By inviting students to contribute to the classroom discourse with their (experiential or abstract) knowledge and by encouraging students to exchange the role of listeners to communicators both among students and with their instructors, thus creating an environment in which students and instructors participate wholeheartedly in in-class activities, the classroom becomes a student-centered space for learning. It is this welcoming space for HLLs that gives opportunities for student-to-student communication that will, in the end, generate much greater communication competence. Replacing the vertical strategy “initiation – response – evaluation” with the horizontal model “facilitate – listen – engage”, the students in a discourse classroom setting will gain more than HL skills: they will acquire relational skills which are transferable and may be useful later in real-life situations.

The most challenging of language skills for HLLs is writing. One of the questions that I have asked myself is “How can instructors make HLLs write progressively from one short paragraph to a one or two-page essay?” Based on my teaching experience, the first answer is that the writing task has to be related to HLLs’ life. Scaffolding from easy tasks whose vocabulary is most likely known to the students – draw your family tree and write the word defining the relationship with each person on your tree; write a note to your parents explaining why you are going to be late from school; write a text message to your friend asking about the Language Arts assignment; write a Christmas card or a postcard to your grandparents – to more complex writing genres is an effective way to acquire writing skills. Building on what students already know it is a much positive start than starting with things that are completely new and may challenge students who do not know any of the spelling rules which may be quite overwhelming for novices. Providing short readings that contain part of the vocabulary that students have to use in writing is a strategy with two goals: first, it gives contexts and useful collocations and structures; second, it becomes a potential generic model. To make a friend’s portrait and check whether their characteristics match their description in a horoscope or a numerology chart; to write a letter to your school

principal asking for funds for an activity that matters to you; to interview a family member about communism and report to the class your findings; to search your favorite Romanian athlete and write him/her a letter congratulating them for the most recent success are writing prompts that have proven to be inspiring for students. Another valuable strategy to stir HLLs' interest in writing is to assign a project documenting aspects of their academic interests and/or extra-curricular activities. For the more complicated assignments templates may help students write grammatically correct texts without worrying about whether they are on the right track or not. Discussing the template in class and answering all their questions will give students confidence in their ability to write.

In all in-class activities, texts and dialogues, games and songs, instructors and students will identify grammar issues that will need to be addressed in connection with the context in which they occurred. To maintain HLLs' interest in mastering their HL, instructors should consider adopting the six STARTALK principles for effective teaching and learning.¹⁰ The goal of the STARTALK program is both linguistic and cultural:

1. "Implementing a Standards-Based and Thematically Organized Curriculum" for which instructors have to imagine what students will be able to do at the end of each unit so that they will design units beginning with the end, with the goal of the unit;
2. "Conducting Performance-Based Assessments" which means that instructors will constantly monitor the progress of their students;
3. "Integrating Culture, Content, and Language" so that the HL is not a goal in itself but a means of learning more about the target culture and the world. Instructors will use a diverse range of authentic texts pertaining to different fields of knowledge as much as possible and will facilitate meaningful encounters with native speakers of the target language or original artifacts that are used as teaching materials: stamps, slogans on posters, etc.;
4. "Using the Target Language and Providing Comprehensible Input" is a means of immersing students into a HL experience even if this approach puts more pressure on instructors to find creative ways to communicate with HLLs, using translation into the dominant language as little as possible;
5. "Facilitating a Learner-Centered Classroom" empowers students to use the target language because instructors provide them with sentence frames (structures that go beyond their level, but inspire them to make an effort); idiomatic expressions; word walls (word banks in the target

¹⁰ STARTALK is a federal grant program funded by the National Security Agency, in accordance with the language priorities of the moment in the US. See www.startalk.umd.edu/public/about

language); language ladders (expressions which can be used interchangeably); transition words;

6. “Adapting and Using Age-Appropriate Authentic Materials” include realia and appealing materials that stimulate students to switch from the acquisition mode to the language production mode.

Applying an American methodology of language teaching – i.e. STARTALK – will create a comfortable environment in which students recognize the format, know what is expected from them, and respond accordingly. The only potential downside of this approach is that their parents may expect an old teaching method they were exposed to in communist Romania and may dismiss the American approach as not being challenging enough for their children.

Teaching Romanian as a heritage language needs to be part of the larger process of constructing, understanding, and accepting their hybrid identity as Romanian-Americans. As their identity is hyphenated, their linguistic skills have to reflect that hyphenation, which at the level of languages translates as bilingualism, or at least as functional speakers of Romanian and proficient speakers of English. To paraphrase Aneta Pavlenko and James Lantolf (2000), I would state that heritage language learning makes sense to heritage students only if they can fit it into their already existing life plot. HL instructors have to remind themselves that their HLLs’ life story will be incomplete identity-wise without a functional level of Romanian or, even better, without perfect bilingualism.

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