

# ROMANIAN *SINCER* “SINCERELY” AND *SERIOS* “SERIOUSLY”: TWO EMERGENT DISCURSIVE MARKERS IN ONLINE INTERACTION

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**Abstract.** This study examines the pragmatic-discursive functions of two Romanian lexical items, *sincer* ‘sincerely’ and *serios* ‘seriously’, which are frequently used in contemporary spoken Romanian and in various forms of computer-mediated communication. We focus on instances in which these words no longer carry their original descriptive meanings – of sincerity and seriousness, respectively – but instead act as pragmatic markers that express a wide range of speaker attitudes. These include expressing the speaker’s point of view, signaling agreement or disagreement to varying degrees, and even conveying irony or sarcasm. In some cases, they also serve phatic or metadiscursive functions. Our analysis is based on a corpus of excerpts of online dialogue, including comments from forums, blogs, and social media platforms (such as *Reddit Romania* and *Facebook*). The goal is to document the full range of novel meanings of *sincer* and *serios*, and to explain the cognitive and linguistic mechanisms behind the pragmaticalization of these forms.

**Keywords:** pragmaticalization, pragmatic markers, *sincer* ‘sincerely’, *serios* ‘seriously’, contemporary spoken Romanian, online interactions.

## 1. STATE OF THE ART

This study focuses on the pragmatic-discursive functions of two lexical items, *sincer* ‘sincerely’ and *serios* ‘seriously’ which are commonly used in both contemporary spoken Romanian and in various forms of computer-mediated communication. These environments – especially online platforms – often reflect or replicate features of spoken language, creating a hybrid communicative space in which the traditional boundaries between speech and writing are increasingly blurred.

Actually, online communication exists in a dynamic and evolving relationship with oral communication, reproducing many of its key traits while also reshaping them for a digital environment. Many foundational elements of spoken interaction — such as turn-taking, conversational flow, and relational exchange — are adapted across platforms like chat apps, video calls, and voice messages. Even when stripped of voice and gesture, written online exchanges often mimic the rhythm and tone of oral speech, through the use of informal language, emojis, abbreviations, and other expressive shortcuts. One of the

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most telling signs of the continuity between oral and online communication lies in the type of language used: online discourse frequently adapts the structure and spontaneity of spoken language to the characteristics of the written and technologically mediated space. Users recycle familiar expressions and speech-like syntax, crafting a hybrid register that feels spoken but reads as written. In this way, online language bridges the gap between conversation and composition, preserving the immediacy of speech while adapting to the affordances and constraints of the digital medium.

Within this context, the language of online communication becomes a fertile testing ground for observing how certain lexemes, such as *sincer* and *serios* in our case, evolve and change their function. Originally associated with the expression of sincerity or seriousness, these two lexical items have shifted in meaning, from qualifying descriptors to functioning as *pragmatic markers* that convey a wide range of the speaker's *evaluative-emotional attitudes* (see 1–4, below). Within both spoken and online discourse, they now express authorial stance, varying degrees of agreement or disagreement, and at times, irony or sarcasm. Additionally, they may fulfill a phatic role – maintaining the flow of interaction – or serve metadiscursive functions (commenting on the discourse itself, such as indicating the speaker's intention to grant the interlocutor the opportunity to take their turn).

- (1) – Nu va mai exista niciun pericol pentru toți, spuse el râzând cu placere.  
– Dar **sincer**, Ștefan, a existat? Sau numai eu am căzut în plasa ta de seducător. (CoRoLa).  
‘– There will be no more danger for anyone, he said, laughing with pleasure.  
– But **honestly**, Ștefan, was there any danger? Or was it just me who fell into your seductive trap?’
- (2) **Sincer** – și vă rog să nu dați cu prea multe pietre :) – *nu pricep deloc* febra asta a românilor pentru premiile Oscar. [...] Avem cam tot atâta legătură cu premiile Oscar cât are baba Floarea cu balul Reginei Angliei. (CTSM).  
‘**Honestly** – and please don't throw too many stones at me :) – *I just don't get* this Romanian obsession with the Oscars at all. [...] We have about as much connection to the Oscars as old lady Floarea has to the Queen of England's ball’.
- (3) Și ce nu înțeleg io e de ce oamenii ăștia de bine sunt șocați; oare ei pe bune nu știau că o mulțime de români sunt răsiți? Trăiau până acum cu impresia că români au în general o părere bună despre romi, evrei sau negri? **Serios**? (CTSM).  
‘And what I just don't get is why these so-called “decent” people are shocked; did they really not know that a lot of Romanians are racist? Were they honestly under the impression that Romanians generally have a good opinion of Roma, Jews, or Black people? **Seriously**?’
- (4) Renunță la televizor. **Serios**. Îți bați joc de creierul tău dacă stai cu orele vizionând emisiuni în care niște neica-nimeni vorbesc despre nimic. Televizorul e pierdere de timp prețios, pe care nu îl dă nimeni înapoi. (CTSM).  
‘Give up watching TV. **Seriously**. You're wasting your brain if you spend hours watching shows where nobodies talk about nothing. Television is a waste of precious time that no one will ever give back to you’.

The nuances of their meanings are diverse and complex, with word order and intonation serving as key paraverbal elements that not only provide emphasis, but also aid

in interpreting their context-dependent subtleties. However, in online communication, although the textual position and the pragmatic function of these lexical units are relatively easy to identify, their prosodic or intonational value must be inferred from secondary contextual cues such as punctuation, typographical emphasis (e.g., capitalization or repetition), and paralinguistic markers (e.g., emojis or emotive symbols), as can be seen, for example, *supra* in (4)<sup>2</sup>.

Within this framework, our study presents a pragmatic-discursive analysis based on a corpus of approx. 200 excerpts of dialogic discourse, collected from various online communication platforms – such as forum comments, blogs, social media (*Reddit Romania*, *Facebook*, *ReversoContext subtitles*, etc.) – as well as from several widely-used corpora of contemporary spoken Romanian (CoRoLa 2014, ICSO<sub>1</sub> 2020, ICSO<sub>2</sub> 2022, CLRV 2023, and CTSM 2018–2019)<sup>3</sup>. With specific reference to these five corpora, the frequency of each lexical item expressing the pragmatic meanings listed above is as follows:

- (i) *sincer*: 2 occurrences in CoRoLa; 5 occurrences in ICSO<sub>1</sub> and ICSO<sub>2</sub>; approximately 75 occurrences in CLRV; and approximately 15 occurrences in CTSM<sup>4</sup>;
- (ii) *serios*: 0 occurrences in CoRoLa; a single occurrence in ICSO<sub>2</sub>; 33 occurrences in CLRV; and 3 occurrences in CTSM.

This statistical overview serves to confirm the presence of the newly identified discursive meanings associated with the two words in both oral and online communication, as well as to support our hypotheses regarding their origin and pragmatalization. Following this preliminary survey, the objectives of this study are to identify, categorize, and analyze the emergent discursive meanings and subtle semantic shifts of *sincer* and *serios*, as well as to explore the cognitive and linguistic mechanisms underlying their pragmatalization.

Our approach is structured in three main chapters. First, following a detailed corpus-based analysis of each of the two terms under study (*sincer* – Section 2, and *serios* – Section 3), we briefly examine how their English equivalents and Romance cognates (in French and Spanish) function – Section 4. The aim is to outline a typological framework for this path of pragmatalization and trace the origin of the semantic shifts affecting *sincer* and *serios*. Regarding this last point, our hypothesis is that the core meaning of these two lexemes lies in their capacity to convey “an affective value, expressing an emotional reaction from the speaker”, and “to carry an evaluative trait of the true/false type (modalizers)” (Kerbrat-Orrechioni 1980: 83, 120, quoted by Lefèuvre 2020: 3).

<sup>2</sup> In (4), *sincer* occurs between a directive utterance conveying advice or a request to the interlocutor to discontinue a certain activity, expressed with an imperative form (*renunță* ‘give up’), and a following explanatory sentence highlighting the negative consequences of the action condemned by the speaker (*îți bați joc de viață ta* ‘You’re wasting your brain’).

<sup>3</sup> It should be noted that some of these corpora (CoRoLa, ICSO<sub>1</sub>, ICSO<sub>2</sub>, CESM) include transcribed excerpts from interactions on blogs, forums, or other forms of online communication, while CLRV contains samples of spoken interaction from various communicative contexts, including from (transcriptions of) television broadcasts.

<sup>4</sup> *Corpus de texte din Social Media* (2018–2019) (CESM) is a recent, small-scale corpus created by students (generally speaking, young people) from the Faculty of Letters at the University of Bucharest, under the supervision of Prof. Alexandru Nicolae.

## 2. SINCER: A CORPUS-BASED ANALYSIS

### 2.1. An overview of its etymology and its lexical and grammatical features

In Romanian, *sincer* is a Romance loanword with either multiple etymologies – deriving from French *sincère* and Italian *sincero* (according to DLR), or from French *sincère* and Latin *sincerus* (according to DEX 1975) – or a single origin, from Italian *sincero* (according to TDGR<sub>3</sub>). Its earliest attestation in Romanian dates back to the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (1821 Doc. T. V. II, 311, according to TDGR<sub>3</sub>), and it has outlasted the now obsolete adverbial form, *sinceramente*<sup>5</sup>.

Morphologically, *sincer* is syncretic, and may be used both as a masculine singular qualitative adjective and as an adverb of manner (5). In both usages, this word conveys qualities of sincerity – “reflecting or demonstrating sincerity” (typically in relation to emotions or various human actions) – and, by extension, the idea that these actions are “in accordance with certain rules or principles” (according to DEX 1975)<sup>6</sup>.

(5) *M-am bucurat sincer* când am văzut în ziare numirea. (C. Petrescu, *Calea Victoriei* 105, in DLRLC).  
 ‘I was genuinely happy when I saw the appointment in the newspapers’.

As shown in the example above, *sincer* frequently appears with verbs expressing will or emotion – such as *a se bucura* ‘to be glad, to enjoy’, *a fi fericit* ‘to be happy’, *a plăcea* ‘to like’, *a dori* ‘to desire’, *a părea rău* ‘to feel sorry’, *a regretă* ‘to regret’, *a admira* ‘to admire’, *a detesta* ‘to detest’, *a deplângă* ‘to lament’, etc. It also commonly occurs with verbs of opinion and belief, like: *a crede* ‘to believe’, *a consideră* ‘to consider’, *a fi de părere* ‘to hold the view’, *a presupune* ‘to suppose’, etc., as well as with speaking verbs, including *a spune*, *a zice* ‘to say’, *a vorbi* ‘to speak’, *a întreba* ‘to ask’, *a exclama* ‘to exclaim’, *a prezenta* ‘to present’. These adverbial uses of *sincer* are typically found in highly subjective contexts (cf. Traugott 1995: 31–54).

### 2.2. Sincer – emergent functions in online interaction

#### 2.2.1. Sincer – a new focalizing discourse marker?

In oral interactions and digital communication, *sincer* has developed – especially over the past decade – a wide and diverse range of pragmatic meanings heretofore undocumented in Romanian lexicographic works. These uses can be seen either as internal resemanticizations rooted in the word’s original meaning, or as calques influenced by foreign usage patterns – most likely English ones.

For example, in many occurrences, within a noun phrase (6) or a nominal predicate (7 and 8), where it appears alongside an adjective or an adverb, *sincer* functions as an

<sup>5</sup> This adverb was borrowed from Italian *sinceramente*: “Vreți să vă vorbesc **sinceramente**?", 'Shall I speak **honestly** with you?' (Bassarabescu, v. 213, in DLR).

<sup>6</sup> *Sincer* (adj., adv.): “1. (Despre sentimente, acțiuni, manifestări ale oamenilor) Care reflectă sau dovedește sinceritate; 2. Conform cu anumite legi, cu anumite principii” (DEX 1975).

*intensifier*. It precedes the adjective or adverb, enhancing its meaning. In such cases, its meaning is equivalent to expressions like: *cu adevărat/într-adevăr* ‘truly’, ‘indeed’, *pe bună dreptate* ‘rightly so’, *pe de-a dreptul* ‘plainly’, *realmente* ‘really’, *chiar* ‘even’, or *foarte* ‘very’, from which it differs both in register and in the way subjectivity is conveyed:

- (6) Dar ce-a făcut astă-seară este incorrect și dăunează imaginii manifestației spontane a unor oameni **sincer** revoltați (CTSM).  
‘But what he did tonight is wrong and damages the image of spontaneous protest by people who are **genuinely** outraged’.
- (7) FBI-ul vă este **sincer** *recunoscător* pentru ajutor, dle Tuan. (Reverso Context, subtitles).  
‘The FBI is **sincerely** grateful for your help, Mr. Tuan’.
- (8) Păreai **sincer** *surprinsă* când ai văzut cadavrul lui Abe. (Reverso Context, subtitles).  
‘You seemed **genuinely/truly** surprised when you saw Abe’s body’.

An extension of the intensifying function described above can be found in interactive contexts, where *sincer* emphasizes the entire content of speech acts in which the speaker expresses disagreement with the interlocutor’s viewpoint. In such occurrences, *sincer* often appears alongside pro-forms *da* ‘yes’ or *nu* ‘no’ – confirmation or rejection markers – that help recover the meaning of a prior statement and implicitly convey the message that *sincer* is used to highlight (see 9 and 10).

- (9) C: <zâmbet în colțul gurii> *EU am demonstrat ce\_am avut de demonstrat*↓  
CB: <J> pă bune? + ba să demonsTREZI.  
C: *da*↓ **sincer** *da*↓  
CB: vreau să demosTREZI↑  
C: NU eu: ā: chiar nu mai am resurse↓  
CB: BA chiar ai de demonstrat↓  
C: <R> ei o să vezi că nu↓ o să vezi că NU mai am de demonstrat↓ (sprâncenele ridicate) (CLRV: 51–52).  
‘C: <smirking> *I’ve proven what I needed to prove.*↓  
CB: <J> Seriously? + No, you still have to prove it.  
C: *Yeah*↓ **sincerely**, *yeah*↓  
CB: I want you to prove it↑  
C: NO, I, uh, really don’t have the energy anymore↓  
CB: Oh yes you do, you definitely still have something to prove↓  
C: <R> You’ll see I don’t↓ you’ll see I REALLY don’t have anything left to prove↓  
<raises eyebrows>.’
- (10) Dar modificarea Constituției ne-ar îndepărta și mai mult de acest mod de parteneriat. *Are cineva un avantaj din toată povestea asta? Sincer, nu.* (CTSM).  
‘But changing the Constitution would take us even further away from this kind of partnership. *Is anyone actually benefitting from all of this? Honestly, no*’.

There are, however, several contexts in which the speaker explicitly expresses an evaluation of a situation that is marked by a strong degree of subjectivity. Within this discursive strategy, *sincer* not only serves to highlight the propositional content being

asserted, but also signals the speaker's emotional and cognitive involvement. In such cases, the analyzed word no longer functions merely as a simple (adjective) intensifier (often conveying a strong degree of intensity – see example 11), but rather becomes a discursive marker that emphasizes the author's point of view. Thus, in examples like (11) below, its meaning is somewhat ambiguous, and it can be said to function like a focal particle (for instance, like *chiar* 'even' in (11a): *E chiar cea mai obositoare parte* 'It's **really** the most exhausting part') or as a marker reflecting the speaker's updated beliefs or attitudes towards the proposition (such as (11b): *E, din punctul meu de vedere/intr-adevăr, cea mai obositoare parte* '**In my opinion**, this is **indeed** the most challenging part'):

(11) *Şi mai mult: veşnica acuză, dacă facem moţiune de cenzură, de ce nu ne străduim să treacă, chiar dacă acest lucru este imposibil. Sau, dacă știind constelația politică, nu facem moţiune, suntem acuzați că suntem lași. E sincer cea mai obositoare parte din strădania de a fi politician bun.* (CTSM)  
 'What's more, if we table a motion of no confidence, we are constantly accused of not trying hard enough to get it passed, even though this is impossible. Or, if knowing the political situation, we don't file the motion, we're accused of being cowards. **Honestly**, it's the most exhausting part of trying to be a good politician'.

This kind of occurrence can be considered a *switch context*<sup>7</sup> (Heine 2002) along the pragmaticalization cline, where the analyzed word becomes progressively less syntactically integrated, and tends to occur within a relatively limited set of lexical patterns, e.g.:

- (i) a. *sincer* + [vă spun/vă zic] 'sincerely + [I tell you/I'm telling you]';  
 b. *sincer* + [vorbind] 'sincerely + [speaking]';  
 c. *sincer* + [să fiu] 'sincerely + [to be] or to be honest';
- (ii) a. [Ca să fiu] + *sincer* ... '[To be] + honest...';  
 b. *Dar* (da') + *sincer* 'but, honestly' + a negated verb in either the conditional or indicative mod (present/past) (*Dar* (da')), + *sincer*, n-aş face *asta*/n-aş crede *asta*/nu a fost vina *lui* etc. 'But **honestly**, I wouldn't do that/But **honestly**, I wouldn't believe that/But **honestly**, it wasn't his fault'.
- (iii) a. [Nu știu ce să zic] + *sincer* 'lit. [I don't know what to say], **honestly**;  
 b. [(nu) îmi place] + *sincer* 'I like it/I don't like it], **honestly**'.

### 2.2.2. *Contextual meanings*

**2.2.2.1. Sincer** is an *emergent discourse marker used in polemic rejection strategies*. The lexical and syntactic patterns discussed earlier, which highlight both the great flexibility of *sincer* and its preferred placement within the sentence, convey a wide range of pragmatic meanings (which are, generally speaking, strongly dependent on word order). For instance, in the first pattern presented above (i)<sup>8</sup>, illustrated in examples (8)–(11),

<sup>7</sup> This refers to the polysemy of elements undergoing pragmaticalization, which can be interpreted both in terms of their original meaning, and in terms of the meaning(s) that are beginning to emerge.

<sup>8</sup> As the examples below show (see 8–11), *sincer* has various lexical and grammatical variants, such as: *ca să fiu sinceră/sincer(ă) să fiu* 'to be honest' or *sincer vorbind* 'honestly speaking'.

*sincer* serves as a marker expressing a polemical authorial voice<sup>9</sup>. These meanings occur in assertive statements that reflect varying degrees of discursive polyphony, and effectively introduce polemic strategies of rejection – that is, viewpoints that are contrary to the interlocutor’s previous remarks. In these cases, *sincer* may appear in sentence-initial position (see 8–11), and within negative (10) or adversative (11) syntactic structures.

- (8) **Sincer**, aici ai vorbit ca un becalist. (ICSO<sub>1</sub>: 45)  
‘**To be honest**, you sounded like a fan of Becali here’.
- (9) **Sincer**, *eu aș fi preferat* să folosească timpul ăla mult mai eficient. Gen, să pună un livestream cu procesul de tundere a gazonului de pe Național Arena sau ceva la fel de plictisitor. (ICSO<sub>1</sub>: 172)  
‘**Honestly**, *I would’ve preferred* if they used that time more efficiently. Like, I don’t know – livestreaming the process of mowing the lawn at the National Arena or something equally boring.’
- (10) **Ca să fiu sinceră**, *nici nu arată* ca un SH. Multe SH-uri au un miros anume, aici mirosea ca-n H&M. (ICSO<sub>2</sub>: 244)  
‘**No joke**, *it didn’t even look like* a thrift store. Most of them have that... second-hand smell, you know? This place? Straight-up H&M vibes.’
- (11) E drept că există libertarieni în USA care visează la un stat minimal (și e dreptul lor să o facă), *da* ‘**sincer vorbind**, *n-aș zice* că au mare susținere în partid (CESM)  
‘It’s true that there are libertarians in the USA who dream of a minimal state (and that’s right), *but honestly speaking*, *I wouldn’t say* they have much support within the party’.

**2.2.2.2.** *Sincer* also appears with a range of *metadiscursive functions*. For instance, as a *focalizer* (with the meaning of *chiar* ‘even’ or *într-adevăr* ‘indeed’, ‘really’), it occurs in medial position (albeit with this function in only a small number of cases), most often in connection with negative and/or adversative structures (see 13–15) or with purposive syntactic constructions, as illustrated in (19) and (20). In online communication – where paraverbal cues that typically convey intonational nuance are absent (see 14–15) – these syntactic and textual structures help recover the intended meaning through a deductive process. Other metadiscursive functions of *sincer* include that of *phatic marker* (similar to *hai!* or *te rog!* ‘come on, please!’), or as a *signal for yielding the floor to the interlocutor* (comparable to the interrogative *ce zici?* ‘what do you say?’, ‘your turn’) (see 12–13, and 1, repeated below in 16).

- (12) Dacă mă placi și ești băiat, **sincer**, dă-mi un buzz [...] (ICSO<sub>1</sub>: 59)  
‘If you like me and you’re a guy, **honestly/go ahead and** give me a buzz’
- (13) *Dar*, **sincer**, *te-aș rugă* să mă ajută să strâng bani pentru o Kendamă. (ICSO<sub>2</sub>: 290)  
‘**But honestly**, *I would ask you to help me raise money for a Kendama.’*
- (14) În seara asta aș vrea să dau un semnal pozitiv, *dar sincer nu pot*. Opoziția este prea mică și prea sfârâmată. Plus compusă dintr-o anomalie. (CTSM)

<sup>9</sup> With this meaning, it can be glossed as: *din punctul meu de vedere* ‘from my perspective’, *părerea mea sinceră este* ‘my honest opinion is’.

‘Tonight, I’d like to send a positive message, *but to be honest, I can’t*. The opposition is too small and fragmented. Plus, it’s composed of an anomaly’

(15) *botinele tale\_+ sincer* mie nu\_mi plac nu ştiu (CLRV: 21)  
 ‘your boots – **honestly**, I don’t like them. I don’t know’

(16) – Ei lasă că mâine plecați și se întoarce la tatăl tău. Nu va mai exista niciun pericol pentru toți, spuse el râzând cu placere.  
 – Dar **sincer**, Ștefan, a existat? Sau numai eu am căzut în plasa ta de seducător. (CoRoLa)  
 ‘P: “Well, tomorrow you’ll leave and return to your father. There will be no more danger for anyone,” he said, laughing with pleasure.  
 D: “But, **honestly**, Ștefan, did it exist? Or was it just me who fell into your seductive trap?”

**2.2.2.3.** In many instances, *sincer* functions as an *affective-attitudinal marker*, conveying a wide range of emotions such as surprise, regret, disappointment, helplessness, distrust, disagreement, etc. (see 17). With this meaning, *sincer* occupies the utterance-final position, preceded by a short or even longer pause, and pronounced with brief, rapid emphasis. Generally, the final position is semantically polyvalent and generates ambiguity.

(17) [citește toată știrea] Cică “a fost obligată de un proxenet să se prostitueze“ probabil era o atenție pentru vre-o taxa de primă înmatriculare ceva am încheiat aici .... pentru că nici *nu ştiu ce să mai zic... sincer* ... “Trăim în România și asta ne ocupă tot timpul” poate ... dar a spus-o Mircea Badea înaintea mea (CoRoLa)  
 ‘[read the full article] “They say she was forced into prostitution by a pimp.”  
 Probably just a ploy for some registration fee or something. I’ll end here... because *I don’t even know what else to say... honestly...* “We live in Romania, and that takes up all our time” – maybe... but Mircea Badea said it before me’

(18) C: am spus că eu încă sunt în devenire n\_am terminat tocmai o școală↑ o facultate↑  
 aşa cum ați terminat voi↑ eu am făcut decât o școală de doi ani↑ eu cred că mai am multe de\_nvățat↑ ÎNSĀ chiar dacă mă inspir cum te inspiri și tu sau cum se inspiră și alte persoane↑ nu înseamnă că eu + copiez. eu poate am făcut creația asta acum șase ani când nici nu era valentin cu creația aceasta. **sincer**. (CLRV: 21)  
 ‘I said that I am still developmenting; I haven’t just finished school or university like you. I only completed a two-year school. I believe I still have a lot to learn. However, even if I am inspired by you or others, it doesn’t mean I’m copying. Perhaps I created this work six years ago, when Valentin wasn’t even associated with this creation. **Honestly**.’

(19) <L> <zâmbet> îmi place FOARTE mult faptul că: ai preLUAT ceva↑ ai INterpretat↑ îmi place FOArte mult că: ai punctat cu acea cataramă\_n talie↑ (arătătorul măinii drepte orientat spre obiectul despre care vorbește). îmi place catarama. **SINCER**. (CLRV: 22)  
 ‘<L> <smiling> I REALLY appreciate the fact that you took something and interpreted it. I especially like how you highlighted it with that belt buckle. (Pointing with your right index finger towards the object being discussed.) I genuinely like the buckle. **Honestly**.’

(20) C: mă așteptam să\_ti placă. **sincer**. [...] (CLRV: 48)  
 ‘I expected you to like it. **Honestly**’.

In (19) and (20), *sincer* functions as a focalizer, highlighting a contrasting perspective. This emphasis is marked not only by its prosodic prominence – such as intonation (19) or pauses (20) – but also by its syntactic position, often utterance-final.

**2.2.2.4.** As an *illocutionary marker expressing interrogative-dubitative modality* (similar to *oare* ‘perhaps’), *sincer* appears in interrogative structures. Though infrequently, it may also follow extended monologue sequences, as a strategy to re-engage the interlocutor. It is typically positioned at the end of the utterance and is emphasized through intonation. The expected response, which the speaker implicitly solicits from the interlocutor, generally contrasts with the speaker’s own viewpoint.

(21) P: <F> DIVINITATEA↑ + mi se pare ++ necesară↑ ++ ca existență↑ ++ pentru că + dacă +DUMNEZEU↑ +++ nu există + multe↑ + săt inexplicable↑ + pe lumea astă↑ + probabil ++ pentru confortul + rațiunii noastre↑ + chiar + e nevoie↑ + să credem↑ + în DUMNEZEU↑ + și + în al treilea rând ++ DUMNEAVOASTRĂ↑ + chiar credeți↑ + că + există↑ + în lume↑ + dialog↑ + chiar++ credeți↑ + că există comunicare↑ + **sincer**?  
 E: eu chiar↑ + sper că există.  
 P: *nu*↑ ++ [*la mine*↑ (CLRV: 122)  
 ‘P: <F> I believe that divinity is essential for existence because if God doesn’t exist, many things in this world would be inexplicable. It’s probably for the comfort of our reason that we need to believe in God. And thirdly, do you truly believe that dialogue exists in the world? Do you believe there’s communication? **Honestly**?  
 E: I *sincerely* hope it exists.  
 P: I don’t / Not for me...’

### 3. SERIOS: A CORPUS-BASED ANALYSIS

#### 3.1. An overview of its etymology and its lexical and grammatical features

The Romanian word *serios* is also a Romance loanword with multiple possible etymologies – either from French *sérieux* and Latin *seriosus* (according to DEX 1975), or from Latin *seriosus*, French *sérieux*, and Italian *serioso* (according to DLR). Its first recorded use dates back to the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century (1852, *Calendar*, 102/23, DLR, s.v. *serios*).

From a morphological perspective, *serios* functions either as a qualitative adjective or as an adverb of manner. In the latter case, it conveys a particular modality – “without any intention of joking or trickery” (22), or “firmly, persistently, with determination, thoroughly”<sup>10</sup> (23) (DEX 1975) – indicating the manner in which the action expressed by the predicate is carried out.

(22) Noi trebuie să ne gândim **serios** la viață (Agârbiceanu, A., 334, apud DLR: 742).  
 ‘We need to think **seriously** about life’.

<sup>10</sup> *Serios* (adv.): “(1) fără intenție de glumă sau de farsă”; (2) “hotărât, stăruitor, cu tot dinadinsul, temeinic” (DEX 1975, s. v. *serios*).

(23) Aceasta venea după ce aflase că Ion umbla **serios** după Ana (Rebreanu, *Ion*, 31, DEX 1975).  
 ‘This came after she found out that Ion was seriously pursuing Ana’.

With these meanings, it tends to occur alongside verbs of cognition and thought, such as: *a crede* ‘to believe’, *a considera* ‘to consider’, *a se gândi* ‘to think’, *a se întreba* ‘to wonder’, *a medita* ‘to reflect’, and *a privi* ‘to view’, as well as verbs expressing emotion, like *a regretă* ‘to regret’, *a detesta* ‘to detest’, and *a deplângere* ‘to lament’. It also appears with speech-related verbs, including *a spune*, *a zice* ‘to say’, *a vorbi* ‘to speak’, *a sta de vorbă* ‘to have a conversation’, and *a întreba* ‘to ask’. Overall, *serios* is typically found in contexts marked by a strong subjective stance.

The same meanings also appear in everyday spoken Romanian and in online communication.

(24) Principalele boli cardiovasculare, diabetul de tip II, numeroase cancere se pot preveni. Prin dietă, mișcare, evitare fumat... *Gândiți-vă serios* la asta, vă rog (CTSM)  
 ‘The main cardiovascular diseases, type 2 diabetes, and many cancers can be prevented through diet, exercise, and avoiding smoking... Please give this some **serious** thought’.

(25) Vă rog să spargem tiparul. Vă invit să o votați pe dumneaei (sper să nu se supere ceilalți colegi), să o ducem pe primul loc și să-i dăruim puțină recunoștință. *Vorbesc foarte serios*. Faceți asta. (CTSM)  
 ‘Please, let’s break the pattern. I invite you to vote for her (I hope the other colleagues won’t mind), let’s put her in first place and offer her a bit of well-deserved recognition. *I mean it* Ø. Do it’.

(26) Avem **serios** de lucru la multe capitole. (CTSM)  
 ‘We have **serious** work to do in many areas’.

(27) a. **Să fim serioși**, îi e frică să nu-și piardă amândouă centurile. (ICSO<sub>2</sub>: 305)  
 ‘**Let’s be honest/come on**, she’s afraid of losing both her titles’.  
 b. Nu că mi-ar fi plăcut vreodată „overview-urile” tale (**să fim serioși**, sunt departe de a fi review-uri), dar ăsta chiar e varză. (ICSO<sub>2</sub>: 399)  
 ‘It’s not like I ever liked your ‘overviews’ (**let’s be honest**, they’re far from real reviews), but this one is a complete mess’.

In (27a), the speaker expresses their own point of view and makes an appeal for objectivity and clarity (the word *serios* here can be likened to exhortative phrases like: *Hai să fim cinstiți!* ‘Let’s be honest!’ or *Hai să spunem lucrurilor pe nume!* ‘Let’s call a spade a spade!’), implicitly signaling disagreement with a situation previously described by the interlocutor. Likewise, in (27b), *serios* also functions as a marker of disagreement and of categorical rejection of another viewpoint. This meaning is more clearly articulated due to its incidental position and the explicit semantic context.

### 3.2. *Serios* – emergent functions in online interaction

#### 3.2.1. *Serios* – a new interrogative and dubitative illocutionary marker?

**3.2.1.1.** The most common pattern found in the corpus is the *serios interrogative* type, whose meaning is equivalent to expressions like: *chiar aşa?* ‘really?’, *oare?*

‘really?/is that so?’, *nu pot să cred!* ‘I can’t believe it!’ or *măi să fie!* ‘well, I’ll be!’. Here *serios* functions as an *interrogative-dubititative illocutionary marker*: it is used with a series of rhetorical questions, speculations, or hearsay (28). It often appears in isolation, syntactically unintegrated, with the vowel [o] pronounced in an exaggerated or drawn-out manner, and is generally marked by a sharp tone – possibly accompanied by a deliberate pause after the question – and, in any case, by a descending intonation that conveys disdain, indignation, or unpleasant surprise, signaling the speaker’s categorical rejection or clear disapproval of the interlocutor’s previous statements. It also carries an expressive and/or a mirative value (see 29), and can convey varying degrees of suspicion and disbelief on the part of the speaker:

(28) *Şi ce nu înțeleg io e de ce oamenii aştia de bine sunt şocați; oare ei pe bune nu ştiau că o mulțime de români sunt răsiști? Traiau până acum cu impresia că români au în general o părere bună despre romi, evrei sau negri? Serios?* (CTSM)  
 ‘And what I just don’t get is why these so-called “decent” people are shocked; did they really not know that a lot of Romanians are racist? Were they honestly under the impression that Romanians generally have a good opinion of Roma, Jews, or Black people? **Seriously?Really?**’

(29) E: + din experiența dumneavoastră↑ + de viață↑ + cam la ce concluzii + credeți + că ați ajuns + ce calitate + apreciați cel mai mult + la un om + din fața dumneavoastră?  
 J: să fie BUN↑ +  
 E: bunătatea?  
 J: bunătatea lui↑ + și îmi dau seama imediat↑ + dacă e bun↑ + sau dacă e al dracului↑+  
 E: **serios**?  
 J: *vă jur* + nu știu cum? + unda aia + se duce la el + și îl depistează↑ (CLRV: 115)  
 ‘E: Based on your experience, what conclusions do you think you’ve come to?  
 What quality do you value most in a person that’s in front of you?  
 J: That they’re kind↑  
 E: Kindness?  
 J: Their kindness↑ And I can tell right away↑ if someone is kind↑ or if they’re nasty↑  
 E: **Really**?  
 J: *I swear*↑ I don’t know how↑ but that vibe just reaches them↑ and I can sense it↑’.

Unlike *sincerely*, in many of these instances, the speaker does not necessarily expect a reply from the interlocutor, as their opposing stance is already implicitly communicated in relation to the viewpoints being referenced. From this perspective, *serios* functions as a weaker marker of polemic confrontation. For instance, in (28), *serios* appears within a question that is more rhetorical in nature, whereas in (29), the response it elicits from the interlocutor is introduced by a strong testimonial verb – *a jura* ‘to swear’.

**3.2.1.2.** Its use with interrogatives can lead to interpreting *serios* as a marker for requesting information or an answer from the interlocutor and soliciting confirmation. In this case, the word becomes equivalent to the interrogative adverb *da* ‘really’ or ‘is that so’, with which it often co-occurs (30), reinforcing its illocutionary force. As with the previous pattern (see 3.2.1.1), interrogatives *serios* also appears in utterance-final position. However,

it is characterized by a cheerful tone and a rising – surprised or ironic – intonation often accompanied by a pause or an elongated vowel (e.g., *seeerios?*), which conveys the speaker's astonishment, disbelief, and/or amusement, subtly questioning or even ridiculing the reaction or the information provided by the interlocutor.

(30) E: cât timp de gândire + v-ați acordat?  
 I: cam un minut↑  
 E: o + ha-ha <râde> + **serios?** + da?  
 I: *da*.  
 E: ardelenii + se spune + că sănt mult mai lenți↓ + în reacții + stau + și cuge[tă  
 I: dar + nu] în gândire↑ (CLRV: 130).  
 'E: How much time did you give yourself to think?  
 I: About a minute.  
 E: Oh – *laughs* – **seriously? Really?**  
 I: *Yes*.  
 E: People say Transylvanians are much slower to react – like they just sit and ponder.  
 I: But not when it comes to thinking!'

### 3.2.2. *Serios*, a focalizing discourse marker

Another contextual use of *serios* is as a **focalizer** of the speaker's (categorical) point of view. In this function, it typically appears utterance-initially or, quite often, is used in isolation as a separate response (and turn) with a certain predicative force. In the latter case, it functions as a speech act similar to a warning or an emphatic assertion, such as: *Vorbesc serios!*<sup>11</sup> 'I'm serious!', *Nu glumesc!* 'I'm not joking!', *chiar (aşa)!* 'Really!', *într-adevăr* 'Indeed!' (see also the English translation in (31) and (33)). In such cases, *serios* is accompanied by rising intonation (see (4), also referenced in (31)) and appears in discursive contexts with negative connotations (see *I don't understand*, repeated three times in (32)), or in which the speaker constructs scenarios that border on the improbable, impossible, or surprising – scenarios that the discourse marker *serios* serves to emphasize:

(31) Renunță la televizor. **Serios**. Îți bați joc de creierul tău dacă stai cu orele vizionând emisiuni în care niște neica-nimeni vorbesc despre nimic. Televizorul e pierdere de timp prețios, pe care nu îți-l dă nimeni înapoi. (CTSM).  
 'Give up watching TV. **Seriously** [*Be honest with yourself/Think about it/Trust me*]. You're wasting your brain if you spend hours watching shows where nobodies talk about nothing. Television is a waste of precious time that no one will ever give back to you'.  
 (32) MI: [...] ++ să mângâi↑ ++ un om în românia↑ ++ să-l îmbrățișezi↑ ++ să-i dedici ceva↑ ++ să fii fericit↑ pentru el ++ și să-i și arăți asta↑ nu înțeleg↑ ++ de ce↑ ++ **serios**↑ ++ nu înțeleg↑ ++ și cu atât mai puțin↓ ++ nu înțeleg↑ ++ de ce săntem ++ ă: livrați aşa↑ suntem la voia întâmplării↑ ++ oricine vine AICI ++ și spune↑ ++ ce

<sup>11</sup> In this sentence, *serios* functions as a *metalinguistic marker of the speaker's enunciation* – a marker that provides procedural instructions to the hearer, who is expected to interpret the message as serious (see Pop 2015: 93).

Vvrea el↑ ++ nu-l corecteažă nimeni↑ ++ ia câți bani poftește↑ exprimă ++ orice vrea el +++ da ++ și pare că a trecut ++ printr-o apă ++ nu s-a legat nimeni ++ de el↑ (CLRV: 100)

‘[...] ++ to gently touch↑ ++ someone in Romania↑ ++ to hug them↑ ++ to dedicate something to them↑ ++ to be happy↑ for them ++ and to actually show it↑ – I don’t understand↑ ++ why↑ ++ **honestly**↑ ++ I don’t understand↑ ++ and even less so↓ ++ I don’t understand↑ ++ why we are ++ uh: delivered up like this↑ we’re left to chance↑ ++ anyone can come HERE ++ and say↑ ++ whatever they want↑ ++ no one corrects them↑ ++ they take as much money as they please↑ they express ++ whatever they feel like +++ yes ++ and it seems like they’ve been ++ through water ++ no one challenges them↑’

(33) E: se deschide o ușă ++ și intră ++ cine crezi↑ ++ horia brenciu↑  
 H: ha-ha (bate din palme)  
 E: **serios**↑  
 H: care horia brenciu↑ în ce an↑ mă interesează ++ acest lucru↑  
 E: horia brenciu↑ cel de acuma↑ care a făcut ++ construcții de mașini ++ la brașov↑  
 H: o doamne↑ (CLRV: 568)  
 ‘E: A door opens ++ and guess who walks in↑ ++ Horia Brenciu↑  
 H: [laughs and claps]  
 E: **I’m serious**↑/**No joke** /**For real**/**I’m not kidding**/ **Swear to God**  
 H: Which Horia Brenciu↑ What year are we talking about↑ I need to know this↑  
 E: The Horia Brenciu from now↑ the one who studied ++ mechanical engineering  
 ++ in Brașov↑  
 H: Oh my God↑’

The example above highlights the word’s ability to refer back to various segments of the speaker’s earlier discourse (see *serios* meaning “chiar el, Horia Brenciu” ‘Horia Brenciu himself’ in (33)), as well as its role in segmenting and organizing the flow of information within the interaction. At the same time, it contributes to advancing the communicative exchange: the interlocutor picks up on the speaker’s evaluation and is prompted to continue the conversation in the direction set by the speaker.

### 3.2.3. *Serios*, a phatic discourse marker

Finally, as a **phatic marker** used to engage the interlocutor and to guide or shift the discourse topic, *serios* appears frequently alongside the deictic adverb *acum* ‘now’. The role of *acum* is to reconnect the discourse to the original communicative topic after one or more digressive loops. In this function, *serios* appears in our corpus in sentence-initial position or as a standalone utterance, delivered with an imperative tone. It is roughly equivalent to expressions like: *și aproape!* ‘by the way’ or *hai să vedem!* ‘let’s see’ (see 34).

(34) Iliescu: *dar serios acum*, pe cine propunem? Maria Grapini?  
 Dragnea: nu, stați, stați că mi-a venit o idee!  
 Fifor: cine? (CTSM)  
 ‘Iliescu: But **come on/all jokes aside/let’s be real** now, who are we proposing?  
 Maria Grapini?  
 Dragnea: No, wait, wait – I’ve got an idea!  
 Fifor: Who?’

(35) **Serios** *acum*, primăria nu e în stare să pietonalizeze cumva piața gării și s-o facă un spațiu de activare pietonală, turistică și comercială cum se-ntâmplă prin alte orașe în spațiile urbane adiacente gărilor. (ICSO<sub>2</sub>: 413)  
 ‘Come on/honestly, can’t the city hall figure out how to pedestrianize the square by the train station and turn it into a vibrant pedestrian, tourist, and commercial space – like other cities do with the areas around their stations?’

#### 4. A CROSS-LINGUISTIC PERSPECTIVE

##### 4.1. English equivalents: *seriously* but not *sincerely*

In 1997, Bruce Fraser identified similar meanings for the presumed English cognates of the two words under study, which he grouped under the category of *commentary pragmatic markers*.

(36) **Seriously**, I don’t know how you can stand him (Fraser 1997: 122).  
 (37) **Seriously**, how can you stand him? (Fraser 1997: 122).

Within this category, Fraser (1997) identifies a subclass called *Manner-of-Speaking Markers*, which includes adverbs like: *bluntly*, *briefly*, *candidly*, *confidentially*, *crudely*, *fairly*, *frankly*, *generally*, *honestly*, *ironically*, *metaphorically*, *objectively*, *personally*, *precisely*, *roughly*, *seriously*, *simply*, *strictly*, *truthfully*.

These adverbs, when used in declarative or imperative sentences “[...] signal a message to the hearer commenting on the way the speaker is conveying the message” (Fraser 1997: 122) (they are referred to as “illocutionary adverbials”, by Bach and Harnish 1979: 219–221). However, when used in interrogative structures, they “often signal both a message commenting on the manner in which the speaker is conveying the basic message, and a request that the hearer provide the answering in the indicated way” (Fraser 1997: 122).

The meanings of the presumed English cognates of *serios* and *sincer* are the following:

(i) **Seriously**<sup>12</sup> (adv.) is used: (i) “to indicate that you are not joking and that you really mean what you say” (as in 38) or (ii) “when you are surprised by what someone has said, as a way of asking them if they really mean it (a convention)” (as in 39)<sup>13</sup> (Collins Online Dictionary). In oral and online interactions, *seriously* is (iii) “a lazy response of agreement to almost any statement. [It] takes the place of ‘yeah’, ‘same’, or ‘mmm’ (as in 40) (Urban Dictionary) or (iv) “a marker of sarcasm, [that] doesn’t actually signal a serious message, but rather a sarcastic comment on the preceding sentence” (Sileo *et al.* 2020: 5) (as in 41).

<sup>12</sup> In youth slang, *SRSLY* “is an internet slang abbreviation that can be used as an interrogative exclamation or as an adverb to emphasize that one feels strongly about something” (<https://www.mmguardian.com/teen-slang/srsly#:~:text=SRSLY%20stands%20for%20seriously.,one%20feels%20strongly%20about%20something>).

<sup>13</sup> In these contexts, *seriously* becomes a synonym for: *really?*; *well, I never!*; *truthfully?*; *honestly?* (Collins Online Dictionary).

- (38) *But seriously*, we've had really positive feedback from all sorts of people (Collins Online Dictionary).
- (39) 'I tried to chat him up at the general store.' He laughed. '**Seriously?**' (Collins Online Dictionary).
- (40) A. That movie was pretty good.  
B. **Seriously**. (*Urban Dictionary* <https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=Seriously>)
- (41) I don't think i can stop with the exclamation marks ! ! ! // this could be a problem ! ! ! ! **Seriously** (Sileo *et al.* 2020: 4).
- (ii) **Sincerely** (adv.) is used ‘if you say or feel something sincerely, you really mean or feel it, and are not pretending’ (Collins Online Dictionary <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/sincerely>):
- (42) a. 'I **sincerely** hope we shall meet again,' he said.  
b. He **sincerely** believed he was acting in both women's best interests (Collins Online Dictionary).
- (43) Do you **sincerely** want to be rich? (*Sunday Times* 2014, quoted by Collins Online Dictionary)
- (44) We **sincerely** hope to enter a business relationship with your esteemed self (*The Sun* 2010, quoted by Collins Online Dictionary).

## 4.2. Romance cognates

### 4.2.1. French equivalents: *sérieusement* and *sérieux*

In French, the adverb *sérieusement* has three distinct uses: (i) as an adverb of manner with a subjective orientation (such in 45) (Álvarez-Prendes 2016); (ii) as an intensifying adverb of manner (as in 46) and (iii) as a ‘sentence (or stance) adverb expressing style or speaker's attitude’ (Álvarez-Prendes 2021: 350, our translation)<sup>14</sup> (see 47):

- (45) Marc, qui n'était pas de mauvaise foi, réfléchit **sérieusement** à cette phrase (Fred Vargas, *Debout les morts*, apud Álvarez-Prendes 2018a: 474).  
'Marc, who was not acting in bad faith, **seriously** reflected on the sentence'.
- (46) Il n'était pas surprenant de voir l'hémicycle **sérieusement** clairsemé lors de la séance de lundi soir (*Le Monde*, 29/10/2013, quoted by Álvarez-Prendes 2018a: 475).  
'It was no surprise that the chamber was **noticeably** sparsely attended during Monday evening's session'.
- (47) Je flambe ! **Sérieusement**, je dois récupérer la quarantaine de Chinois qui se sont échappés dans votre casino, pour leur faire boire du vin et caresser des vaches (Álvarez-Prendes 2018a: 473).

<sup>14</sup> ‘adverbe disjonctif de style (et plus concrètement, un *adverbe d'énonciation*), qui montre l'attitude sérieuse du locuteur vis-à-vis de son propre dire’ (Álvarez-Prendes 2021: 350); it is referred to as a *textual adverb* (‘adverbe de texte’), by Pop (2001: 13–20 and 2002: 437–450).

‘I’m on a roll! **Seriously**, I need to round up the forty or so Chinese people who escaped into your casino, so I can make them drink wine and pet some cows.’

In spoken Canadian French, over the past decades the adjective *sérieux* has acquired a range of discursive meanings that allow the speaker “either to emphasize the truthfulness or sincerity of what they are saying or have already said, or to ask the listener to confirm their statement” (Lanciault 2009: 123, our translation)<sup>15</sup>.

- (48) A: *J’ai passé ma journée au lit.*  
B: **Sérieux** ? (Lanciault 2009: 88).  
‘A: I spent the whole day in bed.  
B: **Seriously**?’
- (49) **Sérieux**, *il faut avoir dix-huit ans pour acheter des billets de loterie.* (Lanciault 2009: 88).  
‘**Seriously**, you have to be eighteen to buy lottery tickets’.

#### 4.2.2. Spanish equivalents: *seriamente* and *en serio*

In Spanish, there are two adverbial equivalents to Romanian *serios* and *sincer*. One is *seriamente*, which is used (i) as a subjectively oriented adverb of manner (as in 50), and (ii) as an adverb of manner expressing intensive quantification (as in 51):

- (50) *Australia es muy grande, tiene un tamaño muy superior al de las islas Canarias y, sin embargo, los australianos se plantean seriamente erradicar los gatos de su mundo* (CREA, quoted by Álvarez-Prendes 2018a: 474).  
‘Australia is a huge country – much larger than the Canary Islands – yet Australians are **seriously** considering wiping out cats from their environment’.
- (51) *Grandes extensiones de bosques centroeuropeos, especialmente de coníferas, están seriamente afectadas por esta contaminación* (CREA, quoted by Álvarez-Prendes 2018a: 475).  
‘Vast stretches of Central European forests – especially coniferous ones – are **seriously** affected by this pollution’.

The second equivalent is the adverb *en serio*, which functions: (i) as a subjectively oriented adverb of manner (see 52), and (ii) as a disjunctive adverb of style or enunciation (see Álvarez-Prendes 2018a,b) (see 53):

- (52) *Los economistas liberales pronto le [sic] tomaron en serio* (Álvarez-Prendes 2018a: 474).  
‘The liberal economists soon started taking him **seriously**’.
- (53) *Mientras no cambies, en serio, ni serás feliz, ni conseguirás la paz que anhelas* (Álvarez-Prendes 2018a: 473).  
‘**Honestly**, unless you change, you won’t be happy or find the peace you long for’.

<sup>15</sup> “soit d’insister sur la véracité ou la sincérité de ce qu’il dit ou a déjà dit, soit de demander à l’interlocuteur de confirmer ses propos” (Lanciault 2009: 123).

## 5. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Our analysis shows that *sincer* and *serios* – originally qualitative adjectives with subjectively evaluative meanings – have undergone various stages of pragmatalization in contemporary Romanian – as illustrated through an analysis of its occurrences from oral and online interactions. In particular, they have evolved from (adjectival and) adverbial uses to a broader range of pragmatic and discursive functions. This development has been facilitated by their inherent semantic core, which involves a subjectively and emotionally charged value judgment (i.e., subjective and affective axiological evaluation).

In terms of both frequency<sup>16</sup> and semantic variation<sup>17</sup>, *sincer* appears to be at a more advanced stage of pragmatalization than *serios*.

We have also observed that similar processes occur in other Romance and non-Romance languages, affecting corresponding words/terms with similar meanings. For example, in English – which serves as the source language for many loanwords and calques in modern Romance languages – *seriously* exhibits the same contextual and discursive meanings and functions as Romanian *serios*. However, *sincerely* does not appear to have developed the range of meanings associated with Romanian *sincer*. In English, *sincerely* is typically used in formal written contexts (as in the closing formula “*Sincerely yours*”) or to explicitly express emotion or intent (“*I sincerely apologize*” or “*I sincerely hope you’re okay*”).

One might be tempted to assume that these innovative uses of Romanian *sincer* and *serios* (both originally Romance borrowings), commonly found in spoken and online interactions, are the result of resemanticizations modeled after English. However, as we have seen, this explanation holds true only in the case of *serios*.

The situation in French (including Canadian French) and Spanish – where *sérieusement*, *sérieux*, and *en serio* function similarly to Romanian cognate *serios* – together with the more advanced stage of pragmatalization reached in Romanian by *sincer* compared to *serios*, supports the hypothesis that certain *universal cognitive patterns* may be at play. These patterns are likely activated by speakers – possibly influenced by foreign language models – and applied to broad lexical classes belonging to a wide range of semantic fields.

Regarding informal online communication – which typically lacks face-to-face interaction –, we reiterate our earlier claim from the introduction that this environment is particularly conducive to the emergence and reinforcement of such discourse markers. These markers serve to focus and intensify illocutionary force while also spreading their evaluative and affective nuances. Indeed:

on social networks like Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, connectors and conversational or interactive markers predominate; these are generally used to modulate the illocutionary force of one’s own utterance and to express agreement or disagreement with what is said in other messages (Alamán 2020: 397, our translation)<sup>18</sup>.

<sup>16</sup> See the statistical overview presented in §1.

<sup>17</sup> See § 2 and 3. It results that *sincer* has a large and diverse number of meanings in online interactions.

<sup>18</sup> “en las redes sociales Facebook, Twitter y YouTube predominan los conectores y los marcadores conversacionales o interactivos, que se emplean generalmente para modular la fuerza ilocutiva del propio enunciado y manifestar acuerdo o desacuerdo respecto a lo que se dice en otros mensajes” (Alamán 2020: 397).

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