

RECENT DATA ON THE USAGE OF *GEN* ‘LIKE’ IN ROMANIAN ONLINE INTERACTION

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Abstract. The present paper examines the functions of the pragmatic marker *gen* ‘like’ in Romanian online interaction both from a qualitative and quantitative perspective, focusing on data from the Romanian Reddit community *r/CasualRo*. Building on previous work (Jipa 2025 [first presented in 2020]), which catalogues and classifies the pragmatic functions of *gen* ‘like’ in synchronous and asynchronous online interaction, this paper tests whether those same functions can be found on Reddit, and if so, what their quantitative hierarchical distribution is. The findings point to five main functions of *gen* ‘like’ in asynchronous online interaction, namely those of introducing examples, explanations, comparisons, direct speech, along with that of serving as an approximator. The analysis confirms that asynchronous media favors more stable uses of *gen* ‘like’, while less familiar usage is attested in synchronous media (e.g., as a focus or modal marker).

Keywords: pragmatic marker, discourse marker, online interaction, asynchronous interaction, *gen*, like.

1. INTRODUCTION

Like many other languages, Romanian borrows not only words and structures, but also various linguistic “trends” from American English. A linguistic “trend” can be defined as “the phenomenon, obvious to anyone, of favouring some words, for longer or shorter periods, through a massive and rapid increase in their frequency” (Guțu-Romalo 1992: 161, our translation). The invariable word *gen* ‘like’ is an appropriate example of this concept. Isambert (2016) calls the French equivalent, *genre* ‘like’, “une mode récente, mais qui vient de loin” (‘a recent trend which comes from afar’), which proves to be true of both French and Romanian. This trend is indeed long-standing, attested in French starting at least in the 19th century, and in Romanian² in the 20th; however, its recent productivity and creativity are most likely due to the influence of American English *like* (at least for Romanian; see Preda 2025: 26).

This paper is comprised of two main parts. Firstly, I will present the main *pragmatic functions* of the invariable word *gen* ‘like’ in its bare form, without including the contexts

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² As suggested by Isambert (2016) for French, and by Zafiu (2012, for *de genul* ‘of the kind’), and Terian (2018, for *în genul* ‘of the kind’) for Romanian. Both Zafiu (2012) and Terian (2018) suggest that more recent usages of *gen* could stem from prepositional contexts such as *de genul*, *în genul* ‘of the kind’.

in which it is preceded by prepositions, following my previous research (Jipa 2025). For this purpose, I created and used a corpus which includes data both from the online corpus CoRoLa³ (asynchronous written interaction) and from private text messages (synchronous written interaction). The inclusion of synchronous media was essential in order to best capture all the functions *gen* ‘like’ might have, because this type of online interaction is the one that most resembles oral interaction. This is therefore a qualitative analysis (Jipa 2025), which stems from the idea that *gen* ‘like’ can be used in a wider range of contexts than has been previously suggested (Terian 2018, Popescu and Ionescu 2019).

In the second part, I analyze the *frequency* of these pragmatic functions in a Romanian Reddit community. My main research question is the following: can all functions of *gen* ‘like’ of the type I describe in Jipa (2025)⁴ be encountered in asynchronous online communication, or are they only expected to appear in synchronous interaction, which is more similar to face-to-face interaction⁵? My intuition, based on recent experience on social media, is that some functions, e.g., that of example connector, are much more frequent than others. The present study is conducted on the Romanian Reddit community *r/CasualRo*⁶. Using the forum search engine, I recorded the first 100 occurrences of *gen* ‘like’ and organized them according to their function; I then compared these pragmatic functions to those listed in the *gen* inventory (Jipa 2025, see also Preda 2023, 2025).

This paper aims to answer the main research question through a quantitative analysis based on the corpus I developed in past work, in addition to new data from the Romanian Reddit community *r/CasualRo*. This study will also help formulate observations concerning the characteristics of asynchronous online communication.

2. POSSIBLE ORIGINS AND EVOLUTION OF RECENT USAGES OF *GEN* ‘LIKE’

Terian (2018: 130–131) signals that constructions such as *în genul* ‘like, similar to, in the style of’ are to be found as early as the middle of the 19th century. According to the hypothesis that such constructions led to the emergence of *gen* as a pragmatic marker, the invariable word *gen* must have appeared later (Ardeleanu Gomoescu 2016⁷, Preda 2023, 2025).

³ CoRoLa. Corpus computational de referință pentru limba română contemporană: <https://corola.racai.ro/> [Computational corpus for contemporary Romanian].

⁴ This study is based on the previous literature on *gen* in Romanian: Zafiu (2012), Ardeleanu Gomoescu (2016), Terian (2018), Popescu & Ionescu (2019), to which we can add Hanț (2022) and Preda (2023, 2025). These works highlight the plausible pragmaticalization path(s) for Romanian *gen*.

⁵ The pragmatic functions of *gen* as noted in Jipa (2025: 176–179) are the following: direct speech connector, marker of exemplification, of comparison, focus marker, and modal marker (suggesting doubt, disapproval, hesitation, or uncertainty). For examples, see (3–8) below. See also Popescu and Ionescu (2019), Preda (2023, 2025).

⁶ Reddit is a well-known, popular online forum which allows users to create communities, thus facilitating the interaction of people with similar interests. *r/CasualRo* is a Romanian Reddit community with approximately 227,000 users which strive for a more relaxed (“casual”) style of communication.

⁷ See Jipa (2025) for arguments against the hypothesis of phonological erosion proposed by Ardeleanu Gomoescu (2016).

The first attestations of *gen* reflecting modern usage, which I was able to document myself, date back to the first half of the 20th century. They are found in literary works, such as those of G. Călinescu (1), who adopts the French technique typical of Balzac’s style (2). The connection between the two authors is relevant because Balzac himself used the French equivalent of *gen*, namely *genre*.

- (1) După câteva vorbe banale, moșierul scoase din buzunar o fotografie care înfățișa o doamnă foarte picantă, *gen* actriță întreținută, și un bărbat exotic, cu floare la butonieră. (Călinescu 2010 [1938]: 474)
‘After a few trivial words, the landlord took out of his pocket a photograph of a very provocative lady, like a kept actress, and an exotic man, with a flower in his buttonhole.’
- (2) Le banquier, pour ne pas paraître écraser la table de valeurs d’or et d’argent, avait joint à tous ces services une porcelaine de la plus charmante fragilité, *genre* Saxe, et qui coûtait plus qu’un service d’argenterie. (Balzac 1847, *apud* Isambert 2016)
‘The banker, so as not to appear to overwhelm the table with gold and silverware, had added to all these settings a porcelain set of the most delicate fragility, Saxon-style, which cost more than a silver service.’

Considering the French cultural and linguistic influence on the Romanian space in the late 19th century, it is natural for Călinescu (1938) to have borrowed a structure that was readily available in French in the work of Balzac (1847), which is often considered one of the models of Călinescu.

In this context, both *gen* and *genre* link two distinct nominal phrases – in the case of Romanian, *gen* connects the NP *o doamnă foarte picantă* ‘a very spicy lady’, which denotes a class, a general category, to the NP *actriță întreținută* ‘kept actress’, which can be seen as a subclass, i.e., as a specific element of the broader class which is being referred to by the NP before *gen*. More precisely, a ‘kept actress’ is a sub-genre of ‘very spicy ladies’.

The Romanian noun *gen* ‘kind, type, sort’ usually makes reference to a type, a category. It can be noted that at least a small part of its meaning is preserved when it is used as a pragmatic marker, despite undergoing significant semantic changes, which is typical of pragmatalization (Traugott 2007: 152). This can be noted in contexts like (1), where the relation between the two NPs connected by *gen* is transparent – the first one is a (superordinate) class, the second one is a subclass. This is thus a case of *pragmatalization*, which can be characterized as “a particular phenomenon of linguistic recategorization, defined as a change in the status of some lexical or grammatical entities, which lose their initial function (propositional meaning) through a gradual evolution and migrate to the rank of pragmatic units” (Mladin 2009, *apud* Ardeleanu Gomoescu 2016: 77).

Given that Romanian, French, and (American) English are highly similar when it comes to the use of these pragmatic markers, the following scenario can arguably be assumed: as is known, French influence on Romanian diminished over time, with (American) English becoming the main external influence. The use of the pragmatic marker *gen* thus naturally mirrors these changes. As Preda (2025: 26) puts it, its usage “appears to be influenced by contact with the English language among the younger generation, as well as among adults under 40.”⁸

⁸ Similarly, with the ascending international popularity of (American) English, French *genre* is also progressively influenced by American English *like*; this becomes apparent due to their similar developments, as observed by Isambert (2016: 90–91).

Several terms have been coined to describe markers of this kind. Schiffrin (1987) proposes the term *discourse markers* (DM) to describe elements that are syntactically detachable from the utterance, but which ensure discourse cohesion (as posited by Levinson) and also contribute to shifts in meaning. Drăgușin (2016) tracks the diachronic evolution of this terminology, and observes – in relation to the term *pragmatic marker* which she adopts, originally proposed by Andersen (2001) –, that it “describes a class of short linguistic elements that usually do not have a great lexical significance, but serve significant pragmatic functions in conversation” (Drăgușin 2016: 157). Lee (2004) finds an umbrella term for these types of elements: the author includes any entity with the aforementioned characteristics under the generic category *filler*, emphasizing the fact that they have an important discursive role, and that some even function as discursive markers. This had previously been suggested by Stenström (1994: 223), who views DMs as “empty lexical entities with uncertain discursive functions, apart from filling a conversational void”. This definition is very closely related to the idea of *discursive fillers*, also suggested by Lee (2004). In this work, I will mainly use the term *pragmatic marker*, which has already been used in Romanian scholarship in reference to *gen* (Drăgușin 2016). Nevertheless, this theoretical discussion proves particularly interesting because certain recent uses of *gen* in Romanian seem to fall under all the definitions thus provided. My choice is mainly motivated by the fact that *filler* might be too misleading of a term – not in general in application to *gen*, but specifically concerning this paper – because in online interaction (and especially in asynchronous online interaction), as I will show, *gen* (almost) always has a specific function⁹.

3. RECENT PRAGMATIC FUNCTIONS OF GEN ‘LIKE’

English *like* is said to be associated with the discourse of adolescents (Andersen 2001). Since there are no specific sociolinguistic studies on the use of *gen*, age-related parallels with its American counterpart may be drawn by other means, such as through intuition. To my knowledge (and according to observations and comments made by most of the people I discussed with, of different ages), it is fair to assume that the usage of *gen* in Romanian is peculiar to the speech of young people. Adolescents seem to favor it the most; as age decreases or increases past adolescence, its use starts to progressively decrease as well, until it becomes marginal.

In my previous research on *gen* (Jipa 2025), I noted that, in order to capture a wider range of its pragmatic functions, I had to include private text messages in my sample, because the contexts found in the online corpus (CoRoLa) were not as varied as initially expected (as compared to previous subjective observations on spoken interaction, where *gen* was used more frequently, and in a broader variety of contexts).

While recording examples from CoRoLa, it became apparent that the functions tied to recent usages of *gen* are indeed much less frequently found in writing. It usually appears as a marker of the type of oral discourse young people use. Thus, in order to capture the wide range of values this word can have, it was necessary to also include private text messages. This

⁹ It would be interesting, however, to analyze how frequently *gen* is used with the sole function of ‘filling a conversational void’ in spoken interaction (similarly to other elements, like *um...*).

phenomenon is worth studying precisely because these functions of *gen* are peculiar to a certain age category, in a way that accounts for the multitude of pragmatic (and other) functions it can have.¹⁰ (Jipa 2025: 175–176, our translation).

As noted in Jipa (2025; see also Preda 2023, 2025), *gen* can introduce direct speech (3), examples (4), explanations (5), comparisons (6), or it can act as a focus marker (7), or modal marker (8). The examples recorded in CoRoLa fall under the first four categories. The latter two values – those of focus or modal marker – are documented only in text messages.

Next, I will offer a brief inventory of the pragmatic functions of *gen*; it is divided into two categories, according to the main source of the examples. The first category contains the functions recorded in CoRoLa, which I also expect to find on Reddit, given that the data they provide results from unidirectional interaction, in both cases. The second category contains the functions recorded in text messages, which are not expected to be found on Reddit, because, as instances of synchronous interaction, they are more similar to face-to-face interaction. Indeed, the usage of this pragmatic marker appears to be more varied in synchronous media, as all functions of *gen* have been recorded in text messages, but this is not true of asynchronous media.

3.1. Asynchronous written interaction

The functions of *gen* attested in the online corpus CoRoLa are those of introducing direct speech (3), examples (4), explanations (5), and comparisons (6).

(3) *Introducing direct speech*

a. În condiții aspre, ziariștii tot nu se lasă seduși de declarații oficiale *gen* „Credem în libertatea presei și totdeauna i-am îndemnat pe politicienii partidului nostru să-i lase pe ziariști să lucreze liber” (ministrul indian al Agriculturii, Jyotipriya Mallick). (CoRoLa)

In harsh conditions, journalists still aren't seduced by official statements like “We believe in press freedom and have always urged our party's politicians to let journalists work freely” (Indian Minister of Agriculture, Jyotipriya Mallick).

b. Evident, am început discuția în același stil clasic, cu aceleași întrebări *gen* de ce doriți să plecați, ce v-ar motiva la noul loc de muncă și inevitabil ce proiecte de viitor aveți. (CoRoLa)

Naturally, I started the conversation in the same classic style, with the same questions like why do you want to leave, what would motivate you at the new job, and inevitably what future plans do you have.

The functions of *gen* in (4) and (5) are very similar. All examples share the structure NP¹ *gen* NP², where NP¹ falls under a specific category, and NP² either represents various

¹⁰ “Odată cu preluarea exemplelor din CoRoLa, a devenit clar faptul că, într-adevăr, utilizările mai recente ale cuvântului *gen* sunt cu mult mai puțin răspândite în texte scrise. Ele apar, de cele mai multe ori, ca marcă a tipului de discurs oral practicat de tineri, aşa încât, pentru a putea puncta varietatea valorilor pe care acest element le comportă, a fost necesară colectarea unor exemple din conversații familiare avute de tineri. Chiar dacă pare a fi un element specific exprimării unei anumite categorii de vîrstă, merită studiat tocmai prin prisma acestui aspect și mai ales având în vedere multitudinea de valori pragmatice (și nu numai) pe care le poate comporta”.

elements of the category denoted by NP¹ (4), or a single element of that category (5). This structure is in line with the one found in Călinescu (1938), and can therefore already be deemed more stable in Romanian than other uses of *gen*. As such, it is expected to be found frequently in Reddit interaction.

(4) *Exemplification marker*

În raport cu platformele consacrate *gen* WordPress, Joomla sau SimpleUpdates, s-a căutat obținerea unui optim cu privire la complexitatea soluției și facilitățile oferite. (CoRoLa)

Compared to established platforms like WordPress, Joomla, or SimpleUpdates, the goal was to strike an optimal balance between solution complexity and feature availability.

(5) *Explanation (by reference to a subclass)*

a. Un nou început de săptămână de februarie coincide cu un nou drum *gen* navetă spre Capitala Culturală a Moldovei, orașul lui Eminescu și Creangă. (CoRoLa)

A new start to the week in February coincides with a new trip, a sort of commute, to the Cultural Capital of Moldova the city of Eminescu and Creangă.

b. Expresie ce amintește fatal de stalinism, de represiunea de la Canal, de stahanovismul *gen* Bumbești-Livezeni, impus de securiștii regimului comunist. (CoRoLa)

An expression that is fatally reminiscent of Stalinism, of the repression at the Canal, of Bumbești-Livezeni-style Stakhanovism, imposed by the secret police of the communist regime.

(6) *Comparison connector*

a. Și de aceea fac și eu o proclamație *gen* cea a lui Tudor de la Padeș prin care dau un fel de anunț la mica sau marea publicitate în sensul de a găsi „panduri ai fericirii” asemenea mie, care vor să fericescă această nație. (CoRoLa)

And that's why I too am making a proclamation similar to that of Tudor from Padeș, through which I am making a kind of advertisement, small or large, in order to find/with the goal of finding “pandurs of happiness” like myself, who want to bring happiness to this nation.

b. O fază, plină de amuzament și lacrimi, *gen* „Viața bate filmul”, s-a petrecut între Andreea D. și „dama” din Tânărul cuplu. (CoRoLa)

A moment full of laughter and tears, reminiscent of “Truth is stranger than fiction,” occurred between Andreea D. and the “lady” of the young couple.

3.2. Synchronous written interaction

(7) provides two examples of *gen* as a focus marker, because it shifts the focus of what is being communicated onto a specific aspect. More precisely, *gen*¹ in (7a) shifts the focus onto the anxious-avoidant behavior of the person that the author is writing about. Note that *gen*² in (7a) does not share the same function; in this case, it introduces an explanation about the behavior of the person being referred to (Jipa 2025).

(7) *Focus marker*

a. Da bă da e *gen*¹ comportament anxios-avitant în relație, *gen*² îi e frică să se atașeze și nici nu știe ce e cu el. (Private text message)
 Yeah man, yeah, it's like anxious-avoidant behavior in relationships, like he's afraid to get attached and he doesn't even know what's going on with himself.

b. Spune pe grup chestia asta. Că *gen* se închid înscrierile dacă se acoperă numărul de boboci, să știe. (Private text message)
 Say this on the group chat. That, like, registrations will close if the number of freshmen is filled, just so they know.

Isambert (2016: 92) believes that French *genre* can function as a modal marker, shifting the meaning of the entire phrase under its scope. Taking this idea into account, I previously assumed that the corresponding Romanian term shares this function, due to examples such as those in (8), where *gen* marks doubt, hesitation, or uncertainty. It is easily noticeable that the meaning of the utterances changes if *gen* is removed, in which case each example would have a neutral reading (Jipa 2025: 177–178).

(8) *Modal marker*

a. Mi-a trimis un meme cu o girafă și *gen* voia răspuns, nu înțeleg. (Private text message)
 He sent me a meme with a giraffe and like he wanted an answer, I don't get it.

b. Poți să *gen* recomanzi pe cineva? (Private text message)
 Can you like recommend someone?

c. Bă nu știu *gen*, dar înțelegi și tu. (Private text message).
 Man, like, I don't know, but you get me.

In (8a), *gen* helps the speaker express their doubt or disapproval (or rather, lack of understanding) concerning a gesture made by the person they are talking about, namely sending a meme with a giraffe. Here, the pragmatic function of *gen* is supported by the additional comment at the end of the example, *nu înțeleg* ‘I don't get it’; in this case, removing *gen* would not necessarily produce a change in the meaning of the utterance. In my experience (and following my intuition), if the utterance-final *nu înțeleg* ‘I don't get it’ were absent, *gen* would not necessarily mark doubt or disapproval. This goes to show that *gen* is indeed very versatile, and sometimes requires additional comments in order to disambiguate its meaning. The hesitation (or attenuation) marked by *gen* in (8b) is more clear. Here, removing *gen* would undoubtedly change the meaning of the example; more precisely, without *gen*, the utterance in (8b) would merely indicate the speaker's request for information (or for assistance regarding a recommendation), without any sort of attenuation. In (8c), *gen* emphasizes the meaning of *nu știu* ‘I don't know’.

4. THE USAGE OF *GEN* ‘LIKE’ ON REDDIT

In this section, I will first make some theoretical observations about Computer-Mediated Discourse (CMD), and about computer-mediated communications in general, since the distinction between synchronous and asynchronous interaction can influence the array of attested pragmatic functions of the word *gen*.

Then, I will offer a quantitative analysis of the data collected on the Romanian Reddit forum *r/CasualRo*. This is intended for the development of a quantitative hierarchy of the functions of *gen* in asynchronous online interaction on Reddit. For this purpose, using the Reddit search engine, I recorded the first 100 contexts featuring *gen*, and analyzed them, sorting them into categories according to their function. Despite initially using the pragmatic values listed in Jipa (2025), I ultimately split one category into two separate ones – namely exemplification and explanation – and also created a new one – approximation (attenuation).

4.1. Computer-Mediated Discourse (CMD). An overview

Even though online communication becomes progressively more accessible and diverse, it still remains notably different from face-to-face interaction. Thus, communication medium becomes an appropriate parameter to take into consideration for discourse analysis.

As Herring (2001: 612) defines it, “[c]omputer-mediated discourse is the communication produced when human beings interact with one another by transmitting messages via networked computers.” A fundamental property of computer-mediated interaction is that “CMD exchanges are typically faster than written exchanges (e.g., of letters, or published essays which respond to one another), yet still significantly slower than spoken exchanges, since even in so-called ‘real-time’ modes, typing is slower than speaking” (Herring 2001: 614).

CMD thus refers to a wide range of discourse sub-genres, which are influenced by many types of interaction. Although Herring (2001) includes only those means of communication which were readily available when the study was conducted, nowadays further types (Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp, all part of the Meta group) can be included, each with their own functions and peculiarities, which facilitate different types of online interaction.

In order to investigate the frequency of the use of *gen* in online interaction, I collected the first 100 examples found on Reddit, a very popular social media platform. Users can post texts, images, videos, which can receive comments, frequently leading to discussions involving many people. Users can form communities, while their posts are organized in subreddits, which allow posts to be sorted, e.g., according to subject.

I chose Reddit particularly due to this grouping of users into communities, and also because searching keywords is easier than on other more complicated platforms, such as Facebook or Instagram. Reddit allowed me to select the first 100 examples its searching engine provided. For this purpose, I chose the Romanian community *r/CasualRo*¹¹ which is, as the description states, “a community for occasional online conversation”. The community consists of 227,000 followers, and users must follow certain rules regarding online interaction: politics cannot be discussed in this community; tolerance is mandatory;

¹¹ This was originally suggested to me by Bianca Alecu.

discrimination, hostility, and violence of any type are not condoned. Interaction in this community is greatly influenced by these rules, considering the fact that the forum guidelines urge users to avoid discussing controversial subjects and delicate matters in the group; “funny, interesting, new, captivating, inviting” matters are preferred. The Reddit community is very active, with many posts published every day, which further stimulates interaction.

Interaction on Reddit is thus of the kind specific to forums, and is best characterized as *asynchronous* communication, with *one-way* transmission. As Herring (2001: 615) puts it, “[i]n one-way transmission, a message is transmitted in its entirety as a single unit, with the result that recipients do not know that a message is being addressed to them until it arrives, thereby precluding the possibility of simultaneous feedback.” Asynchronous communication has another important characteristic, namely that, unlike instant messages, it allows people to formulate their intervention carefully, and even to edit before posting. Consequently, generating well-formed, coherent comments is particularly frequent simply by virtue of the elevated amount of time spent writing (Herring 2015: 131). Therefore, it is important to observe that not all computer-mediated communication is characterized by a comparatively reduced amount of subordinate clauses and restricted vocabulary, as Herring (2001: 617) put it.

4.2. Interaction management

Reddit allows users to interact mainly in the comments section of each individual post. User-made posts are essential as conversation starters, and can therefore influence conversation. Comments can be consulted easily, because they are organized hierarchically in threads, which facilitates an understanding of how each comment is related to the others. These strategies are useful (and necessary), though unrelated messages or smaller adjacent discussions can disrupt the “conversation”. “Such strategies are useful in multiparticipant asynchronous CMD, where the logical adjacency of turns is disrupted by other unrelated messages” (Herring 2015: 136). Sometimes, when posts *go viral* – receiving an impressive number of comments and reactions –, the conversation becomes difficult to follow and to comprehend, because

[m]ultiple responders who are unaware of what others are typing can generate redundant responses or fragment the topic of discussion by moving it in different directions. This contributes to the tendency for discussions in one-way CMD to digress away from their starting points. Digression is especially common in unstructured, unguided discussions in public forums (Herring 2015: 137).

Thus, it is to be expected that the functions of *gen* on Reddit are similar to those found in the examples extracted from the online corpus CoRoLa – namely, that they include the introduction of direct speech, examples, explanations, and comparisons. It remains to be seen, however, what the relative frequency of these functions is, and whether Reddit users favor any specific functions.

4.3. Quantitative analysis

As expected, the values found in CoRoLa are also attested in the Romanian Reddit community *r/CasualRo*, emphasizing the idea that asynchronous media, despite its differences with synchronous media, ultimately shares the same main properties.

Table 1
CoRoLa vs Reddit

	CoRoLa	Reddit (<i>r/CasualRo</i>)
DIRECT SPEECH CONNECTOR	X	X
EXAMPLE CONNECTOR	X	X
EXPLANATION CONNECTOR		X
COMPARISON CONNECTOR	X	X
APPROXIMATOR	—	X

Using the examples found on Reddit, I refined the initial inventory of the pragmatic functions *gen* (Jipa 2025). The data from CoRoLa was not indicative of any significant distinction between the function of introducing an example and that of introducing an explanation, because in most situations the structure of the examples was similar to the one identified in Călinescu (1938) – PHRASE¹ *gen* PHRASE², where PHRASE² is a subclass of PHRASE¹. Data from Reddit proves that introducing examples and introducing explanations constitute two distinct functions of *gen*.

The examples below in (9a-d) follow the class – subclass structure. For instance, in (9a), *eJobs* and *BestJobs* (NP²) are two examples of Romanian job search websites (NP¹). It should also be noted that *gen* may introduce not only specific elements, i.e., instances of a larger class as occurs in (9a-b), but also categories of elements within a class, without indicating a specific individual (9c-d).

(9) *Marker of exemplification* (41 contexts)

a. Cum vă găsiți job-uri? Pe site-uri de joburi *gen ejobs, bestjobs*?

How do you find jobs? On job search websites like ejobs, bestjobs?

b. E vorba de modă/modele. Și de adaptarea mai ușoară la locul unde trăiește copilul. De multe ori sunt preferate nume biblice, mai „universal”, *gen Luca, Lea* etc. Puțini mai tin cont de tradiție.

It's about fashion/trends. And about helping the child adapt more easily to the place where they live. Biblical names, are often preferred, as they are more “universal,” like Luca, Lea, etc. Few people care about tradition anymore.

c. Ca o altă paranteză, tot ce avem sau am făcut până acum, *gen joburi, mașină, casă, nuntă* etc. sunt pe banii noștri și munca noastră.

As a side note, everything we have or have done so far, like jobs, cars, houses, weddings, etc., has been paid for with our own money and work.

d. Căți dintre voi când ați fost în vacanță undeva la Hotel ați plecat cu obiecte ale hotelului *gen prosoape, pastă dinți, periuță dinți, halat și le-ați luat acasă?* V-au reproșat ceva cei de la hotel?

How many of you, when you went on vacation and stayed at a hotel, ended up taking home hotel items like towels, toothpaste, toothbrushes, robes? Did the hotel staff ever say anything?

Similarly to the examples from CoRoLa, Reddit examples show that *gen* can also introduce a subclass (10a), or a single element within the class denoted by NP¹ (10b-c).

(10) *Example by reference to a subclass/single element* (34 contexts)

- a. Mai mult, unii oameni din jur, *gen* prieteni, își dau cu părerea cum ar trebui să mă comport/reactionez.
What’s more, some people around me, like friends, feel the need to tell me how I should act/react.
- b. Am încercat și meal prep, și efectiv orice altă variantă, până și să mănânc la ore fixe sau diete nebunești *gen* Rina și efectiv degeaba.
I’ve tried meal prep, and literally every other option, even eating at set times and crazy diets like Rina’s, and it was all for nothing.
- c. Pentru limba engleză, poți să iezi legal cărți de pe Standard eBooks. Au o grămadă de cărți faine, clasice, editate pentru dispozitive *gen* Kindle în formă îngrijită.
For English, you can legally get books from Standard eBooks. They have lots of great classic books, properly edited for devices like Kindle.

The function exemplified in (11) (“introducing an explanation”) is separated from the one in (10) because unlike the latter, the two connected phrases do not share a class – subclass relationship, rather they share the same meaning and intention, where the second phrase is an attempt to strengthen the first, to highlight its importance. For instance, in (11a), the affirmation *Ai iubit-o pe ea mai mult decât te-ai iubit pe tine* ‘you loved her more than you loved yourself’ is followed by an explanation which tries to clarify its meaning, and evaluates the behaviour of the interlocutor, asserting that they did not prioritize themselves. In (11b), the phrase that follows *gen* clearly and plainly explains what ‘letting pregnant women and parents with kids go ahead in line’ means: it means actively checking this rule is enforced and encouraging people from this category to benefit from this advantage, not just passively allowing them to go to the front of the line when they do it of their own accord. Thus, the way *gen* introduces explanations is similar, but not identical to the way it introduces examples, since it does not directly reflect a class – subclass relationship.

(11) *Introducing an explanation* (9 contexts)

- a. Ea probabil te-a acceptat ca partener din cauza situației financiare, altfel nu cred că era necesar să alergi după ea! Ai iubit-o pe ea mai mult decât te-ai iubit pe tine, *gen* nu te-ai prioritizat mai deloc! Iar acum îți zic o chestie... Dacă tu nu te iubești pe tine, cum ar putea altcineva să te iubească?
She probably accepted you as a partner because of the financial situation, otherwise, I don’t think you would’ve had to chase after her! You loved her more than you loved yourself, like, you didn’t prioritize yourself at all! And here’s the thing... If you don’t love yourself, how could someone else love you?

b. Lași în fața ta gravidele și părinții cu copii la orice coadă ai sta (*gen* te uiți efectiv să nu fie nimeni din aceste categorii nefavorizat).

Always let pregnant women and parents with kids go ahead of you in line (like, actively check to make sure no one in these categories is left behind).

The reason why introducing direct speech is not a particularly common function of *gen* could be that there are several other ways of introducing direct speech in Romanian, including through the use of other elements (*cum ar fi* ‘such as’, *ca* ‘as’) or introductory verbs without any other connector.

(12) *Introducing direct speech* (8 contexts)

a. Am avut o dramă în familie atunci, lui taică-meu i s-a făcut rău plus chestii *gen* „cum de am crescut un copil aşa prost” și „ce-am făcut atât de greşit de cărăbuş de noi”.

We had a family drama back then, my dad got sick, plus stuff like “how could we have raised such a dumb child” and “what did we do so wrong that he disrespected us like this.”

b. De la o vreme după ce vorbim îmi dau tot felul de replici *gen* „spune-mi dacă ești supărata” sau dacă am pățit ceva etc.

Lately, after we talk, I get asked things like “tell me if you’re upset” or if something happened to me, etc.

c. De curiozitate, cum gestionați o chirie de la (aşa) distanță? Vă ajută vreo rudă/prieten din apropiere sau vă ocupați 100% voi? Mă refer aici la chestii de-alea *gen* „s-a spart o ţeavă, mi s-a stricat încuietoarea de la uşă” etc., vreun complaint de pe la vreun vecin, dar și situația de găsit/plecat/schimbat chiriași.

Just curious, how do you manage a rental from (such) a distance? Do you have any relatives/friends nearby helping you, or do you handle it 100% by yourselves? I mean stuff like “a pipe burst, my door lock broke” etc., maybe a complaint from a neighbour, or things like finding/moving/changing tenants.

Apart from the expected functions of *gen*, I also found one that was not included in my previous inventory (Jipa 2025): *gen* can also serve as an approximator (or attenuator) with quantifiers. This was previously mentioned by Zafiu (2012), who calls *gen* “a marker of approximation and relativisation”. This goes to show that this pragmatic marker can be used as a token of *vague language*. As Channell (1994: 20) puts it, “[a]n expression is vague when it conveys the same proposition as another expression arising from intrinsic uncertainty” (Channell 1994: 20), such as *niște brânză* ‘some cheese’, *puțină brânză* ‘a little cheese’. In these instances, both *niște* ‘some’, and *puțină* ‘a little’ convey a similar meaning, since they both refer to an unspecified (*vague*) quantity of cheese. Conveying the right amount of information, mitigation, solidarity, strengthening, self-protection, withholding information (Zhang 2023: 285–288; see also Zafiu 2002: 400) are all pragmatic functions of vague language. Of these, *conveying the right amount of information* is the most appropriate descriptor for *gen* in (13a-c), given that users seem to express both approximation – considering *gen*’s adjacency to a quantifier – and attenuation – considering that in (13a-b), the values preceded by *gen* are hypothetical. In (13a), “90%” represents the hypothetical chances of couples’ therapy not working; in (13b), “50%” represents the hypothetical tax that should

be applied on sweetened products. On the other hand, in (13c), “500-1000” represents the supposed bonus payout one receives when gambling as an incentive to play more; in this case, *gen* only marks approximation, and is doubled by another indicator of approximation, namely reference to an interval (500–1000), rather than to a specific number value.

(13) *Approximator* (8 contexts)

- a. Terapia de cuplu chiar merită, chiar dacă sunt șanse de *gen* 90% să vă ajute să vă despărțești elegant și nu să reaprindeți scânteia.
Couples therapy is totally worth it, even if there's like a 90% chance it'll help you break up gracefully rather than rekindle the spark.
- b. Corect ar fi fost să aplice o taxă masiva *gen* 50% pentru orice produs care conține orice formă de îndulcitor sau mai mult de 20g zahăr/100g produs.
It would've been right to apply a massive tax, like 50%, on any product containing any form of sweetener or more than 20g of sugar per 100g.
- c. Nu mai zic că dacă câștigi o sumă mare, primești după bonusuri sume *gen* 500–1000 lei să te atragă să joci să îi pierzi și după să se activeze ceva în creier să îți pară rău că ai jucat și să vrei să recuperezi banii și să pierzi tot ce ai câștigat anterior.
Not to mention, if you win a large sum, you'll get bonus payouts, like 500–1000 lei, to lure you into playing more, then you start feeling guilty for losing them and try to win your money back, only to lose everything you had previously won.

Given the properties of online interaction on Reddit, and judging by the quantitative results of my analysis, the reason for which some of the recent functions of *gen* are not encountered in the sample analyzed can be explained. In face-to-face or instant online communication (through direct/instant messages in private or small group conversations), interlocutors can manage their conversation better. This is due, first of all, to the absence of unrelated comments and parallel discussions otherwise inevitable on forums, but also to many of the specific features of various platforms, which include (but are not limited to) seeing when the other person is typing, accessing read-receipts for messages, replying to specific messages (which is similar to comment threads on forums, but the latter are not always sufficiently transparent, since comments cannot be linked to one another, but users can add reactions to threads). These features allow users to react more quickly and efficiently during conversations, which makes synchronous online communication through instant messaging the medium of written online communication that is most similar to face-to-face interaction. Moreover, private conversations of this type usually entail a close connection between conversation participants, allowing the use of a more relaxed register.

Reddit, however, does not share these characteristics, which means that in this context, the array of pragmatic functions of *gen* is more limited.

4. CONCLUSIONS

There are many recently developed uses of the invariable word *gen* that are attested in online written communication (especially in synchronous communication). When it comes to asynchronous communication, the functions of *gen* do not reflect the broad variety of functions found in oral communication or in synchronous communication.

Therefore, asynchronous online interaction is more conservative, while synchronous media is more creative, showing a greater resemblance to oral communication.

Judging by the data gathered from Reddit, the most common functions of *gen* are those of introducing examples, explanations, direct speech, or marking approximation. The latter value, that of approximation (or attenuation) marker, is a new addition to the previously developed inventory of *gen*'s pragmatic functions (Jipa 2025), though it had been previously pointed out by Zafiu (2012). The contexts from Reddit where *gen* functions as an approximator/attenuator prove that this pragmatic marker can also be considered a token of *vague language*.

In summary, this study helped formulate the following quantitative hierarchy of pragmatic functions of *gen* in Romanian:

Quantitative hierarchy of pragmatic functions (synthesis)

- i. Example connector (multiple elements) – 41 contexts;
- ii. Example connector (single element) – 34 contexts;
- iii. Explanation connector – 9 contexts;
- iv. Direct speech connector – 8 contexts;
- v. Approximator – 8 contexts.

An important avenue for further research is investigating *gen* in spoken face-to-face interaction. The difference between the functions found in online asynchronous and synchronous interaction suggests that spoken interaction could give rise to still further pragmatic values of *gen*, which may differentiate in terms of possible functions and quantitative distribution.

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