

## EDITORIAL

Digital technologies have triggered various transformations in the ways language is produced, disseminated, and interpreted. As communication increasingly occurs within online environments – ranging from social media platforms and messaging applications to virtual forums and algorithmically mediated spaces – linguistic practices have adapted, changed, and evolved in many complex ways.

A special workshop dedicated to *Digital language and online communication* was hosted by *The 24<sup>th</sup> International Conference of the Department of Linguistics (CIDL24), Approaches to Language: Data, Interpretations, Theories* (Faculty of Letters, University of Bucharest, 15–16 November 2024). The presentations explored how digital affordances shape language, how communication norms are negotiated within virtual communities, and how identity, power, and ideology are encoded through digital discourse. This special issue of *Revue Roumaine de Linguistique* publishes a subset of these contributions, which opens a space for further inquiry into the functioning of language in cyberspace, highlighting how digital environments reshape the dynamics of human communication.

The editors grouped the articles selected here into three sections: *Rethinking pragmatics*, *Identity construction and social positioning*, and *Digital registers and expressive shifts*. Each of them reveals the interplay between technological mediation and the interpersonal, social, and cultural dimensions of language use in the digital age, and together they illuminate various facets of meaning-making, as well as the fluid boundaries of emerging communities of practice.

**Section I** features two theoretical articles that delve into how digital communication technologies are reshaping the core principles of pragmatic theory, challenging traditional models and prompting novel approaches. In “Shifting from cognitive pragmatics to Internet pragmatics”, **Francisco Yus** illustrates how the transformations brought about by Internet communication in relation to prototypical face-to-face interaction can be approached through the lens of Relevance Theory. Building on his previous contributions to Relevance Theory and Internet pragmatics, the author examines several complex factors that impact the interpretation of meaning conveyed online: the mediating influence of digital interfaces and platforms, the multiplicity of audiences, the fluidity of contextual frames and their impact on interactional patterns, the dynamics of multimodal encoding and transmission of meaning, and the affordances of expressing non-propositional content such as affects and emotions. **Andra Vasilescu** authors the article “*The pragmatic competence of ChatGPT. An AI-assisted research*”, in which she not only employs AI creatively as a research tool, but she also presents an AI-generated meta-analysis of the chatbot’s pragmatic competence. Departing from the prevailing focus on the machine’s limitations, she proposes an alternative theoretical framework in which pragmatic competence is redefined as “an emergent property of ontologically distinct communicative systems.” This perspective broadens the scope of pragmatics to encompass hybrid, asymmetrical agency interactions between chatbots and humans. Her proposal marks a shift from traditional pragmatics

toward a new paradigm she terms *trans-pragmatics* – a field of inquiry dedicated to post-human authorship and communication.

**Section II** includes four articles that revolve around the idea of *persona* and of relational identities discursively constructed across various digital subgenres, platforms, and communicative goals. In her article, “Identity work in Romanian history memes. A case study”, **Mihaela-Viorica Constantinescu** utilizes multimodal data to examine how meme creators and distributors engage in identity work. She distinguishes between two primary types of history memes: “standard” memes, which rely on conventional references and established semiotic practices, and “pretense artifact” memes, which are claimed to represent historical objects such as lithographs, paintings, and manuscript illustrations. Drawing upon identity theory, stancetaking, and digital literacy, Constantinescu’s analysis combines quantitative methods – highlighting the most frequently referenced historical figures and periods – with a qualitative exploration of semiotic strategies, intertextual complexity, and the attitudes expressed toward historical “objects,” whether events or historical figures. **Bianca Alecu**’s “Humorous online dialogues on Romanian Reddit: Discussing conspiracy theories” is a blend of dialogue analysis, multimodal discourse analysis, computer-mediated discourse analysis, humor studies, and critical frameworks used to examine the forms and functions of online humor. Focusing on dialogic exchanges centered around two conspiracy theories from a Romanian subreddit forum, Alecu’s qualitative study reveals that the dynamics of online conversational humor closely mirror those found offline. The analysis identifies verbal play – such as puns and competitive wordplay – and collaborative fantasizing, often grounded in established verbal stereotypes, as key mechanisms leveraged by users. These mechanisms are instrumental in crafting intricate parodies of conspiracy theories, operating “both at a formal and at a functional level of interaction”. **Adina Botăș** examines online political discourse in her article “Self- and other-presentation in the 2024 Romanian presidential election. A discourse-based analysis”. She investigates how emerging topics became central themes for leading presidential candidates during the October–November 2024 election campaign in Romania. Specifically, Botăș analyzes the ways candidates construct an image of ordinariness, utilize medium-level credentials as strategies for (de)legitimization, and navigate gendered expectations in relation to political leadership. Drawing on digital communication theory – particularly the concepts of online campaigning and self-presentation – she applies pragmasemantics and Critical Discourse Analysis to public statements and interviews. The study pays close attention to the candidates’ lexical and discursive choices and their ideological positioning, shedding light on how candidates conceptualize their electorate, or “the public from the mind of the candidate”. An out-of-the-box contribution is “Framing RFL in digital niche discourses”, by **Alexandra Cotoc** and **Anamaria Radu**. The authors examine how Romanian as spoken by non-native users is perceived by native speakers within online environments. Their study reveals that nonnative internet users exploit Romanian – considered a “less widely used and less taught” language – to enhance their visibility and acquire symbolic capital on social media platforms. In these digital spaces, Romanian as a Foreign Language (RFL) is utilized not just for communication, but as a strategic tool for personal branding and cultural mediation, often in performative and creative contexts. Cotoc and Radu analyze the linguistic characteristics of RFL as demonstrated by two influencers with different proficiency levels (A1+ and B2) and investigate native Romanian philology students’ responses to their online content. The students’ feedback highlights

a generally positive attitude toward speakers of RFL, viewing it as a sign of cultural engagement, respect, and curiosity. Specifically, for the influencer with a B2 level, students appreciated the accurate pronunciation, syntax, and vocabulary, while for the A1+ influencer, they noted the overall discourse and the symbolic significance attached to using Romanian in a public digital setting.

**Section III** groups four articles that examine evolving expressive repertoires and discursive strategies in cyberspace, highlighting how digital registers emerge and shift in response to platform-specific affordances and sociolinguistic dynamics, and how users adapt and innovate language in online interactions. **Marie Boscaro** investigates “The discursive role of hyperlinks on social media platform X”. She examines how hyperlinks function beyond simple information sharing and “markers of information sources”, showcasing multiple discursive functions: source, illustration, referent anchor, justification, humorous implicature, and pro-speech gesture. Drawing on tweets in French and English related to the ecological crisis, Boscaro analyzes their roles through the lens of common ground theory. Her claim is that the use of hyperlinks, whether they have a main or a side discursive contribution, is shaped by the epistemic profile of the audience reading the tweet. **Marinela Bota, Valentina Cojocaru and Irina Paraschiv** address “Discourse strategies in current-day digital communication. Language-contact phenomena in Instagram reels”. The authors explore the phenomenon of English–Romanian language contact as manifested in Instagram reels across various domains such as fashion, beauty, lifestyle, and entertainment. Their analysis centers on the contexts and frequency with which language contact phenomena arise, aiming to uncover the motivations behind users’ distinct linguistic choices in digital discourse. Findings highlight that code-switching plays a pivotal role in making messages more engaging and appealing to audiences, while also helping influencers project a sense of expertise. Intrasentential code-switching is found to be most prevalent, followed by intersentential code-switching, with tag or emblematic switches occurring infrequently. The study further identifies a continuum between code-switching and borrowing, illustrating the dynamic nature of language use in these settings. Pragmatic borrowings serve multiple functions, such as amplifying enthusiasm, summarizing content, shifting topics, and acting as cultural markers that reflect users’ alignment with global trends. The interactive aspect of reel discourse is also emphasized as a key factor in shaping these linguistic practices. Emergent discourse markers in online communication are discussed by **Cecilia Mihaela Popescu** in “Romanian *sincer* ‘sincerely’ and *serios* ‘seriously’: Two emergent discursive markers in online verbal interaction”. The pragma-discursive functions of *sincer* ‘sincerely’ and *serios* ‘seriously’ – two pragmatic markers commonly found in both spoken and online written Romanian – are analyzed in connection with speakers’ attitudes. These include expressing personal viewpoints, signaling agreement or disagreement, conveying irony or sarcasm, and serving phatic or metadiscursive purposes. The study further explores the cognitive and linguistic processes behind the pragmaticalization cline of the two pragmatic markers. Specifically, the semantic core of *sincer* ‘sincerely’ and *serios* ‘seriously’ is rooted in subjectively and emotionally charged value judgments (i.e., subjective and affective evaluative stances), which serve to highlight and intensify the illocutionary force of an utterance. Additionally, the analysis suggests that the resemanticization of *serios* – at least in part – may be influenced by contact with its English counterpart, ‘seriously’. **Vlad Jipa** continues his previous research on the pragmatic marker *gen* ‘like’ and presents “Recent data on the

usage of *gen* ‘like’ in Romanian online interaction”. The analysis draws on data from forum discussions on the Romanian Reddit community r/CasualRo and examines the functions and distribution of the pragmatic marker *gen*. Five primary functions of *gen* are identified: introducing examples, providing explanations, making comparisons, signaling direct speech, and expressing approximation. As for its distribution, the author identifies a “quantitative hierarchical distribution”. The study finds that, in asynchronous interactions, the use of this marker is more consistent and restricted. In contrast, synchronous exchanges display a broader range of usages – including less conventional roles such as focus or modal markers – that echo patterns observed in informal face-to-face conversations.

This thematic issue also includes five review articles authored by Răzvan Săftoiu, Noémi Tudor (Uretu), Violeta Irimie (Rus), Stanca Măda, and Carmen Radu, respectively. They present recent outstanding scholarly contributions at the intersection of linguistics, digital discourse, and social media: Majid Khosravinik (ed.), *Social Media and Society: Integrating the Digital with the Social in Digital Discourse* (Amsterdam, John Benjamins, 2023, 210 p.); Isabel Ermida (ed.), *Hate Speech in Social Media. Linguistic Approaches* (London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2023, 443 p.); Villy Tsakona, *Exploring the Sociopragmatics of Online Humor* (Amsterdam/Philadelphia, John Benjamins, 2024, 263 p.); Andreea S. Calude, *The Linguistics of Social Media. An Introduction* (London/New York, Taylor and Francis Group, 2024, 230 p.); Francisco Yus, *Emoji Pragmatics* (Palgrave, Macmillan, 2025, 446 p.). Collectively, these works reflect the growing complexity of digital communication and the need for nuanced linguistic frameworks capable of capturing its expressive, ideological, and interactional shifts. Through their engagement with multimodal, multilingual, and platform-specific phenomena, the reviewed volumes contribute to a deeper understanding of the evolving landscape of digital language practices.

As communication in cyberspace continuously evolves, so too does our understanding of the adaptability and expressive potential of language within digitally mediated contexts. The articles and reviews included in this special issue offer interesting insights into the dynamic interplay between technological affordances and linguistic practice, underscoring the importance of ongoing research at this intersection. It is our hope that these contributions not only deepen academic dialogue around online communication, but also inspire new inquiries into the ways language both shapes and is shaped by the ever-changing digital landscape.

The Editors