

FRAMING RFL IN DIGITAL NICHE DISCOURSES

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Abstract. In an increasingly globalized and digitally mediated world, languages traditionally considered “less widely used and less taught” (LWULT) are gaining new visibility and symbolic capital through online platforms. Romanian, often positioned on the periphery of global linguistic hierarchies, is now being recontextualized in digital spaces through the voices of non-native speakers who use it in performative, creative, and culturally engaged ways. This study explores how Romanian as a Foreign Language (RFL) is employed by influencers on Instagram reels and how this usage is perceived by native-speaking philology students. By analyzing both the linguistic features of RFL and the reactions of Romanian-speaking audiences, the study aims to understand how digital discourse contributes to the construction of authenticity, cultural alignment, and prestige for a language that is often overlooked in global media. Through this lens, we examine how RFL functions not only as a communication tool but also as a strategic resource for personal branding and cultural mediation in online communities.

Keywords: LWULT language, RFL, niche communities, digital discourses, symbolic capital.

1. INTRODUCTION

Social media has become an integral part of everyday communication, fundamentally transforming how people transmit and exchange information, interact with one another, and express their identities. Moreover, given that multilingualism is inherent to the nature of social media, we are witnessing a shift in how language use is performed and negotiated in online spaces. Within this evolving landscape, the dynamics of Less Widely Used, Less Taught (henceforth LWULT) languages in digital contexts reveal how niche communities are shaped through the content of influencers who creatively and performatively engage with both language and cultural elements. Among these languages, Romanian as a Foreign Language (henceforth RFL) has also gained increased visibility on digital platforms, particularly through the efforts of content creators who explore Romanian language and culture in innovative and expressive ways.

This trend of using LWULT languages within online niche communities highlights how RFL also extends beyond a mere communicative function, serving as a means of cultural alignment, identity construction, and personal branding. The new social value

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of RFL in digital spaces is reinforced also by non-native speakers who use it to build online reputations and connect with audiences using culturally resonant and linguistically creative content (Radu and Cotoc 2024, 2025). This performative use of RFL not only garners admiration from native speakers, but also actively contributes to shaping a plurilingual digital environment that promotes openness and cultural hybridity, and challenges traditional language hierarchies.

Building on these observations, this paper begins by outlining the theoretical framework that informs our analysis, drawing on sociolinguistic concepts and the dynamics of LWULT languages in digital contexts. We then examine how RFL is employed in Instagram reels by non-native speakers and how this usage is perceived by Romanian philology students. By analyzing both the linguistic features and the respondents' reactions, we aim to understand how digital discourse contributes to shifting perceptions of Romanian, enhancing its symbolic capital and cultural relevance in the global digital landscape.

2. RFL: LWULT LANGUAGE

Globalization and digital communication technologies have profoundly transformed the flow of information and the ways in which communication occurs. These developments have dismantled traditional boundaries of time, space, and language, enabling real-time interaction across diverse cultural and linguistic contexts. As a result, new forms of participation and identity expression have emerged, particularly in digital environments where linguistic diversity is increasingly visible and valued. As noted in the new preface to the work of Castells, we are witnessing “the almost instantaneous flow and exchange of information, capital, and cultural communication. These flows order and condition both consumption and production. The networks themselves reflect and create distinctive cultures” (2009: 1). Within this dynamic landscape, LWULT languages are being reimaged and recontextualized. Once confined to limited geographic or institutional settings, these languages are gaining renewed visibility and vitality in niche and transnational communities. Digital platforms enable speakers and learners to engage with LWULT languages in creative, performative, and socially meaningful ways, often outside traditional educational or national frameworks. This transformation is driven by processes of digital glocalization because global connectivity and hyperconnection intersect with local linguistic and cultural expressions, creating what Bhabha (1994) terms a “third space”, understood as a dynamic site of negotiation, identity construction, and symbolic revaluation. In this third space, the discursive conditions of enunciation are “that the meanings and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized and read anew” (Bhabha 1994: 37). Through platforms such as YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram, speakers and learners of LWULT languages engage in dynamic, multimodal exchanges. The affordances of digital media (e.g., instant connectivity, user-generated content, and algorithmic amplification) have altered the dynamics of the linguistic landscape, enabling these languages to circulate more widely and gain symbolic capital, defined by Bourdieu as “the acquisition of a reputation for competence and image of respectability and honourability” (1986: 291). In line with forms of symbolic capital as conceptualized by Bourdieu and emphasized by

Ihlen, we consider that in the digital landscape, these languages gain “economic capital (money, property), cultural capital (knowledge, skills, educational qualifications), and social capital (connections, membership of a group)” (Bourdieu 1986 *apud* Ihlen 2018: 2). As Parianou (2010: 4) notes, “the same changing language attitude goes for the choice of a foreign language where the ‘niche’ and the ‘needs’ determine the language status”, reinforcing the idea that LWULT languages acquire value not inherently, but through the socio-digital contexts in which they are practiced and performed. Consequently, LWULT languages like RFL become valuable cultural commodities within niche and transnational communities. Economic capital is exemplified on social media through influencer monetization, as non-native speakers who use RFL in engaging ways attract large followings that can be leveraged through brand deals, sponsored content, and platform-based revenue (e.g., Instagram bonuses, affiliate marketing). Cultural capital is reflected in language proficiency because non-native influencers demonstrate a linguistic competence that is often perceived as impressive by native speakers. Additionally, cultural capital is also shown through cultural fluency, as these influencers navigate Romanian customs, humor, idioms, and traditions. Social capital is evident in the community-building aspect of their content, as influencers foster niche communities centered on Romanian language and culture. These communities often extend into cross-cultural networks, given that many influencers are involved in transnational relationships (e.g., romantic or professional), which broaden their reach and connect diverse audiences.

Building on this, LWULT languages are no longer merely preserved but actively performed, recontextualized, and reimagined in online spaces, contributing to evolving linguistic identities and fostering new forms of cultural belonging. Content creators who use RFL often aim “to reduce social distance” (Yule 2020: 300–301) between themselves and native Romanian speakers. By showing interest in local culture and engaging with Romanian speech communities, they demonstrate a desire for convergence, and they adapt their language use to align more closely with native norms. At the same time, their non-native status naturally maintains a degree of divergence and the preservation of distinct linguistic identities. For instance, some influencers intentionally retain accented pronunciation or insert humorous mistranslations as part of their personal style, which not only signals their foreignness but also becomes a recognizable and relatable feature of their brand. This dual dynamic reflects how users actively shape evolving linguistic identities by leveraging both digital and linguistic resources. This dynamic signals not only alignment with certain cultural, social, and economic trends but also an emotional connection to the Romanian-speaking community.

To further understand the linguistic processes at play in these interactions, it is useful to consider the concept of interlanguage (IL) which “validates learners’ speech, not as a deficit system, that is, a language filled with random errors, but as a system of its own with its own structure” (Gass et al. 2020: 14). Gass and Selinker emphasize the dynamic and evolving nature of language acquisition, particularly in second language learning. They explain that “inherent in an analysis of interlanguage data is a focus on the learner and on the processes involved in learning” (Gass and Selinker 1994: 14), highlighting the central role of the learner’s cognitive and linguistic development. Also, IL seen as “suspended between the student’s mother tongue and the target-language” (Platon 2019b: 68) is vividly illustrated in the Instagram reels created by non-native speakers of Romanian. These short-form videos often reveal the transitional and hybrid nature of IL through linguistic features

such as calques, code-switching, and code-mixing. For instance, direct translations from the speaker's native language into Romanian (calques) can result in unusual or humorous phrasing, while code-switching between Romanian and English (or other dominant languages) reflects the speaker's fluid navigation between linguistic systems. Code-mixing, where elements of both languages are blended within a single utterance, further highlights the dynamic and evolving nature of IL as a communicative tool. These phenomena not only demonstrate the speaker's developing linguistic competence but also contribute to the authenticity and relatability of their digital persona, reinforcing the idea that IL is not a deficiency but a creative and strategic resource in multilingual digital spaces. In this context, RFL can be understood as an IL constructed by non-native speakers, comprising not only elements from their native language and the target language, but also "autonomous" elements that emerge uniquely within the learner's linguistic system (Gass and Selinker 1994: 17). These autonomous features reflect the learner's internal strategies, approximations, and creative constructions as they navigate the complexities of Romanian.

To better understand the autonomous features of RFL within the framework of IL constructed by non-native speakers, reference can be made to structured proficiency models such as the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFR) (2020), *The Threshold Level for Learning Romanian* (Moldovan et al. 2002), and *Descrierea minimală a limbii române. A1, A2, B1, B2* (Platon et al. 2023). These frameworks offer a comprehensive approach to describing language competence across linguistic, pragmatic, and sociocultural dimensions. However, when applied to digital contexts such as Instagram reels, these descriptors intersect with more fluid and performative uses of language that go beyond formal proficiency. In this space, the use of RFL in Instagram reels becomes a form of creative linguistic performance that contributes to personal branding, digital storytelling, and cultural engagement. These short-form videos often blend humor, storytelling, and language play, allowing creators to stand out in the digital landscape. The creative value of such content lies not only in the novelty of using a LWULT language like Romanian, but also in how appropriately it is embedded within the social and cultural context of the platform and its audience. This aligns with Piccardo's definition of creativity as "a capacity to realize a product that is both novel and appropriate/useful to the context where it appears, as judged by a suitably knowledgeable social group" (2017: 2). In this case, the "knowledgeable social group" may include both native Romanian speakers and global audiences familiar with digital trends, who recognize the effort, humor, or authenticity involved in using RFL. The creative act is performative and strategic, contributing to the influencer's symbolic capital by signaling cultural curiosity, multilingual competence, and originality.

This linguistic performance can also be seen through the lens of linguistic competence and autonomy. As Platon argues, "the linguistic competence represents precisely the innate capacity that a speaker-listener has to produce new statements" (2019a: 146). This capacity is not limited to native speakers; it extends to learners who, through exposure and practice, begin to generate novel and contextually appropriate expressions in Romanian in their reels. This creative linguistic output is supported by what Platon refers to as "a minimum linguistic autonomy on which the acquisition of pragmatic cultural knowledge is founded" (2019a: 147). In the case of non-native influencers, this autonomy enables them to navigate Romanian as a cultural tool, allowing them to engage with Romanian-speaking audiences in ways that feel authentic and socially meaningful.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study examines two Instagram reels: one produced by the influencer Ronni Lvovsky (username: *primal_gourmet*) and the other by Isiah Ngirishi (username: *lifeofisiah19*). The reel by *primal_gourmet* features a RFL sample at the A1+ level, while the reel by *lifeofisiah19* presents a B2-level sample. Both reels are analyzed in terms of their linguistic structures. The same reels were incorporated into a questionnaire distributed to philology students, who were asked to view the content and share their perceptions of the RFL samples. Hence, this study is structured around two interrelated dimensions: it investigates how RFL is used by non-native speakers in Instagram reels and how this usage is perceived by native speakers of Romanian. By analyzing both the linguistic features of RFL and the respondents' reactions, the study aims to understand how Romanian is positioned in the glocal digital discourse: not only as a tool for cultural engagement and personal branding, but also as a language that can acquire symbolic capital in online communities.

To explore native speakers' perceptions, the study involved students enrolled in philology and language-related programs at the Faculty of Letters, Cluj-Napoca, Romania. These participants were chosen because of their academic background and presumed linguistic awareness, which made them well-suited to evaluate the nuances of RFL use in digital media.

3.1. Research instruments

For the first part of this study, concerning the analysis of how RFL is used by non-native speakers in Instagram reels, our methods involved observation and content analysis of selected reels and their transcriptions. The objectivity of the analysis of the online discourses is ensured through the use of the following linguistic tools: *Descrierea minimală* (Platon *et al.* 2023), *The Threshold Level for Learning Romanian* (Moldovan *et al.* 2002) and the CEFR (2020).

For the second part, the perception of this RFL usage by native-speaking philology students, the research method employed consisted in the administration of a Google Form survey, carried out in October 2024. All responses were provided in Romanian. To ensure clarity and accessibility, we provided our own English translations for each of the open-ended responses included in the study.

The survey was structured into three main sections. The first section collected demographic information, which was essential for contextualizing the responses and ensuring that the sample reflected the target group, that is to say, students who are enrolled in philology and who are native speakers of Romanian. The second section of the survey addressed general perceptions and usage of RFL, and consisted of eight items: five multiple-choice questions and three checkbox items. The third and last section focused on concrete examples of RFL use in digital media, particularly in two Instagram reels. It included two open-ended questions. This questionnaire was designed to elicit quantitative and qualitative insights into how participants interpret and respond to specific instances of RFL. The analysis of the open-ended questions constitutes one of the main parts of this study, and provides data for thematic analysis.

3.2. Research hypotheses

Our study tested the following research hypotheses:

- (1) Non-native Romanian speakers on Instagram Reels use an IL marked by translingual practices, code-mixing and code-switching; their form of RFL that is intelligible to bilingual or multilingual niche audiences.
- (2) Native speakers of Romanian perceive RFL use in reels positively, especially when the speaker demonstrates cultural engagement and effort, with pronunciation and accent contributing more to perceived authenticity than grammatical accuracy.
- (3) Exposure to RFL content enhances native speakers' awareness of Romanian's global digital presence and highlights how LWULT languages gain symbolic capital online.

4. ANALYSIS

The first section of the questionnaire gathered demographic information from 77 participants, of whom 68 were female (88.3%), 7 were male (9.1%), and 2 preferred not to disclose their gender (2.6%). Most respondents were aged 18–20 (70.1%), followed by 24.7% aged 20–30, and a small minority over 30 (5.2%). In terms of background, 70.1% came from urban areas and 29.9% from rural settings. Academically, 81.8% were enrolled in Bachelor's programs in philology or related fields, 11.7% already held a Bachelor's degree, and 6.5% were Master's students (see Figure 1 below). These socio-demographic characteristics are relevant to the research. The predominance of young, urban, female students enrolled in philology programs reflects a cohort that is both digitally literate and academically equipped to critically assess language use in online spaces. Their insights are particularly valuable for understanding how RFL is perceived by those with formal training in language and literature.

77 responses

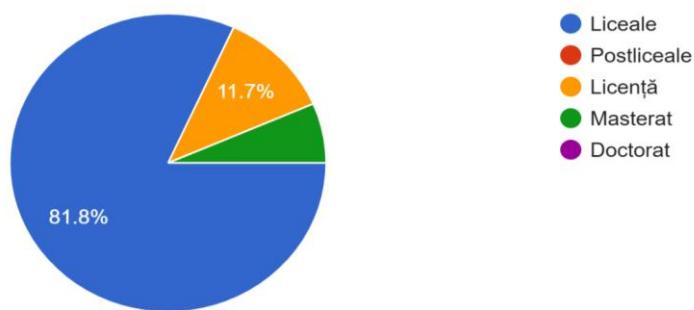


Fig. 1. Academic profile of respondents³.

³ From top to bottom: High school diploma, Associate's degree, Bachelor's degree, Master's degree, PhD.

As part of the survey, participants were asked to indicate which social networking platforms they currently use. This question was included to assess the digital environments in which our sample (female philology students) is most active and to identify the platforms where they are most likely to encounter RFL content. As shown in Figure 2, the most frequently used platforms among respondents are WhatsApp, Instagram, YouTube, and Facebook. A smaller number also reported having accounts on Pinterest, TikTok, and Snapchat. In contrast, platforms such as Twitter (X), Reddit, and LinkedIn were among the least popular. Notably, every respondent indicated that they have at least one social media account, as none selected the option “I do not have an account on any social media platform.”

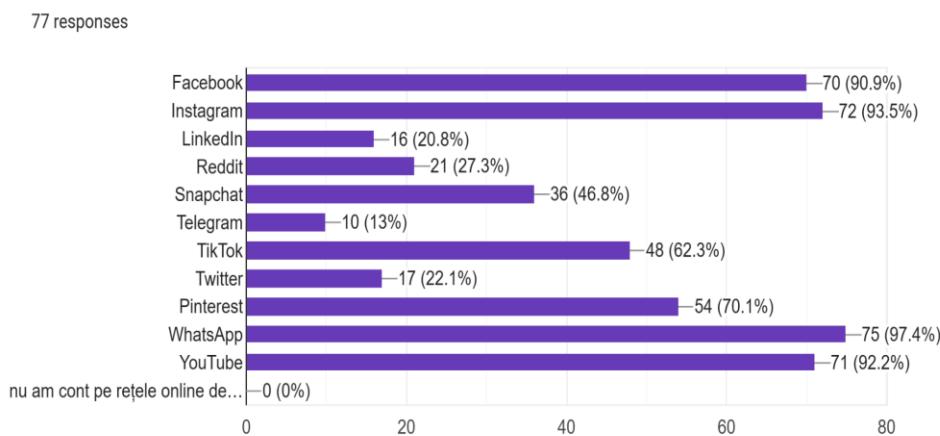


Fig. 2. Social media presence of respondents.

This data is directly relevant to our third hypothesis (i.e., exposure to RFL content enhances students’ awareness of Romanian’s global digital presence and highlights how LWULT languages gain symbolic capital online), which posits that exposure to RFL content on social media plays a significant role in shaping how LWULT languages are perceived among native speakers. This also informs our analysis of how Romanian is positioned within global digital discourse and how it acquires symbolic capital through online participation.

4.1. Quantitative analysis

When asked whether they are in contact with non-native speakers of Romanian, 67.5% of our respondents answered affirmatively (see Figure 3). This high percentage was expected, given that the study sample consists of undergraduate and Master’s students aged between 18 and 30, who are typically in contact with Erasmus or exchange students, as well as with members of the Hungarian and German communities in Romania.

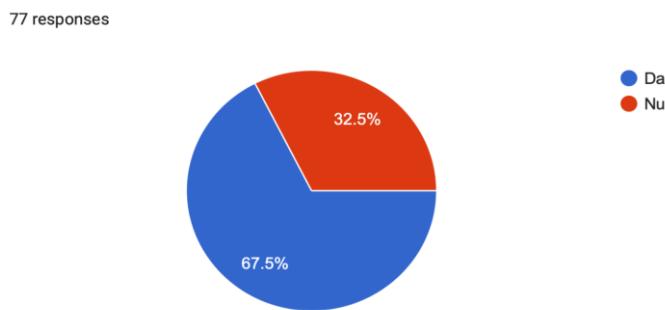


Fig. 3. Contact with non-native speakers of Romanian⁴.

Although 67.5% of our respondents reported being in contact with non-native speakers of Romanian (through personal relationships, academic settings, or online interactions), their actual exposure to RFL remains relatively low. When asked how often they encounter RFL in spoken or written form, only 12.7% indicated that they do so “very frequently” or “frequently”. These categories were defined in the survey as “encountering RFL several times a week or more”, either through direct conversation, social media, or other media formats. Meanwhile, 31.2% reported “sometimes” encountering RFL (defined as occasional exposure, such as once or twice a month), and 46.8% said they “rarely” encounter it (less than once a month). A further 10.4% stated that they are “not exposed at all” to RFL (see Figure 4).

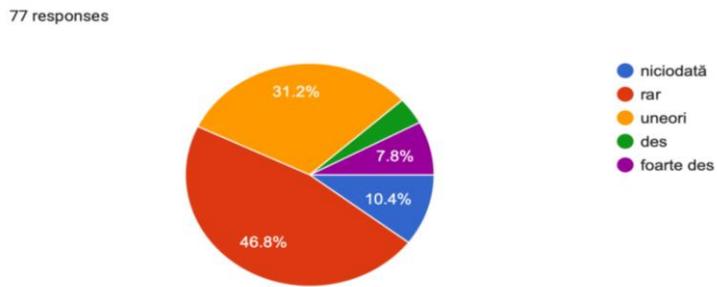


Fig. 4. Frequency of exposure to RFL⁵.

This distribution stands in contrast to the data presented in Figure 3, where a high percentage of respondents confirmed being in contact with non-native speakers of Romanian. The apparent discrepancy suggests that while many respondents know or interact with non-native speakers, these individuals may not regularly use Romanian in those interactions.

The contrast between the two figures is significant because it highlights a key aspect: contact with non-native speakers does not necessarily translate into exposure to

⁴ From top to bottom: Yes, No.

⁵ From top to bottom: never, rarely, sometimes, often, very often.

RFL. This finding also supports the third hypothesis that RFL, despite its potential as a tool for cultural engagement, remains a niche linguistic code in digital contexts/spaces and a LWULT language in interpersonal communication or academic settings. It also underscores the importance of distinguishing between social contact and linguistic exposure when analyzing the visibility and importance of LWULT languages.

The survey included a checkbox question allowing participants to select all environments where they most frequently encounter RFL. The results reveal a diverse range of settings in which participants are exposed to RFL, reflecting the multifaceted nature of language contact. However, most respondents (54.5%) reported encountering RFL primarily in online environments, such as social media platforms or in other digital spaces. Nearly half (49.4%) indicated that they are exposed to RFL at university, which is expected given their academic background in philology and the presence of international students or language learners in such settings. Additionally, 37.7% reported hearing or seeing RFL through friends or acquaintances who are non-native speakers. Everyday interactions also play a role: 28.6% mentioned exposure in ordinary public situations, such as interactions with waitstaff or delivery personnel. Notably, only 13% reported encountering RFL within a family context. The checkbox format allowed respondents to reflect on the complexity of their experiences, highlighting that RFL is not confined to a single domain but rather emerges in different types of social settings, while the digital environment is the most common space for RFL exposure (see Figure 5 below).

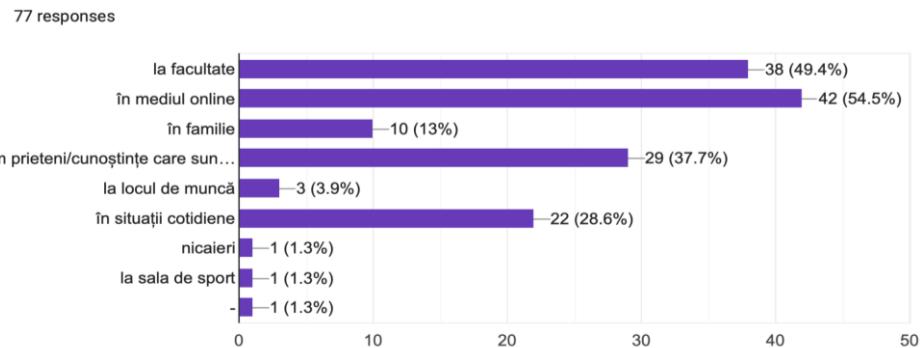


Fig. 5. Participant exposure to RFL⁶.

Our respondents noticed that non-native speakers tend to blend English or their mother tongue when speaking Romanian. According to the respondents, many non-native speakers frequently mix languages when speaking Romanian, with nearly 60% doing so often or sometimes. Specifically, only 6.5% of respondents reported that this never happens, 16.9% said it rarely occurs, 29.9% indicated it happens sometimes, another 29.9% noted it occurs often, and 3.9% mentioned that it always happens (see Figure 6 below). These results indicate that code-mixing and code-switching are common tendencies, which

⁶ From top to bottom: at the faculty, online, in the family, I have friends or acquaintances who are non-native speakers, at the workplace, in everyday situations, nowhere, at the gym.

could be influenced by various factors such as proficiency in Romanian, the context of the conversation, or speakers' comfort levels with the non-native language, which is a common feature of IL as defined in the specialized literature.

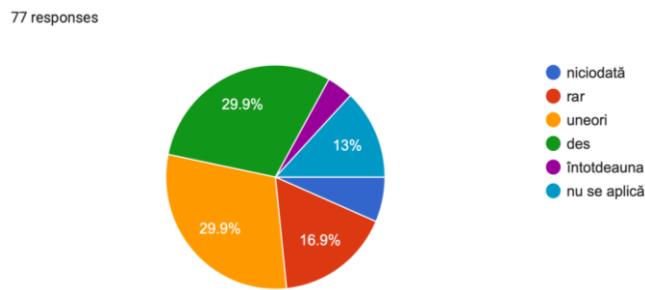


Fig. 6. Use of English/mother tongue by non-native speakers, according to native speakers⁷.

The survey item measuring reactions to RFL content was designed as a multiple-choice checkbox question, allowing respondents to select more than one response. As such, when exposed to RFL, our respondents reported the following reactions: 50.6% claimed to be impressed, 49.4% were surprised, and 48.1% felt curious. Only 14.3% of respondents were indifferent (see Figure 7 below). The percentages indicate that most respondents had a positive or engaged reaction to RFL, with over half being impressed and nearly half feeling surprised or curious. The low percentage of indifference suggests that RFL effectively captures the attention and interest of its audience, if the audience is Romanian. These results partially validate Hypothesis 2 by showing that students perceive RFL use positively.

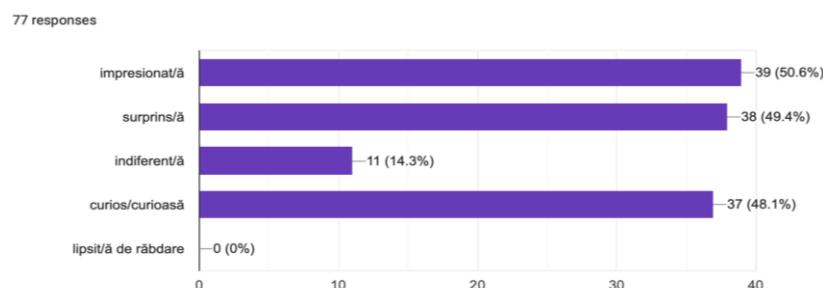


Fig. 7. Respondents' attitudes towards use of RFL⁸.

The following question was also designed as a multiple-choice checkbox question, on the implications of speaking Romanian within the native speakers' communities (see Figure 8 below). Over two-thirds consider it a sign of respect (66.2%). Additionally, more than a third (35.1%) believe it to be necessary for integration into Romanian society, while a quarter (26%) find it useful but not indispensable in daily life. The fact that one-fifth of

⁷ From top to bottom: never, rarely, sometimes, often, always, it does not apply.

⁸ From top to bottom: impressed, surprised, indifferent, curious, impatient.

respondents (20.8%) find RFL use attractive suggests that it has a certain appeal, even if it is not deemed indispensable by everyone. These findings reinforce Hypothesis 2 by showing that native-speaking students value the effort and cultural engagement demonstrated by non-native speakers in learning this LWULT language.

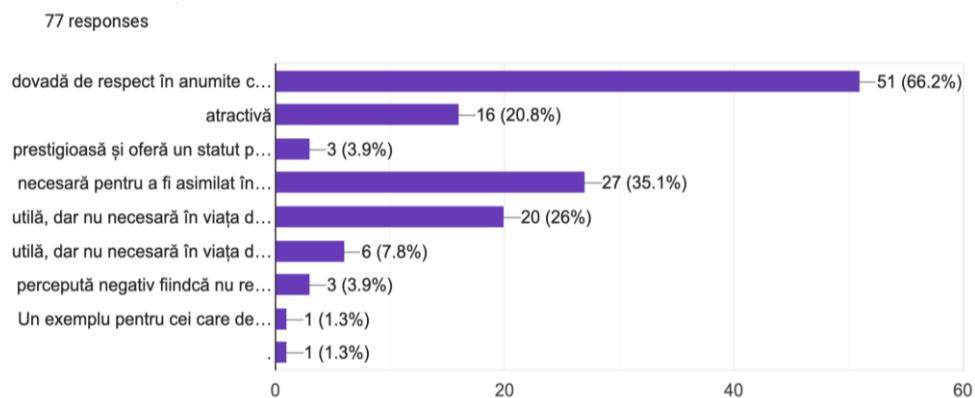


Fig. 8. RFL Implications of using RLF within Romanian speech communities⁹.

4.2. LWULT as a branding strategy: the case of RFL

From the audience's perspective, the use of RFL in the analyzed Instagram reels is perceived as an element that potentially enhances influencers' personal branding strategies. A significant 87% of respondents believe that using the Romanian language helps these influencers craft a more original and distinctive personal brand (see Figure 9 below), suggesting that linguistic choices play an important role in how authenticity and uniqueness are communicated to followers. However, as this study does not investigate similar content in other LWULT languages (e.g., Polish or Hungarian), we consider that we cannot determine whether it is Romanian specifically that enhances perceived originality or whether other factors (content style, humor, or platform-specific trends) play a more significant role in shaping audience perceptions. In this respect, there are other influencers who might be perceived as equally original through the use of different language combinations¹⁰. This could be a trend and a strategy that influencers have discovered, and which they successfully implement in order to gain more followers and to become popular in niche communities in which these LWULT languages are spoken.

⁹ From top to bottom: proof of respect in certain contexts; attractive; prestigious and it offers a prestigious status; necessary in order to integrate in Romanian society; useful, but not necessary in everyday life; useful, but not necessary at the workplace; perceived negatively because it does not represent standard Romanian, a positive example for native speakers of Romanian.

¹⁰ For instance, the following reels offer additional examples that illustrate how diverse linguistic strategies can contribute to a distinctive personal brand: pierogi_tacos, a Mexican man living in Poland who produces content in Polish; osiugonoh, a Nigerian woman living in Poland who produces content in Polish; olgagroszek, a Polish woman living in Hungary who produces content in Hungarian.

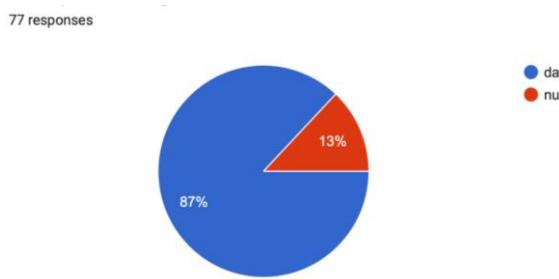


Fig. 9. RFL use as a personal branding strategy: native speaker perceptions¹¹.

In the reels analyzed, Romanian is used in casual, humorous, or lifestyle-oriented content, and it appears to function as a strategic choice that distinguishes the influencer, potentially enhancing their originality and relatability. This may contribute to their personal brand and symbolic capital.

We also asked our respondents whether they consider RFL to be an influential and prestigious linguistic code, and the results show that 53 out of 77 respondents expressed agreement (see figure 10 below), suggesting a generally positive perception of its symbolic value. In the context of globalization, social media and increasing plurilingualism, LWULT languages can be perceived as valuable assets, fostering engagement in niche communities.

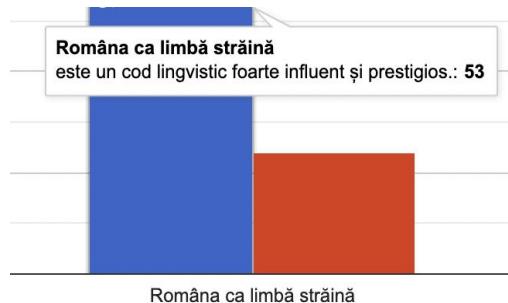


Fig. 10. Symbolic capital of RFL¹².

4.3. Qualitative analysis

Our respondents watched two reels created by influencers on Instagram, and were asked to provide their opinion on the content produced by these non-native speakers. The reels were produced by content creators that we analyzed in a previous study, which focused on the role of RFL in branding cyber-identities and monetizing Instagram accounts (see Radu and Cotoc 2024). Ronni Lvovski (username: *primal gourmet*) is a self-taught chef, food photographer, stylist, recipe blogger, and coffee aficionado residing in Canada.

¹¹ From top to bottom: yes, no

¹² Romanian as a foreign language is a prestigious and influential code.

He is married to a Romanian woman and frequently visits her family. His reels feature recipes and anecdotes he shares while shopping at the market in Brașov or taking a stroll with his wife. Although he speaks some Romanian, his reels typically blend English and Romanian. Isiah Ngirishi (username: *lifeofisiah19*) is an African photographer residing in Transylvania. His reels predominantly focus on the cultural and culinary differences between African and Romanian traditions. He has lived in Romania since 2006, and he masters Romanian. His reels are typically elaborate, and he seldom engages in code-switching. Initially, his Instagram reels were entirely in English, but he later transitioned to Romanian.

To ensure a comprehensive analysis, we selected one representative reel produced by the user *primal_gourmet* and one reel produced by the user *lifeofisiah19*. For these reels, the respondents were given the task to report their own perception across two different levels of Romanian proficiency: beginner (the content produced by *primal_gourmet*) and upper-intermediate (the content produced by *lifeofisiah19*).

4.3.1. At the market by *primal gourmet*

The reel¹³ shows *primal_gourmet* going to the market and buying groceries while also enjoying the different products he purchased and interacting with local farmers. Below is the transcript of the reel *Come with me to the local farmers market in Brașov, Romania*, reproduced verbatim. The bold represents the RFL sequences produced by the content creator, while the rest of the text in English. The following paragraph contains the transcript in which the Romanian sequences are translated, and are written in square brackets:

Come with me to the local farmers market in Brașov, Romania. We can get some incredible fresh produce and practice the very little Romanian that I know. First stop: a little covrig. Bună dimineața! Un covrig cu floare de soare. Mmmmm (while eating it). Bună ziua! Da-mi vă rog trei bucăți de roșii, mai tari, vă rog. O bucătă de ceapă vă rog. O jumate de kilogram de castraveți, două bucăți de mărari și două de pătrunjel. Atât! Mulțumim mult! Vrăbioară, una. La revedere! Aste e telemea? Dați-mi, vă rog, 200 de grame, vă rog. Urdă dulce. I need a little espresso break. Mulțumesc! Now we move on to the fruit section. Una de asta. Let's get some cherries. O jumate de kilogram. Last stop is the watermelon. 6 kilograme, mai dulce. Se poate proba? Incredible! I love Romania!

Come with me to the local farmers market in Brașov, Romania. We can get some incredible fresh produce and practice the very little Romanian that I know. First stop: a little covrig. [Good morning! A pretzel with sunflowers] Mmmmm (while eating it). [Hello! Give me three tomatoes, please. The firm ones, please. A piece of onion, please. Half a kilo of cucumbers, two sprigs of dill and two of parsley. That's all! Thank you very much. A piece of steak. Goodbye. Is that white cheese? Give me 200 grams, please. Sweet cheese]. I need a little espresso break. [Thank you!] Now we move on to the fruit section. [One of these] Let's get some cherries. [Half a kilo] Last stop is the watermelon. [6 kilos, the sweeter kind. Can I try it?]. Incredible! I love Romania!

¹³ Reel 1. *primal_gourmet*, *Come with me to the local farmers market in Brașov, Romania*, at: <https://www.instagram.com/reel/C82KhTZO-UA/?igsh=MTQwYTF5aWUwOTJkZQ%3D%3D>, Published: June 30, 2024; 1.1 Mil views and Likes: 60,014.

4.3.1.1. Level A1+ sample

In this reel, the speaker's discourse appears authentic, as he spontaneously interacts with local farmers. Although we lack insight into the extent of curation behind the content, the final product presents a clear level A1+ sample of Romanian IL. It is characterized by calques, code-mixing, and code-switching, reflecting typical features of early-stage language acquisition and digital multilingual performance. As such, we notice the following features (see Platon et al. 2023: 10–26):

A1

Basic communicative functions: *Bună dimineața!*; *Bună ziua!*; *Vă rog*; *Mulțumim mult!*; *La revedere!*;

Basic Grammar and vocabulary:

nouns: *un covrig*, *roșii*, *ceapă*, *castraveți*;

adjective: *dulce*;

A2-level correct use of grammar and vocabulary:

Comparatives: *mai dulce*, *mai tari*;

Demonstratives: *asta*, *una de asta* (using the short forms, typical of spoken Romanian);

A2-level structures that are not yet fully mastered:

Incongruent level of formality between the imperative and the clitic: *Da-mi vă rog!* (mixing the second person sg. with the second person pl.) / *Dă-mi, va rog!* (this is used correctly in the second occurrence).

Genitive: *floare de soare* – the use of analytic instead of synthetic strategies;

Calques: *o bucătă de ceapă*, *trei bucăți de roșii*, *bucăți de mărar* ('a piece of');

B1-level (correct) use of vocabulary:

B1: Vocabulary: *mărar*, *pătrunjel*, *telemea*, *urdă*, *vrăbioară* (see Platon et al. 2023: 64);

B1-level lexical-semantic mismatches:

B1: Structures: *Se poate proba?* – instead of *Se poate gusta?*

As can be seen in the analysis above, the influencer's discourse is predominantly an A1-level, with occasional A2 features that are not always fully mastered, which allows us to consider his oral production skills as A1+. Moreover, even if his discourse occasionally contains B1-level words and structures, we claim that this is a natural feature of discourse among non-native speakers, especially those who have a Romanian partner or are actively learning foreign languages. As Gass et al. (2020: 467) note, learners "repeat something that has been memorized as a whole". This phenomenon shows formulaic learning rather than spontaneous production, and it highlights the interplay between language exposure, personal relationships, and the cognitive strategies learners use to communicate effectively. In the case of this reel, an example of a B1-level expression is the question "Se poate proba?" which translates to 'Can I try it on?'. What makes this instance particularly interesting is that, although the phrase is grammatically correct and commonly used in Romanian, its application here is contextually inappropriate. The correct expression in this food-related context would have been "Se poate gusta?" ('Can I taste it?'), as "Se poate proba?" is typically used when referring to trying on clothes. This mismatch between form and context suggests a reliance on memorized chunks of language, a characteristic feature of A1+ level learners who may not yet fully grasp contextual nuances.

4.3.1.2 Respondents' comments

Although we did not provide respondents with a specific evaluation grid or detailed instructions on what to focus on, Romanian native speakers tended to apply similar benchmarks when assessing both A1+ and B2+ level productions. We aimed to observe how non-native discourse is perceived intuitively by our respondents, who are linguists in training. Interestingly, their evaluations align closely with the criteria and the minimal descriptors for spoken production outlined in the CEFR, suggesting that even without formal guidance, native speakers draw on implicit standards that mirror established proficiency frameworks. We later organized these proficiency criteria into salient analytical categories: *Vocabulary and Complexity of structures* (7), *Accuracy* (7), *Pronunciation* (8), *Fluency* (3). More general observations were grouped under the category *Discourse in General* (28), and all the comments referring to symbolic capital were classified separately into the category *Symbolic Value of Language Use* (21). There were also three comments which we categorized as *Negative* (2), and *No comment* (1), respectively (see Table 1 below). The respondents' answers were in Romanian, and they can be accessed on Zenodo (<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.16673273>). We have provided the English translation.

Table 1

Vocabulary and complexity of the structures (7)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. He used structures that were a little more complex than I expected. 2. He uses “piece” for anything, instead of other words he could use, e.g., a bunch of dill or, in the case of tomatoes, he could have said the number + tomatoes, but he probably doesn’t know these details or thinks in English and mentally translates them into Romanian. 3. More advanced than I expected, considering that he specified at the beginning “the very little Romanian I know” 4. The effort made in learning the proper terms used in discourse and trying to avoid Romglish during the interaction with others is commendable. 5. He sometimes translates directly from English. E.g., “o bucătă de ceapă” (one piece of onion). He has difficulty using linking words. 6. I think he’s doing really well in Romanian, especially since he even uses abbreviations (“o jumate de kg”). You can tell in some cases that he’s not a native speaker because he translates word for word from English to Romanian, but otherwise he’s doing great. 7. He doesn’t know that many words, but he is able to make himself understood.
Accuracy (7)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 8. I find his grammar very good. 9. I found it correct 10. It is good, one can notice the effort made to pronounce the words and formulate the sentences as correctly as possible 11. Although the gentleman is not a native speaker, he uses the Romanian language very nicely and correctly. 12. Even if there are a few mistakes, the message is conveyed. It is

	<p>understood. So, from that point of view, the goal was achieved: he went shopping and didn't come back empty-handed.</p> <p>13. Even if you can hear that he's not native because of his accent and he still makes some mistakes, I'd say he was able to express himself very well. The most important thing is that he made himself understood.</p> <p>14. I found the influencer's discourse intelligible. He does not speak like a native speaker, but he uses the Romanian language correctly enough to make himself understood.</p>
Pronunciation (8)	<p>15. His pronunciation is much better than what I've heard before; the accent was only noticeable in two or three words.</p> <p>16. I think he speaks quite well. The accent is noticeable, but not disturbing.</p> <p>17. His pronunciation is very good, considering he is not a native speaker.</p> <p>18. I believe the person has even worked on their accent quite a bit.</p> <p>19. He spoke very well, almost like a native. I noticed he had more difficulty pronouncing words that contain diacritics.</p> <p>20. His pronunciation is very good for a non-native speaker; I'm impressed.</p> <p>21. His effort to express himself in Romanian is clearly visible, and he largely succeeds. However, it is noticeable that he is not a native speaker, due to his accent and some difficulties in pronouncing the sounds /ă/, /â/, /t/.</p> <p>22. I'm impressed because he has a very authentic Romanian accent.</p>
Fluency (3)	<p>23. He is quite fluent.</p> <p>24. He speaks quite well and found it easy to communicate what he wanted to buy.</p> <p>25. I consider that the influencer's speech in Romanian is very fluent and easy to understand for native Romanian speakers.</p>
Discourse in general (28)	<p>26. he speaks quite well</p> <p>27. Interesting for someone who is not a native speaker</p> <p>28. very impressive</p> <p>29. His attempt to practice his Romanian was good; he managed to get by without needing translation apps.</p> <p>30. Very good speech, you can tell he's not Romanian, but he's doing very well.</p> <p>31. He speaks much better than my friends (Hungarians) who were born and raised here in Cluj.</p> <p>32. If I weren't from Romania, it would probably impress me.</p> <p>33. I find it impressive that he speaks quite well.</p> <p>34. Ok</p>

	<p>35. Although he does not speak Romanian perfectly, his speech was good enough to be understood, which is all that matters.</p> <p>36. His speech is not perfect in terms of accent, but the information he wants to communicate is clear and understandable.</p> <p>37. It is good</p> <p>38. The speech is simple, but at the same time easy to understand, even if some sentences are not correct.</p> <p>39. It is understandable.</p> <p>40. He speaks quite well for a foreigner. His level of Romanian seems sufficient for everyday life, and will most likely improve even more with time.</p> <p>41. He speaks well and is understood.</p> <p>42. Impressive</p> <p>43. Admirable, but it sounds a little cringe. (I saw it for the first time.)</p> <p>44. It's quite impressive coming from a foreigner.</p> <p>45. Ok</p> <p>46. It is ok</p> <p>47. It's quite impressive, even if it may not be perfect, it's admirable when someone wants to learn a new language.</p> <p>48. He is very well prepared.</p> <p>49. Nice man. He is pretty skilled, doesn't stand out as a foreigner, except in some cases.</p> <p>50. Friendly, formal</p> <p>51. He speaks well enough to integrate and cope with everyday life.</p> <p>52. Very good, everything is clear.</p> <p>53. Good</p>
Symbolic Value of Language Use (21)	<p>54. It is commendable that he is trying to learn the language and uses it whenever he has the opportunity.</p> <p>55. It is a praiseworthy effort, as learning Romanian requires more effort than English—not necessarily because of the language itself, but due to the significantly smaller amount of available learning materials.</p> <p>56. Ambitious</p> <p>57. It may seem somewhat amusing to us as native speakers. However, the video shows that the influencer is genuinely trying to learn some Romanian words that he can use when needed.</p> <p>58. It's good! I appreciate that he is trying to use the Romanian language.</p> <p>59. I appreciate the effort he puts into speaking as correctly as possible, even as a beginner. His presentation of Romanian traditions shows genuine involvement in researching national culture.</p> <p>60. Interesting. The dedication he has shown in learning the language is commendable.</p>

	<p>61. I find it admirable that he has learned to speak Romanian.</p> <p>62. I appreciate that he has learned Romanian and manages quite well.</p> <p>63. His discourse is not entirely grammatically correct, but it is commendable that he is trying to use Romanian, the official language of the country, as a foreigner who seems to have had no prior contact with Romania. It helps him get integrated.</p> <p>64. Anyone who tries to learn a language deserves appreciation.</p> <p>65. I like that he contributes to presenting our country in a good light.</p> <p>66. He made an effort, and that is commendable.</p> <p>67. Very nice! He speaks Romanian very well for a non-native. He promotes typical Romanian things and presents the country in a positive light internationally.</p> <p>68. It's fantastic to see how much effort some foreigners put into speaking Romanian.</p> <p>69. It is commendable that he is trying to speak Romanian as well as possible.</p> <p>70. I like that he is making an effort. It's beautiful when a foreigner tries to get by in the language of the country they are in, I do the same, and it's a personal challenge.</p> <p>71. His speech seems to be a sign of respect and interest toward the country he is in, which helps him gain the sympathy of his interlocutors.</p> <p>72. It is a sign of respect for our country and for Romanians</p> <p>73. It brings me joy to see this</p> <p>74. Incredible, I wish I had the same confidence to speak a foreign language in another country.</p>
Negative (2)	<p>75. Curious, but unsure.</p> <p>76. Meh.</p>
No comment (1)	77. Idk

The questionnaire responses from the 77 participants reacting to the reel produced by *primal_gourmet* reveal patterns in how his online discourse and its symbolic language use were perceived. Although no specific evaluation grid was provided, some respondents applied criteria that align with CEFR descriptors. Many comments praised his discourse production and his effort to learn Romanian, interpreting it as a sign of respect and cultural integration.

Some comments overlapped across categories, highlighting the difficulty of drawing strict boundaries. Overall, the comments gathered from the 77 native speakers support hypotheses 2 and 3. First, the positive reactions confirm that our respondents perceive RFL use in reels favorably, especially when the speaker shows cultural engagement and effort. Many praised *primal_gourmet*'s dedication to learning Romanian, often highlighting pronunciation and accent as key markers of authenticity, more so than grammatical

accuracy, thus validating hypothesis 2. Second, the attention given to symbolic aspects of language use and the recognition of Romanian in a global digital context align with hypothesis 3, with respondents demonstrating increased awareness of Romanian's online presence and its potential to gain symbolic capital when used by non-native speakers.

4.3.2. A house and a housewife by *lifeofisiah19*

The reel by *lifeofisiah19*¹⁴ offers a vivid and humorous glimpse into the speaker's personal experience, presented as an anecdote. Below is the transcript of the reel that the influencer captioned as *Nu poți face sarmale fără orez*. English code-switching and code-mixing sequences are marked in bold:

Unul dintre cele mai mari roasturi care le-am primit vreodată. Nu știu care-i cuvântul exact pentru roast în română. Da', dacă știți, puneți în comentariu, vă rog. În fine, a fost faptul că eu, fiind crescut într-o familie tradițională, în care mama și tata au roluri tradiționale, e normal ca eu să gravitez către o familie tradițională. În fine, și eu când vorbesc cu prietenii, cam ăsta este punctul meu de vedere. Și o prietenă de-a mea a spus unei alte prietene de-a mea acest lucru despre mine. Ceva în ideea că Isiah vrea femeie de casă, dar el n-are casă. (Uhhhuuuuhuuhu!) Emotional damage. Dar a spus în engleză și n engleză sună și mai bine. Bine că Isiah vrea un housewife, but he has no house. What did I do to you? You woke up and chose violence. Sunt un student sărac, la facultate. Cum ar trebui să-mi permit o casă? Dar cam are dreptate. E ca și cum zici: Vreau să fac sarmale, dar tu n-ai orez. Cum sărăcia crezi că o să faci chestia asta?

[One of the greatest roasts I've ever received. I don't know the exact word for 'roast' in Romanian. But, if you do, put it in the comments, please. Anyway, it was the fact that I was raised in a traditional family, where my mom and dad have traditional roles, it's only natural that I gravitate towards a traditional family. Anyway, and when I talk to friends, that's kind of my point of view. And a friend of mine told another friend of mine this about me. Something along the lines that Isiah wants a housewife, but he doesn't own a house. (Uhhhuuuuhuuhu!) Emotional damage. But she said it in English and in English it sounds much better. Isiah wants a housewife, but he has no house. What did I do to you? You woke up and chose violence. I'm a poor college student. How am I supposed to afford a house? But she's kind of right. It's like you're saying: 'You want to make cabbage rolls, but you don't have any rice.' How on earth do you think you're gonna do that?] (authors' translation, taken from Radu and Cotoac 2025: 137).

4.3.2.1. B2 level sample

The content presents a clear B2-level sample of Romanian IL. It is characterized by code-mixing and code-switching, reflecting typical features of upper-intermediate spoken production (see Platon *et al.* 2023: 71–90):

B2: Vocabulary: *a-și permite, femeie de casă*;

¹⁴ *lifeofisiah19*, *Nu poți face sarmale fără orez*, at: <https://www.instagram.com/reel/C48cQWvoJK5/?igsh=MWdmMm9yYzdsNHZrZA==> Published: March 25, 2024; 42.2 Tsd. views and Likes: 1,719.

B2: Structures: gerund: *find crescut*;
 partitive construction with a superlative: *Unul dintre cele mai mari*;
 adverbs of time: *vreodată*;
 genitive with pronominal adjective: *unei alte prietene*;
 Connectors: *ca ... să*;
 Discourse fillers: *În fine*, *Cum sărăcia...*, *Ceva în ideea...*;
 B2-level structures which are not yet fully mastered:
 The lack of the ‘pe’ accusative morpheme: *roasturi *pe care le-am primit vreodată*;
 Structures with genitives and partitives (which native speakers also use in spoken Romanian): *A spus unei alte prietene de-a* mea*.

The speaker navigates between Romanian and English, employing code-switching and code-mixing as communicative strategies to compensate for lexical gaps (e.g., *roast*) or to enhance a comedic effect (“You woke up and chose violence”). This bilingual fluidity is typical of upper-intermediate speakers who are comfortable expressing themselves in both languages but may still rely on their stronger language for precision or stylistic impact. The Romanian segment includes several B2-level features such as the gerund construction (*find crescut*), the partitive with superlative construction (*unul dintre cele mai mari*), and adverbs of time (*vreodată*), all of which contribute to a coherent and expressive narrative. However, the speaker’s Romanian still reflects areas that need improvement. Notably, there is a missing accusative marker in “roasturi care le-am primit vreodată”, where the correct form would include “*pe care*”. Similarly, the genitive construction “*unei alte prietene de-a mea*” suggests a need for refinement in complex noun phrase structures. Despite these minor inaccuracies, the speaker demonstrates a strong command of discourse organization, using connectors like “*ca ... să*” and discourse fillers such as “*Cum sărăcia...*” and “*Ceva în ideea că...*” to maintain the narrative flow. Overall, the reel is not only entertaining but also a linguistic artefact that illustrates the dynamic nature of interlanguage at the B2 level.

4.3.2.2. Respondents’ comments

Table 2 below contains the same categories as Table 1, and it presents the respondents’ answers in relation to the second reel. The answers were in Romanian, but we translated them into English. The original Romanian answers can be accessed on Zenodo (<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.16673273>).

Table 2

Vocabulary and complexity of the structures (10)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> I noticed that he also used colloquial expressions (such as “cum sărăcia” [how on earth]), which made his speech much more natural. He also uses English, but only in the parts of the conversation where a native speaker of Romanian would use it. His speech is impressive because he uses expressions commonly used by native speakers. He sounds natural. The speech contains sentences in both Romanian and English, and is a concrete example of Romglish. I think he learned Romanian in Transylvania. For example, he pronounces “di-a mia” [of mine]. He uses expressions such as “cum sărăcia” [how on earth] correctly.
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	<p>6. Instead of “roast”, he could have said “să mă ia la mișto.” [make fun of me]. He speaks very well, everything is understandable, provided the listener has advanced knowledge of English.</p> <p>7. He speaks Romanian very well. He sometimes mixes Romanian with English, but this does not affect the understanding of his speech.</p> <p>8. I believe that the expressions he uses in English are simply today’s trends, which you encounter everywhere. You end up integrating them into your vocabulary, either because of the people you talk to (they may follow trends frequently, until you catch on too), or because of the constant repetition of such terms online.</p> <p>9. It is a presentation of traditional sayings, translated into English.</p> <p>10. Again, in an informal context, since I understood what he meant, it doesn’t matter to me what mistakes are made. If it were a different context, for example, an academic one, then it would matter. And it’s interesting how he switches from English to Romanian, but with specific expressions (“emotional damage”), which would only be understood by people who know the source of the expression (virtual). So, I think certain native Romanian speakers, perhaps older ones, who don’t know English or have familiarity with these “memes”, would have trouble understanding his speech.</p>
Accuracy (12)	<p>11. He speaks Romanian very well and correctly, even though he is not a native speaker.</p> <p>12. Perfect Romanian</p> <p>13. It contains, in certain places, grammatical inconsistencies in Romanian, but it is not impossible to understand.</p> <p>14. he manages very well — I would have thought he is a native speaker of Romanian if it weren’t for a few small mistakes here and there.</p> <p>15. This speech is much more coherent than the previous one and is also predominantly in Romanian. However, some mistakes can be identified, such as the use of the form “care” instead of “pe care” and a few errors of grammatical agreement (“asta este punctul meu de vedere” [that is my point of view]; “o prietenă de-a mea a spus unei alte prietene de-a mea” [a friend of mine told another friend of mine]).</p> <p>16. It is a successful one, the message got across correctly to the interlocutors despite some minor mistakes, and the fact that he also used English terms reinforced his message.</p> <p>17. Just like the previous one, but much more confident with the language.</p>

	<p>18. He speaks Romanian very well, which is commendable.</p> <p>19. Although not entirely correct and occasionally interrupted by English phrases, his speech is friendly and amusing.</p> <p>20. I think he speaks very well.</p> <p>21. (His girlfriend is right.) He speaks excellent Romanian, good for him.</p> <p>22. It seemed to me that the speaker in the clip spoke very good Romanian, almost like a native speaker.</p>
Pronunciation (6)	<p>23. He speaks rather quickly and is somewhat challenging to follow. His pronunciation is ok, but he appears to have a Moldovan accent; Idk if this is due to his speed, his native accent, or something else. I did not fully comprehend everything he said in English either, as he speaks quickly and he uses abbreviated forms.</p> <p>24. His interpretation of the saying is interesting. As for his accent and correctness, it seems to me that he learned Romanian in a Moldovan region.</p> <p>25. He speaks very well, with almost no accent.</p> <p>26. His Romanian accent is much closer to that of a native speaker than his English accent. This is somewhat consistent with an anecdote I personally observed regarding people from African countries. More specifically, sub-Saharan Africans can "absorb" the Romanian accent much more than people from other regions/countries.</p> <p>27. Even the accent sounds quite good to me.</p> <p>28. Almost indistinguishable from a native speaker, the accent seems to be slightly different, which gives him away.</p>
Fluency (7)	<p>29. Fluent for a non-native speaker</p> <p>30. Fluent</p> <p>31. Quite fluent</p> <p>32. He speaks very fluently</p> <p>33. His speech is perhaps even more fluent than that of a large part of Romania's population.</p> <p>34. He speaks quite fluently, but he has a strong accent. Again, it's admirable that he uses Romanian.</p> <p>35. He speaks quite well, is fluent, and his accent is almost perfect. He still makes small mistakes, but they are irrelevant.</p>
Discourse in general (31)	<p>36. Ok</p> <p>37. This one speaks quite well as well, although here it is more obvious that he is not a native speaker.</p> <p>38. VERY IMPRESSIVE, RIGHT?</p> <p>39. It's easy to understand</p>

	<p>40. It is funny.</p> <p>41. He's pretty good, he's probably been speaking Romanian for a few years.</p> <p>42. It is evident that Romanian is not his native language, but he speaks it extremely well.</p> <p>43. He speaks Romanian quite well.</p> <p>44. I think he speaks very well in an informal setting.</p> <p>45. Incidentally, we are acquainted. I consider his Romanian to be very good, almost like that of a native speaker.</p> <p>46. He spoke very well and gave an amusing speech.</p> <p>47. He makes himself understood even though he is not a native speaker, which is very good.</p> <p>48. Very interesting</p> <p>49. nice</p> <p>50. I think he did very well and you can really understand what he wanted to convey.</p> <p>51. He speaks Romanian very well.</p> <p>52. He speaks Romanian at almost a native level, and I had no problems understanding him. I also find him amusing and interesting.</p> <p>53. The combination of Romanian and English creates a sense of familiarity, in contrast to the other reel (which was meant to promote Romania), this one conveys an atmosphere of familiarity, as if you were talking to a friend.</p> <p>54. It is understandable, despite the grammatical errors, which is the most important thing.</p> <p>55. Good</p> <p>56. It's a good one</p> <p>57. It is very funny :)</p> <p>58. He speaks Romanian well and it is clear in his discourse and attitude that he wants to improve his knowledge of Romanian.</p> <p>59. He is pretty good for a non-native speaker.</p> <p>60. It is funny, but in a way a bit sad.</p> <p>61. I think his speech is extremely good, but the accent doesn't seem as authentic.</p> <p>62. He has a very nice discourse in Romanian. You can see he is trying to speak as well as he can, which is to be appreciated.</p> <p>63. It is pretty clear.</p> <p>64. Very good!</p> <p>65. It is very similar to the discourse of a Romanian, informal, funny</p> <p>66. His speech in Romanian is almost identical to that of a native speaker, and the influencer manages to convey the desired message successfully.</p>
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Symbolic Value of Language Use (4)	67. As in the previous video, it's admirable that he learned Romanian. It's also a little funny. 68. He speaks Romanian well and I am glad to see his interest in learning the language. 69. It seems to me that he has already become a part of our country, and although not Romanian, according to the words he is using, he could be considered native 70. Nothing to comment. It is admirable that foreigners who move here are actually trying to learn the language.
Negative (3)	71. It is quite disturbing to hear phrases in Romanian, and then immediately in English, mixed and combined. It's a bit tiring, but the message gets across. 72. Difficult 73. Not too good
No comment (4)	74. I'm not interested 75. I do not have an opinion :(76. No 77. Idk

The responses to the reel produced by *lifeofisiah19* show that, at this proficiency level, the native speaker respondents focus on vocabulary range, structural complexity, and grammatical accuracy (a total of 35 comments) more than just on general intelligibility (31 comments). Respondents noted the use of more advanced structures, and the accuracy and fluency of the discourse were frequently highlighted. While some minor errors were observed, most respondents agreed that these did not hinder comprehension. His pronunciation was widely praised, with several commenters impressed by his near-native accent. The symbolic value of his language use was acknowledged in 4 comments, and this represents a significant contrast to the 21 comments received on the reel produced by *primal_gourmet*. This discrepancy suggests that the audience perceived a deeper cultural or emotional resonance in *primal_gourmet*'s use of Romanian, possibly due to differences in context, delivery, or perceived authenticity.

The IL in the case of this B2 production, combined with code-mixing and code-switching, is intelligible mainly within specific niche communities because knowledge of both codes, Romanian and English, is necessary. Ten respondents explicitly acknowledged this phenomenon (see comments 2, 4, 6, 7, 10, 19, 23, 26, 53, 71 in Table 2 above).

5. FINAL REMARKS

This study has explored how RFL, a LWULT language, is employed by non-native influencers on Instagram and how it is perceived by Romanian native speaker philology students. The findings reveal that RFL is not only a communicative tool but also a strategic asset in digital personal branding, particularly within niche communities. The analysis of Instagram reels and the questionnaire results support all three research hypotheses.

On the one hand, the non-native Romanian influencers analyzed use a dynamic IL shaped by “minimum linguistic autonomy” and translingual practices. This evolving linguistic repertoire allows them to create an intelligible and relatable digital discourse in RFL, effectively engaging multilingual audiences and communities.

On the other hand, native speaker students of philology perceived RFL positively because the non-natives showed cultural engagement, interpreting the use of RFL as a sign of respect and cultural curiosity. The respondents evaluated the use of Romanian by non-native speakers by emphasizing aspects of pronunciation and accuracy in the case of the B2 spoken production, while in the case of the A1+ discourse, they tended to highlight aspects pertaining to discourse in general and symbolic value. The questionnaire focused on philology students from a single Romanian university, which may not fully capture the broader perspectives of philology students elsewhere. However, this specific sample offers a valuable point of comparison for future studies involving different target groups or longitudinal analyses. Additionally, the questionnaire data can be compared with user comments on Instagram.

The exposure to content in LWULT languages such as RFL enhances awareness of these languages in global digital spaces. Our study shows that RFL is recognized as a language with symbolic capital in online niche communities, especially when used creatively and strategically in order to construct a personal brand.

This study constitutes an important dimension of the authors’ ongoing investigation into the use of RFL online and also highlights various possibilities for further research.

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