

# Branding with Language: Romanian as a Foreign Language on Instagram

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## Abstract

*In the era of social media platforms, the Romanian language, considered a ‘minor’ language, is experiencing a resurgence due to the online activity of young content creators who engage audiences by creating impactful narratives in Romanian. These young content creators choose to use Romanian in their posts to gain virality and attract followers. This does not only illustrate a trend that puts the language in motion but also leads to the emergence of a new linguistic variety which is evolving and adapting to new contexts, reflecting the dynamic nature of the online space where users come across various communities and narratives. This study highlights the transformative power of social media on ‘minor’ languages, presenting the case of Romanian used as a foreign language by Instagram influencers who construct an L2 identity, build and maintain an online reputation and a brand by creating engaging content on topics like cuisine and culture, fun facts and clichés, humour and (self-)irony, lifestyle and professional life, travel experiences.*

**Keywords:** prestige language, ‘minor’ language, social media, branding strategy, language variety

## INTRODUCTION

Social media platforms have reconfigured society both online and offline on all levels, and the digital landscape creates the groundwork for interactions involving a mixture of prestige languages and ‘minor’ languages. By ‘minor’ languages we refer to Less Widely Used Less Taught (LWULT) Languages, and we use this label intentionally throughout the paper to expropriate the Anglocentric hegemonic language as a means of highlighting the power dynamics inherent in the discourse being examined.

In this context, we examine Romanian as a foreign language or as a second language used by foreign users in reels on Instagram with the intention of self-branding, while also placing a focus on the comments posted to these reels. The time span under focus is June-September 2024. In order to provide a comprehensive picture of the Romanian discourse produced online by non-native content creators and native speakers’ attitudes, we begin by presenting the overall

situation of online participation and sites of engagement. We present theoretical concepts and ideas, then we proceed to qualitatively analyse and discuss a selection of examples. The examples selected are in Romanian, we reproduce all of them *verbatim*, and we also provide an English translation of these examples.

### ONLINE PARTICIPATION AND SITES OF ENGAGEMENT

Online, we witness ‘a bedlam of blip culture’ (Toffler, quoted in Lindgren, 2017: 22) and languages because sociocultural attitudes towards language use might shift: prestige languages may lose status when Romanians speak them online, while ‘minor’ languages may experience a boost in status when foreigners speak Romanian online. This is due to the fact that Romanian users value the linguistic competencies and adaptability of these foreign influencers. In this context, we witness the overall impact of the digital on society in which ‘narrowcasting’ (*Ibidem*) and niche audiences replace broadcasting and mass audiences of earlier media landscapes. Lindgren also mentions the example of Toffler, who, in the early 1980s, imagined what the functioning of digital media would be today. Toffler proposed the concept of ‘bedlam of blip culture’ and he predicted that ‘the myriad small pieces of content offered through electronic media over time will make people more active in navigating and piecing things together by themselves’ (*Ibidem*). In this way, new forms of participation and engagement, change of language status, power relations, and solidarity are inherent to digitally networked media. Moreover, we also witness the production and consumption of content in the form of ‘prosumerism’, understood as the use of social networking sites as information resources for the sharing and consumption of product and brand information (Silver, 2009) and also as commodification of identity and self-branding construction in the online sphere. The divide

between private and public information is blurred, and netizens on social media sometimes gain the status of micro-celebrities exactly because of this clash between a public context and private content, this also leading to ‘the emerging new rhetoric about democratisation and participation’ (Lindgren, 2017: 34). Netizens no longer consume media passively, but they participate actively, creating power that emerges from digital platforms and creates a ‘participatory mindset’ (Lindgren, 2017: 74). As Lindgren states, society is ‘affected by digitally networked communication tools and platforms’ (Lindgren, 2017: 12), and our daily lives are influenced and reconfigured.

### INSTAGRAM AND RFL – ‘A NEW SOCIAL VALUE’

In the local milieu of the digital space, which encapsulates both the local Romanian context and the global context in which individuals learn the language due to contingent factors (e.g. having a Romanian girlfriend/boyfriend/Romanian friends, interacting in Romanian in professional contexts, learning the language out of pure curiosity, etc.), Romanian as a foreign language (RFL) is reimagined as a linguistic resource that provides popularity to its speakers and also functions as a self-branding online tool. In conjunction with the online affordances that facilitate easy access to Romanian resources of all types, RFL has achieved high status among niche audiences, which establish micro-societies with specific interests and needs.

The status of English as the world’s major language, lingua franca and ‘the language of science, technology and international diplomacy’ (Parianou, 2010: 5) has been reconfigured in some spaces of the online environment, which has facilitated a change of trends and discursive strategies, expressing ‘collective cultural capital and identity’ (*Ibidem*) as represented by niche audiences. These audiences, with their unique interests and perspectives, can appreciate and

assign meaning to online content. In the online context, the use of a ‘minor’ language like Romanian also brings about integration in the national or diasporic communities, and it expresses globalisation not as ‘the homogenisation of world culture or from a homogeneity position’ (*Ibidem*), but rather from a heterogenous position in which major and ‘minor’ languages intertwine in order to create an online performance. This turn brought about by the digital context has led to a more diverse and inclusive landscape, where different voices can be heard and valued, entitling us to state that social media has completely transformed the manner in which we share information, express ourselves, and relate to others, leading to significant shifts in status and roles.

When used online as a foreign language, Romanian is perceived as a high-status language by niche audiences that have particular language attitudes, but it is important to note that ‘language attitudes should not restrict themselves to attitudes towards language alone but should open themselves up to speakers of whatever language and society they live in’ (Parianou, 2010: 2). This is especially applicable to foreigners who use Romanian in reels on Instagram and who try to gain popularity through a ‘minor’ foreign language that brings forth their openness to multiculturalism, diversity, and interest in contributing to the change of linguistic trends online. These language attitudes are new to the ‘minor’ languages, contrary to the popular belief ‘that the status of certain languages has fallen in comparison to the world language English’ (Parianou, 2010: 2). However, we concur with Parianou (2010: 4) when she states that ‘the same changing language attitude goes for the choice of a foreign language where the “niche” and the “needs” determine the language status’.

Online, we witness a constant change in the content that is being created and consumed because the niche audiences and the needs and interests of content creators are dynamic. This

dynamism is not just about the topics and themes, but also the specific language and style chosen by the content creators. Defining style in Bourdieu’s terms (1993: 39), we consider that the online content sometimes shows individual deviations from the linguistic norm, constituting an elaboration that tends to give discourse its distinctive properties, which play a crucial role in attracting and retaining specific audiences. We can thus speak about specific styles of content creators that create a linguistic habitus understood as ‘a set of dispositions to speak in a certain manner, to say certain things, and a learned capacity to properly use linguistic resources in certain situations’ (Bourdieu, 1993: 37-38), perceived not merely as a reflection of the style, but also as a product of their social constellation (social status, background, relations, norms, values, preferences, expectations, etc.). Moreover, ‘there are socially constructed dispositions of the linguistic habitus, which imply a certain propensity to speak and to say determinate things (the expressive interest)’ (*Ibidem*). This expressive interest is both shaped by and shapes the online content landscape, where the focus is again on the linguistic habitus, and Romanian spoken by non-native speakers appears catchy and garners appreciation from the native speakers, who are impressed both by the language skills of these content creators and by the fact that they embrace and promote Romanian culture. These language attitudes are expressed in the comments section of reels, as can be seen by a small selection of screenshots rendered in *Figure 1* below:

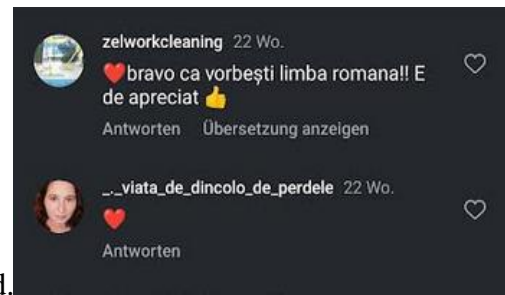




Figure 1. Perception of RFL in reels on Instagram

Based on the language attitudes displayed in the screenshots above, it is clear that users associate prestige with individuals who speak RFL rather than English or their mother tongue.

We thus notice attitudes like: excitement/delight/amusement instead of correction for language mistakes (a. *Un covrig cu floare de soare – ce frumos sună [A pretzel with sunflower – it sounds so nice]* – here the content creator uses *un covrig cu floare de soare* instead of *un covrig cu semințe de floarea-soarelui [a pretzel with sunflower seeds]*), admiration and positive evaluation of language skills (a. *Your Romanian skills are impressive; a. You're a very good Romanian speaker*), surprise triggered by the high language skills (b. *Dude, you call that “very little Romanian”?* *Even your accent is almost Romanian*), admiration by comparison with native speakers of Romanian (b. *true. I was confused for a second. Is he Romanian speaking English or English speaker knowing Romanian so well?*; e. *He speaks better Romanian than me.*), admiration for overall intelligence (e. *Cât de inteligent ești.*

*Vorbești foarte bine româna wow [You are so intelligent. You speak very good Romanian]),* reverence towards the Romanian language and culture (g. *Omul are mai mult respect de România decât 90% din români [The man has more respect for Romania than 90% of Romanians]; i. Someone give this man the citizenship already; c. Ești un copil bun și foarte bine educat. Vorbești românește perfect ceea ce e de apreciat [...] [You are a good kid and very well educated. You speak Romanian perfectly, which I really appreciate]),* welcoming (h. *Nu mă interesează ce naționalitate ai avut până acum, dar de acum încolo ești 100% român [It does not matter what nationality you had so far, but from now on you are 100% Romanian]).* All these attitudes are pragmatically reinforced by the emoticons that accompany the written text (smiley, laughing out loud, surprise, applause, hearts, etc.).

These attitudes and reflections show that there is an interplay between online discourse and RFL which produces ‘a new social value’ (Bourdieu 1995: 52-53) because content creators engage audiences and create impactful narratives in their reels. Through these narratives, content creators create a ‘third space’ understood as situations in which people come across a new language and culture (Block, 2007) and participate in L2 identity development and self-branding narratives to attract more followers and become recognised members of online communities. Thus, the use of Romanian online shows evidence of plurilingualism, which

differs from multilingualism (the simple addition of languages in societies and/or individuals) in that it focuses on the relationships between the languages an individual speaks, the underlying linguistic mechanisms and cultural connotations, the personal linguistic and cultural trajectory as well as the persons’ attitude toward language diversity, stressing openness, curiosity, and flexibility (Piccardo, 2017: 2).

In addition to configuring a plurilingual environment in which narratives and identities develop with the purposes of gaining popularity, the use of Romanian in reels on Instagram shows that plurilingualism can trigger positive change towards a diverse and inclusive society. Providing individuals the tool to connect different language systems and uncovering their complete range of linguistic abilities leads to a fusion and interrelationship of languages and cultures and a better understanding of diversity, but it also enhances deeper self-awareness of one's own culture and identity via the lens of otherness. Hence,

embracing plurilingualism can initiate change from the tiniest to the broadest scale, from helping individuals see the interconnections between language systems and discover their full repertoire, thus liberating their plurilingual self, to empowering them in perception, awareness and active exploration of linguistic and cultural diversity, hybridity and interconnections (Piccardo, 2017: 11).

### **PERSONAL AND PROFILE BRANDING THROUGH RFL**

The digitally networked communication on Instagram reels provides the space for content creators to realise personal and profile branding, which we consider a sign of creativity, understood 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' (Piccardo, 2017: 2). As such, novelty, or at least novel elements, are a prerequisite of this environment as bringing something new or different content determines the number of followers and positive reactions. In this sense, the use of RFL is a linguistic strategy that ensures novelty and attracts attention, while targeting specific audiences who will recognise

and evaluate the content as being appropriate or useful for them.

The audiences of Instagram reels are also engaged in the content creation by the comments and the reactions to the content they consume, thus becoming prosumers and steering the creation of the content creators towards the type of content that they want to see online. This content becomes a 'Brand Me' mode of online self-presentation, which also involves this constant interaction and dialogue with the prosumers and which constructs not only a dialogical self that is always updated, but also 'an entrepreneurial self, a self that's packaged to be sold' (Deresiewicz, 2011: 7). In this line of thought, Smith and Watson (2013: 79) see the self as a commodity constructed to show 'a desirable brand "Me" — digitally hip, successful, fully sociable, intriguing'. This personal and profile brand focuses on what is unique or special, and the use of Romanian plays precisely this function in the Instagram reels under focus. The content creators of these reels can also 'turn themselves into a kind of "logo", which will consistently deliver a product and up-to-date status reports', while also creating 'a multimedia CV that marks "you" as a brand' (Smith; Watson, 2013: 79) through the dialogical process of self-curation performed under the guidance of the prosumers.

These content creators engage in short narratives that mostly focus on the ordinary and tell stories that embed the Romanian culture and language in a novel and surprising way because they are foreign speakers whose identity is not connected to Romania by any default factor, but rather a matter of choice and taste, making the online content a performance that continually shapes and conveys a branded self. As a consequence, the content creators' narratives, profiles, images are linked and communicate aspects of their offline experiences and also of their interest, all of them being built into a coherent presentation and a brand that is consolidated and marketed.

The personal and profile branding emerged from the content of the Instagram reels makes us address three questions taken from Smith and Watson (2013: 80):

Is the creator branding herself or himself on the site? How is the brand linked to autobiographical stories about experiences, character features, achievements? And how convincing is the assertion of brand coherence?'.

We will try to answer these questions by illustrating the typologies of content creators who are foreigners and use RFL, but also by identifying some prevalent elements of the discourses that they reveal online and by which they construct and maintain an online reputation.

### CASE STUDY: PREVALENT TYPOLOGIES

Using a previous study on Romglish (Radu; Cotoc, 2023: 211-232), we can draw a parallel between the reasons for using Romglish and the reasons for using RFL because we consider that the use of these two varieties brings forth the personal and professional branding construction dimension. Exactly like Romglish, which is a linguistic blend used by Romanian speakers incorporating English elements to contribute 'to the performative construction of a desired up-to-date prestigious individual and group identity' (*Idem*, 214), RFL is often used by non-native speakers with the same purpose, while also signalling their connection to and interest in the Romanian culture and society. In both cases, the language used is not just a tool for communication, but also a means of expressing identity, navigating social relations, and negotiating cultural belonging. This highlights the complex and multifaceted role of new linguistic contacts in our lives, both use of Romglish and RFL show 'a clear link between language and identity, articulating identities and stories which

activate the current Romanian collective imaginary and revealing collective imagination which is encoded in linguistic facts' (*Idem*, 214). Moreover, both language varieties entail 'power relations and inclusion-exclusion dynamics in terms of group identification and membership' (*Idem*, 215). In this way, RFL also 'becomes a social and cultural construction specific to and adopted in different manners by various individuals, groups and communities with the desire to mark group membership through linguistic resources and attitudes towards language and linguistic codes' (*Ibidem*).

For the purpose of this study, we selected eight Instagram accounts. We will present their nationality, where they live, the connection to Romanian culture/language/the country, the overall content of their videos, and their evolving online identities:

- *Southy*: English singer and songwriter; he is in a relationship with a Romanian woman; he speaks some Romanian; his videos are a blend of Romanian and English. He started by creating videos that follow a particular pattern: 'If you have a Romanian girlfriend... (you have to be prepared against the *făcăleț* treatment and to gain *papuci immunity*)'; 'In Romania they don't say *You are crazy*, they say *Ești dus cu pluta* and I like that'. In the most recent videos, he tries Romanian food and products and starts launching songs in Romglish.
- *lifeofisiah19*: An African photographer living in Romania. He calls himself 'Copil al Ardealului' [Child of Transylvania]. Most of his reels contain long narratives and explanations regarding different cultural and culinary differences between the African and Romanian traditions. He speaks Romanian as a foreign language; having lived in Romania since 2006, he masters Romanian and his reels are usually elaborate; he rarely uses code-switching.

His first Instagram reels are all in English, but then he switches to Romanian.

- *primal\_gourmet*: His real name is Ronny Lvovski; he is a self-taught cook, food photographer and stylist, recipe blogger, and coffee enthusiast living in Canada<sup>1</sup>. He is married to a Romanian woman and often visits his in-laws. His reels contain recipes and little stories he creates while going to the market in Braşov or while taking walks with his wife. He speaks some Romanian, but his reels are usually a mix between English and Romanian.
- *rikito.watanabe*: Japanese chef/Ramen ambassador living in Romania. He speaks Romanian fluently, with Japanese inflection. His reels feature recipes and document food experiences in a humorous and relaxed style. His approach is not curated to the level of producing perfect Romanian language; he creates a brand by being very authentic.
- *zm95m*: an Iraqi barber residing in Romania; he shares reels showcasing mundane activities and fun facts. His content often includes (self-)irony and sarcasm and can come across as sexist or mean-spirited. He posts content both in Arabic and in Romanian; he speaks fluent Romanian, nevertheless with a specific accent, and does not use code-switching.
- *ruthie\_kuszai*: Filipino digital creator, married to a Romanian man and living in Romania. Most of her reels contain narratives and explanations regarding different cultural and culinary aspects, travels, and everyday activities; most of her videos are in Romanian and very few in English.
- *bantodossantos*: Brazilian artist, married to a Romanian woman and having three

children; they are currently living in Romania; his focus is on fashion and styling, events, parties, weddings, and other types of shows that he is invited to. Most of the content is in Romanian, and he even sings Romanian folklore.

- *edsta*: American photographer and cameraman, living in New York. Romanian is his L1, as he was born in Romania but left the country as a child. Despite having acquired Romanian as L1, we included him in our corpus because he uses Romanian to brand himself. However, his discourse is in English and he only includes short structures in Romanian with the purpose of introducing his nonnative followers to the Romanian language while walking on the streets of New York. In his videos, he sometimes blends English with Romanian and renders clichés and expressions by providing word-for-word translations in English and then saying the Romanian expression. For example: ‘A Romanian will not tell you to stop wasting your time, he’ll tell you to *stop rubbing the mint* [*Nu mai freca menta*]’; he tastes Romanian food and different products and evaluates them; and, in his more recent reels, he interacts with the people from the Romanian diaspora living in New York.

All the Instagram accounts selected for the purpose of this study focus on the ordinary and the mundane, appealing to the emotion of the audience by offering a unique window into the everyday life of foreigners who speak Romanian. They manage to create content that resonates with their audience formed both by foreigners who speak Romanian and by native speakers of Romanian. They skilfully utilise Romanian artefacts and language to promote their professions, a particular lifestyle or product, covering a great variety of topics ranging from traditional Romanian cuisine and humour to fun

<sup>1</sup> For more details, see also his website: <https://cookprimalgourmet.com/my-paleo-story/>



facts and linguistic peculiarities, such as idiomatic Romanian phrases and expressions.

These accounts provide a platform for cultural exchange, featuring content that draws comparisons between cultures, promoting their own culture, and even reaching out to Romanians who do not speak English. They are aware of the fact that for followers it is quite special to see foreigners speaking their language, and they cognitively activate various dimensions related to life in general (e.g., going to work, wishes, travel experiences), creating a space that is both informative and entertaining. This blend of content promotes a sense of community among followers, and contributes to the construction of a shared hybrid cultural identity, bridging the gap between cultures.

### RFL ONLINE: SELECTION OF EXAMPLES

Through RFL, Instagram influencers build an online reputation and they create engaging content that spans a variety of topics: cuisine and culture; fun facts and clichés; humour and (self-)irony; lifestyle and professional life; travel experiences. These content creators carefully select topics that enable a lasting connection with their audience, as can be seen by the growing number of followers. Even if the Instagram influencers have a preference for particular topics, the topics that we identified as prevalent are tackled by all the Instagram influencers because they all fall under the umbrella of Romanian curiosities and culturally relevant aspects, which are meant to entertain and create a positive atmosphere without criticising or judging them.

#### *Cuisine and culture*

The Instagram influencers *primal\_gourmet* and *rikoto.watanabe* frequently produce engaging reels in Romanian, with a primary focus on Romanian, Canadian or Japanese cuisine and recipes. Their content showcases a rich blend of

traditional and modern culinary practices, highlighting the diverse flavours of their original cultures and those of Romanian heritage. Through their visually appealing and informative reels, they celebrate gastronomy, but also promote cultural appreciation among their followers.

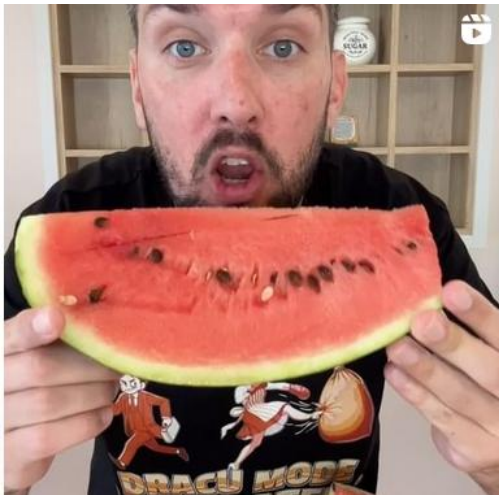
*Southy* and *edsta* frequently produce entertaining reels in Romanian, centring on tasting a variety of Romanian products and foods. The selection of examples below (*Figure 2*) shows that their content is not only a delightful exploration of local cuisine but also a humorous take on Romanian expressions, behaviours, and even clichés. Through their playful and witty approach, they celebrate and poke fun at the unique aspects of Romanian culture: example a. shows *edsta* on the streets during the Romania Festival in New York. The picture is a collage of the actual street footage to which *edsta* added two of the most typical Romanian dishes, also adding the question ‘*Mici or Sarmale?*’; example b. shows *edsta* holding the most typical Romanian bar of chocolate; examples c. and d. show *Southy* indulging in the local cuisine (eating Romanian watermelon, respectively a typical dish based on cabbage, meat, rice, polenta).



a.



b.



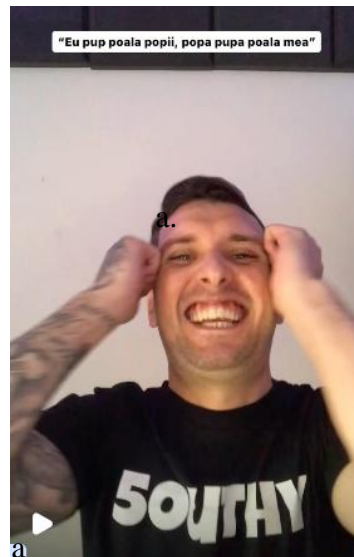
c.



d.

Figure 2. *Cuisine and culture  
Fun facts and clichés*

Romanian culture is rich in unique expressions and fun facts that often make their way into social media content, especially among influencers and Instagrammers like *Southy*, *edsta* and *rikito.watanabe*. These influencers share interesting tidbits and expressions that are very catchy and could be used in everyday life. *Edsta*'s focus on linguistic features and Romanian lessons makes his content particularly valuable for those interested in learning the language and understanding its nuances; he has several reels teaching his followers expressions and words in Romanian. *Figure 3* below illustrates a Romanian tongue twister (example a.), the fact the Romanian idiomatic expressions are notable (example b.), typical Romanian greetings, especially among the elderly (example c.).



a.



b.

Figure 3. *Fun facts and clichés*

*Humour and (Self-)Irony*

*Southy*, *ruthie\_kuszai*, *rikito\_watanabe*, *edsta* and *zm95m* often use humour and (self-)irony in

their reels to highlight Romanian temperament, cuisine, and habits, as well as their personal lives. They share exaggerated reactions, cooking mishaps, cultural quirks, and relatable stories, all in Romanian, making their content entertaining and engaging. Some examples include: image a. is one of the amusing examples in which *Southy* creates humorous content where he pokes fun at the strict and severe nature of his Romanian partner. As such, he is seen desperately reciting a prayer that children typically say when they need help and protection. This playful exaggeration adds a lighthearted touch to his content, making it relatable and entertaining for his audience. Image b. shows *rikito\_watanabe* making funny facial expressions and closing his eyes when trying Romanian food, emphasising how much he enjoys it. *Zm95m* is always self-ironic about his weight and appetite, and, in example c., we can see him asking the question: *How does the stomach know if it is day or night?* – suggesting that he is always hungry. Example d. shows *zm95m* inviting the viewers to follow him: *Dă-mi și urmărire, nu te uita de pomană*. This Romanian sentence has two interesting aspects: he uses the noun *urmărire*, which is the Romanian version of ‘follow’, indicating that he is fully immersed in the Romanian language, as opposed to other Romanian Instagrammers who use the English version. Moreover, we consider this to be an interesting case because Romanian native speakers use code-switching (*dă-mi follow*), but he does not. To this, he adds that the viewers should not just watch his funny content without giving something in return, namely clicking the *follow* button. We note that the expression *de pomană* constitutes a very subtle phrase that only proficient speakers master, and he uses it in the right context with the right meaning, and the outcome is a real delight for the Romanian audience.



a.



b.



c.



d.

humorous), b. *ruthie\_kuszai* picking fresh fruit from her garden and captioning the video in Romanian (*Fructe proaspete din curtea noastra*), c. *zm95m* in his hair salon with a client, d. *lifeofisiah19* talking about his parents and explaining in Romanian how come they have a loving marriage even after more than 27 years, e. *primal\_gourmet* with his wife visiting Brașov and his in-laws, f. *bantodossantos* with his daughter recording a clip.

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a.



b.

Figure 4. *Humour and (Self-)Irony*

#### *Lifestyle and professional life*

Balancing personal and professional content on Instagram can be delicate, but the influencers we selected manage it effectively by posting, from time to time, reels with their spouses/partners, parents, in-laws, sons and daughters, clients, etc., making sure it aligns with their overall brand. In this respect, the examples selected in *Figure 5* below show: a. *rikito\_watanabe* drinking a beer and saying ‘Sărbătorească’ (*Let them celebrate!* – making a confusion between *Let us celebrate*, first person plural, and 3rd person, and the result is



c.



d.



e.



f.

Figure 5. Lifestyle and professional life

### Travel experiences

Both the professional and personal content exposed on social media include travel experiences as a relevant dimension that contributes to the configuration of the overall picture of the online identity and brand construction targeted by the influencers. Whether they are exploring the picturesque landscapes of Romania or venturing into other destinations, their content is a blend of nicely curated visuals, cultural insights and personal experiences, often captioned in Romanian and/or mentioning Romanian experiences as can be seen in Figure 5 below: a. *rikito* is inviting his followers to accompany him in discovering the Japanese experience of going to the market by speaking Romanian, writing a Romanian description to the video and by adding captions to his video: *Haideți cu mine la ...* [Come with me to ...]; b. *ruthie\_kuszai* is visiting a village in Romania and promoting Romanian tourism: *Am vizitat Sebeșu de Jos* [I have visited Sebeșu de Jos]; c. *Southy* is trying to find Romanian food in Malta.



Figure 6. *Travel experiences*

The travel experiences illustrated in the three images above depict three typologies: the foreigners in their own country speaking Romanian, acting as cultural ambassadors, fostering a sense of connection and bringing their unique heritage closer to their followers; the foreigners exploring towns and villages in Romania, speaking Romanian and expressing admiration, often comparing its beauty to other countries (e.g., Switzerland); the influencers visiting a foreign country (other than Romania or their own) and often referencing Romania and Romanian cuisine as a point of comparison, praising its complexity.

### CONCLUDING REMARKS

As seen by the five categories above, branding strategies that leverage the uniqueness of Romanian as a foreign language and the presentation of Romanian cultural elements through the eyes of foreigners can create a compelling narrative. Influencers like *Southy*, *ruthie\_kuszai*, *bantodossantos*, *rikito\_watanabe*, *primal\_goromet* and *edsta* effectively incorporate these strategies into their content. They produce reels that blend their professional insights with personal anecdotes, making their content both relatable and appealing to a diverse audience. By presenting Romanian places, restaurants, customs, or telling stories and anecdotes from their own cultures, they highlight the richness of Romanian culture in an engaging manner. This approach not only resonates with Romanians who appreciate the humour and self-irony but also attracts foreigners who are curious about the language and culture. The combination of professional and personal life elements in their reels ensures that their content remains authentic and relatable, fostering a deeper connection with their audience.

These non-native speakers effectively use Romanian in their Instagram reels to create a unique and engaging self-brand. This highlights

their linguistic skills and their appreciation and understanding of Romanian culture. The reels often feature humorous and self-ironic content related to Romanian temperament, cuisine, and customs. This not only entertains but also educates their audience about Romanian culture, while stimulating cultural exchanges. The comments on these reels reveal a mix of admiration and constructive feedback from native speakers. Non-native speakers are often praised for their efforts, and native speakers provide additional cultural insights, creating a collaborative learning environment.

By blending professional insights with personal anecdotes, the influencers make their content relatable and authentic. This approach resonates well with Romanian and international audiences, enhancing their online presence and engagement. The discourses produced by these users highlight the dynamic interplay between language, culture, and social media, demonstrating how Romanian is used creatively for self-branding and cultural exchange in the digital space.

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