

Mika Sarlin

*Romanian Grammar*



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Mika Sarlin

# **Romanian Grammar**

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# Contents

About the Romanian language.....	13
Sounds of Romanian and their spelling.....	16
Consonant sounds.....	16
Vowel sounds.....	17
Asyllabic <i>i</i> .....	19
Diphthongs and hiatus.....	20
Triphthongs.....	22
Stress.....	23
Intonation.....	23
Alphabet.....	24
Pronunciation of vowel letters.....	25
Pronunciation of consonant letters.....	29
Syllabification.....	34
Sound changes.....	35
Nouns and articles.....	38
Gender.....	38
Number.....	44
Plural of masculine nouns.....	44
Plural of feminine nouns.....	49
Plural of neuter nouns.....	57
Singular nouns.....	63
Plural nouns.....	64
Cases.....	64
Nominative-accusative case.....	64
Formation of the genitive-dative.....	64
Formation of the vocative.....	68
Indefinite article.....	71
Forms of the indefinite article.....	71
Use of the indefinite article.....	72
Other indefinite determiners.....	74
Definite article.....	75
Definite forms of masculine nouns.....	75
Definite forms of feminine nouns.....	79
Definite forms of neuter nouns.....	83
Use of the definite article.....	85
Other definite determiners.....	87
Declination models.....	88
Genitive article.....	92
Demonstrative article.....	95
Compound nouns.....	97

Proper nouns.....	98
Personal names.....	98
Animal names.....	100
Astronomical names.....	100
Geographical names.....	100
Commercial names.....	104
Spelling of foreign words.....	105
Adjectives.....	106
Forms of adjectives.....	106
Declension of adjectives.....	106
Incomplete adjectives.....	112
Invariable adjectives.....	112
Adjectives with irregular genitive and dative.....	113
Definite forms of adjectives.....	113
Compound adjectives.....	114
Vocative.....	115
Position of adjectives.....	116
Agreement of adjectives.....	119
Declension models.....	121
Comparison.....	123
Positive.....	123
Comparative.....	123
Superlative.....	124
Numerals.....	126
Cardinal numerals.....	126
Ordinal numerals.....	132
Partitive numerals.....	136
Multiplicative numerals.....	137
Adverbial numerals.....	138
Collective numerals.....	138
Distributive numerals.....	140
Pronouns and pronominal adjectives.....	141
Personal pronouns.....	141
Stressed forms.....	141
Unstressed accusative and dative forms.....	143
Polite personal pronouns.....	148
Reflexive pronouns.....	151
Possessive pronouns and adjectives.....	153
Emphatic reflexive pronominal adjective.....	157
Demonstrative pronouns and adjectives.....	159
Interrogative pronouns and adjectives.....	165
Relative pronouns.....	170

Indefinite pronouns and adjectives.....	175
Quantitative indefinite pronouns and adjectives.....	184
Negative indefinite pronouns and adjectives.....	193
Prepositions.....	196
Prepositions requiring the accusative case.....	196
Prepositions requiring the genitive case.....	206
Prepositions requiring the dative case.....	209
Verbs.....	211
Conjugations.....	211
Personal forms.....	212
Unipersonal verbs.....	212
Negative forms.....	213
Auxiliary verbs and compound verb forms.....	214
Indicative mood.....	215
Present indicative.....	215
Imperfect indicative.....	232
Perfect indicative.....	234
Simple perfect indicative.....	235
Pluperfect indicative.....	237
Future indicative.....	239
Future perfect indicative.....	240
Past future indicative.....	241
Imperative mood.....	241
Conjunctive mood.....	245
Present conjunctive.....	245
Perfect conjunctive.....	249
Use of the conjunctive mood.....	250
Conditional mood.....	251
Present conditional.....	251
Perfect conditional.....	252
Use of the conditional mood.....	252
Presumptive mood.....	253
Present presumptive.....	253
Perfect presumptive.....	254
Use of the presumptive mood.....	254
Nominal forms.....	255
Infinitive.....	255
Participle.....	258
Gerund.....	261
Supine.....	264
Passive voice.....	266
Formation of the passive.....	266
Passive and impersonal <i>se</i> .....	268
Impersonal <i>tu</i> .....	268



Reflexive verbs.....	269
Adverbs.....	270
Lexical adverbs.....	270
Derivation of adverb from adjectives.....	273
Comparison of adverbs.....	273
Semi-adverbs.....	274
Conjunctions.....	275
Coordinating conjunctions.....	275
Copulative conjunctions.....	275
Adversative conjunctions.....	276
Disjunctive conjunctions.....	276
Conclusive conjunctions.....	277
Subordinating conjunctions.....	277
Syntax.....	278
Case usage.....	278
Nominative.....	278
Accusative.....	279
Genitive.....	280
Dative.....	281
Vocative.....	282
Sentence types.....	282
Interrogative sentence.....	282
Exclamative sentence.....	283
Imperative sentence.....	283
Syntactic functions.....	283
Subject.....	283
Subject-predicate agreement.....	284
Multiple subjects.....	285
Relative pronoun as the subject.....	286
Direct object.....	287
Direct object with the preposition <i>pe</i> .....	287
Redundant direct object.....	290
Secondary object.....	293
Indirect object.....	293
Redundant indirect object.....	294
Predicative.....	295
Subject predicative.....	295
Object predicative.....	296
Subordinate clauses.....	296
Use of moods in subordinate clauses.....	296
Use of tenses in subordinate clauses.....	297
Subordinate declarative clauses.....	298
Subordinate interrogative, imperative and exclamative clauses.....	302
Relative clauses.....	303
Conditional clauses.....	304
Temporal clauses.....	305

Causal clauses.....	307
Final clauses.....	308
Concessive clauses.....	308
Consecutive clauses.....	309
Modal clauses.....	309
Comparative clauses.....	310
Adversative clauses.....	311
Cumulative clauses.....	311
Exception clauses.....	311
Word order.....	312
Bibliography.....	315
Appendix 1: The personal and temporal endings of the verbs.....	318
Appendix 2: Conjugation models.....	320
Ia: JURA.....	321
Ib: LUCRA.....	328
II: VEDEA.....	330
III part. -ut: BATE.....	332
III part. -s: ARDE.....	335
III part. -t: RUPE.....	338
IVa -i: FUGI.....	340
IVb -i: CITI.....	344
IVa -î: VÂRÎ.....	346
IVb -î: HOTĂRÎ.....	348
Appendix 3: Irregular verbs.....	350
Appendix 4: Conjugation of reflexive verbs.....	362
Appendix 5: Passive conjugation.....	364
Appendix 6: Word order of the verbal structure.....	367
Index of verbs.....	369
Index of grammatical points.....	373



## Preface

This book intends to be a comprehensive grammar of modern Romanian for foreign students. It is based on the Finnish version originally published in 2009. However, many changes and enlargements have been made in order to make this book more suitable for English speaking readers.

In this grammar, special attention has been given to the rich morphology of Romanian, including the many irregularities and sound changes. The book includes e.g. very detailed lists of Romanian verbs with all their sound changes. Since this is an advanced grammar, basic knowledge of traditional grammatical terms is assumed. However, the grammatical explications have been kept as short and simple as possible, and more space is given to examples, declension and conjugation tables, word lists, etc. Most of the example sentences are taken from modern sources, mainly from different on-line newspapers.

This grammar follows the latest norms published by the *Academia Română: Gramatica limbii române* (2008), *Gramatica de bază a limbii române* (2010), *Dicționar ortografic, ortoepic și morfologic al limbii române DOOM* (2007), *Dicționarul explicativ al limbii române DEX* (2009), *Enciclopedia limbii române* (2006).

In this second editions many small corrections and some additions have been made.

September 28th 2014

The author

# PHONETIC SYMBOLS

## Vowels

i	close unrounded front vowel
e	mid unrounded front vowel
ɨ	close unrounded central vowel
ə	mid unrounded central vowel
a	open unrounded central vowel
u	close rounded back vowel
o	mid rounded back vowel
ø	mid rounded front vowel
y	close rounded front vowel
ɨ̥	voiceless, asyllabic

## Semivowels and semiconsonants

w, ʋ	semiconsonantic and semivocalic u
j, ɨ̥	semiconsonantic and semivocalic i
ɛ̥	semivocalic e
ɔ̥	semivocalic o

## Consonants

p	voiceless bilabial stop
b	voiced bilabial stop
t	voiceless denti-alveolar stop
d	voiced denti-alveolar stop
k	voiceless velar stop
g	voiced velar stop
kʲ	voiceless palatalised velar stop
gʲ	voiced palatalised velar stop
s	voiceless alveolar fricative
z	voiced alveolar fricative
ts	voiceless denti-alveolar affricate
ʃ	voiceless postalveolar fricative
ʒ	voiced postalveolar fricative
tʃ	voiceless palatalised postalveolar affricate
dʒ	voiced palatalised postalveolar affricate
f	voiceless labiodental fricative
v	voiced labiodental fricative
h	voiceless glottal fricative
x	voiceless velar fricative
ç	voiceless palatal fricative
l	voiced alveolar lateral
r	voiced alveolar trill
m	voiced bilabial nasal
ɱ	voiced labiodental nasal
n	voiced alveolar nasal
ŋ	voiced velar nasal
ɲ	voiced palatalised velar nasal

## About the Romanian language

Romanian is spoken by ca. 24 million people. It is the official language of Romania (ca. 19.4 million) and Moldova (ca. 2.8 million), where it is often been known as the Moldovan language<sup>1</sup>. It also has an official status in the autonomous province of Vojvodina in Serbia (ca. 35 000). Romanian is also one of the official languages of the European Union.

Apart from Romania, Moldova and Vojvodina, some Romanians also live in Ukraine (ca. 410 000), Russia (ca. 180 000), other parts of Serbia (ca. 40 000) and Hungary (ca. 15 000). In Israel, about 218 000 people are of Romanian origin. In Ukraine, Romanian has been declared a regional language in the villages of Bila Tserkva (Rom. Biserica Albă) and Tarasivtsi (Rom. Tărășăuți)<sup>2</sup>.

After 1989, many Romanians have moved to Western Europe. In 2010 there were ca. 800 000 Romanians in Spain and over 1 million in Italy.

The name 'Romanian language' usually refers to the main dialect, *Dacoromanian*. The other Romanian dialects are less widely spoken. These dialects are: *Aromanian* (or *Macedo-Romanian*), which is spoken by some 200 000 people in Albania, Bulgaria, Greece and Macedonia<sup>3</sup>; *Megleno-Romanian* (spoken by ca. 5 000 people in Moglena, Greece and in Macedonia<sup>4</sup>); and *Istro-Romanian* (spoken by only ca. 500-1500 people in Istria, Croatia<sup>5</sup>). The Dacoromanian dialect is further divided into subdialects (*grai*), but the dialectal differences are quite small. Southern dialects are spoken in Oltenia, Muntenia and Dobrogea, while northern dialects are spoken in Transylvania and Moldova.

Romanian is a Romance language, which means it has developed from Latin just like Spanish, Portuguese, French and Italian. The Roman emperor Trajan conquered Dacia in 101-106, but the Roman rule lasted only for a short time, and in 271 emperor Aurelian pulled the Roman army and administration out of Dacia. However, this short period was enough to latinize the area.

---

<sup>1</sup> The name Moldovan was used in the Soviet Union. In the declaration of independence of Moldova (27/8/1991) the language was called Romanian, but in the constitution (29/7/1994) it was again called Moldovan. On December 5<sup>th</sup> 2013 the Constitutional Court of Moldova ruled that the official language is Romanian.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.kyivpost.com/content/ukraine/romanian-becomes-regional-language-in-bila-tserkva-in-zakarpattia-region-313373.html>.

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.ethnologue.com/14/show\\_language.asp?code=RUP](http://www.ethnologue.com/14/show_language.asp?code=RUP). Aromanian is one of the official languages in the town of Kruševo (Macedonia).

<sup>4</sup> [http://www.ethnologue.org/show\\_language.asp?code=ruq](http://www.ethnologue.org/show_language.asp?code=ruq)

<sup>5</sup> [http://www.ethnologue.org/show\\_language.asp?code=ruo](http://www.ethnologue.org/show_language.asp?code=ruo)

During the Migration Period, Proto-Romanian was separated from the other Romance areas and at the same time it was split into the above mentioned dialects. Because of its isolation, Romanian has evolved quite differently from the other Romance languages. Sound changes typical to Romanian include e.g. *qu* → *p*, *gu* → *b*, *ct* → *pt*, *l* → *r*.

Latin	Romanian	Spanish	Italian	French
aqua <i>water</i>	apă	agua	acqua	eau
quattuor <i>four</i>	patru	cuatro	quattro	quatre
lingua <i>language</i>	limbă	lengua	lingua	langue
octo <i>eight</i>	opt	ocho	otto	huit
lac(tem) <i>milk</i>	lapte	leche	latte	lait
sol(em) <i>sun</i>	soare	sol	sole	soleil
caelum <i>sky</i>	cer	cielo	cielo	ciel

Romanian has also maintained some Latin sounds that have changed into other sounds in the other Romance languages, e.g. the diphthong *au*.

Latin	Romanian	Spanish	Italian	French
aurum <i>gold</i>	aur	oro	oro	aur [or]
audire <i>to hear</i>	auzi	oír	udire	ouïr

Perhaps the most noticeable feature of Romanian is the declension of nouns and adjectives. Like Latin, Romanian has three genders: masculine, feminine and neuter. Romanian has also retained some of the Latin cases. The declension is further complicated by the fact that the definite article is a suffix in Romanian (Sp. *el estudiante*, It. *lo studente*, Fr. *l'étudiant*, Rom. *studentul*).

The Romanian conjugation of verbs differs somewhat from the other Romance languages as well. For example, the future is formed in Romania with the Latin verb *velle* (*volo cantare* → Rom. *voi cânta*), whereas in the other Romance languages a suffix formed from the Latin verb *habere* is used (*cantare habeo* → Sp. *cantaré*, It. *canterò*, Fr. *chanterai*).

During the Middle Ages, Church Slavonic became the language of civilization in Romania and the written use of Latin was forgotten. A huge number of loanwords entered Romanian, especially from Slavic languages, but also from Greek, Turkish and Hungarian. These loanwords give an exotic flavour to Romanian compared to the other Romance languages.

The oldest remaining Romanian text is the letter of *Neacșu* from 1521. It is written using the Cyrillic alphabet, which was in use until 1862. Because of Soviet influence, the Cyrillic alphabet was used in Moldova until 1989, but the Moldovan alphabet differed somewhat from the one used in Romania<sup>6</sup>. Some people still use the Cyrillic alphabet, especially in Transnistria<sup>7</sup>.

Apart from changing the alphabet, the language was also otherwise strongly re-latinised during the 19th century. The vocabulary experienced great changes and new words were borrowed, especially from French. It has been estimated that as much as 40% of the modern Romanian vocabulary has been borrowed from French. About 80% of the Romanian vocabulary is of Latin origin, coming either directly from Latin or as loan words from other Romance languages. Nowadays new words are borrowed mainly from English.

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<sup>6</sup> For more information see e.g. [http://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alfabetul\\_chirilic\\_rom%C3%A2n](http://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alfabetul_chirilic_rom%C3%A2n) and [http://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alfabetul\\_chirilic\\_moldovenesc](http://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alfabetul_chirilic_moldovenesc).

<sup>7</sup> The T. G. Șevchenko University in Tiraspol has a department of the Moldovan language (Катедра де филоложие молдовеняскэ). This is the only university in the world that still teaches “Moldovan” in Cyrillic script.



## Sounds of Romanian and their spelling

### Consonant sounds

The Romanian language has the following consonant phonemes:

	Bilabial	Labiodental	Alveolar	Postalveolar	Velar	Glottal
Stops	p b		t d		k g	
Fricatives		f v	s z	ʃ ʒ		h
Affricates			ts	tʃ dʒ		
Nasals	m		n			
Laterals			l			
Trills			r			

In Romanian, the voiceless stops are unaspirated, just as in French, Italian and Spanish.

As in the other Romance languages, the consonants /t, d, ts/ are laminal denti-alveolars: they are pronounced with the blade of the tongue against the alveolar ridge, leaving the tip of the tongue against the teeth (and therefore traditionally called *dentals*<sup>8</sup>), unlike English /t/ and /d/, which are apical (pronounced with the tip of the tongue against the alveolar ridge). Also /s/ and /z/ are laminal (like in English, Italian, etc., but not like in North Iberian Spanish) and pronounced with the blade of the tongue, not with the tip of it.

In Romanian, the lateral /l/ is always clear (like the first *l* in English *little*), and never dark (as the second *l* in *little*). The Romanian /r/ is a trill, like in Italian.

The sounds /ʃ, ʒ, tʃ, dʒ/ are not so clearly rounded as in English, and in the standard Romanian /tʃ/ and /dʒ/ are always slightly palatalised<sup>9</sup>.

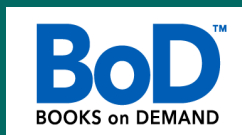
The other consonants are pronounced as in English.

<sup>8</sup> According to Academia (DEX, ELR) also /l, n, r/ are dentals. *Limba română contemporană* (1985, p. 72) calls all the consonants /t, d, s, z, ts, l, r/ 'dental (alveolar)'. Canepari (2007: 350) classifies /t, d, s, z, ts/ as dentals and /l, n, r/ as alveolars.

<sup>9</sup> They are pronounced hard in Maramureş ([tʃ, dʒ]) and as fricatives in Moldova ([ʃ, ʒ]).

This book is an advanced grammar of Romanian for English speakers.

Romanian is a Romance language, meaning that it has developed from Latin just like Spanish, Portuguese, French and Italian. Romanian is spoken by ca. 24 million people and it is the official language of both Romania and Moldova. It also has an official status in the province of Vojvodina in Serbia and in few villages in Ukraine. Romanian is also one of the official languages of the European Union.



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