

Teaching Business Romanian to Hungarian Students within the Faculty of Economics and Business Administration, “Babeş-Bolyai” University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania

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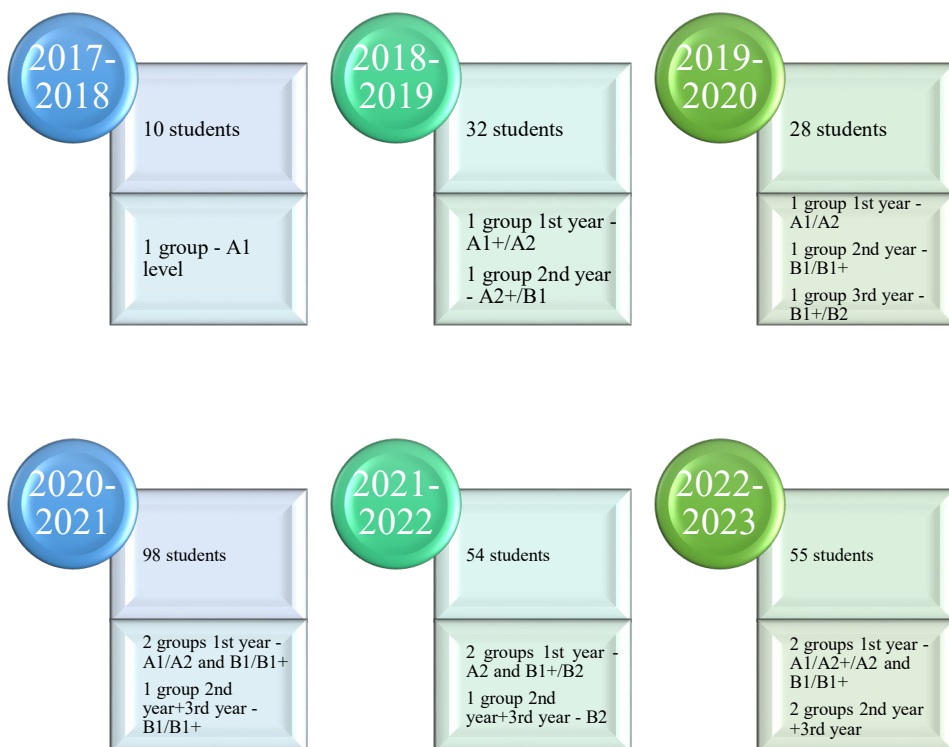
Teaching Business Romanian to Hungarian students within the Faculty of Economics and Business Administration has constantly developed in the last couple of years. The main aim of this paper is to present the Hungarian student profile and expectations regarding the Business Romanian classes and the main challenges that the Business Romanian teacher needs to deal with.

Romanian as a foreign language; Hungarian line of studies; student profile; learning expectations; teaching challenges.

The Romanian Language within the Faculty of Economics and Business Administration

The introduction of the Romanian language within the Faculty of Economics and Business Administration is quite recent, but it has constantly developed in the last couple of years. This practical course was introduced in the Hungarian students' academic plan in 2017 and since then the students' interest in the study of the Romanian language used for business purposes has steadily increased. At present, the students from the Hungarian line of studies have the possibility of studying the Romanian language six semesters, starting from the 1st year, 1st semester. In the academic year 2017-2018, when the Romanian course was introduced in the students' curriculum, there were 10 students who enrolled to the practical course. It was an A1 level homogenous group. In the following academic year 2018-2019, 32 students enrolled to the course, giving us the possibility of organizing the Romanian classes in two different groups: a group at the 1st year, with an A1+/A2 level and a group at the 2nd year with an A2+/B1 level. In the academic year

2019-2020, 28 students enrolled for the class, separated into three different small groups: a group for the 1st year, with an A1/A2 level, a group for the 2nd year, with a B1/B1+ level and a group for the 3rd year, with a B1+/B2 level. During the pandemics, due to online classes, the number of students who enrolled for the Romanian class rocketed to 98 students, thus giving us the possibility of having more groups: two groups for the 1st year (a group for beginners and students with an elementary level – A1/A2 and a group for students with an intermediate level – B1/B1+) and a group for the 2nd and the 3rd year, with a B1/B1+ level). In the academic year 2021-2022, 54 students enrolled for the Romanian classes. Two groups were created: one group for the 1st year (A2 and B1+/B2) and a group for the 2nd and the 3rd year, with a B2 level of proficiency. In the academic year 2022-2023, 55 students decided to enrol for the Romanian class and the groups distribution was kept (2 groups for the 1st year – A1/A2/A2+ and B1/B1+ and 2 groups for the 2nd year and the 3rd year). In this academic year, 2023-2024, there are 70 students enrolled for the Romanian class (45 students at the 1st year, a homogeneous group with an A2+/B1 level) and 25 students at the 2nd year and the 3rd year, with a B1+ level).



The Hungarian Student Profile and Expectations

The Hungarian Student Profile

The students at the Hungarian line of studies are students who come from the following counties of Romania: most of them from Harghita, Covasna, Mureş, followed by the students from Satu Mare, Bihor, Arad and there are also students who come from Cluj. They have different knowledge of the Romanian language, from beginners to upper-intermediate, sometimes advanced; some of them come from regions where the Romanian language is not spoken at all in real-life situations, except for the school, during the Romanian classes or from families where everybody speaks only Hungarian, therefore this category of students is not exposed at all to the Romanian language. Moreover, they have neither Romanian friends nor Romanian relatives. Usually, these students are the students who start the study of the Romanian language in beginner groups. Furthermore, there is the second category of students, the ones who were/are exposed to the Romanian language, not that much in family or school, but they have Romanian friends or Romanian relatives, or they also studied in a place where the Romanian language is spoken a lot and their level of proficiency in the Romanian language is, at least, elementary up to intermediate. Last, but not least, there is the third category of students, the ones whose one parent is Romanian and the other one is Hungarian. These students speak both languages at home, have Romanian friends and relatives and they usually have an upper-intermediate level of proficiency up to advanced.

Taking into consideration this background, it is worth mentioning the fact that their expectations also differ. The students who have an A1/A2 level of proficiency in the Romanian language are willing to learn the Romanian language, because they are aware of the fact that without it, they cannot manage the most common real-life situations.

The students who have an A2+/B1/B1+ level of proficiency want to practice as much as they can, therefore the focus of the Romanian classes is always on communication activities.

The students who have a B2/C1 level usually attend the Romanian classes because they want to be better and better and, in their situation, the focus of the Romanian class is on business related terminology that they need in their future career as economists.

The Hungarian Student Expectations

As it has been mentioned before, the students from the Hungarian line of studies have a wide range of expectations, based on their experience with the Romanian language. In the last couple of years, I conducted research in the field of the students' expectations regarding the Romanian language. I used a questionnaire with open questions that I always administered to my 1st year students, in our 1st meeting. Since 2017, I have gathered more than 250 answers from my students and I will try to present the most interesting expectations facts below.

Learning the Romanian language and how to use it correctly

Most of the students from the Hungarian line of studies consider that one of the most important expectations is learning the Romanian language and how to use it correctly. Some of them stated that they want to learn the Romanian language, some of them said that they tried to learn it, but they couldn't, some of them said that they understood, but they could not speak etc. No matter the reason behind their choice to study the Romanian language, there is something that strikes out: their strong willingness to attend the Romanian course based on the students' awareness that they need this language. Here are some of the students' answers¹ that will help us understand better their willingness to learn this language: "I chose the Romanian language course because I want to learn this language. I hope this course will help me learn the language" (Student 1) or "I chose this course because I don't know the Romanian language that well, my expectation is to learn better" (Student 2) or "I chose this course because I don't know Romanian ... I have tried to learn it, but so far I have not succeeded. I hope that I will learn the Romanian language with the help of this course" (Student 3) or "I chose this course because I don't know Romanian but I want to learn it" (Student 4) or "Because I don't know the Romanian language, I don't know how to read and write correctly" (Student 5) or "I chose the Romanian language course because I don't know too many things, I understood what was said to me but I don't know how to answer" (Student 6).

Overcoming fears and negative experiences related to the Romanian language

Most of the students from the Hungarian line of studies are afraid of the Romanian language. When being asked about the reasons of being afraid, most of them referred to different negative experiences they had with the Romanian language, based on not having enough knowledge, or using Romanian has been a tremendous problem for them, or speaking into Romanian led to fears, nervousness, anxiety, uncertainty, or being ashamed by the fact that maybe the other ones will start bullying them based on their vocabulary or pronunciation, etc. Some of the students stated that they have a lot of fears regarding the possibility of making mistakes, mostly grammar mistakes and due to this, they have a lot of inhibitions and cannot speak fluently and spontaneously. Here are some of the students' answers regarding the fears that they had to deal with and what kind of expectations they have regarding the possibility of overcoming these fears: "I chose this course because I don't know how to speak Romanian correctly and that's why I had a lot of negative experiences" (Student 7) or "I chose the Romanian language course because I feel that I still need to practice the language. I'm afraid of speaking in Romanian. By the end of the faculty, I would like to speak better the Romanian language and using it

¹ The answers were given in Romanian but for the purpose of this paper they were translated into English. The students' answers in Romanian were authentic, with common grammar and vocabulary mistakes specific to the level of proficiency that each student had.

correctly not to be a problem anymore” (Student 8) or ”I chose the Romanian online course because every time I have to speak in Romanian I am nervous, and I feel anxious. My main expectation is to be able to speak without any fears and more confidently” (Student 9) or ”I chose this course because I want to speak this language without shame, I have many inhibitions when I have to speak in Romanian. My expectation is to acquire the grammatical secrets of the Romanian language and I want to speak spontaneously, without having to think about a sentence for 10 minutes to make it correct”. (Student 9)

There were also students who focused on the fact that one of their main fears is grammar or some of the answers covered cultural issues, referring to the Romanian language in comparison with the English language. I will render two interesting answers that I received from two of my students regarding the relationship the Hungarian students have with the Romanian language but also with other languages they had to learn at some point in the past.

”Being Hungarian in Romania, as a child, I learned two languages and I also started learning English in the 3rd grade. I had many difficulties with the Romanian language, especially with grammar. English was much easier for me. Now I am 19 years old and I can say that depending on the language I speak I have 3 different personalities. When I speak in my mother tongue, in Hungarian, I am a friendly, talkative person and I feel like myself. When I speak in English I feel brave and very cool. And when I speak in Romanian I feel insecure but I am also proud of being able to speak this language”. (Student 10)

and

”I have noticed that when I speak in English I am much calmer and rational, I think much more about what I want to answer to someone and what effect my answer will have on the person I am talking to. But when I speak in Hungarian I have noticed that I say the first thing that comes to my mind without thinking about what can happen after I say what I am about to say. And when I think in Romanian

it's like I have a yin-yang mentality, either I'm very calm and nothing upsets me or I start to complain about the smallest thing that happens to me". (Student 11)

Improving Romanian Language Knowledge

Most of the students considered that improving the Romanian language knowledge is a "must", since they were born in Romania, they live in Romania and, some of them, would like to live in Romania after graduating. They are also aware of the fact that there is a big issue in the regions they are coming from due to the fact that the Romanian language is not spoken and they do not have the possibility of speaking the Romanian language; moreover, they realize that not only the general language is needed but also business terminology would be a valuable asset, especially for the ones who are willing to work in a bank, in marketing or as entrepreneurs:

"I chose the Romanian language course, because in the city where I live most of the people speak Hungarian and because of this I haven't had the opportunity of learning the language as well as I want to know it. That's why I chose this course, because I want to speak this language at an acceptable level". (Student 10)

or

"My main reason for choosing this course is my desire to improve my knowledge of this language, to learn new expressions, words that can help me in the field in which I want to work in the future, but also in everyday life. On the other hand, I'm a maximalist girl and it bothers me when I make mistakes or when I can't express myself correctly, and for me it's very important to learn this language, because after graduating, I want to stay in Romania". (Student 11)

or

"I chose the Romanian language course because I don't know the language at an acceptable level. I understand well, but it's hard for me to express myself what I

want to say. I make a lot of grammar mistakes. I would also like to learn business terminology”. (Student 12)

Acquiring business terminology and using it correctly in different communication situations

Being students at the Faculty of Economics and Business Administration within “Babeş-Bolyai” University Cluj-Napoca, Romania, and specializing in different business areas, such as *Finance and Banking, Management, Marketing and Informatics Applied to Economics*, the students from the Hungarian line of studies are aware of the fact that, in their future jobs, they will have to use the business-related vocabulary, not only in Hungarian and English, but in Romanian too. Therefore, in the case of the intermediate groups, the focus of the class is always on teaching the business terminology and how to use it correctly in a wide range of communication situations.

“I chose the Romanian language course, because I wanted to learn some Romanian business words and phrases. In addition, I chose the Romanian language course, because at the Hungarian line of studies, there aren’t any classes held in Romanian and I didn’t want to forget speaking in Romanian”. (Student 13)

or

“I chose the Romanian language course because I thought about the fact that I will need this knowledge in my future. If I want to work in the business area, I have to use a specialized language, I have to express myself fluently and confidently, I have to know certain business terms and phrases. I think that this possibility is a very rare one, and I didn’t want to lose it”. (Student 14)

or

“I would like to learn the specialized language, which is mandatory in the business field. The Romanian teacher I had in highschool gave me a good basis to speak

the Romanian language as correctly and fluently as possible, but the necessary business phrases and terms, which I would like to learn during the Romanian classes, were missing”. (Student 15)

or

“I chose the Romanian language course, because I live in Romania and I would like to improve and develop my vocabulary with business terms too, so that I can understand some terms that are still unclear to me in Romanian, or I associate them poorly with Hungarian words. I would like to study economic market related terms, the complicated ones. I would like to know, as we also studied at English, things about the company structure, or about the recruitment process or how to go to an interview, how to answer when attending an interview, how to write an email, an application letter etc.” (Student 16)

Carrer Plans

Some of the students’ answers revolve around their future career plans. Students are aware that knowing the Romanian language is a priority for them: “As far as it concerns my future business career plans, I need the knowledge and deep acquisition of the Romanian language. Learning the Romanian language is a priority for me”. (Student 17)

or

“I chose this course because I consider it an opportunity to develop my knowledge of the Romanian language. My goal is to get a much more developed vocabulary in the business field that will help me in my future job.” (Student 18)

or

“I chose the Romanian language course because, first of all, I want to learn more things that will help me deal with different work-related issues, and in my career as an economist”. (Student 19)

Topics

Students have many expectations regarding the topics discussed during the Romanian classes. Based on their answers, they would like to study everything from the first semester, if possible, but that’s impossible. Their interests cover topics such as: management, daily life administrative issues, marketing, communication topics, how to write an email, commerce, expressing opinions orally and in writing, ways of greeting and introducing people in different business cultures, IT, company structure, negotiations, meetings, finance and accounting, contracts, economic crisis, market analysis, the recruitment process (CV, application/cover letters, job interview). They are also interested in grammar; most of the students find it very hard to cope with the plural forms and gender of nouns in Romanian, the pronouns, and the verbs; moreover, some of them explained that they have problems with the order of the words in a sentence or with the interrogative forms or with the demonstrative pronouns and adjectives.

The Romanian Teacher Challenges at the Hungarian Line of Studies

Let’s talk about anything! Let’s practice communication! as one of my students pointed out. There are a lot of challenges both for the teacher and the students at the Hungarian line of studies.

The first challenge is the class itself: from organisational and administrative issues, knowing the students, setting up their level of proficiency, deciding on the topics that will be studied, the assessment grid, identifying their expectations and trying to meet them, making the classes interactive etc.

The second challenge is the heterogeneity of the groups; since the level of proficiency is different among the students, it’s very hard to have a 100% homogeneous group, therefore, in most of the cases, the beginner group is made up of students who have both an A1 and an A2 level of proficiency, the elementary groups are made up of students who have an A2+ level and sometimes even B1, depending on the number of students and the intermediate groups are usually made up of students who have a B1+/B2 level of proficiency.

The third challenge refers to the diversity of the topics that students want to study; they want to study everything about the business terminology, but this is practically impossible, because, for example, in the case of the beginner groups, the introduction of business terminology is done step by step, since at the beginner level, the Romanian teacher needs to start with the basics of the Romanian language. More than that, every

year, the students who attend the Romanian class have totally different interests in the field of economics: the ones from *Finance and Banking* are mostly interested in finance, banking procedures, the ones from *Informatics Applied to Economics* are mostly interested in software, IT, devices, programs, the ones from *Marketing* are interested in sales, advertising, market research and the ones from *Management* are mostly interested in managerial skills, leading a company, dealing with conflicts within a company, setting up a business etc. Furthermore, some of the students want more grammar, some of them want to focus more on specialized vocabulary, another percentage of the students would like to study the Romanian language from the basics, or another percentage would like to do a lot of communication activities. To reach their expectations, the Romanian teacher needs to adapt easily, by choosing the most relevant topics for the students and, in an ideal classroom, where all students come from the same specialization, for example *Finance and Banking*, then in such a utopic scenario, only finance and banking related topics can be taught.

The fourth challenge is creating weekly materials with economic content. Since the groups are diverse yearly, there are high chances of not being able to use the same materials from one year to another. There are a lot of Romanian Language Coursebooks available on the Romanian market, which represent valuable and excellent teaching instruments², but there aren't any Business Romanian Coursebooks now, therefore the task of teaching Business Romanian³ is even more difficult.

Last, but not least, there is also the need to renew the teaching methods. Covid 19 pandemic completely changed not only the teaching process, but also the teaching and learning methods. The online teaching, the online learning, the online platforms and their usage and accessibility, the new assessment methods, everything was a complete challenge not only for the students, but for the teachers too. The 100% traditional teaching is no longer working. Even though everything is done onsite now, the online methods are still used and will be integrated in the teaching-learning process.

Syllabus

As I have already mentioned in the previous paragraphs, students are willing to learn the so-called “everything” about the business terminology. A thing which is practically impossible to be fulfilled. Like any other classes, the Romanian class works based on a syllabus which was well planned and thought to meet the students' needs and expectations. In the first year, the taught topics during the Business Romanian class are the following ones: *Professional Communication, Company Structure, Recruitment,*

² Platon, E., Burlacu, D., Arieșan, A. (2021), *Manual de limba română ca limbă străină* (RLS). Nivel B2, Presa Universitară Clujeană, Cluj-Napoca; Platon, E., Sonea, I., Vilcu, D. (2019), *Manual de limba română ca limbă străină* (RLS) A1-A2, Presa Universitară Clujeană, Cluj-Napoca; Platon, E., Vasii, L., Vilcu, D. (2021), *Manual de limba română ca limbă străină* (RLS). Nivelul B1, Presa Universitară Clujeană, Cluj-Napoca;

³ There will be an available Coursebook for Business Romanian A2/B1 published in the summer of 2024 (Maria-Zoica Balaban, *Business Romanian A2/B1* – under the publishing process)

Management, Business Ethics, Business Travel, and a topic that will be recommended by the students based on their interests. In the second year, the taught topics during the Business Romanian class are the following ones: *Marketing, Advertising, Finance and Banking, Insurance, International Trade*, and a topic that will be recommended by the students based on their interests. In the third year, the taught topics are *Oral Communication* (business presentations, business meetings and business negotiations) and *Written Communication* (business reports and business proposals).

Conclusions

The introduction of the Romanian language course to the Hungarian line of studies is an advantage for the students, giving them the opportunity of studying specialized language in the Romanian language, which will also help them in their future career. The students from the Hungarian line of studies also have the possibility of studying the Romanian language for six semesters which is also a plus for them, giving them the possibility of studying many business-related topics. They also have the possibility of attending, as an extracurricular activity, the Romanian Language Workshop, which was specifically designed for them, which is organized monthly, with the participation of invited speakers, professionals in the field of teaching Romanian as a foreign language). Moreover, starting with the academic year 2023-2024, a new course was introduced at the Faculty of Economics and Business Administration, the so-called *Language and Style in the Professional Environment* (in Romanian, for all years of study and all lines of study), where students have the possibility of discussing about different documents written for business purposes, find out more about the language styles used in business and how to communicate effectively and efficiently in different business-related situations.

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