LANGUAGE LEARNING – A TOOL FOR MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING AND COOPERATION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

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Abstract: In a continuously growing and developing European Union, with 28 member states and 24 official languages, mutual understanding and cooperation need communication more than ever. The purpose of this article is to analyse the current situation in the E.U. and in Romania, and what can be done in order to promote multilingual and multicultural communication, which are not only a tool for better communication among the European citizens, but also a method to boost businesses and to contribute to each individual's personal and professional development.

Keywords: languages, European Union, Romania, communication, business, language learning

Overview of languages in education and business

The European Union is a true melting pot, having 28 member states and 24 official languages. Majority and minority languages, as well as various cultures co-exist in this land of diversity, therefore supporting the EU motto of "unity in diversity". Not only does language mean diversity, cultural heritage, but also cooperation and business at a global level. It is therefore possible to cooperate and to conclude contracts with all countries of the world.

As such, in 2010, following the global economic crisis, the European Commission issued a communication meant to strengthen its three main priorities: smart growth, sustainable growth, and inclusive growth of the economy of Europe, which had much suffered because of the financial and economic crisis. Therefore, the European strategy for the following ten years targeted the development of the economies of all its 28 member states, in order to 'take charge of their future' (EC, 2010:3). According to the Lisbon strategy for growth and jobs, Europe is recognised worldwide "for its high quality of life,

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underpinned by a unique social model. The strategy should ensure that these benefits are sustained and even further enhanced, while employment, productivity and social cohesion are optimised."[1]

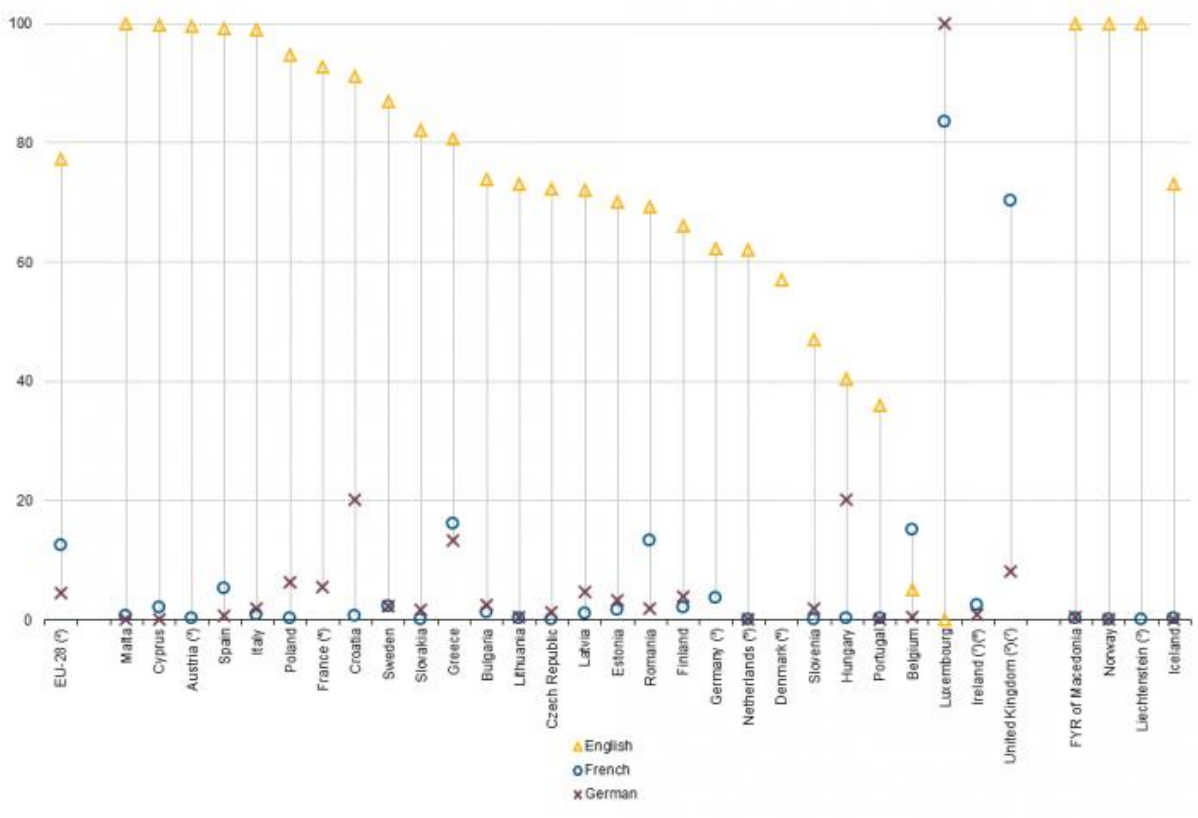
Languages can be found at the core of these strategies, as no business can be 'smart' or 'sustainable' without them, while employment, productivity, and social cohesion cannot be optimised in their absence. All these are strong arguments for the power of language, for their learning by individuals at all ages, since employability is also one of the key reasons for learning a language for most students and prospective employees.

According to a Eurostat news release, in what concerns language learning and language teaching at EU level, the English language is the most widely taught foreign language in primary and secondary education in the EU member states. In primary education, English is mandatory in many primary education schools, as can be seen in the table below.

[1] *http://ec.europa.eu/archives/growthandjobs_2009/index_en.htm, accessed on 12/04/2016.*

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(*) Ranked on English. Refer to the internet metadata file (http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/cache/metadata/en/educ_uoe_enr_esms.htm).
(*) 2012.
(*) German: not applicable.
(*) French: not applicable.
(*) French and German: 2013.
(*) French and German: not available.
(*) English: not applicable.
(*) 2011.
Source: Eurostat (online data codes: educ_ilang and educ_uoe_lang01), UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS), OECD

Figure 1. Proportion of pupils in primary education learning foreign languages, by language, 2014

Source: http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/, accessed on 01/04/2016.

100% of pupils in primary education in Malta, Cyprus, Austria, Spain, Italy, Macedonia, Norway, and Liechtenstein study English as their first foreign language. High percentages are also registered in Poland, France, Croatia, Sweden, and Greece (above 80%).

In secondary education, at EU level, it is still English that is the most widely taught foreign language, maximum percentages being recorded, in 2014, in Malta, Sweden, and Liechtenstein. High percentages are also registered in Belgium, Bulgaria, Denmark, Estonia, Greece, Spain, France, Latvia, Croatia, Romania, etc., as it can be seen in the table below.

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	Pupils learning English in general programmes		Pupils learning French in general programmes		Pupils learning German in general programmes	
	2009	2014	2009	2014	2009	2014
EU-28	94.2	94.1	26.0	23.0	23.1	18.9
Belgium	95.0	95.6	49.3	48.4	29.3	27.6
Bulgaria	87.5	90.7	14.5	12.4	35.9	34.3
Czech Republic	100.0	95.0	24.8	16.2	60.6	55.8
Denmark	91.6	82.1	10.7	14.6	35.1	28.0
Germany	91.8	86.8	28.1	23.8	–	–
Estonia (²)	96.2	97.6	6.9	7.0	39.2	28.5
Ireland	–	–	58.2	59.5	16.4	16.5
Greece	93.8	94.4	7.8	4.4	3.4	2.5
Spain	94.4	97.5	27.0	24.2	1.1	1.7
France	99.5	99.8	–	–	21.3	21.5
Croatia	99.0	99.5	3.7	4.2	62.5	61.5
Italy	96.5	97.8	20.1	16.1	6.9	8.2
Cyprus	91.4	90.2	40.6	37.1	2.2	6.2
Latvia	97.2	97.8	3.9	5.7	28.8	27.6
Lithuania	90.8	95.3	3.8	2.9	18.8	8.6
Luxembourg	97.7	92.1	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Hungary	79.4	83.1	6.6	5.7	48.7	46.3
Malta (³)	100.0	100.0	6.9	22.2	1.5	4.7
Netherlands	100.0	95.5	64.2	31.1	69.8	40.3
Austria	98.5	99.4	42.5	37.7	–	–
Poland	92.2	94.6	8.7	8.0	54.4	46.7
Portugal	83.2	65.2	13.3	2.8	1.7	1.5
Romania	98.1	99.3	85.3	85.2	12.1	12.8
Slovenia	92.8	98.2	9.8	10.8	66.4	63.4
Slovakia	98.3	99.0	16.4	13.2	67.9	57.7
Finland	99.7	99.9	17.9	11.3	27.8	16.9
Sweden	99.9	100.0	20.0	16.8	27.0	21.4
United Kingdom (²)(⁴)	–	–	32.3	28.3	11.8	9.7
Iceland	73.2	72.2	13.7	10.7	25.4	22.5
Liechtenstein (⁵)	100.0	100.0	100.0	96.8	–	–
Norway	44.8	43.9	12.8	9.9	20.3	21.3
Turkey	81.8	99.2	1.4	25.2	14.8	24.1

(¹) Refer to the internet metadata file (http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/cache/metadata/EN/educ_uoe_enr_esms.htm).
(²) Data for 2008 instead of 2009.
(³) Data for 2010 instead of 2009.
(⁴) Data for 2013 instead of 2014.
(⁵) Data for 2011 instead of 2009.
Source: Eurostat (online data codes: educ_ilang and educ_uoe_lang01), Unesco Institute for Statistics (UIS), OECD

Figure 2. Foreign languages learnt per pupil in upper secondary education (general),

2009 and 2014

Source: http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/, accessed on 01/04/2016

The second and third most widely taught foreign languages at secondary level are French and German, with percentages varying from one EU member state to another (e.g. Luxembourg – 100% French and German, Romania – 85.2% French and 12.8% German).

Similar percentages can be seen in Romanian higher education system, for instance where, in one of the faculties of Babes-Bolyai University, the largest and one of the oldest universities in Romania, 88.7% of the students who enrolled here in the first year chose to study English, followed by German, Spanish, Italian, and French[2].

In business, there is an acute need of foreign language speakers as the foreign investments have increased during the past years. Our economy started its development

[2] *Statistics made based on internal reports of the Department for Specialised Foreign Languages within UBB Cluj.*

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after 1989, the year of the collapse of the communist regime, and was initially characterised by instability and an increase in the number of unemployed persons.

According to the data on direct foreign investments, published by the Romanian National Bank (BNR), in 2010, one can see an obvious increase in the direct investments made by foreign companies in our country, from 1,946 million euro in 2003 to 3,357 million euro at the end of 2009. In 2012, the direct foreign investments amounted to 2,489 million euro; however, although the 2012 investments were higher than the ones made during the previous year, the amount of direct investments was still low compared to 2009 for instance. At the end of the financial year 2014, concluded on 31st December, the flow of foreign direct investments was of 2,421, less than in 2012 and 2013, however more than in 2010 and 2011[3].

Therefore, given the large flows of foreign direct investments, having employees with foreign language skills is no longer a desideratum, but a necessity in this continuously changing globalised market. It is not only the FDI that has created the necessity of foreign language speaking employees, but also the technological development, the internationalization of studies and of the market, as well as the increase of business trips around the world.

Benefits for the individual

It is not only the economy that can benefit from the linguistic skills of the work force operating on the labour market, but the individuals, the employees can have several benefits from knowing as many foreign languages as it is possible. According to the *Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions of 24 July 2003* on the promotion of language learning and the linguistic diversity, the EU citizens should have the necessary skills in order to be able to communicate with their neighbours. EU member states were encouraged to introduce new language policies to promote the *mother tongue plus two* policy (i.e. citizens should learn at least two foreign languages apart from their mother tongue).

In today's globalised labour market Individuals learning foreign languages can, therefore, benefit from this development. According to the European Investment Monitor,

[3] *Banca Națională a României, Investițiile străine directe în România în anul 2014, 2015, p. 19, accessed online at www.bnr.ro on 05/05/2016.*

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the number of FDI projects and jobs in Europe has increased by 10% in 2014 as compared to 2013, from 3,957 projects in 2013 to 4,431 projects in 2014.

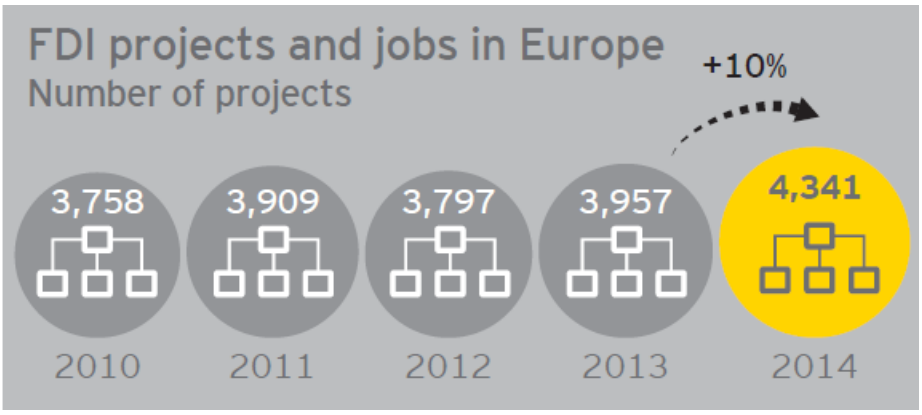


Figure 3. FDI projects and jobs in Europe

Source: EY Attractiveness Survey. Europe 2015. Comeback Time

At global level, Europe still is the most attractive region to establish operations. Romania is a good example in this case, as numerous foreign companies outsourced their services to our country. This is, evidently, an excellent opportunity for the creation of new jobs for the Romanian workforce that also possesses linguistic skills. As such, Romanian citizens with bachelor's and master's degrees can find a well-paid job in Romania as well.

With quite constant flows of foreign direct investments, varying from one region of Romania to another, individuals become more and more motivated to learn foreign languages. English is and will remain for a long period of time the *corporate lingua franca*; however, we no longer have English-only businesses, but multilingual businesses. According to the origin of FDI in Romania, the most wanted foreign languages are: English, Dutch, German, French, Italian, Spanish, and Hungarian[4].

The benefits of learning and speaking a foreign language do not only refer to material gains. Obviously, most individuals are instrumentally motivated[5] and target material benefits. However, studies have proven the fact that learning a foreign language is a gain for the brain as well, as bilingualism or plurilingualism can prevent Alzheimer and dementia, as well as other neurological disorders, it can make the grey matter become

[4] *Idem, p. 11.*
[5] *R.C. Gardner & W.E. Lambert (eds.). Attitudes and motivation in second language learning, Rowley, MA: Newbury House, 1972.*

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denser[6], can lead to an improved memory, can make task switching and easy thing, and can improve overall cognitive skills[7].

Benefits for companies

Not only bilingual or plurilingual individuals have a competitive advantage due to their foreign language skills, but companies employing bilinguals of plurilinguals as well. As previously mentioned, numerous foreign capital companies invested in Romania and, consequently, want to employ individuals who are able to speak fluently at least one foreign language.

According to the BNR statistics for the financial year concluded on 31st December 2014, the main domains that absorbed foreign investments are the industry (18,132 million euro, i.e. 30.1% of the total flow of FDI), trading activities (3,706 million euro), civil engineering and real estate transactions (3,541 million euro), financial activities and insurance (1,658 million euro), and IT and communication (1,380 million euro). Therefore, there fields of activity definitely need foreign language speakers as employees within the companies operating on these markets.

The companies can benefit from their bilingual or plurilingual employees, as they are considered to be more flexible than monolinguals[8], they have a better language awareness and can use it better in communicating their ideas across different cultures[9]. It is said that "the more languages you know, the more of a person you are", a saying that is of real benefit for companies employing bilinguals or polyglots, as they are able to see a problem or a situation from different perspectives and, therefore, can come up with innovative solutions. Furthermore, bilingual and plurilingual employees tend to be more tolerant, therefore an environment with many bilinguals and polyglots is an environment that promotes equality and tolerance.

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[6] *O. A. Olulade, N. I. Jamal, D. S. Koo, C. A. Perfetti, C. LaSasso, and G. F. Eden, Neuroanatomical Evidence in Support of the Bilingual Advantage Theory, in* "Cerebral Cortex", 16 July 2015 *DOI:10.1093/cercor/bhv152, accessed on 06/05/2016.*

[7] *Viorica Marian, Anthony Shook, The Cognitive Benefits of Being Bilingual, Cerebrum. 2012 Sep-Oct; 2012: 13, published online at http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3583091/, accessed on 05/05/2016.*

[8] *Kenji Hakuta, Rafael M. Diaz, The Relationship between the Degree of Bilingualism and Cognitive Ability: A Critical Discussion and Some New Longitudinal Data, in K. E. Nelson (Ed.), "Children's Language", Volume 5, Hillsdale, N. J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, pp. 319-344.*

[9] *E. Peal, M. Lambert, The relation of bilingualism to intelligence, in "Psychological Monographs", 1962, 76 (546), pp. 1-23.*

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English-only businesses?

In today's globalized world, where "states and societies are becoming «increasingly enmeshed in worldwide systems and networks of interactions»"[10], the flow of work force, commercial activities and capital place language and communication at the core of the interactive global cultural economy.

In a more recent interview, published on 6th February 2015, in the online version of *Deutsche Welle* magazine, taken to Ulrich Ammon, the renown German linguist, he talked about the languages that are mostly used in businesses across Europe and stated that – in an international ranking of languages – an important factor taken into account is the gross national product of a country. Consequently, according to Ammon, English ranks first, and is followed by Chinese, Spanish and German. As to the languages spoken within a company, Ammon states it is a matter of practicality. As such, there are companies that choose English as the language of communication (for example BMW in Germany), or both English and the official language of that country (e.g. VW in Germany)[11].

It is not, however, the case of Romania, where Romanian is the official language of the country and the language that is widely used inside companies on our territory. Foreign languages, mostly English, German, French, Italian, and Spanish, are mostly used in the relation with the companies' foreign partners or mother company.

Conclusions

Languages have always been a much debated topic. In ancient times, languages were even capable of causing wars between peoples. Today, languages are seen as a true asset, and not a flaw. The more languages one speaks, the more of a person they are. The same is true at European level in general, and in Romania in particular.

Given the constant flow of foreign direct investments in our country, Romania is a favourable country for the learning of foreign languages. Learning foreign languages is encouraged from an early age so that, when they become employable, citizens can have better job opportunities and, in their turn, companies can benefit from the linguistic skills of their employees. Foreign language speaking employees in Romania are seen as a real asset as they have a better language awareness and can use it better in communicating their

[10] *Naz Rassool, Global issues in language, education and development: perspectives from post-colonial countries, Multilingual Matters: Clevedon, Avon, 2007, p. 100.*
[11] *Ulrich Ammon, The Status and Function of English in Germany, in Canaria de Estudios Ingleses, 53, 2006, p. 32.*

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