

## WHAT FUTURE FOR BILINGUAL SKILLS IN ROMANIAN NON-PHILOLOGICAL FACULTIES?

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***Abstract:** The linguistic offer has intensively developed in the last 20 years and the educational system has been required to update both its content and form in order to meet society's needs. Economic phenomena play an important part in the re-organization of current curricula for foreign languages. Teaching and learning foreign languages has undergone major transformations in the academic environment, especially in its non-philological dimension. English as a lingua franca proves to be insufficient for the new generations of undergraduates. The aim of this paper is to question the status of foreign languages taught in Romanian non-philological faculties, and the relationship between English and other languages.*

*Oferta lingvistică s-a dezvoltat foarte mult în ultimii 20 de ani, iar sistemul de educație a fost nevoit să își reconsidere atât conținutul cât și forma pentru a putea face față nevoilor societății. Fenomenele economice joacă un rol important în re-organizarea programelor actuale de limbi străine. Predarea și învățarea limbilor străine a suferit transformări majore în mediul universitar, mai ales în cazul sectoarelor nefilologice. Scopul acestui studiu este de a analiza statutul limbilor străine predate la facultățile nefilologice românești, și relația dintre limba engleză și celelalte limbi.*

***Keywords:** bilingual, foreign languages, non-philological, skills.*

### **To learn or not to learn...more foreign languages? That is the question**

Foreign languages have become a compulsory item on every citizen's Curriculum Vitae. It's a worldwide approach which has major consequences in the Romanian educational system too. Chronologically speaking, one may mention a particular development of foreign languages after the communist regime when Russian has gradually begun to lose its supremacy as a *lingua franca*. Thus, school curricula start to include English, German, Spanish or Italian in their linguistic offer. Consequently, employers perceived linguistic skills as a valuable asset and no wonder that their requirement appears explicitly in job offers under formulations such as "a foreign language is an advantage".

Nowadays, the status of foreign languages has definitely been questioned in various environments. European organisms have greatly fought for the revival

of languages and their natural integration in schools and public life. One of the most fervent organizations whose aim is to protect and promote languages is the European Observatory for Plurilingualism. Among its cross-cutting themes, we mention plurilingualism vs. multilingualism, plurilingualism and linguistic policies, the future of languages, language policies, languages dynamics, languages and history, languages and sciences. In a nutshell, the linguistic potential is strongly related to our professional and personal lives, it's a part of what we are and also taken into consideration by governmental educational policies.

The *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment* (CEFR) is another example and a landmark for foreign languages in the European context. "It was designed to provide a transparent, coherent and comprehensive basis for the elaboration of language syllabuses and curriculum guidelines, the design of teaching and learning materials, and the assessment of foreign language proficiency." Although, its content has been constantly debated and questioned, it gives educators an important tool for teaching and assessing skills in foreign languages because:

- it provides six levels of foreign language proficiency;
- the CEFR's scales "are accompanied by a detailed analysis of communicative contexts, themes, tasks and purposes as well as scaled descriptions of the competences on which we draw when we communicate";
- it's a European Indicator of Language Competence.

Compulsory education in Romania includes the learning of two foreign languages in secondary school. Furthermore, their study should be continued in the academic programs as employers request other foreign languages besides English. The purpose of this article is to emphasize the need for bilingual needs in the academic context, especially for the non-philological students.

### **What need is there for bilingual skills?**

English is the most frequent medium of communication in this era of globalization, embodying various statuses and playing an important role in the social, cultural, historical or economical events. It is the major language of international commerce and a facilitator in the activities of governmental and non-governmental organizations, and also a crucial instrument in educational and social interactions (Pennycook, 1994; Graddol, 1997; Halliday, 2003). Despite its solid position as a *lingua franca*, learning and teaching English is deeply connected to economic transformations:

"Market forces, not ideology, will determine the future of ELF (English as a Lingua Franca). Any attempt to promote ELF as a new pedagogical target must be grounded in the harsh realities of the marketplace, not the wishful conjecture of scholars." (Grimshaw, 2010: 277)

From my experience in teaching French in multinational companies, the dynamics of professional interactions cannot be limited to English. Depending on the nationality of the collaborators in a project, the employees are demanded to possess at least minimal skills in the language of the Other. Although it has not been explicitly stated yet, there are several reasons that may explain this phenomenon:

- setting a common linguistic ground improves communication;
- being more aware of the Other's culture creates a more tolerant environment;
- minimal linguistic skills (A1, A2) may be acquired in a short period of time;
- students may become more emphatic;
- there is also a personal development aspect involved in the professional activity.

However, the volume of work does not allow employees to be involved in courses of languages. Their activity relies, to a certain extent, upon their former linguistic knowledge, gained during secondary school and university. That's the reason why I plead for the acquisition of bilingual skills at the university in order to prepare students for their professional future.

### **Mind linguistic needs and become bilingual!**

Non-philological faculties should include in the language curricula at least two foreign languages, namely English and another language, depending on their pedagogical resources. Both languages should be compulsory and attended throughout the entire academic program. It is not the purpose of this paper to justify the need for English, but to promote other languages as part of students' linguistic portfolio. Both European and non-European languages might successfully be included in the academic linguistic offer as courses, workshops or complementary activities.

Undoubtedly, non-philological departments have their specificity as far as languages are concerned:

- different levels of languages should be considered: general and specialized;
- emphasis on communicative skills (spoken and written competences);
- cultural awareness;
- languages are used as communication tools and not from a scholar's perspective.

One may also consider the status of foreign languages in the curricula of a non-philological faculty as it comes at the end of students' learning priorities. Moreover, students tend to believe that their high school language level is quite appropriate for their needs. Languages are dynamic systems, in continuous movement and evolution, thus their learning is not a finite process. Language improvement should become one of student's priorities and he/she

must be aware that the linguistic skill plays a major role both in its academic and professional life. The main advantage is that learning languages, in this particular context, is in a constant relationship with the other courses from the specialization of the faculty. In other words, we talk about language learning for language use or language in action in multiple situations. Other benefits would be:

- being able to access research works and international projects;
- applying for Erasmus scholarships;
- getting involved in student projects with an international involvement;
- facilitating interaction with foreign students who study at their faculty;
- being able to apply for part-time positions in their field;
- there is no need for the achievement of high levels, elementary and intermediary levels respond to basic communication needs.

On the other hand, foreign language teachers need to understand the current need to form a learning community and motivate undergraduates in the construction of their linguistic assets. Bilingual skills have become a compulsory aspect of language learning, especially in the academic environment. Furthermore, new technology can ease language acquisition, providing virtual tools of learning and evaluating language levels.

Methodological works “learning how to learn” can be created in order to facilitate students’ behavior towards languages. Integrating languages in their study-project should be as natural as possible and connected to their academic needs.

## **Conclusion**

In this paper I have argued that other languages besides English should become compulsory in the academic curricula. In my view, bilingual needs might be one of the characteristic of the future of languages in non-philological faculties. The marketing mix will decide the linguistic hierarchy and its consequences in education. Students’ needs might be a motivational factor in the linguistic choice they will make. For this very reason, we might reach a point where language learning does not need to be promoted, language learning will happen anyway.

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#### NOTES ON THE AUTHOR

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