

The Foreign Languages Centre (retrospective and perspective)

The Foreign Languages Centre of RM Foundation (FLC) has witnessed a significant evolution in its position as an educational and cultural institution, at national and international levels. Since its beginning in October 2002, the Centre managerial team has regarded its activity as a response to the requirements instructed by the present times in terms of the enlarging and specialization of the plurilingualism communication process. Lining up with the globalization- and multiculturalism-related phenomena, the Centre aims to extend and concentrate on 'learning foreign languages' through intensive teaching/learning means, which will add on and strengthen the foreign languages learning at pre-university, university and post-university levels.

It is not to ignore the fact that our managerial team has paid attention to the changes in the employment market within the context of Romania accession into the European Union in 2007. Thus, the perspectives of insertion of the Romanian citizens into the national and international labor market have multiplied many times, as the people holding linguistic competence certificates (English, French, German) will find employment in various fields. The range of positions in need for English, French and German speakers has widened in the economic, trading, medical, law, political and cultural areas. The needs for such people who have a good command of the languages above are surging at the level of the European institutions (in Brussels, Luxembourg, Strasbourg), within the joint companies or the foreign companies located in or outside Romania. Here is why the organization of such courses taught in dynamic, modern and flexible foreign languages in an institutional framework, under the sponsorship of higher education institutions, i.e. Spiru Haret University is an essential prerequisite.

The goal of FLC has been and is still complex. It takes into account all the acquisition levels of foreign languages, by providing a wide range of module-type courses for beginners, intermediate and advanced learners. The teaching activity is based on a coherent curricular planning, which assures the continuity of the acquisition process by allowing the student to shift from one level to another, one module to another. Differentiated testing will establish the starting level of each student; these tests will check on the lexical, grammatical and conversational knowledge of the student, and they will build as the input that every student brings into a certain module. Mid-term tests will be given, to monitor the progress the students make. The goal that the student mentions at the beginning is a criterion in distributing the students on levels and groups of study.

The modules last for three months and they include bi-weekly one and a half hour seminars, amounting to 32 hours. The list of the languages is as follows: English, French, German, Italian, Spanish, Russian, Arabic and Japanese. English seems to hold a top position, with its British and American versions.

The FLC managerial strategy is characterized by its openness to cooperating with academic institutions in the countries of the languages taught at our location. These two-way agreements are beneficial for the students who, upon final testing, will be granted certificates of an international validity, given by commissions representing the academic institution that belongs to the respective linguistic community (British, American, French, etc). To this end, our Centre has developed the relations with the English Philology Institute of Michigan (USA), based on a partnership contract with the Hellenic-American Union (2002-2006), where the students were granted the ECCE Certificates (for competence in English) and

ECPE (for excellence in English). The final purpose for our courses (further detailed in the second part of the present article) is for the students to be granted the ECCE certificates (for competence in English) and ECPE (excellence in English). Another reputable cooperation is the one that the English Department has with the British Council in Bucharest, as the latter is the main organizer of the Cambridge exams. The FLC is an authorized testing centre for the ECL tests (certificate of competence in modern languages) and Toefl (testing English as a foreign language).

The audience for the FLC is extremely varied. On the one hand, the courses are attended by our students at faculties of Spiru Haret University (to improve their language knowledge). For the groups that are being trained for obtaining the certificates with an international validity (Cambridge, ECL and TEOFL), a large number of students at *Faculty of International Studies and Relations* and *Faculty of Foreign Languages* attended and successfully graduated.

On the other hand, these courses have attracted participants, thanks to the exceptional level of training, of different age and background. Between 2002 and 2006, the courses for ECCE and ECPE had a number of 300 students and circa 250 passed the final tests and obtained the Michigan certificates. The Cambridge training courses had 260 students in attendance (2002-2006), for TOEFL 47 students and ECL 57 students. Should we look at the age of the participants, we notice that 85% are adults, which confirms the supposition that these courses largely contribute to their professional conversion.

The FLC of Romania de Maine Foundation has had a great number of beginners (450 people), as well as intermediate and advanced students who intend to improve their knowledge in special purpose languages. Thus, starting with 2004, we had groups of people in courses teaching Medical English.

Between 2002 and 2006, the FLC activity extended to other locations, besides Bucharest, as in Constanta, Craiova, Gaiesti and Ramnicu-Valcea. In Bucharest, our Centre has gained a contract with Petrom, by auction (2004), and had the possibility to teach to beginners, intermediate and advanced of their personnel.

Our success is due to the programs and materials used as a teaching support (course books for different levels, published by the Cambridge and Michigan universities, along with CDs, audio and video tapes, DVDs). An important contribution has been brought by the team of young teachers, holders of master and/or PhD diplomas, besides teaching certificates issued by British and American supervisors following yearly instruction courses.

For the grammar in practice area, the teaching materials have been supplemented with exercises and tests drafted within FLC and the Faculty of Foreign Languages at Spiru Haret University.

The quality of the teaching methodology support and the exigent selection of students have triggered a good percentage of students with good and very good marks, which places us on the first position in the south-eastern Europe in terms of the Michigan University examination worldwide.

Our Centre has benefitted from its location within Spiru Haret University, thus providing an appropriate framework at an university and post-university levels. The inclusion of the FLC in the USH main building has many advantages: easier access of the teachers involved with FLC to the classrooms, better access to the FFLs library and multi-media labs.

In a nutshell, the intensive teaching activities developed up to present have had a notable progress in foreign languages knowledge (mainly English), registered in a great number of students of USH as well as the post-university training of adults with various employment background.

EMILIA BONDREA – General Director