

TEACHING ENGLISH IN HIGHER ESTABLISHMENTS OF ROMANIA

Halyna SEMEN

Associate Professor, PhD.

(Chernivtsi Yuriy Fed'kovych National University, Ukraine)

[Iryna MURADKHANIAN](#)

Associate professor, PhD.

(Chernivtsi Yuriy Fed'kovych National University, Ukraine)

i.muradhanyan@chnu.edu.ua

[Lesia HLADKOSKOK](#)

Associate Professor, PhD.

(Chernivtsi Yuriy Fed'kovych National University, Ukraine)

l_gladkoskok@ukr.net

Abstract

The present article discusses the issue of teaching English in Romanian higher educational institutions and its topicality nowadays. Alongside the analysis of different reasons of Romanian success story in this respect, some phenomena in two languages – English and Romanian – are being elucidated. The similarities found can be helpful in teaching/learning activity.

Keywords: globalization, EFL (English as a foreign language), borrowing, term, lexical unit, bilingual dictionary

Rezumat

În acest articol, se examinează problema predării limbii engleze în instituțiile de învățământ superior din România. Se analizează cauza succesului în acest domeniu și se cercetează câteva fenomene în două limbi: engleză și română. Similaritatea prezentată poate ajuta în activitatea de predare/învățare a ambelor limbi.

Cuvinte-cheie: globalizare, ELS (engleza ca limbă străină), împrumut, termen, unitate lexicală, dicționar bilingv

1. English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in Romania

Teaching English in Romanian higher educational institutions is tightly connected with the process of globalization. The world has changed greatly for the last time, society has turned into a high-tech civilization, new technologies, as well as new approaches to the system of education have appeared. More and more people have the opportunity to travel all over the world nowadays, to communicate with native speakers in English speaking countries. No less is the influence of mass media – newspapers, TV and Internet, which contribute to our reading and hearing abilities; people can compare different facts and make conclusions. Besides, more and more countries endeavour to join the European Union, as a result people of those

countries have individual contacts with each other and facilitate learning foreign languages, English in particular. People are trying to gain proficiency in English, as it helps to study at higher educational establishments, to get a decent job, to have access to different fields of culture and arts. Indubitably, English is playing the dominant role in the modern world and Romania does its best to take the right niche in this process to communicate with the universe. That's not a secret that globalization is one of the strongest traits of our time, people should think globally and be prepared to solve global problems. Thus, global mediation is the framework within which the teachers of English and the students must consider the subject of the English language to gain more competences characterizing the future teacher of English. Globalization tendency makes English a language of communication and development giving the students chances to enhance their proficiency and to gain success.

English as a foreign language (EFL) is taught in most countries of the world, in Romania as well. Here the language is taught at all levels of the system and it is a means of Romanian undergraduate students' development, being the world-wide language of trade, diplomacy, business, technology, music and all the other spheres of people's life. As it was stated before, English has become the main medium of communication, and no wonder that a great number of academic curricula include English. As students of other countries, Romanian undergraduate students were also taught English since their early childhood via pop culture, movies, music and the Internet and all that facilitated students' interest in English. English as a foreign language takes a very important place in the Romanian education system, it's one of the main subjects in students' curricula and it explains the fact why the authorities try to draw Romanian education nearer to European standards. Romania has a population of 22 million and an area of 237,000 km², it is the second largest country in Central and East Europe and, on January 1st 2007 it became member of the European Union. In its turn, the latter helps Romania greatly to reform its organization system. Taking into account the fact that the country had been influenced by the French culture for a long time, we must estimate the level to which the teaching of English was raised, as nowadays the majority of students study the English language as a first foreign language.

English as the main language in global education is fulfilling new functions. A lot of undergraduate and graduate students pay attention to the advantages of the international higher education and programmes. For example, the Erasmus programme is another outcome of the globalization and international cooperation between universities. Thus, studying abroad opens all the doors to universal education and culture and is simply a modern necessity.

English has a great influence on the European continent, first of all, because of its presence in the media: the Internet, forms of popular youth culture and popular entertainment, advertising etc. That is why English in Romania can be heard daily on the radio, in music, in films and on television. As the dubbing is not common in Romania and most films are subtitled, English is used as a language for the enjoyment of the cinema, to say nothing of English being used increasingly by Romanian authors.

At the same time, people express their fear as to the dominance of English on a global scale, of losing individuality and originality, but English language programmes, international conferences and journals using English as their official language online or in class courses give reasons to believe, that this process is rather an aid than a threat in international cooperation.

Different reasons stimulate people to learn foreign languages. It is important, first of all, concerning international students when talking of their motivations. There are students who speak English as a first language, those for whom it is the second language and those who speak it as a foreign language. And only those students for whom the language is a foreign or a second one can appreciate its global future.

Alongside with other countries Romania has adopted a national education policy, which stipulates new curricula changes and new approaches to teaching English. It helps students to acquire not only the information or simply knowledge about the language, but to gain new heights of communicative ability.

Both state and private universities try to attract international students, it enlarges the international scope of those establishments and their marketing strategy. Surely, the fact has its advantages and responsibilities, as now professors have to deliver their lectures in English and it is another manifestation of English as a global language. Of course, it influenced the Romanian higher educational system, which offers two approaches to internationalize its educational programmes and offers: instrumental and integrative. While the first orientation means learning a foreign language as a tool or a means of job development, the second implies cultural activity for people communicating in that language.

Globalization covers both everyday life and education, and, as a result, Romanian higher institutions are widely promoting teaching courses in English, which have political, economic and cultural meaning for the country. Certainly, teaching Romanian students English as a foreign language and offering international students new possibilities means keeping in pace with the demands and requirements of the modern world and a step forward in the European evolution process. Higher educational institutions in Romania do their utmost to help their students to compete in a globalized labour market, mobility trends and work out intercultural and

language skills. Traditional methods of teaching are used to promote research in foreign countries and exchange programmes.

The Romanian academic system becomes an active part of the Erasmus and Erasmus Plus mobility programmes. Acknowledging the key role of the English language in this context, the Romanian higher education system promotes multilinguistic and multicultural aspects of teaching with the help of these programmes. Nowadays the Romanian higher educational system endeavours to globalize its content, where IT, the online educational system and distance learning are topical. Actually, to attract students from all over the world educational programs should be conveyed in English and it is no longer a fashion, but a necessary stage in the development of the world education system.

English is conquering new and new horizons of technological and scientific development. It is the language of new literature and entertainment, new thinking in economics and management. Also, it gives green light to new technologies and, consequently, there appear new ways of speaking and writing, new grammatical forms and vocabulary.

As the globalization influences the educational sphere, a lot of Romanian higher institutions have to look for new strategies for a multicultural educational process, where the role of the English language is invaluable.

2. A General Overview of Literature on the Subject

The problem under discussion becomes the center of attention in different sources among which are those providing the necessary information about Romania Higher education (*Romania Higher...*, 2014). Thorough explanations of the structure, types and cycles of the Higher Education System in Romania, admission requirements, curricula, teaching methods, student assessment, certification (the Diploma Supplement is issued in Romanian and English), employability, lifelong learning programs prove to be helpful for a better understanding of how the system works.

Much attention has been paid to the teaching of the English language at the early stages of instruction (Loboda, 2017), the evolution of the curricula (Bucur et al., 2015, pp. 52-54), teacher training and main strategies in primary education and pre-school stage of learning English in Romania based on personal experience (Loboda, 2017, p. 128). Romania is included into the manual of the educational systems of the European Union Council (Sisoeva et al., 2012, pp. 131-135). The authors emphasize that after the Romanian language, foreign languages belong to the main subjects in the curricula (*idem*, p. 133).

Valuable data can be found in the article written by Oana-Roxana Ivan entitled "Why do Romanians speak foreign languages so well?" (Ivan, 2013). The author states that English is the foreign language that Romanians speak most and shows the reasons of it: the early foreign language learning, the increase in the number of hours allotted for it, attending courses organized

and paid by various companies, summer camps in foreign countries. English as a foreign language in Universities and Romanian academia became the issue discussed by Maria-Miruna Ciocoi-Pop. In her investigation the author draws the attention to the fact that “English is always the student’s first option for the foreign language class” (Ciocoi-Pop, 2015, p. 565) for the overwhelming number of studying programmes, international conferences or journals, online or in class courses use English as their official language (*idem*, p. 566). In her research Narcisa Țirban has examined the future of teaching English in Romanian higher education as a second language and the effect of the globalization upon it (Țirban, 2013, pp. 74-79). Explaining the reasons for the proficiency in English of Romanian students the author elucidates the influence of the European Union, the globalization, modern technologies on the presence of English noting that it is also used for “the enjoyment of cinema, since the dubbing is not very common in Romania” (*idem*, p. 76) arguing that in future new vocabulary, grammatical forms and ways of speaking and writing will lead to further development of the so-called ‘net English’ (*idem*, p. 77). Among the reasons for Romanian students being “the best among the European speakers of English, with the least country-specific accent” (*ibidem*) the author cites the sudden burst of alternative textbooks, the enthusiasm of the English teachers, intensive study, bilingual classes, division into groups, scholarships offered to Romanian teachers which “meant an important turn point in many Romanian teachers of English careers” (*idem*, p. 78). There also exist investigations concerning similarities between English and Romanian but the authors mostly concentrate on separate spheres of activity, economy in particular.

3. Lexical Similarities between English and Romanian.

One can’t but fully agree with the explanations provided in different sources, with all the above mentioned reasons of Romanian students high level of background, their proficiency in English. The aim of our investigation is to add one more detail to these considerations, namely, the linguistic aspect of the problem. The device of calculations and the comparative method helped to state the number of similar words in both languages on the basis of the English-Romanian and Romanian-English dictionary published in Bucarest (author A. Bantaș). The choice of words always being a bit subjective to a certain extent, it mostly covers the frequently used vocabulary of the language. The author of the dictionary, Andrei Bantaș states in the foreword that the dictionary is based on authoritative sources such as Hornby, Muller and Webster. The explanation is provided that due to the small scope of the dictionary he avoided including the words that have a form close to each other in both languages (e. g. precept, grammatical), but preserved the terms with similar forms and different translation (e. g. *fabric* = țesătură). The number of derivatives were also reduced (e. g. *headless* = fără cap, *unimportant* = neînsemnat). In general, the

compound words were grouped by their initial word and the most frequently used words were selected. English-Romanian dictionary is 95 pages bigger than the Romanian-English, the latter having less words and no transcription as the Romanian reading rules do not need one. The English-Romanian part has got approximately 15, 000 words, respectively the Romanian-English one has 12,000 words. After the selection of similar words it turned out that their number out of 15, 000 is 3286 which constitutes 22% and out of 12, 000 their number is 4112 which makes up 33, 3 %. This leads to one possible outcome: $\approx 22-33,3$ % of the vocabulary in two languages is very much alike. Out of all 10 parts of speech mentioned in the foreword almost a half has a big number of similar words, the rest have either none or very few similar lexical units. Three out of 5 types of verbs have a lot of similar words. The overall number of similar words in the English-Romanian dictionary being 3286, the distribution according to the parts of speech is as follows: nouns (s) make up 2043, adjectives (adj.) - 558, transitive verbs (vt) - 402, transitive and intransitive verbs (vt, vi) - 89, intransitive verbs (vi) - 82, nouns, adjectives (s, adj.) - 62, adverbs (adv.) - 22, interjections (interj.) - 10, transitive and reflexive verbs (vt, vr) - 6, prepositions (prep.) - 3, nouns and transitive verbs (s, vt) - 2, pronoun (pron.) -1, numeral (num.) - 1, adjective, adverb (adj., adv.) - 1, reflexive verb (vr) - 1.

The degree of similarity may be different. Some lexical units in Romanian are borrowings from English: *lord, camping, trust, lift, snob, toast, set, jet, golf* etc. Certain words need explanation: *grog* [grɔg] s. = rachieu cu apă și lămâie, *grog*; *penny* ['peni] s. = monedă de un penny. Some words have certain differences and are only partially similar. Romanian words may be shorter: *gesture* ['dʒestʃə] s, = gest; *luxury* ['lʌks(ə)rɪ] s. = lux. Being identical in spelling they may have different pronunciation: *raid* [reɪd] s. = raid [raɪd]. Some letters may change: *jockey* ['dʒɔki] s. = jocheu; *ferry-boat* ['ferɪbɔt] s. = feribot. Both languages have similar names of the months: *December* [dɪ'sembə] s. = decembrie. This similarity is observed only in the literary names of the Romanian months, not only the ones used in folklore. Adjectives characterizing people or objects, mostly have synonyms in translation: *popular* ['pɒpjələ] adj. = popular, simpatizat, admirat. Similar are the names of the citizens of certain countries, representatives of the race, the continent, the nationality: *Canadian* [kə'neɪdɪən] s. adj. = canadian (ă). In English this word denotes both masculine and feminine gender whereas in Romanian for feminine letter ă appears in this case or there are some other changes. In compound words one part of the English word may be a capital letter, in translation into Romanian the words are in full form and are placed vice versa: *A-bomb* ['eɪ.bɒm] s. = bombă atomică. Doubling of letters is changed in Romanian: *giraffe* [dʒɪ'rɑ:f] s. = girafă. Not all derivatives may be alike: only 3 words out of 6 derivatives from the word *real* are the same. Some prefixes are identical and some are different: *pre* (E) = pre (R), *sub* (E) = sub (R), but *super* (E) = supra (R), *in* (E) = ne (R), *un* (E) - de (R). At the same time there are certain regularities in digraphs: *th* (E) = t (R), *ph* (E) = f (R).

One of the crucial issues is stylistic differentiation. Similar words for the most part are bookish, literary used less often than corresponding colloquial or neutral words: *obtain* [əb'tein] *vt.* = a obține is used more rarely than get which has no similarity in translation into Romanian. The curriculum of English teaching at the university demands working with texts on speciality which include terms. They are mostly similar in both languages, to say nothing of internationalisms.

Similar words include names of different domains of knowledge and types of activity, abstract notions, they may belong to medicine, science, education, linguistics (grammar, style), politics, art (theatre, architecture), military sphere, history, sport, geography, religion, seafaring, economy, finance, biology, clothes, meals, entertainment and others.

There is also one phenomenon we should dwell on in the article. Romanian is open to other languages, especially English. The reasons being explained, it is necessary to quote some examples taken from the manuals, newspapers, radio programs and everyday speech. English words get Romanian endings and become part of the Romanian active vocabulary: *week-end-ul*, *CV-ul*, *gadget-ul*, *job-ul*, *rogaining-ul*, *lounge-ul*, *hit-ul*, *hackerul*, *business-ul*, *show-ul*, *logo-ul*, *body-gardul* etc., *-l* being an article and *-u* – the linking element between this article and the word. Plural forming suffix is added and is written hyphenated: *site-uri*, *like-uri*, *sweatshirt-uri*, *modemuri*, *disc-uri* etc. Article is added to the plural form: *topurile*, *iconurile* etc. Some cases of the Romanian nouns are formed by means of such endings, but they are added to English words: *brand-ului*, *jeans-ului*, *starurilor*, *shopping-ului*, *play-off-ului*, *hip-hop-ului*, *raperului*, *showbizului*, *selfie-urilor*, *modellings-ului* etc. English entered the Romanian speech very visibly and actively.

4. Concluding remarks

A lifelong experience of teaching English both to English and non-English majors, some of them being Romanians, self-study, attending in class lessons, courses of the Romanian language, systematic listening to both English and Romanian speech, work with dictionaries, watching films and attending festivals prompted the writing of this article with the aim of a thorough study of the Romanian experience of teaching English at higher-educational institutions. Much needs to be further explored: the specific domains where similarity prevails, terms in certain spheres of activity, new vocabulary and changes that appear in the languages due to the innovative technologies. The difference between the two languages is likely to attract the attention of the scholars probably even more than similarity, for students still experience great difficulties in learning English, especially when it comes to the tricky issue of the difference between the sounds and letters in English. But it goes without saying that some measures taken in some countries (change of the alphabet), the availability of students-

polyglots in the group enhances the general level of knowledge of any foreign language, widens the horizons of the students and finally leads them to positive results and a fairly good background.

The present investigation is also essential for the receptive technology as it denies the desire of some scholars to exclude Romanian from the European group of languages. Joachim Grzega, while creating his table of similar words, excluded Romanian for reasons of readability. The author acknowledged that the Romanian language was respected by Klein and his team, but he considers that “the classification of Rumania as part of European civilization is doubted; at least it is a borderline case” (Grzega, 2005, p. 3). Indeed, there are some difficulties in writing some Romanian letters, but for us the belonging of Romanian to Europe from the geographical, historical, political, economic and cultural points of view is beyond any doubt.

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