

100 YEARS OF LANGUAGE EDUCATION IN THE BUCHAREST UNIVERSITY OF ECONOMIC STUDIES

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Abstract

This paper is an opinion essay on the importance of language education within the education of professional people, mainly economists and business people, by looking at the importance of the study of languages during a century of existence of a university.

Keywords: language education, higher education, history of language education

A century old university is neither old, nor young. As with human beings what counts with institutions is the quality of the life span and the meaningfulness of that life, not necessarily its length. And yet institutions which lasted for a hundred years through a turbulent historical period and have developed and become stronger and more significant in various ways and for a large variety of stakeholders are relatively few in the large number of what is labelled today as a university. As such their endurance deserves a moment of reflection and this is the objective of the present article.

Universities worldwide go through a period of redesigning their mission and of looking into a hazy, nebulous and therefore difficult to grasp future in order to be able to have a coherent vision of further development. Like most of the other organizations and in line with a certain mainstream thinking that development means more and larger, universities tend to value quantitative criteria to measure their success and their chances for further development. However, in a world of dwindling resources and declining demographics, at least in certain traditionally highly populated areas such as Europe, it is important to reflect upon the realism of wanting more numbers, both in students and researchers, and to organize reflection groups to build scenarios for tumultuous times.

The celebration during 2013 of a century of existence of the Bucharest University of Economic Studies is such a moment of reflection for the community of languages educators within our institution. The reflection process started some years ago and in the centennial year materialized in a book that courageously tried, and to a certain extent managed, to put together glimpses of the history of language education in our university where language teaching and learning were from the very beginning high on the list of the curriculum priorities.

History is more than a collection of dates and data – assuming that they are available, which is not always the case. It is rather an interpretation of what had happened that each generation interested in drawing a professional profile and a history of its field of activity

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brings to the present. Language education, though very important and always present in the curricula of our university, has been until today considered mainly a support field which helps economists and business people get better and fuller access both to documentation for research and also equips them for their jobs in a globalized world and internationalized economy. This is why it was strongly felt that a field of education, applied languages to business and economics, that is a century old has to record at least part of its professional preoccupation for the benefit of today's public. Interest in the history of language education is relatively new as new is the field itself though the activity of teaching and learning languages is as old as human history and languages. In Romania the field is even younger than in the rest of the world. It is the duty of the members of this professional community to record their history and the volume that is presented in the following lines is an attempt to start such a mission. We are very much aware that this mission needs more than commitment and professional awareness. Resources need to be identified in order to allow the community time for research and reflection. It is also true, however, that in order to get to resources one needs to articulate a vision and plan for the mission to reach. This is what our community started doing to celebrate our history of one hundred years in one of the most prestigious universities in Romania. And as a concrete sign of a maturing community with a distinctive voice in the larger chorus of academics, a new study programme has been launched in 2013 in the Bucharest University of Economic Studies – applied modern languages to international business and economics.

The volume *The History of Modern languages in the ASE. A centenary perspective* is part of a larger research project which aims to document and proposes a monograph of the development of modern languages in the field of economics and business in Romania. The volume is the result of an interdisciplinary effort conducted over a period of more than two years, with limited resources, but instead with the full creative spirit and the managerial ingenuity of those who contributed to it. The volume consists of anniversary greetings from educational partners from home and abroad, a study on the role of language in shaping professional economists and business people and a brief history of teaching applied modern languages in the Bucharest University of Economic Studies. This part includes, besides the history of the people and structures through which those activities were carried out, a chapter on the PROSPER project, which impacted the change and professional development of the field of applied modern languages throughout the country, contributing significantly to its structuring; a chapter on the PROSPER-ASE Centre of English Language and a chapter about the French Lectorate. One of the highlights of the book is a special section entitled „Teachers' Profiles”, dedicated to the people who made the history of the field of modern languages. For various reasons, some due to the objective lack of information, some more subjective, due to helplessness or indifference, this chapter is incomplete as presence and composite as presentation. Choosing the people that have been presented were mainly an option of convenience based on the availability of the information and, not least, the popularity of that person in the collective mind of the domain. One chapter presents the *English and German publications of the Department of Modern Languages and Business Communication* and another chapter those of the *French, Italian, Spanish and Russian Publications of the Department of Modern Languages and Business Communication*. And because some of the most significant parts of our professional lives have been spent preparing for conferences and organizing them another important chapter is the one entitled *National and International Conferences of the Department of Modern Languages and Business Communication*. The book ends with *A History in Pictures of Teaching Modern Languages in the ASE Bucharest*.

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