

The Foreign Language Centre of *Spiru Haret* University in Romania : Past, Present and Future

The accredited private *Spiru Haret University*, which was founded in Bucharest in 1991 by the *România de Mâine Foundation*, had the initiative of setting up a **Foreign Language Centre** with multiple objectives in the domain of second language teaching/learning. The Centre was set up in October 2002 under the auspices of the above mentioned University and Foundation. Its mission has been two-fold. First and foremost the Centre has aimed at stimulating foreign language learning by *Spiru Haret* students in faculties with a philological profile, and, more importantly, in faculties with a non-philological orientation. The second goal has been to encourage and support foreign language teaching/learning on a wider scale, by organizing intensive courses for Romanians outside the University, who are interested in acquiring a second or even third foreign language. In fact, the essence of this mission has always been to contribute substantially to the mastery of foreign languages, with all the skills implied, by as many individuals as possible, so as to meet the requirements of multilingual communication in the present-day international context.

Methodological Standards

The distinctive feature of the policy pursued by our Centre is its commitment to the academic standards of foreign language teaching, which presuppose the recourse to updated methodology, the elaboration and use of adequate teaching materials and procedures, the realistic placement and grouping of students according to their needs and to the corresponding level, the correct final assessment of their competence.

Hence the managerial staff has studied the initial stage of the learners which determines important differences at the starting point. Romanian students in general acquire two foreign languages at high school, so that they already possess second and third language knowledge at the low-intermediate level, if not at a low-advanced level. The problem with students in philology is, therefore, to refine this knowledge and to ensure intensive language practice. Concerning students in other domains, they need to consolidate their basic knowledge of at least one language and to develop study-skills so as to be able to read specialized literature and to enrich their knowledge of terminology in the respective domains.

The Centre faces greater problems with the second type of addressee, who ranges typologically from high school pupils to elderly people with various professional backgrounds. These beneficiaries of our courses, forming a heterogeneous audience, have to be carefully tested and appropriately placed in groups and modules.

Module-Based Programs

Given the multiple objectives of the Centre and its relatively varied public, we have decided that teaching programs should be conceived as module-based structures

consisting of 32 hours (classes extending over 10 weeks). Each module is specialized according to the following criteria: a) learner level; b) learner needs and target; c) methodology (materials included).

For each of the modules we have devised a syllabus and a set of partial and final tests. The modules preparing students for obtaining the Cambridge Certificates (FCE or CAE) or the Michigan Certificates (ECCE or ECPE) use the teaching materials issued by the respective centres and end with tests administered by representatives of the examining boards appointed by the selfsame academic institutions.

The other modules end with tests administered by our teaching staff. The students who get the pass obtain diplomas issued by the Foreign Language Centre of the *Spiru Haret* University.

Range of Modules

Our Centre organizes the following set of modules per each semester:

- the module for beginners in English, French, Italian, German, Spanish, Arabic, Japanese
- the module for the elementary level in the same languages
- modules for the intermediate and advanced levels in English (in partnership with the British Council in Bucharest), which end with examinations for getting the FCE or CAE issued by Cambridge University (UK)
- modules for the intermediate and advanced levels in American English (in partnership with the Hellenic American Union), which end with examinations for getting the Certificates of Linguistic Competence (ECCE) and Certificates of Excellence (ECPE) issued by the University of Michigan - English Language Institute (ELI).
- the module for advanced French courses, in partnership with the French Institute in Bucharest that issues Language Diplomas (DL) authorised by the Ministry of National Education in France.
- Foreign languages for special purposes (business, medicine, law, etc)

Teaching Staff

The team of teachers exclusively includes young members of the *Department of Germanic, Slavic and Oriental Languages* and of the *Department of Romance languages* belonging to the *Faculty of Foreign Languages and Literatures* of the *Spiru Haret* University. All of them have MA degrees in the respective language, being involved at present in the final stage of their doctoral studies. The teachers of English and French have all been trained by teacher-trainers of the Cambridge or Michigan Universities and have been accredited as language teachers of the Centre.

Our teachers employ learner-centred methods, resorting to interactive procedures in order to stimulate language acquisition and refinement by the students.

Facilities

The courses are hosted by the *Spiru Haret* University, which supplies adequate classrooms in the headquarters building (Ghica Street 13), located in the centre of Bucharest. The Centre puts at the students' disposal a room for video and TV

teaching programs, a multimedia lab used for listening and practising the language by IT techniques and a library equipped with a whole range of recent teaching materials issued in Romania or abroad.

Assessment of results

The results obtained yearly by students enrolled in the various modules can be estimated as very good. Thus, acknowledging the excellent results of our candidates in 2003, the University of Michigan – English Language Institute (ELI) praised the high quality activity of the Foreign Language Centre of the *Spiru Haret* University. They placed our Centre, in their annual report, among the first three European educational institutions with which they cooperate.

Prospects

Our Centre makes steady efforts to meet the requirements of the present-day international context as to communicative goals and means. By offering the best learning and testing conditions to our students, the Centre tries to endow them with an internationally valid 'linguistic passport'.

In the near future, the Centre aims at further diversifying its activity by organizing workshops on topics related to teaching foreign languages. This is an attempt to turn to good account the experience acquired by the team of teachers along the four years of teaching activity.

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