

Adjusting Teaching Aids to the Regulations of CEFR

The project” *Didactics of Modern Languages and Romanian as a Foreign Language in Higher Education; Strategies of Alignment to the European Linguistic Policy*” starts from the findings of the drawbacks that exist in the nowadays foreign language education in Romania and aims to offer more efficient methods in agreement with the European linguistic policies to:

- 1) the faculty who teach and the students who learn foreign languages such as English, French, German and Russian, in the Romanian universities, to facilitate their integration in the European space;
- 2) implicitly, other categories of Romanian public interested in learning foreign languages to enter easily the euro-atlantic work market;
- 3) foreigners willing to learn Romanian for study programmes (joint/ master/ PhD) or work and business relations.

The sources of documentation consist of:

- a) documents of linguistic policy of the European Council and European Universities;
- b) teaching aids and theoretical frameworks in the field of modern languages and that of Romanian as a foreign language;
- c) specialized existent public and private education institutions.

Under the given circumstances, we intend to aim the project towards a coherent and homogenous objective, that of providing, on the basis of findings, the following:

- 1) a critical synthesis and bibliography of the problematics;
- 2) homogenous descriptives for the target languages;
- 3) accessible instruments for a selective and efficient learning, structured on two fields: general language and specific purpose languages.

The European linguistic policy is unequally known and applied in the Romanian universities, the language education specialists are insufficiently involved in adapting the education system and the teaching aids to the concrete and hasty needs urged by Romania’s

integration in Europe and the application of the Bologna system to the Romanian higher education. But, these processes require a rapid and radical change both in the mentality and the teaching aids used in the language education.

On national scale there are various and disparate foreign language teaching aids which, nowadays, for academic usage:

- a) are insufficient or nonexistent in the academic libraries and cannot meet the requirements of students who learn at least one foreign language as part of the compulsory education;
- b) are inadequate for this category of public, students by excellence, who, due to study mobility, need to have a satisfactory level of linguistic competence in two or several modern languages and in most of the cases they need to hold language competence certificates in order to obtain scholarships, or as an entrance exam for the B.A/ B.Sc. or for the master and doctoral programmes.

Regarding the general public, the teaching aids are insufficiently diversified and adapted to the communication needs or activity in the extended European space. The Romanian schools, language centers, bookshops and public libraries are endowed with poor or inefficient learning instruments.

Internationally, Romanian is scantily represented as a foreign language, although the request is more imperative than in the past. Teaching Romanian in the local and foreign institutions is generally done without or by means of old teaching aids, unadjusted to different purposes and at a lower level as compared to the European standards.

The research team was selected from professors who work in the field of methods of teaching foreign languages (language departments and centers), well trained and experienced linguists, able to evaluate the real situation, the present needs of language education in Romania in agreement with the European linguistic policy. The members of the team are also qualified in elaborating tests that meet the requirements of CEFR, authors of efficient course books and teaching aids, M.A. and PhD students who have to get integrated in research or didactic programmes.

The research team consists of members for each of the five target languages, as well as IT specialists:

Romanian:	Liana POP, Victoria Moldovan
French:	Iulia Mateiu, Valerica Hopârtean
English:	Diana Cotrău, Camelia Teglaș, Dorina Loghin, Michaela Radu, Constantin Husti-Răduleț
Russian:	Diana Tetean, Judit Bartalis
German:	Denisa Petrehuș, Raluca Surdean
IT Assistants:	Manuela Mihăescu, Cristina Varga

Stages of the project:

Documentation: the study and evaluation of the available teaching aids and of the existent descriptors as a basis for the development of our activity.

Elaboration of the teaching aids:

- Bibliographies
- Student's Textbooks of general and specific purpose language for the five languages that make the object of the project and which will display the following structure:
 - Communicative thematic units (12 units per each level of competence)
 - Language Reference Compendium (B1 level)
 - Key to Exercises
 - General Vocabulary
 - Students Workbook

The Student's Textbooks for the five languages – English, French, German, Romanian and Russian – are aimed to provide the public with communicative, topic-based units in a user-friendly format. The process of elaboration proved to be difficult, especially in adjusting the content to A1 level. The general tendency was that of using a large number of words and phrases, creating difficult dialogues, making use of descriptive discourse. Another difficulty was adjusting to the book format which is based on headings and

columns displayed on two mirror pages. Contextualization was another problematic issue. Lining up five languages that imply different cultural, social and political context in the context of globalization, but preserving the sense of identity and nationality, was a true challenge. That led also to difficulties in the drawing up process, as we had to use the same signs, conventions, markers in all the languages. Serious problems appeared when the members of the Russian team had to use Cyrillic alphabet and no Cyrillic keyboard was available.

Another difficulty was to adjust to the communicative aim, covering areas as *identity, public places, services (hotel, taxi), national currency, the weather, the calendar, daily activities, etc.*, bearing in mind the golden rule “Grammar comes second!” The general tendency was to stick to tradition, instead of focusing on communication, which is a must of nowadays.

But, despite all the difficulties, the result is a textbook where grammar exercises are communicative, the dialogues are contextualized and the elements of culture and civilization, which support the context, make it accessible, relevant, but most important, user-friendly.

The set of **Workbooks** for the languages covered by our project is designed with a twofold intention. On the one hand, they are meant to reinforce the vocabulary and grammar items touched upon and briefly signaled in the Student Textbooks (they are elaborated in the *Grammar Reference* sections). On the other hand, the exercises therein are conceived as ways of developing both the skills needed for successful social communication in a ‘foreign’ milieu as well as such skills as are being assessed in the tests using the CEFR for their evaluation grill. We have in mind, here, primarily the internal Babeş-Bolyai regulations concerning students’ language acquisition and linguistic competence. Consequently, a uniform structure permeates each set of Workbook units, laid out as follows: *vocabulary; use of language; reading comprehension; speaking; writing.*

It should be noted that the Workbook units parallel the thematic sequence of the units in the students’ textbooks. Thus, each workbook unit not only echoes numerically a Textbook unit (e.g. *Unit 1 – Workbook Unit 1*), but also picks up and elaborates on the theme set for

the latter. The exercises and drills featured facilitate a linguistic incursion into such domains as are likely to engage the students' sociolinguistic and professional: *personal, public, occupational, and educational*.

- Elaboration of teaching aids in electronic format:
 - All textbooks will be accompanied by a CD containing interactive exercises, vocabulary and multimedia teaching aids for the thematic units.
 - They will also be accessible on-line, on the project's web page.

The Database – ordering element of the project

Although initially structured as annex element of the project, the usage of a database proved to be very useful and provided solutions to the difficulties encountered by the research team when establishing, sorting and organizing the existent teaching aids which becomes larger as the research work develops.

For the first stage, the labeling and organizing of bibliographical references, there was designed a database which comprises at present 300 titles, but which is continuously expanding. The users have quick access to information according to different criteria such as: *language, author, volume / article, category of bibliographical reference, year of publication*.

The end of the first year of research work, which meant the time to draw a balance-sheet, was the moment when it became clear that we needed a synthetic, clear-structured form of make-up which does not include redundant elements (different preliminary versions, test elements, unused teaching aids) because they represent only stages of the research work. This marked the beginning of the use of the data base as the centralization device for the entire information elaborated contained in our project.

As a next stage, we developed a graphic interface which permits the users- the members of the research team – to introduce easily data, we created new fields and we obtained a data base with objects. The reference material of *CEFR* translated into several languages was inserted (as hypertext links, *Word* and *pdf documents*), we developed

special sections for the final draft of the units and of the grammar reference sections (**Word** document format) and we added information about the members of the research team.

Thus, we developed a complex work instrument that facilitates the insertion, editing and exploitation of information and teaching aids for each work group in parallel.

The manner of work is as follows: once a thematic unit, a part of the grammar reference section is crystallized -may it not be a final version - the members insert this element as an object in the data base. At this stage all the members of the research team may access the unit, update and modify it independently. Meanwhile we have the certitude that those who want to access the data base will see the last version of the unit.

What we consider as a future development of this IT instrument for a better management of the data for the teaching aids elaborated within the project is to extend the data base and design a section to stock the **images gallery**. After checking, editing and approving the images which illustrate the units, the members may stock them in the gallery. As a future stage we anticipate the necessity of designing a **sound gallery** where we can stock the audio files on the electronic format (**CD, DVD**) accompanying the textbooks. Later on, it will be useful to design a **styles and formatting gallery** (For textbooks, grammar reference compendium and workbook) and to develop a section devoted to the teaching aids to be published on the project's web page, among which is worth mentioning especially **interactive exercises**.

Thus, on completion of the project, the data base will constitute a viable solution both for the management and centralization of data and for the exploration and recovery of it. The general structure used in the elaboration of textbooks and CDs for the first level of language (A1) is preserved for the elaboration of further textbooks. The multimedia aids (photography, sound, video, animation) unused at a certain level due to space limitations or inadequate topic, may be preserved for a future usage.

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