

# Business communication, education in foreign language in Hungary

[Szilágyi Katalin]

*Abstract*—Foreign language learning has always been an important concern in Hungary, since Hungarian language is less known in the world. Languages are taught at all levels in public and higher education.

Language teaching has traditions in Hungary. Before the socialist era, all European languages were taught, although German was the most valued language. After 1945, it was compulsory to learn Russian language in public and higher education. The developing commercial relations with the western part of Europe, however, urged to improve the teaching of German, English, French and other languages in every field of education.

After 1990, due to the arrival of foreign capital and international firms, Hungary had to face a quickly increasing need of foreign language speaking specialists.

Students are admitted to higher education with a relatively high level of general language knowledge, therefore universities have to provide language courses for special purposes so as to prepare students to an international professional career. Language teaching involves offering courses in line with the main subjects, therefore in the College of International Management and Business, the language of business, cross-country studies, the language of press and media, communication and intercultural communication are taught in foreign languages.

Business education is offered mainly in higher education, although there are secondary schools specialised in business studies as well.

Some higher education programmes combine professional studies with language teaching: the College of International Management and Business

run an English and a French programme where the curriculum and all the courses are offered in English and French respectively.

During the last intercultural communication skills have an increasing role. The success of a firm operating in the international market depends highly on its employees' communicational activity,

on their recognition and adaptation to the partners' cultural identity.

The French programme of the College of International Management and Business provides international communication courses allowing students to learn how to conduct a successful win-win business negotiation.

Support material used at the courses are of different origin: books written by College teachers, authentic – foreign – editions, periodicals, newspapers, audio and video tapes, CDs and the internet is used.

The pedagogical staff is composed of the College's teachers, and professionals working in Hungarian, French, international and multinational societies.

As the number of language courses is limited, and the students' independent research, reading, and creating activities is emphasised – assessment is based on the quality of students' activity.

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## **I. Short introduction to business education in Hungary before and after the political changes**

### **A. Language learning before 1990**

1990 is the date of the political changes in Hungary. Before the 1990s, strangely enough, the state-party encouraged language learning, although it was rather aimless Hungary's political and cultural relations having been very poor, and citizens had only very strongly limited rights to leave the country. The selection of foreign languages were determined by Hungary's political orientations: students were obliged to study Russian, and only as a second language could they learn either English, German, French, Italian, Spanish or other languages..

Languages were easily available: secondary grammar schools proposed „specialised classes” - one class every day, and language courses were organised by the national Scientific Public Association (TIT).

### **B. Language learning after 1990**

Russian timerily disappeared, and some new – previously less frequently learnt – languages entered into the market: Chinese, Korean, Arabic, Japanese.

A fairly great variety of possibilities characterises the panorama of language education in primary and secondary schools. Children are obliged to learn two languages of their choice. Mainly English is chosen, German comes second, French, Spanish, Italian are also popular, Russian – after a period of considerable decline – is recovering. The first language is introduced at the age of 6, 8, or 10, depending on the type of the school, and – in some cases – on parents' requests. There are 3, 4 or 5 classes of 45 minutes a week, the number of the classes depends on above mentioned elements. The second language is taught at the age of 10, 12, 14, or 16, the number of the classes is variable.

The aim of language teaching at primary and secondary level is to consolidate grammar and vocabulary and to practice communication in foreign languages. Unfortunately this is not always successful. Parents often enrol their children in private language schools where children learn languages in the afternoon, as an extra curricular activity.

In higher education institutions generally two languages are taught, and the diploma cannot be delivered to the students until they acquire one or two language certificates – according to the requirements of the given university or college.

According to the preferencies of the education authority no general language courses can be offered at universities and colleges, only languages for special purposes can be taught. These „directives” imply some dangers: no beginner courses are allowed to offer, consequently the less frequently taught languages that are not taught in secondary schools disappear from the previously wide choice of languages offered, e.g. Portuguese, French, Spanish or Italian as well. English and German are the most frequently taught languages.

Another problem is that the number of foreign language courses are rather limited, and as a result skills cannot be strenghten enough.

## **II. Business education**

### **A. Secondary and higher education**

In Hungary, except for some secondary schools, business education is the task of higher education: universities and colleges.

The term „college” needs some clarification. These establishments were originally founded to provide practical and technical education as opposed to universities whose task was to give theoretical education. Universities trained experts who found employment in the practical fields, whereas universities educated scientists and researchers. Since little theoretical knowledge was taught, studies in colleges took 3 years, and the young graduates easily found their way to the industry or to other firms. Lately colleges have seen themselves obliged to change their programmes

mainly in industrial sectors. After 1990 firms that went bankrupt were closed or sold out, so technical colleges could not offer any employment possibilities to their students.

Colleges have survived until today, and they try to comply to European Union's Bologna trend.

After this short historical overview business education in Hungary will be described. Colleges and universities continue – in general – to operate as they used to.

Business education is offered by a few specialised secondary schools in Hungary. Besides the general subjects such as Literature, Mathematics, Geography or History, students learn Economics, Business Administration, export, import dealings, etc. In secondary grammar schools and in other secondary schools no specialised business areas are taught.

At universities (3+2 years of study) economic and business studies are offered among others micro and macro economic theories, financial studies, Mathematics, Statistics, Marketing. A mostly theoretical approach is given. Colleges, such as Budapest Business School, offer the same subjects, but education is practice based., and during the 3 year period of their studies students learn practical subjects, e.g.logistics, import, export processes, business administration.

### ***B. Language teaching for special purposes***

Students are admitted to Hungarian universities and colleges based on the results of their secondary school final examination.

During their studies students have foreign language courses, where they learn the special language of their future profession: students of medicine learn special medical language, future engineers stake special technological language courses. These special language studies are assured by language teachers graduated from Faculties of Arts. All the other subjects are taught by experts of the given field, according to the law engineers, doctors, lawyers. Language teachers – evidently – have to learn first the special language of their institution without becoming a specialist, or a graduate expert of the field. However, it is

not uncommon that a language teacher acquires the diploma of his/her institution, as a second diploma. This is the practice at the College of International Management and Business of Budapest Business School, and thus the language teachers who graduated can teach their field in a foreign language.

### **III. Business education in foreign language at the College of International Management and Business Budapest Business School**

In the predecessor of the College of International Management and Business of Budapest Business School, foreign language education aimed at training correspondent clerks, sales and forwarding clerks for foreign trade companies.

Budapest Business School (BBS) was established in 2000 by the merger of three formerly independent colleges, the College of Commerce, Catering and Tourism, the College of International Management and Business, and the College of Finance and Accountancy. The colleges retain much of their autonomy in academic matters. It is a publicly funded university sector college with an significant number of students most of whom are studying at an undergraduate level in Business, Finance, Tourism or closely related areas.

In the College of International Management and Business of Budapest Business School there are 4 business language and communication classes a week.

There is an interesting initiative of 16 years of experience at the College: the English and French dual awards programmes. The language of tuition on these programmes is French and English, respectively. Students can graduate with two diplomas: they can receive the diploma of the Hungarian home institution and the diploma of the partner institution, Avans International School of Breda (the Netherlands),

and Université de Picardie Jules Verne (France). The teaching staff consists of teachers of the College who can teach their subject in a foreign language, language teachers graduated as experts of the field, teachers of the partner institutions, and – of course – experts of the given special subject area coming from a foreign country (England, France, Belgium) living in Budapest.. The development of special language education in the future takes this new orientation: teaching subjects in foreign languages.

At the courses teachers use the books published by the College's experts and authentic editions as a basic material, and materials of the partner institutions. Business and administration periodicals, journals and other printed material, is used as supplement material, but audio-visual material such as video and audio tapes, and electronic supports like the Power point presentations, internet information, and educational software are used as well .

Intercultural communication plays an important role in French dual awards programme. The success of a company depends mainly on the quality of the employees' communicational skills, psychological openness and language knowledge. The following description gives some important guidelines of Intercultural communication training.

### ***A. Description of a course***

It is a contradictory matter: a basically practical, communicational, mainly practice-generated suite of operations should be recognised and learned in an artificial surrounding which is a school class.

A short introduction is given about the psychological aspects of a communicational situation. Characterology is mentioned: a salesman, fulfilling his obligations of selling the goods of his company meets his partner for the first time. He has no knowledge of his partner's personality, he has very little information, he has to rely on his own impressions of the person, on what he sees about the partner.

Students learn about the win-win method of negotiation, about the technics of arriving at a compromise.

Students proceed by the elements of the a situation of a negotiation: asking a meeting by phone, introducing themselves, presenting the

goods, speaking about the price, constructing an effective argumentation, presenting and rejecting arguments, etc. The group watches a video presenting the given communicational situation. Eventually unknown words and expressions are explained, then the situation itself is analysed: what is the basic task of the meeting, which are the verbal, non-verbal, communicational instruments used by the partners, in what proportion the tasks will be realised at the end of the meeting. After this passive part of the lesson, students make up parts of the situation. They have to identify the preparational activities of the meeting, and they have to redo the situation part by part. Everybody will take part in the game at the end of the lesson. Homework is given: to make up a file of the situation (checking dates, looking for supports of the argumentation, choosing arguments, presenting samples, etc.), to write a monologue of the salesman, of the customer, to write the dialogue of the situation, to arrive at a conclusion.

### ***B. Assessment of students' progress***

In Hungarian higher education assessment proceedings are similar in every institution. Teachers give either seminar marks at the end of the semester, or they evaluate the student's knowledge at an exam. The former evaluates student's progress, diligence, activity during all the classes, and the results of the mid-term tests , while the latter assesses the student's knowledge at the specific moments of the exam.

Assessment of intercultural communication is based on a series of tasks. Students have several exercises to do at home individually, or as a team work: vocabulary listing, conversation writing (professional communication, sale, making a complaint), commercial letter writing, constructing an argumentation. During the oral part of the exam students are asked to realise a selling situation with all the details a real business dialogue can contain: presenting the price, refuting the arguments supporting the price, trying to arrive on a win-win conclusion.

Companies which engage graduate students of the English and French dual awards programmes of the College of International Management and Business confirm that the institution is successful, the idea of training

students in a foreign language is useful, students contribute to the success of the company by their approved communicational activity.

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