

**LANGUAGE GRADUATES
- EDUCATIONAL AND PROFESSIONAL PERSPECTIVES**

**Viorela Valentina DIMA¹
Lucia-Mihaela GROSU-RĂDULESCU²
Raluca Elena HURDUZEU³**

Abstract

The paper investigates the educational and professional opportunities that open up for graduates of study programs in foreign languages, by exploring the international and Romanian trends in the field. After reviewing a series of international publications on the topic, we present a case study conducted among the graduates of the Bachelor's program in Applied Modern Languages organized by the Faculty of International Business and Economics within The Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Romania. The results of the case study confirm the international trends, in that foreign language graduates are shown to be able to continue their studies and/or embark on a professional career in a wide range of fields, not being restricted to the philological domain.

Keywords: applied modern languages, professional career, labor market.

1. Introduction

Against the background of an increasingly globalized world, with more and more universities and companies offering their services to clients (be they students or professionals) all over the world, it is quite natural to assume that the role of foreign language specialists is increasingly visible as well. The aim of this study is to examine whether this assumption is correct and, if so, to identify the areas which foreign language graduates choose to further specialize and build a career in.

The paper is organized as follows: firstly, we present recent employment trends at European and Romanian level, highlighting the labor market areas that need foreign language specialists and the reasons why such specialists are seen as valuable; secondly, we take a closer look at Romanian data provided by recruitment websites and universities, on the one hand, and by Romanian language

¹ Viorela Valentina Dima, The Bucharest University of Economic Studies, viorela.dima@ase.ro

² Lucia-Mihaela Grosu-Rădulescu, The Bucharest University of Economic Studies, lucia.grosu@rei.ase.ro

³ Raluca Elena Hurduzeu, The Bucharest University of Economic Studies, rehurduzeu@gmail.com

graduates from The Bucharest University of Economic Studies, on the other hand. Last but not least, the article summarizes the main findings of this research and points to possible areas for further research.

2. Language graduates' insertion on the labor market – recent trends

With Romania's accession to the European Union in 2007, a new perspective over students' employability has started to gain ground in higher education. Prior to this year, education specialists were mainly considering equipping students with knowledge and skills in order to find a job on the local labor market. With the opening of the country towards the rest of Europe came a (natural) desire of graduates to develop and acquire abilities which might allow them to build a career abroad. The same event in 2007 also meant an important number of multinational companies decided to open subsidiaries in Romania, thus increasing the number and variety of jobs available.

Another important factor impacting the manner in which universities see their role in their students' employability was the creation of European Higher Education Area (EHEA) in 1999. The focus was clearly set on developing a "competence-based training approach" (Huc-Hepher & Huertas Barros, 2016: 139) which meant actively involving universities in providing graduates with a fair chance on the labor market. With EHEA, "employability" has become part and parcel of European universities' educational purposes, a trend which has been adopted and implemented in Romanian higher education institutions as well. In Knight and Yorke's view "[e]nhancing employability means [...] taking seriously many of the long-established goals of higher education and devising arrangements likely to help most students to make stronger, convincing claims to achievement in respect of them" (Knight & Yorke, 2004: 2).

However, embedding employability in the curriculum is not an easy task and it requires first of all "in-depth local job market knowledge" and second of all "openness and flexibility" (Sadoux, 2016: 30). Neither aspects are easy to deal with from the perspective of higher education institutions which are proverbially difficult to direct toward change. With the advent of international rankings and worldwide performance indicators among which graduate employability has become a key factor (Sadoux, 2016: 30) universities have had to pay more attention to the future-after-graduation of their students and place more emphasis on adapting syllabi and curricula to the demands of the job markets.

Andrei N. Kouznetsov, in his chapter entitled "Language Mastery Development within TVET⁴ for Professional Mobility", mentions that, as early as the '80s, the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe had clearly pointed toward the

⁴ TVET - Technical and Vocational Education and Training

importance of culture in uniting Europe. Kouznetsov refers to only a few of the pivotal ideas contained in Recommendations 82 (18) and 98 (6):

- [...] language diversity should [...] enrich national cultures and facilitate communication between ethnic groups. [...]
-international co-operation in the advancement of language mastery may stimulate and promote relevant local and national programs at different levels. (Kouznetsov, 2009: 1742).

In Romania, language graduates have greatly benefitted from the country's new European membership and the above-mentioned trends in higher education. Gradually, Romanian universities have had to agree on the importance of humanities in general and foreign language education in particular. However, this trend is not specific to Romania only. As will be further shown, many universities worldwide have had to adjust their curricula to fit in foreign language modules to support a growing demand of such graduates among employers. According to Huc-Hepher and Huertas Barros, building on the research of Chouc and Calvo (201) and Lisaité et al. (2016),

Although recent research in the fields of languages and translation unequivocally demonstrates the value of foreign language knowledge on the graduate labor market, employers are increasingly seeking additional abilities including: intercultural, interpersonal and communication skills, aptitude at addressing international audiences, peer-review competence, adaptability, business awareness, subject knowledge and research skills. (Huc-Hepher & Huertas Barros 2016: 140).

This conclusion, though pertaining to a Europe-based study, is in line with previous research conducted in the United States by Marcel M. Robles. In 2012, he published a study in which he gathered data from in-depth interviews with American business executives and decision-makers in order to establish the most sought-after skills they were looking for in new employees. His data revealed that the most "attractive" abilities were not hard skills, but soft ones. Most of the abilities mentioned in his "Top Ten Soft Skills Needed in Today's Workplace" were communication and interpersonal skills (Robles, 2012: 455). Foreign language graduates' education focuses especially on these particular abilities. Hence, we might infer that, once they finish their studies, language graduates have a real chance at being employed.

There is an ongoing fallacy that languages can only be useful for working in certain fields (education, translations or interpreting). The reality is quite different (as we will also point out in our final data analysis). Language graduates work in different domains from travel to media industry and from finance to public sectors (Fernandez-Sanchez, 2016: 11). The abilities and knowledge acquired by students in foreign languages prove to be among the most important ones mentioned by employers nowadays:

Learning a language not only develops the linguistic skills associated with the discipline, but a whole range of abilities which employers rate very highly. [...] language graduates often show excellent analytical skills honed through the discussion of complex issues in the course of their studies; language degrees will involve the analysis of topics related to cultural awareness, business, politics, ethics and economics. Employers value having graduates who have the ability to present an articulate argument, to negotiate, and to adapt their register or rhetoric. [...] Language graduates leave university with a great grounding in written and oral presentation skills: they could end up writing a speech for a government minister or delivering a pitch to win new business for a tech startup. (Fernandez-Sanchez, 2016: 11-12)

A very recent study in the United Kingdom, *CBI/PEARSON Education and Skills Survey 2017*, has found that only 34% of British employers are satisfied with the foreign language skills of college graduates entering the work market (*CBI/PEARSON...*, 2017: 25). The same study clearly points out that their data

show that with solid basic skills and the right approach, a young person can build a successful working life. Personal attitudes, aptitude, readiness to learn, effective communication skills and a sufficient capacity to cope with numerical data are the key enablers. It is critically important that all young people are helped to develop as fully as possible in these areas. (CBI/PEARSON..., 2017: 26)

Two years before this study, CBI released another research on the same topic (*CBI/PEARSON Education and Skills Survey 2015*) where employers specifically mentioned that they valued abilities in the field of languages, “with 45% recognizing foreign language skills among their employees as beneficial, particularly in helping build relations with clients, customers and suppliers” (*CBI/PEARSON Education and Skills Survey 2015* qtd. in Fernandez-Sanchez, 2016: 14).

The importance of modern/ foreign languages for the future employability of students is clearly gaining more terrain on the European labor market. In a chapter entitled “Communicating and teaching languages: a module for life”, Koglbauer, Andersen and Stewart remind readers that “[a]s linguists and educationalists, [they] have argued for decades that studying a language does not end with being fluent in a foreign language. Being able to communicate in a foreign language opens one’s horizon, allows the speaker to see the world in a different light—through different cultural lenses (Koglbauer, Andersen & Stewart, 2016: 108). This particular aspect related to the language graduates’ ability to filter reality through a cultural lens is essential in their own personal development but also in their gradual process of building a solid career. Most language graduates prove to be able to interact by taking into account cultural particularities of both colleagues and potential business

clients; they are articulate and have strong critical thinking skills; they have the habit of written and oral presentations, and they can easily adapt to new and challenging situations. Surely, , the same can be said about other graduates who have cultivated their soft skills, but, as Fernandez-Sanchez points out, it is easier for employers to see these gathered skills in junior employees with a background in foreign languages (Fernandez-Sanchez, 2016: 11-12).

Having reviewed some of the European and international contemporary studies on the prospects that open up for language students upon graduation, we now turn to a more in-depth presentation of the fields such graduates find employment in. To do so, we compare the information on several university and recruitment websites from Romania, Europe, USA and Australia. Then, we try to see whether the employment data corroborate with the (Romanian) language graduates' choices in terms of Master's programs chosen to continue their education in.

3. Language graduates' employability – international data

During 2016-2017, we have monitored the websites of various university and recruitment agencies to collect data on the professional fields that language graduates in several countries on different continents turn to after finishing their studies. Table 1 below lists the domains that Romanian and international language graduates find a job in. We notice that, aside from the first three domains usually associated with the profession of 'linguist' – education, publishing and language service company –, there is a wide variety of domains that require foreign language professionals both in Romania and worldwide:

Table 1. Career opportunities for language graduates

Domain	Jobs available in Romania ^{5,6}	Jobs available at international level (UK, USA, Australia) ⁷
1. education	foreign language teachers for state and privately-owned institutions, as well as for educational NGOs, writers of educational materials	foreign language teachers for state and privately-owned institutions, as well as for educational NGOs, writers of educational materials
2. publishing	copy-editor, proofreader, editorial assistant	copy-editor, proofreader, editorial assistant
3. language/ translation service company	translator, interpreter, project manager	translator, interpreter, project manager
4. public service	-	√
5. media companies	broadcast assistant, reporter	Advertising Effectiveness Analyst, reporter
6. Sales & Marketing consulting firms/ departments	banking, consulting firms, real estate agencies, pharmaceutical companies, telecommunications companies, call centers	√
7. Human Resources consulting firms	Talent Acquisition Specialist, interviewer/recruitment consultant	Talent Acquisition Specialist, interviewer/recruitment consultant
8. Public Relations	√	√
9. IT companies	√	linguistic annotator, web editor
10. telecommunications	√	√

⁵ Mention should be made that several keywords were used for the search: “linguist”, “modern languages”, “foreign languages”, as by only using “linguist”, the query returns very few jobs if any.

⁶ Data collected from the following websites, accessed January 2016 – October 2017: <https://www.ejobs.ro/locuri-de-munca/limbi%20moderne/>, <http://www.bestjobs.ro/>, <http://www.hipo.ro/locuri-de-munca/cautajob/Toate-Domeniile/Toate-Orasele/lingvist>, <http://www.myjob.ro/locuri-munca-lingvist/>

⁷ Data collected from the following websites, accessed January 2016 – October 2017: Flinders University, Adelaide, Australia, <http://www.flinders.edu.au/ehl/language-studies/applied-linguistics.cfm>, Portland State University, Oregon, USA, <https://www.pdx.edu/careers/what-can-i-do-degree-applied-linguistics>, Linguistics Society of America - <http://www.linguisticsociety.org/content/why-major-linguistics>, UK, http://www.prospects.ac.uk/options_linguistics.htm,

11. diplomacy	-	Political Officer for a US embassy
12. law or medicine	-	consultant in language
13. entertainment industry	-	actor or actor trainer
14. tourism agencies	√	-

According to Table 1 above, there may be areas in which foreign language specialists are more or less required during a given time interval (2016-2017 in our case), depending on the labor market requirements. Moreover, the availability of job advertisements on recruiting websites may also be influenced by other factors, such as employer preferences as regards candidate selection. This might explain why no language specialist job ads for diplomacy were found in 2016-2017 on the specified Romanian recruitment websites, but Romanian foreign language graduates still found a job in this field in the respective time interval (see Table 2 below).

4. Educational and career prospects for Applied Modern Languages graduates from Romania

Out of the nearly 100 accredited public and private universities in Romania, 20 universities organize Bachelor's programs in Applied Modern Languages and 26 universities organize Bachelor's programs in Foreign Languages and Literatures. For reasons of space, we only refer to the educational and professional prospects language graduates have in Romania, according to the websites of the twenty higher education institutions that offer study programs in Applied Modern Languages (henceforth, AML)⁸.

With regard to the possibility of continuing their education, AML students in Romania are specifically offered Master's programs in philology and related fields: terminology and specialized discourse, specialized translation and interpretation, foreign language teaching, cultural studies, communication in English/ French, multilingual and/or intercultural communication. A distinct Master's package is offered by the Faculty of International Business and Economics from The Bucharest University of Economic Studies, namely a Master's program in Business Communication in English, and a Master's program in English Language Education and Research Communication for Business and Economics.

As concerns prospective careers for AML graduates, the 20 university websites in Romania make reference to the fact that the graduates will develop and acquire abilities which might allow them to do general and specialized translation,

⁸ The names and websites of the respective 20 Romanian universities are provided in the section "University websites" from the *References and Bibliography* section, at the end of the article.

multilingual professional communication, linguistic and cultural mediation, applied and multimedia computing text editing and revision in economics, accounting, marketing, management, law, public relations, international business. What is important to mention is that all educational opportunities presented by the universities are centered on the principles of intercultural openness, flexibility, public and interpersonal communication. These are considered to be the prerequisites for developing a successful career in this field.

By comparing this list of competences with the job advertisements in Table 1 above, we notice that the former are compatible with the latter. However, university websites' descriptions of educational/professional opportunities for AML students only focus on the philological input necessary for such jobs, no specific mention being made of the professional competences acquired in the field of application (i.e. non-linguistic professional competences in economics, technology etc.).

Moreover, the professional opportunities for language graduates mentioned on the Romanian universities' websites under consideration seem to align with the types of jobs listed in the Classification of Occupations in Romania – COR. The latter returns a very narrow list when using the terms 'linguist' or 'foreign languages' to search for occupations:

- authors/writers, journalists and linguists
- translators, interpreters and other linguists
- proofreader/language editor
- researcher in Linguistics
- research assistant in Linguistics
- other trainers – foreign language trainers
- education specialists not covered by previous major groups⁹

This section has briefly presented the information available on the websites of all Romanian universities that provide AML Bachelor's programs with respect to continuing education and career options. In the following section, we will present the situation of AML graduates of 2016-2017 from The Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Romania.

⁹ https://www.rubinian.com/cor_1_grupa_majora.php

5. Educational and career prospects for Applied Modern Languages graduates from The Bucharest University of Economic Studies (ASE), Romania

The Bachelor's program in Applied Modern Languages was launched by the Faculty of International Business and Economics from The Bucharest University of Economic Studies - ASE in October 2013 and has since produced two series of alumni – the Class of 2016 and the Class of 2017. Given the fact that the program curriculum is designed to form specialists in foreign languages (English and French) that can apply their linguistic knowledge in the field of international business and economics, one would expect graduates to continue their studies and/or seek for employment in both the philological and the business fields. To find out whether this expectation is borne out, in the summer of 2017 we conducted a survey among all AML graduates from ASE; in the following, we briefly present the corroborated results of the survey.

The investigation was carried out throughout July-October 2017 and consisted in collecting data from various sources: alumni's responses to an educational and employability survey administered in the summer of 2017, information provided by ASE's IT Department regarding the enrollment of AML graduates in ASE's Master's study programs, the results provided by internet search engines with regard to Master's enrollment data for a series of Romanian universities, data collected from AML graduates' LinkedIn and Facebook pages. Educational data were made available by 60 out of a total of 82 graduates, i.e. 73% of the latter. Employment data were made available by merely 31 out of a total of 82 graduates, namely by 37.80% of the alumni.

As regards the educational paths AML graduates of 2016 and 2017 decided to follow, Figure 1 below points to the fact that the respondents are continuing their studies in 2 foreign universities (The Hague University, The Netherlands, and University of Lancaster, UK) and 14 faculties from 6 Romanian universities (The Bucharest University of Economic Studies - ASE; the National School of Political and Administrative Studies – SNSPA, Bucharest; The University of Bucharest; The University Politehnica of Bucharest – UPB, The University of Oradea and The University of Pitești). Figure 2 provides details about the actual faculties chosen by AML graduates for continuing their studies. We notice that the large majority of graduates opted for Master's programs in *economics* (Business Administration, Finance and Banking, Management, Marketing, Human Resources etc.). A smaller number of graduates opted for *philology* (Cultural Studies, Translation Studies, Communication and Public Relations), *diplomacy* (International Business Management), *inter-disciplinary research* (Project Management). All in all, AML graduates from ASE Bucharest exhibit a preference for continuing their studies in the non-philological field.

Figure 1. Universities chosen by ASE's AML graduates of 2016-2017 for continuing their studies

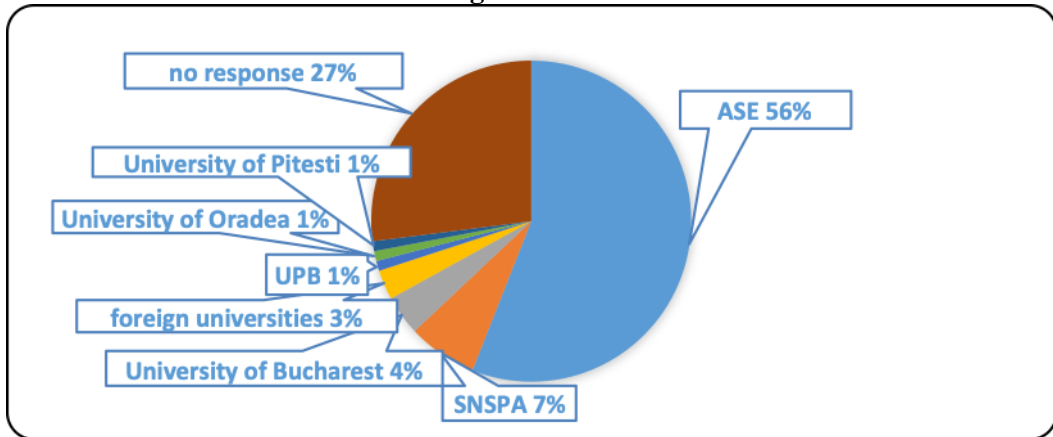
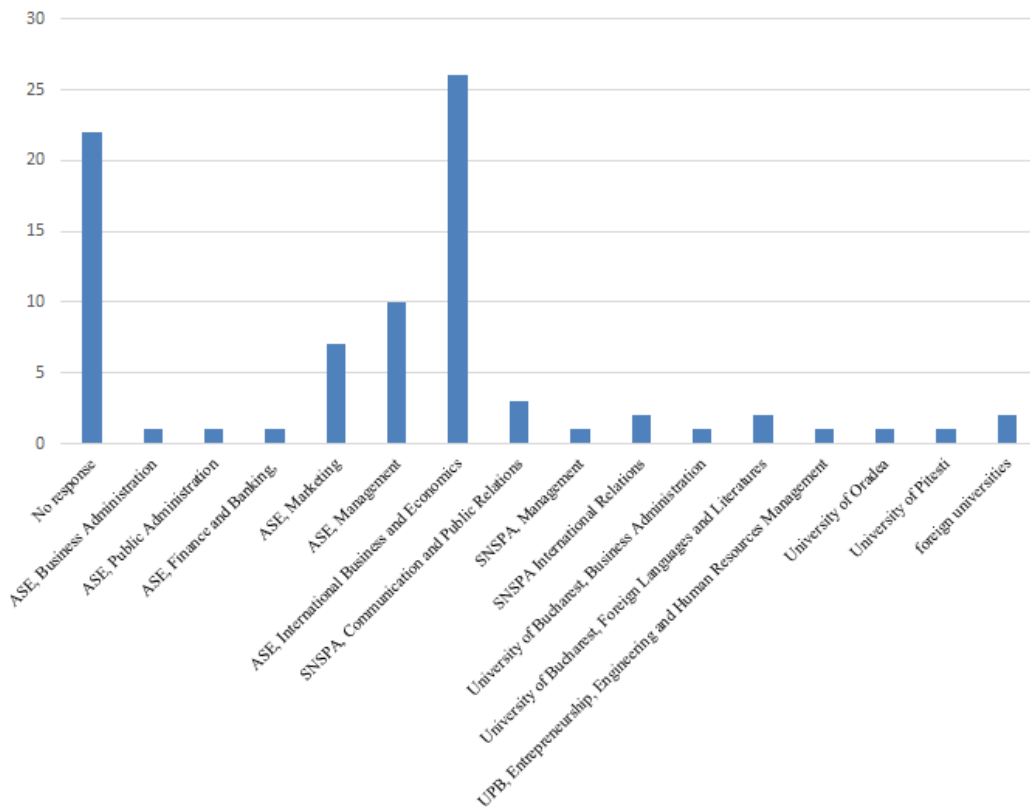


Figure 2. Faculties chosen by ASE's AML graduates of 2016-2017 for continuing their studies



As regards career choices, AML graduates of 2016 and 2017 found employment in the 14 domains listed in Table 2 below. Noticeably, the majority of the respondents found a job in the *economic* domain (sales representative, Human Resources specialist, financial consultant, marketing assistant, flight attendant etc.). Fewer graduates found a job in *diplomacy* (as embassy employees or interns), in an *interdisciplinary field* (Project assistant), or in a *philological field* (translator, trainer). Moreover, it is worth emphasizing that, irrespective of the job and professional domain they are in, the majority of the graduates of 2016 and 2017 pointed to the fact that they use one or two foreign languages at work on a daily basis.

Table 2. Employability data for ASE's AML graduates of 2016-2017

Declared domain of activity	Jobs held in October 2017
1. banking	assistant analyst, Know Your Customer analyst, financial advisor, Human Resources specialist
2. culture	online marketing assistant & promotion of museum activities
3. diplomacy	Social Media Coordinator and interns in embassies
4. finance	project management consultant, investment product specialist, investment broker, engagement specialist
5. food industry	customer service intern, project assistant, sales assistant
6. outsourcing	senior operations specialist
7. IT	web content analyst, recruiting associate, talent acquisition specialist, accounts payable, quality assurance assistant, translator
8. human resources	Human Resources generalist
9. textile industry	Department Manager
10. marketing and advertising	freelance blogger
11. trade	unspecified
12. transportation	flight attendant, Human Resources specialist
13. tourism	sales assistant
14. non-governmental organizations	trainer

To sum up, the data collected throughout July-October 2017 about the continuing education and career preferences of ASE's AML graduates of 2016-2017 point to the fact that such Bachelor's study programs open up a wide variety of choices in both areas. However, ASE's foreign language graduates exhibit a clear tendency to further specialize and to seek for jobs in the economic and related fields, with only few of them opting for philological Master's studies or jobs.

6. Conclusions

The aim of the present article has been to present the authors' research results on the educational and professional opportunities available for foreign language graduates, at both national and international level. By reviewing a series of recent international publications on the topic, we discovered that employers find it increasingly beneficial for their employees to possess foreign language competences as the latter are accompanied by other valuable professional skills, namely good communication and interpersonal skills, awareness of cultural and ethical values, knowledge of specialized issues in business, politics or economics, adaptability and so on.

We tested the findings of these studies by surveying a wide range of university and recruitment agencies websites to find out what kind of jobs are made available by employers for language graduates at international level. We discovered that the labor market needs foreign language specialists not only in the philological and related fields, but also in a wide range of other business-related domains, ranging from media and public relations to IT and law or medicine.

To see how Romanian data fit into this international trend, we channeled our research endeavors on the educational and professional paths Romanian Applied Modern Language graduates are offered and/or expected to follow. We have seen that, despite being guided by university websites towards continuing their studies in the philological domain and finding employment in a related field, very few AML graduates actually do so.

Interestingly, the educational and professional routes taken by the 2016-2017 graduates of the Bachelor's program in Applied Modern Languages organized by the Faculty of International Business and Economics within The Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Romania, point to the fact that economic and related fields are clearly preferred, to the detriment of philological Master's studies or jobs. We believe this preference to be the effect of curriculum design; in other words, graduates of a more business-oriented AML study program could choose business-oriented postgraduate studies and employment, while graduates of AML study programs focused on other fields could seek for employment and/or Master's studies in those particular fields. This inference needs to be tested by further research into the continuing education and professional options of graduates from all 20 Romanian universities that offer Bachelor's programs in Applied Modern Languages.

Moreover, to form a complete picture of the educational and employment patterns characteristic of Romanian language graduates, further research is necessary, to also include the data available about Romanian graduates in Foreign Languages and Literatures. Naturally, it is also necessary to examine Romanian and

international employer preferences in terms of knowledge and competences expected of foreign language graduates.

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University websites:

"Alexandru Ioan Cuza" University of Iasi, Romania, www.uaic.ro
 "Babes-Bolyai" University of Cluj, Romania, www.ubbcluj.ro
 "Dunarea de Jos" University of Galati, Romania, www.ugal.ro
 "1 Decembrie 1918" University of Alba Iulia, Romania, www.uab.ro
 "Lucian Blaga" University of Sibiu, Romania, www.ulbsibiu.ro
 "Ovidius" University of Constanta, Romania, www.univ-ovidius.ro
 "Petru Maior" University, Targu Mures, Romania, www.upm.ro
 "Politehnica" University Timisoara, Romania, <https://www.upt.ro>
 "Sapientia" University in Cluj-Napoca, Romania, www.sapientia.ro
 The Bucharest University of Economic Studies - ASE, Romania, www.ase.ro
 Technical University of Civil Engineering Bucharest, Romania, www.utcb.ro
 Technical University of Cluj Napoca, Romania, <https://www.utcluj.ro>
 "Titu Maiorescu" University, Bucharest, Romania, www.utm.ro
 "Transilvania" University of Brasov, Romania, www.unitbv.ro
 University of Bucharest, Romania, www.unibuc.ro
 University of Craiova, Romania, www.ucv.ro
 University of Pitesti, Romania, <https://www.upit.ro>
 "Vasile Alecsandri" University of Bacău, Romania, www.ub.ro
 "Vasile Goldis" Western University of Arad, Romania, www.uvvg.ro
 West University of Timisoara, Romania, <https://www.uvt.ro>
 Flinders University, Adelaide, Australia, <http://www.flinders.edu.au/ehl/language-studies/applied-linguistics.cfm>,
 Portland State University, Oregon, USA, <https://www.pdx.edu/careers/what-can-i-do-degree-applied-linguistics>,

Recruitment websites:

http://www.prospects.ac.uk/options_linguistics.htm,
<https://www.ejobs.ro/locuri-de-munca/limbi%20moderne/>
<http://www.bestjobs.ro/>
<http://www.hipo.ro/locuri-de-munca/cautajob/Toate-Domeniile/Toate-Orasele/lingvist>
<http://www.myjob.ro/locuri-munca-lingvist/>

Other websites:

Linguistics Society of America, <http://www.linguisticsociety.org/content/why-major-linguistics>
 COR – Classification of Occupations in Romania,
http://www.rubinian.com/cor_1_grupa_majora.php
<http://www.salarulmeu.ro/>

The authors

Viorela-Valentina Dima is an Associate professor with The Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Romania. She holds a BA degree in Romanian and English, and a PhD degree in Philology, all from the University of Bucharest. She is a professional translator and an ECQA Certified Terminology Manager. Her research areas include: theoretical and applied linguistics, foreign language teaching methodology, translation studies, higher education marketing.

Lucia-Mihaela Grosu-Rădulescu is an Associate Professor with the Department of Modern Languages and Business Communication, the Bucharest University of Economic Studies. She holds an MA degree in *British Cultural Studies* from the University of Bucharest and an MS degree in *English Language Education and Research Communication in Economics* from the Bucharest University of Economic Studies. In 2012, she received her PhD degree in Philology from the University of Bucharest for research in the field of Canadian female ethnic writers. She has published three books, has collaborated on a textbook on cultural studies and co-authored a monograph on francophone Romanian writers and she has also published numerous research papers in academic journals. Her research interests range from teaching methods in ESP and business communication to socio-economy and social psychology or to literary and cultural studies.

Raluca Elena Hurduzeu is an Associate Professor with the Department of Modern Languages and Business Communication, Faculty of International Business and Economics of the Bucharest University of Economic Studies. She holds BA degrees in Foreign Languages and International Business and Economics, an MA degree in Business Communication, and a PhD degree in Economics. Her research areas include: intercultural studies, foreign language teaching methodology, translation studies, international business, higher education internationalization.