

Foreign language requirements in Hungarian job advertisements

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As a result of globalisation, European integration, technological innovations, historical and political changes, and also student and workforce mobility, foreign language needs and requirements have changed in Hungary. The aim of this paper is to present foreign language knowledge requirements at Hungarian workplaces in order to provide a picture of the language skills in demand on the labour market. The study analyzes 400 Hungarian online job advertisements to identify foreign language and other competence requirements expected from Hungarian graduates. The findings show the significance of speaking English as a foreign language, followed by German. The analyses of the advertisements have revealed that the employers require foreign language competences mainly from engineers, however, for economists, doctors and lawyers it is not a great necessity. Besides foreign language requirements, the investigation has proved the necessity of good communication skills.

Keywords: foreign language requirements, foreign language usage, job advertisements, Hungary, needs analysis

1. Introduction

In 1989 the former Hungarian People's Republic came to an end, the Republic of Hungary was established, and the first democratic election was held in 1990. Since then the Hungarian governments' top foreign policy goal has been to achieve integration into Western economic and security organizations. At the same time, a gradual transition towards open markets and economic liberalization has started. Therefore, in 1995 Hungary became a member of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), in 1996 a member of the World Trade Organization (WTO), in 1999 Hungary joined the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and on 1st May 2004 the European Union (EU). The Schengen Agreement was signed in 2003 and implemented in 2007, which made passport-free travel possible in the member states. As a consequence, student and workforce mobility rapidly increased among Hungarians. According to Eurostat data, the number of Hungarians living abroad has been continually increasing since the mid-2000, the main countries of destination including Germany, the United Kingdom and Austria. In 2013 nearly 280,000 Hungarian citizens were living in the countries of the European Economic Area (EEA), which is an approximately three times bigger number than it was in 2001. According to the United Nations (UN) data, 528,000 Hungarians were living abroad all over the world in 2013, which is 5.3 percent of the total population (Gödri, 2014).

According to the Database of UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS), the number of Hungarian students participating in academic programs abroad increased in the last

decade by 15%, that is, the number of students grew from 6,880 to 7,921 between 2000 and 2010. Hungarian students attended foreign institutions in 43 different countries on five different continents. The top destinations include Germany, Austria, the USA, France and the United Kingdom (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2014). However, foreign language proficiency is not only necessary for those who wish to study or work abroad, but companies operating in Hungary also require such a competence from their employees.

The first part of the paper presents the background of the study, namely, it describes the theoretical framework and it also discusses the results of several research studies carried out by Hungarian scholars between 2004 and 2011, including five data analyses of the job requirements of Hungarian job advertisements and the foreign language competence requirements of the companies operating in Hungary. The second part shows the outcomes of a recent analysis of 400 job advertisements. Finally, the paper gives suggestions on how teaching should take account of these needs.

2. Background

In language teaching needs analysis is defined as “... the process of determining the needs for which a learner or group of learners requires a language and arranging the needs according to priorities... [it] makes use of both subjective and objective information ...” (Richards & Schmidt, 2010, p. 389). The aims of a needs analysis are to gather information on the situations in which a language is used, the purposes for which the language is demanded, the type of communication that is used, and the required level of language proficiency (Richards & Schmidt, 2010, p. 389).

Several approaches to needs analysis have been developed over the years, and the most influential models include target-situation analysis, present-situation analysis, learning-centred approach, strategy analysis, means analysis and language audits (Jordan, 1997, pp. 23-28). First of all, target-situation analysis focuses on the students' needs at the end of a language course and target-level performance. The core of Munby's model (1978) is the Communication Needs Processor (CNP) in which account is taken of the variables that affect communication needs by organising them as parameters. The results from the processing of the eight parameters indicate the learners' language needs, then, based on the outcomes, a syllabus is designed (Munby, 1978, pp. 32-40). While the model provides several details, it has proved to be inflexible, complex and time-consuming. Despite these shortcomings, it has influenced later approaches (Jordan, 1997, pp. 23-24). Secondly, present-situation analysis was developed by Richterich and Chancerel in 1977 with the aim of finding out the learners' state of development at the beginning of the language course, by means of surveys, questionnaires and interviews. As opposed to Munby's model, in this approach the learners are at the centre of attention, and their needs are examined by the learners themselves, the teaching establishment and by the institution by using more than one

data collection method (Richterich & Chancerel, 1977, pp. 5-8). Thirdly, the learning-centred approach was developed by Hutchinson and Waters in 1987. They made a distinction between learner-centred and learning-centred approaches. The learner-centred approach means that learning is determined by the learner, whereas in the learning-centred approach the process of learning is negotiated between the individuals and the society (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987, pp. 72-74).

Hutchinson and Water compared target and learning needs. Target needs describe the learners' needs in the target situation, whereas learning needs are about the learners' actions in order to learn. Target needs are divided into necessities, lacks, and wants. Necessities describe the knowledge the learners need to be able to function effectively in the target situation. Lacks are defined as the gaps between what the learner knows and the necessities. Wants are described as the learners' opinion of their own needs (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987, pp. 54-56). Learning needs refer to the following areas: why the learners are taking the course, how the learners learn, what resources are available, who the learners are, when and where the course will take place (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987, pp. 62-63). The methods of data collection include questionnaires, interviews, observation, data collection (e.g. gathering texts), and informal consultations with sponsors or learners (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987, p. 58).

The fourth approach is strategy analysis. Allwright (1982) was a pioneer of strategy analysis. His starting point was to examine the students' perceptions of their own needs, and he made a distinction between needs, wants, and lacks. Allwright's aim was to help students to identify skill areas and their preferred strategies of achieving these skills. Problems have occurred when students utilise learning strategies or styles that are considered inefficient or inappropriate by teachers. Therefore, the development of learner autonomy and learner training became more important (Allwright, 1982, pp. 24-31). The fifth approach is means analysis, which was developed by Holliday and Cooke in 1983. This approach attempts to adapt language courses to local situations. It involves a study of the local situation in order to see how a language course might be implemented. This approach starts from a positive premise of what might be achieved with certain factors, and pays attention to what is culturally appropriate and discourages any models that are inappropriate in the given situation (Holliday and Cooke cited in Jordan, 1997, pp. 27-28). Finally, a language audit is a special type of needs analysis, because it is carried out within a particular company or organization and focuses on the specific features of that organization. It identifies the strengths and weaknesses of a certain organization in terms of its foreign language communication. The findings of the language audit provide the basis of a report which outlines what actions the company needs to undertake in order to increase its employees' language competence. However, there are three disadvantages of language audits. First of all, research into the company may be restricted or the final report may be considered confidential, because the company does not want to disclose any sensitive consumer or customer data. Secondly, the collected data cannot be generalised because they apply only to one organization.

Finally, it is difficult to access data on all levels of the organization (Huhta et al., 2013, pp. 22-23).

2. 1 Foreign language requirements in Hungarian job advertisements

Several studies have been carried out by Hungarian scholars in Hungary to discover the foreign language requirements of Hungarian companies. In their investigations two directions can be discovered, one of them aims at finding out the needs by analysing job advertisements and the other at discovering the foreign language usage at Hungarian workplaces.

Five studies carried out by Sturcz (2004), Híves (2006), Hajdú (2007) and Bajzát (2010; 2011) have analysed the requirements in job ads. Sturcz (2004) analysed the requirements of 181 companies in 2004. The analysed companies were large or medium-sized firms including multinational and Hungarian companies from all areas of employment. The companies were looking for applicants with a degree in the fields of arts, health care, pharmacology, law, economics, engineering and management. The data show that most of the employers (88%) require knowledge of English as the first foreign language, followed by German (7%), French (2%), Italian (1.5%), Russian (1%) and Spanish (0.5%). His findings also indicate that a third of the companies (36%) expect their future employees to have a competence in a second foreign language as well. For forty-three percent of the companies the knowledge of German is required, followed by English, French, Italian, Russian and Spanish. Besides the needs of speaking foreign languages, the study highlights the importance of possessing good communication skills as 41 out of the 181 companies (23%) expressed this need (Sturcz, 2004, pp. 31-32).

Híves (2006) analysed 954 job advertisements in 2006. The outcome of his research shows that more than half of the employers (57.2%) require knowledge of English as a foreign language, followed by German (18%) and other languages (5.5%), such as French Italian and Russian. The data also reveal that one third of the advertisements (33.5%) do not contain any language requirements. After analysing the data further, Híves points out that companies operating in the fields of IT, technology, commerce and tourism, finance and education are looking for applicants who have foreign language competences; however, in the fields of law, health care and social services such competences are not required. In addition to foreign language requirements, the advertisements mention the need for good communication skills (34%), problem-solving skills (10.9%), organizational skills (8.8%) and team-working skills (8.6%) (Híves, 2006, pp. 81-82).

Hajdú (2007) carried out her research among 112 employers in 2007 in the North Great Plain in Hungary. Her findings show that companies are looking for workers who are competent in three foreign languages at the same time. English as a first foreign language is required by most employers (83.4%), followed by German (8.4%), Russian

(3.2%), Italian (2.6%), Romanian (1.9%) and French (0.6%). The data show that the second expected foreign language is German for more than half of the companies (57.3%), followed by English (21.8%), Russian (6.4%), Romanian (5.5%), Dutch (3.6%), Italian (3.6%), French (0.9%) and Spanish (0.9%). Hajdú highlights that German is required as the third foreign language by a third of the employers (31%), followed by Romanian (22.4%), Russian (22.4%), French (8.6%), Spanish (8.6%), English (3.4%), Italian (1.7%) and Polish (1.7%) (Hajdú, 2007, pp. 145-146).

Bajzát (2010) conducted her data analysis between November 2008 and March 2009 and analysed 1000 Hungarian job advertisements targeting engineers to be employed in Hungary. Most of the advertisements (840 ads) appeared online on Hungarian job search websites (<http://profession.hu>, <http://jobline.hu>, <http://szuperallas.hu>, <http://www.topjob.hu>, <http://www.workania.hu>, www.jobpilot.hu) and 160 appeared in the job hunting brochures of Miskolc University between 2005 and 2009. Only those advertisements were included in the analysed data that required the knowledge of at least one foreign language. The results show that more than half of the advertisements (56.8%) are looking for engineers with the competence of speaking English, followed by “English or German” (17.2%), “English and German” (16.5%), “German” (6.3%), “English or French” (2.1%), “English or Russian” (0.3%), “English or Italian” (0.3%), “English and French” (0.3%) and “English and Russian” (0.2%). It can be seen that English is mentioned as a foreign language requirement in most of the advertisements (93.4%), and only a few of the ads (17%) expect applicants to have the competence in two foreign languages. Besides the foreign language requirements, more than half of the advertisements (60.5%) contained other skills and competence requirements, the most frequently mentioned were good communication skills (55%), problem-solving skills (38%), team-working skills (30%) and organizational skills (8%) (Bajzát, 2010, pp. 92-96).

Bajzát (2011) carried out a second data analysis between March and April 2010 and analysed 400 Hungarian job advertisements aiming at graduates to be employed in Hungary. All the 400 advertisements appeared online on Hungarian job search websites (<http://profession.hu>, <http://jobline.hu>, <http://szuperallas.hu>, <http://www.topjob.hu>, <http://www.workania.hu>, www.jobpilot.hu). The companies were looking for applicants with a medical (100 ads), a law (100 ads), an economics (100 ads) and an engineering (100 ads) degree. The study shows that most of the advertisements (81%) expect applicants to have competence in one foreign language, whereas only 11 advertisements (3%) require knowledge of two foreign languages, while 65 out of the 400 ads contain no language requirements. Most of the advertisements (94%) describe the need for general language knowledge, and only few of them (6%) require the knowledge of a foreign language for special purposes. The data reveal that most of the advertisements mention “English only” (79%) as a foreign language competence requirement, followed by “German only” (16%), “English and German” (2%), “French only” (1%), “Italian only” (1%), “English and French” (0.5%) and “English and Spanish” (0.5%). It can be

seen that if two languages are mentioned as requirements, English is always present as one of the foreign languages; therefore, English is mentioned in 82 percent of all advertisements. If the foreign language competence expectations of the different fields are compared, it can be noticed that this requirement is the highest in the fields of engineering (97 ads) and economics (96 ads), followed by medicine (72 ads) and law (59 ads). Speaking two foreign languages is required for people holding a degree in economics (4 ads), engineering (4 ads) and law (3 ads); nevertheless, it is not expected from employees with a medical degree. In addition to foreign language requirements, most of the advertisements (74%) contained other competence and skills requirements. The most frequently mentioned skills and competences are the following: excellent communication skills (70%), self-determination (37%), problem-solving skills (30.5%), exactitude (24%), organizational skills (20%) and team-working skills (17%) (Bajzát, 2011, pp. 297-302).

2. 2 Foreign language usage at Hungarian workplaces

Four studies have aimed at exploring the foreign language usage of employees at Hungarian workplaces. András (1999) carried out his research at Dunaferri, near the capital of Hungary. Konczos-Szombathelyi (2008) conducted her research among Hungarian managers working in Győr, in the western part of Hungary, near the Hungarian-Austrian border. Bajzát (2010) pursued her research among 92 mechanical engineers working at six multinational companies in north-east Hungary. Finally, Ablonczyné Tompos and Kecskés (2014) did their research at 250 companies in the north-western part of the Transdanubian region among 250 employees.

The results of the four studies demonstrate that English and German are the main foreign languages of communication. András (András, 1999, p. 115) found that more than half of the Hungarian workers (61%) communicate with their foreign colleagues in German and nearly half of them in English (39%). However, the findings of the three other research studies suggest the dominance of English as the language of communication. Konczos-Szombathelyi's results show that the Hungarian managers communicate with their foreign colleagues in English in more than half of the cases (54%) and in German in nearly half of the cases (46%) (Konczos-Szombathelyi, 2008, pp. 89-90). Ablonczyné and her colleagues found that the workers use the following foreign languages during their interactions at work: English (in 58% of the cases), German (33%), Russian (2%), Slovakian (2%), French (1%), Italian (1%) and other foreign languages (3%) (Ablonczyné et al. 2014, pp. 12-13). Furthermore, Bajzát's findings reveal that the language of communication is mainly English (94%), but some of the workers (6%) communicate in German. Because the language of communication is a third language – neither the mother tongue of the Hungarian employees, nor the mother tongue of the foreign colleagues – the Hungarian engineers have communication

problems that arise from the lack of active vocabulary, the lack of grammatical knowledge, comprehension, the speed of speech, the differences in pronunciation and accents (Bajzát, 2010, pp. 113-115). The variation in foreign language use can be explained by regional differences, and the differences in company ownerships and business partners. Another reason for the differences can be the increasing usage of English language as a lingua franca.

3. The present study

3.1 Methods

The study uses a quantitative data collection method in order to gain insights into the most recent foreign language requirements of Hungarian workplaces. The data collection was conducted between February and April 2016. Since online job adverts are removed after a short period of time, data was collected fortnightly within the sampling period. The purposive sampling approach was employed for collecting the advertisements. Two sampling criteria were chosen, namely the ads were selected by place (i.e. to be employed in Hungary) and type (i.e. graduates). The corpus contains 400 Hungarian job advertisements targeting graduates to be employed in Hungary. The ads appeared online on five Hungarian websites recruiting workers (<http://profession.hu>, <http://jobline.hu>, <http://www.topjob.hu>, <http://www.workania.hu>, www.monster.hu). The advertisements were published for applicants with a medical (100 ads), a law (100 ads), an economics (100 ads) and an engineering (100 ads) degree. The gathered data appeared only online and not in print. After data collection content analysis was carried out. The key elements (foreign language requirements, competence in a general foreign language, knowledge of a foreign language for specific purposes, other skills and competence requirements) were collected manually by reading the ads. For the purpose of analysis, the data were arranged according to the different foreign languages and other skills and competence requirements. Finally, the comparison of the requirements between the different fields of employment was carried out.

3.2 Results and discussion

The data reveal that a little more than two thirds of the advertisements (66.5%) require the knowledge of one foreign language, whereas only five advertisements (1.25%) expect applicants to have the competence in two foreign languages, while a third of the ads (32.25%) contain no language requirements. Most of the ads (93%) describe the need for general language knowledge, and only few of them (7%) require the knowledge of a foreign language for specific purposes. Competence in a foreign language for specific purposes is necessary for people with law, medical, economics and engineering degree. The results demonstrate that most of the advertisements mention

“English only” (80%) as a foreign language competence requirement, followed by “English or German” (13%), “German only” (5%), “English and Russian” (1.2%) and “English and German” (0.8%). It can be seen that English is present as the foreign language requirement in 95% of all advertisements. Comparing the foreign language competence expectations of the different fields, it can be seen that this requirement is the highest in the fields of engineering (97 ads), which is followed by economics (74 ads), law (59 ads) and medicine (37 ads). However, speaking two foreign languages is required for applicants with a medical (2 ads), a law (2 ads) and a technical degree (1 ad) and none for people holding an economics degree. Besides foreign language requirements, most of the advertisements (70%) contain other competence and skills requirements. The most frequently mentioned skills and competences are excellent communication skills (61%), self-determination (46%), accuracy in work (41%), problem-solving skills (32%), team-working skills (31%), being able to handle an increased workload, (18%) and reliability (16%).

A comparison of the five previously described needs analyses and the results of the present study reveals that speaking English as the first foreign language is the most significant requirement in Hungarian job advertisements. The knowledge of a second foreign language does not prove to be as important as having a competence in English, and speaking German as the first foreign language is a necessity only for some of the employers. Furthermore, competence in other languages as a second or third foreign language, for example, French, Italian, Romanian, Russian and Spanish, is mentioned even in fewer advertisements. General foreign language competence is a requirement in most cases, and the knowledge of foreign languages for specific purposes appears only in some of the advertisements. The data also prove that foreign language skills are not equally necessary for everybody with a higher education degree since only companies operating in the fields of IT, engineering and economics are looking for applicants who have foreign language competences. However, in the fields of law, medicine, health care and social services such competences are not required to such an extent or in some cases they are not even necessary at all.

Comparing the results of the data analyses with the outcome of the four studies carried out at Hungarian companies (András, 1999; Konczos-Szombathelyi, 2008; Bajzát, 2010; Ablonczyné, Tompos & Kecskés; 2014) it can be seen that for most companies, English is the primary foreign language of communication, followed by German. The differences among the companies can be explained by regional differences because if a company is near the Austrian-Hungarian border or if it is a subsidiary of a German-owned and directed company, German plays a more important role than English. In one of the research studies (Ablonczyné et al. 2014, pp. 12-13) besides English and German, other foreign languages were mentioned as the language of communication; however, the need for speaking Russian, Slovakian, French, Italian or other foreign languages proved to be much lower than the knowledge of English and

German. This result also resembles the outcome of the analyses of the advertisements of the present study.

If the findings of the present analysis are compared with the previously discussed ones it can be seen how the requirements have changed with time. One of the differences is that there are fewer foreign languages mentioned among the needs of the employers, that is, earlier several other languages, such as Dutch, French, Italian, Romanian and Spanish appeared besides English and German. At the same time, English plays an even more major role in the 2016 analysis than in the data analyses carried out earlier by Sturcz (2004), Hives (2006), Hajdú (2007) and Bajzát (2010; 2011). Another difference is that the need for the knowledge of foreign languages for specific purposes has slightly increased; however, it is still not an essential requirement for people with higher education. A further difference is that the need for foreign language skills in the different fields of employment has changed as well. In other words, the latest results show that for engineers the knowledge of a foreign language is still considered to be of crucial importance; however, for economists and doctors this requirement has considerably decreased. Apart from that, for employees with a legal degree it is still not a necessity. Also, speaking two foreign languages is not a requirement for economists any more. In the case of engineers and lawyers, however, this need has decreased, while for doctors this requirement has become more important. A comparison also demonstrates that in addition to having foreign language proficiency, employees are required to possess excellent or good communication skills, problem-solving skills, organizational skills and team-working skills. The data from 2016 show that besides these requirements the ideal worker is reliable, has strong self-determination, preciseness and is able to manage a heavy workload.

4. Conclusion

The purpose of the current study was to determine the foreign language requirements in Hungarian job advertisements. The research has identified the significance of speaking English as a foreign language, followed by German. The findings of the reviewed empirical studies have also revealed that most of the employers require the knowledge of one foreign language and only some of them are looking for employees with a good proficiency in an additional second or third foreign language. The analyses of the advertisements have shown that the employers require foreign language competences mainly from engineers, however, for economists, doctors and lawyers it is not a great necessity. This research has several practical applications. Firstly, students should be encouraged and given the opportunity to study and further develop their proficiency in English as a foreign language. Secondly, language awareness of other foreign languages and multilingualism should be promoted. Thirdly, more attention should be paid to developing engineering students' foreign language skills at Hungarian institutions.

Besides foreign language requirements, the investigation has proved the necessity of communication skills. In the case of companies, communication in a foreign language is part of the employees' daily routine. As Bajzát's study (2010), carried out with engineers, shows, the lack of good communication skills in a foreign language might cause serious problems, especially if the employees' knowledge of active vocabulary and grammar is not sufficient, or if they are not familiar with different pronunciations and accents. In the advertisements an increasing attention is paid to having excellent or good communication skills as a primary requirement, followed by problem-solving, organizational and team-working skills. Consequently, education should aim at developing such skills as well, and raising students' attention to the development of these additional skills and competences. Moreover, the findings could be used for course design and development, language policy and planning; moreover, future employees might also benefit from them.

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