

THE ADEQUACY OF THE TEST OF ROMANIAN AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE TO THE TEST TAKERS

ANAMARIA RADU¹

ABSTRACT. *The Adequacy of the test of Romanian as a foreign language to the test takers.* Since the interest in learning Romanian as a foreign language has increased a lot in the past few years, language testers have endeavored to design the most accurate and efficient tests. Thanks to the concerted efforts made by experts in this field, Romanian language testers have succeeded in developing the most up to date tests. The present study is aimed at addressing the issue of the adequacy of the tests of Romanian as a foreign language designed at the Faculty of Letters, Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, established on the content and construct validation employing a qualitative and a quantitative analysis based on questionnaires regarding all sections of the test (listening and reading comprehension, grammar and vocabulary, speaking and writing).

Keywords: *examinations, adequacy of the tests, test takers, qualitative analysis, language testers*

REZUMAT. *Adecvarea testului de limba română ca limbă străină.* Deoarece interesul pentru limba română ca limbă străină a crescut considerabil în ultimii ani, testatorii s-au specializat în crearea celor mai obiective și mai eficiente teste. Grație eforturilor experților în domeniu, testatorii au reușit să realizeze teste standardizate. Studiul nostru analizează adecvarea testelor de limba română ca limbă străină create la Facultatea de Litere, Universitatea Babeş-Bolyai, Cluj – Napoca, stabilind validitatea de conținut a acestor teste din punct de vedere calitativ și cantitativ, în urma interpretării chestionarelor ce au vizat răspunsurile candidaților referitoare la toate secțiunile testului (ascultare, citire, gramatică și vocabular, vorbire și scriere).

Cuvinte-cheie: *examinare, adecvarea testelor, candidați, analiză calitativă, testatori de limbă*

The fairness of language assessment has been the subject of analysis and critique in the field of language testing. The main goal of our paper is to address the issue of the adequacy of the tests of Romanian as a foreign language designed at the Faculty of Letters, Babeş-Bolyai.

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Test paper development and research related to the test validity and assessment reliability are the responsibility of the members of the language department. The interest in learning Romanian as a foreign language has increased significantly, as a result language testers improved the quality and the efficiency of the tests.

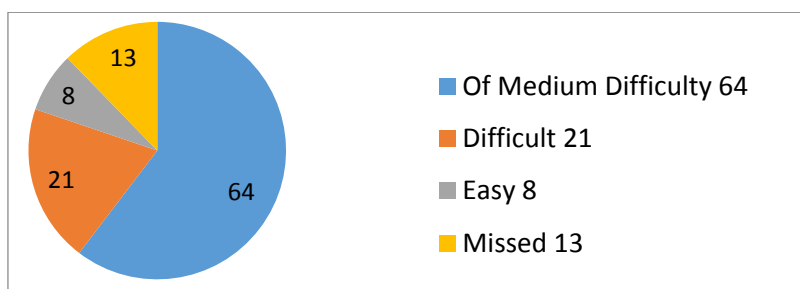
The members of the Department of Romanian Language, Culture and Civilisation, Faculty of Letters, Babeş-Bolyai University have succeeded in designing a prestigious test that responds to the standards of international proficiency testing criteria certified by the Association of Language Testers in Europe (ALTE), successfully passing the auditing process of examinations.

Testing and assessing Romanian language at the Faculty of Letters, Babeş-Bolyai University is done in relation to the CEFR and to the standard European policies. In order to check the validity and the adequacy of these high-stakes tests in what the test takers are concerned, the members of the department used questionnaires that the test takers had to fill in.

The questionnaire consists of 12 questions, plus one extra section for *other comments*. All test takers were asked to fill in the questionnaires. Based on their answers we will measure the adequacy of the B2 examination.

The first question is concerned with an overview of the degree of difficulty of the B2 examination. The test takers were asked to say if overall the exam was *easy/of medium difficulty/difficult* – out of 106 respondents 8 candidates answered easy, 64 participants answered of medium difficulty, 21 of them answered difficult and 13 skipped or missed this question. We can see that out of 106 respondents, 64 rated the test as being of medium difficulty, see the chart below *Overview of the test*.

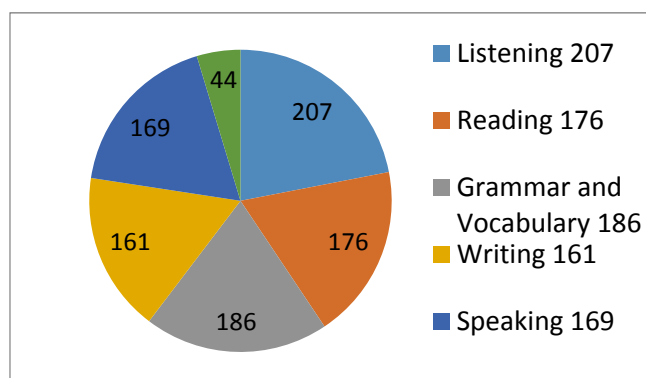
Overview of the test – Total of 106 respondents



The second task was for the test takers to order the sections of the test (Listening, Reading, Grammar and Vocabulary, Writing, Speaking) having in mind their degrees of difficulty, giving them values from 1 to 5, where 1 means the easiest section and 5 the most difficult one. First of all, we have to mention

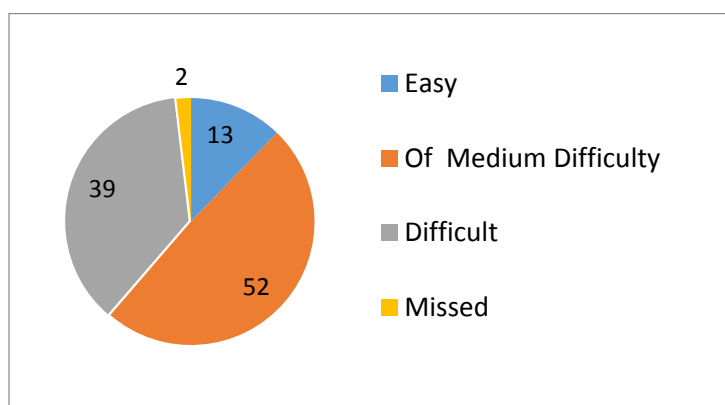
that 44 respondents did not answer correctly the task. Nevertheless, all the other results show that there are not huge differences between each section. As the chart below (*Overview of the test sections*) shows there is a high degree of equilibrium between the sections, as perceived by the test-takers.

Overview of the test sections



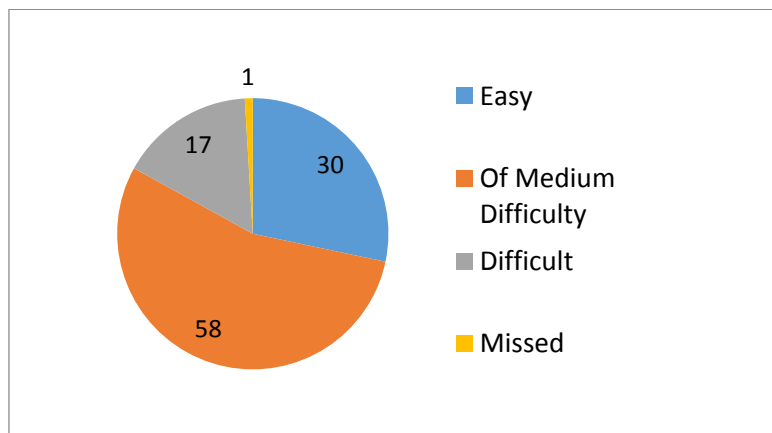
In order to get a closer look to all sections of the examination, the questionnaire contains questions regarding them separately. *How would you rate the Listening section?* is the third question the respondents were asked to answer. As shown in the chart *The Listening section* almost half of the respondents found the listening section as being of medium difficulty, while 13 participants rated the section as easy.

The Listening Section

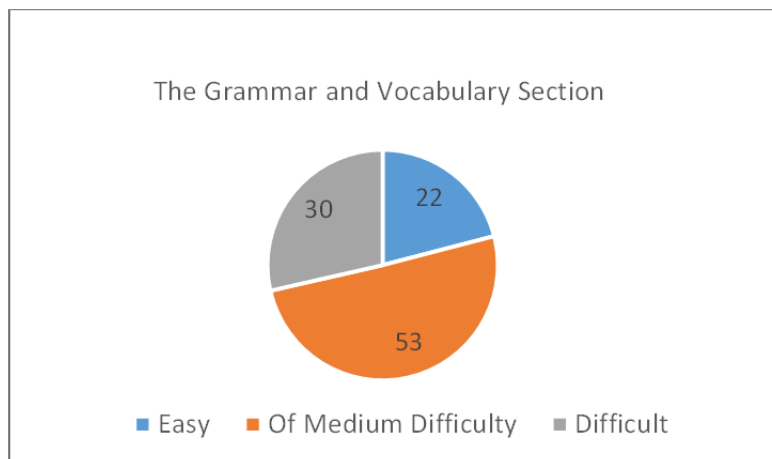


Analyzing the reading section, we obtained similar results. *How would you rate the Reading section?* is the fourth question in our set of questions. 58 respondents rated the section as being of medium difficulty, while 30 rated it as easy, only 17 answers indicated that the section was difficult. See chart below – *The Reading Section*.

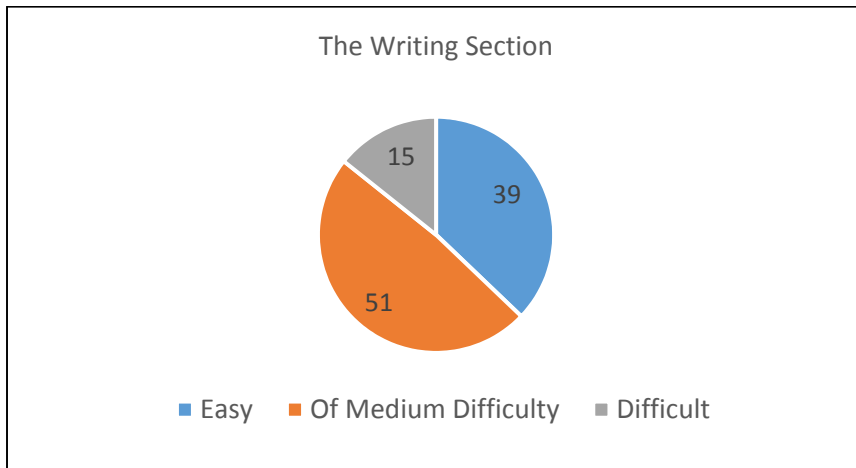
The Reading Section



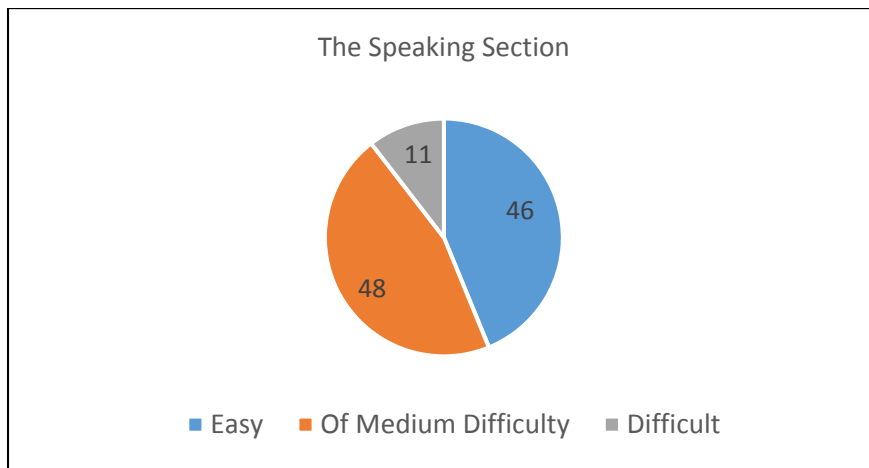
In what the Grammar and Vocabulary section is concerned, the outcome is also relevant. 53 of the responses show that the section is of medium difficulty, 22 show that the section is easy and 30 represents the number of the respondents who found the section difficult, as represented in the chart *Grammar and Vocabulary*.



The answers regarding the writing section are similar to the previous ones. 51 test-takers rated the section as being of medium difficulty, 39 respondents said the section is easy and 15 of them said the section is difficult, as represented in the chart below.

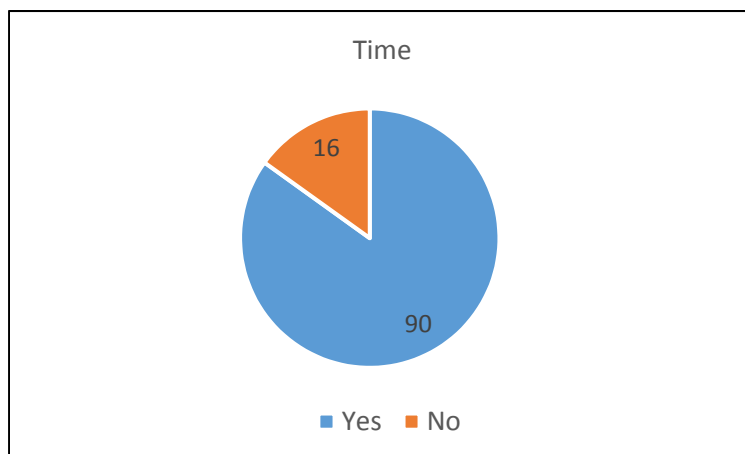


The speaking section was rated as difficult only by 11 test-takers, 46 participants considered this section easy, while 48 of them said it was of medium difficulty. Comparing the 5 sections and taking a closer look to the second chart of our analysis, we came to the conclusion that the speaking part is considered the easiest of the sections, however the results show that there were not relevant discrepancies between the five sections.

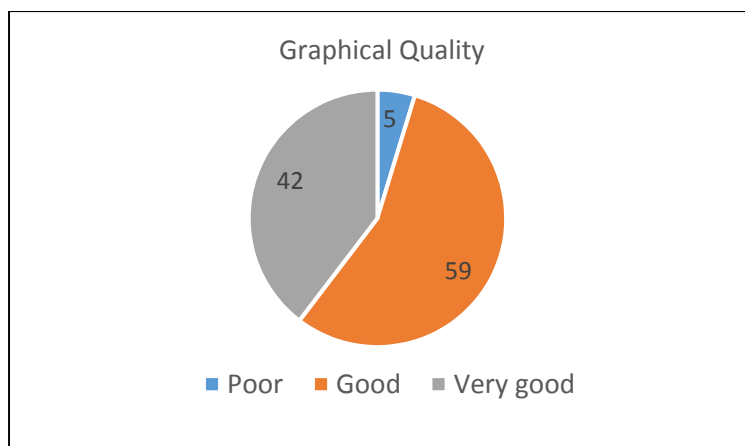


The questionnaire contains questions regarding the amount of time, the quality of the paper and the audio file used during the examination.

Out of 106 respondents, 90 answered that the time they had at their disposal was enough to solve all the tasks in the examination.

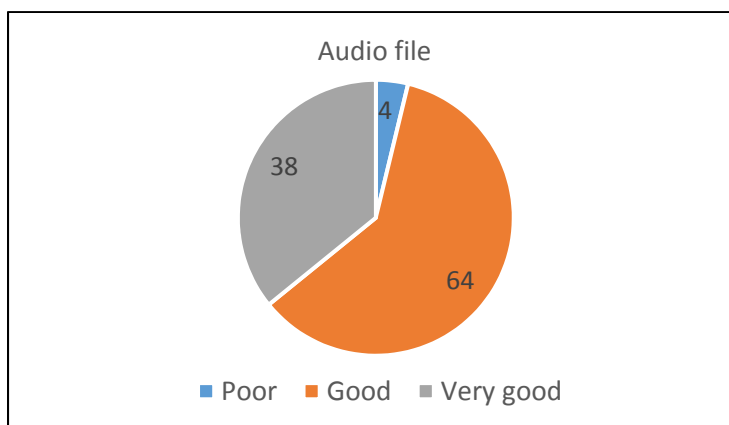


In what the aspect of the graphical quality of the papers is concerned, only 5 of the test takers rated the papers as being of poor quality. 42 persons rated this aspect as being very good and 59 as being of good quality.

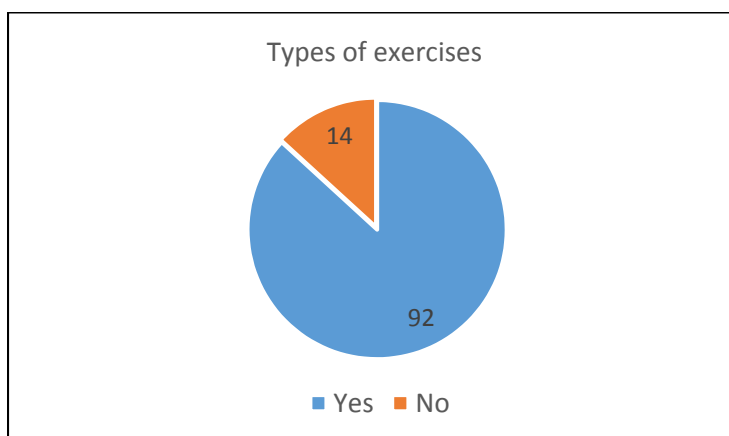


Similar results were shown for rating the quality of the audio files in the listening section. Only 4 of the test takers rated the audio file as being of poor quality, 38 persons rated this aspect as being very good and 64 as being good.

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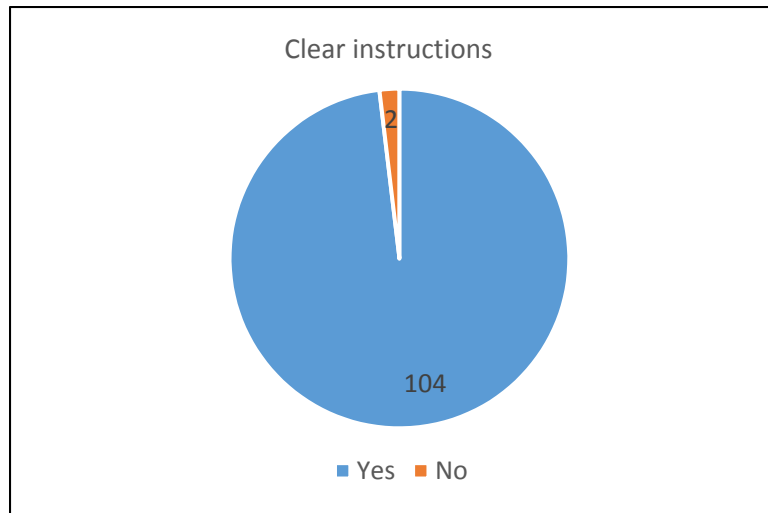


In order to ensure that all the test-takers are familiar with the examination tasks, we have sessions of pre-examinations. Participants in the final exam are given a set of pre-tests that they are asked to solve as if they were at the actual exam. All patterns are the same, the types of exercises, tasks and items, except for the inputs which are different. This way we provide all test takers support and we cover also one scaffolding method, necessary in the evaluation process. The respondents were asked if they were familiar with all the types of exercises and, as shown in the chart below, only 14 answered they were not familiar with all the types of the exercises.

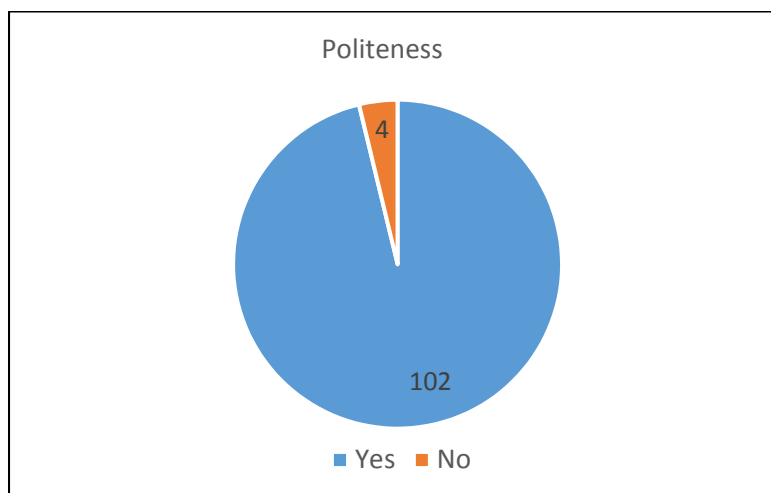


Being one of the most stressful part of the exam for almost all the candidates, we decided to take a closer look to the speaking part of the examination. A series of homogeneous factors could affect the quality of their

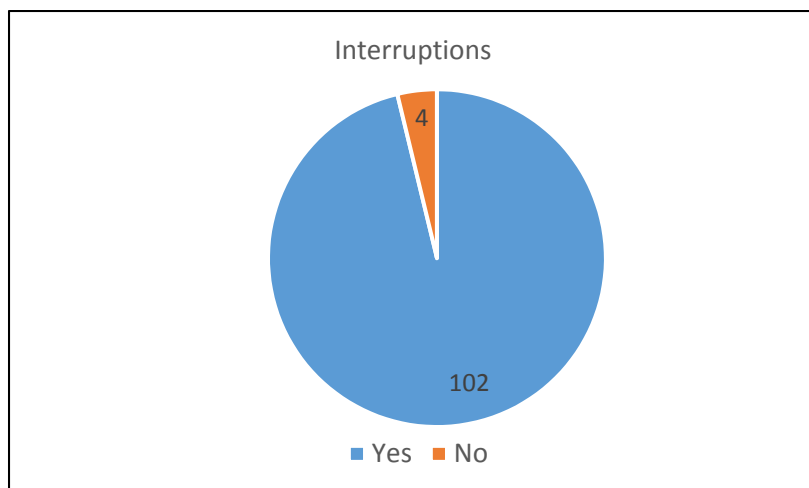
produced discourse. That is why we consider that the examiner could reduce their stress by having an appropriate attitude during the examination. The first question was - *At the Speaking examination, the examiner gave you clear instructions?* Only 2 of the respondents' answers were negative.



The second question was - *At the Speaking examination, the examiner was polite?* Out of 106 responses, only 4 were negative.



The last question regarding the examiner's attitude - *At the Speaking examination, the examiner spoke enough, without interrupting the candidate several times?* – has similar results - out of 106 responses, only 4 were negative.



The last section of the questionnaire should contain other comments or suggestions that the test-takers have. The majority of the respondents don't fill in this part. Some of them (approximately 10) have comments such as: *Thank you!* or *It was a good exam*, or *It was not too difficult*. Very few of the test takers have commented upon the speaking part, explaining that if they have a less skilled colleague for the spoken interaction that is in their disadvantage, or that they are really stressed at the spoken examination and they sometimes "forget words".

The examinations of Romanian as a foreign language designed and administered at The Department of Romanian Language, Culture and Civilisation the Faculty of Letters, Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, have gone through several processes of revisions and development. As the results of the questionnaire show, these examinations are adequate and are reliable instruments for measuring the test-takers' competences in Romanian language. From the point of view of the test-takers, the examinations constitute efficient and fair instruments for measuring their skills, as shown in the results and charts of our present study.

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