Between Language and Culture: Investigating Motivation to Learn Romanian in Portugal

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Abstract

The promotion and study of Romanian as a foreign language has a well-established tradition and has evolved over time in accordance with the language policies implemented by the Romanian state. The case of Romanian language study in Portugal is particularly paradoxical: despite its long-standing tradition, the number of students currently choosing to learn Romanian remains low.

This study attempts to provide a more informed and nuanced account of this paradox by applying Hofstede's 6-D model of national cultures, using data about Romania and Portugal as presented in Hofstede's Globe. The analysis reveals that, although the two nations share several cultural dimensions, they also exhibit divergent values and cultural tendencies that reflect deeper, often invisible aspects of daily life – factors that may help explain the low interest shown by Portuguese students in studying Romanian.

Keywords*: language policy; linguistic attitude; motivation; cultural dimension; intercultural psychology*

Introduction

Teaching and learning Romanian abroad can be quite an adventure, given the mixed perceptions people have about a language from Eastern Europe. While some may be aware of its Latin origin, others – due to the geographical region where it is spoken – mistakenly associate it with the Slavic language family, despite its name clearly suggesting otherwise. Romanian is often perceived as having limited utility on the job market or marginal relevance within the European linguistic landscape. Conversely, it can also be seen as uniquely intriguing and intellectually stimulating, with the potential to awaken lifelong passions.

While people may choose to learn French for its cultural prestige and diplomatic status, Spanish for its global reach, or Italian for its musicality and ties to a glorious past, those who opt for Romanian tend to do so for very specific reasons, which are generally less economic or

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international in nature. Most learners of Romanian either have a strong passion for languages – where the rarity of a language becomes part of its appeal (e.g., the Latin-Slavic blend that characterizes Romanian, unique among Romance languages) – or they have Romanian ancestry and a desire to reconnect with their roots.

There are also several practical reasons for learning Romanian, including tourism (to explore attractions such as Transylvania or the Danube Delta), business opportunities (given Romania's growing economy), and education (notably in the fields of medicine and engineering, where universities offer high-quality instruction at affordable tuition fees). One could argue that the reasons for learning Romanian are numerous and diverse – which is indeed true, with one caveat: those who make that choice do not follow conventional paths. On the contrary, they value difference and adventure, and are drawn to the experience of connecting and learning from the Other.

These are anecdotal observations based on sustained direct experience with the Portuguese public in my capacity as a Romanian language lecturer in Portugal. While not the result of systematic research, these insights nonetheless help delineate the typical profile of the learner of Romanian abroad.

1. Romania's language policy abroad

It is common knowledge that each country has its policy as regards the dissemination and teaching of its national language abroad. In Romania, this policy is primarily implemented by the Romanian Language Institute (Institutul Limbii Române - I.L.R.), established in 1999 "as a specialized institution under the authority of the *Ministry of Education*, intended to serve the promotion and teaching of the Romanian language and culture abroad" (Cuibus 2024: 10). The Institute currently coordinates a network of 59 Lectorates in universities across Europe and beyond, making it "the most extensive, consistent, and professionalized Romanian linguistic and cultural presence in the international academic environment" (Cuibus 2024: 10).

The idea of establishing Lectorates to promote the Romanian language internationally is not a recent one. The tradition of sending teachers to European universities as part of cultural diplomacy dates back to the 19th century. Romanian was first taught at the universities of

Budapest and Torino as early as 1863 (cf. https://www.ilr.ro/lectorate/). The first Romanian lecturer in Portugal, Professor Victor Buescu, arrived in 1943 and played a key role in introducing the Portuguese public to Romanian language and culture, alongside Mircea Eliade, who was at the time the cultural attaché to the Embassy of Romania in Portugal.

2. Romanian in Portugal

In a recent article, *A Brief Journey through the Romanian Cultural Presence in Portugal. The Romanian Lectorate at the University of Lisbon* (Ciolăneanu, 2024: 303 - 315), I provided a detailed account of the cultural and political context in which the Lectorate of Romanian in Portugal was established. I also discussed its development over 80 years - from the foundational efforts of Professor Buescu to the various activities carried out today. However, I did not attempt to explain the notably small number of Portuguese students who choose to learn Romanian.

As previously mentioned, Romanian tends to attract a "special" kind of learner across the globe - one who is rarely numerous. Yet, in Portugal the number is even lower than in comparable Romance-speaking countries. The reasons that drive people to study Romanian are generally consistent across the contexts and have been beautifully summarized by the ChatGPT itself: *linguistic interest* (Romance language similarities, unique features, curiosity among polyglots), *practical reasons* (travel & tourism, work & business, education, immigration & citizenship), and *cultural and personal motivations* (heritage & family, relationships, media & pop culture) (OpenAI, 2025).

Despite targeted efforts made by the Romanian Lectorate at the University of Lisbon - ranging from conferences and workshops to social media campaigns, literary events, film screenings, and poetry readings (see Ciolăneanu 2024: 307 - 308 for a detailed description) - these initiatives have not yielded the expected results in terms of student enrolment. A modest increase in curiosity about Romanian is observable, but the number of students remains disappointingly low. This leads to the obvious question: why? Is it because of the geographical distance? Because of the cultural differences? Because of the (perhaps) perceived low economic and political importance of Romanian abroad? A clear answer cannot be provided at this stage. One cannot stop but wonder when confronted with the stark

discrepancy in institutional presence and student interest between the two countries shown in the table below:

Table 1. *A sketchy comparison between Romanian Studies in Portugal and Portuguese Studies in Romania*

The study of Romanian in Portugal	The study of Portuguese in Romania
Romanian language instruction began in Portugal approximately 82 years ago.	Portuguese language instruction began in Romania approximately 53 years ago.
Romanian can only be studied at the University of Lisbon, where the Lecturer of Romanian alone - under the coordination of the Romanian Language Institute in Bucharest[2] - covers all curricular and extracurricular activities.	Portuguese can be studied in (at least) four universities in Romania, often with several instructors. In addition to the official lecturer coordinated by the Camões Institute[3], there are other teachers who are supported financially by Camões or by host universities.
There is no BA in Romanian. A former BA in Translation (with Romanian as Language B)[4] was discontinued in 2025 due to lack of enrollment.	Portuguese is offered at all academic levels - BA, MA, PhD. There are two Romanian universities that offer BA in Portuguese language and literature: the University of Bucharest[5] and the University "Babeș-Bolyai" in Cluj-Napoca[6]. Two Romanian high schools offer a Portuguese bilingual profile: "Eugen Lovinescu" Highschool in Bucharest[7] and "Mihai Eminescu" Highschool in Cluj-Napoca[8].

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[2] Romanian in foreign universities: https://www.ilr.ro/lectorate/limba-romana-in-universitati-straine/.

[3] Romania. Lectureships and Portuguese teachers in higher education in Romania: https://www.instituto-camoes.pt/en/activity-camoes/what-we-do/teach-portuguese/lectorships-co-operation-agreements/romenia.

[4] The programme was initiated only in 2017 after a huge effort made by the Lecturer of Romanian herself to convince the Portuguese partner, *The School of Arts and Humanities of the University of Lisbon*, to take the challenge of opening, for the first time in Portugal, a BA with a specialization "Romanian - Language B" with the view to giving Romanian a more stable and future-oriented position among students. Unfortunately, only a small number of students took up this opportunity between 2017 and 2025.

[5] University of Bucharest, Faculty of Foreign Languages and Literatures, *Philology*: https://lls.unibuc.ro/facultate/studii/licenta/limba-si-literatura/.

[6] University "Babeș-Bolyai" in Cluj-Napoca, Faculty of Letters, *Portuguese Language and Literature*: https://lett.ubbcluj.ro/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Macheta-licenta-PT.pdf

[7] "Eugen Lovinescu" Highschool in Bucharest: http://lovinescu.ro/scolarizare/

The study of Romanian in Portugal	The study of Portuguese in Romania
	A new Centre for the Study of Portuguese was recently opened at "Alexandru Ioan Cuza" University in Iași[9].
The students are mainly interested in the "big" languages: English, Spanish, Italian, French, German despite the wide range of language programmes offered by the University of Lisbon[10].	The interest of students in languages and philological studies is distributed across the varied language programmes offered by universities.

This table clearly shows that, although Romanian has had a longer institutional presence in Portugal, Portuguese has achieved far greater academic integration and prestige in Romania. Romanian still struggles with outdated stereotypes and low visibility in Portugal, whereas Portuguese enjoys a well-established reputation as a valuable and appealing language. Curiously enough, it is often the Romanian learning institutions that show more interest in promoting Portuguese culture, working proactively with the Portuguese cultural and diplomatic institutions present in Romania.

This imbalance cannot be easily explained by negative stereotypes alone, as similar images exist in countries like France, Spain, or Italy, where Romanian enjoys relatively better academic and cultural interest. Rather, the explanation must lie deeper - within the invisible cultural mindset of each society. As suggested by Gavriluță (2017), this mindset may be embedded in the *negative[11] of daily life* defined as the part of the world "which cannot be seen but which shapes reality at a profound level" (p. 17).

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[8] "Mihai Eminescu" Highschool in Cluj-Napoca: https://eminescucj.ro/despre-portugheza/
[9] The Inauguration of the Centre of Portuguese Language in Iași:
https://www.uaic.ro/event/inaugurarea-centrului-de-limba-portugheza-din-iasi/
[10] University of Lisbon, School of Arts and Humanities, Department of General and Romance Linguistics, *Foreign Languages*: https://sites.google.com/campus.ul.pt/dlgr-letras-ulisboa/l%C3%ADnguas
[11] *Negative* is understood here, following Gavriluță 2017, as in "the negative photographic image (…) from which positive prints may be made" (*Oxford Languages and Google*).

3. Hofstede's 6-D model of national culture: description and hypotheses

In light of the previously outlined issues, this article proposes a new line of inquiry into the motivation of Portuguese students to learn Romanian, which takes into account broader cultural values identified through cross-cultural studies in social and intercultural psychology. The primary framework employed is Hofstede's *6-D model of national culture*, which is explained in detail by its author on the official website[12]. The site also offers an interactive tool, called *Hofstede's Globe*, which enables users to retrieve the necessary data.

The model comprises six dimensions, each of which can be interpreted in terms of its potential impact on foreign language learning. Below is a brief presentation of these dimensions, together with some working hypotheses based on my long-term classroom and institutional observations in the area of language teaching and learning in Romania and Portugal.

Table 2. *Cultural dimensions: description and language learning hypotheses* **(modelled after Hofstede's *6-D model of national culture*)**

Cultural Dimensions	
1 **Power distance:** "the extent to which the less powerful members of organizations and institutions accept and expect that power is distributed unequally" (Hofstede: online source)	**small power distance** - societies that value equality and individualism and encourage curiosity and communication. **large power distance** – inequality is considered normal, people easily accept hierarchical relations, without questioning them.
Hypothesis: In small power distance societies, people are open to engage with diverse cultures, want to broaden their horizons, and, consequently, they are naturally driven to learn new languages. In large power distance societies, although curiosity may still be present, it could be more constrained by societal expectations. Consequently, language learning may be seen more as being an institutional pursuit rather than a personal endeavour.	
2 **Individualism *vs* collectivism:** individualism refers to the societies in which "the ties	**individualistic cultures**: the individual is more important than the group; applying a universalist perspective, the others are

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[12] The 6-D Model of National Culture: https://geerthofstede.com/culture-geert-hofstede-gert-jan-hofstede/6d-model-of-national-culture/.

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between individuals are loose; everyone is expected to look after himself/herself and the immediate family", whereas collectivism defines the societies in which "individuals from birth onwards are part of strong in-groups"
(Hofstede: online source)

simply classified as individuals. Competition is between individuals. People tend to pursue personal growth and self-expression. **collectivistic cultures**: the group is more important than the individual, which helps classify the others as in-group and out-group; consequently, who is not part of the group (out-group) tends to be excluded. Competition is between groups. The personal development of the individual needs to serve the group.

Hypothesis: In an individualistic culture, as personal growth is of critical importance, the desire to explore new languages and cultures must be highly important in the process of personal development. In a collectivistic culture, as personal growth needs to be put in the service of the group, learning a new language may be viewed important as a strategy to better integrate into a community or organization so that group harmony and cohesion be achieved.

3 **Masculinity *vs* femininity:** in a masculine society "emotional gender roles are distinct", i.e., "what you should feel being born as a boy or being born as a girl. The boy should be assertive and tough and focused on material success and the women should be focused on the quality of life". In a feminine society, these roles are not clearly separated.
(Hofstede: online source)

masculine cultures: value assertiveness, competition and achievement; work is highly valued.
feminine cultures: value cooperation, care, quality of life; there must be a balance between work and private life.

Hypothesis: In masculine societies, learning languages can be seen as a way to gain advantage in a competition such as applying for a job, whereas in feminine societies, language learning may be viewed as a way to smooth communication and build harmonious relationships. Knowing various languages foster empathy and understanding.

4 **Uncertainty avoidance:** "the extent to which the members of a society feel threatened by ambiguous and unknown situations"
(Hofstede: online source)

uncertainty accepting societies: uncertainty is seen as normal; what is different is curious. People are flexible, open to new experiences, and embrace the other with curiosity and willingness to know more. They seek new opportunities, and learning

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new languages can help in this endeavour.

uncertainty avoiding societies: uncertainty is seen as a threat; what is different is dangerous. In this type of cultures, people prefer stability, rules and predictability. They avoid the unknown and are reluctant to engage with unfamiliar languages and cultures.

Hypothesis: In uncertainty accepting societies, as people are in search of new opportunities, learning new languages can be seen as a possibility to open new paths in life; in uncertainty avoiding societies, as people are rather reluctant about the unknown, engaging with a new, less used language may be seen as not a very good strategy in the process of personal growth.

5 **Long-term** *vs* **short-term orientation:** looking to the future *vs* focusing on past and present.

long-term orientated cultures: focus on future rewards, saving, perseverance, long-term objectives. The capacity to adapt to new circumstances is highly valued, and learning from other countries is seen as positive.

short-term orientated cultures: focus on quick gratification, with immediate results. Present and past are more important that the future. The person who is perceived as being always the same is valued, and pride in their own country is cultivated.

Hypothesis: In long-term orientated societies, as education is seen as a long-term investment, language learning may be seen as part of a useful strategy to improve one's future life. In short-term orientated cultures, language learning may be viewed as an instrument to achieve short-term objectives such as travelling or getting a job.

6 **Indulgence** *vs* **restraint:** is related to "feelings of subjective happiness or unhappiness and control of the people's own life or the opposite"
(Hofstede: online source)

indulgent cultures: "allow relatively free gratification of basic and natural human desires, leading to enjoying life and having fun" (Hofstede: online source). People have a perception of personal life control.

restrained cultures: "suppress gratification of needs" (Hofstede: online source) and emphasise social norms, control and conformity. What happens in their lives depends on other factors, not on their own doing.

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Hypothesis: Given the leisure ethics of indulgent societies, language learning may be seen as an enjoyable and fulfilling activity, which feeds their curiosity and helps self-expression (people in indulgent societies tend to be more extroverted and make friends easily). The work ethics found predominantly in restricted societies may lead to see language learning more as a duty, a pragmatic activity to comply with the requisites of their professional life.

These six dimensions provide a comprehensive framework for interpreting how national cultural profiles influence attitudes towards foreign language learning. The next section will apply this model to Romania and Portugal in order to better understand the observed discrepancies in students' language-learning behaviour.

In other words, the analysis developed in this paper is not a straightforward comparison between the interest of Romanian students in studying Portuguese and the interest of Portuguese students in studying Romanian. Such a line of investigation could easily reduce the discussion to a mere contrast between the economic, political and social status of the two languages, which would inevitably result in a significative quantitative discrepancy.

Romanian is the official language in two countries - Romania and the Republic of Moldova - and serves as heritage language for a considerable number of people living in the historical provinces of the neighbouring countries (e.g., Serbia, Ukraine, Hungary) as well as among more recent immigrant communities in countries such as Italy, Spain, France, and Portugal. Estimates suggest a total of approximately 29 million Romanian speakers worldwide, including 21.5 million native speakers in Romania, 3.5 million in the Republic of Moldova, and around 4 million native and heritage speakers in the historical and diasporic communities abroad (Trandabăț et al., 2021: 11).

In contrast, Portuguese has approximately 261 million speakers worldwide. It is the official language in countries across Europe, Latin America, West Africa, Sub-Saharan Africa and Southeast Asia. Through diasporic communities, it is also used systematically in North America, South Asia, and Oceania (Santos Silva, 2016: 11 - 12). Furthermore, a

political community has been established under the name of the *Community of Portuguese Language Speaking Countries* (CPLP)[13].

Having said that, the present study focuses instead on students' attitudes and openness towards learning foreign languages irrespective of their extrinsic values such as economic and political status – factors that have already been shown to rank highly among the reasons for choosing one language over another: "[l]anguages rise and fall in world esteem for many kinds of reasons – political, economic, social, religious, literary" (Crystal, 2003: 106). However, the question that needs to be asked is: to what extent, if at all, are students' linguistic attitudes and motivation conditioned by the unconsciously acquired values embedded in their own cultural environment?

4. Romanian and Portuguese cultural models: analysis and results

Using the data provided by *Hofstede's Globe*, this section compares cultural values in Romania and Portugal to explain differing attitudes toward language learning in each country. The following table summarises the results according to the data provided by *Hofstede's 6-D model of national culture*:

Table 3. *Romanian and Portuguese data on the 6 cultural dimensions retrieved from Hofstede's Globe data provided on Hofstede's 6-D model of national culture website*

	Cultural dimensions	Romania	Portugal
1	**Power distance**	Large power cultures	
		90	63
2	**Individualism *vs* collectivism**	Collectivistic cultures	
		30	27
3	**Masculinity *vs* femininity**	Feminine cultures	
		42	31
4	**Uncertainty avoidance**	High uncertainty avoidance	
		90	104
5	**Long-term *vs* short-term orientation**	Long-term orientation	Short-term orientation
		52	28
6	**Indulgence *vs* restraint**	Restraint orientation	
		20	33

[13] Romania has become an observer state to CPLP in 2021.

5.1 Power distance: Romania: 90; Portugal: 63

The distance is calculated on a scale from 0 (small power distance) to 100 (large power distance). The data show that both Romania and Portugal are large power distance cultures, with Romania showing a stronger tendency towards the centralization of power than Portugal. It indicates that language learning in both cultures might be more institutionally rather than personally controlled. The explanation of the difference observed in the attitude of the Romanian vs Portuguese students towards learning less known and used languages should be then looked for in the way the educational systems of the two countries encourage the study of various foreign languages and what the educational offer is that the pupils are presented with since their very early steps in school.

Table 1 convincingly shows that the Romanian educational system encourages significantly more the study of Portuguese in Romania as opposed to its Portuguese counterpart. What seems to be even more important is the fact that the national system itself makes efforts to disseminate Portuguese, offering the possibility for the students to get accustomed with the foreign language even during their pre-university studies.

4.2 Individualism *vs* **collectivism:** Romania: 30; Portugal: 27

The distance is calculated on a scale from 0 (collectivism) to 100 (individualism). At a first glance, both Romania and Portugal are collectivistic (they both belong to the 24-32 interval on Hofstede's map), so learning languages should be seen in both societies mainly as an instrument to achieve group harmony. That would justify the attitudes of the Portuguese students, who generally prefer to study internationally validated languages, but not the attitude of the Romanian students, who manifest a lot of curiosity and interest in adding new, less known languages, to their language repertoire.

A more thorough analysis (David, 2015: 169-170) shows that the two countries present two distinct types of collectivism: Portugal presents a *pathogenic collectivism*, rooted in historical threats from infectious diseases[14]

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[14] It has been documented that there is a cause-effect relation between the countries which have a past in which infectious diseases were highly present and the collectivistic nature

(David, 2015: 92, 170) and, hence, shaped by health and safety concerns implying a greater adherence to social consensus and established norms. Romania presents a *protective collectivism*, rooted in historical needs for defence and cohesion when confronted with external military and political aggression (David, 2015: 169)[15]. The author suggests that Romanians are fundamentally individualists, but, because of the history's vicissitudes, they created a special kind of collectivism focused on family and religion, and not on collectivity (David, 2015: 169-170). His conclusion is supported by Shulruf et al. 2011 study that shows that the profile of the young Romanian people is individualist, characterized by autonomy and independence (David, 2015:170). Elsewhere, the author speaks about selfish individualism, which can serve as the basis for a specific type of collectivism (David, 2015: 167), named *autarchic individualism* by other researchers (Gavreliuc, 2011: 108).

Individualist people are strongly orientated towards personal growth and self-expression to which professional success may be added. This may explain why Romanian students are more interested in studying a wider range of foreign languages. Mastering a less known and used language may be considered added value in finding better job opportunities, and a facilitator in communicating with others. Moreover, given the special type of Romanian individualism, which is not necessarily based on the cooperation with the other social actors (as in the classic definition of individualism), it needs to be correlated with *competition* in which the Other is the adversary, and the competition may be more or less loyal (Gavreliuc, 2011: 108-109).

The hypothesis formulated in the previous section is supported by the following findings: in the Romanian individualistic culture, as personal growth is of critical importance, the desire to explore new languages and cultures is highly important in the process of personal development, which may also have a competitional dimension. In the Portuguese collectivistic culture, as personal growth needs to be put at the service of the group, learning a new language may be viewed as a strategy to better integrate

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of their societies (among other cultural practices) (for a detailed presentation of these correlations, see David, 2015: 92 - 93).

[15] That explains why, among the countries of the European Union with a predominantly individualist cultural profile, only Portugal, Greece, Romania and Bulgaria are collectivist (cf. David, 2015: 170).

into a community or organisation so that group harmony and cohesion can be achieved.

A study on collectivism-individualism and personal conceptions of intelligence in Romania and Portugal (Ciochină & Faria, 2011) provides further confirmation. It concludes that

(…) with regard to competition seen as an important element characteristic of individualism, we noticed that this functions differently in the two cultural contexts. Thus, in the Portuguese cultural context, competition stimulates the concern about getting better results than others, the efforts made for developing intelligence being therefore sacrificed, while in the Romanian cultural context this desideratum is mediated by the interest in developing one's own intellectual competence. (Ciochină & Faria, 2011: 45 - 46)

This finding supports the idea that Romanian students pursue language learning for personal enrichment, even if it does not yield immediate recognition, whereas Portuguese students tend to choose paths that optimise visible and measurable results, sometimes to the detriment of personal development. The motivation of Portuguese students generally oriented towards short-term goals such as "getting better results than others" implies a sense of competition that may be correlated with the hierarchical way of viewing the world, in which the position occupied in the hierarchy determines the value of the person.

4.3 Masculinity *vs* femininity: Romania: 42; Portugal: 31

The distance is calculated on a scale from 0 (feminine) to 100 (masculine). Both Romania and Portugal are classified as feminine societies, but Romania leans more towards masculinity in its value system. The fact that the feminine character is not very accentuated (David 2015: 100) correlates with the whole discussion on *competition* (a core value in masculine societies) and may reinforce the competitive edge observed among Romanian students, who perceive lesser-known languages as assets on the job market. In contrast, being part of a feminine society which values harmony and understanding, Portuguese students tend to prioritise communication and global consensus, favouring languages with widespread recognition and established prestige. This also correlates with the Portuguese hierarchical way of seeing the world, in which the place in a certain type of classification establishes the value of that particular item (the more highly placed, the more important, hence worthy, it is). In other

words, in the Portuguese culture, languages are not necessarily intrinsically important; on the contrary, their worth is established by taking into account their economic and political associated values, hence the Portuguese students' propensity for international languages such as English or Spanish.

4.4 Uncertainty avoidance: Romania: 90; Portugal: 104

The distance is calculated on a scale from 0 (tolerant) to 112 (avoiding). The data show that both cultures see uncertainty as a threat. Portugal scores slightly higher than Romania, reinforcing its cultural preference for stability and predictability. This supports the tendency of Portuguese students to gravitate toward "safe" language choices, which have already been proven to be useful or prestigious. This correlates with their collectivist characteristic that values the choices of the group more than the personal ones.

Romanians, while also uncertainty averse, are more willing to embrace it if it can yield long-term personal or professional benefits. This correlates with the individualistic characteristic of Romanian culture and with the interest of the Romanians in achieving competitive edges that might add value to their personal and professional development.

4.5 Long-term *vs* short-term orientation: Romania: 52; Portugal: 28

The distance is calculated on a scale from 0 (short-term) to 100 (long-term). This dimension marks one of the clearest distinctions: Romania is modestly long-term orientated, while Portugal is clearly short-term oriented. Romanian students may therefore approach language learning as an investment in future success, with lesser-known languages considered as added value, whereas Portuguese students prioritise immediate gains, often favouring languages with clear economic or academic returns. This correlates with their need for security (discussed in the *uncertainty avoidance* section) that urges them to follow tested paths, embraced by most members of the group.

4.6 Indulgence *vs* restraint: Romania: 20; Portugal: 33

The distance is calculated on a scale from 0 (restraint) to 100 (indulgence). Both cultures are restraint-oriented, which suggests that language learning is often framed as a duty rather than an enjoyable pursuit. However, this does not explain preferences for particular types of languages. Therefore, this dimension seems to have limited explanatory power in this context.

5. Tentative conclusions

This study has sought to shed light on the persistent paradox that characterises the teaching of Romanian in Portugal: despite a long-standing institutional presence and continuous promotional efforts, the number of Portuguese students choosing to study Romanian remains remarkably low. To understand this phenomenon beyond anecdotal explanations or simplistic references to negative stereotypes, the analysis turned to Hofstede's *6-D model of national cultures* as a tool for interpreting the invisible cultural mindsets of the two cultures.

The comparative analysis revealed that, while Romania and Portugal share several cultural features - such as *high power distance*, *strong uncertainty avoidance*, and a *restrained orientation -*, some key differences appear to account for the diverging attitudes toward the study of lesser-known languages such as Romanian. Most notably, Romanian society shows stronger traits of *individualism*, *competitivenes*s, and a *longer-term orientation*, which foster personal growth as a valued goal.

The findings also suggest that the limited success of Romanian in Portugal cannot be explained solely by institutional factors or public visibility, but must be understood in relation to deeper cultural tendencies that shape the perception of language learning itself. In the Portuguese society, language study is often viewed through the lens of collective validation and pragmatic benefit, making less commonly taught languages appear peripheral or even irrelevant. Romanian, with its niche appeal and perceived lack of pragmatic utility, is not necessarily considered as a valuable choice for their future careers.

To address this mismatch, language promotion strategies must move beyond traditional formats and reconsider how Romanian is framed and offered to Portuguese students. Efforts could be directed towards

aligning the image of Romanian with values that resonate culturally in professional mobility within specific sectors. In parallel, integrating Romanian earlier into the educational system, even as an optional module, might be a way to make it more visible and, thus, (more) appealing to the Portuguese public.

Further research could expand this cultural comparative model to other contexts in which Romanian is taught, identifying whether similar dynamics are at play or if different cultural variables influence the perception of the language. Additionally, qualitative studies focusing on students' narratives and attitudes could provide a richer understanding of the emotional and symbolic dimensions attached to Romanian and its speakers in Portugal.

Ultimately, this inquiry reinforces the idea that language learning is never a culturally neutral act. It is profoundly shaped by the ways in which societies imagine the Other, assess usefulness, and position themselves in relation to difference. In this sense, the challenge of teaching Romanian abroad is not only about institutional presence, but also about cultural resonance and, perhaps more importantly, about finding meaningful ways to speak to the curiosity that lies dormant beneath the surface of familiar and taken for granted ideas and stereotypes. As for the case presented here, the analysis points to a deeper cultural logic that helps explain why Romanian students are more open to exploring less conventional language options, while Portuguese students remain more anchored to dominant, institutionally endorsed languages. Such findings underscore the importance of understanding the cultural mindset - not merely individual preferences - when analysing trends in foreign language education.

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