

ABSTRACT

This paper presents the results of the preliminary work carried out for the CMC_E European Project (*Communicating in Multilingual Contexts Meets the Enterprises*), within the frame of the Lifelong Learning Program. This project, which has its origin in a previous language programme addressed to mobility and Erasmus-Socrates students and which was awarded the European label, intends to offer innovative on-line material which may promote the development of language professional skills.

My main aims here are to introduce the project, to show the language needs of different European enterprises, to offer an analysis of those needs and to explain how they will be taken into account for the development of the project language materials.

First of all, I will concentrate on the importance of needs analysis for the design of syllabus and language courses as stated in the literature (Munby 1978; Hutchinson and Waters 1987; Nunan 1988; White 1988; Palacios 1992, 1994; García Mayo 2000). Secondly, I will present a brief description of the CMC_E project: its background, the participants in the project, its objectives, the languages involved, the language level, the target learners, etc. Thirdly, I will describe how the survey used to analyse the language needs of different local, regional and national European enterprises was designed, the main results obtained and the implications of these results for the production of the project materials (units, topics, language skills, methodology, tasks, etc). Finally, I will provide information about the future plans for the CMC_E project.

1. Introduction

This paper presents the results of the preliminary work carried out for the CMC_E European Project (*Communicating in Multilingual Contexts Meets the Enterprises*), within the frame of the Lifelong Learning Program, which intends to offer innovative on-line material to promote the development of language professional skills.

The main objectives of this paper are to introduce the project, to show the language needs of different European enterprises, to offer an analysis of those needs and to explain how they will be taken into account for the design of the project language materials.

In the first part of the paper, I will concentrate on the importance of needs analysis for the design of syllabus and language courses as stated in the literature. The following section will be devoted to present a description of the CMC_E project. Thirdly, I will describe how the survey used to analyse the language needs of different local, regional and national European enterprises was designed, the main results obtained and the implications of these results for the production of the project materials (units, topics, language skills, methodology, tasks, etc). Finally, I will provide information about the future plans for the CMC_E project and how the analysis of learners' needs will be taken into account all along the development and implementation of this project.

2. The importance of needs analysis: brief review of the literature on the topic

The idea of focusing on learners' needs originated in the 1970s resulting from the interest in the design of language courses that could satisfy individual and social needs (Palacios Martínez 1992:135). Its development evolved in association with the teaching of languages for specific purposes. In 1978, Munby proposed his "Communication Needs Processor" (CNP), a model for needs analysis which was quite influential, and stated that the design of syllabuses for language courses could only take place after a preliminary work on the learners' needs. However, Munby just produced a list of the linguistic features of the target situation in his model, and as García Mayo (2000) claims there should be more to needs analysis than that.

Being aware of the needs of the learners influences not only the content of the language course but also what potential can be exploited through such course. Needs analysis is a complex process which has to take into account what Hutchinson and Waters (1987:54-63) define as "target needs", what learners need to do in the target situation – i.e. language use, and "learning needs", what learners need to do in order to learn – i.e. language learning. In a more modern view, we should not only take into account "target needs" and "learning needs" – i.e. objective needs – but also learners' subjective needs, that is, their affective needs, such as their interests, wishes, expectations and preferences (Nunan 1988).

We can gather information about learners' needs through different media (Hutchinson and Waters 1987:58; Palacios Martínez 1994:143): surveys, questionnaires, interviews, attitude scales, intelligence texts, language tests, job analyses, content analyses, statistical analyses, observation, data collection, or informal consultation with sponsors, learners and others.

Furthermore, needs analysis should not only be considered as a pre-stage for the design of language courses; in fact, it is an "on-going process" (White 1998:91) and, as evaluation, it can be used to design, improve and implement language programmes.

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3. The CMC_E Project: History, description and main objectives

The basis of our project is that multilingualism is a key feature of Europe. The benefits of knowing foreign languages are unquestionable as language skills not only facilitate studying, travelling and working around the world, allowing intercultural communication and integration, but they are also an asset in meeting the new economic and professional challenges of the European Union.

In a previous project, CMC (*Communicating in Multilingual Contexts*, integrated within the Socrates Programme Action Lingua 2) we developed materials for mobility students who wished to carry out a university experience abroad. Our purpose was to contribute to the development of *linguistic academic skills* in less used and less taught languages, such as Dutch, Italian, Portuguese, and Slovak, in order to highlight further the need for a broader multilingual community where the knowledge of such languages may begin to be spread in European countries.

Thus, our objectives were mainly centred on enabling university students to improve the quality of their linguistic knowledge as required in trans-national higher education contexts; creating the opportunity of a multilingual network environment which targets mobility students' foreign language training and enhancing adequate and effective preparation besides promoting a multilingual and culturally-diverse environment.

Six national teams (University of Calabria, Italy – CMC Project Coordinating institution; University of Santiago de Compostela, Spain; Maastricht University's Language Centre, The Netherlands; Instituto Politécnico de Castelo Branco, Portugal; Technical University of Košice, Slovakia; and London School of Economics and Political Science, UK) created two modules of four units each, produced in the six languages, based on a thematic-oriented approach around topics, such as “meeting on campus, study skills, academic seminars, oral presentations, CVs” and related to the skills defined in the Common European Framework of Reference, CEFR, (Council of Europe 2001); and also a website <<http://www.cmcproject.it>> aimed at promoting a notice-board where students can exchange opinions, provide suggestions and ask for advice.

The didactic resources were developed according to the CEFR language levels: the English and Spanish materials are directed to B2/C1 users, while the Dutch, Italian, Portuguese and Slovak materials are directed to beginners, A2 users.

Figure 1. Home page of the CMC_E Project website

The CMC_E project (cf. Figure 1), <<http://www.cmceproject.it/>>, moves forward by offering materials which promote the development of *linguistic professional skills*. It aims to encourage the best use of innovative materials developed in the context of the CMC Program. The project wants to provide small but meaningful support to the effects on the European economy of the shortage of foreign language skills in enterprises (see ELAN report, EC 2006).²

These materials promote the development of professional language skills in English (C1 level) and Spanish (B2/C1 level) as well as in Italian (B2 level), Portuguese (B1/B2 level), Slovak (B1/B2 level) and Polish (A2/B1 level),³ in order to highlight the need for a broader multilingual community. The CMC_E Project offers a range of innovative on-line materials based on the results of a survey of needs carried out throughout different sectors of the labour market. The survey has highlighted gaps in language knowledge within enterprises and major areas of language development needs in the various sectors.

In this case, the target groups are not university students, but university leavers preparing to enter the labour market and therefore in need of acquiring professional language skills which will help them become more competitive and also in-service workers who need to develop and reinforce their professional language competences in order to fulfil better their job responsibilities.

The main objective of this project is to contribute to the development of professional language skills in six different languages via the creation of a multilingual network and a culturally-diverse environment in accordance with EU policies. This project also aims to promote intercultural communication, to promote linguistic diversity, to develop innovative ICT-based content, to promote content-language learning and intercultural knowledge; and to contribute to the development of quality lifelong learning.

The methodological/didactic approaches on which both modules (CMC and CMC_E) are based are CLIL (Content Language Integrated Learning), Blended Learning and Learner-centred materials.

4. The survey: *Compilation and design*

As mentioned in the previous section, we carried out a survey addressed to small and medium private enterprises, social enterprises and local institutions. These companies belonged to different sectors in the labour market of the local area in which each partner is located, so that we were able to identify the key professional skills required by employers and employees. In order to make the delivery of the questionnaire more accessible, it was translated into the six languages of the project and published on-line on the project website.

The companies were invited to participate in the survey through a formal letter sent by e-mail, through the help of associations, such as Chambers of Commerce, and also through contact by phone. We contacted around 3,073 companies and only around 302 answered the on-line questionnaire. However, the number of answers (10%) was significant enough to give us an idea of the needs of companies in the countries surveyed.

The questionnaire is divided into two clear parts. The first one deals with the company's description (cf. Figure 2) and asks questions such as its location, profile (production, services, commerce/sales, other), sectors the company operates in, main products and/or services, number of employees, general scope of the company's transactions (whether local, national or international), and business relations abroad.

² The ELAN report (*ELAN: Effects on the European Economy of Shortages of Foreign Language Skills in Enterprise*) was commissioned by the Directorate General for Education and Culture of the European Commission in December 2005. The study was undertaken by CILT, the UK National Centre for Languages in collaboration with InterAct International and an international team of researchers. Its objective was to provide the Commission and decision-takers in Member States with practical information and analysis of the use of language skills by SMEs and the impact on business performance.

³ The Warsaw Academy of Computer Science, Management and Administration (Poland) has recently joined the CMC Programme, as substitute for the Maastricht University's Language Centre (The Netherlands).

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CMC_E. Communicating in Multilingual Contexts meets Enterprises
 Proyecto Europeo financiado por la Comisión Europea
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ENCUESTA SOBRE EL ANÁLISIS DE NECESIDADES DE LAS EMPRESAS CON RESPECTO AL CONOCIMIENTO DE LENGUAS EXTRANJERAS
La Universidad se comunica con las Empresas

A continuación encontrará 10 preguntas acerca de la importancia que tienen los conocimientos de lenguas extranjeras en el mundo empresarial.

Nombre de la Empresa:
Localización de la Empresa:
Nombre del encuestado:
Cargo dentro la Empresa:
Dirección de correo electrónico del encuestado:
¿Cuál es el perfil de su empresa? (Puede escoger más de uno)
 Producción Servicios Comercio/ventas Otros
¿En qué sector opera su empresa?
 Seleccionar
¿Cuáles son sus productos / servicios principales?

¿Con cuántos empleados cuenta su empresa?
 Seleccionar
¿Cuál es el ámbito general de las transacciones de su empresa?
 Local Nacional Internacional

1. ¿Con qué parte del mundo tiene relaciones comerciales? (Puede elegir más de una respuesta)
 África
 Asia
 Australia
 América Central
 Este de Europa y Rusia
 Europa
 Área mediterránea
 América del Norte
 Nueva Zelanda
 América del Sur
 Ninguna en particular ahora mismo, pero sí en el futuro
 Ninguna
 Si lo desea, mencione el país:

Figure 2. First part of the on-line questionnaire (Spanish version)⁴

The second part is devoted to the company's needs of foreign language competences: the languages they need to do business, whether the company's staff need to acquire or improve their competence in foreign languages, areas where they need to use foreign languages (management, research and development, sales, etc), the average level of foreign language competence of their company staff, areas where they find valuable the knowledge of foreign languages, whether they had ever lost a business opportunity due to the lack of foreign language skills, areas in which they find the biggest difficulties, language strategies they use to deal with foreign clients/suppliers, linguistic competences needed by their company staff, and, finally, whether the company provides language training for their employees.

5. Results and their implications in the project design⁵

5.1. Results

Despite the fact that most of the companies deny having lost business opportunities due to the lack of foreign language skills (80% answered "no"), they acknowledge a necessity for their staff to acquire and/or improve competence in foreign languages (69%, cf. Table 1). The enterprises surveyed believe that knowing foreign languages is crucial or very important for attracting new customers, entering new

⁴ Link to questionnaires: <<http://cmceproject.unical.it/portale/questionnaires.pdf>>

⁵ For a much more complete overview of the survey results, please visit <<http://cmceproject.unical.it/portale/survey.pdf>>.

foreign markets and enhancing staff mobility at the international level, as well as for encouraging research within the enterprise. However, only 25% of the enterprises provide some sort of language training for their employees.

<i>Does your company staff need to acquire and/or improve competence in any foreign languages?</i>	
YES	69%
NO	31%
<i>If so, which? (number them in order of importance for meeting the company's needs, 1=most important)</i>	
English	39%
Spanish	9%
Italian	6%
French	13%
Portuguese	7%
German	11%
Russian	5%
Slovak	1%
Chinese	1%
Polish	2%
Other	6%

Table 1. Questions 3 and 3.1 of the questionnaire

The results also show that most of the business relations of the companies surveyed take place within Europe (27%); though North America (10%) and Asia (10%) are also within their scope. They mostly use English (39%), French (13%), German (11%) and Spanish (10%) to carry out business, so they also consider these languages as the most important for meeting their needs (cf. Table 1). In fact, the level of competence of their staff in these languages is the highest, especially in English.

These companies use different strategies to deal with foreign clients and suppliers, such as having their information or web sites in foreign languages (22%) or using foreign language competence as a criterion for the selection of their staff (21%).

They believe that the areas of the company which need to use foreign languages are the sales (23%), managerial (19%) and marketing (13%) sectors. They experience problems especially communicating over the telephone (12%), speaking in formal contexts (9%), understanding (9%) and using (8%) specific/technical lexicon, and understanding written professional material (8%). In that sense, they consider that their staff need to acquire linguistic competence mainly in listening and speaking skills (22%), telephone skills (19%), the translation of information (13%), knowledge of specific/technical lexicon (10%) and reading skills in specialised language (8%) (cf. Table 2).

<i>Which of the following linguistic competence are needed by your company staff in order to better deal with foreign markets?</i>	
Listening and speaking skills	22%
Telephone skills	19%
Reading skills in specialised language	8%
Knowledge of specific/technical lexicon	10%
Translating information	7%
Writing skills	13%
Delivering oral presentations	5%
Presenting products at international exhibitions	5%
Communicating in informal contexts	5%
Knowledge of cultural aspects of the other country	4%
Other	1%

Table 2. Question 9 of the questionnaire

<i>And in which particular topics?</i>	
Administration	14%
Business and Finance	20%
Development	7%
Education	2%
Environment	7%
Law	5%
Marketing	15%
Politics	1%
Research	7%
Social	4%
Science	3%
Technology	11%
Tourism	5%
Other	4%

Table 3. Questions 9.1 of the questionnaire

Finally, Table 3 shows that the topics in which these companies recognise the highest lack of language competence are business and finance (20%), marketing (15%), administration (14%), technology (11%), research (7%) and development (7%) and environmental issues (7%).

5.2. Implications

All the above-mentioned information served as a guideline to create the different units that conform the CMC_E. The five unit topics selected have to do with the fields of interest of the companies surveyed: Training in the workplace, Administration, Business and Finance, Marketing, Technology and Environment.

Each unit will offer five activities (with three exercises each) which integrate the four language skills as well as focus on communicative competence linked to the workplace. Actually, they will encourage the developmet of the skills which the companies highlighted as being the most difficult to master, such as communicating by telephone, writing e-mails, understanding and using specific/technical lexicon, reading specialised texts, describing products, participating in formal and informal conversations, etc.

The type of activities will vary from drag and drop exercises, re-ordering texts and conversations, type-in activities and even free-writing. Besides, we will provide on-line feedback which will help learners in the completion of the different tasks.

6. Future plans for the CMC_E project

We mentioned in the review of the literature that needs analysis is an “on-going process” (White 1998:91), and that is the way in which it is understood by the members of the CMC_E project. As a matter of fact, we will be piloting the materials both in-progress and in the final stage of the project, so we will be able to correct, modify and complete what we have already done. We will also provide learners with end-of-module tests in order to verify the efficiency of the materials.

Besides, final users will be provided with tools for evaluating not only the project as a whole, but also each of the units presented. The information retrieved by these evaluation questionnaires will be very useful for the improvement of the materials, as it will show us not only their advantages but also their disadvantages. This way we will have direct access to the needs of the learners when using the materials and also after they have used them.

These materials are intended to be used especially in language teaching centres and institutions, so learners will have the help of on-campus tutors to go through the different tasks. Teachers from these centres will also provide useful information about the difficulties they find when using the CMC_E materials in their syllabuses.

Finally, we have created the figure of an on-line “e-mentor”, who will be in charge of explaining doubts, correcting exercises, etc, and who will also act as a liaison between learners and project designers.

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