

## CELAN – Language Strategies for Business

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### Abstract

*The CELAN project, which is funded by the European Lifelong learning Programme, has been designed and developed by a network of organisations and their associates belonging to the EU Commission's Business Platform for Multilingualism. The project aims to address in the broadest possible terms the question of how best to identify, record and assess the actual language needs of business users and so define and develop effective and relevant solutions. The first stage of the project was to collect pertinent data on language needs directly from business users across Europe, helping respondents, where possible, to express explicitly needs which may not have been specifically perceived. The next activity involves a survey of the language market to identify the range of services, tools, strategies and policies available to organisations wishing to consolidate and/or enhance corporate linguistic skills and culture. Following these exploratory activities, the project will concentrate on the development of dedicated tools to support business users in analysing and responding to their language needs. In particular, an online 'language needs assessment tool' is being designed to help business users to match language requirements which they have already perceived or which they identify through comparison to similar practice with verified successful solutions. The tool is based on a decision-tree analysis that exploits the data and information collected in the first phases of the project. Other tools that are being developed include a showcasing system to present examples of effective solutions, a management tool-kit to support the development of business-oriented language strategies and policies, and a series of computer-based instruction modules to provide training in addressing language needs in corporate environments. Ultimately, the project will seek to provide the business community with effective resources to expand and improve multilingual skills as a key element of all business activities.*

### 1. Background and Context

In recent years, the importance of multilingualism in corporate competitiveness and employability has become a major element in EU language education policy, and a substantial number of EU publications [1] and [2] and initiatives [3], [4] and [5] have sought to raise awareness of the issue among the various stakeholders. The Business Platform for Multilingualism, set up by the European Commission in September 2009, is one such initiative bringing together representatives from the academic and business worlds to facilitate an exchange of best practices and gather relevant information and opinion. Business-related multilingualism is viewed in this context not only in relation to language teaching, learning and assessment, but also with regards to the broad range of opportunities provided by the language industry at large, of which even specialists may not always be aware. The Celan project ([www.celan-platform.eu](http://www.celan-platform.eu)) has developed out of the work of the Business Platform and is seeking to research and document in detail the real linguistic needs of companies and employees, and to assess to what extent these needs are satisfied by current provision of language resources. Specifically, the project aims to address in the broadest possible terms the question of how best to identify, record and assess the actual language needs of business users and so define and develop effective and relevant responses to these needs.

## 2. Project phases

The starting point of the Celan project is, therefore, the collection of relevant data from the typical business users who need language expertise to sustain and develop their professional practice. Subsequently, the language market, i.e. the providers of the various tools and services potentially able to satisfy the business user's needs, will be surveyed and catalogued. Once these inputs have been assessed and analysed, an on-line platform will be designed to host a series of systems able to interrelate the two bodies of data and therefore help to match the identified needs with potential solutions. In particular, a 'Language Needs Analysis Tool' will allow users to describe the context and characteristics of their language use and from this provide support and guidance in identifying the relevant resources and services that are now available in the language market. A showcasing system will illustrate examples of good practice and successful implementation, while a management tool-kit will facilitate the specification and implementation of specific language strategies and policies. Finally, instructional modules will provide a training environment in which to test and assimilate new solutions. The platform interface will be in English, French and German.

### 2.1 Language needs of business users

The first part of the project concentrates on research on the linguistic needs of companies in different sectors and different regions of Europe. These needs will be identified in economic and technical terms, so as to produce a comprehensive picture of requirements based on qualitative responses rather than using a quantitative approach. However, understanding the needs of companies regarding languages is a complex endeavour, as users themselves may not always be aware of their real need or able to express their positions in analytical terms. Moreover, not all companies face the same challenges and different economic sectors and different countries/regions of Europe may have diverse linguistic needs.

The main operational tool for this part of the project is a questionnaire delivered on-line or in presence which identifies how the user interacts with the language environment. In addition to demographic data on company size, location and sector, the survey records which languages are used, which members of staff need language skills, how the company currently satisfies its language needs. Data is then collected on knowledge and use of language tools (e.g. on-line translation and spell-checkers, terminology glossaries and databases, etc.) and language services (translation and interpretation, language consultancy, qualification accreditation, etc.). In particular, specific questions seek to identify the actual needs of the user in terms of the functions that typically have to be undertaken (presenting products and services, interacting and negotiating with partners, providing technical support, writing reports, etc.).

Once analysed, the results from the questionnaire will constitute a first fundamental input to the needs analysis tool by providing significant data on how organisations in given environments address the issue of language skills and competence. The results will also be linked to and compared with other current investigations.

### 2.2 Provisions of the language market

This part of the project concentrates on the identification and analysis of existing language and language-related tools and services relevant to business users, i.e. those resources that have proven practical usefulness and can be shown to address specific language needs in corporate contexts. Work will include a full analysis of current language technology tools e.g. terminology databases, sector-specific glossaries, industry standards and guidelines, technical ontologies, as well as current

language support services, e.g. machine-assisted translation, technical authoring tools, corpus development, content management systems. Attention will also be paid to the design and formulation of successful and responsive language development strategies and policies, and to alternative evaluation and assessment systems.

Initial results will be validated through interviews with a select group of companies and network organisations in order to assess how and why particular services, tools, and resources represent valid, business-driven solutions for genuine language needs. Current up-take of the various resources will also be assessed. A significant by-product of these activities will be the identification of whole-company success stories.

Higher education providers will also be polled to establish to what extent these organisations are responding to business needs by actively seeking to match their programmes (undergraduate and graduate courses, continuing education, certification, customised services) to the demands of the corporate market.

### **2.3 Tools to match language needs and provision**

Using the outputs from the first two phases, the central project task will be to develop an on-line platform to host a range of tools able to match the highlighted business needs with the identified provisions of the language market. The main component of the on-line platform will be an ad-hoc application with which business users can analyse independently their specific language requirements and assess appropriate language resources to satisfy these requirements. The application will exploit some decision-tree structures, but will essentially be non-hierarchical, so that the users can begin their analysis from any point of view, e.g. services needed, previous experience, resources available, etc., and then move across a 'canvas' of relevant issues and critical considerations. In response to user input, the system will provide information, potential solutions, and best practice based on the data collected from the survey of business needs, the data on available resources and the responses from other users of the system. On the basis of the choices made and the path taken across the canvas, the user's individual profile will be recorded for later retrieval and/or modification. As use of the assessment tools increases, these profiles will form the foundation of on-going best practice that will be showcased in a second tool offered on the platform. The showcasing system will offer a searchable framework to present and illustrate the linguistic solutions available for various user contexts, e.g. implementation of language technologies, examples of successful language learning practice and methodologies, validation and certification of linguistic competence, derived both from the internal profiles and additional external sources (reports, projects, applications). In addition, a specific 'tool-kit' will be developed to support management in understanding, developing and implementing enterprise language strategies and policies. Finally, instructional modules will be designed and deployed on-line to provide an interactive learning space to guide the choice and application of language solutions.

### **3. Expected outcomes**

The first two phases of the project will generate a series of results, including assessment reports of language needs and experience (e.g. by company type and location), statistical analyses of current practice, interviews with significant stakeholders, and annotated catalogues of the tools and services available in the language market. Once the research and surveys have been completed and the tools developed, the products will also be used to generate a further series of outputs. These will include a vademecum of significant language scenarios based on a variety of 'what-if' analyses (e.g. if I do not have an official language policy, what risks do I run?), alternative means of language capacity building (e.g. if I need to promote primarily oral language skills, how best can I do this?), a policy brief outlining the crucial elements and variables of language provision to the professional world, and a body of

specific recommendations that might be successfully combined with other current practice to serve as potential input to future language policy at national and European level.

With regards the impact of ICT on language learning, the Celan project addresses this issue from two perspectives. On the one hand, a key element of the overall project is precisely the identification of the leading-edge technology-based resources which can support and enhance not only language learning, but also a more wider spread use of a broader range of tools and services to promote a more active integration of linguistic skills into successful business practice. On the other hand, the central element of the project, the 'Language Needs Analysis Tool' makes innovative use of current ICT technologies to provide an attractive and easy-to-use application to match recognised linguistic needs and demands of business users with the wealth of potential responses to satisfy those needs which are being increasingly generated in the multifarious language market.

## References

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