Understanding Cultural Heritage

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Abstract

Promoting to learn more than one language is central to the European Union language policy. Everyone within the European Union is encouraged to do so in the interests of mutual understanding and communication.

Preparing material for courses on Languages for Specific Purposes, such as law, economics, health sciences or – as in our case – cultural heritage preservation bears an intermediary status between philology and the various specific fields of knowledge. Thus, material concentrates more on language in context than on grammar and language structures, an approach that greatly enhances the relevance of what students are learning.

Generally, the project aimed to achieve efficient communication among those active in cultural heritage preservation in the multilingual European environment by offering complete and easily accessible possibilities for learning and assessing the language skills in several European languages (French, Greek, Italian, Slovene and Spanish). The project has reached the following targets:

- *Face-to-face and online courses and examinations on the agreed level (in general, Level B2 of the Common European Framework)*
- *Covering major and less spoken languages such as French, Greek, Italian, Slovene, and Spanish (in alphabetical order)*
- *Training courses and testing implements for tutors and teachers for enabling them to deal with all aspects of these focused, personalised learning activities.*
- *Certification of every type of knowledge and skills acquired*
- *Integration and operation of all activities within accredited LSP Language Centres*
- *Implementation of the Language Centres Network in the Southern Mediterranean basin*

The following institutions co-operate to reach the results mentioned above

- *Institutions teaching cultural heritage preservation and valorisation*
- *University language teaching units*
- *University or professional ICT experts*
- *Professional partners dealing with cultural heritage preservation and valorisation*

General remarks

The project meets the need for communication among those active in material cultural heritage preservation and valorisation in the multilingual European environment. To this scope, it offers complete and easily accessible possibilities for learning and being assessed in major and less spoken European languages in the specific frame of the discipline.

The initiative is aimed at enhancing both distance interaction and physical mobility within Europe and outside its borders by facilitating information sharing, knowledge transfer, problem discussion and network development. It is addressing students and curators, and is leading to the implementation of Language Centres for Cultural Heritage Preservation. These are conceived as an open-ended network founded upon harmonised virtual campus infrastructures, utilising the same course and examination material and obeying a common framework for teacher qualifications. The Centres are proposing a number of alternatives for mastering the specific linguistic requirements of the discipline in what concerns learning, certification and assessment at levels B1/B2. Besides English, several major and less spoken languages of the Mediterranean area are covered, namely Spanish, French, Italian, Greek and Slovenian. All courses are offered conventionally or on-line; while examinations can be performed in distant classrooms, according to a hybrid scheme of real time communication. Alternatively, learners may choose to work with a teacher in one-to-one or group frames, and be examined in a face-to-face manner. In other words, any intermediate choice of limited physical attendance is possible.

Based on a large survey and a careful needs analysis, newly developed and accurately adapted products covering the learner-teacher-examiner triangle are implemented and constantly evaluated.

Moreover, specifically developed material for teachers and assessors ensures systematic certified training.

Products destined to learners consist in self-assessment courses, self-assessment progress tests, tailor-made one-to-one courses, anticipating a tutor; and examinations. Resources for teachers include multilingual guidelines; and especially designed Teaching Knowledge Tests for the target languages.

At a first phase the product modules are set up in English. This edition is tried in real conditions; then the material is translated and linguistically adapted for further languages; it is evaluated before it enters the Centres. Finally, all modules are actually implemented as pilot activities, intended to enhance student feedback and proceed to necessary modifications.

Framework

Multilingualism is a fact of life in the European Union. Promoting language learning is central to the European Union language policy; and everyone is encouraged to learn and speak more languages in the interests of mutual understanding and communication [1].

The European Commission is entrusted with promoting language learning and linguistic diversity across Europe as part of its aim to improve the mastery of basic language skills in the area. Within this context, the European Commission is working with Member States towards the objective of enabling citizens to communicate in at least two languages in addition to their mother tongue.

The over-arching activities of the Directorate General for Education and Culture in the field of languages are outlined in detail in the 2008 communication *Multilingualism – an asset for Europe and a shared commitment* [2].

Priorities in the field of languages include several important objectives:
1. To **retool education systems in the Member States** so that the students graduate with higher competences in foreign languages;
2. To gather data in order to **monitor progress towards indicators and benchmarks of language teaching and learning** to encourage multilingualism as a pathway to improve employment prospects and free movement in the European Union;
3. To reward innovative initiatives in the field of teaching and learning languages [3].

Recently, the European Council came to notable conclusions on multilingualism and the development of language competences [4]. The conclusions are based on the considerations that:
1. Linguistic diversity is a fundamental component of European culture and intercultural dialogue, and that the ability to communicate in a language other than one's mother tongue is acknowledged to be one of the key competences which citizens should seek to acquire;
2. Language competences contribute to the mobility, employability and personal development of European citizens, in particular young people, in line with the objectives of the *Europe 2020* strategy for growth and jobs.

Thus, the European Union invited Member States to:
1. Adopt and improve measures aimed at promoting multilingualism and enhancing the quality and efficiency of language learning and teaching, including by teaching at least two languages in addition to the main language(s) of instruction from an early age and by exploring the potential of innovative approaches to the development of language competences.
2. Make greater use of European transparency tools and initiatives designed to support and promote language learning, such as the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages*, *Europass*, the *European Language Portfolio*, and the *European Language Label*.
3. Explore ways of increasing the attractiveness of, and ensuring greater commitment towards, language learning, including through the use of ICT and Open Educational Resources, with a view to reducing the number of learners who abandon language studies before attaining an adequate level of proficiency.

Preparation of materials

Preparing material for Languages for Specific Purposes courses and teaching is an experience bearing an intermediate status between philology and various specific fields of knowledge. These may expand from law, economics, engineering, or health sciences to tourism, aviation professions, accounting, or business in general.

Both planning/authoring contents and teaching Languages **for Specific Purposes are distinct from analogous tasks related to L**anguages **as a Second Language.** Students aspiring at specific skills are usually adults who already have some acquaintance with the target language, and wish to

communicate a set of professional skills and perform particular job-related functions. In fact, the learners have a distinctive interest for learning subject knowledge and well-built adult learning strategies. Thus, material concentrates more on language in context than on grammar and language structures, an approach that greatly enhances the relevance of what students are learning [5].

The adequate level of knowledge for Language for Specific Purposes learners, as referring to the common reference levels and sub-levels approved by the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages*, may vary from basic to proficient user according to the subject in consideration; and the tasks to be performed by the individual professional or university/vocational student.

Aims and Objectives

General aim of the project is meeting the need for efficient communication among those active in cultural heritage preservation and valorisation in the multilingual European environment, by offering complete and easily accessible possibilities for learning and being assessed in several European languages in the specific frame of this highly inter-disciplinary subject.

To achieve this goal, the profoundly diversified educational backgrounds and ISCED levels of the target groups – students, vocational trainees, and professionals active in cultural heritage safeguarding and valorisation – should be seriously taken into account, nevertheless without creating barriers in the choice of particular teaching/learning modules and packages. In addition, individual interests should be addressed, in order to attract professionals to the scheme proposed; while quality should be ensured at every phase.

Concrete objectives of the project are therefore:
a. Developing courses and examinations of all types, at the linguistic levels agreed upon and fully based on the Common European Framework for Languages, within a shared pool of linguistic resources, and following the same patterns.
b. Adopting a learning-outcomes-oriented, strictly modularised form, permitting individualised attainment of knowledge and skills.
c. Offering both face-to-face and on-line courses and examinations, in order to guarantee flexibility in time and location, without implying obligatory ICT literacy.
d. Covering major and less spoken languages of the Mediterranean area.
e. Training and testing tutors and teachers adequately for enabling them to deal with all aspects of these focused-on, personalised learning activities.
f. Certifying every type of knowledge and skills acquired.
g. Integrating all activities within accredited LSP Language Centres.
h. Operating the Languages Centres under real conditions.
i. Disseminating the products within already fully operating Intensive School schemes.
j. Sustaining the initiative by implementing a LSP Language Centres Network.
k. Implementing the Language Centres Network in the Southern Mediterranean basin.

Realising these objectives will bring a substantial amelioration in the interaction among those active in cultural heritage safeguarding and valorisation all over Europe and beyond its borders. As a matter of fact, in this frame physical mobility at all levels and for all types of employees and workforce will be smoothened and enhanced; while interactive communication will be greatly improved.

Furthermore, the certified courses and examinations, designed on the basis of learning outcomes, will permit evaluation of individual achievements, and the European Language Portfolio will guarantee transparency of qualifications.

Realisation Phases

The work programme is designed in order to proceed to a gradual realisation of the objectives, and finally yield fully operational Language Centres on Cultural Heritage Preservation. The realisation phases read as follows:

A survey and a needs analysis permit defining content, type and format of products.
a. A multilingual *corpus* of pertinent documents is compiled. The *corpus* serves as a shared pool of resources, indispensable for creating the products in all target languages; but as well necessary for designing the framework for the course and examination material, in what concerns contents of modules.
b. Products of previous collaborations are accurately enlarged, and totally new ones are developed. They cover self-assessment courses, progress tests, one-to-one courses, and examinations; and are designed for on-line or face-to-face use.

c. Products in all languages are developed. They use linguistically adapted contents, deriving from the English edition and the *corpus*. After being tested, the evaluated versions are included in the Language Centre material. They are designed for on-line or face-to-face use. Target languages are Spanish, French, Italian, Greek, and Slovenian.

The manual developed in English was translated to the target languages, while being adapted to their particularities. Evaluation of the manual was carried out by experts; and is taking place by teachers and students in specialised Intensive Schools, and in the frame of an Erasmus Mundus master's course in archaeological materials science. Moreover, available interactive material was adapted to the target languages and translated.

a. Teachers are offered a systematic certified training, including especially designed Teaching Knowledge Tests, training-the-trainers courses, and regularly organised workshops.
b. Multilingual guidelines are compiled, informing on acting in a virtual environment, designing syllabi for any request, and performing examinations.
c. A European Language Portfolio is purposely developed.
d. Accredited LSP Language Centres and an open-ended relevant Network are implemented.
e. Pilot operation of the Centres under real conditions is performed and evaluated.

Establishing the Centres presupposes a series of ICT-related activities – realising a multilingual educational web portal, harmonising video conferencing infrastructures, developing the on-line form of courses and examinations, and evaluating the usability of infrastructures and on-line material.
Quality of the products and activities is guaranteed by teacher training, and further by:

a. Creating a register of teaching staff.
b. Externally evaluating the outcomes.
c. Accrediting LSP Language Centres.

Apart from the implementation of the LSP Language Centres Network, the dissemination and exploitation strategies include:

a. Development of an attractive web site.
b. Establishment of a support and information point.
c. Overall dissemination of information on the Centres and their products.
d. Organisation of awareness-raising workshops.
e. Integration of products in already fully operating Intensive Schools.
f. Development of a register of policy makers.
g. Authoring of a special document for policy makers.

The project is based on the close interaction of four partner categories:

a. Institutions teaching cultural heritage preservation and valorisation,
b. University language teaching units, and foreign language schools,
c. University or professional ICT experts for proceeding to relevant activities,
d. Professional partners dealing with cultural heritage preservation and valorisation.

References

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