

# ***Entrepreneurial Competences in Translation Training***

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## **Abstract**

Because of globalisation and the influence of the knowledge-based economy and society, the demand for entrepreneurial competences has not stopped increasing (Binks, et al. 2006:1). In his book *Translation as a profession*, Gouadec (2007) carries examines how these competences can be introduced into the domain of translation training at the level of higher education and points out the need for the debate to adapt to present economic circumstances.

An attempt to introduce entrepreneurial competences into the translation class was made in the form of small business projects that have been carried out by Master's translation students at University College Ghent since October 2007. This article will report on how students – under the guidance of Vlajo<sup>1</sup> – set up their own translation agency and acquired entrepreneurial competences such as sales and marketing competences, financial know-how, self-motivation, administration and time management competences. Over a period of ten weeks they set up a business plan, looked for a translator tutor, found their own customers, translated the texts provided, set up a termbase and presented their business at a poster session. They dealt with the customers themselves, wrote invoices, produced a balance sheet, and achieved a turnover of €4,000. They organized their own timetables, arranged meetings on their own and assessed each other. The report will cover both strengths and weaknesses of the experience and point to solutions that may improve this shift in translator education.

## **The market and translation training**

Like many other markets today, the translation market is highly influenced by globalisation and the knowledge-based economy (Binks, et al. 2006:1). Both developments have led to an increase in the demand for translation: as more companies enter the international market, so their need for more language competences grows, and as they make an issue of the importance of knowledge, so they need to convey this knowledge by means of its most frequently used instrument, that is, language. At the same time, many people present themselves as translators or translation providers and competition is becoming fierce, especially in times of financial insecurity or a looming recession like the present one.

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<sup>1</sup> Vlajo is the Flemish Agency for Young Businesses. It is a cooperative venture between the Flemish Department for Education and the Department for the Economy.

It is therefore important that translation students are fully equipped with the necessary competences when they graduate. Most of these competences are usually covered in translation training programmes. However, in Flanders, entrepreneurial competences is something that is not included in the traditional translation curriculum. And, yet, they are important, too. In his speech at the opening of the University College Ghent Centre for Enterprise, Van den Berghe (2008), representing the think tank Tilkon, pointed out the correlation between entrepreneurial competences and the development of the economy: they lead to a higher degree of flexibility, innovation and internationalisation, all of which contribute to a higher degree of well-being. Entrepreneurial competences also directly impact on a community and provide for cohesion in society: they stimulate local dynamics, trust in the future and constructive attitudes among its members. Finally, if students are required to develop competences typical of enterprising business, they are also to be given the opportunity to practise activities that will promote their self-development: they will develop competences they can use in their personal lives, on a daily basis, which in turn will again increase their employability. The view that institutions of higher education have become essential players in this field has been recognized by the city council of Ghent, which has asked the College to set up an inventory of all UCG initiatives which stimulate entrepreneurial activity in students.

However, the business world is no longer the only party which requires entrepreneurial competences from its young people. Academia itself has now come under pressure to acknowledge their importance: since accreditation criteria now also include general competences such as creativity, communication competences and problem-solving, academic institutions are including them explicitly among their education goals.

The fact that so much attention is paid to enterprise in the area of Ghent is very much related to recent figures from the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM), a worldwide investigation into the degree of entrepreneurial activity coordinated and supervised by the London Business School (UK) and Babson College (Massachusetts, US) and carried out by Vlerick Leuven Ghent Management School and Ghent University in Belgium at the request of the Flemish Department for the Economy. They show results for Flanders that are below the average European Union level. Belgium, in position 21 among European countries, does not even obtain a score of 3%, and

although Flanders does slightly better than Wallonia, it precedes Belgium by only one place in a list which is headed by Iceland and where countries such as the UK, Russia, Italy, Greece, etc. do much better (Van den Berghe 2008). In contrast to other countries, Flemish education does not seem to promote entrepreneurialism; on the contrary, a higher education degree has even turned out to bear an inverse relationship to entrepreneurial competences. Even in the world of academia, the need for researchers to develop entrepreneurship was expressed on the occasion of the 80th birthday of the Flemish Research Council. The Flemish Minister of Economy, Enterprise, Research, Innovation and Foreign Trade introduced the term O&O&O, a term not easily amenable to translation, as it stands for Onderzoek (Research) & Ontwikkeling (Development) & Ondernemen (Enterprise).

This outline of the entrepreneurial situation in Flanders has caused translation training programmes to adapt to the new demands and to take Gouadec's advice and the arguments he presents in his book *Translation as a profession* (2007) to heart. Consequently, the Faculty of Translation Studies, University College Ghent, has made an attempt to introduce entrepreneurial competences into the translation class in the form of small business projects that have been carried out by Master's translation students since October 2007. The initiative is referred to as SBP, an abbreviation for Small Business Project, and has the following two major aims:

- to develop competences and attitudes necessary for the job of a self-employed professional translator with a focus on entrepreneurial competences, incl. to set up and carry out projects; to settle conflicts, negotiate, coordinate, communicate and work together with peers according to a time schedule;
- to expand knowledge in relation to terminology, background information, text genres and relevant translation studies.

### **Entrepreneurial competences**

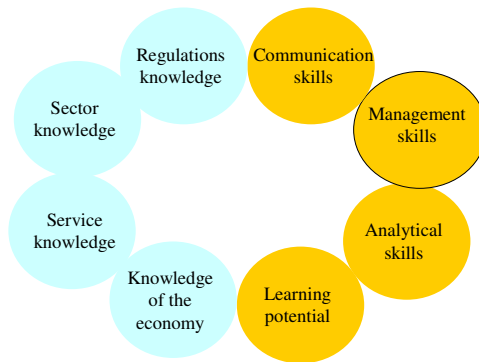
In traditional translation classes, students are told that the first step of their translation activity is to search the translation market, respond to it, find a customer and find out all the details of the translation situation before they start their translation proper. However, these activities are not usually performed in the training itself. So, how can

they know about them and integrate them into their translation approach if they are never told to actually explore the market? How do I know, as a teacher and an occasional translator who never needs to look for translation work, what exactly are so-called entrepreneurial competences?

Of course, many different answers have been given to this question, but as space is limited, I will just report on present opinions and attitudes in the local area of Ghent University and the UCG Centre for Enterprise. They have identified entrepreneurial competences on the basis of entrepreneurial values. The latter, they stress, are actually intrapreneurial values, too (spelt with an ‘i’, the term denotes those values that companies want their staff to have so that the business develops well) and they are recorded in Figure 1, below. Entrepreneurs are people who hold dear the following values: they are not afraid of taking risks, they feel sure of their abilities and worth, so they behave confidently and assertively (self-confidence), they can act separately from other people (independence), they are able to invent and develop new and original ideas (creativity), they make the first move to solve a problem or do something important (initiative), they anticipate difficulties and act in advance (proactivity), if difficult circumstances do turn up, they will not give up (perseverance), and they can make the right decisions and behave properly without someone else watching them (responsibility).



**Figure 1. Entrepreneurial values**



**Figure 2. Entrepreneurial competences**

Figure 2 shows what is needed to obtain the values in Figure 1: four knowledge domains (sector, service, regulations and economy) and four competences that contribute to the entrepreneurial values. Since it is the aim of the SBP to have the students experience the market and its laws rather than to acquire more ‘academic’ knowledge, the course focuses on the competences. Learning communication competences is not something new to our students, though a few relevant aspects have been included among the assessment criteria that our students use to assess themselves and their peers, as will be explained below. Analytical competences are not new either: they are developed in students in text analysis classes and in their research assignments. Learning potential may perhaps be the most intriguing competence mentioned in this figure. Admittedly, some of our translation students may have quite limited mathematical and scientific learning potential, but the question is whether such learning potential is still learnable and teachable. In addition, in another domain, that of the humanities, translation students’ learning potential is among the highest: they learn so much about cultures and different ways of thought and world views that their capacity for conceiving different things is definitely not among the smallest. This type of learning potential is already fostered in most translation training

classes. Consequently, the SBP-course mainly focuses on that set of competences that have been developed the least explicitly in the course so far, that is, management competences. These have been divided into two main categories: social and professional management competences. The two sets have been inspired by the self and peer assessment method set up by Lievens, a colleague from the Trade and Management Studies Faculty at UCG (2007).

The social management competences include: stimulate friendliness within a group, make clear agreements regarding deadlines and stick to them, aim at consensus, explain information clearly, give clear instructions, allow for feedback and constructive criticism, make contact with team members spontaneously, dare ask questions when matters are unclear, and show respect for the opinions, feelings and reactions from other team members and from third persons. Since the last competence is one which is stressed so often in translation training – empathise with your source text author – this is one where they should be able to perform well, although, of course, they have not been used to empathising with their fellow students, which may be a challenging new requirement for some students.

The competences that are assessed as professional management competences are: think of solutions or alternatives, work according to schedule, stick to the deal, think of feasibility, finish tasks well – even under stressful conditions, make decisions, be satisfied only when the result is satisfactory, take responsibility, aim for the quality levels that have been set and show effort, dedication and energy. Readers will undoubtedly recognize some of the above competences as typical of translation too: show respect for the opinions, feelings and reactions from other team members and third persons, finish tasks well under stressful conditions, make decisions, be satisfied only when the result is satisfactory, aim for the quality levels that have been set and show effort, dedication and energy. One competence may actually seem somewhat contradictory to the usual translation competences: students are not usually asked to think of possibilities other than those that are obvious in the given translation situation. If there is one competence that needs, therefore, special attention, it is that of creative and imaginary thought: the type of thought that does not need to obey the law of adequacy (be faithful to the source text) or the law of acceptability (remain within the boundaries of your audience) (Toury, 1995). The remaining competences are necessary for the performance of any type of professional job.

## **Course organization**

Now that we have identified the competences we need to develop among our students, we can describe the method that has been adopted by Vlajo, the Flemish government Agency for Young Businesses, a cooperative venture between the Flemish Department for Education and the Department for the Economy, to teach young people enterprise competences. The SBP may be compared to programmes initiated by Young Enterprise (YE UK), the UK's leading business and enterprise education charity, which engages in its programmes more than 5,500 schools and colleges and more than 350,000 young people a year from primary school right through to university. All programmes are characterized by the principle of Learning by Doing and also participate in JA-YE Europe, Junior Achievement - Young Enterprise Europe, a not-for-profit association designed to bring together under one pan-European network a large number of national organisations which offer Junior Achievement and Young Enterprise programmes across the continent.

The aim of the translation SBP project is to set up a translation agency in a period of ten to twelve weeks and then close it down again. In groups of four to five students, they look for a coach, be it a professional translator, a member of the Belgian Chamber for Translators, Interpreters and Philologists, a manager or a member of a local Chamber of Commerce. Coaches will meet teams a couple of times (1-2hrs) in that period. They will function as models, mirrors or soundboards to the students. Their main task is to listen and to answer students' questions about their business plans, schedules, about finding customers, promoting translation services, standing out from competitors, pricing, etc. Team members assign themselves different roles: there is a CEO, a financial manager, an administrative manager, a commercial manager and/or technical manager (terminologist).

Students will further open a bank account at a branch of the BB Paris Bas Fortis bank, which supports the scheme and also offers students counselling advice for two hours, and they will 'sell' their shares. Usually each student buys one share for a small sum of money. Then students look for customers (organizations whether private or not) or subcontract from a freelancer, another translation agency, a self-employed translator, the internet, abroad, etc. Each

student is required to translate a text of min. 1,500 words (EN-NL or NL-EN) of a high level on a general topic. They set up a term base (Multiterm, Wordfast, ...) and apply the norms of the European Standard (They need to use the best available resources.). They may also accept revision work.

At the same time, students write a business plan, market their business, maintain a relationship with the customer, carry out any administration, write invoices, produce a balance sheet, manage their own time (make schedules and set deadlines), log activities, arrange meetings, assess themselves and each other and present their business at a poster session at the end of the course. In 2007, the class reached a turnover of €4,000.

To guide students, four class meetings are organized. In week 1, the students listen to two guest lectures. One is presented by a translation professional, the other by a Vlajo coach. It is not the intention to give them information about the official procedures on how to set up businesses, which offices to go to, etc., but to make students think: Will you be able to live from your earnings? Where will you find customers? How will you persuade a potential customer to come to you instead of your fellow students? Students themselves then raise pertinent issues such as quality, languages, specializations, revision, speed and price. In week 2, the Vlajo coach informs them about the different requirements of a business plan. The third class meeting is organized towards the end of the course. Then the Vlajo coach returns to the class and takes them through the accounting procedures step by step in the computer class. Finally, the students make their posters and attend the poster session, to which teachers, fellow students, coaches and customers have been invited.

### **Student assessment**

Assessment of the project is no longer a 'simple' matter of translation quality. Instead, it is the other competences that are emphasised and they are assessed according to both process and product criteria. The process assessment is mainly done by the students themselves: Lievens from the Hogeschool Gent developed an instrument for self and peer assessment which includes the two sets of management competences mentioned above. The students apply the instrument twice: once at the end of week three and once at the end of the course in week eleven. It is an Excel file in which students first assess themselves with regard to twenty different competences and then



they assess their peers on a comparative basis. For the latter, they start out by giving themselves zero for each criterion and giving the students who they think do better a positive value, those who do equally well zero and those who they think do not do as well as themselves a negative value. Product assessment is done by the teacher, who gives a mark for the business plan, the poster presentation and a random passage from the translation work. Self-assessment counts as 5% of the total mark, peer assessment 25% and teacher assessment (70%). If coaches, customers and or commissioners want to assess students' work, they can also fill in a form, and their assessments may influence the total mark given to the students.

### **Discussion**

It is clear that the students are given ample opportunity to practise many competences that are necessary in the freelance translation business. However, I must recognize that students actually start the SBP-activities in the project on a very weak basis: entrepreneurial skills have not been part and parcel of their programme, they have only had a very few entrepreneurial / intrapreneurial models in the preceding years (Teachers, unless they are or were freelance translators themselves or entrepreneurs in some other capacity, have not usually been selected on the basis of their entrepreneurial spirit.) and they have little insight into the knowledge domains presented in Figure 2 (sector, regulations and economy). In addition, they have not had any experience of translation project management either. In all, this makes the SBP a very challenging task, especially for students who have not been raised in an entrepreneurial environment or those who have little entrepreneurial spirit. Some colleagues suggested replacing the SBP by informative sessions. Although more information would definitely help some students overcome their fear, a series of informative sessions will not contribute to the development of entrepreneurial competences. It is the principle of learning by doing that is so essential: students need to learn again to take risks and with the SBP they can do so in a safe environment. It builds their confidence and gives them the experience which they will need in the following year when they leave the safe college environment. Consequently, the SBP remains within the context of the one-year Master's in Translation and from next year onwards will be offered in the second semester. As soon as the Flemish government gives the go-ahead for a two-year translation Master's programme, however, the SBP experience will move to the second year, after students have

completed their training periods in the first year. That should give them the know-how and more experience of professional life before they are asked to create a translation business on their own. In the meantime, the first steps have been taken to set up a collaborative venture between economics and translation students. Economics students are also asked to set up small businesses and they need communication skills, sometimes also foreign languages. Our students can carry out some tasks for the the economics students, while the latter can then be asked to help ours with their business plans.

Another current drawback of the SBP is the absence of detailed Flemish market studies. Here is an opportunity to combine entrepreneurial, translation and academic competences: in the future, we will ask students to do research related to the SBP for their Master's dissertations. They could:

1. carry out market analyses, whose results would become available to students (and teachers);
2. observe a SBP team with respect to a particular aspect (for instance, a particular entrepreneurial competence) and assess its development in the course of the SBP;
3. question alumni about the impact of the project on their jobs;
4. investigate some assessment issues in SBP.

Finally, finding translator coaches is not an easy matter. Last year, it turned out to be the case that there were actually too few translator coaches who are willing to spend the time with a team of students so that help was needed from the Flemish Chamber of Commerce, and people from other businesses who were willing to convey the entrepreneurial spirit to young people stepped in. Fortunately, the president of the Belgian Chamber of Translators, Interpreters and Philologists has presented herself as a coach this year and a colleague from the other side of the world, Professor Alet Kruger in South Africa, also offered to coach a team. A feedback questionnaire among coaches should be able to point the way in which we can improve the project in the future. Extending the feedback survey to include alumni is, of course, another item on our agenda.

If our Master's programme is spread over two years, I expect our students will also participate in 'Enterprise without Borders', the international programme for businesses for young people, where students can learn to understand the economic principles of

European and international trade and apply them to their businesses. Since our faculty is the one that has the highest degree of 'internationalisation' in the university, I am confident that these rich, active-learning experiences will contribute to fostering sensitivity to other cultures among our students and make them better communicators and entrepreneurs on a global scale.

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