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Actes del Primer Simposi sobre l'Ensenyament a distància i semipresencial de la Tradumàtica

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The distance and semi-presence-based learning of tradumàtica

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As is the case where making a New Year's resolution to stop smoking, to go to the gym or to learn a foreign language is concerned, there are surely plenty of people who, with the best will in the world, will have found themselves in the situation of subscribing to or signing up for a distance-learning course that promises that they will acquire knowledge with little effort, at their own pace, over as long a period as they require and with a greater or lesser degree of personalised attention. Another situation that will undoubtedly be familiar is that of such students abandoning their courses halfway through due to a lack of motivation, an absence of tutoring and monitoring, or discrepancies between their expectations and what the course really offers.

Over recent years, distance learning has developed a great deal and has benefited from the impetus of governmental and academic institutions and businesses alike. Companies have been quick to see the advantages and profitability of distance training when specifically adapted for their staff and customers, while academic institutions have stumbled across a cash cow that they too can milk, thanks to its appeal to students in different geographical locations or who are simply unable to commit themselves to set timetables. In conjunction with the progress made in the field of new technologies, these circumstances (demand combined with a need for education) have given rise to a new form of distance learning, namely e-learning, which uses new technologies via the internet and, more than ever, focuses on students rather than on lecturers. The importance attributed and support afforded to e-learning, as well as to learning how to use and actually using new technologies, are exemplified in a resolution of the Council of the European Union on e-learning (13/07/02), which establishes the objective of encouraging member states and the Commission to undertake initiatives geared to facilitating the incorporation of information and communication technologies (ICTs) into the field of education and training. By way of examples, such initiatives would include promoting the development of high-quality digital pedagogical material that ensures the reliability of online offers; reaping the benefit of the potential of the internet and virtual and multimedia learning environments as regards permanent education; and supporting existing European portals in order to promote cooperation and the exchange of experiences in the field of e-learning and pedagogical development.

Evidence of the boom that this area is experiencing comes in the form of associations, courses, lectures, publications with varying degrees of specialisation and on a range of media, and portals and websites dedicated to the subject of e-learning. Relevant examples of highlights as regards symposia and conferences include the first National E-Learning Meeting, organised by E-magister and AEFOL, the leading Spanish-language e-learning portal; the second Expoelearning European Conference; and the third International Conference on Technology-based Education and Training, all of which took place in Barcelona, in June 2001 and March and May of 2003 respectively.

Additionally, on 6 and 7 June 2002, the Departament de Traducció i d'Interpretació of the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (UAB) held the "first symposium on the distance and semi-presence-based learning of tradumàtica". This event was organised by the Tradumàtica group and attended by guests from a range of Spanish universities (U. Jaume I de Castellón, U. Europea de Madrid, U. de Granada, U. de Deusto, U. de Vic, U. de La Salle, U. Oberta de Catalunya, U. Politècnica de Catalunya). The aim of the symposium was to exchange opinions regarding content, methodology and technology in relation to the teaching of tradumàtica, a discipline that encompasses complementary areas such as specialised translation, terminology, documentation, new technologies and IT applied to translation. Lecturers from all the fields referred to above gave their points of view on the teaching of their respective subjects in their faculties of translation and interpreting. In doing so, they emphasised the implications that semi-presence-based education or distance learning would have as regards didactic material and content, as well as in terms of approaches to teaching, required infrastructure and a different methodological perspective from that which is typical of presence-based classes.

The articles presented in this publication examine different issues, all of which are relevant to the distance or semi-presence-based learning of tradumàtica. Ricardo Muñoz and Óscar Jiménez, both from the Universidad de Granada, and Celia Rico, from the Universidad Europea de Madrid, underline the need for change where syllabus design is concerned, in order for translation students to be able to experience a greater degree of realism, i.e. the situation of companies and the market. According to Muñoz, such a redefinition of the content of current training (presence-based or otherwise) for translators, of whom an ever-increasing degree of versatility is demanded, entails overhauling the very criteria that determine the content of translation classes and the progression of that content. Meanwhile, Óscar Jiménez describes the need to achieve a balance between the objectives of companies and those of lecturers and students without ever losing sight of learning objectives.

The articles of Amparo Alcina, a lecturer in IT applied to translation at the Universitat Jaume I in Castellón, and Vicent Montalt, who lectures in technical and scientific translation at the same institution, include contributions related to distance learning and semi-presence-based education on the basis of the experience that they have built up through their teaching work. A common theme in both authors' articles is the use of remote resources as a means of reinforcing or complementing other, presence-based activities, such as traditional tutorials. The aim of all such facilities is to improve the education that translation students receive, or at least to make it possible to do so.

Nonetheless, both Ricardo Muñoz and Vicent Montalt remind us of how little we know as yet about how translation is taught or learned in classrooms, which is probably due to the difficulties inherent to such studies. In this respect, Wilhem Neunzig of the UAB has taken a step towards bridging this gap in research into translation studies by carrying out an experiment on the effects of different types of pedagogical intervention and the feedback received by lecturers, something that constitutes a fundamental element where e-learning is concerned. His article also includes a review of the various ways in which ICTs can be used for the distance learning of translation.

However, if there is a thorn in the side of distance learning or e-learning, it is the fact that it is constantly compared to presence-based education, as is made clear in the article of Mònica Fernández, a lecturer at the UAB. She examines the similarities and differences between the two methods before subsequently switching the focus to distance learning in its own right, with particular emphasis on the concept of distance itself. Once we have been familiarised with the field, another lecturer from the UAB, Ramon Piqué, suggests an outline for a pedagogical model for the distance learning of tradumàtica, centring on the learning process and explaining everything from the activities performed to the agents involved therein and the educational platform.