Initiatives and evaluation of teaching-learning process in translation training

María-Dolores Olvera-Lobo[1,2], Juncal Gutiérrez-Artacho[3]

[1] CSIC, Unidad Asociada Grupo SCImago, Madrid, Spain

[2] Departament of Information and Communication,
University of Granada, Granada, Spain

[3] Departament of Translation and Interpreting,
University of Granada, Granada, Spain

molvera@ugr.es; juncalgutierrez@ugr.es

Abstract

The ability to manage information and communication technologies (ICT) is a professional prerequisite for translators. The translation discipline is aware of this trend because ICTs have changed and developed the translation profession. Translation training is more than just learning a proficient command of languages, and translators must also develop other important skills – such as accessing and managing information resources.

A group of teachers from various departments of the Universidad de Granada (Spain) have developed and applied a series of innovative learning projects. Translation teaching is approached in these projects from the information society perspective and the demands of the translation market. We have created and developed a 'Professional Approach to Translator Training' (PATT), which builds a dynamic and virtual model of translation briefs – and exposes students to real-life work environments and tasks. This teaching approach combines elements of role-play, team-based task learning, simulation, and case study. The approach uses an innovative e-learning environment which functions on a collaborative platform. In addition, we have prepared teaching tools that include: a work guide; a digital translation library; and several interactive and multimedia tutorials.

These tools are intended to assess the impact of these innovations on students and determine the following: levels of expectations; capabilities as ICT users; familiarity with the range of computer applications in use; opinions regarding teamwork; and specific knowledge of the course modules involved.

Introduction

Information and communication technologies (ICT) play an important role in our society because they are, either implicitly or explicitly, integrated in our main daily activities. The ability to manage the technologies that enable access to information is now an essential requirement. In addition, competence in some workplaces means the ability to use information. Therefore, translation is a paradigmatic task in this context.

The gradual introduction of new technologies in undergraduate teaching and the classroom is necessary for future workers (Hong, 2002; TTEL, 2001). This is particularly important in degree programs for preparing professional translators (Ramirez & Secara, 2008). Translation is a prototypical teleworking profession where translators are almost obliged to make use of these technologies every day. Activities relating ITC and training can be justified because: (a) economic growth (at least, over these last few years) has encouraged a constant development of ITCs; (b) information has become more affordable and available in all formats; (c) information is becoming more heterogeneous; and (d) users need to be constantly updated on the most recent developments in every discipline.

The implementation of ITCs has meant some important changes in translation training: new activity areas are emerging (localization, audio description, subtitling); translators may more easily obtain original texts; resources and information sources are available in electronic format; and useful information tools are appearing that help translators in their work (automatic translation systems, translation memories, word counters, and so on).

Modern translators can define themselves as multilingual communicators with command of the necessary tools. Translation training is more than learning a proficient command of languages, because translators must also develop other highly important skills in various subjects. However, this does not mean that language competence has become less important; on the contrary, language skills are only one facet of the essential sub-competences required to acquire real competence as a translator (Kelly, 2000). As ITCs greatly help translators in their work and familiarity with their operation is a prerequisite in the labour market, so these technologies must play an important role in

translation training (Archer, 2002; Askeave, 2000). The syllabus of the four-year degree program in translation and interpreting at the Universidad de Granada includes courses with varying disciplines. These courses complement the linguistic and traditional translation modules and give students a wider and more relevant training. Disciplines such as documentation, multimedia programming, terminology, and professional management play an important role in translator training – because they are absolutely vital in the work market.

A group of teachers from various departments of Universidad de Granada have developed and applied new innovative learning projects to promote a translation teaching method based on the information society and translation market. The main idea is to offer cross-curriculur training that is focused on the relationship between students and the implementation of knowledge and skills about the development of the translation process. The result based on these ideas (Olvera et al*., 2007, 2008b) has been termed 'Professional Approach to Translator Training' (PATT). Various other related tools have also been developed. *,*

Methodology

According to Olvera and colleagues (2005), the translation market can be defined as global, decentralized, specialized, dynamic, virtual and demanding. While a command of languages and an excellent understanding of the text subject are still generally considered the cornerstone of quality for the professional translator, other highly important translation tasks include the management and use of a wide range of information and communication resources. Tasks in the translation process include documentation, terminology, desktop publishing, and relations with the target reader and client.

Internet is the greatest source of information and provides direct access to information irrespective of geographical location. Consequently, the task of gathering the information needed to correctly understand a source text has been considerably simplified. This is a

great advantage because it means translators can invest most of their time in the actual translation process. However, today's translators must develop research strategies and evaluate the quality of information without the help of other professionals (librarians or subject-matter specialists) who used to fulfil these tasks and were so vital to the success of the translator's work .

Terminology has followed a similar path, according to Wright & Wright (1997), as it is more important to develop some skills in the acquisition and management of information than to become a specialist in this area. Previously, the fundamental problem was gaining access to obscure sources of specialized terminology. Online and digital resources enable access a wide range of updated lexicons and these guarantee a greater degree of precision than that expected by specialists. These facts have changed the nature of terminological tasks and issues.

Layout (graphic design of text) has undergone a revolution because users can create good quality publications using only a PC word processor. In this context, translators are expected to be familiar with the requirements of businesses, the printed media, and clients. Therefore, it is vital for translation students to learn design and layout skills during their degree studies.

In addition, we have to consider the opportunities opened by the telecommunications sector. Translation has changed from being a local to worldwide market (Muñoz, 2000). It is very common for translators and their clients never to meet face to face, and communicate exclusively via the Internet. However, this is just one aspect of the phenomenon. The evolution to an information society has provoked new kinds of translations with different formats.

From the reception of work to the delivery of the final product, the translator has to manage several tasks organized in various stages: documentation in two languages, terminology, translation, proofing/editing – as well as layout and publishing stages. Producing a good translation now involves different interrelated tasks and translators working alone must complete every stage. These tasks are divided and assigned to various people when working in teams. The increased number of translation agencies encourages

this tendency. Ideally, these agencies would have staff from different areas (information specialists, terminologists, translators, and other specialists). However, these agencies are usually small and middle-sized companies that typically aim to hire versatile translators who are able to handle every task. All of these tasks and resources have led to the creation of a new job: the project manager. This development can be seen clearly in organizations where there are large volumes of text to translate, such as translation services in the European Parliament. Nevertheless, in small and middle-sized companies there is always a project manager who establishes and maintains relations with clients and freelancers. These project managers form a key element in the production system.

PATT is based on these ideas (Figure 1). Compartmentalizing learning into course modules with only minimal teaching coordination does not create an overall view of the complete task within a professional process (La Rocca, 2007). Neither does such compartmentalization facilitate an understanding of teleworking and team-working: two of the keys to success for professional translators. Our idea introduces a sequence of tasks into translation subjects. Students are divided into teams, where each individual student carries out tasks related to the specific module – with each task fulfilling invaluable functions for the whole team. Our project applies the recommendations of the Bologna process because it offers career-centred teaching with the focus on students and the work they undertake. Moreover, we aim to encourage an understanding of the learning objectives by all participants. Our project also brings productive work routines into the classroom and helps students internalize these in a real context. This experience should give these students a competitive edge when they join the labour market.
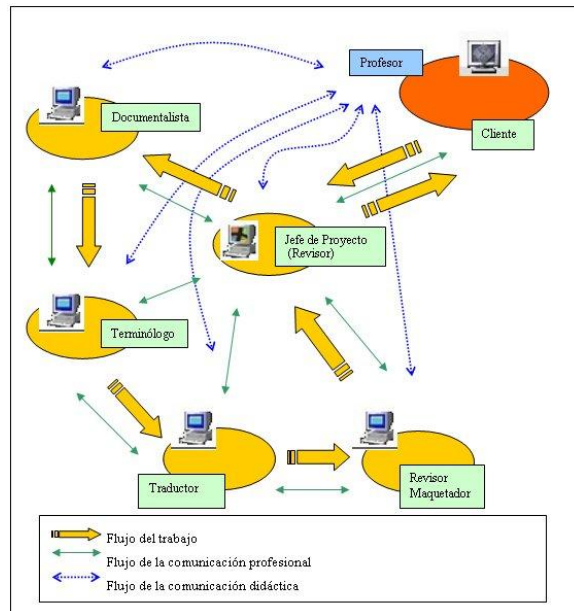
Figure 1. A professional approach to translator training application using basic support for collaborative work

PATT has being implemented on several of translation courses: Spanish-French, Spanish-English, Spanish-Italian, Spanish-Portuguese, and Spanish-Russian. Students are divided into translation teams, and each student is placed in charge of managing a task. As Figure 1 shows, each group has five members, each of whom selects a different role (information specialist, terminologist, translator, proofreader/editor/layout, or project manager). For each new translation assignment, team members adopt a different role, so that each student carries out all of the tasks. Teachers play an important role because they must supervise student progress during the translation assignments. With our project, students can gain an insight into the role of each task within the translation process – before entering the job market.

Teleworking is a crucial aspect of professional life for many translators (Montalt, 2005; Olvera et al., 2009), and so we aim to ensure that students have an opportunity to familiarize themselves with teleworking using PATT in the modules studied. PATT enables students to share tasks and publish results on the web, so strengthening their teleworking skills. In most translation courses, students receive tutorial support for their

translation assignments. PATT ensures more effective overall translator training by adding a virtual dimension. We have created two tools that enable students to share the problems or questions that may arise during a translation: a website and a collaborative work platform.

Our website is a meeting point and the main tool for developing our translation projects. Content has been recently extended and updated. The website offers students information about projects, lecturers, and course modules. A work guide is set out as a tutorial and designed to help students handle the tasks and roles they must undertake during the project. The website also provides links to information about the translation briefs and teams, online resources, and a reference corpus in the digital translation library. There are also some interactive and multimedia tutorials where students can expand on the information given in the library. In addition, the website gives access to the collaborative work platform and a restricted area, where students can exchange ideas, organize meetings, store documents, upload and download documents and files, and evaluate their knowledge by self-testing. The website also enables teachers to monitor learning activities and evaluate students.

Another important tool for the implementation of PATT is an online collaborative work platform. It enables students to organize their projects, exchange documents, support inter-group communications and share results (Peverati, 2009). We analyzed various platforms, before selecting several for teaching purposes (Claronline, BSCW, Moodle, Swad). These platforms enable the creation of specific workspaces where each translation team can exchange documents, websites, files, and so on. The work is organized in a shared work space that facilitates online cooperation between team members. Students learn how to plan and share the different translation tasks. In addition, this tool is easier to use for information-sharing than other tools (for example, file transfer protocol).

Another important advantage of our project is that it encourages self-learning. Our approach is nearer to the teaching model recommended within the European Higher Education Area than the traditional Spanish model. Students can always contact their lecturers or tutors for assistance, but they are responsible for meeting the standards and needs of colleagues representing the next link in the production chain. In addition, using

virtual learning environments as teaching tools – also known as e-learning – enables us to cover more precisely the skill needs of the labour market. Students studying with the PATT approach also show higher levels of satisfaction than students studying with more traditional teaching models.

Results

We have carried out several investigations to evaluate the impact of our innovative project on several aspects of translation studies. We have measured student opinion and levels of satisfaction after participating in PATT. We have used various tools for making these assessments: website use statistics; analysis of log files; pre-course questionnaires; post-course questionnaires; and so on.

The analysis of log files is based on the user transaction entries (teachers and students). The log files automatically record interactions between users and the collaborative work platform. The student workflow analysis shows us firsthand information on student work. An analysis of the website server and the platform produces relevant data about student work, teleworking, team-working, and the project in general.

In the same way as shown by Appelt (2001), an analysis of the log files generated by the collaborative work platform reveals that the most frequently used tools were those which virtually facilitate collaborative projects (Senso et al., 2006), such as file administration or the linking of documents, images, and URLs.
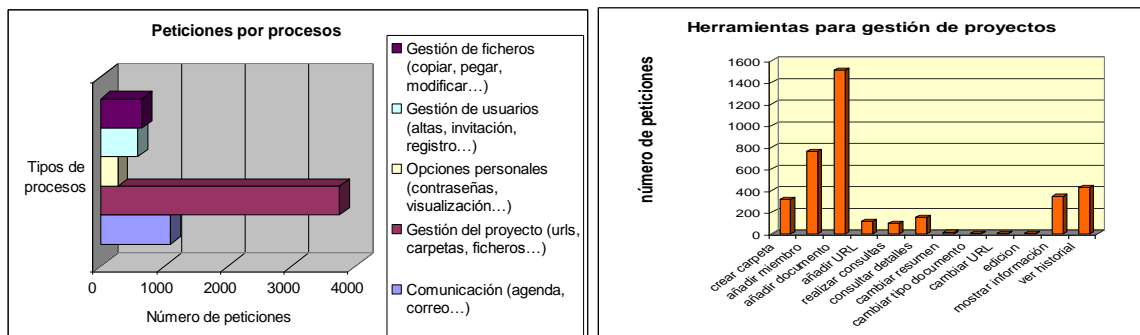

Figure 2. Evaluation of this project

Questionnaires were also developed and used in our project as evaluation tools. Student data was gathered through two kinds of questionnaires: before (pre-course questionnaires) and after (post-course questionnaires) the implementation of PATT. Questionnaires were structured around various topics: computer knowledge, translation, teleworking, team-working, the online collaborative work platform, and previous and post knowledge regarding PATT, and the translation process.

In general, students reported that they had gained knowledge while participating in our project – and this finding echoes previous studies (Olvera et al., 2008a). In addition, we have shown that students believe there was an improvement in their documentation skills, and their understanding of word processors and web browsers.

After jointly calculating the variables regarding teleworking, we have found that students have a very good impression of teleworking in the translation process. These statements confirm the appropriateness of this experience, not only for translation but also for encouraging an increased understanding of teleworking among students. The figures confirm this increased understanding, at least from the student point of view.

Variables gathered on team-working before and after PATT suggest that the virtual classroom has improved overall student disposition towards team-working. This confirms the findings of Hong, Lai & Holton (2003) that students are generally satisfied with this aspect of translation work. Students said that team-working is one of the main differences between PATT and traditional models.

Result evaluation shows that students feel that their competence in various tasks (documentation, terminology, translation, proofing/editing, and project management) has widened in general. Through participating in a virtual environment, students have boosted their general confidence and feel more capable of carrying out any stage of the translation process. This last finding is confirmed by several student responses to the post-course questionnaires. Some students also stated that they are more familiar with the different tasks in the translation process and this broader understanding gave them a sense of being better prepared for the professional world.

Conclusions

This article presents a research study made at the faculty of translation and interpreting of the Universidad de Granada (Spain). The objective was to develop several tools and projects to improve the translation teaching process. These tools and projects had the effect of technologically advancing the translation process, while exposing students to real-life tasks and work environments – such as teleworking and collaborative work platforms.

Our first aim was to familiarize translation students with how translation agencies work. We achieved this aim by requiring each student to perform a task in a chain of production using a system created on our website and other tools. Another important aim was to obtain information about the influence of new technologies on translation teaching. We collected data to evaluate the experience by issuing questionnaires before and after the course and analyzing the log files. These analyses have given us a specific understanding of the potential of new information technologies in teaching projects. Several tools and a model, PATT, were created to carry out all the previous tasks and present a real work environment.

To achieve these objectives, it was necessary to encourage teleworking and team-working. This is a cross-curricular approach and knowledge was required from all the courses taught in the four-year translation program. The Professional Approach to Translator Training (PATT) combines everything taught from a theory-practice point of view.

Finally, thanks to the work developed in this project and the empirical results obtained, we can establish some proven and accepted methodological models. These approaches have already been established and many further advantages can be gained in future works. The data suggests that using a collaborative work platform in translation courses is beneficial, and enables students to feel satisfied with their work and gain confidence. Nevertheless, we believe that it would be interesting to compare the results presented here with those obtained by other studies. This could be achieved by measuring an increase in student satisfaction and competence after completing translation briefs in the traditional

way – without virtual communication on a collaborative work platform.

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