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Building Professional Awareness in the Cyberage: The World of Professional Translation and Interpreting in the German Speaking Countries¹

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1. Introduction and aims of the task

Within the overall framework of the Cibertaaal project, the task [El mundo profesional de la traducción y la interpretación en Alemania](#)² was designed for second-year Translation students who learn German as a second foreign language. Their average level of proficiency in German, according to the European Frame of Reference at the time of completing the task, was A2/B1. Translating from German into their native Spanish or Catalan is the main objective of the curriculum for the second foreign language in a Translation degree, which turns reading comprehension into the most important aspect of the language courses that precede the actual training in translation. This focus on developing reading strategies as well as the pre-intermediate level of proficiency of this group of students makes them the ideal target group for a cybertask as outlined in the previous chapters.

It is obvious that reading can only be learnt through practice and that the internet is one of the sources of textual input that is most easily accessible to our students and that offers a wide range of possibilities. However, at this early stage of the acquisition process, many of our students still shy away from using web pages in German as a resource either for authentic information or for reading material. This is why the central idea behind this cybertask is helping students to overcome this difficulty and to access a variety of texts – even texts that may be beyond their linguistic abilities – in a way that is purposeful and leads them to establish a meaningful interaction with the texts. In order to achieve this, we take advantage of several factors that enhance the student's ability to deal with complex foreign language texts:

- Above all, the selection of a topic both motivating and sufficiently familiar to learners. In this case, the task introduces students to the world of professional translating and interpreting in the German speaking countries. There is thus a direct link to students' interests as well as the possibility of comparing with what they know about their profession and its market in their own country. This makes it likely for them to be genuinely interested in resolving the task.
- Student familiarity with many of the genres they will encounter during the task, either traditional or new digital genres.
- The pre-existence of web navigation strategies that students have already developed for their native language or for their first foreign language (English).
- The multilingual nature of the web.

For many German pages, there is also an English version available (occasionally in other languages like French or Spanish too). Although it is desirable to have students use only the German version (from the point of view of developing their German language skills), we have found that resorting occasionally to the English or Spanish

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² There is also a German version of the same task: [Übersetzen und Dolmetschen in den deutschsprachigen Ländern](#).

version can help weaker students complete the task and thus make the most of it rather than abandon it altogether due to linguistic difficulty.

Owing to the twofold nature of this first generation of cybertasks as language learning tasks and instruments for carrying out research in action, our task is designed to achieve both learning objectives and research aims. The most important learning objectives belong to the areas of developing language skills, professional awareness and learning autonomy:

- Language skills: Enhancing reading comprehension
 - Reading and analysing texts belonging to different text types and discourse genres
 - Practising different reading styles
 - Developing and using different reading strategies
 - Combining information from different sources
 - Developing a critical attitude in reading: evaluating source reliability
- Professional awareness: Getting to know the fundamentals of the translation and interpreting market, its mechanisms and requirements is an essential part of translator and interpreter training. This task gives the students an initial insight into this market in the German speaking countries.
- Developing autonomy: The task is designed to enhance student autonomy both in language learning and in their professional skills by improving their competence in seeking and processing information in the foreign language.

Our research aims, on the other hand, comprise analysis into the following aspects:

- The students' reading and navigation modes in relationship to the nature of the task and the web sites
- The relationship between level of proficiency and navigation strategies
- The relationship between navigation strategies and cognitive and learning styles

2. Description of the task

Our task about the world of professional translation and interpreting in the German speaking countries can be found in: [El mundo profesional de la traducción y la interpretación en Alemania](#). It has the format of a web-quest in the sense of Koenraad's "talenquest" (Koenraad & Westhoff 2003; Koenraad 2006) or the web-task for language learning described by Luzón (2007). It is designed to give significant, attractive and authentic input, it is based on a natural need for information, and it tries to promote the use of learning strategies and the reflection on strategy development as well as on product and process.³ In this version of the task, designed for students with a level of A2/B1 in German, the main focus is on receptive strategies and processing meaning, the productive and meaning negotiation phases being carried out in the student's mother tongue. However, the task could easily be adapted for more advanced learners by introducing more language production-oriented activities.

Phase 1: Professional associations

In the first step, the students quickly get to know the eight different web sites by classifying the associations geographically (Germany, Austria, Switzerland) and in terms of their scope (translation and interpreting in general, legal translation, conference interpreting, etc.). The following steps explore different aspects of the professional associations, for instance conditions and procedure for gaining membership, courses that are offered, finding a

³ Another example of a web-quest for the same target group – which is described in Oster (in press) – can be found at: <http://www3.uji.es/~oster/plantilla2/index.htm>.

translator, and ethical codes. After the familiarisation phase, the tasks are set in a way that the learner has to do more than simply look for a piece of information on a particular web site and paste it in a worksheet. For example, the learners choose a web site according to their own interests; they have to find different ways of retrieving the information in different web sites. In [Task 1C](#) they define their own (hypothetical) translation need, locate the appropriate search engine ([this one](#) for translators or [this one](#) for interpreters, for example) and interact with the interface that allows them to find a suitable translator or interpreter. In [Task 1D](#), which deals with ethical codes and is more advanced, students combine and evaluate information from different sources in order to establish their own list of ‘dos and don’ts’ in translation practice.

[Phase 2](#): Interpreting agencies

In the last task, students work in teams in order to assess the sites of three interpreting agencies. They adopt the role of the organiser of a large multilingual conference and have to decide which of the agencies they would trust with the job. By browsing the sites, they identify criteria that can sustain their decision (for example, general information on interpreting, information on the experience and training of the interpreters, the existence of voice samples or recordings of previous interpreting jobs, etc.). This last task is the most demanding one, in the sense that it requires active processing of the information, combining information from various sources, evaluating and rating the importance of different criteria, contrasting the information with other members of the team, and negotiating the result.

3. The web sites

3.1 Characteristics of the web sites

The web sites that are offered to the students as resources for completing the tasks are of two types. In the first part of the task, they work with the pages of different translator and/or interpreter associations; the second part deals with the sites of three translation and/or interpreting agencies. The sites have been chosen according to the following criteria, which are shared by all the other cybertasks in this project.

- **Multimodality:** All sites contain text and images; many also offer videos and audio files.
- **Interactivity:** All pages offer several types of possible action by the reader or interaction with the “writer” of the page:
 - filling in a contact form
 - signing up to the association
 - offering oneself as a professional
 - seeking a professional translator or interpreter in a database
 - calculating the price of a professional translation
 - reading, watching or listening to information
- **Multilingualism:** Many of the pages offer an English version, with some offering as many as four additional languages.
- **Genre:** All the sites show a high degree of multigenericity and transgenericity as explained in Villanueva, Luzón & Ruiz (2008). We find a range of genres including informative ones (regulations, FAQs, fees), advertising texts, CVs, directories and link collections.

3.2 Site architecture

The eleven web sites the students use to complete the task are quite complex and different in structure. We have analysed them with the help of the y-Ed software, which enables us to represent the structure of the site and the internal links graphically (cf. chapter 4). As an example, figures 1 and 2 show the graphs of the three pages used for the second phase of the task. The blue image corresponds to a site called *Syntax*, the yellow one to *simultanea*, and the pink one to *d-interp*. Every rectangle represents a page, and the lines signify internal links.

In both types of layout (the organic and the circular) we can clearly see that *Syntax* is much more loosely structured and that there are much fewer links between different elements of the site. *Simultanea* and *d-interp*, on the other hand, are closely knitted structures in which every element is linked to a large number of others. This can be seen most clearly in the circular layout (Figure 2), where these two sites present a structure that Navarro and Villanueva (2008) call “radiolarian”, a term borrowed from biology. The organic layout shows that *simultanea* and *d-interp* are made up of clusters that are heavily connected internally and among each other. On closer examination, we find that each cluster corresponds to a different language version of the site: two languages in the case of *simultanea*, and four in the case of *d-interp*.

As explained in chapter 3, during the experimental phase of the project the students’ navigation and the time spent on each page have been recording. These data will hopefully enable us to draw conclusions on whether site architecture can influence the way students navigate in order to find information.

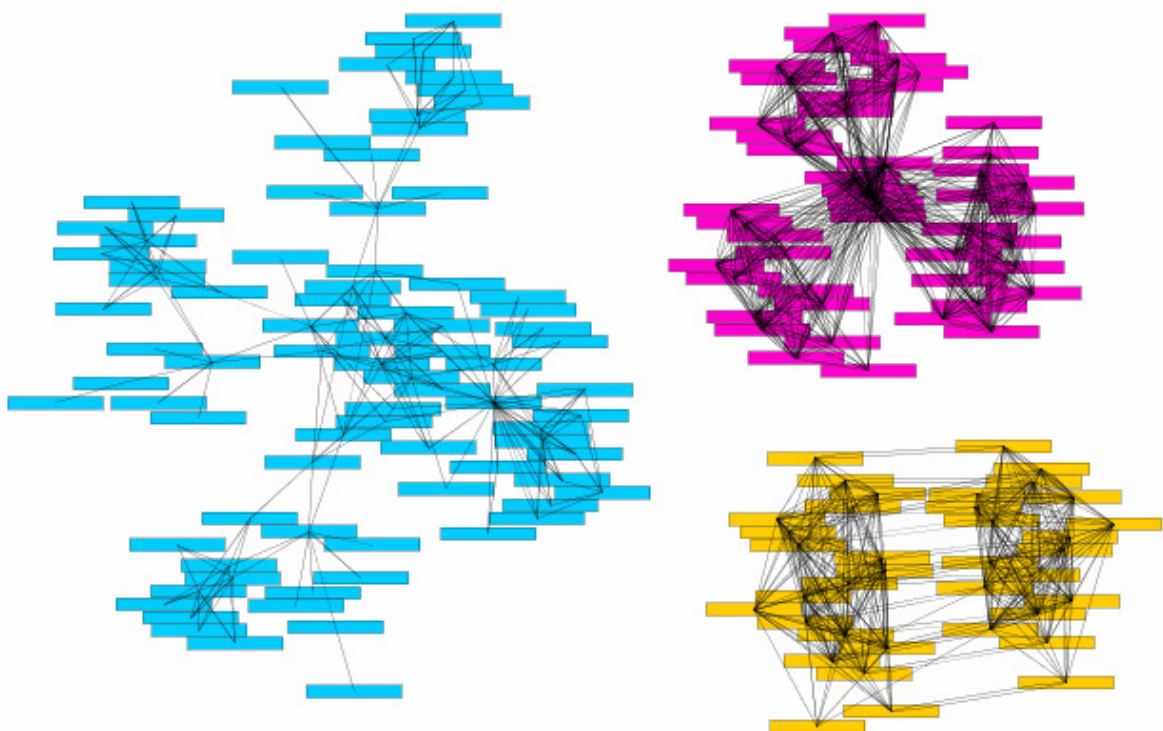


Figure 1: Organic layout

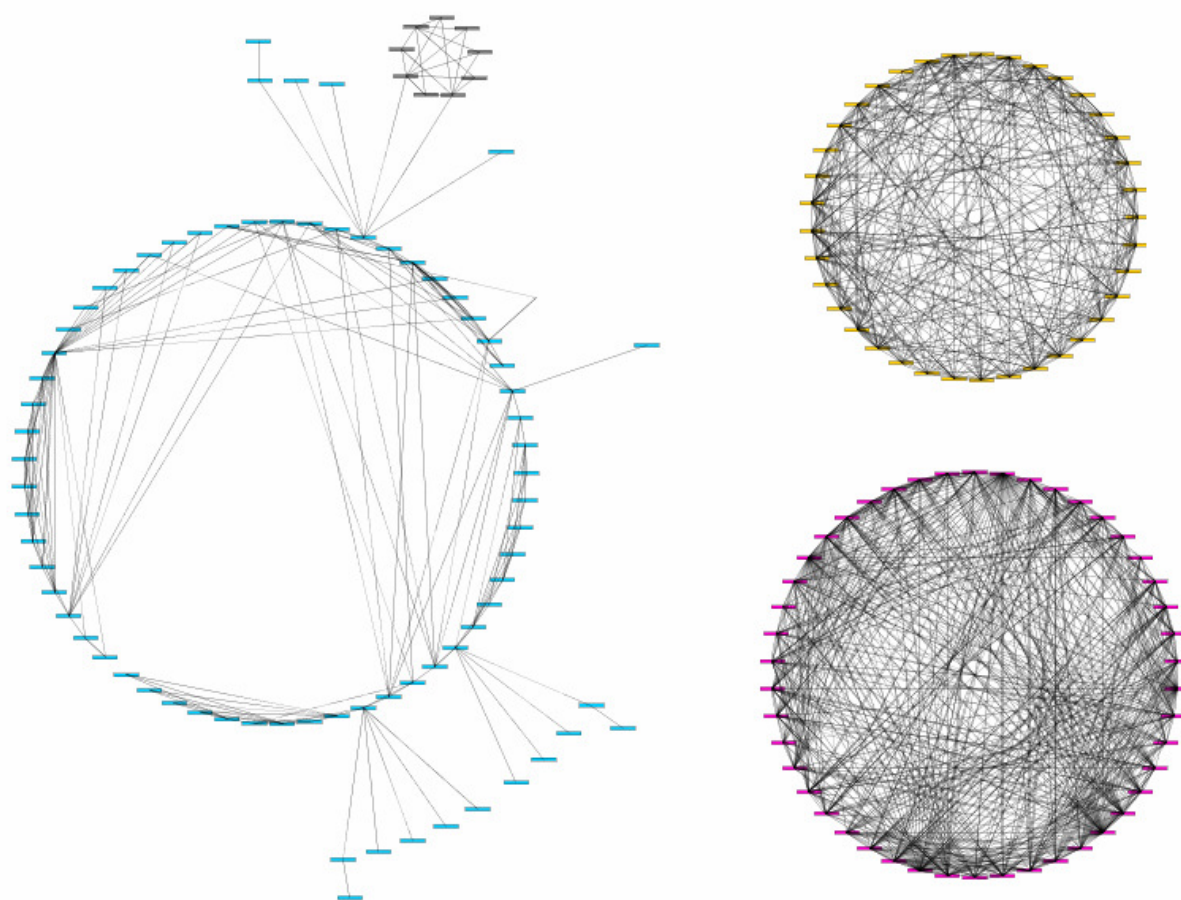


Figure 2: Circular layout

4. Evaluation of the task and the experience

In accordance with our aims in designing this task, our evaluation of the results will take into account the way students dealt with the task in the classroom on the one hand and some tentative initial conclusions with respect to our research aims on the other. In order to reach these conclusions we rely on the students' self-evaluation as well as our observations during the experience (two teachers took notes on the individual approaches of each student including their way of navigating and the kind of questions they asked).

4.1 Student self-evaluation

Generally speaking, the overall impression is that of a good acceptance of the task by the students. Most appreciate that the task offers them interesting information about their future profession and access to documents in German they would not even try to read otherwise. The negative aspects the students point out are related to technical problems (slow internet connections), the length of the task in relation to the available time, and problems with linguistic difficulty.

Most students are confident about their skills regarding the use of the internet as a source of information. However, many of them feel it could be useful to improve their search techniques. Furthermore, the foreign language is seen as more problematic. Many students report difficulties due to a lack of linguistic knowledge. However, in most cases this does not

prevent them from completing the exercise successfully, as is shown in their answers to question 6, where they explain what they did to overcome these difficulties.

The answers to question 3 also reflect student competence in managing internet resources.

- They do not find it problematic to combine information from different sources.
- Most of them are aware of having used and combined information of different types (image, text, audio or video).
- When they face linguistic problems, they resort to online dictionaries (96.43 %) and occasionally switch to a version of the web site in another language.
- Almost half the students (46.43%) declare that they have stepped outside the direction given in the task, carrying out relevant additional searches autonomously.
- More than 80% use the given links selectively, either before or after entering a web site.
- More than 60% find the links helpful, whereas a minority (17.86%) feels links can distract them while searching.

Student satisfaction with different aspects of the task, on the other hand, is generally high:

- More than 90% rate their handling of the internet for resolving the tasks, for gathering information, and for construction of meaning as “medium” or “good”.
- More than 70% rate their ability to use the foreign language to access new information as “medium” or “good”.
- More than 75% rate the influence of ICT and the learning task on their foreign language development as “medium” or “good”.

4.2 First impressions and observations

Although a thorough examination of the data resulting from observation, registration of the students' navigation, the learning styles test and the student self-evaluation is still to come, we can advance some preliminary conclusions concerning some of the variables that influence task success:

- **Language proficiency**
According to the language test completed by the students before doing the cybertask, their level of proficiency in German ranged from A1/A2 to B2. With the task being designed for level A2/B1, it is not surprising that lower-level students reported more problems and needed more help with the task, while the feedback of more proficient learners was more positive.
- **Learning styles / Ways of processing information**
In contrast to the overall influence of the variable of language proficiency, we can also observe some interesting exceptions. Some students who usually do well in other types of classroom task showed signs of being overwhelmed by the amount of information offered by them and/or the linguistic complexity of the texts, which was well beyond the average classroom text. On the other hand, other students whose performance in other language tasks is not outstanding in any way did remarkably well in this task and did not find it difficult.

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