Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in Collaborative Translation Teaching: Legal and Economic Translation

1. Introduction

The aim of this contribution is to share with trainers of prospective translators a proposal for a teaching strategy for specialized (legal and economic) translation in a collaborative environment through the use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT). The Education Innovation Project, "Metodología de la enseñanza-aprendizaje de la Traducción especializada (textos jurídicos y socioeconómicos): integración en la plataforma DEVLT del campus virtual" (DEVLT-UMA, reference number: PIE04/053, 2004-2005) ("Teaching and learning strategies for specialized (legal and economic) translation: inclusion on the virtual campus DEVLT platform"); we are outlining is the result of the continuous effort of a team of trainers and researchers of the University of Malaga which started in 1997/1998 academic year with the project called "El aula virtual: un nuevo recurso pedagógico al servicio de la enseñanza de la traducción" ("The virtual classroom: a new pedagogical resource for translation training") and followed by a series of such projects.

Translation teaching scenario has changed considerably since then both regarding translation teaching strategies and the development of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) thus forcing us to find a translator training model which takes advantage of this technological development and reconciles the actual specialized translation subjects syllabus with the ever-changing demands of the professional specialized translation labour market insisting on the use of specialized translation tools such as Computer Assisted Translation (CAT), Translation Memories (TM), etc.

In order to illustrate the above, the development and outcome of our last Education Innovation Project, implemented during 2004/2005 academic year, will be described.

2. Objectives

The general objective of this project is to include the subject "Specialized Translation B/A, A/B: Legal and Economic Texts (English)" (Traducción especializada B/A, A/B. Textos jurídicos y socioeconómicos (B = Opción inglés)) from the BA Degree in Translation and Interpreting on the virtual campus of the University of Malaga in order to improve and adapt its pedagogic methodology to meet the demands towards the construction of the European Space for Higher Education (Espacio Europeo de Educación Superior (EEES)).

This general objective can be broken down to four more specific objectives that would together achieve the overall goal of the project as follows:

2.1. Student Participation in the Planning and Development of Their Own Learning Process

Active student participation in the planning of objectives, content and other aspects of the syllabus of this subject is essential. For this reason, students were asked to answer a questionnaire regarding the following items:

- General translation proficiency;
- documentation techniques applied to translation;
- IT and ICT skills; and,
- specialized translation professional environment knowledge.

Once their previous knowledge, learning needs and preferences were detected and students became aware of what the study of this subject implies, we were ready to start implementing our proposed teaching strategy using the platform available on the virtual campus of the University of Malaga.

2.2. Subject Syllabus and Teaching Materials Development

Even though most course material and both theoretical and practical content of the syllabus had already been selected and prepared in previous academic years, they needed to be updated and improved before they were available for students in the subject web page placed on the virtual campus. They include, a workshop on Internet document search for specialized translation, electronic format reference material, legal and economic texts parallel and comparable corpora, electronic resources, etc.

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2.3. Coordination and Cooperation Among Different Area Specialist Trainers

We are dealing with an interdisciplinary subject therefore the need for specialist trainers of the different areas which make it up —translation, law, economics, etc.— to work together in this project.

2.4. Adaptation of Teaching Strategies to the European Space for Higher Education Framework

As mentioned above, one of the aims of the training strategies we are putting forward is the reconciliation between specialized translation curriculum and the demands of the real-world professional setting especially those related to the use of specialized translation tools. As Kiraly (2000: 123) puts it:

Today, both freelance and staff translators use computer-based workstations, complete with word processors, spreadsheets, terminology databases, translation memory, desktop publishing software, access to the Internet, and a variety of on- and off-line electronic resources. They send and receive files via electronic mail, and they surf the Internet for background information, parallel texts and multilingual glossaries. Translators today can maintain long-term working relationships with agencies and direct clients they never see and who may be located in distant cities and even far-off countries.

Since this is also one of the priorities set out in both the European Space for Higher Education and LETRAC (Language Engineering for Translator Curricula) guidelines we intend to achieve it with the assistance provided by the virtual campus of the University of Malaga and emulating usual professional practice in a translation company so that students can experience the various roles existing in any such company, that is, acting as project managers, editors, documentalists, terminologists and translators on a shift basis.

3. Description

The implementation of this project was carried out in two different stages.

3.1. First Stage

This first stage started with the attendance to several training workshops offered for lectures and researchers by the University of Malaga on the introduction to the use of the tools offered through the virtual campus. These included communications tools, multimedia materials development, web pages construction, etc.

The second step was by the study of the virtual spaces existing in the Spanish universities which provide translation studies.

This was followed by the construction of the web page of the subject "Specialized Translation B/A, A/B. Legal and Economic Texts (English)" and the subsequent inclusion of teaching and learning material, and other resources mentioned above.

The last step of this first stage was an analysis of the theoretical framework for the implementation of the European Space for Higher Education and, more specifically, the European Credit System, in order to perform the required curricular adaptation.

3.2. Second Stage

Once the web page was ready —available at <http://www.filosofia.cv.uma.es/course/view.php?id=22>—, an introductory workshop was designed and delivered so that students could become acquainted with both the virtual campus and the web page of the subject. This workshop proved to be very useful and welcomed by most students.

The main resources and tools introduced in this workshop will be described in the next section following the order of the different activities which make up our proposed teaching approach for specialized translation.

4. Teaching Strategies for Specialized (Legal and Economic) Translation

Before students could start working they had to be distributed into several translation teams and this was done using a tool specially designed for this purpose on the virtual campus. Each team consisted of a project manager, an editor, a documentalyst, a terminologist and at least two translators.

When teams had been formed, an introduction to actual translation practice was carried out by means of the simulation of a translation assignment. This case study has been designed by trainers as guidance to the usual translation procedures undertaken to fulfill a translation project as follows.

1) Firstly, the source text is uploaded onto the web page together with the translation assignment guidelines —author, customer, skopos, receiver, etc.—, deadline and guidelines for submission.

2) Then translation teams download all files containing the above documents and after going through them they start by using a word counting tool in order to prepare an estimate for their potential customer. Once they have counted the words in the source text, they identify possible difficulties in the source text and in the translation assignment as a whole with the help of two further documents provided: the guidelines for translation assignment analysis and the guidelines for source text analysis.

3) The next step is the translation itself and, for this purpose, they commence with their documentation —concept, text and terminology— tasks to solve any translation problem encountered in the analysis stage. On this occasion they have the help of the general translation electronic resources and the Legal and
official translation electronic resources available on the web page where electronic resources as well as a 
workshop for specialized document search are provided. A demonstration is carried out taking some 
translations problems from the source text of the case study being undertaken.

4) Part of this problem-solving stage where document search and terminology management are effected is 
the so-called expert consultation. This practice is considered essential in the translation of specialized texts 
and, for this reason, students have been given the opportunity to consult the expert researchers and 
trainers collaborating in this project. Additionally, the Guía de expertos de traducción (Translation Experts 
Guide) and Guía de expertos de la UMA (University of Malaga Experts Guide) (Palomares et al., 2003), 
available at <http://guiaexpertos.uma.es/>, have been made known to students as a further consultation 
resource for professional translators.

5) When translation teams have finished their assignments they proceed to submit their target texts either via 
electronic mail or through an internal communication tool provided in the web page. These means of 
communication are also used along the whole translation process to carry out virtual tutorials.

6) Once submitted translation assignments have been assessed by trainers, there is a subsequent 
assessment of the results in class where students are given the published translated version of the text 
carried out by a professional translator so as to engage them in a discussion in which each team spokes 
person can give his/her opinion of how translation problems have been tackled the “official” version as well 
as put forward proposals for improving the given version.

7) This simulation concludes with a model of glossary which includes all specialized terms from the source 
text students can have access to on the web page as part of the terminology management tasks they will 
be required to fulfill in further translation assignments. Together with the glossary they are provided with an 
invoice model so as to enable them to prepare their own as if they were professional translators.

After this monitored translation assignment simulation, translation teams start working on their own on several 
translation projects along the academic year following the same procedures described above and using the web 
page either in the computer lab or teleworking from their own homes.

5. Conclusion and future prospects
Even though this was a very demanding project, we can conclude that most general and specific objectives were 
achieved in spite of time restraints.

Our assessment of the experience has been very positive for both trainers and trainees and this fact has 
encouraged us to try and extend this project to other translation subjects not only in the BA Degree in Translation 
and Interpreting of the University of Malaga but also to those of other training institutions with virtual spaces.

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