

TEACHING AUDIOVISUAL TRANSLATION ON-LINE: A REALITY

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When the UAB organised the first postgraduate (PG) course on audiovisual translation, it received applications from as far a field as Greece, Puerto Rico, Peru, UK and Japan. Some students were able to raise sufficient funds to travel and live in Barcelona for the duration of the course whereas others were not. To our surprise many students who lived in Barcelona, were unable to attend for a number of diverse reasons. After two years of successfully running the PG course, we decided to embark on the designing of an on-line PG course for those who could not attend the course either full- or part-time.

While some sceptics argued against the feasibility of such enterprise, the experience gained after two years running the course gave us belief in the project even though we still lacked a complete knowledge of the most effective workings of the on-line format. At the same university there is a team of experts on on-line teaching – Metodologies en educació <http://mem.uab.es> from the Facultat de Ciències de l'educació – who had designed and run on-line courses for the past seven years. The team of experts from audiovisual translation joined the on-line teaching team and we formed an actual team of audiovisual translation on-line, who designed, created and ran successfully the first course on audiovisual translation on-line.

This paper will analyse the problems encountered at the moment of designing, establishing and running the course and also other problems such as: copyright, evaluation, communication, technical, software, etc. to conclude with the reality: the first year concluded with positive feedback from both students and teachers, and we are currently running the second year of the on-line course.

THE CONTEXT BEHIND THE ORGANISATION OF THE ONLINE COURSE

In September 2001, at the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, started the first postgraduate course (PG) on audiovisual translation (AVT) in Spain (Díaz Cintas & Orero 2003). It was a pioneering course. Its contents went beyond the two traditional modules of subtitling and dubbing offering a module of voice-over and multimedia. It had two software programmes – subtitul@m and REVOice – which made it possible to teach simulating the working conditions in a subtitling or a dubbing studios (Bartoll & Orero forthcoming). All the lecturers were professionals and were experienced in their particular field within audiovisual translation. It also offered work placements and a regularly updated employment offers. Over thirty students applied for the course, and we had many enquires from around the world. After two years successfully running the course we felt we had a team of experts which understood how to reach audiovisual translation, who had managed to create teaching materials from first hand

experience which matched students' expectations. It seemed we could provide the next step which was to create the online format – not a distance-learning course (*cf.* Millan-Varela 2001).

THE POSTGRADUATE COURSE ON AVT ON-LINE COURSE: A SHORT DESCRIPTION

The postgraduate course on AVT on-line course started in January 2003, and we are now at the end of its second edition. A major difference between the on-line course and the traditional face-to-face version is that it has been designed to be taught by linear development. That is, students follow only one module at a time. Each of the four modules – Theory of AVT, Dubbing, Subtitling and Multimedia Translation – consists of ten units which have a theoretical framework, although the emphasis is predominantly on practical aspects. A unit takes place over one week – Monday to Monday. Students hand in their work on the Monday, the same day when they receive the previous week's marked work. The process of linear development also means that whilst all students are able to work at the same pace and receive general weekly feedback from the teacher; they can also participate in group discussion either via chats or forums. A further benefit is the possibility of incorporating new intakes who can join the course every 11 weeks, and that teachers are employed for a 12-week period.

Most teaching material is posted on the platform for the duration of the course. Files containing audiovisual material take up considerable memory space and cannot be posted online for long periods to allow students download them in their own time. This is one of the first obstacles we had to face which will no doubt disappear in future as most countries update their communication systems to keep up with the expectations of the market, but at present we have to cater for the lowest downloading facilities in order to be compatible with the majority of students and their equipment's capabilities. Hence in the meantime, we have opted to sending our students several CDs with clips from the films used as case studies for each unit in each module. Other material is maintained as part of the teaching virtual learning environment.

The virtual learning environment – an intranet – has an area for curricular content where materials are created in a multimedia format to be exploited individually by each student (Amador, Dorado & Orero 2004). Completed exercises are sent weekly to the teacher, who corrects them and returns them with feedback to the students the following week. Comments are made individually, though some more general issues that seem to be commonly recurrent in exercises tend to be focussed on in weekly group discussions.

The communication area offers students the following facilities: personal e mail, a forum where general topics are posted, a chat service for those connected synchronically or wanting to carry out a group activity, a resource area – where the course bibliography is kept for any student to download – and some general links of interest to (audiovisual) translators. The job-offer area is also located here, together with a diary of events such as seminars, conferences, etc.

The course was designed to be run and taught by a team, designed to offer a similar course as that on offer with the traditional face-to-face postgraduate audiovisual

course. This was in order to follow the approach for creating materials which focus on the process of creation rather than evaluation. For this approach the experience of previous face-to-face experience is important, as it is the working in teams, which in the case of the face-to-face course worked and there existed an understanding and empathy with all its members.

The team also opted for an approach on the creation of high quality material rather than testing these created materials since “good quality can be built in, rather than bad quality being inspected out” Koumi (1995: 341); who also lists the following recommendations which have been followed for this course:

- Recruiting high-quality staff for the materials creation
- Training of staff
- Incorporation of substantial face-to-face student contact within staff duties
- Striving to retain staff so that they will become experienced
- Working in well-established teams
- Teams permitted plenty of thinking time to re-draft and refine materials
- Teams working to a student-centred set of design principles, which are frequently reappraised.

Since the teaching does not focus on assessment requirements, the students are naturally inclined to have a “deep learning approach” – against a surface approach (Harris 1994: 203, Morgan 1995: 57) where the interaction and dialogue in learning – student-teacher/student-student – helps the student towards a reflexivity in their study and encourages the student to construct meaning. The encouragement to students to adopt a deep approach to their learning is a key issue in our course in order to teach the many skills within a context and taking into consideration the discourse of each subject material.

With all these basic considerations we can see the experience gained in the year of preparation, setting up and running - in different areas – thanks to significant problems we encountered and how were solved:

AGENTS

Though some training had been offered to the teachers and the material creators, some of them did not follow instructions. For example, one material creator did not meet with the team, and handed in material with no consultation. The material proved to lack the focus required for interactive student-content, and hence challenging its objectives: students’ motivation, to facilitate the learning process, and the acquisition of new knowledge. The contents should, therefore, be conceived more from the perspective of the student and the environment, and less from the linearity of the contents themselves, which was the case in point. The content also lacked the format which took into account a logical structure and at the same time a psychological appropriateness to the student and the method.

Another problem – common to all modules – was the creation of exercises. While material creators had been introduced to the many possibilities when designing exercises and evaluations, they presented traditional exercises which could be easily corrected in a face-to-face format but time consuming for marking when on-line

format. Whereas the former problem was solved by employing a new material creator who was prepared to work in a team, the latter problem was easily corrected by the material creators after the first year experience of long periods of marking and evaluating student's work. New exercises were designed and some case-study discussions were set up as online discussions in the forum as a form of group exercise (Romiszowski 1995).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

From a very early stage, the team was aware of the problem caused when students who live away from a University needed to consult some bibliography. Since the course starts with a module which contents is theoretical, the bibliography was one of the first issues raised by students, who – as expected – could not access libraries with such a specialised topic. There were some 7 students living abroad, hence the bibliography had to be adapted to a more international perspective. When the works cited were the Spanish translation, it was obvious that a simple reference to the original was needed, but when the reference was an article, which in some cases can be difficult to find, we resorted to contacting the author and asking for permission to reproduce it in an electronic format. We have now some 80 articles which gave us the idea of starting an on-line Documentation Research Centre for Audiovisual Translation CETAV (Díaz Cintas & Orero 2003: 386-7)

TECHNOLOGY

1. Server

The server is situated in the Faculty of Education of the Universitat Autònoma. This means that any general cut of the electrical supply affect the server, as it happened in two occasions: one was due to some general works in the building and the other to torrential rain. In both cases the server was back in use within 24 hours.

1. Software programmes had to be adapted for online environment

[Subtitul@m](#), the simulation computer programme for subtitling developed by Toni Cumplido for the UAB had to be adapted for the new environment.

2. Sending CDs

Files containing audiovisual material take up considerable memory space and cannot be posted for long periods of time on the server to allow students to download them at their disposal. This obstacle will no doubt disappear in future as more and more countries update their communication systems to keep up with the expectations of the market, but at present we have to cater for the lowest downloading facilities in order to be compatible with most students and the capability of their equipment. The short-term solution has been to send our students several CDs with clips from the films used as case studies for each unit in each module.

LEGAL ASPECTS

Another key problem faced were the copyright aspects of both the content materials and the clips of films used within the materials. There were no first cases to rely on, or

to gain experience from. Thus some time was spent with the university's legal office drafting a copyright contract with the material creators, and looking into the copyright of clips of films to be used for educational purposes.

1. Copyright of material

The materials were created by a team of experts following the recommendations described by Koumi (1995) to create high-quality materials. Once the materials were created and digitised, the authors signed a copyright contract with the university, who was then entitled to exploit the materials in an online format. The intellectual rights of the materials remained with the authors, but the right of the exploitation was transferred to the university.

2. Copyright of film clips

There was also a problem with the clips of the films used to illustrate explanations or to be used for exercises. Since the course is posted on an Intranet with restricted access, the similarity between the face-to-face teaching where a physical door closes the classroom, and a password which limits the access online is identical. Taking this access restriction into consideration, and under Spanish law "Ley de propiedad intelectual" from the Real decreto Legislativo 1/1996 from 12th April 1996, in the exception to the "artículo 32" under "Citas y reseñas" it is permitted to show for teaching purposes, and under restricted access, some excerpts from audiovisual material. The same cannot be said for paper format documents where there is a clear specification to the % of what is considered under an "example" or "quotation". Nevertheless, since we were also producing a book on subtitling¹, which would be sold and did not fit with the Spanish "exception", we obtained to the distribution company the copyright of some twenty films, which we used in the course for examples.

ADMINISTRATION

This seems a very silly issue, since after all it falls out of the academic boundaries of setting up and running an online course, still we have found it to be one of the biggest problem areas. We have identified the following steps:

1. Enrolment

The free-access web page <http://www.fti.uab.es/onptav> amongst other items had the online enrolment facility. Each module had the application form in.pdf which could be downloaded, filled in and sent by snail mail to the university PG administrative office. This is a retarded, hybrid step in which an online facility reverts to a paper format, as today anybody can choose, buy, and pay for a pair of shoes online. This will takes us to the following issue.

2. Payment

The university's preferred method of payment is by a barred cheque, which is only issued by banks for a fee. In some exceptional cases VISA payments are accepted, but the cost of a course is over 3000 Euros, so the majority of people do not have such credit facilities, hence the payment bounces back. The university fails to take this into

¹ Díaz-Cintas (2003): *Teoría y práctica de la subtitulación Inglés-Español*. Barcelona: Ariel.

account and subsequently declines enrolment, creating very difficult and embarrassing situations.

As previously mentioned in Enrolment (7.1), the possibility of using a facility similar to any internet shopping set-up would be of an advantage for both university administrators and students. It would also save considerable coordination time, since it shifts the responsibility of having to inform the potential student of the VISA rejection, or any irregularity, on to the coordinator. The following is an example.

3. Titles

The courses offered are both PG courses which means that a three year degree, or a diploma, is the minimum academic qualification required. Alternatively, modules can be taken separately removing the requirement of a degree qualification. The accreditation given after the completion of each module is a certificate of that particular module. The problem arises when the student is from a different country and the university requires the original degree certificate translated. This may take time, and the university has finally accepted to delay this requirement until the time the course has finished – 2 years.

RUNNING OF THE COURSE: COORDINATION

Leaving aside the many problems related to the setting up and material creation, the first problem to be faced was to advertise the course. It was decided that a massive mailing with information would be sent to all translator associations in Spain and South America, and also to those countries with any Spanish links. The economic effort to set up the course had been enormous, and we needed over 20 students at the start of the first year to avoid any additional losses. We had planned for a three year economic deficit before any surpluses would be created. We managed to enrol 14 students for the whole course, but thanks to the open system of enrolment, three more students were taken on board on the second module, finishing the first edition with 21 students.

The course started with some hiccups, the materials were ready in time because the author of the material had not handed them to the digitising team soon enough. The materials were found to be unacceptable, hence more time was needed to make urgent corrections. The first edition finally opened four weeks behind schedule.

The first couple of weeks were amazingly rewarding since the students and the team worked well, displaying dynamism and empathy. We seemed to have managed the online transformation, but hit bad luck again as the teacher who was in charge of the module went on sick leave. This presented us with the first dilemma, should we stop the course and wait for the teacher, or find a replacement? Considering the circumstances we opted for the replacement option, which worked suitably.

Soon after, we discover that no materials were produced or handed in for digitisation for the following module. This required a rearrangement of team members, and also a rescheduling of timetables. New people entered the team, and we settled and quickly found more problems. This time the team who were teaching the second module realised that the exercises they had produced were not adequate for online

marking – as already mentioned in 3. Agents. Each exercise would take up to three hours to correct. This meant that the course dynamics were flawed: students handed in work on Mondays but did receive marked work from the previous week. This was a common problem for two modules and required a further training session with the online exercises advisor to create online exercises. The changes were updated online, and this second edition has run smoothly on the marking front.

1. Students and lecturers getting used to the visual learning environment

While some students will familiarise themselves rapidly with the platform, others will find problems, usually due to technical updates or configurations. It seems that the first week of any module, with the new student intakes, has proven to be more taxing for both coordinators: academic and technical. Though students are reminded to make technical consultations to the technical coordinator, questions are mostly posted first to the academic coordinator.

2. Deadlines for handing in homework

Not only did teachers find marking a burden, but also some students – for diverse reasons – either did not hand in the exercises on the due day, or fell behind. This creates a backlog of work for teachers towards the end of the module, when students realise that they may not be awarded the pass mark. In the first year, students were allowed to hand in exercises at any time, within or out of synchronisation of the module which was being taught. This was corrected in the second edition and unless there is an exceptional circumstance, students are only permitted to hand in work within a 2 week delay, otherwise, correction will not be offered.

EMPLOYABILITY

One of the features of this audiovisual course is the close contact with the market reality. This has been achieved by only hiring teachers who were practitioners in the specialised area, the materials were also created by those who work in the field, and the software programmes simulated those used in professional subtitling and dubbing studies hence recreating real working conditions. One commitment of the team was to help students become incorporated in the working world (Rico Pérez 2002), and one of the most frequently asked question regarding enrolment was the availability of work placements. Jordi Mas and Pilar Orero (2004) explained in great details this commitment in the Girona conference last July. Also in the online format, we created an area of the FORUM to for Work opportunities, which is updated daily. Students are also sent to work placements. The work placements represented a problem because of the online format. Nevertheless a company was prepared to send some texts - related to the audiovisual world – for translation. This work placement didn't work, students weren't motivated and it was reflected in the quality of their translations, so we have stopped using this facility. Students who want to do a work placement either live nearby or come for a short stay in Barcelona, Madrid or Seville. Though it seems an extra burden to ask students to travel and stay for a month – more or less – to one of the already mentioned cities, they are ready to do so in order to have a first hand experience of the job and the opportunities they may be opened for them.

FINANCE

Before having any revenue from student fees or franchises, which as Lockwood explains (2001: 4) is “not only vital to any innovative task but needs to be agreed at the highest level of the organization”, the following expenses (cf. Oliveita & Orivel 2003: 215) had to be met before starting the online course and having any revenue from students’s fees:

- Funding for design of virtual learning environment
- Funding for design of material
- Funding for digitisation of materials
- Funding for the creation of materials

In our case, we were able to start the course from the benefits from the second edition of the traditional PG course on audiovisual translation, also on offer at the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona. The second year, we had to fend for ourselves and planned a three-year development, which means a large intake of students, and no benefits. After the third year, we have decided to reinvest any benefits, and we opted for the creation of the master degree, offering two new modules, which broaden the offer and, hopefully, with a similar growth in the years to come we will be able to offer a more complex degree and with a certain degree of optionality.

CONCLUSIONS

After three years of designing, creating and preparing the setting up and running of the first online course on audiovisual translation we have come to accept that it has been a very tough experience, but immensely rewarding nonetheless.

In this article we have pointed out the many errors, problems, flaws – from diverse areas- and also how we solved them.

The course was an ambitious enterprise which was able to successfully establish itself thanks to the work of experts and enthusiast who believed in the project from its outset. Each individual member of the team has worked very hard, and has been recompensed not in economic terms, but in the certainty that the online format works. Perhaps most surprisingly for many, it is a warmest and more human approach than the face-to face traditional teaching format.

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