Collaborative Work Training in Higher Education

María Dolores Olvera-Lobo
University of Granada, Spain

Rosa María Castro-Prieto
University of Granada, Spain

Enrique Quero-Gervilla
University of Granada, Spain

Ricardo Muñoz-Martín
University of Granada, Spain

Eva Muñoz-Raya
University of Granada, Spain

Miguel Murillo-Melero
University of Granada, Spain

Bryan Robinson
University of Granada, Spain

José Antonio Senso-Ruiz
University of Granada, Spain

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the influence of information and communication technology (ICT) has transformed the professional practice of translation and, consequently, led to the introduction of new techniques, methods, and media in the university teaching environment. The new technology has made professional translators' work easier but, in order to ensure translation studies graduates meet employers' needs, ICT must occupy its rightful place in their training. The ever-demanding market expects would-be professionals to be able to access the subject matter of any text, use a wide range of computer tools proficiently, and be versatile enough to master all aspects of the translation process. Today, the market place for translation can justly be described as global, decentralized, specialized, dynamic, virtual, and demanding (Aulaint, 2005).

In response to these new needs, at the University of Granada (Spain), a professional approach to translator training (PATT) has been designed and applied to bring students closer to the current professional environment and its challenges. The PATT approach stands on three pillars: first, the construction of a Web site where all information generated by tutors and students is administered; this serves as an operational base and meeting point for teacher-researchers and students. Second, the use of a collaborative work platform (BSCW) through which students acquire the basic experience needed to function in the professional world and develop both team and teleworking skills. Third, the design, development, and application of optimal tools to collect and analyze data on student opinions. The use of questionnaires before and after the learning experience and the study of log files, multiplies the opportunities to analyze data, assess use of the BSCW platform, and study the application of PATT.

In this context, the present study reports research performed in the faculty of translation and interpreting of the University of Granada (Spain). Our objectives were to analyze student satisfaction with PATT, an innovative teaching method designed in response to the new demands of the professional translation market and to assess student use of the BSCW platform.

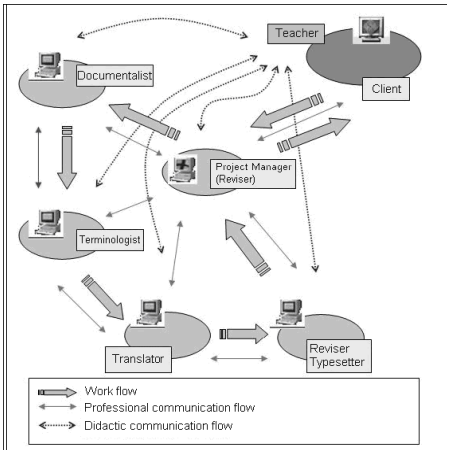
A PROFESSIONAL APPROACH TO TRANSLATOR TRAINING (PATT)

The PATT model offers students a dynamic, virtual experience of professional translation practice and familiarizes them with a simulation of real-life collaborative work environments. Data from the post-course surveys administered indicate the suitability of this method for teaching students about teleworking from a practical standpoint. Analyses have been highly effective in establishing levels of student satisfaction and of student acceptance of PATT. After PATT, translation students seem to have improved their computer skills and assimilated sophisticated teleworking skills, moreover, their attitude toward teamwork has shown a marked change for the better.

As previously stated, teleworking is crucial in professional translation. Alcina (2002) states that "familiarising translation students with a virtual environment helps them to acquire the professional skills that will be demanded in the future, since in the current information society translator's work demands the automation of most tasks, the use of teleworking and, on many occasions, distance team working." We believe PATT contributes to strengthen students' teleworking skills.

PATT is currently being applied in the teaching of several translation course modules involving language combinations of Spanish with English, Portuguese, Italian, and Russian (Olvera-Lobo et al., 2006). Students are divided into groups, each one of which is in charge of managing a different translation brief. Each team is made up of five students (Figure 1), each of whom takes on a role as information scientist, terminologist, reviser, desktop publishing editor, or project manager. In each new translation brief, team members adopt a different role so that every student carries out all of the different tasks during a full course module. The involvement of teachers during the development of projects is important as they supervise the evolution and progress of the translation briefs. Consequently, students have the opportunity to gain an insight into each stage of the translation process and its connection to the whole process as part of their training at the University. Through this approach, they can experience the complementary relationships between different course modules and their importance within the syllabus. Thus, self-directed learning is strengthened because, although students are assisted by their tutors,

Figure 1. A professional approach to translator training application using basic support for cooperative work



they are the ones responsible for meeting the demands of the team member who is the next link in the chain. In this respect, the fact that professional relationships are established between students via electronic media strengthens the development of teleworking and tests students' communication skills.

Consequently, the objectives of our approach to translator training are: (a) to familiarize students with the methods of work typical of translation agencies by recreating the production line of the professional workplace; (b) to develop teleworking in teams, self-instruction, and interdisciplinarity; (c) to offer a work setting and the tools needed by teachers and researchers to incorporate ICT in the classroom and, at the same time, to offer them the chance to reproduce the environment of the professional work context within the academic world; (d) to obtain first hand information as to the impact of ICT on university teaching; and (e) to promote coordination between subject matter areas in the university teaching of translation.

THE COOPERATIVE WORK PLATFORM: LOG FILE ANALYSIS

The use of cooperative work computer programs has been essential in teleworking. Consequently, in addition to using the Web site, the students share their tasks and publish their results on the BSCW *(basic support for cooperative work)* platform, which is widely used for a range of purposes in other universities (Becking & Schlageter, 2002; Sikkel, Gommer, & Veen, 2002; Sales,