**TEACHING COMPUTER-ASSISTED TRANSLATION AND LOCALIZATION: A PROJECT BASED APPROACH**

**From *Teaching Translation and Interpreting: Challenges and Practices* by Fiorenza Mileto and Luigi Muzii**

**Introduction**

*Tell me and I forget. Show me and I remember. Let me do and I understand.*

*Confucius*

Globalization has become a synonym for commoditization of work, including knowledge work. In this framework, universities should be the place for continuing education, incubators of new ideas, approaches and solutions. Unfortunately, in our experience as students first, then as professional translators and localizers, and finally as trainers and teachers, we observed that, especially over the last few years, translation schools in Italy have become sterile conservatories for accepted ideas, and the level of expertise offered by graduates is far from the realities and requirements of the workplace.

This does not mean that translation schools should churn out instantly productive professionals like so many human widgets, yet we believe that students should not be considered only diploma products.

The approach used for teaching computer-assisted translation and localization at the faculty of interpreting and translation at the “S. Pio V” University in Rome is aimed at helping each student’s skills emerge by shifting his or her focus from grades to experience.

In fact, the common theoretical “conduit” view of learning still predominates in translator education, and students generally tend to focus to exams and grades rather than actual learning but when they get into business, they blame the university since they become impotent witnesses of the unwillingness of employers abdicating their responsibility to educate and train their employees. On the other hand, the widespread practice of ceasing hiring in favor of short-term contracts confirms that certificates and diplomas are tickets to nowhere.

As business is the mainstay of modern translation practice, to help the development of translator competence, and the comprehension of all aspects of the translation process learning should be carried within the context of real translation projects.

This paper is a report of a five-year teaching experience starting with a post-graduate course in localization to continue in the curricular courses of computer-assisted translation and localization.

The teaching approach comes from professional experience and industry knowledge as well as from the continuous exchange of ideas with colleagues and students at LUSPIO and during seminars, workshops, and conferences. We came up with a “formula” to exploit class teaching at best, and help students to get accustomed to goal setting as they will typically bump into on the workplace.

The purpose of this paper is to outline our approach for student-centered classroom activity, with no theoretical or methodological claims.

The paper presents a parallel structure reflecting our individual experiences in a common effort to improve each one’s approach to teaching and evaluation. In this respect, special attention is given to the differences in the evaluation systems to appraise the students’ level of competence and maturity.

PBL

Project-based learning (PBL) is a constructivist pedagogy approach for classroom activity that emphasizes learning activities that are long-term, interdisciplinary and student-centered. This approach is generally less structured than traditional, teacher-led classroom activities; it is designed to be used for complex issues that require students to investigate in order to understand: in a project-based class, students often must organize their own work and manage their own time.

Within the PBL framework students are asked to team up, work together, take on social responsibilities, and find solutions to real problems. The students’ choices lead to artifacts representing what is being learned.

The approach is based on two key assumptions:

− learning is enhanced when knowledge is activated;

− processing knowledge in a problem-solving approach to learning improves the ability to organize, store and retrieve it.

Not only do students respond by feeding back information, they also actively use what they know to negotiate, and devise solutions.

In PBL, traditional classroom activity integrates with “real world” issues and practices. Running a structured project allow students to practice “real-world” conditions in a “safe” environment, and finally deliver a synthesis of their learning experience in a factual product.

The teacher teach students how not be at loss in real life situations, and help them build strategies to be armed with to deal with whatever comes their way. The class changes from a teacher-fronted passive mass to a place of activities. Instruction has its goal to make the student a self-sufficient problem-solver.

Students are discouraged to be passive receivers of the information transmitted to them from the teacher or the textbooks. They will otherwise end up focusing only to the exam, trying to devise strategies to pass it with the minimum effort and maximum profit.

**The Rationale**

Over the last few years, the need has become acute to adapt educational practice in university-level schools for translator training to rapidly changing market requirements. Nevertheless, teaching is still based on a trial-and-error approach, reflecting the teacher’s self-deemed superior wisdom and the attempt to duplicate knowledge in students’ minds.

In our experience, translation buyers and employers have definite expectations of new graduates in translation, and they are finding that the universities fall short of meeting their expectations regarding the skills and preparation for being on the workplace. The main obstacles encountered when hiring graduates are their preparation for dealing with specialized translation, terminology management and information technology, narrow exposure to culture, lack of practical training but also with their ability to organize themselves autonomously or work independently or in teams, solve problems or establish and effectively manage social relations on the job.

Anyway, comparing job profiles with academic programs will make the educational gap clear. We have been trying to reduce it by introducing a certification pathway and a real-life project experience to endorse each student’s skills.

In the traditional translation education scenario, the in-class instructional process is largely reduced to homework review: the instructor essentially identifies the errors in students’ drafts and provides “correct” solutions to translation problems. The teacher is supposed to possess absolute knowledge of how to translate, while translator competence emerges as the result of the collaborative completion of authentic translation work.

Gaming is a fundamental ingredient in learning, and to help students achieve a professional-like level of autonomy and expertise they should go through experience by being involved in the collaborative undertaking of authentic translation projects for real customers. Nevertheless, while newspaper texts are actually rare on the translation market they are still the all-but-exclusive practice material in classes.

The results achieved so far confirm the soundness of the approach, and the accomplishment of the educational goals: the rate of abandonment is next to zero, students are mostly enthusiastic in their comments in the questionnaires they are asked to fill anonymously at the end of courses, and the placement rate is largely satisfactory.

Last year, the SDL Trados certification exam was introduced at the end of the computer-assisted translation course: 18 students out of 28 passed the exam. 78% of students from the post-graduate course in localization, the computer-assisted translation course and the localization course are proficiently and satisfactorily working in the GILT industry, in Italy and abroad.