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# Training Legal Translators Through The Internet: Promises and Pitfalls

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## Abstract

*This contribution presents the design, development and results of several projects implemented between 1999 and 2003 with groups of students who were enrolled in legal translation courses at the Universitat Jaume I (Castello, Spain). I will explain how face-to-face classes were combined with activities carried out and tutored in virtual environments and then present the data collected by monitoring the classes, from the reports generated from the different environments used, and from the questionnaires administered to the students taking part in the projects. I will describe how we evolved from a first basic project with the WWW, which involved designing a legal translation portal (URL [www.gitrad.uji.es](http://www.gitrad.uji.es)), consisting of traditional web pages. The scheme was tested with a small group of students and then given the go-ahead and extended to all legal translation courses in the degree. The following year, this more common environment was combined with BSCW in order to introduce new ways of interacting with students and to enhance cooperative tasks. After detecting several drawbacks in this new model, the virtual environment and the face-to-face*

*classes were complemented by compulsory tutorial sessions and extracurricular technological training. Thanks to the acquisition of WebCT licences by the Universitat Jaume I, it became possible to introduce a new combination of environments in this mixed model of teaching. Reducing the numbers of students in the groups taking part in this new project (2003-2004) enabled us to carry out a personalised control of the value and real use of the tool in learning and teaching. Finally, a new environment (Moodle) has been adopted by the University in 2004-2005, forcing us to change again the dynamics and materials used in the classes. This instability, however, has given us the chance to reflect on what best serves the aims of a technology enhanced legal translation course.*

## **Introduction**

The process of teaching and learning legal translation to undergraduate students is usually impaired by one special feature: students have no knowledge whatsoever of the field they have to translate nor do they have any idea what law or legal translation is. The limited extent to which Law is popularised in society and the relatively scarce mentions it gets in the mass media grant us the opportunity to do away with a large number of prejudices, misconceptions, etc. before starting work. Yet, this fact involves a great deal of disadvantages both for trainers and trainees. Because of their age, these students have never had to come into contact with the legal formalities that are going to bewilder them a few years into the future. For the same reason, they haven't usually needed to have any foreign qualifications recognised or to register a citizen from another country. Consequently, when they begin the degree course, the contents of the syllabus are as unknown to them as they are boring and, apparently, difficult. The thing is that the students'

having no idea of Law when classes start will indeed have repercussions in how they face the course. Having to learn many things about the topic and getting used to new sources of information in just three semesters is a daunting task. However, thanks to that effort, a better understanding of the day-to-day social reality we live in can be gained and this newfound literacy in that subject matter can enable students to enjoy many personal and professional satisfactions. The question is, if the result is so rewarding, why does getting there have to be so unpleasant?

During the three semesters I myself attended legal translation subjects at the University, I had to seek out a vast amount of information from a great variety of sources. That meant a lot of work gathering sources and then choosing the ones that could make the job of assimilating law more appealing to me. Fortunately, it was a time when online resources had already started to become widely available and in which the Internet opened up a whole new range of possibilities in that sense. From all that information I built up a large collection of materials. Shortly afterwards, I had the chance to begin conducting research into legal translation and I started working with members of the teaching staff at the Universitat Jaume I, more particularly, with Dr. Anabel Borja. One of the projects we were most enthusiastic about was the idea of making both all those resources and the electronic corpus Dr. Borja had been compiling for some time (together with any other material we might create or find in the future) available to anyone who was interested in legal translation. That was how we brought into being a support tool that has gone on developing and growing relentlessly ever since and which we, perhaps somewhat pretentiously, decided to call the Legal Translator's Website (URL [www.gitrad.uji.es](http://www.gitrad.uji.es)). Just a few weeks after the website was launched, the impact it was having made us aware of how attractive this tool was and we immediately decided to look for a way to make use of it in the classroom. Thus, from what started out almost as a pastime, we have gradually built up an aid that has given excellent results in the technology enhanced (that is to

say, partly online and partly face-to-face) training of legal translation.

### **The Beginnings: A Documentary Tool on the WWW**

The Legal Translator's Website (GITRAD) was presented as a place for recycling, that is, an open space that was to generate a varied range of resources that could make the legal translator's professional practice easier and make them available to everyone. At the same time it would provide a common space that could be shared by both professional and apprentice translators of this specialised field. After a fairly shallow analysis of what was needed by different translation situations, we drew up a preliminary list of the resources that could satisfy those needs and then designed a website that was launched during the academic year 1999-2000. Obviously, these design phases have been repeated periodically in an attempt to improve the materials on offer. In those early days, however, the resources were set out in three main sections that included several different subsections, as will be explained below.

- **Academic Information Section**

In this first section students could see the career stream that the University offers future legal translators, have access to the syllabi of the specialised subjects and get in touch with their teachers by email. They could also find out about complementary training activities (workshops, seminars, conferences, and so on).

- **Documentary Section**

Here we offered all sorts of *resources* structured following a number of publications about information science and translation and about information science and law (*Maciá* 1998, *Pinto and Córdón* 1999). We wanted to organise the information that was online, the material that we had already prepared and that we were

going to prepare, and then put it all together at different levels of complexity. The data was then distributed in a contrastive fashion to allow users to obtain a comparative vision of Law and legal language in the main languages of the website (English, Catalan and Spanish).

An important section here was that devoted to *bibliography*, where students could access a list of bibliographical references organised by subject matter which later included access to full texts we obtained from different authors. In this way we gradually built up a virtual library containing documents about a wide range of topics related to legal translation, language and legal systems.

Another section offered student information about the *official exams* that lead to the qualifications required to be an official translator in Catalan (Autonomous Government of Catalonia) or in Spanish (Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs). The website also had a directory of professional official and legal translators which included a list of teachers giving this subject in different universities and also information about professionals who agreed to collaborate with the website. Lastly, we added a link to the database of the register of official translators and interpreters at the Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and at the Autonomous Government of Catalonia.

The next section was devoted to specialised *glossaries*. One of the tasks that the legal translator has to perform most frequently is terminology research. In order to make this work easier, we included legal glossaries in several languages available on the Internet, glossaries elaborated by the author or provided by other students, and also the terminological registers that were being created by our research group. The last area of this section consisted of a corpus of original and translated legal documents, which were organised by legal systems, branches of law, textual genres and languages. This parallel corpus (URL [www.cdj.uji.es](http://www.cdj.uji.es)) was designed so as to make it

possible to consult the original and translated versions of legal texts at the same time (Monzó, 2003).

- **Interactive section**

The following subsections constituted what we called the *interactive section*. Here, firstly, there was a newsgroup (which has since disappeared) where we hoped that students would discuss the problems they might have with legal translation with other students or with any professionals who wished to collaborate. Also a notice board was used to post information about job offers and requests, reviews, and new publications. Finally, the last subsection enabled users of the website to contact us to comment on anything they found was missing from the site or any other matters concerning the contents on offer.

This website was used in class during the academic year 1999-2000 with specific practical activities involving case studies. A translation case was proposed and students had to use the website to access sources of information while also using other programs available in the translation laboratory. In this way students became more familiar with the Legal Translator's Website, which, according to the records of visits per day, was very popular with our students and those from other universities, as well as with professionals in the sector, some of whom were regularly in touch with the research group. This quickly led us to think of ways to make better use of the website in legal translation classes and to periodically renew the contents, which has meant that at present some subsections have been discarded and replaced by others. The current structure of the website can be seen on its home page:



*Fig. 1. Screenshot of the Legal Translator's Website home page*

As can be seen, we have included a subsection about the GITRAD group, a subsection about research in legal translation and the possibility of registering as a member of our virtual community.

### **The WWW Enters the Classroom: A Hybrid Environment**

Given the success and appeal of the website among students, the research group (called GITRAD after the domain it was assigned by the university Computing Service - [www.gitrad.uji.es](http://www.gitrad.uji.es)) decided to give it a more active role in the teaching activities carried out in the classroom. The fundamental aim was to make legal translation more appealing to students, who usually see this course as highly difficult. It should be pointed out here that in the beginning (academic year 1998-1999) the author's knowledge of how to create computer resources was quite limited, as were the chances of engaging multimedia production services, and the technical means available at that time did not allow those of us with a restricted knowledge of programming to develop websites to the same extent they do nowadays. As these conditions evolved, our objectives and the

educational improvements had to be fitted to the technological tools that became available.

Another noteworthy objective was to make use of the online resources that began to flourish and which constituted an easy-to-access, quick look-up library that could be used in the classroom with the right equipment, which in fact was already available in the Translation Laboratory in our Department. This environment would enable us to introduce specific tools for translators with which to create new resources that could, in turn, be made available to a wider public through the website.

On the other hand, our intention was to improve the traditional classes so that the students not only felt more motivated by the subjects but also assimilated the contents of the course more easily. In addition, I wanted to take advantage of the potential for self-evaluation offered by multimedia material I had already experienced in other contexts (for example with the HotPotatoes software) and be able to reach learners in a wider variety of environments, such as during their stays abroad as exchange students.

Therefore, the subject needed to be re-engineered to allow us to train students in the new technologies, familiarise them with a career that is becoming more and more *technologised* and enhance performance not only in the academic subject of legal translation but in all those that make up the course of studies in the degree of Translation and Interpreting. At the same time, it had to allow us to improve students' capabilities in their professional practice, prepare them to work in an international market and help them mature as citizens of a technological society by making them look at the new technologies with a critical eye. We had to make the existing system advance by reorganising it and introducing modifications so that it allowed for the new objectives. In consequence, in the academic

year 2000-2001, we conducted a new needs analysis and designed a new solution.

In that academic year we began to offer online the materials of the course. The website hosted the contents which were developed in the classroom (tasks, documents to translate, notes, slides to follow lectures...), posted the grades obtained in the exercises, and introduced communication tools so that the students may address the trainer online. This project was first piloted with the legal translation group working from English to Catalan. Because of its bilingual context, the University Jaume I offers students the possibility to study two languages, Catalan and Spanish, as mother tongues. Students will chose one of these as their A1 language (first mother tongue), and the other will be their A2 language (second mother tongue). Catalan being a minorized language in our region, most students chose Spanish as their A1 language. As a consequence, those students who chose Catalan as A1 language will share a short of advantageous milieu in translation classes with 15 to 20 students, as compared to their classmates who have chosen Spanish as A1, who attend classes with 60 to 70 students. The Catalan A1 group was chosen because of its size (17 students in the third year at the time), which would allow to evaluate the changes before exporting the project to a larger group.

In the classes we combined sessions in conventional classrooms with others in the translation laboratory, where, through our website, students accessed explanations in HTML, PowerPoint presentations, texts in Word format, and exercises in HTML and JAVA script, among others. The answers to questionnaires that were not self-evaluating, translation exercises and other tasks such as estimates or bills had to be submitted by email so that the teacher could correct and post them on the website with any comments that might accompany them. The experience was well received by students, but there were a number of methodological and technological shortcomings. For example, we noticed important

differences between the performances of some students, which could be accounted for by the fact that some of them were adopting an individualistic approach to participation, although many of the case studies were set out as work to be done in teams. The comfort to work with online materials had driven them to a quite passive attitude towards the course. This pushed me to look for a way of intensifying the role of the teams not only in the classroom but also in the tasks that had to be performed outside it and which, I hoped, would foster peer learning and a greater degree of integration among all the members of the class.

Yet, to do so would mean increasing students' chances of interaction through the learning environment, since their participation in this environment was at that time mediated by the teacher. Communication, which was done by email but always asynchronously, needed speeding up. Some tasks, which involved downloading files, working on them and then sending them back to the teacher, who eventually posted them on the site, had to be made simpler and quicker. In an attempt to promote cooperation among students, we offered them a public forum, GITRAD, which they did not find was suited to communicating with each other about matters concerning specific tasks. In order to put this situation to rights, we took the objectives we had set out while this first project was being implemented, and which could not be fulfilled with the means we had available to us, over to the Universitat Jaume I's Centre for Education and New Technologies (CENT), which was set up towards the end of 2000. What we wanted and were asking the professionals from the Centre to help us achieve with our technology were the following:

- to increase the autonomy of students and work teams with respect to the teacher;
- to grant students a higher degree of flexibility in their participation (time limits, independence from the tasks performed by others);

- to allow fluent communication not only with the teacher but also with other learners;
- to enable students to play a more important role in the materials offered, and in relation to this,
- not to increase the workload on students to an excessive extent by adding different tools and environments that implement different technologies.

### **Towards online interactivity: WWW and BSCW**

With the help of the Centre for Education and New Technologies and the collaboration of Doctor Alicia Bolaños, in 2001 we began to plan the second year of the project. Both the CENT and Doctor Bolaños (Bolaños and Máñez 2000) used an environment designed for cooperative work, BSCW, in project management and teaching, respectively. BSCW (Basic Support for Cooperative Work) was not designed specifically for use in education but for teamwork in general and that is why some teams of professional translators use it as a place that allows them to exchange information and material. Nevertheless, the importance of cooperative learning techniques in current research into education makes it a very useful tool in teaching. It allows us to introduce user-friendly techniques to increase performance and the participation of all the learners, as well as to generate positive behaviours in the socialisation of the group, whose members learn to share goals and rewards, an attitude which they will probably continue to have in their professional live (on the importance of this for the professional group, see Monzó 2002). Thus, the design is extremely well suited to these activities and saves a lot of time when it comes to preparing the environment for them. For educational centres, this application has an added advantage in that the licence is free, which means that, apart from all its other positive points, it is inexpensive to use in the classroom.

The latest version of BSCW has a very broad range of features including an agenda for each individual and group, an address book and capabilities allowing the user to send and receive email, and to store URL addresses and files in a very simply structured directory of folders. It also offers forums where users can exchange messages about a particular subject matter. What makes this an ideal environment for working in groups, however, is the opportunity it affords to share information about a given topic (which could be an academic subject but also a research or translation project) with certain people who identify themselves every time they log onto the space and who share the same responsibility in the development of the contents. There are also other features that are helpful in this sense, such as the possibility of adding new versions of documents without losing the previous ones, which makes it easier to revise translations within a group and for the teacher to access the versions belonging to different members of the team. Another possibility it offers that must be highlighted is that of controlling all the activities that take place in the environment either by logging in and checking the actions done to each of the documents or folders or by means of a daily or weekly report of the actions carried out within the cyberspace which can be automatically generated and sent to the trainer's mailbox. The fact that the files can be marked or that comments can be added to them is also a big advantage when it comes to correcting exercises.

In general, this space did a good job of simulating a collaborative professional environment in the legal translation classroom. Nonetheless, the fact that I wanted to prevent the students from manipulating certain explanatory texts led me to combine this environment with the previous one. This would enable us to provide a more flexible structure for the material. The introduction to the subject and the work plan (objectives, methodology and contents) programmed for the semester were posted on the website as permanent and fast look-up contents. The website also displayed the tasks students would be asked to do, together with related

informative material. After receiving the instructions for the exercises or the translation briefs, students accessed the cooperative environment where the texts were hosted and where they had to leave the results of their work (documentary materials, translations, resources, glossaries, bills and estimates, etc.), ordered systematically.

For these tasks, we combined Aronson and colleagues' (1978) Jigsaw puzzle model with Slavin's (1978) objectives model, which is also used by the TACTICS group in Mexico (Juárez and Waldegg 2003). Both of them adapt case studies for use in teamwork. After splitting the class into teams, each group is given an assignment that is analysed and divided into tasks that are allocated separately to the different members (Aronson's model) or which are performed as a joint effort by all the members working together (Slavin's model). Once the search has been conducted, the information is synthesised in the team so it can be presented to the rest of the class. By the end of the sessions Aronson's model was seen to be more productive for the translation tasks, in which we clearly simulated a professional division of the work. In contrast, when the objective was the acquisition of declarative knowledge, as in the tasks involving knowledge of the legal system, students' confidence in their own capabilities diminished and Slavin's model was more effective. This may be due to the fact that it allows students to be permanently in contact with and have the support of their companions and they are not individually responsible for any of the parts of the project. In any case, BSCW proved to be a very appropriate platform for exchanging information.

With regard to the technological aspects, at first this environment was set up in a server belonging to the Department of Translation and Communication, which meant taking active steps to protect it against malicious attacks by hackers. In fact we had more than our fair share of this kind of problems and so when the University offered us the chance to use an institutional server we

jumped at the opportunity. Nevertheless, an increase in the number of bureaucratic barriers (hard disk quotas on the server or its administration and maintenance by third parties) and other problems with some versions of the most common browsers meant that this tool was not the ideal setup.

On the other hand, right from the outset students had difficulties with learning how to use the technology in this environment, which obliged us to organise specific extracurricular courses that did not resolve all the problems. Moreover, the environment was not visually very attractive and this ran against one of our basic premises: to make legal translation classes more appealing through the way materials are presented. As regards following up the students, no reports were made regarding individual users but instead reports were drawn up on folders or files, which meant it was easy to monitor the activities carried out by the group but not the individual exercises. It was also a simple task to track the participation of each individual in the work done by the team (students did the work in groups outside the environment and submitted the results together, so that the work appeared under just one alias) or to monitor the progress made by students throughout the semester.

### **Back to the Classroom: Face-To-Face Support**

One way to offset these shortcomings was to monitor the student's progress by means of tutorial sessions, which simulated a meeting between the customer and the translation company. In this way we were able to determine how students were progressing and at the same time how the project was coming along. In these tutorials students were encouraged to talk about the problems they were encountering, the improvements they had achieved and their experiences with the environment in order to obtain a personalised guide that would be reinforced later when information was put together and discussed in the classroom.

With a view to improving communication between students and the teacher, the CENT recommended that we use a tool that was then in an experimental phase but which they wanted to make available to the university community so as to enable them to evaluate its usefulness and applications in teaching. This instrument was an instant messaging (mi.uji.es) tool based on an open code. Many of the students were already familiar with instant messaging so that using it as a means of carrying out long-distance tutorials in real time, on the one hand, was made easier by the existence of students' having prior knowledge of the method but, on the other hand, was handicapped by the fact that they used MSN Messenger and were reluctant to change to another application. This system was especially useful for resolving any doubts students had while they were doing the exercises and translations, but one serious drawback for the teacher was the repetition of questions, which were asked as the doubts arose (sometimes the same question was asked by all the students but at different times). In consequence, the time given over to tutorials became fragmented and multiplied.

Another feature of the face-to-face interaction was the technology training seminars which were entirely devoted to learning about the capabilities of the tools. These sessions were planned as extracurricular activities, outside class time, and students were given a certificate of attendance (which they need when presenting their CVs in the Spanish context) in order to encourage them to participate. By so doing we solved the problems of technological literacy and, by extending the initiative to other subjects given as part of the degree course, we managed to save time for a number of academic subjects, since otherwise each of them would have had to devote time to training in the use of the same tool.

Although combining BSCW with the website and tutorials brought about a notable improvement, there were still deficits that needed solving if we were to fulfil our initial aims. The factors that

had to be reinforced so that this hybrid model of teaching would offer advantages over the traditional situation included the following:

- Take steps to ensure that tasks were finished on time: owing to the continual presence of material within the virtual environment students tended to leave their work there at any time, even after the time limit set by the study programme, and this hampered its correction.
- Make it easier for the teacher to carry out a ongoing assessment of the students' work: even though the BSCW registered the name of the person depositing the material, they found it very practical to upload their classmates' work along with theirs; individual tasks undertaken within the group were not documented because the students did not usually employ this environment to exchange materials amongst themselves; the reports were not easily broken down by users.
- Make it easier for students to appreciate their own progress: there was no simple way to make students' ongoing assessment available to them individually; self-evaluating exercises were not well integrated into the environment and had to be developed outside it (the HotPotatoes suit proved useful to do so).
- Allow for a distinction to be made between profiles: in BSCW, the different profiles are only applied to the technological possibilities of the environment - no specific changes can be made for users, although it is possible to restrict access to certain folders.
- Make it easier to reuse material in forthcoming academic years. Exploiting material becomes difficult if it is not saved in a parallel space on the teacher's hard disk.
- Solve the problems encountered when trying to make backup copies of material: to make backup copies they

have to be downloaded one by one or stored in compressed files in order to download a whole space, which, in our case, has given us more than a few technological headaches.

- Ensure the time the teacher devoted to this matter was spent as profitably as possible.

## **New Technologies for New Ambitions**

In the academic year 2003-2004, the Universitat Jaume I showed its support for technology-enhanced teaching by acquiring licences for a new environment, WebCT, which was specially created for giving distance learning courses. WebCT, which was originally developed by the University of British Columbia, includes tools for the design and development of interactive teaching material. Since it was developed ad hoc for educational settings, its capabilities have been conceived from this perspective and simulate the classical environment together with the classical hierarchical relationships between teacher and pupil. On the other hand, it includes a number of very useful applications that solve many of the problems we faced when using BSCW. It is, for example, visually attractive and navigation is very intuitive. Some of the activities that are possible in this environment are the following:

- **Evaluation Tools:**
  - Creation of self-evaluation questionnaires: it is possible to define a database with questions and answers and use them to make different questionnaires.
  - Tasks can be defined with fixed or flexible hand-in dates; students give in their work in the same space where the task is defined and they can then see the correction and grade given by the teacher.
  - Ongoing assessment. Students have access to a record for the academic year where they can check the progress

they have made by looking up the grades they have been given for all the work completed throughout the year.

- Monitoring students. There is a wide range of instruments available for tracking students' progress, from checking the pages consulted by each user to the number of visits received by each section of the course and the time spent there, as well as finding out whether it has been a long time since a student last accessed the environment.
- **Communication Tools:** Within the environment itself, users can access three different types of support:
  - Chat: a program enabling communication in real time allows interaction between all the users of the environment, between members of the class group or those in the work group, depending on the settings used by the teacher.
  - Forum: a space where messages about open matters or topics set by the teacher can be exchanged asynchronously; the application includes selection and filtering features.
  - Email: all the users have an account which can only receive messages from other WebCT users and which is only accessible from this environment; the address book includes all the members of the class group.
- **Access to Material:** Materials can be presented in all formats, although the simplest to visualise are HTML and PDF. The others have to be downloaded prior to opening them as in the case of BSCW. These materials are available in folders that are:
  - shared by all the students, where the teacher leaves common materials,
  - shared by the work groups, where they can create their own work, or

- available to individual students, who can create and administer personal pages.
- **Programming:** It also includes tools for programming activities. More specifically:
  - Agenda: there is a calendar that all the members can modify and where it is possible to keep track of classes, include personal and public appointments, and so on.
  - Notices: the teacher can create notices that appear when students log onto the cyberspace.

Processing the materials is a very simple task and there are also online support materials. One particularly attractive feature in this sense allows you to programme the dates on which certain materials will appear right at the beginning of the year. This makes it possible to control students' progress or to let them know about the work to be done throughout the course. There are different tools for creating the different types of materials that we might want to use. There is, for example, a specific feature for creating the syllabus that includes fields for the most common materials and allows for different levels of detail in the explanation of the contents. Students therefore have access to detailed explanations of each unit (called *lessons*). Another feature is designed to create and organise the course materials the teacher wants to make permanently available to students, such as study notes, presentations, a list of objectives assigned to tasks or units, reference materials, glossaries, etc. Data migration is also very simple and we have not had any technological hitches with it. The same can be said of making backups, uploading and downloading files or generally administering the environment.

Nevertheless, we must also point out its negative aspects, such as its more traditional class conception, which was avoided by tools like BSCW, and the hierarchy that is established between teacher and pupil (which does not stop us from carrying out the same cooperative tasks as those that were previously done with BSCW -

with less ease and comfort, though). Nevertheless, it is a tool that does greatly simplify the creation and development of technology enhanced classes.

However, in the course we used other methods, and so teletraining was combined with face-to-face sessions in conventional classrooms and in a translation laboratory, asynchronous tutorials with forums, chats and email, as well as face-to-face tutorials about the contents of the academic subject and the technology we use (computer-aided translation tools). In teletraining, WebCT was combined with the Legal Translator's Website as a documentary instrument and as an access point to the virtual community of legal translators.

All in all, this was a very useful tool in that it was easy to use for both trainees and the trainer. However, it was not practical for cooperative tasks, since the forum was the only place where students may upload files accessible to the whole class and it did not allow them to create folders and organize materials. Moreover, our university cancelled its subscription in the following year and we had to move to a free open-source online learning solution - Moodle.

### **Never-Ending Changes, and Never-Ending Opportunities**

The latest phase of this project has been to adapt the methodology to a new e learning tool with different possibilities. Moodle is a free open-source application, which means that, obviously, anyone can afford it and that each institution can modify whatever they consider necessary to adapt it to its particular needs. Moreover, there is a virtual community of developers who share and make new tools to enhance this virtual environment available to everyone using Moodle, so that limitations can be shared and gradually solved. As said, this is the latest phase of the project and we will have to wait some time before we can really stand back and see the results from a little further away. However, we can already

comment on some issues which should be improved if this is going to be a useful tool for translation trainers and trainees, as well as other issues which contribute to a positive evaluation of the tool.

First of all, the environment offers a pleasant appearance and several built-in applications which the teacher may add to any one section. The following figure is an example of a self-assessment exercise where the student first reads on different translation techniques and has different examples from legal translations. Then s/he must decide on the translation technique given to one particular example. After giving the right answer to this question s/he will be led to others from this same module on translation theory applied to legal translation practice. The students must complete the whole exercise and then they will get their marks immediately. (The exercise has been translated into English and shortened.)

<b>Translation theory for legal translating</b>
<b>Translation techniques</b>
<p>Although we already accept that word per word translation becomes impossible and that translation as a communication activity deals with texts and not words, when translating we also decide on microlinguistic units. If we need to decide how to translate into Catalan an English institution (such as the Law of Property Act) we may think of different options:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Law of Property Act</li> <li>• la llei anglesa de propietat</li> <li>• la llei anglesa de propietat (<i>Law of Property Act</i>)</li> <li>• Llei sobre Dret de Propietat</li> <li>• la llei que regula el dret de propietat a Anglaterra i Gal·les</li> <li>• la Law of Property Act, que regula el dret de propietat a Anglaterra i Gal·les</li> <li>• Law of Property Act ('Llei sobre Dret de Propietat')</li> </ul>
[...]

<p>Which of the previously explained translation techniques has been applied to this particular case regarding the translation of <i>provisions</i> and <i>section</i>?</p> <p>The provisions contained in sections 5 to 8 [...] El que disposen els articles 5 a 8 [...]</p>
<p><input type="checkbox"/> Variation and borrowing</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Transposition and calque</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Transposition and equivalence</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Calque and transposition</p>
<p>Please check one Answer</p>

***Fig. 2. Sample self-assessment translation exercise***

The overall structure may be varied according to course needs, and so it may look like a forum, where leading topics dealt with by all participants would structure all contents, or else it may be divided into weeks or into topics. I particularly use the three of them in different subjects. The forum best suits a final course where the students have to develop a complete translation project involving more complex translation and some research competence with no face-to-face classes. This environment is thus used as a virtual customer-translator meeting point, where questions, answers, documents and resources may be exchanged, and advice given to all would-be translators. In another course, materials are structured according to topics - all related to company law - so that the students can specialise in one of them and work with it from the start. These students will be responsible for shedding light on issues arising from their assigned specialty when we work with the translation of the

different texts included in the syllabus. Finally, the first of the legal translation courses in the degree is structured around a (fairly tight) time schedule and materials are presented in the same week they are going to be worked on in class, so that students know what they have (or had) to do every week. This, together with notices on upcoming events, allows students to follow the learning process with a high degree of certainty as to what they are expected to do, which helps to minimise the typical rejection with which they face this subject in this first year.

Other positive features of this environment are the 'recent activity' and the 'online users' sections, whereby, on logging on, both trainer and trainees may know what has been changed since they last entered the virtual classroom and who is working at the same time, wherever they may be. Assignments, quizzes, glossaries, self-correcting exercises, chats, forums, as well as files and links are some of the resources and activities which may be used in this environment. A very special type of activity is what is known as a 'wiki', a traditional webpage that can be modified and updated by anyone in the system. However, participants cannot upload files, so everything must be converted to txt, rtf or HTML formats, which precludes easy management of translation memories and terminology databases.

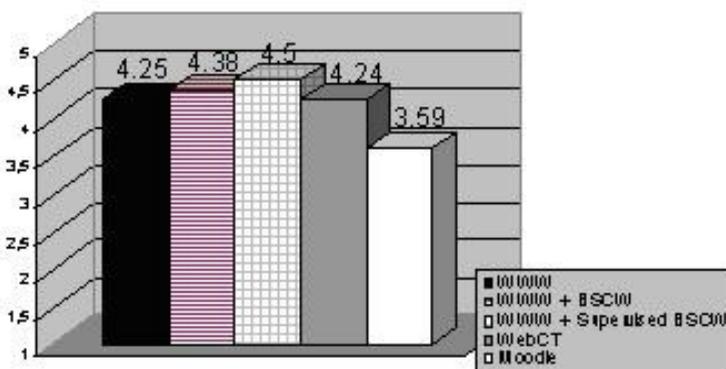


***Fig. 3 Moodle environment for a legal translation course in the Universitat Jaume I***

All in all, Moodle shares common ground with WebCT in that it is designed for a hierarchical learning process, and thus the possibilities to enhance cooperation values among the group are diminished. This is something which definitely needs changing, and from the Department of Translation and Communication we have asked the University to allow for a wider range of possibilities for cooperative tasks. Thus, we hope we will be able to maintain diversity in the development and management of course contents and students' results - something which we were not able to do with the cooperative work environment - while at the same time avoiding the need to sacrifice a value we consider essential for the success of the translation and interpreting community in our country. We are closer than ever to a virtual campus for legal translation training, but obviously there are still many things that need considering.

## Progressions and Regressions

The responses to the questionnaires administered to the users of the different environments have enabled me to record the experiences they have undergone with each of the technology enhanced teaching models described here. Below, I will comment on them.

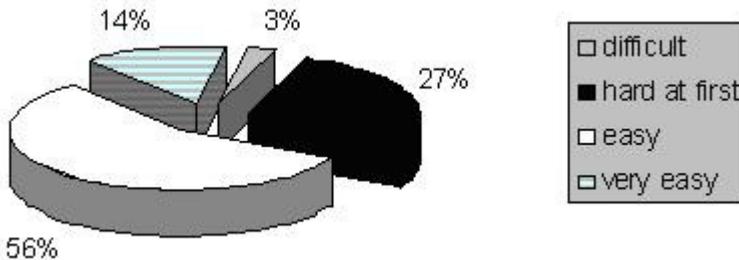


*Fig. 4 Students' evaluation of the environment used (range 1-5)*

Before going on, it should be pointed out that the students' literacy in technology was expected to increase gradually over the years, but this did not happen; they are not more used to computers, the Internet and well-known tools such as chats. This may, at least partially, account for the fact that the year when seminars on technology were introduced (with WWW used together with BSCW and a greater emphasis on supervision), seems to score higher in students' acceptance. On the other hand, WebCT and Moodle were rated lower than a simple WWW environment, despite their offering increased ease-of-use for the trainer, and the fact that interactivity and autonomy were clearly fostered to a lesser extent with WWW and BSCW had several additional technological problems. Overall, 86.5% stated that working with online resources is practical as

opposed to the remaining 13.5%, who did not find it such a handy way of working mainly due to the shortage of connections, especially at home.

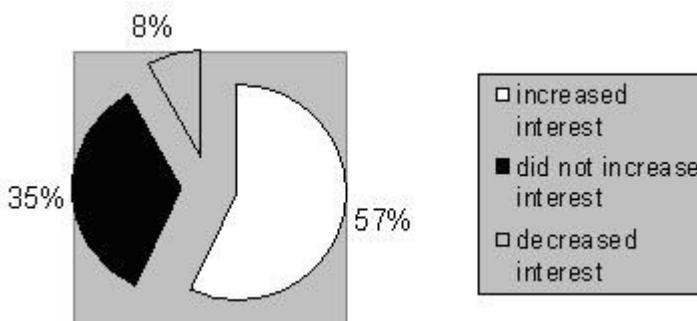
As regards user-friendliness, in general terms most students found these tools easy to use but there were very significant differences from one environment to another. Thus, while 100% of the students thought WebCT is easy to use, 50% believed that BSCW is hard to learn at first even with the aid of support classes. This was brought out by the fact that in the second year of using BSCW 25% still thought that it is a difficult tool to learn to handle. Moodle is also hard to work with at first, and 50% of students who had been working with this environment expressed this opinion. In contrast, 100% of cases perceived the website as being easy to handle and the comments made by technologically less literate students showed their enthusiasm for it. This enthusiastic response was also the case with regard to WebCT, but not so often.



**Fig. 5. Overall ease-of-use of the virtual environments**

Turning to the influence on attitudinal aspects, the environment raised students' motivation in 57% of cases and of those who did not find it increased it (35% of cases), 96% claimed they already found themselves motivated to study the subject due to other factors, and that this was not affected (the other 4% did not answer). In consequence, the main aim of the project remained intact. Overall, we found that, for one reason or another, the evaluation of students'

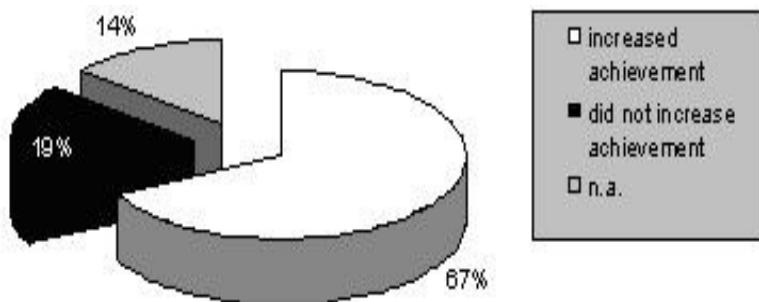
interest towards the course was positive in 96.7% of cases. Nevertheless, we should highlight the drop in the percentages obtained with the use of BSCW without face-to-face tutorials, where the percentage of people who became more interested in the subject because of the environment fell to 25%. Even more worrying is the fact that Moodle decreased interest in 4% of cases, and only increased interest in 40% of that year's students.



**Fig. 6 Influence of the environment on students' interest in the subject, as perceived by the students themselves**

With regard to academic achievement, 67% of the students thought that using the tool as part of the subject helped them to improve their academic achievement and only 19% believed that this was not so. Those who viewed this factor positively stressed that they rated the environment highly as a means of fostering ongoing assessment of the subject by requiring them to periodically submit work over the Internet. They also appreciated the fact that both the materials the teacher posted in the environment as *surprise* incentives and the resources added from time to time by their companions encouraged them to get into the habit of checking the environment almost every time they logged onto the network, thus enabling them to receive the information in a more continuous manner. The fact that students were given study notes written by the teacher was also judged positively, as this allowed them to complete

or to correct those they themselves had taken in class. More especially, it was claimed that this method enabled them to hand in more exercises and practice translations and, in consequence, they felt better prepared to sit their final exam. In this case, there were no differences in terms of which environment was utilised, but certain distinctions could be seen in another aspect: 100% of the students who followed the subject, either wholly or partially, while on a study visit to another country stated that one important advantage of the environment was that it had enabled them to improve their academic achievement. Another important issue is that no one thought the use of any environment had a negative influence on their final achievement.

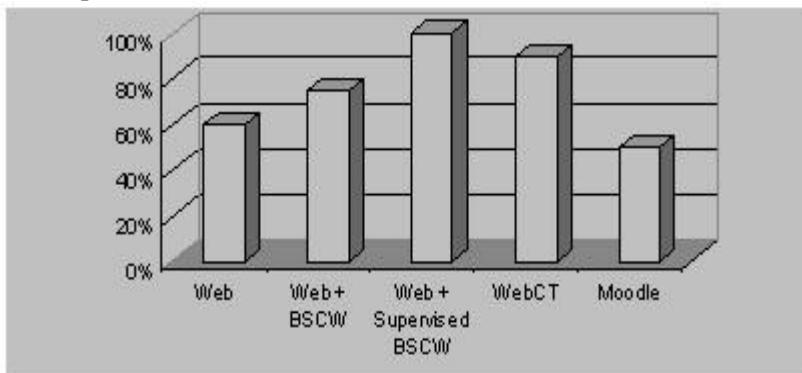


***Fig. 7. Influence of the virtual environment on academic achievement, as perceived by students***

Turning to look at participation, 71% of students found that having the virtual environment at their disposal increased their participation in the subject, while 24% thought that this was not the case. One interesting point is that the people who had difficulties in their early days with technological environments said that, although they did not make use of the environment at first, they did the work anyway but felt that their efforts did not show and this gradually encouraged them to interact with the cyberspace. Other important elements that stand out include students' realising that the subject

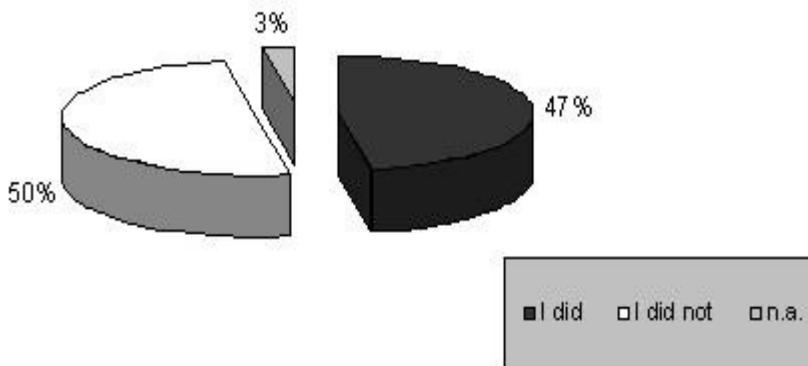
was not limited to just the time spent in class, thanks to their being able to continuously consult others, submit corrections and see corrected work outside those hours, which somehow granted it a more significant position in their daily lives. In addition, being able to see the changes that took place throughout the year, for example, with regard to the organisation of the materials they themselves uploaded or getting answers to the questions they posed or further information they had requested, made them aware of the teacher's involvement and a sort of commitment to the subject. Being able to miss the classes without losing contact with the course was something that, in our sample, received little attention and, in fact, was only mentioned by one student.

If we deal with each of the different environments separately we can see how they clearly exerted an effect on participation, which progressively increased with the first years of project implementation. In the project with WebCT, however, despite a slight drop participation was still very high, both comparatively and in absolute terms. Then, again, Moodle rates very poorly, only 50%, in comparison to other environments.



*Fig. 8 Rating of the different environments in terms of the increase in participation with respect to the conventional classroom setting*

As for the amount of time devoted to the academic subject, there was very little difference between those who believed they had spent more time on the subject because of working with the virtual environment and those who thought the opposite. Similarly, there were no differences between one environment and another. Some of those who did dedicate more time to it claimed that this was due to the control the teacher had over the work they submitted with the tools they were using, whereas others emphasised the fact that they had far more information available to them. Nevertheless, none of the students thought that the extra time that had to be devoted to the subject was a negative factor or something resulting from technological shortcomings.



***Fig. 9 Increase in the time spent on the subject because of the environment***

Turning to consider the communicative features, I asked students about how the environment affected communication with the teacher and with their companions. It is very interesting to note that here there were significant differences from one environment to another. In the cases of the website alone, of the website with BSCW together with tutorials, and with Moodle the majority of students did not perceive any improvement in communication as a result of using the tool. On the other hand, in the BSCW with website environment

and WebCT, a substantial number of students (75% and 90%, respectively) found communication with the teacher had been enhanced by the use of the environments. In these cases, the improvements consisted in the convenience of not having to actually go to tutorials (which would explain why there was no improvement in the third year of the project) and the immediacy of communication offered by instant messaging, chats, newsgroups and email.

It can be clearly seen how the cooperative environment exerts a very positive influence on in-group communication and 100% of the students believed it enhances communication, versus 40% who thought the same about the website and WebCT and a rather low 29% with Moodle (though that year's class showed itself to be a very close knit group). It is also worth highlighting the large number of comments made regarding the feeling of being a group generated by working with BSCW and the fact that the work done in the academic subject aroused their interest in teamwork and led them to consider it in a new light. Similar comments were made about WebCT because it enabled them to access the materials of the whole class and the students who had been abroad on a placement through the European Union Erasmus scheme drew attention to the chance it gave them to keep in touch, work and participate in the class. Likewise, students had a very positive view of the environments that had an address book (and more especially so in the case of WebCT) because this provided them with their classmates' addresses, including those whom they did not see very often.

In each academic year the students have made very positive comments about having access to the exercises, translations and resources produced by other companions (87% mentioned this point). They were also pleased to be able to let the rest of the group see their own work in order to get feedback on it and to use the environment to see the corrections made by the teacher before all the work was put together in the classroom. There were also a number of positive comments about being able to follow the syllabus and the

actual classes by means of the common agenda. When this follow-up was done in the website environment, nothing was said about this aspect. It could therefore be said that the way the progress of the classes is presented, and perhaps the possibility of combining this particular method of keeping up with the class with other personal entries, encourage its use.

When asked about points that could be improved, in the first environment there were no suggestions, but in the second they insisted on the need to train students in the use of the technology before beginning the classes. In the third academic year, when such courses were already being run, we focused our attention on the file formats. Documents were usually supplied as Word documents, but because many of the texts required very complex and time-consuming editing after being scanned, PDF seemed to be a far better choice of format. Since, in class, students are asked to imitate the layout and formats used in the original documents as far as possible, they asked for the texts to be well formatted so that such tasks would be made a little easier. Again, PDF made it easier to satisfy this demand. During that year, students also mentioned the need to encourage some people who did not take part in the virtual environment to do so, as this would help prevent unpleasant situations arising from the fact that some people accessed the work of others but did not share their own. In the last year, the WebCT feature for uploading and downloading students' work came under some criticism about its capabilities. Students working with Moodle, on the other hand, highlighted the help of the structure in organising the materials.

One of the most positive aspects that students praised every year was the possibility of comparing their translations with those of all their classmates. Another positive factor students stressed was the novelty of the system and the effect this had on their motivation. Nevertheless, this observation has gradually become less common over the years, to the point where it is now of little significance.

Frequently repeated comments also referred to environmental friendliness (less paper is used) and the saving in the length of time spent at the copy-shop, as well as its interactivity, convenience and the training given in the use of the new technologies. The fact that information remains permanently posted in the environment and can therefore be consulted even though the academic subject has ended was another highly-valued feature despite this being a problem with WebCT. This application has an onerous limit to the number of licences and the list of students who have access to it must therefore be renewed every year. As regards personal interaction, students were especially satisfied with how the teacher tracked their progress and with the effort made by the whole class to keep up to date with the activities and materials.

Lastly, 100% of the students claimed they had enjoyed the experience and in fact believed that the project should be extended to other subjects on the degree course. Moreover, those students who have already finished their degree said that the satisfaction they got from having studied the subject with virtual environments increased once they had entered the translation marketplace, as they have seen the practical application of this training in the new technologies in their work as professionals.

### **About Technology Enhanced Teaching in Legal Translation**

Although the new technologies are undoubtedly appealing to our learners and despite the advantages distance learning may have for many sectors of the public, we must also bear in mind that the step towards working in a virtual environment entails drastic changes in the roles played by the learner and the teacher. At the same time, in addition to the positive aspects there are also a number of negative points. We will now discuss some of these factors in the light of our own experience.

One argument that is often wielded as a negative factor in virtual education is that it is an impersonal system. Not having set times for interaction reduces motivation in the learners, and also in teachers. Individuals who find accessing the cyberspace so easy that they never get round to actually doing so find that their time is given over to other urgent work, which does have fixed timetables and time limits and which is perceived as being *real*. In our case, we got round this problem by using a technology enhanced system which involved holding face-to-face sessions where the class went over part of the virtual work and the remaining work was complemented with tutorials carried out both face-to-face and by means of instant messaging. Furthermore, this type of 'faceless' interaction offered yet another advantage, i.e. we were surprised how much this method helped some students to overcome their shyness, since they very often played an active part in the forums and virtual activities but they did not display the same attitude when they attended the face-to-face sessions.

On the other hand, because students can work from home, they do not need to travel in order to follow their studies. This allows them to save time and a greater number of people (mainly those in working-age who attend regular classes, but also those who live a long way from the centre where they want to study their degree) can afford to continue with their education. Nevertheless, this was seen to increase the number of different types of profiles and so the teacher had to programme different academic streams that enable everyone to take full advantage of the courses. This affects us when, for instance, it comes to explaining certain concepts, since references that are geographically or generationally close and familiar to some students may not be so easily recognisable to others. Cyberspace makes the group more heterogeneous and forces us to take into account a greater number of factors that affect students' lives, understanding and performance. Sometimes we therefore have to avoid localised examples and look for others that are more neutral, although to a certain extent that may have a

detrimental effect on communication, which becomes more distant and less familiar. As an alternative, in such cases we can increase the references and vary them so as to make them fit the different student profiles, which not only increments the teacher's workload but also students' reading time so that they have more chance of becoming bored by the teaching material.

Another problem is that of discipline while the work is being done. While students are in the classroom, and provided that we keep an eye on what they are browsing, they are concentrated on their work. Elsewhere, however, they are open to many distractions that are difficult to control. Nevertheless, we have observed that our students do most of the virtual work in the translation laboratory, which largely, but not completely, reduces the number of distractions. It has also been claimed that students who follow their classes by virtual means find that their education becomes a less important part of their day-to-day lives. In our case we have found that this is not a result of the virtual methodology employed, since these students are motivated by factors that have little to do with technology (family and occupational needs) and that, rather than leading students away from academic life, the new technology-based methods tend to help them to connect with it. The independence of these and other students is seen to increase notably. They can miss a class and not have to have the notes taken in class that day because they are in the cyberspace, but they can also keep up to date with the activities and what is going on in the sessions without the need to take notes because they already have access to them.

Another very interesting matter when dealing with virtual systems is asynchrony. The flexible timetables enable students to participate how and when they can. This means that some students decide to do all the work during the last week of the year, which is undoubtedly an example of educational failure because with this method they have not assimilated the course material and have never got a good mark in any of the exams. To prevent this from

happening we decided to stagger the tasks, which imposes a rigid programming of the work and, in some cases, gives rise to certain technical problems. In BSCW, for example, we had to eliminate students' access rights to the folders, which meant changing them from one place to another; in WWW, we had to deny access to the webpage. In both cases, the steps taken were effective but the teacher had to keep track of the dates each piece of work entered and justify the environment throughout the whole course. WebCT, however, makes this a lot easier and it is possible to programme when events should take place at the beginning of the semester. The flexible timetable also makes life easier for the teacher by allowing her to control the work and to keep in touch with the subject and her students although she has other commitments at the same time.

Asynchrony also implies that communication is very often delayed. This can have a detrimental effect on students' satisfaction and motivation, which is to be avoided if we are to keep to our aim of making the subject more appealing. Students therefore have to know when the teacher will definitely be available to answer their questions, although that does not exclude the possibility of there being extra time, so as to speak, in which they can have their doubts settled outside the established timetable. Additionally, during these hours I opted for the use of instant messaging and chats, which allowed me to give immediate answers to their inquiries. Even so, up to a couple of weeks ago, it was not possible to save the conversations held in the instant messaging sessions and for this reason the teacher, but not students, preferred to use chats, where the exchanges could be recorded. Other communication services, such as forums and electronic messaging, have this advantage and allow students to think about the answers and to select the messages that are of most interest to them, while erasing or devoting less time to the others. It must also be borne in mind that the structure students can follow does not necessarily always match the pace of the class; there is no hurry and most of the topics dealt with do not have an

expiry date. All this means that the problems with delayed communication are more to do with motivation than anything else.

In fourth place, there are also factors concerning the software resources that are used in this kind of teaching. The most obvious requirement is that of having terminals connected to the network. Despite not having to stick to a certain timetable or travel, you do need a computer that is connected to the Internet. In a few cases, the students can find no reason to set up a connection from home and when this happens the teacher has to convince them individually of the advantages of the Internet, and not just for this subject. Moreover, there is the problem of the specific translation software, which makes it necessary to work with computers that are equipped with the right programs. In our faculty, the Translation Laboratory is the ideal place, but other computer rooms for general use for faculty members do not have these applications installed in them. At home, students do not have all the specific software (the TRADOS package, for instance) either. This means that virtual methods in translation clearly limit the tasks that can be carried out: students cannot be required to do work that surpasses the limits of the shareware they are using, which makes it impossible to work on large semester-long projects or that follow the course of the whole syllabus. Again, this means that, in the study programme, the teacher must take into account another factor that conditions the activities she wishes to do outside the classroom and to make it clear to students that certain tasks can only be done in the classroom, during the times they have free access to the Translation Laboratory, or with the necessary software. In short, these matters are of no aid whatsoever to virtual or technology enhanced teaching.

These technologies, however, do have many other advantages. For example, students can have an identical workspace wherever they are working from, which avoids the inconveniences of working with different setups or file structures. The different elements offer a dynamic, more stimulating environment, although

to achieve this, the materials must be adapted to fit the most appropriate applications. This requires the teacher to make a greater effort and to have a better understanding of the technology to be used. In our case, the Centre for Education and New Technologies helps us with this specific knowledge by offering us guidance and training on the sole condition that we constitute a group that is big enough to justify asking a teacher to give a specific course. Furthermore, as teachers, we have also attempted to share this advantage with our students by organising courses and seminars in order to ensure that they are sufficiently computer-literate to be able to make the most of the new technologies.

Another important conditioning factor is speed of the students' Internet connections. Until the use of broadband becomes widespread this will continue to be a problem because a dial-up connection imposes serious limits on the use of audiovisual materials. So, the solution we adopted has been to limit this kind of material, although we also considered setting up a system that provided students with a multimedia client application with texts, pictures, sound and video stored locally on the hard disks. The idea was ruled out, however, because of the excessively large memory requirements.

A fifth matter that I have been able to evaluate is that there is less formality within the classroom. The interpersonal distance between the teacher and students is reduced, which calls for a new teaching style that we will discuss below.

In sixth place, technology enhanced teaching fosters individuality. The teacher pays attention to students one by one and, even though she answers their enquiries globally, people who consult the forums feel that the answers are addressed to them and this is, in fact, often the case because emails, chats, and so on, get the participants involved individually. Thus, it is easy to motivate people on an individual basis because it is also easier to know what

they do (there are very simple tools that provide the teacher with information about students' participation, and it is easy to keep track of the work they do, the work they hand in to the teacher, and so on), although this requires greater dedication from the teacher. At the same time, it is easier to respect the different rates at which students learn and to attend to the more advanced pupils without the slower ones feeling they are not up to standard. Nevertheless, it must be pointed out that the distinct levels of dedication open up huge differences in the knowledge acquired by students, and in-group communication (in forums or in the face-to-face sessions) sometimes becomes complicated.

I must make it clear, however, that I have not managed to create a virtual community, since most students did not find this necessary or even rewarding. As a consequence, the partly virtual nature of the setup leads to differences between those who attend classes and those who do not - for different reasons. Students who attend classes prefer to use face-to-face communication with one another (bar, class) and with the teacher (class and, to a lesser extent, tutorials), whereas those who follow the course virtually only have a fluent relationship with the teacher. Nevertheless, all of them have access to their companions' work, which otherwise they would not have. And this is a point that is highlighted by students year after year.

### **Roles Change**

The use of this technology enhanced methodology imposes changes for both teaching and learning and, consequently, the teacher and the learner have to accept modifications in the way they work. Students are expected to participate actively as well as to be technologically literate and thus become responsible for their own learning. The classroom sets a number of demands that go far beyond the traditional blackboard and chalk. The university needs an important amount of technological equipment. The materials are of a

completely different nature (they are interactive, they need to be continually updated and they have to be independent of the notes students might take). And the methodology needs re-engineering to make it suitable for the new teaching/learning processes. The extra workload is considerable, especially for the teacher, which is a point I would like to deal with in greater length.

The teacher's role changes from that of a transmitter of knowledge to one of guiding research. In the project I describe here and in most cases, students have the same information as the teacher but they need guidance on how to manage the avalanche of information they can find not only in the classroom setting but more especially on the Internet, in order to ensure they fulfil the learning objectives. We run the risk, however, of becoming administrators of information or technologists. We are obliged to master computer systems and we have to seek out information, gain experience in technology, select the best tools and design specific materials to suit the environments. Once it is constructed, we have to have a good command of the environment, despite the changes our students may make to it, and be wholly familiarised with its structure. We must know exactly what each file is for and have a clear understanding of the different career paths our students may choose to follow.

Furthermore, these systems allow for, but also require, the teacher's personalised attention. Prior to the use of this system, face-to-face contact with students enabled us to gain an understanding of students' attitudes and now we have to seek out the person behind the screen in order to identify what they need and what their strong points are. These may include elements such as possible rejection of the new technologies, attitudes towards technology that need correcting, lack of motivation, and excessive amounts of data, and so on. Organising extracurricular courses, if and when necessary, will also become part of the teacher's job. Encouraging students to participate in the virtual environment is a must if the academic subject is to work properly: we have to take part in the forums, get in

touch personally with those who do not join in, and convince those who are reluctant about using the new technologies to ensure learning is taking place under equal conditions.

So as not to lose track of the progress made by the class, we have to combine face-to-face classes with a weekly follow-up of each student, because students have to feel that what they place in the environment is used to evaluate their performance in the subject and that the teacher acknowledges and responds to the time and effort they dedicate to their work. There are also a series of other aspects that we must keep an eye on, such as which pages students visit, how many visits they make while studying the subject and how they are distributed in time, and, above all, whether they finish the tasks they are set. Thus, we can check that they are making progress in an orderly fashion, that they are interested in the subject and spend time on it, and that they want to learn.

As a result of all this, the teaching plan has to be both strict and flexible. The teacher has to set time limits for handing in work, have a good understanding of the environment (materials and technology) to allow for exceptions, and to continually update the materials. At the same time, however, the programme has to be extensive and thorough: we have to cater for different profiles, design alternative study paths and pay attention to the different technologies we have available. In short, we have a series of new jobs to be carried out in the same number of hours.

The rewards from this added workload are strictly personal. I would like to highlight the relation I have with the students, who acknowledge and are grateful for the work that is being done for them. Our relationship is very close and, in fact, they are very often friendlier in their messages than they might seem in person. It is also interesting to note that students' finishing their studies of legal translation as an academic subject does not mean we are no longer in contact with each other, since they get into the habit of writing

emails and continue to tell me how things are going, the problems they are having, or to ask for information about all sorts of topics.

The numbers of students taking part, the quality of the work done both by the groups and on an individual basis, as well as the final results shown by the grades obtained have all progressively improved with each new project. I do not think that this change can be attributed to the students themselves, but rather to my becoming aware of what can hamper their progress and of the ways to motivate them, since I have learnt how semi virtual communities work by my own experience and from how students evaluate them each year. From a more affective point of view, I have seen how students' answers to the evaluations and the satisfaction they express have motivated me to get involved in other projects dealing with the use of virtual environments in academic subjects. At the same time, I have also been encouraged by the personal interaction in face-to-face classes and tutorials, where discussions often stray away from the main subject matter, perhaps due to the absolute immediacy of this kind of communication and the absence of a task that has a time limit. For this reason, I am already planning to incorporate face-to-face tutoring in the Moodle environment, as well as technology seminars, for the next academic year, so that the poor results obtained with the last project can be improved.

Despite the satisfaction that comes from improving details year after year, and the impulse of abandoning environments with poorer results, we work within an institution and therefore we cannot decide directly on what platform to use. Moreover, we need to attain technological stability because it does not make much sense to train oneself in the use of different technologies only to employ them for one academic year until their shortcomings become apparent and we need to introduce another tool to put them to rights. There are environments that can be tried with lower risks as regards the costs of training, such as WebCT, but which, on the other hand, require a very considerable investment by the institution. For this reason it

becomes essential to share our own experiences to help others avoid some of the pitfalls of e-learning.

## NOTES

1. This research is included in the work done by the GITRAD research group, which is currently involved in the description of the social field of legal translators and interpreters in the framework of a project funded by Fundación Bancaja(P1 1A2004-20).

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