Computer-Based Activities For translation Courses at Tertiary Level: A Case Study in Vietnam

Nguyen Thi Nhu Ngoc
Department of Translation – Interpreting
Faculty of English Linguistics & Literature
University of Social Sciences & Humanities
Vietnam National University-HCM, 10 - 12 Dinh Tien Hoang Street
Ben Nghe Ward, District 1, HCMC, Vietnam

Abstract

Great concern has been put in the translation industry during the past decades, especially in Asia's developing countries thanks to the expansion of socio-economic relations. At the tertiary level, the traditional methods using texts in books for written translation and audio-visual tapes for spoken translation likely become unflavored. To meet the requirements of current competitive labor market, translation-major students have to equip themselves with professional skills by exploiting various social contexts and translation-aided software. Thus, translation training programs at tertiary level are expected to be constructed and updated with the computer technology. Based on a survey on translation-major students' experience with using the computer in Vietnam, the paper finds out their real needs and suggests some applicable computer-based activities. These activities provide students with hands-on experiences focusing on their future profession, and are to use as a helpful reference for those with similar teaching contexts.

Keywords: translation, interpreting, computer-based activity, interaction

1. Introduction

Until the 21st century, formal training opportunities for translators have increased throughout the world in general and Southeast Asian countries in particular. However, not many universities in Southeast Asian countries like Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, etc. have provided translation training as a major. For example, the earliest translation division of a foreign language faculty was just set up in a university in Central Vietnam in 2007. Another was born in South Vietnam in 2009. These two are considered piooneers in Vietnam. Although hundreds of students have annually been trained as translators in Vietnam, there have existed several problems in translation education. As suggested in Harmer (2008), the role of the teacher in a translation course ranges from the controller to the tutor in the continuum. However**,** in a survey on 24 Vietnamese teachers of translation (Thu &Ngoc, 2014), it is clear is that, in Vietnam's context, the teacher is always the decisive factor in the translation class despite the trend to move away from teacher-centeredness in both disciplines - language teaching and translation teaching. Hence, raising the quality of teaching in both forms of written translation and spoken translation (interpreting) is of great importance to equip the students, potential translators, with both essential knowledge and foundational skills. The role of teachers is now to provide their students with not only fundamental knowledge of translation, collective experience but aslo practicefocusing authentic skills related to their future profession. We all know that many traditional methods, especially the Grammar-Translation, respect the teacher-centeredness**;** and students are provided with written and oral texts to practice, emphasing the language use. Obviously, they are now unflavored. In translation classrooms, the instructional methods should be based on both learner needs and social needs. In the current computer age, university classrooms are usually equipped with computers and projectors, and most students are equipped themselves with a personal computer or laptop which is supposed to greatly support their learning. This paper aims to present some applicable instructional methods using computer-based activities (CPA) for translation courses. They are supposed to reduce the teacher-centeredness and increase the interaction in class, and considered as a useful implication for translation trainers in the Southeast Asian region, where students share some social and cultural features with those in Vietnam.

Although there is a clear distinction between written translation (Translation) and spoken translation (Interpreting), in this paper, 'translation' is used as an umbrella term for both since they are closely related and integrated in one program in most universities throughout the world.

2. Students' use of the computer for their learning

A small-scale study on students' experience with computer use for their learning was conducted in the early 2016. The participants, ninety six 4th year translation-major students, were surveyed through a questionnaire in which they provided a detailed description of their reasons and strategies for some favorite CBA for their self-study and group study. The findings were quite interesting and encouraging for the implementation of CBA in translation education. All of the participants had their own email address. 90% owned a personal computer or laptop. 69% use the computer extensively - more than 5 hours per week, 20% moderately - from 2 to 5 hours, and only 3% occasionally - about 1 hour or less. Thus, most of the participants use the computer as a popular means in their learning. However, they mainly use the computer (79%) and the internet (81%) at home. About 42% use the off-line program and just 24% use the on-line program at university. It is easily recognized that CBA in the translation classrooms have not been explored effectively. Perhaps, the most popular activity is the Power-Point presentation.

In Table 1, 66% of the students use the computer to do assignments with their classmates from 2 to 5 hours and over per week, indicating that many can deal with teamwork using the computer. However, the rest work with their team only about 1 hour per week. It means that some students have not found it convenient for teamwork. Aslo, 55% use the computer to communicate with their classmates or teachers about less than 1 hour every week. It points out that the academic teacher-student and student-student exchanges are not highly exploited. Undeniably, something really practical to strengthen these ties should be done. And of course, using CBA is worth of consideration. In Table 2, the value of using the IT resources at the university is not highly appreciated: 50% of them think that the university computer lab has no value or just a limited value. About 68% think it helpful to use the computer in the library or in other information resource centers where they can read books and easily get access to the internet. 99% do all their learning tasks using the computer at home. However, in Table 3, most of the students agree about positive impact of CBA on their learning. 60% - 80% think that CBA play an important part, make more fun and interaction in their learning,expectmore CBA in their courses, and find no problem dealing with CBA.

Tables 1:**The weekly frequency of activities related to the computer use**

Activity	*Do not use*	*Occasional (≤ 1 hour)*	*Moderate (2 - 5 hours)*	*Extensive (≥ 5 hours)*
Doing learning tasks collaboratively	3%	31%	52%	14%
Doing learning tasks individually	0%	11%	57%	32%
Listening to course materials	3%	38%	50%	9%
Reading course materials	2%	30%	54%	14%
Writing assignments	0%	40%	50%	10%
Giving oral presentation	4%	36%	48%	12%
Searching for information on topics of personal interest (e.g. articles related to hobbies, downloading music, movies etc.)	0%	6%	37%	57%
Searching for information for learning tasks	1%	18%	57%	24%
Communicating with family/friends	2%	35%	39%	24%
Communicating with other students/ teachers on university related matters	3%	55%	28%	14%

Table 2: The usefulness of the internet-connected computer

Location	*Unnecessary*	*Limited value*	*Valuable*	*Essential*
In the university computer lab	8%	42%	32%	18%
In classrooms	7%	28%	48%	17%
At home	1%	0%	35%	64%
In the university library	4%	25%	45%	26%
In other information resource centers	4%	28%	40%	28%

Table 3: Opinions on using CBA in class

Opinions CBA	Strongly disagree	Moderately disagree	Slightly disagree	Slightly agree	Moderately agree	Strongly agree
CBA are an important element in courses.	5%	3%	2%	14%	38%	38%
CBA make courses more enjoyable.	2%	4%	5%	15%	38%	36%
CBA help students to interact more with others.	2%	3%	9%	25%	29%	32%
It is difficult to use the computer technology in CBA.	25%	15%	24%	19%	9%	8%
Courses are better with more computer-based activities.	2%	7%	5%	25%	31%	30%

Based on such findings, it can be concluded that utilizing the computer technology to produce CBA has not been effective in class. In Vietnam, many teachers and teachers simply think that searching information on the internet and using Power-point presentation in class means an efficient employment of CBA. As translation teachers, we need to make more use of its advantages so that lessons are more diverse and practical, and also encourage students to use their computer skills to learn translation better. Some applicable methods using computer-based technology in translation training. It is of vital importance that translation teachers provide students with career-oriented activities in class so that they can meet the requirements from their potential employers. Mileto & Luigi (2010) emphasize that students in any translation course are expected to be equipped with knowledge about the translation profession, i.e. understanding and evaluating their working environment, maturing a teamwork attitude, and meeting the deadlines, while getting accustomed to identify the technical aspects and skills to develop. To deal with challenges in a translation course, teachers should implement various methods combining theory and practice. Using CBA is quite an effective approach because students find it interesting to learn translation in such a triangle of interaction, i.e. the teacher - the computer - the students. Nowadays the internet access is quite easy. The wireless system is well-equipped in all universities. In case of lacking Wi-Fi connection, a USB 3G or Internet 3G on mobile-phones can be a good compensation. Therefore, it is quite convenient to instruct students to implement CBA related to the internet connection in a normal classroom or in a computer lab. Obviously, CBA in translation courses are somehow different from those in general language courses. Consequently, the translation teaching using CBA requires approaches/methods quite different from those in traditional courses. Written translation is not just what students learn by reading and writing, and spoken translation is not just what they learn by listening and watching. What they need is to learn translation skills and receive feedback on their translation errors in a more professional environment. And the best way to achieve it is to provide them with hands-on practice through CBA.

3. Some CBA for in-class translation training

3.1. Some CBA for written translation courses

Activity 1: Using Google translation and CAT tools as a source for translation evaluation

It costs a lot to buy some professional machine translation software. Thus, Google translation is quite a useful form of machine translation. Despite some unfavorable comments on its quality, Google translation tool is completely free for use in class. Users of machine translation are usually large multinational companies which require technical texts in various languages. Machine translation versions need some edition by human. The activity of translation evaluation is authentic and quite practical for students.

In this activity, sstudents are required to cut and paste a passage/text on the Google translation tool, then they work in pairs or groups to analyze the translation version by Google and make relevant comments and edition, using the tool *Track changes* in word. One of the pairs/ groups is requested to present their evaluation product, and the other students give comments on their presentation and some other suggestion in need. For basic translation courses, the teacher should provide the students with texts whose structures and words are under a certain direction so that he/she can control the activity. For higher level translation courses, texts may be any pieces of hot online news or issues and of the students' choice so that they can have chances to deal with various problems related to various fields.

Another relevant application is the translation memory system. It is a tool for computer-aided translation. It stores the original text and its human translation in manageable units. The translation memory system proposes the translation whenever the same or a similar unit occurs again (Ludwigsen, 2009). The students should be introduced the advantageous knowledge from this system to apply to their translation evaluation. One of its concrete example is the use of linguistic corpus. We have done an interestingly project in one of our advanced-translation classes: We asked our students to analyze a small bilingual linguistic corpus on a given topic by providing them bilingual texts in which English is the source language. The English texts were extracted from the Penn Treebank corpus and the Brown courpus so their quality was confirmed; and we used the CAT (computer-assisted translation) tool, namely Trados, to translate the texts into Vietnamese. The students were asked to edit the equivalent Vietnamese texts. This activity helps them to improve their translation competence a lot because it is a good way to find out rules of equivalence, similarities and differences in various aspects related to syntax, semantics and pragmatics. It is a time-consuming task but it is of great value, increasing the interaction between the teacher and the students, and provides effective lessons for translation edition and professional translation. It should be used as a project for the mid-term or final test at the advanced level.

Activity 2: Using on-line dictionaries for word choice and collocation

It is widely agreed that the advantages offered by online dictionaries are: (1) they are diverse, quick and plentifully informative resources; (2) they are frequently updated; (3) they are free or low-cost; (4) they are easily and quickly accessed and used, (5) it is easy to cut and paste the data; and (6) they provide references to other online sources or links to other entries etc. In a training translation program, the skill of using dictionary is quite important. Thanks to such advantages, using online dictionaries should be embedded in the classroom activities. However, in many translation classes this skill is almost inorged, and it is an unwitten law that students have known or must know this skill so there is no need to instruct it. Actually, using on-line dictionaries effectively is not an easy task. In many cases, specific words cannot be found in paper dictionaries and online dictionaries which are more updated turn to be a valuable tool with more illustration and concrete examples. Moreover, using e-dictionaries and online ones is time-saving. However, online dictionaries are a two-blade knife if the students do not know how to search the information on reputable online dictionaries or how to use them properly. The teacher should suggest the students the web-based dictionaries which are trusted resources. Among numerous dictionaries on the internet, the best or the most reliable ones are from the prestigious and well-established publishers of paper dictionaries. In Vietnam, favored online Vietnamese - English dictionaries are of Vdict.com and Vndict.net. For monolingual English online dictionaries should be products of the publishers such as Merriam-Webster (USA), Oxford (UK), and Cambridge (UK), and especially the WordNet. The teacher can ask the students to find the equivalent of a specific word/phrase in a passage based on its context using some online dictionaries. As they may find various equivalents from different online dictionaries, they are required to discuss with their partner(s) and then come to the final equivalentt with an appropriate explanation. The function of phrase translation is offered by most online dictionaries, i.e. they can offer the translation of sentences containing the word/phrase. When using this function, the students are advised to be aware that the suggested translation is not always perfect, and it is just a reference tool for their translation process. However, this backwash turns to be a good exercise for the practice of translation evaluation.

Activity 3: Using on-line articles or news on websites as a source for updating the students' knowledge about the real situations and accumulating their vocabulary

It is an important task as well as a useful activity. Translation students are required to update themselves with the information about issues in their country as well as others so that they can have a good background of social and cultural knowledge. It is essential for their translation foundation. Reading on-line articles or news on websites is undeniably a good way to update information.

Also, students have chances to pick up new words or expressions in articles or news and enrich their vocabulary stock. Passive words will become active ones with their reading frequency. As a result, they are able to build up their vocabulary and deal with finding equivalents in translation quickly and exactly.

Activity 4: Using on-line texts and their translation versions as a source for translation evaluation

In translation courses of high levels, project-based learning is considered more student-centered and better to explore students' experience with the computer use both individually and collaboratively. Groups can be required to choose an original text, find some different translation versions on the internet, compare these versions with each other, and give an evaluation as well as any other suggested translation if they can. Under the teacher's instruction in the classroom, they should first work together and find out possible guidelines for their evaluating procedure, then each of the group members is in charge of a part of the original text and its translation. They do their task at home or in the library etc., then they work together for the final product of the project and do an in-class PowerPoint presentation. This kind of practice is quite essential for students at later courses in a translation training program because they can employ the knowledge from the courses of translation theories and studies in combination with the techniques and skills from the ones of translation practice. Finding various translation versions for a popular text on the internet is not difficult for students, and they themselves discover a lot of useful things while searching necessary information on the internet. Via the internet, they even find it more effective and time-saving to discuss their problems on their face-books, blogs or yahoo chatting rooms, etc. wherever it is convennient; and they even find it quite easier or more willing to **c**ommunicate with their group members and their teachers on project-related matters than face-to-face communication.

3.2. Some CBA for spoken translation courses

Activity 1: Reading on-line articles/ news, viewing or listening to a TV report for training memory

We are now well into the computer age and find no problem to access any written and spoken international news in online newspapers and websites. Hot issues can be discussed in a translation classroom as a memory training activity: students are asked to read or listen to an online piece of news selectedly for the academic training; then they can do many tasks to improve their memory such as: (1) summarizing its contents, (2) answering questions, (3) placing information units in the order required by the teacher, (4) finding some causes and effects of the events in the news. The length and level of difficulty should be varied depending on the students' input. The human brain has evolved to encode and interpret complex stimuli-images, color, structure, sounds, smells, tastes, touch, spatial awareness, emotion, and language - using them to make sophisticated interpretations of the environment. Human memory is made up of all these features (Zhong, 2003). Online news reports with sounds, pictures, and images etc. are good sources for students' training memory and practice their visualization skill through viewing and listening.

Activity 2: Using online video clips from YouTube and other websites as a diverse source for consecutive or simultaneous interpreting

Video, a form of providing a continuous stream of information on the internet, can stimulate the students' interest; it is re-usable and re-viewable; it can entertain (edutainment), and present 'real-life' problems (Fill & Ottewill, 2006). Therefore, internet-based video clips from websites can provide readily available resources of real-life issues for the practice of consecutive and simultaneous interpreting activities in class. As it is not easy to have guest presenters/lecturers during an interpreting course, using online video clips from websites is quite advisable. Some reference websites are YouTube and others such as www.newsweekinternational.com, www.bloomberg.com, www.nytimes.com, www.afp.com, www.atimes.com, www.bbc.com, www.upi.com, and www.reuters.com, etc. The teacher should choose video clips about interviews with popular people, instructions made by popular speakers/lecturers because it is vivid and useful for consecutive interpreting practice because all the five senses of the students are stimulated. Normally, the length of a video clip shouldn't be over five minutes because practices and giving feedback take a lot of time. A too long video clip makes both the teacher and the students exhausted and unable to enjoy their task. The simultaneous interpreting practice is a little more difficult and should be done in a computer lab. One student plays the role of an interpreter and records his translation with a USB recorder and the others wear headphones to listen to what is spoken on the video clip. After the end of the video clip, the students are asked to summarize the contents of the video clip, listen to the recorded translation, and give comments.

The teacher gives feedback after all. It is considered as a simple and applicable way for simultaneous interpreting practice in Vietnam's context because not many universities can afford an interpreting lab with a cabin.

Activity 3:Group presentation on a topic using student-made video clips or images to create authentic scenes for consecutive interpreting

In reality, many programs such as company presentations or TV shows require the participation of several members. Group presentations are often more appropriate than individual one in an interpreting course. Also, the students find it more enjoyable and interactive to perform plays related to real-life issues via group presentation.

Right at the start of the course, the instruction should be done and the students should have at least two or three weeks for preparation. The group presentations are performed one after another every week; and a group presentation should be no longer than 30 minutes. The class can be divided into 3 or 4 groups of five to eight members. Each is in charge of one of the given topics, e.g. culture, society, economy, politics, education, etc. The group members meet, discuss and write a script for a TV show, an interview on the radio, a company's new product-launching ceremony, a school's vocational or educational consultancy exchange and so on. In the presentation, some speaks the native language and others English. They are advised to email their script to the teacher for recommendation at least one week before the presentation in the classroom. After that they all spend time for a dress rehearsal to give feedback to each other so that they can improve the quality of the whole presentation. They are requested to use their student-made video clips, slides or images in their performance create authentic scenes as well as wear appropriate costumes and do necessary decorations.

On the day of performance, the presentation group should first explain some new or difficult terms and expressions used in their performance so that the classmates can understand as many details in their dialogues/ conversations as possible. And the members of another group are invited to take turn to be interpreters for the presentation. Depending on the students' levels, the teacher can ask them to perform the interpreting in pairs or individually. In our own experience, pairs of interpreters would be better because they can support each other if they face any difficulties. Using student-made video clips, images and slides makes the performance lively and pragmatic, which helps all the students to have more fun: the students in the presentation group feel less stressed and the interpreting students have good clues to catch the ideas, practicese and improve their translation techniques.

Activity 4: Teachers as a model for students' consecutive interpreting

As mentioned above, inviting guest presenters or lecturers is not easy and perhaps done once or twice for an interpreting course. Therefore, the teacher himself/herself is recommended to sometimes perform as presenter model for the students to practise consecutive interpreting. The teacher delivers a speech using some Powerpoint slides. Some students, one by one, are invited to be his/her interpreter for a section of the presentation.

It may be time-consuming for the teacher's preparation if he/she creates a speech and designs slides for the presentation. Therefore, he/she can do some research on the internet and find some PowerPoint files whose content is academically appropriate and make some necessary adjustment. In this way, we have done several presentations in our classes and provided our students with a lot of knowledge about various fields. Also, we have learnt many new and interesting to update our own knowledge.

4. Recommendation and conclusion

With the rapid development of the digital age, translators' working styles have changed: They receive commissions by email, are expected to use the internet, e-dictionaries, translation memory tools, e-corpora and concordance software, searching relevant information to the topics of conferences, business meetings to prepare for translation tasks, etc. They all get involved using computer-based technologies. It is quite essential that the translation-major students get acquainted and be updated with such skills. Therefore, students should be provided with translation knowledge and computing skills so as to perform their translation better and faster. For this reason, a Translation Technology module providing some knowledge of computer-aided translation technology should be embedded in the very early stage of the translation training program. Thanks to the use of such computer-based technologies, various activities as mentioned above can be effectively designed and usefully performed in the classroom, creating an authentic exposure for students' translation practice. Although the translation technology in the very digital age cannot successfully replace humans, it is important for translation teachers to be aware that they may be challenged by those able to apply technology.

The only choice for them is to be well equipped with a good computer competence so that they can design and perform relevant CBA in their classes. We have suggested eight activites for written and spoken translation courses. Based on the experience of teaching translation, consultancy from colleagues, and our own part-time translation job in Vietnam, these CBA have been designed and implemented for our own classes. So far they have been applicable and beneficial to some extent. Hopefully, they are a useful source of reference for those sharing similar translation teaching contexts.

References

Fill, K.& Ottewill R. (2006), Sink or swim: taking advantage of developments in video streaming. Iinnovations in Education and Teaching International Journal, 43, 4, 397-408.

Harmer, J. (2008).How to Teach English. (3rd ed.). Pearson Longman.

Mileto, F. & Muzii, L. (2010), Teaching computer-assisted translation and localization: a project based approach (pp. 3-14). Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Ludwigsen S. (Ed.) (2009). The guide to Translation and Localization: Communicating with Global Marketplace(7th Ed.) (p. 143).Portland: Language Line Translation Solutions.

Zhong, W. (2003). Memory Training in Interpreting. Translation Journal, Vol.7, (3) (July 2003).

Thu, N. & Ngoc, N. (2014). A Survey of the Teaching of Translation at the Faculty of English Linguistics & Literature, University of Social Sciences & Humanities, Vietnam National University-HCM. In the Proceedings of the International Conference on English Language Teaching in Asean Uuniversities 2014 (pp. 397-416).Hanoi: Tri Thuc.