

# Web-Based Methods and Tools in Teaching Translation and Interpreting

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## Abstract

*This paper explores the way web-based methods and tools can be implemented in a specific language teaching activity, namely written and oral translation, in the context of face-to-face traditional teaching at university level. Starting from the assumption that, in a traditional teaching environment like the one discussed here, written translation activities can be improved by using Internet tools, we intend to present some of these tools and the way to apply them in translation classes. The other activity we will focus on is oral translation. Considering the fact that this activity requires frequent exposure to different native speakers in order to increase the students' proficiency level, which is highly difficult to provide in the above mentioned context, web-based resources appear to be very useful*

**Keywords:** translation, web-based teaching, podcasts, corpus

## 1. Introduction

The proliferation of the Internet over the past decades has had an important impact on language learning and teaching, leading to the creation of an increasing number of web-based materials available online and to their incorporation in traditional classroom activity. This paper proposes and examines certain web-based tools and methods that can be used in face-to-face traditional teaching at university level, for language courses dealing with translation activities.

Given that students today generally possess a high level of computer literacy and use the Internet frequently both in school related and non-related activities, we believe it would be a gain to combine face-to-face delivery methods with web-based methods and tools in teaching translation and interpreting, especially since the latter category of methods facilitate students' exposure to foreign language speakers in interpreting with the help of podcasts, or make available to students a range of instruments for improving their written translation skills, such as corpora available on the Internet, machine translation software etc.

## 2. Main concepts

The growing interest in the way new technologies will shape the educational landscape has generated a lot of literature in this field: journals (*e.g. New Journal of Web-Based Learning and Teaching Technologies*), books and conference proceedings dealing with computer-based training (CBT) or electronic learning (eLearning). The impact of web-based tools is also discussed in relation to foreign language teaching and learning: 'With new technologies come new possibilities for foreign language learning and for connecting with students in ways that are relevant to them.' (Guikema 2009:169).

As far as translation is concerned, its place in the curriculum of language students has become increasingly important as, under its multiple forms, it allows students to exercise all the four

language skills and thus to improve their language level. Moreover, there are study programmes, such as the Applied Modern Languages programme – training future translators, where “the goal of translation teaching is [first of all] to facilitate the acquisition of *communicative translational competence*” (Colina 2003:30). The author includes here “the ability to take into account a source text (ST) in its context, the requirements for the translation assignment, and the participants in the process [...] in order to produce a target text (TT) that is adequate to the needs of the assignment and the target context”. In this case, it is essential to equip students with the best tools needed in coping with translation tasks. In what follows, we will suggest some web-based methods and tools we consider useful in teaching oral and written translation starting from our personal teaching experience

### **3. Web-based tools in teaching oral translation/interpreting**

Interpreting is generally seen as a very challenging type of translation, due to some of its specific features. Firstly, the interpreter acts as an intermediary in conveying the message of the source language sender to the target language receiver. In addition, the information is transferred on the spot from one language to the other, and the only tools that the translator uses are his language knowledge and his voice. Under these circumstances, no hesitation from the translator is allowed. This means that he must have an exceptional language level, excellent vocabulary and a good, functional, decision-making sense, both at L1 and at L2 level. Every oral translation is unique in its own way even within the same range of topics.

How can we train a student to become a good interpreter? There is a variety of means, but, in our opinion, those which seem to have the best results are the ones simulating face-to-face interactions: the podcasts. Usually, podcasts are audio files in mp3 format, that can be downloaded from the Internet (McBride 2009:154), but there are also video podcasts. According to research quoted by McBride (2009:154), language learners are much less interested in using video rather than audio podcasts. However, from our experience we found that, for training oral translators both at a BA and MA level, video podcasts are much more useful because they introduce the students to a virtual environment which simulates the real one. In the training process, the video component of the podcasts might be disturbing because it diverts the student’s attention from focusing on words and expression. On the other hand, in improving students’ translation skills, video podcasts allow students a glimpse into the atmosphere of real-life events such as press conferences, political meetings and debates.

In the context of French translation courses which deal with interpreting, we have discovered over the last years that students often encounter difficulties in adapting themselves to the working methods specific to this type of translation, even if their French level is excellent. Acquiring skills such as a prompt response when confronted with a choice of terms or the ability to adapt their discourse to changing circumstances is a priority in teaching these courses, while exposing the students to native speakers in a variety of different contexts, although they are simulated in the virtual world, is a permanent goal. oral translation involves at least two distinct situations: conference interpreting (which involves technical equipment as well – a simultaneous interpretation system) and whispering.

As far as the web-based tools in teaching conference interpreting are concerned, the Internet can function as a source of many short podcasts (1min25’ – 2min25’), which are, usually, news reports produced by different television stations, that can represent an important resource in teaching conference interpreting. As far as interpreting from French into Romanian is concerned, from the variety of sources found on the Internet, we have found the materials provided by TV5 and RFI (*Radio France International*) on their sites (see Fig. 1) very easy to use and adequate for teaching interpreting.

Interpreting activities based on audio or video podcasts usually involve several stages. In the first one, the video is played once for the students to find out the subject and its field (politics, economics, finance, etc.). Then, it is played a second time for the students to identify the possible terminology problems which are explained and rendered into Romanian. If the term in question has no Romanian equivalent, students are encouraged to come up with a paraphrase that can be properly and easily employed in that context. The third stage consists in the actual interpreting, performed by one of the students, equipped with headphones, which means that the others cannot hear the report anymore. This stage involves not only the person who performs the translation, but also the other students in the class, as they focus on the correctness of the Romanian their colleague is using, try to identify the expressions improperly translated, repetitions, lack of meaning, etc. Then, together with the student that interpreted the sequence, they discuss the errors and agree on an improved translation variant.

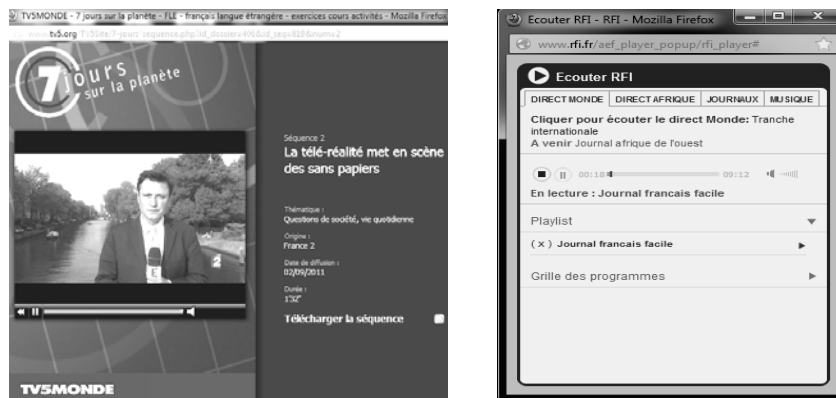


Figure 1. Examples of materials used from the sites of TV5 (on the left) and RFI (on the right)

One of the most frequent problems encountered by students in this type of translation refers to the use of specific terminology. For example, in the material entitled “La télé-réalité met en scène des sans papiers” (available at [http://feedproxy.google.com/~r/7JoursSurLaPlaneteVideos/~5/T5t9XXFfbwk/7jp\\_d261\\_seq1.m4v](http://feedproxy.google.com/~r/7JoursSurLaPlaneteVideos/~5/T5t9XXFfbwk/7jp_d261_seq1.m4v)), for the sequence “ultra diplômés”, there is a strong temptation to translate it in Romanian by “ultra diplomați” while one of the accepted forms would be “super calificați”. Or, in “Journal en français facile” aired on August 9, 2012, the sequence “Il faut empêcher ‘coûte que coûte’ le retour de Marc Ravalomanana à Madagascar” might be translated, due to the prompt response they have to give, as “Trebuie împiedicată, ‘oricât ar costa’, întoarcerea lui Marc Ravalomanana în Madagascar” instead of “Trebuie împiedicată, ‘cu orice preț’ întoarcerea lui ...”.

Another very valuable web-based resource in working with MA students is to be found on the European Union web site: Newsroom, Latest news and Media Resources (available at [http://europa.eu/newsroom/audiovisual/video/index\\_fr.htm](http://europa.eu/newsroom/audiovisual/video/index_fr.htm)). Even if the podcasts cannot be downloaded (like in the case of the TV5 and RFI site), they are very useful because the speeches of French officials are accompanied by their English translation. This means that MA students may work in pairs, each one focusing on one of the languages to come up with the transcript of both the French speech and the English translation. By conducting a detailed analysis of authentic podcast transcripts, students will discover the linguistic and cultural features of the original speech and of its English translation, and may comment on the interpreter’s choices in a way that will

enhance their awareness of interpreting strategies and the factors the interpreter has to consider in opting for these strategies.

As for web-based tools in teaching “whispering”, i.e. interpreting for a very restraint group, from one to a maximum of five people, in which the translator whispers his translation towards his public, the best results are obtained in a one to one oral translation. This type of interpreting is one of the most difficult due to the fact that the interpreter has to maintain his voice at a very low level in order not to disturb the other participants at the event. In this case, we use mainly audio podcasts to train the student in synthesizing the original message in his translation in order to provide all the details of the translation and at the same time be concise, coherent and correct.

#### **4 Web-based tools in teaching written translation**

The activities we will propose in this section are intended for teaching specialized translation (focusing on the fields of Economics and Law, with an emphasis of European Union documents) to Applied Modern Languages students. They can be grouped into two categories: activities in which the students learn to use specific web-based tools in translation – they focus on the translation process - and activities in which they work with translated texts, assessing the quality of translations or correcting them – they focus on the translation product.

The first category of activities addresses one of the main problems in teaching specialized translation, namely to recognize and use the terminology specific to each field. Because each field of human knowledge has its own terminology, the same word used in different areas, *e.g.* law, economics, medicine *etc.*, takes on a different meaning. We will be discussing the following web-based methods and tools: using the Internet as a huge corpus and using terminological databases accessible through the Internet.

The method of building corpora based on Internet texts allows students to see a word or phrase in different contexts and to determine its frequency in an ad-hoc corpus built on the basis of search engines. In addition to the contexts they obtain after the search, they can perform, starting from the search engine they normally use, frequency counts in cases where it is difficult to choose among the variants offered by dictionaries, especially in the absence of usage labels attached to the meaning. For instance, when they begin translating from Romanian into English in the field of the European Union, students hesitate in translating “piață unică” between *single market* and *unique market*. The Google search engine returns for the two variants a considerably different number of hits: for “single market”, 3,860,000 results, while for “unique market” we find 642,000 results. Furthermore, most of the results for “single market” are related to the European Union which makes them more reliable as the single market is, in fact, part of the EU terminology.

The efficient use of the World Wide Web by students as a resource for translation depends on their ability to formulate relevant queries: ‘the sheer volume of information that is available on the Web made students aware of the importance of formulating queries carefully in order to focus on relevant material’ (Lynne 2003:206). The same author discusses the students’ work flow in this situation: ‘students tended to read the source text first in order to get ideas for potential key words. These words were then entered into a search engine, and the resulting hits were examined for relevance as well as for ideas for other key words that could be used for further searches. In addition to key words that dealt with the subject matter, students also found that it could be useful to enter key words relating to the text type’ (2003:206-207).

Students can also use the Internet to access online lexicographic resources, such as online dictionaries, either monolingual or bilingual, glossaries, encyclopedias, which can help them better understand or render the concepts they are looking for. For instance, on the Google search engine, the first hits for the subject key word ‘breach’ are mostly irrelevant texts as film reviews, and are very different from the results of a more carefully formulated search, that combined more key

words, such as ‘breach + contract + dictionary’ or ‘breach + Romanian + dictionary’ (for ready-made translation equivalents), which returned hits for ‘breach’ in *Legal Dictionary – The Free Dictionary*, *Legal Dictionary on Law.com*, *Business Dictionary*, in the first case, and translation variants in a series of Romanian online bilingual dictionaries (<http://en.bab.la/dictionary/english-romanian/breach>, [www.hallo.ro](http://www.hallo.ro)), in the second case.

Another answer to the terminological problem is to use terminological databases accessible through the Internet. Although ‘a great number of existing corpora (e.g., British National Corpus, Bank of English, Mannheimer Korpus) are not suitable for many translation purposes because they deal largely with general language, whereas translation often deals with specialized language’ (Lynne 2003:194), there are, however, counterexamples. One of them is the European Union database IATE (*Inter-Active Terminology for Europe*), which, unlike bilingual dictionaries available online, provides contexts and rates the reliability of the translation variants it offers. The context of use facilitates the student’s choice of the best translation variant. Given that a lot of students resort to dictionaries (mostly bilingual) in translating, preferring the online ones to their paper counterparts and that very few are able to use them successfully to choose the most appropriate translation variant, especially since they fail to provide contexts which are very useful in translation as a text production activity, a terminological database such as IATE can become an invaluable tool if used correctly. It can enable students to find not only the most adequate equivalent in the target language for the word or phrase to translate, but more importantly to identify the appropriate context. The search for the word *interest*, for example, returned 74 results on IATE, differentiated according to the field they belong to: ‘leasehold interest’ (Accounting) - drept de utilizare în sistem de leasing; ‘interest on late payment, delayed interest’ (Finance, European Communities) - penalități de întârziere; ‘general interest’ (Politics) - interes general, etc.

The second category of activities is centered on the translation product. We believe that, by examining other translations, students will be able to improve their own, noticing the way terminological problems are solved, as well as the way grammar or syntax difficulties are tackled by other translators or machine translation software.

The first method we discuss is the use of bilingual corpora in which the source texts and their translations are aligned and can be analysed using a full-text search tool or a concordancer. Such a parallel corpus is the EUR-Lex database which provides direct full access to European Union legislation, made accessible for all European citizens by translations into their own languages. Such an exercise is useful from a terminological point of view, but also because it facilitates the contact with professional translations performed by EU language specialists.

(3) Toate sarcinile individuale sunt prevăzute în contracte specifice în conformitate cu un contract-cadru de evaluare pentru care a fost lansată o licitație în 2004. Aceste contracte specifice urmează să fie încheiate între Comisie și contractantul selectat, după cum se prevede în contractul-cadru.	(3) All individual tasks are subject to specific contracts under an evaluation framework contract for which a call for tender was launched in 2004. Those specific contracts are to be signed between the Commission and the selected contractor as defined in the framework contract.
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Figure 2. Example of the use of EUR-Lex parallel corpus (<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/>)

Another way of making students aware of the translation process and the possible difficulties they might face is to use web-based machine translation sites. Most students mistakenly believe that these tools can perform translation tasks with the efficiency of a trained human translator. This perception prompts them to rely too much on the results of such tools, although a close examination of these translation results shows a range of problems, minor as in example 1, where the machine-translated versions 1 and 2 display problems caused by the interpretation of the Romanian pronoun *i*, or more serious as in Example 2 where the expression ‘pe măsura posibilităților și experienței sale’ proves very difficult for the translation software. These versions, although incorrect, highlight the most difficult spots in the translated texts, areas to which students should pay more attention.

*Example 1*

**Source text:** Angajatului i se va plăti salariul pentru timpul de lucru efectuat.

**Machine translation 1:** Employee i will have to be paid the salary for the time of work done. (<http://translation.babylon.com/romanian/to-english/>)

**Machine translation 2:** I will pay the employee wages for the working time of. (<http://webtranslation.paralink.com/translator/>)

**Machine translation 3:** Employee wages will be paid for time worked. (<http://translate.google.com/#ro/en/>)

*Example 2*

**Source text:** Angajatul este de acord să ducă la îndeplinire sarcinile pe măsura posibilităților și experienței sale.

**Machine translation 1:** The employee agrees to carry out the tasks as far as possible and experience. (<http://translation.babylon.com/romanian/to-english/>)

**Machine translation 2:** The employee agrees to carry out the tasks as opportunities and experience. (<http://webtranslation.paralink.com/translator/>)

**Machine translation 3:** The employee agrees to carry out tasks as possible and experience. (<http://translate.google.com/#ro/en/>)

Another web-based resource which could be used in written translation is represented by forums on which freelance translators and translation companies discuss translation and terminology problems and propose solutions. An example of such forum is *proz.com* where the participants respond to linguistic queries providing arguments for the solutions they propose and/or links or fragment of documents in the target language which act as contexts for the suggested word or phrase. For instance, in the case of *contract cadru*, the query is accompanied by the context in which the phrase was used: .... stabilește și aprobă contractele-cadru dintre agenții economici din sectorul gazelor naturale .... (OBLIGAȚII CONTRACTUALE). The answers are based on the respondent's experience: 'Both variants are valid! I have translated many such contracts and these are the names used!' (Case 1), or they quote established sources, such as Eurodicautom, currently IATE (Case 2).

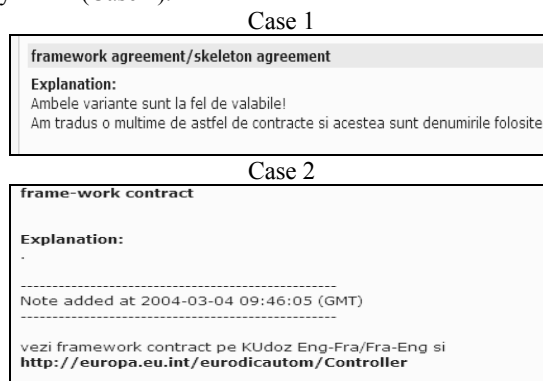


Figure 3. Example of answers to the translation of *contract cadru* into English on the *proz.com* forum ([http://www.proz.com/kudoz/romanian\\_to\\_english/](http://www.proz.com/kudoz/romanian_to_english/))

We believe that students can benefit from being exposed to this sharing of experience, not only from the solutions available on the forum, but above all from the explanations and the debate surrounding them, which sometimes can function as a substitute of a think aloud protocol allowing them to follow the translator's thought process.

## 5 Conclusions

In conclusion, Web-based technologies bring new challenges and opportunities for second language learning and teaching. In the case of teaching oral translation / interpreting, both audio and video podcasts accessible through and downloadable from the Internet represent important teaching resources because they simulate in the virtual environment real-life events and they supply the native speaking component necessary to the future interpreters in order to improve their translation skills. In the case of teaching written translation, the tools suggested rely on the texts available on the Internet, while the methods suppose using these texts to form corpora.

In addition to these suggestions, we would also like to draw attention to the importance of 'teaching students to be able to recognize the benefits and limitations of technology-mediated tools' (Abraham 2003:65), by emphasizing two aspects. The first is that, as Abraham (2003:65) pointed out, 'although Web-based machine translation sites, online dictionaries, and language-related websites are sources that may be frequently consulted and used by foreign language learners, formal training in understanding and using these types of sources does not appear to be commonplace in [...] higher education'. This most often translates into students' misguided use of web-based resources, in the absence of opportunities to discuss and employ such resources as part of their class activity. The second aspect relates to the fact that the Internet is not a reliable learning environment. When used as a source of corpora, students must be aware of the fact that 'there are many texts on the Web that are of poor quality and which therefore do not make good translation resources', that 'anyone can post information on the Web, including non-experts, and Web documents are not always subject to an editing process in the same way that printed documents usually are', or that 'the Web is seen by many as an ephemeral resource; people are interested in communicating information, but unlike the case with printed documents, this information may not be preserved for long (i.e., a Web page can be revised, updated or removed very easily) and so people are less willing to invest much time or effort in formulating that information' (Bowker 2003:205).

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