The Ancient *Latin Language* e-learning Course at the University of Bari

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Abstract: - This paper presents and focuses on the contents and on the methodologies and statements of a basic course of *Latin Language,* studied, and in part realized with the "Lectora Publisher" Course Maker, in order to be used in distance activities, efficient for the education of University students. This course is an explicative example on how the experimentation in e-learning promotion at the University of Bari, by means of PROTEO Project, has took place.
The obtained results in terms of experimentation benefits are presented.

Key-Words: - Latin Language Teaching, E-learning, Learning Method, Latin Prosody, Course Maker, Internet.

1 Introduction

At the beginning of the third millennium, in an historical moment when the Europe interrogates itself and researches the reasons of its unification, the knowledge of the Latin language in all the States of the European Union has become a not negligible problem. In fact, a better and more generalized knowledge of the Latin language allows to go back and to get in direct contact with the sights of the III-VIII centuries, when an European cultural union [1, 2] was constituted. These centuries are remembered as the late-ancient Age, a period rich of fascination and still now partially unknown [3, 4].

On the other hand, the prevalence of a scientific and technological culture on the traditional and humanistic one, rapidly reduces the number of the experts on the ancient Grecian and Latin languages, so that the historic memory about the origins of our civilization is progressively lost.

According to the University reform, that has tried to adequate the organizational criteria of the Italian Faculties to the European standards, it has been founded a Latin language laboratory, that even if supports the Latin Literature exam, keeps distinct from it. The institution of a linguistic laboratory, devoted exclusively to the Latin language learning [5, 6, 7, 8], promotes the inter-exchange among several Faculties as in the same University as in the different European ones. The actual process allows, or rather imposes, to design and realize a formative offer suitable to the requests, not only of the students of the same Faculty (Literature in this case), but also of other Faculties (for example Law Studies) or of other Universities (Erasmus Project, etc.).

2 Technological and Didactical Aspects: Lectora Publisher advantages

By means of PROTEO Project, some pilot courses on e-learning have been followed by an engaged group of very interested Professors of the various Faculties of the University of Bari. The aim of such courses is to focalize the attention to the functionalities of the new equipment provided by the project in different Faculties and to produce, in an e-learning mode, their University courses with traditional arguments and different knowledge areas. In this paper an explicative course on Latin language is presented. Although new technical parameters and features of Lectora Publisher Authoring Tool require a reengineering of the course, advantages in the e-learning initiative are evident. Since Literature Faculty professor generally uses, as didactical instrument, only the articulated speech, the translation of the contents of a Latin course into Lectora Publisher Course Maker can result very difficult.

In fact, in Lectora Publisher there is a number of significant factors to be analyzed in the evolving e-learning applications and activities, including the selection of:

1) a properly basic "unit of learning" or "unit of information", that moves away from the traditional course model (courseware) to become smaller and more detailed module (learningware);
2) properly units of learning, interconnected each other by an internal consequentiality;
3) properly pages or slides having a monothematic scheme;
4) a technical language with the possibility to produce a study in a glossary.

Although modifications have produced a radical adaptation of the methodological and didactical procedures, the results in terms of communication clarity and training facilities are clear. Furthermore, the Lectora's content organization provides a visual, efficient way of organizing the *Latin Language* course as well as an easy access to all didactical units. In addition, the course has an easily and custom-made designed animation, with colored images and parts of texts into the pages. Also multimedia objects, including audio and animations, in different multimedia format, are inserted into the pages.

The possibility to create the most appropriate 'reusable content', either stand-alone or able to form part of a larger aggregation (such as a course) has being supported by AICC/Web Based standard. Requirements of learning design, interoperable repositories, integrated sourcing of content components from "information" repositories and accessibility supports are very attractive for an economic way to support didactical activities.

The e-learning version of the *Latin Language* course is rightly considered as one of the most valuable approaches for education in student daily life since it allows learning without time and space constraints. In fact, e-learning allows, through the use of suitable technologies, to benefit the didactic material independently from the geographical distance between the Professor and the students, who can work every time and in every place, simply connecting their computer to the Internet.

3   The course contents

The *Latin Language* course of first level is specifically adapted to students who, even though they have studied the Latin language in the secondary schools, have reached an insufficient basic knowledge.

Usually a rapid learning of the Latin language is hampered by the poor consciousness of the linguistic phenomenon. A good knowledge of the mother-tongue reduces the learning times. In this course an efficient learning method is presented. With the proposed method the missing linguistic notions are recuperated, allowing also to learn the Latin language. The proposed method consists of several steps, that are:

1) **Matching** between the Latin language and the mother-tongue, starting from the Latin one;
2) Detection of the **pre-requirements**;
3) **Observation** of the Latin variables;
4) Discovery of **relations** and **rule codification**;
5) **Storage**.

The course deals with the following arguments, properly divided into didactical units:

1) Latin prosody
2) Language structure: period, sentence, word
3) Articulation of a Latin sentence, starting from the predicate:
    a. Morpho-syntactical relations in a sentence
    b. Nominal and verbal inflexions
4) Hierarchical structure of the Latin period:
    a. principal and secondary sentences
    b. absolute and relative time: *consecutio temporum*
5) Start to translate into the Latin language.

Now, by way of example, the first unit, concerning the Latin Language prosody and its test examples, will be explained and shown.

4   Latin language *prosody*

Several eminent scholars assert that Latin also, like ancient Greek, was a musical language. In fact, the word "accent", that is the equivalent of the Grecian term "prosody" (pròs odén = *ad cantum*) refers to a musical language.

The Latin *prosody* was a musical system based on the length of the syllables, since the stress position depends on the length of the penultimate syllable.

At this point it is necessary to verify preliminarily if students have or not the general knowledge necessary to understand the Latin prosodic laws.

The **matching** method, just explained, allows to recover the missing linguistic notions.

Pre-requirements for a student to be known are the meaning of a syllable, the difference between closed or open syllables and the perception of the stress position.

The length of a syllable is the time spent in its pronunciation. Long (——) and short (∪) are the symbols that show the length of a vowel inside a syllable.

By **observing** the following Latin words:
❖ the word *monēre* (= to warn, with the theme in long –ē) is pronounced *monère*;
❖ the word *legĕre* (= to read, with the theme in short –ĕ) is pronounced *lègere*.

There exists a **relation** between the length of the penultimate syllable and the stress position:
❖ *mo-nē-re* = penultimate long syllable implies the stress falls on the penultimate syllable = *monère*
❖ *le-gĕ-re* = penultimate short syllable implies the stress falls on the antepenultimate syllable = *lègĕre*.

By **codifying** these examples, the **penultimate syllable rule** follows:
"In the prose reading of a word, the stress falls on the penultimate syllable if the penultimate is long, but on the antepenultimate if the penultimate is short".

Starting from this rule, two corollaries derive:

1) **Baritonesys law**: in a Latin word the stress doesn't fall on the last syllable. The disyllabic words are paroxytonic. Ex. *àmor.*
2) **Three-syllable law**: in a Latin word the stress falls on the antepenultimate syllable at most. In the Latin language words, stressed on the last syllable but three, don't exist. Ex. It is pronounced *ac-cì-pĭ-o*, although – *cĭ*– is short.

Other rules occur in order to distinguish long syllables from the short ones.

1) The closed syllables are always long: Ex. a-***man***-*tis*
2) The open syllable is long if it has a long vowel: Ex. *Ro-mā-nus*
3) The open syllable is short if it has a short vowel: Ex. *di-cĕ-re.*

And now, in order to correctly read Latin words with more than two syllables, it is necessary to:

1) **Divide** the word into syllables;
2) Detect the **penultimate syllable**;
3) Note if it is an **open** or **closed** syllable;
4) Obtain the **length** (also with the help of a dictionary);
5) **Stress** the word according to the penultimate syllable law.

Some particular cases are:

1) **Enclitics.** The enclitics require the stress falls on the last syllable, whatever the length may be. It is pronounced *rosàque* (= ablative case, long *-ā*), and also *rosàque* (= nominative case, short *-ă*).
2) **Vocalis ante vocalem…** Usually a vowel, that precedes another vowel, is abbreviated: Ex. *be-ne-fì-cĭ-um*; *àc-tĭ-o.*
3) **Eurìdice or Euridìce?** In the Latin words, which derive from the Grecian language, the length of the vowels depends on the original Grecian one: Ex. *Alexan-drì-a* (< gr. *Alexàndreia*); *Eurý-dĭ-che* (< gr. *Eurydìke*).

Each didactical unit is provided with an essential bibliography, a useful glossary and tests.

Examples of tests, specific for the Latin language prosody unit, are:
1) Fill in the blank the correct words to complete the sentences concerning the **penultimate law**.
   ❖ If the penultimate syllable of a Latin word is long, the stress falls on ..……………..
   ❖ If the penultimate syllable of a Latin word is short, the stress falls on ……………..
   ❖ In a Latin word the stress never falls on syllables …
2) Divide into syllables the following words and detect the length of the penultimate one:
   cupio, iudex, praemium, pectus, ornatus, barbarum, pauper, rusticus, urbs, oppidum, sufficio, etiam, procella, quinque, istoria, iam.
3) With the help of a dictionary, detect the length of the penultimate syllable and sign the stress position on the following Latin words:
   adpetendum, invicem, dicere, monere, Romanorum, militum, arboribus, pecunia, amicitia, philosophia, Alexandria.
4) Analyse the signed stress on the following Latin words and write the length of the penultimate syllable:
   Romànus, éxulis, públicus, númerus, postrèmus, cècidi, pràecocem, vicèrunt.

Since Lectora Publisher allows to create comprehensive tests, they can be inserted into the e-learning version of the *Latin Language* course to measure the student knowledge level and the progresses in learning. Results of the feedback are recorded in a database and appraisals on the student academic learning level are extracted from reports.

5 *Latin Language* course: the e-learning solution

In the following, the technical aspects of the Latin language prosody assignable unit are shown.

By matching the classical version of the Latin Language course with the corresponding e-version, it is naturally evident that the graphical user interface of the last version allows an easier impact in training and learning by means of colored backgrounds, images, animations, speech etc., as it can be seen in Figure 1. The teaching becomes more intuitive and attractive.

Fig.1 Main page of the *Latin Language* course

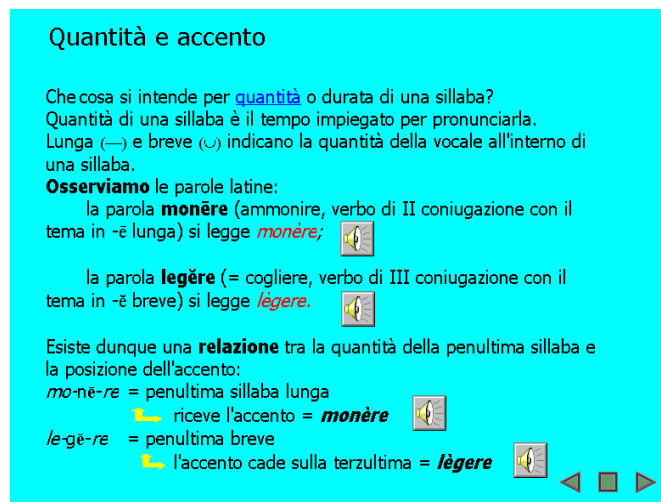An example is the page "Quantità e accento" (Length and stress) (Figure 2).

Fig.2 *Length and stress* page

For each new argument to be acquired, the lesson starts with the observation, it proceeds by searching relations and at the end by codifying and applying the rule. In this page, the words *monere* and *legere,* with the penultimate syllable respectively long and short, are observed. Speech allows to listen the lesson also in absence of the Professor, considering its association with a visible text. This procedure establishes the length/stress relation in order to apply the rule.

Connections to the glossary are useful features for students to understand and remember basic terminologies and notions explained in previous pages. Clicking on the "quantità" (Length) (in Figure 2), a link opens the glossary page (Figure 3) and the correct definition and its meaning are visualized.

Fig.3 *Glossary* page

The introduction of a specific Bibliography, as on papers as in web standard, at the end of each didactical unit, allows to acquire a better knowledge on the treated arguments (Figure 4).

Fig.4 *Bibliography* page

6 *Latin Language* course evaluation

The evaluation of such product and of the formative processes are the objectives of this paper. More specifically, the ancient *Latin Language* course has been evaluated positively in terms of the analysis on the validity of the training activities. Once the *Latin Language* course is completed by using Lectora Publisher Authoring Tool (Figure 1), it consists of several Assignable Units (AU), that are the smallest units the student can pursue. An AU is made up by many different pages. The granularity chosen during the planning phase of the course structure is very important first of all for pedagogical reasons, but also because an AU is a reusable object.

In fact, each learning object (LO) can be material of as in presence as in distance mode didactical activities. A modification on a single learning object, for its stand-alone facility, doesn't cause the adjustment of the entire course.

On the other hand, when the course has been published on a LMS Platform according to the AICC (Aviation Industry CBT Committee)/Web Based standard the didactical features of learning objects sensibility increase.

Now the course is visible from as students as Professors, whose eventual suggestions can be advantageous. It can be continuously updated. Some didactical units can be extracted and subsequently easily re-used for different knowledge level students.

Tests on the course can be inserted on the platform more than a time into several sub-regions with different difficulty levels.

Students think that the e-learning version of the course facilitates the study activity and the recovery of the lost lessons. Furthermore, the navigation of the course pages easily allows the collection of the whole didactic material prepared by the Professor.

Finally, this currently in progress experience is showing that disciplines of the various University Faculties (from *Medicine* to *Literature and Philosophy*, from *Educational Science* to M*athematical, Physical and Natural Science*) can get advantages in using new technological learning instruments and methodologies in order to develop their teaching in an e-learning approach.

7 Conclusions and perspectives

Activities concerning the development of e-learning courses are in progress at the University of Bari, specifically by means of PROTEO Project (PROTEO: "Project of Technological Educational Organizational Oriented Networks") currently in progress at the "Rete Puglia" Center. Several prototypes of e-learning courses of the all University disciplines have been realized and used yet. Among them, there is the ancient *Latin Language* course. In this paper, some issues concerning this course contents are shown. An e-learning version has been realized with the Lectora Publisher Course Maker and it has been published

on a LMS Platform according to the AICC/Web Based compliance.

Of course, in order to get benefits from the technological equipment provided up to now, it is necessary to engage a great quantity of resources and scientific knowledge to realize a dedicated e-learning network. These actions will be done under the auspices to improve the quality of the training offer and to elevate the evaluation parameters of each University at world-wide levels.

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