

START TO TRANSLATE

A new Didactical Unit in the e-learning Course of Latin Language at the University of Bari

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Abstract: - This paper presents and focuses on the theory and techniques of translation within 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, is continuing. The obtained results in terms of experimentation benefits are presented.

Key-Words: - Latin Language Teaching, E-learning, Learning Method, Theory and Techniques of Translation, Course Maker, Internet.

1 Introduction

Speaking of theory and techniques of translation can appear an anachronism, in a moment when science experiments the possibility to assign to the artificial intelligence also the difficult task of translation [16, 17]. However, a pluriennial experience of Latin teaching confirms that the translation is an excellent and complete training activity [1, 3, 7]. In fact, it allows us to consciously regain possession of own mother-tongue [10, 11] as to deeply and directly get to know the language and civilization in which the text has been produced. The words are bringer not only of significance, but also of sense, of vision of reality, of cultural dimensions [2, 15].

The interest in the ancient world has been gradually increased into the contemporary society at world-wide level; cultures, which are sometimes so far from the European one, come under the spell for the literary, artistic and documentary witness of the ancient world. A world, the ancient and the late ancient, that was master of properly human values.

However, the number of experts in the Greek and Latin classical languages decreases considerably and there are less and less students who select to enrol in literary or humanistic courses: in our society there are too little job prospects. So that, the texts, like those written by the tragic and Greek philosophers, or by orators and roman jurists or those by Greek and Latin great Fathers of the Church, ... become progressively an obscure and inaccessible source also for persons of culture [8, 9, 15].

The average contemporary reader is no more conscious to be the heir as of the world of Pericles and Augustus, as of Ambrose and Theodosius as of St. Augustine and St. Thomas too, also because he is no more able to directly draw on those authors, who bounded the European culture and he has to be satisfied with current translations, sometimes obsolete, into modern languages [5, 7, 12]. They hardly have the minimum competences in order to appreciate or only verify the text into its source language. For this reason, frequently a distortion or an impoverishment of the thought derives ... also because the translation isn't an easy skill!

2 Technological and Didactical Aspects: Lectora Publisher advantages

By means of the PROTEO Project, a group of interested Professors of several Faculties of the University of Bari attended some pilot courses on e-learning. Since then they became and continue to experiment the possibility to reorganize their didactical activities in consideration of the realization of university courses to be distributed in e-learning mode.

Advantages are immediately evident. The use of the Lectora Publisher course Maker obliges to think and to repropose all teaching contents in an easy, efficacious and also flexible way. The use of schematic synthesis, tables, visual effects, alternation of colours; the possibility of deepening on single words or characters by means of internal or external links makes the communication very attractive and winning.

The student can personalize his course, by running over again and enlarging, as he likes, those notions not yet totally absorbed or by rapidly following the just acquired notions: he simply becomes the protagonist, since he can adapt his course understanding to his personal requirements and learning rhythms.

Furthermore, the teacher can articulate his course into autonomous and self-consistent didactical units, for example with the production of new units or the reuse of the previously created ones into new training courses, according to the didactical requirements. This sort of flexibility involves a huge effort in order to elaborate accurately and definitively the contents, by offering also the possibility to enrich and to differently articulate the just realized didactical units.

In this particular period for the Italian University, a period with a "crisis of growth", the Lectora Publisher's innovative didactical features are appreciated. By adapting the regulations of studies to the European standards, the University reform has provided the University courses and the laboratories of an increasing autonomy, also out of their own Faculty, University and Country.

For a student, the possibility of changing his training course, by passing from the triennial to the magisterial degree, needs to attend new courses away from his previously given curriculum. These aspects have caused several increasing requests of attending specific courses, like the basic ones; this is the case of the Latin Language laboratory.

The presence of students of various training courses needs the reorganization of the teaching in an easier, more concise and effective way than in the past [15, 18, 21].

Lectora Publisher course maker allows to use a new working method. An example is here presented by showing the "Starting to translate" didactical unit, realized in e-learning mode and inserted into the basic Latin Language Course [19, 20].

3 The course contents

At the first or at the second year of the Literature and Cultural Heritage teaching course, the Latin Literature frontal course is supported by a Latin Language Laboratory of first level, that is specifically devoted to the learning and the experimentation of the language.

Objectives of a first level Laboratory have to be adapted to the average level of student's knowledge. However, generally a first level laboratory has the following objectives:

- ❖ **Recover and search** of the principal prosodic and morpho-syntactical phenomena of the elementary grammar;
- ❖ Gradual development of **the analysis and the translation** of texts;
- ❖ Progressive **lexical enrichment**.

In according to the experimented **method**, that now is presented in e-learning mode, these objectives will be achieved by means of the analysis of simple texts, as literary as documentary, on the Roman civilization.

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**.

The "Start to translate" unit, according to this method by us applied for years in basic Latin Language courses, is particularly important; it is well considered as the right method for learning and evaluation. It needs to be followed transverse to the linguistic structure learning and it has to be applied in a gradual experimentation on increasing complex texts. It is necessary to provide the student to start the translation, on simple phrases with known verbal and nominal forms.

The adopted translation method is reported into the "Start to translate" unit.

4 Start to translate

In order to start a dialogue with an undergraduate and to understand how it is complex and difficult to translate, an experiment of translation, started by the poet Eugenio Montale, is reported. Then, the false theories of translation and some commonplaces among students have to be discredited. At the end, it needs to reflect upon the definition of translation of St. Jerome, a great expert in translations, who started from Cicero and Horace.

An original experiment

What survives of a text after the translation from a language to another one?

Perhaps you know about the original experiment of Eugenio Montale, an Italian poet of twentieth century. He had one of his poems to be translated into the Arabic Language and to be published anonymous. Successively the text should have been translated into French, Polish, Russian, Czech, Bulgarian languages ... and at the end in Italian again. The poet was sure that, at the end, his poem should be unrecognizable. The experiment was interrupted by the death of the poet, but already at the second passage, from the Arabian to the French language, a "progressive meaning shift" was evident.

This usually appends during the translations and not for the incapacity of the translator, but because in the source language there are inevitably semantic or rhetoric or syntactical features that cannot be automatically translated into the target language. So, no wonder if a part of the meaning during the translation is lost or other significances are added.

The art of translation

The translation is for no one an easy art. Also if you will be a Latinist, you will not be deprived of the fatigue of the translation.

Then we ask ourselves what means to translate. Certainly, to translate doesn't mean to literally translate words and constructs of the source language into the target one. This happens since they are two different languages, with different idioms and related morpho-syntactical features. Following the example of Cicero, St. Jerome, who was an excellent expert in translations, gave the following statement: to translate is "non verbum e verbo, sed sensum exprimere de sensu" (Epistle 57,5) [Cf. Fig.1].

So the translation is "a procedure that, by interpreting faithfully the original text, correctly transfers the meaning in another language" [1, 13]. In fact, the ancient translators were called "interpretes".

Literally or free translation?

The trouble of translation reveals itself at the beginning when an inexperienced student asks to the teacher: Should I translate word for word or can I do a free translation? Let us give an example. The title "Ab Urbe condita libri" of the historical work by Titus Livy, if literally translated, could be "Books from the founded city", an meaningless and incorrect expression. On the contrary, a correct translation starts with the comprehension of the meaning of the sentence into the source language, that can be translated (=from Latin *transferre*) into

the target language, according to its own features. That title, correctly translated, is "History Books, from the foundation of Rome". This freely translation is more correct than the other one!

To prepare the "classic"

The translation is a practical need for a student. The Latin Language Literature exam consists of a reading, translation and comment of several texts. The student panics and breathlessly tries to search for previously done translations in order to store them and he is hurry only to search for the correspondence between the translations and the original text. Against this habit, it is proposed a simple, rigorous and certainly effective and durable working method.

You are in front of the classic to be translated, in order to prepare the Latin Literature exam ... and you don't know where you start! Try to follow these preliminary practical advices:

- **Don't read** the classic if you haven't the elementary notions of the Latin grammar, at least related to the morphology.
- **Firstly repeat the verbal and nominal flexion.** They allow you to identify the form and function of each term (ex. *Capita* = plural neuter, nom./acc./voc., from *caput*, *capitis*; or *feceram* = ind. ppf. sing. first person from *facio*, *facis*, etc.).
- **Know about** the author, by means of a **Literary History**, his period, his **Literary Work**.
- **Take again** the classic and continue to **analyze the text**.

A translating method

In presence of a Latin text, usually the students start from a look up of the first word in the dictionary. Instead, a good translation begins from a careful **analysis of the text** [4, 6, 14]. Therefore:

1. **Read** carefully the text and divide it into **periods**.
2. **Locate** into periods the **sentences** and analyze them starting from the **main** one.
3. **Analyze** each sentence starting **from the predicate**.
4. **Search for** unknown words on the dictionary.
5. **Try to translate**.
6. **Compare** it with the translation provided by the teacher during the lessons (or mentioned into the bibliography) and **correct** the errors.
7. **Read again** more than ones the Latin text and **repeat** the translation [Cf. Fig.2].

The proposed method is now applied in a Seneca's text, that a student can analyze and translate according to the table [Cf. Fig.3].

Translating step by step

- ❖ *Read carefully the text more than ones and, paying attention to the punctuation marks, locate the **periods**.*
(period)
- ❖ *Divide each period into related **sentences** (as many as predicates are).*
- ❖ *Search for the **main sentence** (with a significance also erasing all the others).*
- ❖ *Detect the **co-ordinative** and **subordinative** relations among the main sentence and all the others and give a representation of the **structure** of the period.*
(sentence)
- ❖ *Analyze each sentence, starting from the **predicate**.*
- ❖ *Starting from the **predicate**, find the **subject** (explicit or implicit).*
- ❖ *Find the other **morpho-syntactical** relations in the sentence.*
(words)
- ❖ *Search on the dictionary the unknown **words**, starting from the verbal forms.*

Translate!

The student is invited to complete the analysis and the translation of the proposed text, applying the same method.

The unit is completed with related verification tests of increasing difficulty.

5 The e-learning version: Lectora Publisher advantages

By matching the final e-learning version of this didactical unit with a classical lesson, like that provided in a book, it is evident the effectiveness and the immediacy acquired by the communication, provided by the Lectora Publisher course maker. Also when it is matched with a traditional frontal lesson, the realized e-course results superior since it has features that the direct teacher-student communication hasn't.

As just explained, not only the undergraduate can personalize the course fruition by adapting it to his specific knowledge and learning rhythms; but also the teacher is able to communicate with several new facilities. Images, colours, internal or external links to web sites, outlines and diagrams, in addition

to the teaching speech, these are all added didactical potentialities (Fig.1).



Fig.1 The translation art

Such a product can reach the didactic, as in presence as in distance learning mode. Since a teacher has to recapitulate the subject in only few pages, he trains himself: he synthesizes the concepts, he schematizes the data by creating sequences and dotted lists, tables, he simplifies the procedures into successive and consequential steps (Fig.2).

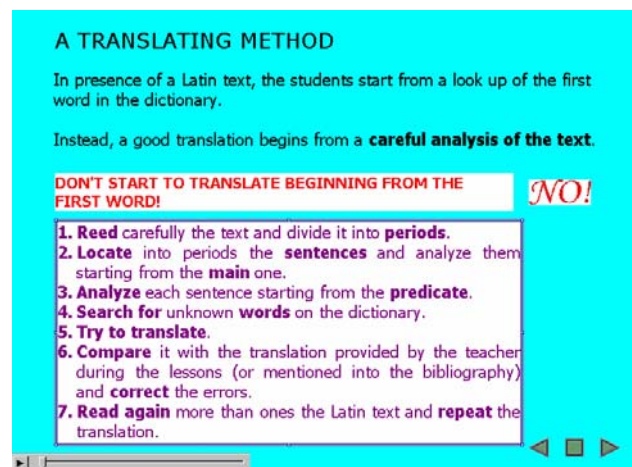


Fig.2 A translating method

Briefly, in the e-learning version the precision level and the economy of communicative language are increased.

By passing from the theoretical statement of the principles to the experimentation, in this case the analysis and the translation of the Seneca's text (Fig.3), the advantages of Lectora Publisher are particularly evident.

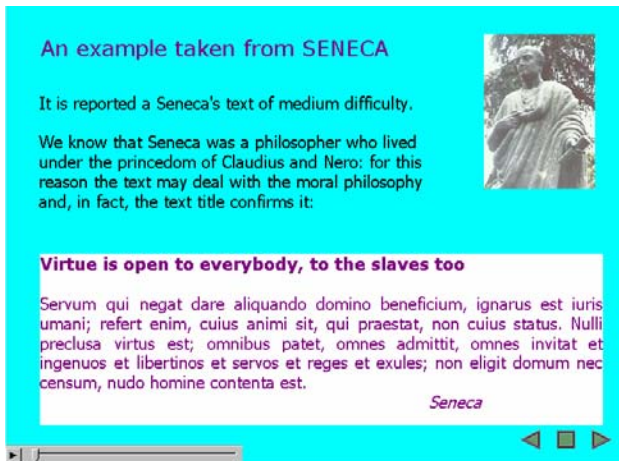


Fig.3 An example taken from Seneca

The different colours used to distinguish periods in a passage and sentences in a period (Fig.4); the red colour that always underlines the main sentence in a period or the main element in a sentence (predicate); the possibility to translate into images the architectonic structure of the Latin Language period (Fig.5) ... all these aspects support the effectiveness of the communicative language and the didactic approach obtains satisfactory results. Not only the best and well-prepared students avail themselves, but also those disadvantaged. The percentage of students able to follow the lessons without incomprehension is considerably increased.

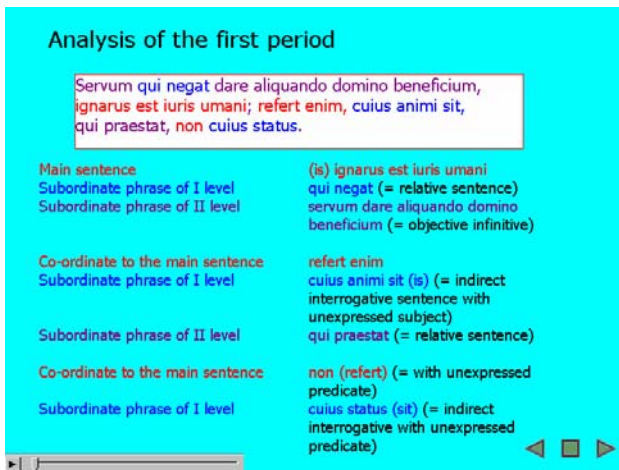


Fig. 4 Analysis of the period

The validation of the student understanding can be done also by using the *True/False* or *Simple/Multiple Choice* evaluation tests. It allows to verify how much the student has removed the previous wrong convictions and has experimented

the application of this method by means of the exercise. Some examples are here reported.

- ❖ Select the correct sentence (3 marks)
 - 1) In a period, the main sentence is meaningful, if also the remaining ones are deleted. (CORRECT)
 - 2) In a period, the main sentence has a predicate in indicative mood.
- ❖ Select the correct sentence (2 marks)
 - 1) In the analysis of a sentence it is suitable to start from the predicate. (CORRECT)
 - 2) In the analysis of a sentence it is suitable to start from the subject.
- ❖ Select the correct sentence (2 marks)
 - 1) In order to correctly translate a sentence, it firstly needs to look up the words on the dictionary.
 - 2) In order to correctly translate a sentence, it firstly needs to detect the predicate, then the subject and at the end all the other morpho-syntactical relations. (CORRECT)

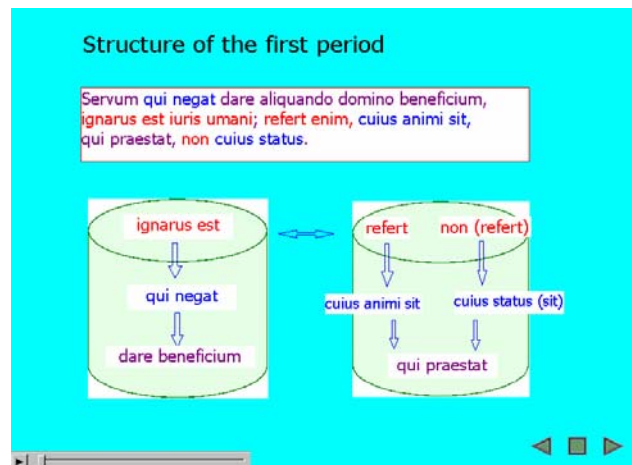


Fig.5 Structure of the first period

6 Evaluation

To pass the Latin Literature exam at the first year of Literature and Cultural Heritage isn't easy. In the past, a sensible percentage of students of Literature renounced and put off the exam at the end. Among them, a conspicuous number repeated the exam several times and someone abandoned the study, just before the degree. The main difficulty for students of the Latin Literature course was to study

the classics: in fact, in addition to the History of the Literature, the exam program requests also a reading, translation and comment of some passages of Latin authors. But several students had not the linguistic notions to do this.

In these last years the possibility for a student to follow a Latin Language laboratory, in addition to the frontal lessons, has allowed to obtain satisfactory results. An high percentage of students not only passes the Latin Language laboratory, but also the Latin Literature exam. Among forty students enrolled at the Latin Language laboratory this year, for the curriculum in Literary Culture of the antiquity, a high number has already passed the intermediate verification tests and now, at the end of the semester, certainly will take the final exam of Latin Literature. Students don't give expressions of panic, as in the past: they play with the exercises and translations; they penetrate the morpho-syntactical phenomena and closely probe the questions. They become reactive in presence of lessons: the fruition of Learning Objects, like this, has certainly increased the percentage of students who interested attend the lessons.

It can be certainly foreseen that an high percentage of enrolled students will successfully pass the exam of Latin Literature just at the end of this semester and that, in any case, no one will put off it – as frequently it happened in the past – in the next academic years.

The realization of University courses in e-learning mode implies for the teacher an effort of reflection and imagination. However, the achieved results reward the waste of time, of energy for this work.

Students are fascinated by this possibility to personalize the courses and teachers, also of traditional and humanistic subjects, are attracted by the e-learning courses realized by means of these innovative and operative tools.

7 Conclusions and perspectives

In conclusion, in this experimentation phase [19, 20] it is necessary to use a larger quantity of means and to involve into the project of University distance learning a larger number of teachers. It is urgent to believe and to devote oneself to discover and retransmit with a new language that wisdom and those human values of which our civilization is rich. There is a challenge, that the dizzy advancement of new technologies of communication puts to the scientific community and, first of all, to the University professors: it is a vital question to be answered. It needs to response to this challenge by

offering contents and values that, occupying the communicative spaces, quench the thirsty of true wisdom that always dwells in the human and younger hearts.

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