Toward a Model of Active and Situated Learning in the Teaching of Computer-Aided Translation: Introducing the CERTT Project

Lynne Bowker and Elizabeth Marshman
University of Ottawa, Canada

Abstract
With technologies becoming more widely and firmly established in the language industries, translator education programs must produce graduates who are knowledgeable about and comfortable with today’s translation tools. How then can translator education programs meet future translators’ and employers’ needs with limited time and resources? One strategy is to adopt a more holistic approach, which seeks to integrate tool use across different elements of the program, including within “core” technology courses, in practical translation and other courses, and as part of independent study activities. Achieving this goal, however, is not without challenges, and it requires an investment of time and effort on the part of both educators and students. In 2007, a new translation technology education initiative was launched at the University of Ottawa’s School of Translation and Interpretation (UO-STI). This initiative is centered around the Collection of Electronic Resources in Translation Technologies (CERTT) project. Motivated by a desire to improve the way in which technology-related knowledge and skills are taught to translators, the CERTT team has developed a framework to assist educators and students in exploring and using a range of over thirty computer tools and resources for translators. This centralized collection of tutorials, exercises, corpora, sample files for use with tools, and other related resources is currently being integrated into LinguisTech, which is an online portal.
and translator’s toolbox intended to supply information and access to a range of language technologies to translation students across Canada, as well as to certain other users. This article describes some key challenges associated with teaching translation technologies and presents the underlying philosophy and framework of the CERTT project, explaining how CERTT seeks to address them. It also briefly reports on the experience of the first four years of teaching with CERTT at UO-STI.

1. Introduction

A number of recent surveys of the translation industry (e.g., CTISC 1999; Lommel and Ray 2004; Lagoudaki 2006; Gauthier 2008) have confirmed that translation technologies are becoming increasingly entrenched in the profession. For translators who are faced with the prospect of dealing with increasing volumes of text in seemingly ever shorter turnaround times, looking to technology for help seems like a promising solution. However, computer-aided translation tools cannot merely be assimilated into the translator’s workflow without any effort. For instance, translation environment tools (TEnTs) can be extremely sophisticated, incorporating a variety of features and functions such as translation memory databases and engines, terminology management systems, concordancing tools, and machine translation software. Moreover, a TEnT may come with its own proprietary text editor, or it may need to be integrated with a third-party text editor. Additionally, research must be undertaken to ensure that any TEnT selected for use is able to adequately process the languages and file formats required by translators and their clients, or that the TEnT will run appropriately given the hardware and software (e.g., operating system) available to the translator. Translators also need to consider the nature of the texts with which they will be working (e.g., text type, subject field, client) to determine whether technologies can be usefully applied to the translation of such texts and, if so, to establish which tool will be most appropriate for a particular job. In other words, in order for translators to become effective users of translation technologies, they need to invest a certain amount of time in learning not only how but also when and why to use a given computerized tool.

There have been reports, however, that indicate that many translators do not seem to be sufficiently well trained in the use of translation