

e-Learning for localisation tools training

by Rafael Guzmán

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Professional translators are in need of life-long training in the use of translation technologies. For many translators, e-learning is the only option available. However, the e-learning environment significantly differs from the traditional classroom. This article describes some of the advantages and issues involved in training translators in localisation tools via e-learning.

The importance of e-learning for translators

Surprising as it may sound, there is still a large number of translators who do not use professional translation tools, but just a word processor, as T. Hudson pointed out not long time ago (Lisa Newsletter, 2002, Vol. 12, No. 2.4), and many other localisation professionals are only familiar with just some tools related to their daily work.

In the last issue of 'Translating Today' (October 2004, Issue 1), M. Carroll stated "translators need further training if they wish to move into new fields and keep up to date with new trends and tools". In fact, localisation of digital content raises important challenges that need to be addressed with different types of localisation technologies (including CAT tools). Because these technologies are constantly changing, translators need life-long learning.

However, finding out about these technologies and learning how to use them is not always easy, attending training courses on localisation tools is often problematic due to lack of time, long distances, and high fees. Thus, e-learning appears to be one of the few options left for translators.

e-Learning and its benefits for translators

There is at the moment considerable confusion regarding what e-learning actually is. Experts argue that the concept of e-learning has been evolving all the time around the technological platform, since it started to be delivered with computer based training (CBT) packages. This has led a wide misuse of the e-learning term, and to a general terminological confusion.

Nonetheless, here we will define e-learning as the *constructivist* use of a Web portal comprising of appropriate learning and communication tools that can enable translators to upgrade their knowledge and skills in the use of current localisation technologies, *from anywhere, any time, at their own pace*.

The reason why I have used the word *constructivist* is because there is not a teacher in the traditional sense in e-learning. Instead, each participant in an e-learning course can be a teacher to the rest of participants. With their help, and assisted by a course facilitator, each participant should be able to *construct* his or her own knowledge and technical skills using the learning resources available in the course Web portal. This pedagogical methodology is known as *Social Constructivism*.

A course Web portal is a means by which translators can get training in localisation tools. Normally, the portal (e.g. Blackboard) provides a number of assignments with instructions on how (and why) to perform different tasks with different localisation tools. The course facilitator is available to help (rather than teach) participants in real time by using a chat room at scheduled times (Figure 1). The use of a discussion board lets course participants to organise an online community where they can post questions on these tools and discuss problems and possible solutions with their course peers (Figure 2).

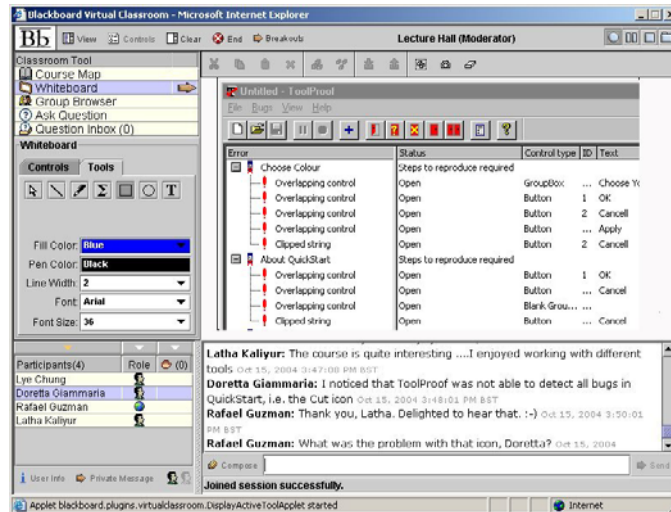


Figure 1: Blackboard's chat room enables translators to discuss problems they encounter while using localisation tools as part of their course assignments.

Topics	Replies	Author	Views	Last Post
Assignment 5: Is it possible to add semantic classes?	1	shtranz	221	Fri Jul 30, 2004 2:28 pm
Bi-directional languages in Passolo	0	Rafael	185	Fri Jul 30, 2004 1:43 pm
Passolo and Greek fonts	1	elida	210	Fri Jul 30, 2004 1:44 pm
unable to connect	1	carla	190	Fri Jul 30, 2004 12:11 pm
Assignment 3: what is the "translation window"	1	shtranz	190	Fri Jul 30, 2004 12:09 pm
Assignment 4: QA project	1	shtranz	166	Fri Jul 30, 2004 9:58 am
Assignment 3: Cannot save changes made in Passolo demo version	5	Gunkie	336	Fri Jul 30, 2004 9:50 am
Webbudget, problems with symbols like ???	1	Irene Baró	186	Thu Jul 29, 2004 5:16 pm
Greek characters don't appear properly in Webbudget	2	elida	229	Thu Jul 29, 2004 3:34 pm
I can't log on to the LOTS server	4	Noelia	270	Tue Jul 27, 2004 3:01 pm
Button resizing with Passolo	1	Noelia	167	Tue Jul 27, 2004 2:58 pm
A question about Tramigo	1	mgosia	195	Tue Jul 27, 2004 2:44 pm
Arabic translators in this course	0	nadia	156	Sun Jul 25, 2004 1:21 pm
Assignment 3: Runtime error upon start-up of Passolo	2	Gunkie	234	Thu Jul 22, 2004 4:02 pm
Loading files into Passolo in LOTS	2	Gunkie	218	Thu Jul 22, 2004 1:52 pm
About Webbudget	1	carla	198	Wed Jul 21, 2004 9:13 am
Assignment 2B: What's 'boilerplate terminology' ?	1	Gunkie	188	Wed Jul 21, 2004 9:09 am

Figure 2: Discussion board in the LRC e-Learning portal

The course documentation should provide background information to the different types of tools. At the end of the e-learning course, translators can submit their assignments, and then get feedback from the course facilitator, normally through email.

Issues raised by e-learning

Nonetheless, e-Learning generates a number of issues. I will mention just a few of them that may affect translators participating in an e-learning course. First, each course participant needs to download some localisation demo tools, course documentation, and sample files to translate, which is not an easy task when internet connections are slow. Second, participants need to be

prepared to work on the assignments on their own most of the time. This may not be suitable for everybody.

Frustration is more likely to surface via e-learning than in a traditional classroom, in particular when participants do not find their learning experience meaningful. This can also happen if the goals of the course and instructions in the assignments are not clear enough; if the course facilitator can not manage to facilitate participants' learning; or if the course learning resources (e.g. sample files and tutorials) are irrelevant or do not work properly.

The experience so far

The e-learning experience in the field of translator training is still limited, but moving forward fast. A number of institutions offering translation or localisation studies all over the world have started to implement e-learning in their programmes. Some well-known examples are Austin Community College (ACC), Rovira i Virgili, and New York University. Last May, the Localisation Research Centre (LRC) began to offer online training in localisation tools to localisation professionals.

In my still limited experience at providing e-learning courses, I must say that, overall, the outcome has always been extremely positive, both for the course participants and myself, as a course facilitator. Imagine how enriching it is to have between 15-20 professionals from different countries and cultures participating in each course, each of them bringing their own professional experience and helping other participants with their questions and contributions.

The LRC is currently using a particularly interesting e-learning tool for their online courses: the online Localisation Technology Laboratory and Showcase (LOTS Online). This is basically a server containing a wide range of current localisation technologies, sample files and tutorials that can be accessed by a PC over the internet. As Figure 3 shows, users can log on over the internet and experiment with different tools in their own PC.

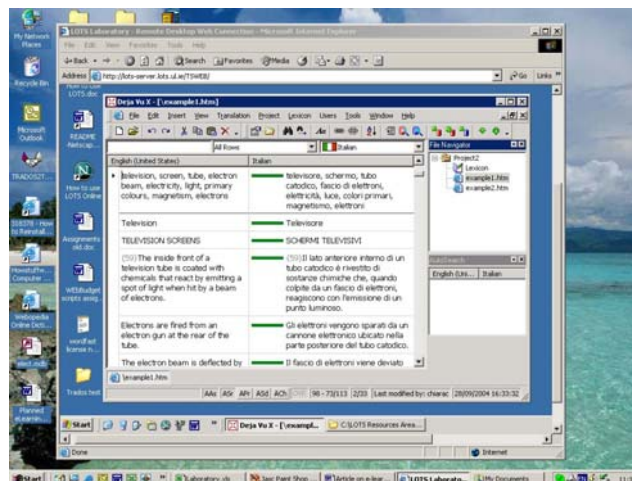


Figure 2: Translation of a Website using Déjà vu in the LOTS Online server, from anywhere in the world.

LOTS Online has been set up by the LRC, and the tools available have been donated by different companies. In order to log on to LOTS Online, it is necessary to have Internet Explorer 5 (or higher) and a fast internet connection. The user can then go to START > All Programs and launch any of the 35 localisation tools available, which are organized in different categories (e.g. Graphical User Interface, Translation Memory (TM), Machine Translation (MT), Testing, and Project Management). The user can experiment with the tools using sample files available in

LOTS Online (e.g. .EXE, .XML, .HTML, .RTF, Flash, Microsoft Access databases, and multilingual glossaries). Tutorials for many of the tools in LOTS Online are also available. In short, LOTS online provides a virtual localization tools laboratory that can be very useful for e-learning purposes.

Conclusion

In the words of Horton, e-learning provides flexibility, reduces time-off-job for training, tunes pace to the learner, allows training to be tailored to personal needs and interests, supports those with disabilities, cuts the costs of training, and reduces travel. Although e-learning is no panacea, it can be of great benefit for life-long translators training, provided it is properly managed and customised to the needs of each course and the learners.

Useful resources:

LRC: <http://www.localisation.ie/learning>

LOTS Online: <http://lots-server.lots.ul.ie/TSWEB>

About the author

At the time of writing this article, Rafael Guzmán was the coordinator of the LRC Localisation Technology Laboratory and Showcase (LOTS). Rafael currently works for Symantec Corporation (Ireland) on terminology management, Spanish MT and linguistic quality. He also provides e-learning courses on localization tools organized by Austin Community College (ACC).

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