The development of intercultural competence through translation skills

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Pedagogical context

ICT is used in a pilot project on developing inter-cultural competence through the teaching and learning of translations skills at a distance.
The **target group** is a group of adult learners who had just finished the Open University Diploma in Spanish (i.e. advanced level).
The **aims of the course** are: ○ to enable learners to collaborate in discussing and solving translation difficulties in a set of texts ○ to explore specifically how learners dealt with translation difficulties of a cultural nature ○ - to evaluate the suitability of the learning environment (D3E) for this type of learning and teaching. D3E is a digital document discourse environment developed by the Knowledge Media Institute at the Open University, http://d3e.open.ac.uk/
The **target languages** were: Spanish and English The **purpose of each language**: Spanish was the source language of the texts to be discussed, and English the target language of the translation, as well as the language of the discussions.

Organisational context

Size of target group: 21-30		
Apart from the target group - were **other people** involved? If yes, who?	How many?	To what purpose?
- fellow teachers	1	acting as tutor
- technicians	2	one to develop the web-site, the other to facilitate the D3E environment
- evaluators	2	both of us evaluated the project
Teaching period: 2 to 6 hours (very flexible, as it was a non-compulsory distance pilot course) per week for 5 weeks		
The whole project was done as distance learning.		

Motivation for the use of ICT

The Open University is a distance learning institution, so we needed a tool suitable to bring together students who were geographically dispersed.

We wanted to use a-synchronous written communication, as we felt this would be the best way to cater for students who would need to study at different times (and for different periods of time). We also felt an a-synchronous written medium would allow students time for reflection, which we felt was essential for a course on resolving translation difficulties.

Description of the course

The **aim** was to give learners the opportunity to investigate translation difficulties, especially cultural ones, in the context of our research interest in Intercultural communication.

We were keen to let students decide what translation difficulties they wanted to tackle, and to work collaboratively to solve them.

We selected a number of texts in Spanish, and produced a set of activities which we presented in the D3E environment through our web-site

The technologies used:

- Hardware: All students had their own PC with internet access
- Special workspaces: D3E environment, http://d3e.open.ac.uk/
  - e-mail
  - internet discussion forums
  - D3E environment
    http://d3e.open.ac.uk/

● What was successful

Students liked solving translation difficulties together, and there was evidence of critical thinking and intercultural communication.

● What was less successful

We had provided a page with links to on-line dictionaries and other resources for translators, but they were not used. Students preferred to use their own dictionaries, colleagues or the internet for their research

● Feedback

We sent questionnaires at the end of the project, and those that were returned were fairly positive. Some students said they would have liked the tutor to mark their translations, although it has to be said that that had never been the intention of the course: students chose to do full translations of the texts of their own accord

● What we would change next time

We would include some form of assessment, as students seem to find it motivating.

● What we would recommend to other professionals in the field

When using technology or a medium that is new to the participants, it is essential to allow some time at the start of the course for participants to familiarise themselves with it. Even

things like having links to netiquette documentation might help those students who are less familiar with computer mediated communication learn the rules of the game faster.

We would certainly recommend the use of a medium that supports a-synchronous written communication for the teaching and learning of translation skills, as we believe that it allows for valuable thinking time which is not usually available in face-to-face communication.

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Professional background

Profession
University lecturers
We are both lecturers in Spanish in the Department of languages, Faculty of Education and Language Studies, The Open University. We are involved in the production and presentation of language courses for distance students, and in research into language teaching, in particular in the area of inter-cultural competence.