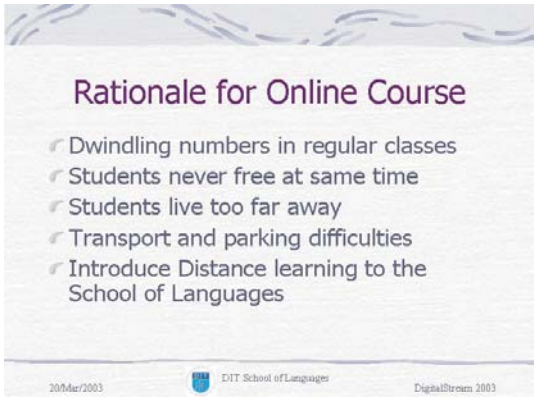
Dermot F. Campbell is Head of the Department of Applied Languages at the Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT), Ireland's largest third-level college. He was a lecturer in German for over 30 years, but now promotes inter- and multi-disciplinary, modular programmes involving foreign languages - including EFL.

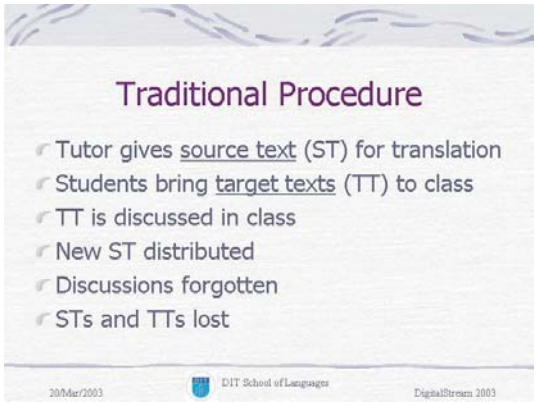
He piloted the first online 'short' course to be quality assured at DIT.

He is currently developing a taught masters programme in e-Learning, which combines competencies in language, internet tools and pedagogy.

He is also principal investigator on the language strand of an inter-disciplinary, *Enterprise Ireland* funded research project (DIT-CALL) which provides EFL students with quality, audio-visual, corrective feedback to improve their speaking and listening skills in English, and includes the use of a slow-down algorithm without tonal distortion.

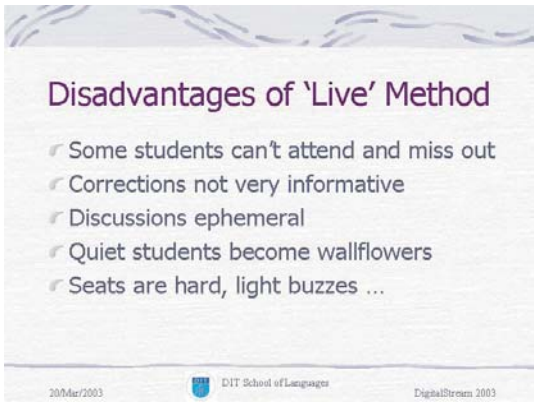



- Attendance at evening classes has been dwindling over the last number of years.
- In order to have a viable class group, approx. 8-10 students per language are needed.
- DIT is in the heart of Dublin city and transport is a problem.
- Since space is at a premium in DIT, there are no parking facilities for students travelling by private car.
- The idea of online learning is new to DIT.
- A Learning Technology Team has been set up to introduce WebCT to a targeted 60% of DIT courses by 2005.

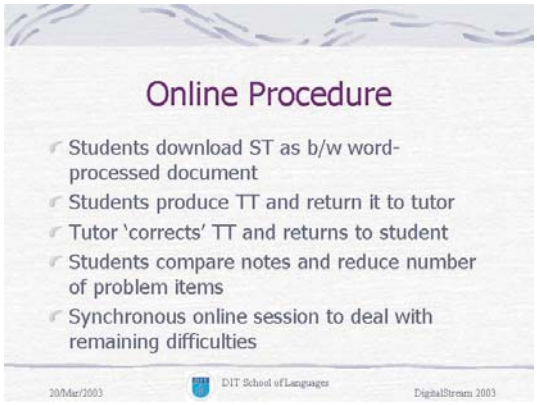



- In a traditional - classroom based - translation class the instructor distributes a foreign language text for translation into English – or vice versa. This is the Source Text (ST).
- Students come to class with their translated versions (target text = TT).
- The ST and the students' TTs form the basis for classroom discussion. This is the main value of the traditional classroom as the (usually) lively discussion is invaluable, if ephemeral.
- New texts are distributed for the next session and the process repeats itself.
- While classroom discussions are context-rich and rewarding they are quickly forgotten; it is not feasible to take copious notes during the sessions.
- The highly organised maintain a full set of texts and classroom notes. The majority have a less complete record!

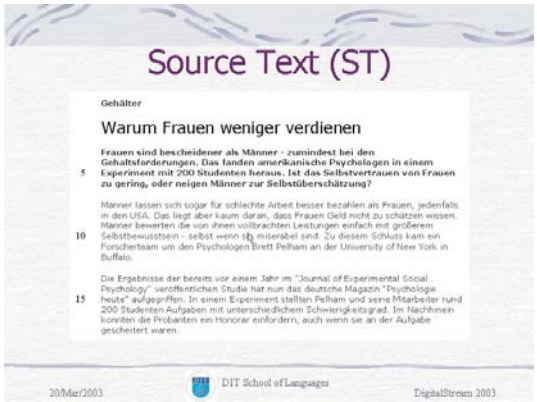
- The traditional translation classroom activity is flexible.
- Students can react in real time, with context-rich oral delivery.
- Most people enjoy the interaction of real classrooms.
- The pace of the class can easily be varied to suit the group.
- Crowd control is rarely a problem for an experienced instructor. The 'glazed eyeball phenomenon' is also a form of feedback, and an encouragement to the instructor to step up the pace.
- The 'agreed' translation is negotiated during the class. Supplying corrections in advance can mean that the 'trail is cold' by the time the class forms, and discussion can be stifled.
- Apart from cuts in the electricity supply (surely unheard of in California!?) few if any technical mishaps need be anticipated.




- The main value of a translation course is the classroom interaction, students who cannot attend miss out.
- Squeezing corrections into the less than generous white space left by students in their target texts can be a claustrophobic experience. There is little hope of an adequate treatment of the problem identified by the instructor.
- For a class-based translation session to be successful it needs to be interactive, which leaves little scope for note taking.
- Not everyone has an expansive, outgoing nature. And not all instructors have the necessary interpersonal skills to ensure that quiet students get their fair share of the (inter)action.
- Not all classrooms are fitted out to four-star levels, and not all furniture layout promotes interactivity.




- The source text (foreign language original) is downloaded by students as a regular, black-and-white, word processed document.
- The target (i.e. translated) text is then returned to the instructor for correction in electronic form, as a regular word processed document.
- The instructor deals with problems encountered in the target text by using a colour-coded reference grid and adding comments in a contrasting font colour. This invites the student to reflect on the translation process.
- Students **MUST** interact (using the facilities offered by a virtual learning environment such as WebCT) in order to emulate classroom-based discussions. This can be done synchronously in a Chatroom, or asynchronously using a threaded discussion.
- The 'round-up session' at the end of the translation cycle is to ensure that the few, remaining, intractable problems are cleared up in a live session moderated by the instructor.




A balance is required between relevance (i.e. texts types which professional translators are asked to translate) and linguistic challenge. While literary texts might provide more pleasure/frustration/inspiration, literary translation is such a specialist aspect of translation that it should be reserved for literature programmes.

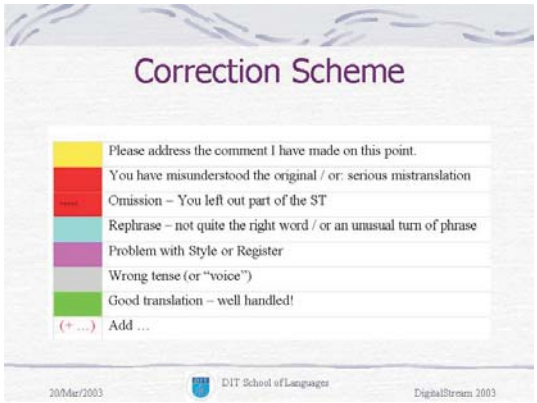
Translations should be done at a professional rate of about 300-350 words per hour. It is important that this rate of delivery be maintained, as a professional translator has to make quality decisions under time pressure. Quality of response will develop over time, but unless students train for speed, they will never pass professional examinations – or eat!

One solution is to designate a section of a text for translation. That way the integrity of a longer text can be maintained. In any event, any text is only a part of a theme, or wider context; and context is everything in translation.

Students are encouraged to complete the translation within a fixed time frame – at the rate of approx. 350 words per hour - or pro rata for longer or shorter source texts.

Only one version of the target text may be given (decision making!), no alternatives, though translator's footnotes are permitted where deemed necessary.

It is important that students return the text in electronic form - any mainstream word processing package will do – as the instructor has to add colour-coded comments in order to stimulate the student to reflect on the translation process.

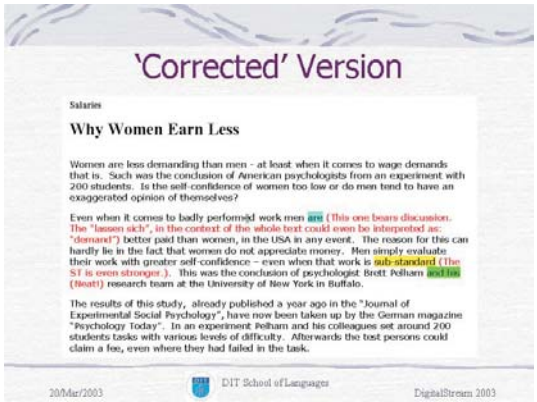



Using tables and the cell-fill facilities available within commercial word processing packages, the **instructor** can devise a correction grid suited to the task – **it doesn't even have to be specifically a translation task**. Any discursive activity can be catered for, such as essays on history, geography, science etc.

A little sensitivity towards localisation should be demonstrated. I have used red to signal serious errors, whereas a Chinese student might think s/he struck it lucky – red signifying different things in different cultures.

The above correction grid requires expansion and perhaps differentiation, but its beauty lies in the fact that it can easily be customised.

If copied and pasted at the head of every corrected, returned target text, students quickly get used to what the colours stand for.




The instructor is free to choose a suitable colour scheme. Whatever is chosen should contrast serious error and positive attributes of the student's work.

My own method is to award a holistic mark for the work according to 'bands', e.g. 'fail', 'pass', 'merit' or 'distinction'. Again, this can be adjusted to suit local requirements.

Then, in the light of the relative distribution of negative and positive points, the initial, holistic mark can be adjusted.

From a student's perspective it is gratifying to have insights and effort rewarded, and to be seen to be rewarded. In traditional methods of providing feedback there is no clear distinction made in the instructor's comments between positive and negative feedback.

The VLE adopted by DIT is WebCT, though other programmes have more or less the same functionality. The website for the Online Translation Programme is currently being rationalised and updated, but this slide shows the main functions found to be useful.

For the efficient running of the course the main elements are:

- Communication (Chat, Discussion and e-mail)
- Course Content (Source texts and Theory pages)
- Downloads (Assignments)

The other functions have their place but play a secondary role.

Ideally an online programme should be launched with an informal wine and cheese reception, so that participants can meet before retreating into virtual reality - but that isn't always feasible, or affordable.

The least one can do is to allow instructor and staff to have some idea of the people they are sharing the course with, by each putting up a home page.

It is worth the instructor's effort to scan in students' photographs if they don't have the facilities to do so themselves.

The first few lessons are pictured here, with ST standing for 'source/original/foreign language' text. G/E indicates whether the original text was in German or English.

Theory pages are added gradually, allowing students to develop a feel for the translation process over the course of the programme.

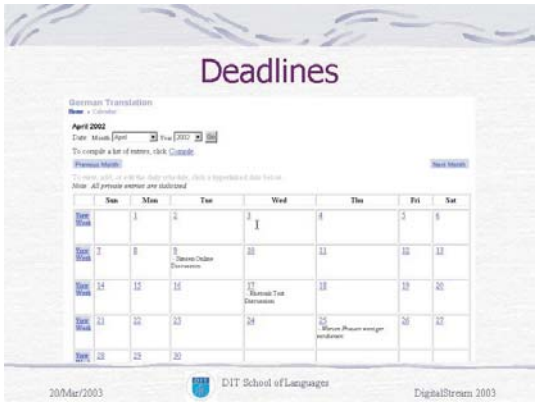
Gradually a considerable resource will be built up, which can be modified by the instructor in time, as some elements prove their worth and others prove to be redundant.

Since HTML does not handle the colour highlighting feature adequately, a download page has been provided.

Allowing students to download a standard text file means they can print it out more readily and work away from the computer, if they wish.

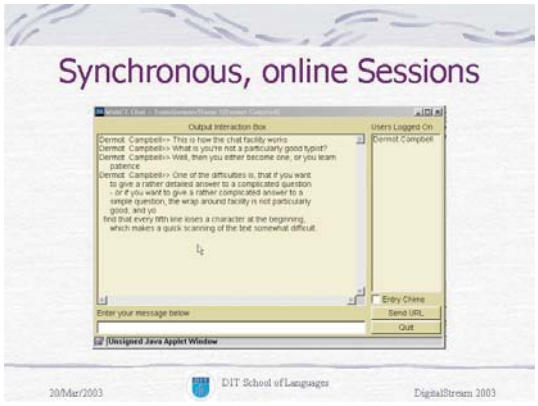
The instructor in turn can apply the colouring scheme to the students' work and provide quality feedback from within a standard word-processing package such as Microsoft Word or Corel WordPerfect.

The student's task is to remove the instructor's coloured feedback, after due consideration has been given to the points made, and collaborative discussion has been entered into with other students on the programme.




The calendar is a handy tool for the efficient running of the course.

Ideally, live sessions should be agreed well in advance, but real life intervenes and sometimes it is necessary to be flexible. The calendar allows such flexibility without the necessity to contact all the students individually regarding any changes to the proposed schedule.

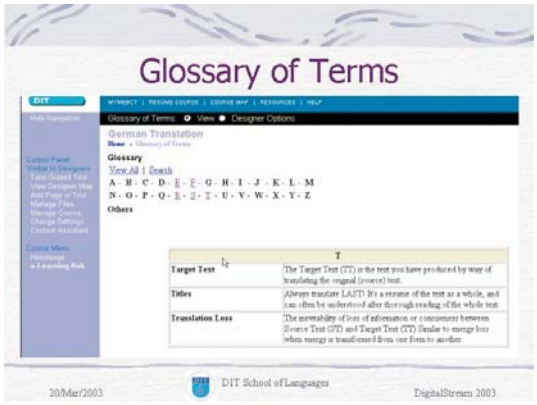



While the 'Chat' facility is more basic than one might wish, it serves its function reasonably well.

'Crowd control' can be a problem if several students wish to take part simultaneously in a discussion. Instructor feedback often requires a lengthy answer, which leaves students wondering what's going on while the feedback is being prepared.

A simple solution is to have agreed codes such as inserting asterisks '***' to represent the message: 'Please read this text while awaiting more feedback on the topic.' When the instructor is finished inputting a reply, a series of number signs '###' can signify: 'The feedback is complete and I'm ready for your input now.'

The live interaction can be recorded and made available to the students, especially those who couldn't participate. While it gives a complete – and therefore untidy – record of the online session, it will capture the main thrust of the discussion and can serve as a useful 'aide-mémoire' of the proceedings.

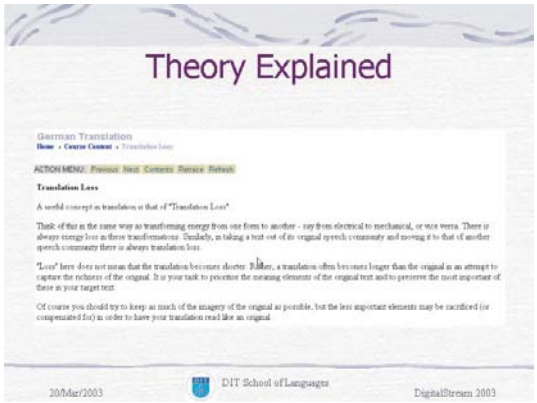



Like the Theory pages, the Glossary can be built up gradually and displayed as a complete listing, or as a listing under alphabetical headings, as shown here.

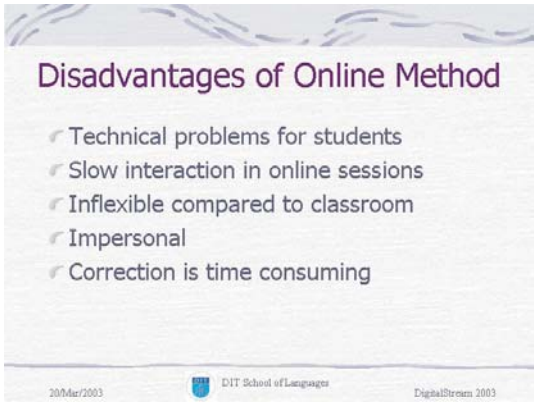
The glossary can work on two levels: either attached to the individual translation text, with restricted application, or with relevance to all texts covered.

Discussion Boards can play a useful role for students who do not wish to, or cannot take part in real-time 'chats'.

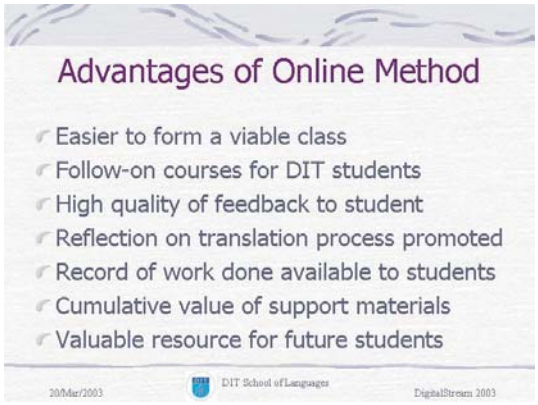
They can also be useful for eager students who cannot let go of a text and want to continue the discussion when the group as a whole has moved on. This happens!




This is a more elaborated version of the individual glossary entry and can complement the Theory Pages section.




- Technical difficulties should be taken seriously. Some students access the online session from work, in which case their company's firewall might exclude them from participating in chatroom activities, which require a two-way flow of information.
- Other students have a slow modem, in which case synchronous activities test their equipment ... and their patience.
- Missing in the online version of the course is the immediate interactivity of face-to-face work. The technology imposes a certain rhythm, which can constrain interactivity.
- Online work can be lonely, but then often translators have a personality structure which can cope with the potential isolation.
- Correction rate – depending on level of analysis – can take about 10-12 words per minute. In order to maintain cost-effectiveness it is important to balance instructor time spent on corrections and course fees.



- Because of work commitments and traffic gridlock, it is difficult to form a viable class group able to meet weekly or twice per week on campus. Online delivery may be the only solution.
- This form of delivery can benefit new language graduates distributed over a wide geographical area, who are used to working within a virtual learning environment (VLE).
- Using colour coding and focused categories, students can be provided with differentiated feedback. This stimulates reflection on the translation process.
- While it may be time consuming, the quality of the feedback justifies the effort. Less organised students have a complete record of their source texts and translations.
- As the course progresses, a body of knowledge of translation theory is built up, based on translations actually worked on, rather than read in the abstract in a textbook.
- Corrected translations can be posted in the VLE as a case study for the next cohort of students.