

**Lumiņa CHIOREAN  
Cristina NICOLAE**

**Humanities in the Spotlight**

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Cristina NICOLAE**

**Humanities in the Spotlight**  
**The Role of Humanities in Pandemic Times**

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Luminița CHIOREAN

Cristina NICOLAE

*Humanities in the Spotlight*

*The Role of Humanities in Pandemic Times*

Studies of literary criticism and discourse analysis, philosophy of culture,  
history, linguistics and the teaching of specialized languages

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“Your writing has taken you beyond your own thoughts. Your writing has proven to be wittier than you, so your writing is not just yours. And the less yours it is, the better it is.”  
(Andrei Pleșu, Romanian philosopher)

The Editors

**Authors take full responsibility for the content of their contributions and accuracy of references.**

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## Chapter Twenty-Seven PLAYING SERIOUS GAMES IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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### **Abstract**

*Building on the outcomes of an Erasmus+ Project, the authors explore the possibility of employing simulation and gamification for the teaching/learning of contents in the field of Humanities and transversal competences at university level. Two Serious Games representing two diverse types of design are described and commented upon, particularly under the viewpoint of their narrative component. Their experimentation provides some initial results in terms of impact and stakeholders' satisfaction.*

**Keywords:** *Simulation, Gamification, Storyboarding, Teaching Methods Innovation, Higher Education*

### **1. Introduction**

The Erasmus+ ELSE (*Eco/ological Learning and Simulation Environments in Higher Education*) project (2018-2021) is promoted by the Università degli Studi della Tuscia (Viterbo, IT) through a partnership with nine universities, both within Europe and beyond, as well as with EntropyKN, a small-medium business (SME) specialising in Technology Enhanced Learning. ELSE aims at studying and promoting the use of virtual simulation environments developing competences at a university level. Based on the vast interdisciplinary literature available and on the research carried out in the last 20 years, which showed the training and educational potential of Technology Enhanced Learning, ELSE identified a few specific operational objectives. These are planning and testing virtual learning objects and environments that are needed for university-level educational goals and teaching methodologies, also in relation to the different cultural backgrounds characterising each international partner. The methodological approach aims at promoting and implementing a generative virtuous circle including *pedagogical approach, teaching and training planning and technological implementation for learning*.

ELSE is an international workshop for university-level didactic innovation embracing the pedagogy of *learning by doing*, a participatory heuristic approach, metacognitive didactics and the use of virtual simulation and gamification in Higher Education. The preferred research sector is an efficient and didactically targeted integration of analog training resources with virtual-technological resources, in a context where trainers are independent and competent in terms of

the project they are promoting. Therefore, one of the expected outputs is the training of university instructors involved in the project with a view to improving their technological competences in relation to the didactic-training planning in integrated learning environments.

The partner company EntropyKN has therefore set the ELSE E-CORE editor to create Serious Games, a series of videogames developed with an educational and training perspective in mind, that is also easy to use for those who are not game designers. E-CORE is a flexible, easy-to-use and easy-to-customise editor. It allows its users to select characters and scenarios which are consistent with reality, upload any file format, such as, for example, pdf, word, videos, Web pages to support the story, as well as provide qualitatively and quantitatively detailed feedback in the final stage. It can be integrated with any training platform or tool through the use of LTI-Learning Tools Interoperability communication protocols. It can also be used as a co-design tool and improve cooperation between a teacher and his or her students. As far as this project is concerned, the tool is aimed at training and developing a *learning game designer's* basic ability—planning training actions based on objectives and being able to create an engaging storytelling experience.

During the first year of ELSE's action research activities, some tools for the training *eco-system* were created, such as two basic-format serious games that have been tested with two specific samples of university students.

## **2. Translation as 'moving into a new house'**

### *2.1. The conception*

The context of the Serious Game *Moving House* is any university course dealing with translation as both theory and practice. Since some of ELSE partner teams operate in the field of applied linguistics/ELT and regularly hold courses on translation, the idea came naturally to develop a Serious Game which would actively present students with basic concepts and attitudes/competences involved in translation. From the very moment of its conception the role of this digital tool was to be mainly motivational, its position in the course being introductory. In the case of the specific course entitled "Translating: from theory to practice" held by the author for the second cycle degree of Modern Philology at Tuscia University, the SG and all its steps—presentation, play, debriefing and possible replay—are meant to enhance a normal six/eight hour initial phase. This first phase starts with a survey asking students about any former translation experience they might have

had. Students are therefore asked to identify translation proper (i.e. *interlinguistic translation*) and reach a provisional definition of the components involved in the peculiar process of communication that is translation even before they are faced with any theoretical reading. This inductive learning phase is usually managed through critical thinking around translation's *wh-questions* (*what? who? who for? how? why?*), collaborative or individual research around key-words/concepts (e.g. *adaptation* or the famous Italian pun *traduttore traditore*) and debating the more adequate strategies for a 'successful' translation. Experience reveals that an interesting way to approach these topics and identify the object of translation is focussing on the etymology shared with little difference by IT *traduzione* (LAT *transduco*) and E *translation* (LAT *transfero*, or better *translatum*). After some discussion, the conclusion is easily reached that the whole translation process very much resembles the situation of changing places. What one transfers is the content of a former environment that needs to be adjusted to a new environment. This infallibly emerges as a powerful metaphor to contrast the mental imprint stemming from an idiomatic expression that exists in many European languages. This is the idea that one translates 'from a language in or toward another language', as if one transferred the whole of one linguistic code to make it overlap with the whole of a different linguistic code. Whereas one brings a text produced in the source language (and culture) to become 'the same-but-not-quite' text to be harboured in the context of a target language (and culture): just like moving furniture!

This was the seminal idea to the SG storyboard. The plot was enriched with the choice of a young musician as a protagonist and player's avatar. Thanks to its intrinsic power of interpretation and its vocation to fusion, music is sure to play a relevant role in conveying the fundamental idea of translation as adaptation. The story is mapped by two underlying conceptual metaphors—TRANSLATION IS MOVING HOUSE and TRANSLATION IS MUSIC according to the classical cognitive-linguistic approach (Lakoff and Johnson 1980). Thus, the SG also exploits the by now widely acknowledged educational efficacy of metaphorical training methods particularly when combined with storytelling (Casula 2002; Fabbri and Munari 2010; Sford 2014; Strongoli 2017).

The production was preceded by an excruciatingly detailed preparatory phase including an initial analysis of the general objectives in terms of academic contents, competences and specific learning strategies (Tables 1, 2). At a later stage, the plot was broken up into chapters with individual scenarios and indication of possible support documents (Tables 3, 4, 5). Lastly, the actual steps were designed.

Table 1 – Start from the goal: ask yourselves....

<b>What goal do I want to achieve with my students?</b>	Reflecting upon and discussing critically the five wh- questions of translating: i.e. what? who? who for? why? how? For example: do I translate a language or a text? what is the translator's position in the communicative process? who are my customers/receivers? what kind of text adaptation am I to produce?
<b>What competences should they develop, so that I can say they are prepared/they have clearly understood, etc.?</b>	Basic decision-making about translating a text, i.e.: is it worth at all? who am I translating it for? should my translation be more source- or target-oriented? what aids do I need?
<b>What behaviours do I expect from someone who has developed these skills?</b>	Refraining from starting to translate without first reading and fully analysing a text. Planning the workflow in advance. Anticipating textual and linguistic difficulties.
<b>WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE GOOD AT... TRANSLATING?</b>	Making the source text 'comprehensible' to the target audience. Recognising the nature and the typology of the text to translate. Identifying a tradition of translations. Practising textual and linguistic analyses in the shortest possible time. Finding the equivalents (from creative to identical) in the target language.

Table 2 – Define the process and the winning strategy

<b>What should s/he do?</b>	Combine both critical reflection and critical practice, not necessarily in this order.
<b>What are the priorities?</b>	The priority is always to acquire awareness of what one is learning while doing and thinking while practising.
<b>If translation is a process, what are its main phases?</b>	Basic decision-making (see above). Deep reading and text analysis. Collecting information about the contents/other translations. Collecting a data base of recurring lexicon in both languages. Spotting and listing possible translation difficulties. Finally putting pen to paper to find the equivalents in the target language while sticking to a principle of economicity. Proofreading the translation.
<b>The worst process</b>	Traditionally, learning about the translation process means extensive reading of translation theories and debates, but this shows to be inefficient in order to develop actual skills.
<b>The riskiest one</b>	The opposite way is to challenge students with a direct attempt at translating. Like any other completely inferential method, this is time consuming and ruled by chance.
<b>The best process</b>	It seems more productive to start with a phase of critical thinking based on personal experiences in the field. Everyone has already practised translation at some level. After reaching a common understanding of what translation implies, it is possible to move to some (un/semi)guided practice and to subsequent observations and inferences. The serious game could help us 'live' this phase of critical reflection through a metaphorical story.

Table 3 – General information on *Moving House* SG

<b>TITLE:</b> <i>Moving House</i>
<b>DESCRIPTION:</b> A player in a marching band decides to improve his position by joining a big orchestra. This implies changing place and adjusting to a new situation.
<b>PLAYER GOAL:</b> Performing in front of a board of examiners to get the new job.
<b>MAIN GOAL:</b> (in terms of competences)
1. learning how to deal with the anxiety of a new situation/decision/achievement
2. learning what is implied by moving into a new house
3. learning who/what can help
4. performing for a different audience in a different context