



Διάλογος

**Curriculum for learners: a case
from Italian studies**

Dialogue down the post-truth hole: programmes and
tools for digging through information and beliefs in the
post-truth era

by Complutense University and project partners

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Introduction

This curriculum has been designed with the purpose of introducing Critical Thinking modules in official courses for undergraduates and graduates in EU Humanities-related Faculties.

We are living in a context of “information disorder”. Fake news is not a new phenomenon, but we are experiencing not only a growing number of fake news, but also a faster and faster spread of them through social media. The Oxford Dictionary choose in 2016 the term “post-truth” as world of the year. It defines it as: “circumstances in which people respond more to feelings and beliefs than to facts”. Under this point of view, the lies circulating through Internet are not the real problem; the real problem is that we tend to relay more and more in what suits our personal situation without any need to find out if it is true or false.

We are facing a lack of critical thinking about the information we are receiving. According to a Stanford University study carried out in 2017, 82% of High School students cannot discriminate an advertisement paid by a brand or institution from a proper new. On top of that, most of the students trusted only in information that contains one or more pictures.

Internet has got rid of the context in most the information. Only a few years ago, students had to find the information on an encyclopaedia or a book or a teacher or from someone with some authority on the subject. Now they just tap the object of their enquiry on the computer or smartphone and read what appears on top of the page. Most of the students stop here, not even going to the second link; sometimes they go a bit further, but they never scroll to the following screen.

Fighting against this lack of context is vital to address students in the right direction. They need to be more critical about the information they are receiving. Most universities are working on a method to help them verify the information. Professor Sam Wineburg form Stanford University proposes a very simple way of

doing it: he calls it “side reading”. The method is based on a very simple resource: before reading the page down, vertically, open another tab and investigate the source, horizontally.

Wineburg and a group of professors published a scientific paper with a side-reading experiment. Before explaining anything to a group of 87 young people, professors asked them to identify the reliability of a page as acceptable or not. Only 3 youngsters opened another tab to check the source or the CV of their authors. The rest tried to unravel the answer by analysing the page, with traditional critical thinking. The methods were almost random, without a proper method. Kind of: is it a .com or .org domain? Do you have many links? Do you have a lot of ads? What do they say in "about us"?

After four sessions on side reading, 67 of the 87 youngsters looked for information outside of that page. Instead, with the common practice, only two of the three who did side-reading were correct about the dubious credibility and robust about the reasons. The other 84 focused "exclusively on features that were irrelevant or could be manipulated" by the authors. After the sessions, 36 of the young people found the information about the dubious financing of the page.

Media literacy is needed more than ever, and more after the Corona virus breakout. Indeed, in the wake of fake news there is a renewed interest in developing media literacy. If new generations get their information from social networks and other online resources, they must learn to decode what they read.

Bearing in mind this information disorder context, at Universidad Complutense we have been acting on three curriculum subjects for undergraduate students. Two of them Contemporary Italian Literature subjects and the third one Theory and Practice of Translation subject. We have dedicated one third of total curriculum hours (20 out of 60 hours) to develop in HE students critical thinking skills. The information about this part of the curriculum has been given at the beginning of the academic year and has been published

in the syllabus of the subjects at the web page of both the BA involved.

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Module 1 – *Critical thinking* through Italian Narrative. Critical use of fiction and artistic languages

Synopsis

- Authors: Aurora Conde; Manuela Rodríguez de Partearroyo.
- Duration: 20 hours.
- Target: 26 students of the 3rd year (most of them: 22 years old); Bachelor's in *Modern Languages*; Course: Italian Narrative (60 hours).

During the Dialogos Project seminars in “Italian Narrative” (15% of our semester time-schedule lessons) we focused particularly on two reflections included in “Διάλογος H. E. Student Curriculum” document (quoted):

- A) *“Re-establishing trust in governments and journalism is not an easy task. However, more critical and sceptical citizens, if provided with the right tools, will be more equipped to decide for themselves who deserves their trust and who doesn't. To achieve this, people's Critical Thinking (CT) and knowledge of the world of information, namely Media and Information Literacy (MIL) must be increased in order to enhance critical information verification, and purposeful engagement with technology”.*

The main task of our proposal during the seminar has been exactly to show to the students that literature (and arts) are extremely efficient tool to increase their critical approach not only to culture, but even more to everyday reality (and society)

- B) *“(THIS cv) It is designed to serve as a model curriculum to give university teachers and trainers, a framework for the development of applied critical thinking, through a specific*

(though reflexive) set of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values. Within a CT perspective, the dialogical way of knowing things, constitutes the royal road to knowledge. On the other hand, the so-called digital era provides both opportunities and threats, resources, and obstacles to this open-ended dialogical journey”.

It is very difficult to define in Narrative classes the concept of “fake news” given that lesson based on “fictional” texts. We started to approach a discussion about “objective” and “subjective” texts (p. e: publicity spots or *dépliants*...vs author’s fictions as novels, stories, films, photographs...). Student have been pushed to realize that a very effective (maybe the only) way to self defence against manipulation a misinformation, should be based on a scientists and academic way of knowledge. We settled traditional academic steps to strength critical and mental attitudes in order to obtain “*a specific (though reflexive) set of strength knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values*” (quoted from Διάλογος H. E. Student Curriculum”.

Thus, the practical project exercises and theoretical approach started from four “academic steps”:

- Deep and previous information on subject treated (bibliographic consultation, source texts readings...)
- Collective Discussion to share and contrasts information (bibliographical comparison, individual readings interpretation...)
- Self and collective critical reflection (paper, short essay...)

We wanted to strengthen the idea that the purpose of an “academic way of facing a text” (particularly in literature and Humanities) must be not to create any kind of truth but a solid, well informed and objectively contrasted “opinion”. Not an indisputable, incontestable and “unique” Truth, not a Fake-Truth, a Half-truth or a voluntarily manipulated one.

In this way, we introduced one of mail ideas in Διάλογος H. E. Student Curriculum document:

“A serious threat derives from what has been called “information disorder”, namely disinformation, misinformation, mal-information, generally known as “fake news”. Just to make sense of what is at stake, according to the public consultation on fake news and online disinformation commenced by European Commission in 2018 (EC 2018), over 97% of citizens claim to have been exposed to fake news, while 74% consider social media and messaging apps as the primary channels through which they come across fake news”.

(*) It is important to underline that the Covid-19 situation had caused a very unusual situation in university teaching development during the second UCM term. The most e-classes model adopted by our Faculty (only one of three lessons per month have been attending classes) hindered the initial Διάλογος Student Curriculum seminars and practical exercises. It has been necessary to adapt the curricular content as well as the quantity of documents and other bibliographic and Media texts. A part of the students involved in the Project quit for intermittent periods due to Covid-19 disease.

PRACTICAL CHALLENGES IN UNIVERSITY TEACHING AND GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

Critical thinking and a strong, incorruptible fight against fake News, Half or Fake Truths and Unique Thought should be not only the main and unrenounceable target in universities, but also even more the only base to support and build knowledge.

The tools Universities can use are very few, but very important.

First of all the increasingly open access to bibliographic, scientist and varied papers, and publications, not only thru the “classical” - but even now irreplaceable- libraries and documentary stocks; in the last decades, the crucial use of computer technology and applications and their global input to an easy share of knowledge and research results.

The other tool is a human one and related to the teaching activities. In Universities, the professor fills the roles from a privileged position: professor is in a broad and open term, “unquestionable authorities”. The students are-particularly in the beginning of their formation-, looking not only for the formation they should receive, but for an authorized and reliable information.

It is supposed that in an academic context, professors basically are transmitting “truths”, because the matter they work on, are the result of an extended, experienced during years and years of studies, research, reflections. Nevertheless, that is not entirely correct. Even in academic framework and in academic results (and “languages”), they are manipulations, disinformation, misleading inputs. In the best cases those -let us call them “mistakes”- crosses centuries and extended cultures, or- that is our study case- critical and historical literature studies. A particularly, an “authorized” author produced a rigorous edition, or a paper, or a book...that established during a long time period, an interpretation based on a sort of “fake truth”: in best perspective a bad interpretation, in worst a manipulation which contributes substantially to a general disinformation. In some cases, a very prestigious source, an “original” source, demonstrates its mistakes and unrelievable contest centuries after. In other cases, the achieved authority of great professors, discourage to finding the fault with the source text or interpretation.

Of course, a mistaken interpretation happens even with no “manipulate will” and lucky those are the most in all academic fields and subjects. The most positive (and probably most “true”) explanation is that a professor, an academic member, try always to communicate knowledge but cannot be avoid sharing always an opinion. Universities in fact are intellectual spaces to share and feed not so much objective information but many “ways of seeing” using the wonderful John Berger’s suggestion. From Διάλογος project perspective professors should face always the strong responsibility that to teach (form and inform) implies with full consciousness of that there are subjects that need a particular care. In the Διάλογος Student Curriculum practical seminars and exercise, we tried to.

THE SUBJECT AND CLASS CONTEXT- UCM

Our proposal is part of the program of Italian Narrative in the curriculum of second or third year of Modern Languages and Literature Grade in Universidad Complutense de Madrid (UCM).

The subject is in Italian and conceived to complete a part of the Literature specialization in Italian Studies. It is an optional subject for all the Grade students (French, German, English, specialization) and for Spanish, Theory, Comparative, and Literature Studies.

This year 17 students be enrolled the subject, three of them leave the course during the semester (Covid-19 direct or indirect causes).

This wide profile of student and their heterogeneous academic background requires a short period of introduction at the beginning of each semester, which is, basically, a presentation of Italian narrative tradition and its major literary trends and authors and, after the introduction, a focus on the XX century literary production. The subject is vast and its contents extremely wide.

The two biggest challenges to face are an appropriate and representative selection of authors, and in parallel, a theoretical approach to remove prejudices and topics that most of our students have about Italian literature. This literature is mainly unknown for the student from other Modern fields or specializations and, sometimes, even for Italian students themselves.

Italian culture- and in particular Italian literature- is tie by most of our Grade students to the artistic production, in a vague and we can say “romantic” way. For many of the university students choosing our studies, Italy is still and above all, the “beauty country”, the Renaissance, beaches, fun, food and friendly Italian character and way of life. There is no objective or scientific or academic approach. That is why we think that this erroneous but positive embracement

of Italian topic, is a very good and useful ground to build a critical, renewed vision.

Of course, our academic first target has been to offer a complete and “objective” information about the subjects and authors we propose in our studies. However, we have tried to come close to the initial problem (the impact and the force of what we have just referred as the “Italian topic”).

Learning Outcomes

THEORETICAL GOALS AND ENLARGED REFLECTIONS

We want to demonstrate how even an abstract and extremely subjective matter as “narrative” or “literature” are a very effective tools to remove wrong visions and to open deep and vigorous reflections about, not only concrete aspects (as “Italian narrative” could be), but also and even more, about our present.

We tried to raise awareness the students that literary (and in a largest way, artistic) languages, are useful and powerful tools in order to increase critical thinking in largest aspects of life.

Those “languages” are often closer to reality, and put under the gaze Human behaviour, reactions, ties...with society, history, and probably first of all-, self- conscience and identity.

Their force is to be found in their *per se* critical approach to World, and the critical and independent mirror that artistic views and proposal give, can be a strong model in order to develop critical and independent ways of thinking.

We are aware that theoretical basis should be obviously prove in a practical way.

For that reason, we started from a large consideration about how Italian Narrative Student got in touch with Italian culture (why they choose this Subject, what did they know about Italy, how did they

get in touch with Italian cultural heritage...). We focused on the iconic text idea and on the extraordinary Italian heritage of iconic and iconic texts (**WORKSHEET DIALOGOS ITALIAN NARRATIVE VISUAL HERITAGE- “ICONOTEXTS”**)

We start from the “Italian-Topic” consideration, and we offer to the students some topic-descriptions (samples of tourist brochures). We ask them to reflect about the match between those “topic-text” and their interior image of Italy. (**WORKSHEET DIALOGOS ITALIAN NARRATIVE- TOURIST APPROACHES**)

Some clear conclusions appear (we develop conclusions of this paper) first of all the association between “Italy” concept and monumental/visual but even space.

We started then to work about the three concepts, particularly space and visual perceptions, enlarging to self and present experience (Vid worksheets in Appendix),

We introduce at this point a different way to describe not only “Italy” but Human relation with visual impacts, space- self experience...

We approach Luigi Ghirri’s Italian photographer works, particularly his “Viaggio in Italia” and, and to observe his empties, anti-topic, unexpected, amazed visual re-presentations comparing those artistic languages to more “realistic” and recognizable ones

We support the study of Luigi Ghirri’s works and meaning with some Italo Calvino’s writings (fictional and non-fictional), particularly his reflections about Photography as true copy and “witness” of Reality, about the crucial meaning of “visibility” and about external, objectives and internal, subjective, spaces.

The first idea of Italy (the topic one) cracked gradually among students as well as modified their own self-reflections about their relationship with spaces (real and mental).

Student debates about the two kind of texts there are approaching: comparing tourist (and journalistic) writings to the artistic and creative works. They could observe how “fake” or “misinformed” languages use apparently more “realistic”, descriptive, objective...forms. How an apparently innocent tourist brochure i.e., manipulates and influence our mental reflection with objects and reality.

By the other side, artistic languages – apparently more rhetorical, manipulated and subjective-, always demands a critical reception because they are not “realistic” and never grants any kind of “truth”. Originate from all those reflections, a derivative –important-, matter appears in discussion: the value of memory and its strength on conscience, identity and self-representation of past and present.

The need to “remember” not only in a subjective, in part uncontrollable way but in an objective and well-informed one (the academic tool), focused a very interesting, participatory and productive debate in seminars.

Student concludes that collective memory, need to base on as well, deep and critical information, which is the biggest (maybe the only) guarantee to remember in an objective way our collective history. As individuals, memories support identity and deepest feelings and are made by a subjective uncontrollable selection of fragments related to subconscious. For that reason, personal memory is fragile, controversial, incoherent but so strong to hold our entire word and life conception; it could be a friendly or, by the contrary, a traitor tool in our life.

Collective memory instead could not and should not be “uncontrollable” and in fact, it is not. The narration of the past (recent or remote) holds our collective present and is, more of times, a subtle manipulation in order to political, economic, social interests. As a very simple example, the transmission of Italy’s legendary beauty and friendly society, responds to that kind of interests (tourism, politic, economic).

Critical thinking is a privileged way to avoid any kind of manipulation, due to oblige a careful, ever doubtful reception of the “collective narratives” spread by History, Media and in the last decades, social network.

Critical thinking should base on direct, critical information and on deep competence in matters. An independent and stimulating method and approach, could strongly contributes to that goal.

Starting from all those considerations, this literary and very specific topic in Italian Narrative, furthermore, served to foster a collective and personal search about many questions as well as a deep reflection about the real meaning of “reality”.

During the seminars pushed by some specific exercise students had requested to reconsider their own experience about some of them (Vid worksheets in Appendix).

Module 1 - Practical activities

GOALS AND EXERCISES

As it has said, our work in seminars focused on the collective image of Italy, based on its imaginary and visual representation. Monumental, urban and landscape representation is a contemporary subject of reflection for many creators in photography, cinema, literature, plastic arts), as well as the urban environment and its influence on person is.

Calvino and few other contemporary artists (particularly, the photographer Luigi Ghirri) addressed this matter during the 70s and 80s of the last century in a very original way.

As has been said, we have given particularly importance to Ghirri works in “Trip in Italy -Italian landscape”, his personal and a collective photograph work in which the topic image of the country is completely renewed in a very astonishing way, fighting against the “Bel Paese” touristic idea.

Both of them proposed a visionary treatment about a subject that emerged again in the last period. Particularly the past decade has been witnessing a remarkable resurgence of interest in urban space representations. A number of essays and artistic works largely discuss its impact in conscience and behaviour. All those works often underline the importance of memories and past in the collective and subjective existential recognition.

In a similar way, the more abstract idea of heterotopic, utopic and dystopic spaces – according to Foucault’s proposals-, appears as a central theme in artistic reflection and we mentioned it during seminars.

A large, participatory and enriching debate had developed in all the practical seminars.

We collected the results of those debates in “Student Exercise and worksheets” document, the practical exercise they had done at the end of seminars.

The exercises are to be done after the explanations and introduction to Calvino’s thought and works, the reading of mandatory and personal texts, and the study of Ghirri’s works.

Students read articles and texts about the “topic” descriptions of Italy (Italian beauty climate, cultural heritage...). All texts were tourist brochures and travel guides. Some shown in classes, others found by students.

Then student observed Luigi Ghirri’s Italian images from “Viaggio in Italia” and other series. **(WORKSHEET DIALOGOS ITALIAN NARRATIVE- GHIRRI)**

We focused on beach and cities.

Then students read Calvino’s works on Visibility, use of photographic image (“a photographer adventure”) and on “reality” and the possibility to translate any kind of objective reality to any

kind of language (*Collection of Sand*, chapter “Levels of Reality in Literature”; *The uses of literature: essays*) (**WORKSHET DIALOGOS ITALIAN NARRATIVE - TEXTS SELECTION- ENGLISH VERSION**).

Then we debate comparing tourist and commercial languages – “objectives” and “real” description”- with Ghirri’s visual texts and opinions and Calvino’s ideas, essays and fictions. We enlarge to some other great Italian contemporary authors. (**WORKSHEET DIALOGOS ITALIAN NARRATIVE- A DIFFERENT WAY OF SEEING**)

The debate focused on two matters:

- The collective idea about Italy
- The relation and self-relation to urban landscape

The main goal is to confront students to the different ways of reality representation, starting from the more “objective” one (landscape, environment, cities....) and drive their reflections on the fragility of “real”, the subjectivity of any representation, the need to contrasts our pre-judgments about all reality.

Later, we moved discussion to the literary and visual re-presentation of reality and focus on the contemporary use of instant shots (Instagram, social network ...).

Some crucial questions came to light: Are those instant pictures catching our “reality”? Are they really a representation or a construction?

Journalist, touristic and commercial texts had confronted to artistic-creative writing, to demonstrate that often, literature (and art more in general) are nearest to “reality”, more and better than the mass media.

As final exercise, we asked students to think about their own experiences: concretes one, as a “day in the beach”, or more abstract as their relationship with their city, neighbourhood, their home...

This part of exercises brings into play the importance of collective and subjective memories.

Student wrote down a short paper. (**WORKSHHET DIALOGOS ITALIAN NARRATIVE- STUDENT EXERCISE MODEL**)

A large, participatory and enriching debate had developed in all the practical seminars.

WHY WE CHOSE THE AUTHORS

As has been said, during the Διάλογος Student Curriculum seminar we worked starting on Italo Calvino's works. The author had been chosen for his specific intellectual and creative profile, particularly fit to the project objectives.

Among many other questions:

Calvino is a particularly interesting author and his large, heterogeneous and, still now, stimulating intellectual profile, is probably the clue to understand his international projection and importance. Calvino is today an outstanding postmodern author not only as a writer, but also as a thinker and his full production (fictions, essays, and theoretical contribution) considered as a fundamental conceptual work.

We started studying and delve into Calvino's most relevant aspects, both biographical than creative and intellectual (Vid the support materials in Appendix). We focused on some particular aspects: Calvino has a scientific and academic background; he started studying engineering in Torino, the father was an agronomist, the mother a botanist.

Calvino never abandoned his education and his contribution in scientific subjects as maths, astronomy, and geometry... had a very high level in specialist opinion.

These facts are clearly perceptible in his narrative production, particularly in some of his most famous titles as *Cosmicomics*, *Invisible Cities*, *If on a winter's night traveller* an so on. In those

books, Calvino even shows the influence of his participation – as one founder- of the OuLiPo group in Paris, a “literature laboratory” whose members tried to apply mathematics and geometric models and scientist “languages” (particularly combinatory models) to fiction (novels, short stories, poetry...).

Besides this double-sided education (scientific and humanist), Calvino spoke several languages (French and English in particular, but also Spanish as being married to an Argentinian translator), lived in foreign countries (in Paris for more than 15 years). Due to this, he has a profile, which is very close to our Modern Languages and Literature students.

Calvino main themes across his entire production was the relation between thinking, vision, experience of “reality” and artistic reproduction, including, obviously, writing.

For Italo Calvino, “Reality” is a subjective and in part untransferable existential experience. He deeply works on the limits of “Reality” and his scientific background forced him to search how words and ideas, subjectively build and organized in our conscience, could represent an objective perception of reality. His famous fiction Palomar is entirely dedicated to proving the impossibility of believe and use “description”.

Calvino focuses the problem of external appearance of things and reality (their “visibility”), and its close and unbreakable relation with ideas, concepts, images and words, that is to say with the way we see, experience and embrace the world, the facts which surround us, our life itself.

We think that this subject (the relation between “visibility”, image, reality and, at the very end, the “true”), is a very current subject of discussion and could really interest our students.

Calvino is an extremely “interdisciplinary” author: he worked and wrote about Physics, Maths, Art (Plastic and Architecture), philosophy... He was close friend to painters, film directors, editors... His works (fictional and non-fictional) shown a deep,

large, competence in all those matters from the literary perspective. All Calvino's works drives to other authors and often opens to large and hidden conclusions.

We introduce Calvino's general thought and works (**WORKSHEET DIALOGOS ITALIAN NARRATIVE-INTRODUCING CALVINO**).

As has been said, we have given particularly importance to Luigi Ghirri works too and his personal way to offer Italian view, landscapes and urban images in which the topic image of the country is completely renewed in a very astonishing way, fighting against the "Bel Paese" touristic idea.

Ghirri's works were appreciate and commented by Calvino (students read Belpoliti essay about this), and his legacy, as well as Calvino's, is increasing in the last years as perfect examples of a different way of face and represents Italy and the perception of reality. Ghirri's empties spaces ask for another language to complete their meaning, they push the receptors to observes not only what is contained in the images, but even more what omitted. A critical reception (a critical thinking approach) is necessary to understand those works, as well as Calvino's fictions and thought.

We introduce both authors relation.

Both authors proposed a visionary treatment about a subject that emerged again in the last period. Particularly the past decade has been witnessing a remarkable resurgence of interest in landscape. While this recovery invokes a return of past traditions and ideas, it also implies renewal, invention, and transformation. A number of essays and artistic works discuss why landscape is gaining increased attention today, and what new possibilities might emerge from this situation. Themes such as urbanism, infrastructure, representation, and temporality had explored in discussions drawn from recent developments. Those works underline the importance of memories and past in the collective and subjective existential recognition.

In a similar way, the more abstract idea of heterotopic, utopic and dystopic spaces – according to Foucault’s proposals-, appears as a central theme in artistic reflection.

To guarantee an equal-collective approach to all students some “mandatory reading” had selected.

Besides those mandatory readings, every student added personal papers, essays and other materials (TV spots, videos, Instagram pictures....)

We used Italian or Spanish version in order to the two languages used in our Grade.

EXERCISE ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSIONS

Results and analysed comment of student’s papers and exercise will be included (still in progress) (WORKSHEET DIALOGOS ITALIAN NARRATIVE- RESULTS).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

All Calvino’s works (fiction and essays) published in English version by Penguin Modern Classics). We used Italian or Spanish version.

At the end of any item (see Worksheets) a specific bibliography is included.

Besides those mandatory readings, every student added personal papers, essays and other materials (TV spots, videos, Instagram pictures....)

Italo Calvino’s essays:

From: *Six Memos for the Next Millennium*, chapter “Visibility”

From *Collection of Sand*, chapter “Levels of Reality in Literature”

The uses of literature: essays (Original Title: *Una pietra sopra*)
Hermit in Paris

Italo Calvino's Fictions:

Invisible Cities

Palomar

Difficult Loves (chapter "A photograph adventure")

If on a winter's night a traveller

Marco Belpoliti:

Conversazione con Luigi Ghirri: Fotografare l'italia,
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De Seta, Cesare :

L'Italia del Grand Tour. Da Montaigne a Goethe, Electa
Ed., 1992

Didi-Huberman, Georges, Chéroux, Clément, Arnaldo, Javier:

Cuando las imágenes tocan lo real, Circulo de Bellas Artes
(Madrid), 2017

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Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias (From:
Architecture /Mouvement/ Continuité October 1984; ("Des
Espace Autres," March 1967 Translated from the French by
Jay Miskowiec)

<http://web.mit.edu/allanmc/www/foucault1.pdf>

Luigi Ghirri:

Italian Landscape, The Map and the Territory; 'Thinking Images' Icons, Landscapes, Architectures. (Spanish version: *El mapa y el territorio*; Museo de Arte Reina Sofía)
Pensare per immagini. Ediz. Illustrata Mondadori Electa 2014

Luigi Marfè:

Geografie dello sguardo (Ghirri, Berger, Celati) (PDF version)

Victor Stoichita:

Ver y no ver, Siruela 2005

Module 2 – *Critical thinking* through literature the critical use of resources in literary studies

Synopsis

- Authors: Leonardo Vilei; Marco Pioli.
- Duration: 20 hours (10 hours of classroom work and 10 hours of individual and group work).
- Target: 26 students of the 4th year (most of them: 22 years old); Bachelor's in *Modern Languages*; Course: Italian Language (C1 level-CEFR) and Literature (60 hours).

The information about this part of the subject has been included in the syllabus that can be found in the UCM Web page.

<https://www.ucm.es/estudios/grado-lenguasmodernasyuslitteraturas-plan-802809>

Our contribution to the project foresees an experimental work with 26 students of the last year of the Degree in Modern Languages, with the following premise: Today's college students can access a very large number of information, with a certainly unprecedented speed. However, from the teaching experience acquired in recent years, and especially during the months of confinement during the second quarter of 2020, it is clear that his academic work does not always reflect the scientific standards required by his level of training. In particular, when they have to develop a research or to write a paper, students demonstrate some recurring "vices": they tend to consult the same sources online; they are limited to the first information traced and do not demonstrate sound criteria when it comes to seriously evaluating their academic reliability.

Therefore, in the *mare magnum* of resources at their disposal, students often demonstrate little capacity for critical thinking with respect to the web as a "place" of bibliographic research and fail to discern the qualitative difference between common sources and

scientific knowledge. All this, of course, undermines their academic work and robs literary studies of their ability to transmit content useful for the cultural and existential maturation of students.

Therefore, this experimental work has aimed to accompany students on a useful journey to reverse this bad habit and mature in them a critical approach to literary studies, as a premise for the writing of the end-of-degree work and the imminent access to the professional world or to postgraduate studies. Through a methodology based on Active Learning, Learning by doing and Cooperative Learning, we have created a virtual environment of cooperation to help students study literature with a scientific approach and use bibliographic resources on the web in a conscious and critical way.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this course, participants will be able to:

- 1) question their own and other's biases, values and beliefs.
- 2) be aware of the possible use of web resources.
- 3) to study literature with a scientific approach and to use bibliographic and web resources in a conscious and critical way.
- 4) apply the set of questions that make up the critical thinking method to the world of literary studies.
- 5) to share the tools for the analysis of literary texts in a cooperative way.

Module Format

Theoretical Lecture and Practical Workshop. Educators will introduce the issues and students will work in small groups or couples.

- Methodologies: Active Learning; Learning by doing; Cooperative Learning.
- Materials: video; slides; surveys; webography and: bibliography; Power Point presentations.

- Evaluation: administration of an inbound and outbound form; papers written by students; mutual advice; direct observation.

➤ **Module 2 Course slides available to be downloaded on the project website**

Online resources to spot misleading graphs and statistics:

<https://www.loom.com/share/251f8c2f06864e90b66934c916d61876>

https://www.loom.com/share/0f731a0d7fda4f05b98bf65a64928024?sharedAppSource=personal_library

https://www.loom.com/share/ad653a6a5fee4d739da7c1e899762b54?sharedAppSource=personal_library

https://www.loom.com/share/2c66540b06fe451db26fb981a3f354ef?sharedAppSource=personal_library

https://www.loom.com/share/f9f19bdfcbea46e6a56e88ecd847f10?sharedAppSource=personal_library

https://www.loom.com/share/82117ea1c9ea41ee9116e71169a00d6f?sharedAppSource=personal_library

See also:

<https://venngage.com/templates/infographics/misleading-graphs-infographic-0b36b9c0-610e-4c84-85d1-2bbc11055013>

Module 2 PRACTICAL ACTIVITIES

- A first discussion with the student about the previous introductory videos.
- Answer a questionnaire in which they are called to express their attitude to the web resources in a literary research (The same questionnaire will be submitted at the end of the course, to check the impact of the module).
- First literary activity: the figure of Italo Calvino is introduced and together with the students we search the web for information about the author. We compare “common” resources in different languages, and we work on comparison.
- Students are divided in small groups: they have one week to write a paper containing a literary analysis of a Calvino’s tale and a comment to the resources they have found (how they found them; why they chose them or why they discard them).
- Educators read the papers and introduce the second plenary discussion about the resources; we especially talk about the academic “doors” to the knowledge, such as JSTOR, MUSE, Dialnet, some specific online tools provided by our library.
- Students have two more weeks to write a second paper on a different author and tale (among 15; we work with a literary anthology); in this case, they work individually, but each of them has to read a colleague’s paper and to write an inform to improve it.
- Educators read the papers, the informs and introduce the last plenary debate.
- Students answer to the final questionnaire.
- Educators sum up the questionnaire results and compare the two of them through graphics.

- Educators disseminate the results (we did in an online congress about innovation in education <https://youtu.be/zh4cnq-qUjI>).

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Module 3 – *Critical thinking* through translated texts. Evaluating the translated message

Synopsis

- Author: Mirella Marotta.
- Duration: 20 hours of classroom work + 20 hours of individual work.
- Target: 60 students of the 2nd year (most of them: 20 years old); Bachelor's in *Translation and Interpreting*; Course: Theory and Practice of Translation (60 hours).

The subject has a total of 60 hours of tuition; we have dedicated a third of the time to develop a critical thinking approach to the subject on our students. The final evaluation includes the participation on this project: 33% of the student's final mark will be given for this activity.

The information about this part of the subject has been included in the syllabus that can be found in the UCM Web page.

<https://www.ucm.es/estudios/grado-traduccion-einterpretacion-plan-805225>

We have been working with two groups of students following the same subject in the Translation and Interpreting UCM Degree. The first group are studying the languages combination English – French to Spanish; the second one, English – German to Spanish. In the first group there are 36 students and in the second one there are 24.

The objective we set ourselves was to develop critical thinking on translated texts. In our world more than 65% of the information comes to us in translation, mainly from English, but also from many other languages. This makes it very important for students to be able to develop critical thinking also towards translations.

From Wilhem von Humboldt to Edward Sapir and Benjamin Whorf, a line of thought argues that different languages express different ways of seeing the world. Wilhelm von Humboldt said that the different languages built different "world visions" (Weltanschauung), an idea later developed by American linguists Sapir and Whorf. The idea has been applied to translation in a variety of ways. Thus, for example, the Russian linguist Roman Jakobson (1959/2000) stated that Germans see death as a man (der Tod, male gender) while the Russians see her as a female (female gender), since the languages themselves attribute those genera. Languages therefore shape the way the world is perceived.

Based on these theories expressed by the Philosophy of Language, students are taught that choosing one term in translation while removing another determines a certain way of thinking and also a different way to present the reality to others. In that sense, information can be easily manipulated through translation.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this course, participants will be able to:

- 1) Check the source of a translated message (author or company)
- 2) Identify the context in which it has been produced
- 3) Evaluate if the translation modifies the real message
- 4) Propose a new translation text

Module Format

Taking into account the concepts set out above, a debate is established with students to become aware that "translation is not innocent" and learn to be critical about the texts of all kinds with which they meet every day.

The exercise they must perform is based on making 10 tabs, each with a translation problem, critically analysing what the problem is, how it affects understanding and how it influences society.

The tabs can identify errors in any medium: newspapers, advertising, literary translation, audiovisual translation (movies, series, video games), web pages, etc.

Module 2 PRACTICAL ACTIVITIES

- Having an initial discussion with the student about the information in translated texts. Stress to them the importance of been aware of every message we receive translated from another language and the need to be critical about its veracity.
- Provide the students a tab they have to fill with an “information disorder” they will observe. Explain to them the different files and concepts in the tab:
 1. Translated text
 2. Original text
 3. Author of the original text
 4. Translator
 5. Context in which the message has been produced
 6. Kind of information disorder they have spot in the translation
 7. Personal reflexion about how the decisions of the translator affect the real message
 8. Proposal of new translation
- Stress to students the need to look at the world around us in a critic way; they will have to be aware of every message, to try to identify what the original could have been and to think if the translated message is fare towards the original or it modifies the information in any way. Doing this, they will have to identify 10 mistranslations in any medium: newspapers, advertising, literary translation, audiovisual translation (movies, series, video games), web pages, etc. Then, they will have to fill a tab for any of those observations.

- The students will have to provide one filled tab every week and they will bring it to the lectures. One third of the time in every session (35 minutes) will be dedicate to the students to present in the classroom their tabs, explaining the problem orally and proposing to the classmates their way to solve the information problem.
- Finally, a debate is established between all the students; at the end of this debate, a final translation proposal will arise.

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