SVETIMŲJŲ KALBŲ STUDIJOS/ STUDIES OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES

Translation, Theory and Practice: an Interactive Approach

Ariane Bogain, Val Thorneycroft

Abstract. In this article, the development and assessment of a web-course in translation specifically designed for online collaborative learning will be analysed. After discussing the concepts of collaboration learning, problem-based learning and computer-supported collaboration learning within the constructivist paradigm it will seek to demonstrate that the field of translation lends itself particularly well to these online collaborative modes of learning. It will then discuss the pedagogical considerations behind the creation of the collaborative "Say what you mean. Mean what you say" translation website and investigate how Modern Languages students at Northumbria University reacted to using it. This investigation will focus on the impact of online collaboration on learners' achievement, satisfaction and participation. By highlighting the contrast between learners' very positive feedback and high level of satisfaction with their mixed achievement and participation that stemmed from their difficulties in applying the skills necessary to take full advantage of an online collaborative setting it will discuss the merits and pitfalls of collaboration learning. It will conclude on the crucial importance of key skills for online collaboration to be successful and the impact this has on universities' e-learning strategy.

Keywords: e-learning; collaborative learning; constructionism; online translation; problem-based learning.

Introduction

This article explores online collaboration in the field of translation through a case study of a problem-based electronic platform created in the French division of Northumbria University. It was designed for second-year language degree students with the purpose of assessing the benefits and potential drawbacks of online collaboration in the teaching of translation from French into English. The educational context of this project will be firstly outlined and the platform will then be presented. The research questions and methodology will subsequently be explained, followed by the findings.

The educational context

With the educational paradigm shift towards constructivism Problem-Based Learning (PBL) has become prevalent in many HE institutions (McPhee 2002; Pearson 2006). As this mode of learning relies on the co-construction of a solution among a small group it is also known as Collaborative Learning (Johnson and Johnson 1989 and 1996; Roschelle and Teasley 1995). The thrust behind PBL and Collaborative Learning lies in the constructivist tenet that in order to gain a deeper understanding learners should be "encouraged to find their own solution and to build on their prior knowledge and experiences" (Neo 2005: p6). Having to solve "real-life" problems enables learners to construct their own solutions, and by taking an "active" part in their learning they can gain a deeper understanding (Jonassen 1999).

The benefits of this mode of learning lie in the

"process of articulation, conflict and co-construction of ideas occurring when working closely with peers. Participants in a problem-solving situation have to make their ideas explicit (assertions, hypothesis, denials…) to other collaborators, and their disagreements prompt justifications and negotiations, thus helping students to converge to [sic] a common object of shared understanding" (Barros 1999: p449).

Collaborative Learning leads to knowledge-construction through a process of discussion and interaction with learning peers (Harasim 1989: p51).

By having to formulate their own constructs and solutions, learners think more critically. Indeed, providing an explanation improves the knowledge of the explainer and the process of explaining one's reasoning creates a higher level of conceptual understanding (Dillenbourg 1999). The verbalisation of this knowledge has an effect on both partners. Similarly, by having to justify themselves, learners make explicit the strategic knowledge that would otherwise remain implicit (Dillenbourg 1999). Finally, Collaborative Learning relies on and enhances learners' key and transferable skills, i.e. generic skills that learners have to acquire in order to make the most of their studies and then transfer to the workplace: *learners must understand and use conflict resolution skills, build trust within the group, communicate their ideas effectively, listen to other ideas, be able to reach consensus within the group and stay on task.* Learners are therefore able to develop a panoply of transferable skills: project-management, teambuilding, problem solving, interpersonal skills, leadership skills, time management; organisation skills.

With rapid technological progress over the years the next step for Collaborative Learning was to set up online communities

and online collaborative learning where learners would collaborate in a shared workspace. These environments are known as Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC), Computer-Supported Collaboration Learning (CSCL) or Computer-Supported Group-Based Learning (CGSGBL) (Michinov and Michinov 2005). They are all based on the notion of joint construction of a problem solution, the coordination of group members in planning the task and focusing both on the learning process and the learning result.

Online collaboration and translation

It can be argued that translation lends itself very well to online collaboration for various reasons.

Firstly, face-to-face group work in class is already widely used in translation teaching. Given the enforced reduction in contact hours between tutors and learners in British Higher Education, online collaboration can be seen as a way to provide students with further practice whilst taking advantage of the anywhere anytime nature of the Internet (Nisar 2002).

Secondly, translation fits in perfectly with the main criteria of effective PBL which have been defined as being complex, requiring knowledge and skills to be solved, having multiple solutions to a problem and requiring learners to have various hypotheses and to look for further information in order to choose the most appropriate (Pumtambekar 2006). Translation fits in very well as there is no "right" translation, as any translation requires careful thinking and justifications and learners are required to acquire skills to convey the meaning of the original text in another language.

Thirdly, online collaboration makes it easier to set up translation groups consisting of native speakers of both the language to translate from and the language to translate into. Not all universities have access to native speakers for their taught translation classes, in particular for the less common languages. Online collaboration enables the creation of virtual groups of mixed nationalities, for example via partner universities abroad. This, in turn, creates an ideal constructivist environment of learning with a "learned other" (Vygotsky 1978: p86). If translation from French into English is taken as an example French students would be a source of knowledge for British students to understand the French text and British students would perform a similar role for French students when writing the translation into English.

Fourthly, online translation fits in well with the development of critical thinking: the translation process becomes far clearer because learners have to justify themselves to the other members of the group, for example by explaining why a word or sentence suggested by their peer does not convey the meaning of the original text. Finally, in the British context of universities being required to implement key and transferable skills in all their courses (Department for Education and Skills 2006), online collaboration is a way of providing students with an opportunity to practice these skills more actively than in the taught translation course when they are often practised in a more implicit way, within the constraints set by the tutor.

The problem-based electronic platform

The French division of Northumbria University devised online collaboration tasks that were added to a translation site that had been designed the previous year. This site invites students to reflect on the translation process by introducing them to some of the theory and metalanguage in this field. Theory is elicited, as necessary, during online translation practice and is a tool to analyse and solve translation problems. Learners can access a series of passages to translate as well as a range of tutorials about the translation process in general and specific difficulties with a corresponding set of exercises. Students are thereby provided with certain elements of theory and terminology necessary to understand and communicate key points in the translation process effectively. Practice translations are ranked according to their level of difficulty and the amount of help provided. Whilst writing up their translation online, learners have access to hints about particular translation difficulties: *learners can click on word(s) highlighted by the tutor in the original text for more detailed explanations about the type of problems they might pose (collocation, apposition, shades of meaning…).* Once they submit their translation they can access a translation provided by the tutor to compare with their own. This "fair copy" contains explanations about difficulties in the original text and how the tutor has dealt with them, with the aim of heightening student awareness and triggering a process of reflective learning.

Although this initial site received very positive feedback from students it is based on a content-centred interaction, a one-to-one interaction between a student and the computer. By adding online collaboration tasks, it was possible to create a learner-learner interaction. For these tasks, students are divided into two groups: a translating group and a commenting group.

Within the specified deadline, the translating group must collaborate using a password-protected workspace and has to agree on and submit a collective translation. They are able to save their work, load it back up, post comments to their fellow members asynchronously, chat in real time, access the rest of the site and finally publish their work.

Once the translating team has submitted their work, the commenting team takes over. Within the specified deadline the group has to agree on a critical analysis of the submitted work by highlighting its strengths and weaknesses. They also have the use of a password-protected workspace. The commenting group is able to view the original text and the published work from the translating group and they also have an area to post their comments and give possible alternatives. The group members can choose to conduct their discussions asynchronously or synchronously.

Once the commenting team has submitted its work, the tutor assesses both tasks, gives online feedback to both and provides a fair copy.

Aims

Even though Collaborative Learning and its virtual variant are seen by many as enhancing students' learning it is not always successful and an online collaborative task can lead

to various problems. Firstly, some students prefer to work on their own (Kirschner et al 2003: p3). Secondly, communication can become an issue: lack of non-verbal cues (Gunawardena 1995), members experiencing difficulty engaging in spontaneous written communication (Tu 2000) and lack of trust between team members (Rourke 2000). Finally, students might be too passive and might not engage with the task or they might let others take over. Bearing this in mind, the overall aim of this case study was to investigate the effects of online collaboration on learners' achievement, satisfaction and participation. More specifically four research questions were addressed:

1. Did students feel they had benefited from this task and as a result that their understanding of translation had been enhanced?

By comparing this student perspective with a qualitative analysis of the messages posted and the final output three more questions were addressed:

2. Did learners engage in meaningful collaboration?

3. Were their key skills enhanced?

4. Did students show signs of deep learning and critical thinking?

Methodology

Two pilot groups were created, consisting of two teams each, one translating team and one commenting team. The four groups were set up by the learners themselves who all knew each other and were all taught together in a class-based translation course. It was emphasised that each team would have to organise itself independently without any guidance from the tutor, as applying key skills were an intrinsic part of the task. To assess the pilot groups' experience, multiple sources of information were used.

Firstly, a questionnaire was given to the students to assess their reactions. The questionnaire was designed to ascertain their attitudes to their task, their ability to work in a team, to think critically and their perception of the overall team performance (appendix). Secondly, verbal feedback was sought in semi-structured interviews with the participants. Finally, a qualitative analysis of synchronous and asynchronous exchanges was carried out. A transcript of the posted messages was used to evaluate student collaboration based on their interaction patterns, individual participation and the cognitive content displayed. To assess the nature of the cognitive content and in particular traces of deep learning, both Bloom's and Solo's taxonomies were used (Bloom et al 1956; Biggs and Collins 1982).

Findings

Learners' satisfaction versus learners' achievement

All the students involved found the collaborative task useful or very useful and they all enjoyed participating in an activity that most found challenging but rewarding. Moreover, 83% found it good practice, 66% confidence building and 80% felt that their understanding of translation had been enhanced. The strengths of the activity mentioned were the following: thinking about the best way

to write a translation with more time than in class, being able to compare their own work with the work of others and discuss with the group, learning from one another, being able to tap into the native speakers' knowledge and thinking critically about the work of others.

It is clear from these comments that all students felt that this type of task had enabled them to become more active participants in their learning process, learn from one another and develop their critical thinking and that it had made the translation process explicit. The effect of online collaboration on learners' satisfaction was therefore extremely high. On the face of it the advantages of collaborative learning seem to have occurred in this case study. However, what is perceived to have occurred by students is not necessarily what really happened, as shown by the cognitive content analysis of the posted messages.

This analysis showed a very different picture and some striking contrasts. On the one hand the work of the first pilot group was purely subjective. The translating team did not have any discussion at all and the translation posted was the work of one individual who overwrote everything. As for the commenting team the comments posted showed that the group not only failed to engage in discussion but also failed to explain their thoughts as students simply gave alternatives without any justification. As a result, the cognitive content was very poor. On the other hand the second translating group fared much better and moved away from subjectivity to embrace elements of theory. They justified themselves to other group members and explained why another person's ideas would not be acceptable. In particular, British students justified at great length why the ideas of the French students would not be acceptable in English. The cognitive content was very good as students displayed knowledge, comprehension, application and analysis (Bloom's taxonomy). The second commenting team also engaged in more discussions than the first. However, discussions only occurred between the two participants who knew each other very well, whilst the others simply posted their own thoughts.

This case study therefore reveals a clear dichotomy between learners' satisfaction and most learners' real achievement as "deep learning" occurred only with the second translating group. It could be argued that this result arose because learners were left to their own devices, without tutor intervention to guide them and put them back on the right track, for example by fostering discussion. This, in turn, raises the question of how best to use online collaborative learning. If it is implemented as a purely independent study tool then learners might misleadingly believe they are making good progress. If, to circumvent this risk, it is used in a blended mode of learning, with tutors checking how it is used and guiding learners, then its cost-effectiveness for universities might be challenged, in particular for British universities, which operate in the context of having to find ways of reducing the delivery cost of each course.

One solution put forward by many universities is to teach students the relevant key skills necessary to become autonomous and independent learners. Compulsory key skills modules are, for example, prevalent across Higher Education in the United Kingdom. However, universities

assume that learners would not only be able to apply them for face-t-face teaching but would also seamlessly transfer them to the virtual world. The analysis of how the learners of this case study used their key skills shows otherwise.

Learners' participation and key skills

The differences in achievement between the groups were due firstly to a total breakdown in communication in the first translating group and secondly to the fact that the two commenting groups treated the task as an individual activity, apart from two participants. It became clear in the interview that these groups had not organised how to proceed prior to the task and as a result felt inhibited. These two reasons point to the main obstacle of any meaningful collaborative work, i.e. group organisation.

In fact, in retrospect, the students readily acknowledged that lack of organisation was the main stumbling block. Indeed, all students, apart from the second translating group, when asked to list the difficulties they encountered, mentioned their inability to organise themselves, for example to meet beforehand and adopt a strategy on how to proceed or establish a time to meet online. In the questionnaire, even if the majority remained non-committal about whether they felt the team had worked effectively they all commented on the fact that collaboration within the group was not easy. This confirms the findings of many researchers (e.g. Johnson et al 2002) that team performance depends on how well the teams are able to establish procedures, resolve conflicts and collaborate.

These points were further corroborated by the message analysis. Indeed, it is clear that collaboration amongst the first pilot group was non-existent. In the translating team, only one student used the message board with the very revealing message *"hello, is anybody there?"*! Similarly, the chat room was used by one student only, desperate to get in touch with the others. The same pattern emerges with the commenting teams. Only the second translating team put some procedures in place, agreeing that one student would produce a draft translation and the others would then discuss it and make suggestions. As a result, discussions were substantial, learners were able to engage in meaningful discussion and displayed a higher cognitive content.

The most striking result in terms of participation was the dichotomy between learners' perception and their actual behaviour: all the learners stated that they were satisfied with their own level of participation despite the fact that many hardly contributed to the task and were unable to organise themselves. It seems that participants were willing to embrace the task but, apart from the second translating group, were unable to apply the key skills necessary to organise amongst themselves how to tackle it.

This raises the question as to why the key skills that all the participants displayed in class disappeared in the virtual environment. It could be argued that the fact that this task was a pilot and therefore not assessed might have led learners not to apply themselves fully and, when faced with organisational difficulties, not to try all they could to overcome them. The fact that they all knew each other and

could have easily talked about their task face-to-face, for example after their taught translation class, added to the fact that many mentioned in the questionnaire that their workload was too heavy to concentrate fully on the task seem to confirm this argument.

This would indicate that for maximum impact online collaboration should be assessed. However, when asked about this possibility, all learners replied that they would not want the task to be assessed because the pressure of handling a group online whilst aiming to achieve a good mark would be too stressful. They added that it was difficult enough to have successful group work in the real world and that ensuring good working relationship in the virtual world would be too daunting. Moreover, all learners displayed a high level of motivation and did try to do what was required of them.

In view of this it could therefore be argued that the task failed for the three groups out of four not because it was not assessed but because the virtual environment needed a different set of key skills that they did not have. Could it then be argued that the lack of social cues, so effective in face-to-face collaboration, is a stumbling block for some learners in the virtual world? For example it was ascertained in the interviews that the fact that all messages were to be read by the whole group and subsequently commented upon by the tutor led some people to feel inhibited. Their inhibition stemmed from their having to express their opinion, which possibly entailed criticising the contribution of the other members of the group, without seeing them and without being able to mitigate their criticisms by friendly body language. This suggests that universities keen to increase the use of online collaboration have to realise that they cannot take it for granted that learners would naturally transfer their key skills from the real world to the virtual world. They have to ensure that all learners are equipped with the right set of skills, which raises the question of how best to train all learners to make the transition between the two worlds.

Learners' participation and group dynamics

When learners did participate and did display a high cognitive content, online collaboration led to conflicts. Indeed, the most organised group showed signs of discontentment. Here, one student decided to write an initial draft of the translation and asked the other members to comment. Even though the discussions were very meaningful there was a clear tendency to let that person take over. That resulted in resentment from some members but they were unwilling to tackle the issue directly and limited their complaints to the questionnaire. Whilst the leader himself felt that leadership had been shared fairly the rest of the group felt the opposite. Clearly this task highlights the fact that students must move away from the egocentricity prevalent amongst independent learners to embrace a group ethos, where the contribution of all group members is equally important. For online collaboration to be successful, a group must decide, prior to embarking on the task, how to deal with passive group members or conversely, with those who prefer to call the tune. The social cues used to deal with these situations in face-to-face

collaboration have to be replaced in an online environment by predetermined group strategies. This corroborates the previous conclusion that the transition between the real and the virtual world cannot be taken for granted and that learners need to be taught how to manage the virtual space.

Conclusion

The results obtained in this project were mixed. The following conclusions can be drawn from each research question:

1. Learners were extremely satisfied and felt that they had benefited from taking part, so much so that they suggested that this online task should be part of the translation class for all students to take advantage of.

2. If online collaboration had a clear positive effect on learners' satisfaction, the same cannot be said for their achievement and participation.

3. Three out of the four groups did not engage in a meaningful collaboration even though they think they did. This gap between learners' perception and reality leads to questioning how best to use online collaboration.

4. The results of question two were explained by the learners' inability to apply key skills in the virtual world. Whether this inability was linked to them not taking the task seriously enough or to not knowing how to collaborate online is a crucial issue as their consequences for universities and learners are very different. Making online collaboration assessable without making sure that all learners are equipped with the right skills to tackle it might lead to dire consequences in terms of learners' achievements.

5. Deep learning was enhanced by this task amongst the only group that had applied the relevant key skills and were as a result able to engage in meaningful collaboration, which makes key skills not only an integral part of effective collaborative work but in fact the key to a successful learning experience.

All in all, this case study showed on the one hand the very positive effect of online collaboration on learners' satisfaction and on the other poor achievement and poor or poorly organised participation. These results therefore indicate that a collaborative setting does not automatically lead to constructive and meaningful student interaction. In order to collaborate successfully students must have a far greater understanding not simply of the crucial importance of key skills for any successful learning experience but also of the necessity to adapt the skills they do possess in the real world to a totally different environment. Ensuring this adaptability should be a priority as students will then not only be better equipped to collaborate to achieve, in this case study, the academic goal of better translations but will also acquire the organisational, team and leadership skills which present day employers find lacking amongst so many British graduates (Association of Graduate Recruiters 2006).

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Interaktyvaus metodo taikymas vertimo teorijoje ir praktikoje

Santrauka

Straipsnyje analizuojamas specialiai kolektyviniam mokymuisi internete sukurto virtualaus vertimo kurso parengimas ir įvertinimas. Konstruktyvistinės paradigmos kontekste aptarus *kolektyvinio mokymosi*, *problemų analize paremto mokymosi* ir *kolektyvinio kompiuterizuoto mokymosi* sąvokas, siekiama parodyti, kad vertimo studijose ypač gerai pritaikomi šie mokymosi bendradarbiaujant metodai. Straipsnyje toliau pristatomas pedagoginis požiūris į kolektyvinės vertimo svetainės „Sakyk, ką galvoji, galvok, ką sakai" kūrimą ir tiriama, kaip šiuolaikines kalbas studijuojantys Nortumbrijos universiteto studentai šią svetainę įvertino. Tyrimu siekiama nustatyti, kokį poveikį šis projektas turėjo studentų kritiniam mąstymui, vertimo teorijos ir praktikos suvokimui ir esminių bei perkeliamųjų įgūdžių taikymui. Atkreipus dėmesį į tai, kad nors studentai labai teigiamai įvertino kursą, tačiau jiems kilo sunkumų ir trūko įgūdžių visoms virtualios kolektyvinės mokymosi terpės teikiamoms galimybėms išnaudoti, aptariami kolektyvinio mokymosi privalumai ir galimos nesėkmės. Straipsnis baigiamas nuostata, kad organizaciniai gebėjimai ir grupės dinamika yra ypač svarbūs sėkmingam bendradarbiavimui virtualioje erdvėje pasiekti.

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APPENDIX

Questionnaire 1

Please indicate, by using the scale below, how you would classify the following statements:

1. Strongly disagree
2. Disagree
3. Undecided
4. Agree
5. Strongly agree

	1	2	3	4	5
You found the activity useful					
You enjoyed doing the activity					
The task was challenging					
You were motivated by it					
Collaboration with the group was easy					
The team worked effectively					
You are satisfied by the level of your participation					
Your understanding of translation has been enhanced					
This activity should be assessed					
You applied key skills (negotiation, team-building…)					

Please comment on the following points:

- What, in your opinion, is the main strength of this activity?

- What, in your opinion, is the main weakness?

- Which difficulties, if any, have you met in doing the task?

Questionnaire 2

Please indicate, by using the scale below, how you would classify the following statements which refer to the role of the learners and the collaborative tasks:

1. Always
2. Frequently
3. Sometimes
4. Rarely
5. Never

	1	2	3	4	5
You participated actively					
You discussed and negotiated solutions					
You shared knowledge with the group					
You had positive interaction with the group					
You shared leadership					
You clarified and elaborated information					
You analysed information					

While you were working in the group, which of the following collaborative mechanisms did you use? Please use the same scale.

	1	2	3	4	5
Clarification or explanation					
Sharing of collaborative work					
Organising group work					
Constructing knowledge					
Conflict					
Compromise					
Encouragement					