

Chapter 9

Translation Competence: Research Data in Multilateral and Interprofessional Collaborative Learning

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ABSTRACT

After Kiraly (2000) introduced the collaborative form of translation in classrooms, Pavlović (2007), Kenny (2008), and Huertas Barros (2011) provided empirical evidence that testifies to the impact of collaborative learning. This chapter sets out to describe the collaborative forms of learning at different stages in the translation processes in the Trans-Atlantic and Pacific Project, a long-term cross-cultural virtual team. It describes the forms of collaborative learning practised in this multilateral international project in technical communication and translator training programmes and explores the empirical data that the project may provide for future research into learning translation.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter seeks to explore the empirical evidence that may show that collaboration is an appropriate means to acquire higher levels of translation competences and that *learning* is taking place to the extent desirable in translation training programmes. The sections to follow illustrate various stages and activities in the translation event (a notion adopted from Toury, 1995/2012), in which

the students' learning has been programmed as a collaborative activity, and relate them to diverse competences that translation students in the 21st century need to develop beyond the obvious linguistic, technological and social ones (cf., the various translation competence and translation training models as in PACTE [2003]; Kelly [2005, p. 64]; EMT Expert Group [2009]; Way [2008, p. 90], Göpferich [2009]; Angelone [2013]). Various types of empirical data are discussed, with

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potential paths outlined for investigating how students can acquire translation competences more effectively.

Launched in the 1999-2000 academic year as the Trans-Atlantic Project and redubbed the Trans-Atlantic & Pacific Project (TAPP) when China was added in 2014, TAPP has developed into a higher educational network of bilateral *writing-translation* projects (since 2000), bilateral *translation-editing* projects (since 2001), and *multilateral* projects (since 2010). By 2014, the TAPP network had, over time, connected classes in writing, usability testing and/or translation at three universities in the U.S., three in Italy, two each in Belgium and Portugal, and one each in Austria, China, Denmark, Finland, France, Kenya, Russia and Spain, involving scores of instructors and thousands of students. TAPP's main aim is twofold: 1) to provide students with a simulated professional environment, and 2) to share insights into collaborative writing and translation, and how to overcome cultural differences.

The typical bi-lateral *writing/translation* project involves a writing class in the U.S. and a translation class in Europe. For example, an intermediate or advanced translation student team receives a text, produced by an introductory technical writing course student, which contains instructions for a particular activity. The translation team may test the instructions, look up the terminology, ask questions of the technical writing student, translate and/or localize, and apply some quality assessment. In some groups, these questions and answers are filtered through a 'project manager' to better simulate real-world language industry dynamics. Readers interested in projects' logistics and operations can find full descriptions, along with workflow charts and work breakdown structures in Humbley et al. (2005), Maylath et al. (2008) and Moustén et al. (2010b). The typical bilateral *translation/editing* project requires a European translation student to translate a published article and ask questions of her or his 'native reviewer' (sometimes called

editor), a role which, to date, is taken up by a U.S.-based writing student who edits the translations for idiomatic American English and asks questions of the translator. In turn, a *multilateral* project can be either 1) a writing-translation project that involves co-authoring in Spain and the U.S., user-testing in English in the U.S. and Finland, and translation to Dutch, French and Italian, or 2) a translation-editing project with translations from Danish, Dutch and Italian to English, all followed by editing for idiomatic American English (Maylath, Vandepitte, et al., 2013; Maylath, King, & Arnò Maciá, 2013).

The beauty of the TAPP is that it combines translation trainees at different levels: advanced undergraduates at Trieste have worked with new graduate students at Padua, even as graduate students at Ghent and Paris are advanced. At the same time it connects students interculturally and interprofessionally, thereby mirroring real-life conditions. These most complex international learning-by-doing (Lesgold, 2001) projects closely resemble the complexity of international documentation workplaces of language service providers: cross-cultural virtual teams (CCVTs) need to process commissions and manage workflows and, in the fashion of Freire (2000), teachers' guidance varies according to the task and learners.

While it is clear that the translation students involved in TAPP CCVTs cannot but *experience* the translation process as an instance of situated cognition, i.e., a cognitive activity that is highly sensitive to its environment (Risku, 2002), and while it is clear that almost all so-called European Master's in Translation competences (EMT Expert Group, 2009) are *practised* in the project, and although one may also assume that the learning-by-doing *principle* may well hold, there is not yet empirical evidence that the collaboration is an appropriate means to acquire higher levels of competences necessary for the various translation stages. Nor is there evidence, beyond the anecdotal, that *learning* is taking place to the extent that is desirable in translation training programmes.

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