Chapter II
Translate to Communicate:
Facilitating Client Understanding of Design Languages

Jason K. McDonald
Brigham Young University, USA

ABSTRACT

In this chapter I discuss how principles of natural language translation can help instructional designers communicate instructional design languages in ways more understandable to their clients. I argue that instructional designers should focus more on the fundamental meanings they are attempting to communicate through their design languages than on the mechanics and style of those languages. This can lead designers to find representation methods that help their clients better understand design meanings than if designers only used the language conventions with which they were already familiar. My hope is that this contribution to the literature on instructional design languages will lead to new language conventions that help designers more easily communicate their intentions and plans to all those who have an interest in a design's overall success.

INTRODUCTION

Practitioners in all service fields need to communicate well with clients to be successful. Doctors must communicate with patients to diagnose a physical ailment and then provide a proper treatment. Realtors must communicate with potential customers to show properties and complete a sale. Instructional designers are no different in their need to communicate well with clients. The clients of instructional designers could include university faculty or administrators, classroom teachers,

corporate executives, students, or anyone who sponsors, pays for, or uses an instructional product. Instructional designers must communicate with these clients to understand their expectations, explain design concepts, refine designs-in-progress, or evaluate the effectiveness of the final product. And these are only a sample of the countless communication points between instructional designers and their clients. In fact, it may not be overstating the point to say that the business of instructional design cannot be separated from the process of communication. Along this line, the ability to "communicate effectively in visual, oral, and written form" has been deemed "essential" by the International Board of Standards for Training, Performance and Instruction (2006).

Unfortunately, the designer-client communications process sometimes breaks down. Communication problems between consultants and clients are well-researched in the general business literature (Appelbaum & Steed, 2005), and a number of researchers in instructional design have made similar observations (e.g., Keppell, 2001, 2004; Maple, 1994; Miles, 1983). A main theme running through all this research and observation is that communication problems between designers and their clients can lead to frustration at best, or perhaps even more severe consequences such as failure of a project or ultimately a deficiency in students' learning.

Given the topic of this handbook, it seems germane to ask what the emerging perspectives on design languages and notation systems can offer instructional designers to help them solve their client communication breakdowns. The answer is that there is much to learn. The concept of design languages can help instructional designers understand communication and communication problems in new ways. At a very basic level, all communication takes place through the use of language. Instructional designers (and, in fact, designers in general) communicate not only through their natural languages (e.g.,, English, Spanish), but also through one or more design languages. "A design language is what designers use to communicate designs, plans, and intentions to each other and to the producers of their artifacts" (Gibbons & Brewer, 2005, p. 113). These languages can take the form of such artifacts as "flowcharts, storyboard forms, scripts, diagrams, sketches, and text descriptions" (Waters & Gibbons, 2004, pp. 66-67). Communicating through one of these design languages can be difficult even among those who are skillfully trained in their use. But it becomes much more difficult to communicate when "speaking" in a design language with others who are not fluent in that language. It can sound as foreign as does Italian to the person who only speaks Korean. Additional challenges arise because of the visual nature of many of the languages used to communicate instructional designs. Understanding visual representations is a learned skill (Rose, 2001). One who is attempting to understand an instructional design, then, must not only be familiar with the jargon and terminology of the discipline, but also must understand the conventions of the drawings or other illustrations used to reify the design.

Given the importance of communication in the work of instructional design, it is worthwhile to use the metaphor of instructional designers and their clients speaking different languages to explore possible solutions for when communication breaks down. When people wish to communicate with those who do not speak their natural languages, some process of translation must take place. Natural language translation is typically not as simple as looking up corresponding words in a foreign language dictionary. Translation is described by translation theorists as "an extremely complex phenomenon, comprise[d] of a set of interdependent processes (perceptual, cognitive, pragmatic, interactive, social and communicative) embedded in a matrix of variable temporal, spatial and cultural contexts" (Shreve, 1999). In other words, successful translation can be a difficult and intellectually taxing job. When translators underestimate the number of factors

13 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage: www.igi-global.com/chapter/translate-communicate-facilitating-client-understanding/22086

Related Content

Active Learning Online: Necessity, Faculty Role, and a Concept Model for Course Design
Viktor Wang, Leslie Hitchand Geraldine Torrisi-Steele (2022). *International Journal of Online Pedagogy and Course Design (pp. 1-13).*
www.irma-international.org/article/active-learning-online/282726

Searching for Information on the Web: A Guideline for Effective Searching
Fadhilah Mat Yaminand T. Ramayah (2012). *Instructional Technology Research, Design and Development: Lessons from the Field (pp. 184-201).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/searching-information-web/61270

Barriers to Blended Teaching and Learning in Sub-Saharan Africa: Challenges for the Next Decade and Beyond
Nwachukwu Prince Ololube, Kennedy E. Umunadiand Peter James Kpolovie (2015). *Curriculum Design and Classroom Management: Concepts, Methodologies, Tools, and Applications (pp. 846-861).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/barriers-to-blended-teaching-and-learning-in-sub-saharan-africa/126735

Stress Assessment
 (2018). *Assessing Social Support and Stress in Autism-Focused Virtual Communities: Emerging Research and Opportunities (pp. 39-45).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/stress-assessment/204331

Critical Success Factors in the Adoption of Technologies in Education in Higher Education: The Case of ISCAP (Polytechnic of Porto)
Anabela Mesquitaand Paula Peres (2016). *International Journal of Online Pedagogy and Course Design (pp. 29-41).*
www.irma-international.org/article/critical-success-factors-in-the-adoption-of-technologies-in-education-in-higher-education/142808