

# TELECOLLABORATION PROJECTS IN TRANSLATOR EDUCATION – DESIGN, IMPLEMENTATION AND EVALUATION

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***Abstract:** With increased emphasis on openness and mobility in higher education, seeking ways of authenticating the training of language professionals at the university level has become a great challenge for many modern philology departments. Opening classrooms to the world and inviting partners to collaborate and co-construct knowledge are regarded as the possible solutions towards increasing the quality of professional training of language teachers and translators.*

*The paper will address important concepts in the process of designing, implementing and evaluating telecollaborative projects in translator education. Special focus will be placed on pedagogical implications, practical tips and tricks and success criteria for projects.*

**Keywords:** teacher education, translator education, telecollaboration, course design, assessment

## INTRODUCTION

Effective translator education should meet the requirements of the present day translation market, but at the same time, it should also be in line with the current educational standards, at large. In other words, contemporary university courses in translation are supposed to respond to two realities: the professional reality in which translators function today and the reality which students are likely to face in present day educational settings.

All in all, both the reality of the professional translation market and that of contemporary education – undeniably share the common denominator of the implementation of digital technology. Consequently, it seems to be only a natural conclusion that if translator education is to be effective in preparing students for the job market, it must involve the technologies and work modes which they are most likely to be required to use in their professional practices, i.e. cloud computing, translation technologies and telecollaboration, respectively.

## 1. TRANSLATOR COMPETENCE

### 1.1 Reasons beyond conceptualising translation competence

Attempts to define *translation competence* or *translator competence*, with each of the notions relating to a slightly different construct, intensified in the 1980s as a corollary of the then-increased interest in the notion of communicative competence in foreign language didactics (Piotrowska, 2007) as well as the nature/nurture debate over the character of people's capacity for translation, fuelled by the writings of Toury (1984), Gerver and Sinaiko (1977) and Höning (1988). Since then, it has been affirmed that translation is not an innate talent, but can – and given an increased demand for language service provision in the contemporary world *must* – be trained. After all, "(...) there are just not enough spontaneously generated translators around to meet market demands (...)" (Gouadec, 2007: 327).

While the outcome of the nature/nurture debate gives meaning and purpose to translation pedagogy (Dybiec-Gajer, 2013), the notion of translation competence informs the outcomes of translator and interpreter (T&I) education as well as T&I education research (Klimkowski, 2015). As it has been signalled, although the terms of translation competence and translator competence have been used interchangeably in the professional literature, they denote different – albeit not mutually exclusive – viewpoints on translation *per sé*. As Kiraly (2006) posits, translator competence is the more inclusive term, which covers not only the linguistic and communicative competences in L1 and L2 that bilingual language users are credited with but shifts attention towards the very person of the translator and highlights the complexity of the translation profession. Piotrowska (2007) rightly observes that it is translator competence that constitutes the domain of translation pedagogy, by which she subscribes to the belief that translator competence exceeds the boundaries of bilingual competence.

### 1.2 Selected models of translation competence

A wide range of models of translation/translator competence have been proposed to date, e.g. by Pym (2003), PACTE (2005), EMT (2009), Göpferich (2009) and Kiraly (2006; 2013) – to name a few. They represent various epistemological standpoints, illustrate the evolving conceptualisations of the competence and imply the pedagogical underpinnings of the methodologies through which it should be

developed. Given their nature, the models can be ascribed to three distinctly different categories: (i) minimalist, (ii) multicomponential and (iii) emergent.

### 1.2.1 The minimalist approach

The minimalist category is represented by Pym's (2003) model, which places at its core the very act of "(...) translating and nothing but translating" (Pym, 2003: 489), and defines translation competence as:

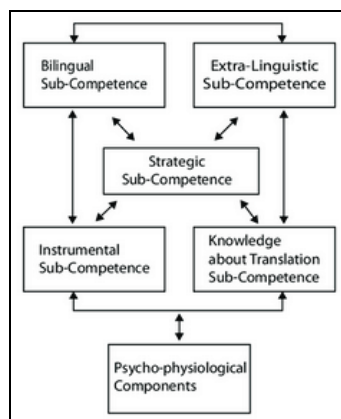
- "The ability to generate a series of more than one viable target text (TT<sub>1</sub>, TT<sub>2</sub> ... TT<sub>N</sub>) for a pertinent source text (ST);
- The ability to select only one viable TT from this series, quickly and with justified confidence" (Pym, 2003: 498).

Simple as the model may seem, it illustrates that at the translational level, the translator's practices are neither purely linguistic nor commercial. Instead, they involve problem-solving which fundamentally boils down to the generation of a number of versions of the target text and ultimately, the selection of the most optimal version out of the ones produced. At the same time, the model may easily be seen as implicitly inclusive of a range of unspecified competences that the translator needs to utilise when performing a translation task.

### 1.2.2 The multicomponential approach

The multicomponential category is best illustrated by models proposed by PACTE (2005) and EMT (2009), which emphasise the compartmentalised and often hierarchical nature of translator competence.

The *PACTE (2005) research group's model* is epistemologically grounded in the positivist views of its representatives, e.g. Orozco and Hurtado Albir (2002), who believe that translator competence should be investigated through empirical research and the implementation of quantitative research techniques.

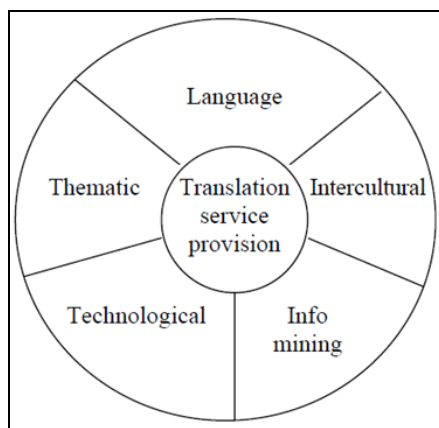


**Figure 1. PACTE model of translator competence.**

*Source: PACTE (2005: 610)*

The pivot of the model is strategic sub-competence, which is procedural knowledge, used by the translator to activate all the other sub-competences, identify and counteract problems as well as compensate for deficiencies with a view to effectively planning, performing and evaluating the translation process. Bilingual sub-competence encompasses the procedural, pragmatic, sociolinguistic, textual, grammatical and lexical knowledge which enables one to communicate in two languages. Extra-linguistic sub-competence embraces general knowledge of the world and field-specific knowledge. Knowledge about translation sub-competence refers to the knowledge of processes, methods and procedures involved in translation *per sé* as well as that of the profession. Instrumental sub-competence comprises knowledge relating to the use of documentation sources and information technologies which are applicable to translation (PACTE, 2005).

*The European Master's in Translation* (EMT, 2009) model, proposed by the Directorate General for Translation of the European Commission, seems to lack a particular epistemological grounding. Yet, as Dybiec-Gajer (2013) observes, it is currently one of the most influential models in Europe, as it informs programme design at EU institutions providing Master's degree courses for translators. The EMT model is strongly oriented towards the recognition of the translator's professional role as that of a service provider (cf. EMT, 2009 for details), and its second most essential element seems to be intercultural competence.



**Figure 2. EMT model of translator competence.**

*Source: EMT (2009: 104)*

Intercultural competence is described in two dimensions: sociolinguistic and textual. In its sociolinguistic dimension, it denotes the recognition of function and meaning in socially, geographically, historically and stylistically demarcated language variations, the identification of community-specific rules of interaction and the application of the appropriate situation- and document-dependent register.

The textual dimension, at its receptive-analytical end, designates the ability to analyse and understand documents in terms of their macrostructure and the subtle allusions, stereotypes, presuppositions, values and cultural references that they carry; the ability to extract and summarise essential information; and to evaluate and resolve one's own comprehension problems. At the productive end, it is the ability to compose documents in keeping with the rules of specific methods of composition, conventions and standards.

The remainder of the constituent competences seem to have been given auxiliary, roles. Information mining competence pertains to various aspects of information management. Thematic competence covers field-specific knowledge and relating skills, the metacognitive element of learning to develop one's field knowledge and the more general component of "Developing a spirit of curiosity, analysis and summary" (EMT, 2009: 7). Finally, technological competence embraces the ability to utilise software tools while performing various stages of the translation task, awareness of the limitations of machine translation and the metacognitive component of being able to learn and adapt to new multimedia translation tools.

All in all, the multicomponential models of translator/translation competence discussed above recognise translation as both an act of communication and a professional activity; hence the presence of the strategic component in each of them, which – at least, partially – situates them in the realities of the translation market, as recommended by Piotrowska (2007). Yet, they have provoked criticism based on a number of premises. In Pym's (2003) view, they lack a clearly defined methodological foundation, and can be expanded endlessly. They also appear to strangely coincide with the teaching content of their proponents' institutions. Therefore they are a projection of the idealised beliefs about translation competence held by researchers, and rather than a reflection of actual market reality.

### 1.2.3 The emergent approach

An alternative to the multicomponential models is Kiraly's (2013) emergent view of translation competence. Basing on post-modernist epistemology and complexity theory, Kiraly (2013) suggests that translator competence is a non-static entity, which is indefinable via *a priori* reasoning, and as such cannot be acquired via the accretion of compartmentalised, transmittable knowledge. Instead, it is a complex adaptive system which emerges "(...) through the translator's embodied involvement (*habitus*) in actual translation experiences" (Kiraly, 2013: 203). By and large, Kiraly's (2013) model recognises the fact that knowledge is not pre-set but enactive, processual and socially-situated. Kiraly (*ibid.*) sees translator competence as manifesting itself in translatory moments, when the translator solves specific translation problems by drawing upon memories of translational experiences, results of learning and intuitions. From this perspective translator competence is the interplay of the components of a complex network of the aforementioned elements as well as human and material resources, and personal,

interpersonal and psycho-physical dispositions, which all come to interact dynamically whenever the translator is on a given translation task.

The concept of emergent competence is epistemologically grounded in social constructivism, or – as Klimkowski (2015) demonstrates – anthropocentric social constructivism, reflective of Gruzca's (1997) anthropocentric view of learning and knowledge. Yet, it reaches beyond social constructivism in that it shifts the locus of competence development from the mind, or the brain of an individual, to their interactive experience with others. It transforms interaction into a prerequisite for the emergence of competence, which is not only situation-bound and context-dependent, but also construed socially through collaborative problem solving. Kiraly (2013) explains that students interact with peers and the teacher in the learning context as much as translators interact with all the parties involved in the translation process. In effect, they each develop their own idiosyncratic competences which are an outcome of a number of individual traces, including past learning, creativity and individual dispositions. In the light of Risku's (1998) perspective, the competence that develops in individuals is inherently complex and recursive, as it is subject to constant evolution. Kiraly (2015) underlines that it is difficult to estimate what sub-competences emergent competence comprises at a given point in time, they are a unique combination for particular individuals and they develop in a non-parallel fashion.

## **2. INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE AS PART OF TRANSLATOR COMPETENCE**

### **2.1 The relevance of (inter)cultural competence for translation**

Links between intercultural competence – or even more broadly, intercultural communicative competence – and translation are indisputable on a number of grounds. After all, translation is not only a form of intercultural mediation, as illustrated by the very titles of publications such as *Translation as intercultural communication* (1995), the likewise titled publication by Katan (2009) or *Translation as intercultural mediation: setting the scene* by Liddicoat (2016), but it is also contributes to culture by creating it (Piotrowska; Piotrowska, 2007; Piotrowska, 2012).

As a matter of fact, the very conceptualisation of the notion, as it was coined by (Byram, 1997), already designates its relevance to translation. At its simplest, intercultural communicative competence is an amalgamation of two the notions of communicative competence and intercultural competence, where communicative competence comprises linguistic competence, sociolinguistic competence and discourse competence, while intercultural competence embraces attitudes, knowledge, skills and critical cultural awareness, which one needs in order to act as an intercultural speaker (Byram & Fleming, 1998) – in other sources, alternatively referred to as intercultural diplomat (Corbett, 2003), intercultural

mediator (Irishkanova, Röcklinsberg, Ozolina, & Zaharia, 2004), or intercultural intermediary (Council of Europe, 2008).

As Byram and Fleming (1998) explain, an intercultural speaker is a person capable of communicating and functioning in intercultural contexts for which he/she has not been specifically prepared. Clearly, what this definition denotes is exactly what a translator needs to be prepared to do, i.e. mediate between users of different languages and members of different cultures with a view to facilitating effective communication. As Małgorzewicz (2014) maintains, cultural and intercultural awareness – *inter alia* – “(...) guarantees communicative effectiveness and confidence in professional performance which would respect the linguistic, cultural and cognitive characteristics of participants the communicative act of translation” (Małgorzewicz, 2014: 6).

The relevance of the concept of mediation for translation becomes even more evident what one looks at Irishkanova et al.’s elucidation of intercultural mediation, which they perceive as the ability to “(..) understand, explain, comment, interpret, and negotiate various phenomena in the target language culture (...) [which results in] (...) a shared understanding by people of different cultural backgrounds and identities” (Irishkanova et al., 2004: 101).

The components of intercultural communicative competence listed above are very comprehensive and cover a multitude of components which are likely to fall into translator competence.

Linguistic competence refers to the ability to perform, both receptive and productively, correctly in the target language by using the language rules that one has internalised. Sociolinguistic competence is the ability to attribute appropriate meanings to messages expressed by one’s interlocutor, while discourse competence is constituted by the ability to construct particular text types in keeping with the conventions of the target language, including situations where the language of communication acts as a *lingua franca* (Byram, 1997).

It is all complemented with the components of intercultural communication, which comprise: attitudes of curiosity and open-mindedness, which are supposed to foster the exploration of other cultures and permit one to cope with difference; knowledge about social groups, cultural products and practices as well as the rules of societal and individual interaction; skills of interpreting and relating, i.e. the ability to interpret and relate documents or events from different cultures; and skills of discovery and interaction, which are supposed to foster one’s actual performance in real time communicative interaction with strangers (Byram, 1997).

Last but not least, cultural awareness is to enable one to use explicit criteria to evaluate cultural products, practices and perspectives with a view to recognizing conflicts arising in intercultural encounters and negotiating them – should they arise – in real time, and accepting the existence of difference (Byram, *ibid.*).

It is not difficult to envisage how the competences which fall into Byram's (1997) model of intercultural communicative competence, including intercultural competence *per sé*, can serve as a manifold apparatus of which the translator can avail themselves while dealing with a translation task, which in itself is an act of intercultural mediation, after all.

## **2.2 The presence of cultural components in selected models of translator competence**

The usefulness of (inter)cultural competence for translators also finds reflection in models of translator competence proposed to date. It is perhaps less evident in the case of Pym's (2003) minimalist model and Kiraly's (2013) emergent model, due to their respective nature; however, it is reasonable to suggest that (inter)cultural components are also likely to constitute translator competence there.

*EMT model.* As it has been mentioned before, out of the componential models, it is the EMT model that most overtly foregrounds intercultural competence – delineated in its two dimensions: sociolinguistic and textual. On closer inspection of the sociolinguistic component, one finds descriptors indicating that intercultural competence in the EMT model has been operationalised in a manner congruent with Byram's (1997) model of intercultural competence, as it refers to the ability to: recognise function and meaning in language variations; identify community-specific rules of verbal and non-verbal interaction; and to produce a sociolinguistically appropriate register for written or spoken text (EMT, 2009).

A similar degree of similitude is observable with regard to the textual component, which embraces the ability to understand and analyse multimedia documents in terms of their macrostructure and overall coherence; apprehend (multimedia) documents at the level of presuppositions, implicit content, allusions, stereotypes and intertextuality; describe, evaluate and resolve one's own comprehension problems; extract and summarise essential information; recognise and identify culture-specific elements, values and references; juxtapose and compare culture-bound elements and composition methods; apply genre-specific conventions and rhetorical standards while composing documents; and to effectively introduce rapid modifications to a text by drafting, rephrasing, restructuring, condensing and post-editing in one's languages A and B (EMT, 2009).

*PACTE model.* The most obvious references to (inter)cultural competence in PACTE's (2003; 2005) model are made in the descriptors of bilingual sub-competence, which involves pragmatic knowledge, defined as "(...) pragmatic, socio-linguistic, textual and lexical-grammatical knowledge in each language" (PACTE, 2005: 610) and extra-linguistic sub-competence, which comprises largely declarative general world knowledge, knowledge about translation, encyclopaedic, declarative knowledge, field-specific knowledge as well as bicultural knowledge, i.e. knowledge about source and target cultures.



Other culture-related elements are perhaps discernible within other sub-competences. For instance, procedural elements can be found – at least, implicitly – in strategic sub-competence and instrumental sub-competence, while attitudinal elements are part of psycho-physiological sub-competence, which involves "(...) intellectual curiosity, perseverance, rigour, critical spirit, knowledge of and confidence in one's own abilities, the ability to measure one's own abilities, motivation (...)" (PACTE, 2003: 17).

*Kiraly's (2006) non-emergent model* contains an explicitly cultural – albeit undefined – component, which constitutes part of what Kiraly (2006) labels as "translation competence per sé" (Kiraly, 2006: 72). Judging by the list of the culture-related components of the above-cited competence, which include norms and conventions, world knowledge and simply *culture* – most probably relating to the knowledge of language-specific cultures and perhaps, the notion of culture as such – it may be inferred that culture in this case is understood primarily as a body of transmissible, encyclopaedic knowledge, without a procedural or attitudinal dimension. However, procedural aspects of cultural competence seem to have been implicitly incorporated into social competence as the ability to follow the professional etiquette, "(...) negotiate effectively with the client (...) [and] function effectively as members of a team" (Kiraly, 2006: 74).

### 3. TELECOLLABORATION IN TRANSLATOR EDUCATION

#### 3.1 Rationale for collaborative learning

Telecollaboration is a form of collaborative learning, enhanced with the implementation of Computer-Mediated-Communication (CMC) tools. Collaborative learning modes have been promoted as an effective educational solution since the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries by a number of scholars, including Rogers (1983), who viewed it as a means of facilitating learners' behavioural and affective change, and Kolb (1984), who emphasised reflection-enhanced experimentation and adaptation in learning. In addition, collaboration has been credited with the potential to develop learner autonomy and a sense of responsibility for one's own learning (Dooly, 2008), foster knowledge retention (Beckman, 1990), and enrich the learning experience via the synergy effect (Dooly, *ibid.*).

Collaboration has been used on a range of epistemological grounds. It converges with – and perhaps derives from – the theories of learning advocated by the proponents the social-constructivist approach to education (Dewey, 1938; Vygotsky, 1978; 1994), democratic learning (Dewey, 1916; 1938) and postmodernist/postpositivist learning, as perceived by Doll (2008), Summara and Davis (1997).

It may be seen as a work mode which, through teamwork, facilitates cognition as an individual process whereby learners construct their own interpretations of the world, which resounds with the tenets of Piaget's radical constructivism (cf. Summara & Davis, 1997). It may be perceived as a didactic solution which helps learners both acquire idealised knowledge that is to be discovered as well as construct their own understanding of the world, which seems to be the approach adopted by González-Davies (2017) in her collaboration projects. It may also be viewed as anthropocentric social constructivist learning mode which facilitates translator education for career (cf. Klimkowski, 2015)

Alternatively, as posited by Kiraly (2015), it may be viewed as an opportunity for context-dependent emergent learning, where learning is embodied action, a reiterative, recursive process that ultimately leads to "*dynamic knowing*" (Kiraly, 2015: 23), which is unpredictable, subject to non-linear development, and which instantiates as learners tackle real problems in authentic translation projects (Kiraly, 2015). Overall, it may be stated Kiraly (2015) views cognition is an emergent adaptive system ameliorated by situated learning.

In this kind of learning particular learners' subjective knowledge constructions in a given context are to be congruent with those of their peers (Summara & Davis, 1997), and all that is to be achieved in the course of the collaborative exploration of problems at hand from multiple perspectives (Doll, 2008).

Consequently, the teacher is no longer expected to transmit idealised and supposedly objectivised knowledge, but to relinquish control to students, who interact while performing teamwork. As González-Davies (2017) explains, the teacher's authority is diffused, and instead of instructing students, they can observe, monitor, or – in Nord's (2005) words – act as a fire brigade. To describe the teacher's facilitative role in collaboration projects fostering emergent learning, which Kiraly (2015) advocates, he uses Davis and Stimmt's (2003) notion of *occasioning* translator competence, whereby he explains the teacher does not only facilitate and scaffold the students' learning experience but also becomes involved in learning. Klimkowski (2015) also suggests that collaborative translation projects are supposed to provide a learning opportunity for both students and the teacher. They all learn and assist one another in their learning, as there is no preset image of reality for them to discover. In Wood, Bruner, and Ross's (1976) terms, they scaffold one another's learning, whereby those in a position to do so help others with less experience to progress. After all, all the parties involved in a collaboration project are to contribute to teamwork and work towards a common goal.

### **3.2 Telecollaboration translation projects**

The use of telecollaboration in translation education corresponds to Kiraly's (2006, 2015) call for shifting translation pedagogy from the still-pervading transmissionist, teacher-centred model of teaching towards the learner-centred, learner-empowering, collaborative model, which has been advocated as a solution

for translator education by a number of other scholars, including Nord (2005), González-Davies (2005, 2017), Massey (2016), Hoffman (Király & Hoffman, 2016) and Marczak (forthcoming, 2016), who has been focused on telecollaboration in particular.

The affordances which telecollaboration brings to translator education are numerous. First and foremost, it permits students to “(...) reconcile theory and practice (...) and helps students resolve both translational and social issues (...)” (González-Davies, 2017: 71), which are relevant to the contemporary professional setting, where translation is a social activity (O'Hagan, 2011, ), and where a demand for effective collaboration (Choudhury & McConnell, 2013) necessitates efficient telework and collaborative translation (DGT, 2016).

In the light of Lankshear and Knobel's (2006) writing, online learning scenarios foster the development of linguistic and communication skills at large, along with an array of operational, cultural and critical literacies. Operational literacy is largely procedural knowledge, necessary to use CMC tools, search the Web effectively, share cognitive and instrumental resources and perform multitasking. Cultural literacy is constituted by declarative knowledge about the context-specific communication principles and guidelines, the Netiquette, i.e. the overt and covert rules of Web-based communication, and digital content ownership rights. Critical literacy is emotive in character and pertains to awareness of the subtleties of online communication, e.g. context-based and CMC tool-dependent power relations.

The list of literacies can be expanded to also cover: collaboration skills, critical consumption of information, learning, unlearning, and relearning, which Davidson (2012) sees as 21<sup>st</sup> century skills, while Herk (2016) refers to a very similar set of job-independent, transferrable skills as soft skills, which increase a person's employability in the contemporary job market (cf. Herk, 2016; NACE, 2016).

Numerous classifications of soft skills have been proposed by academic and professional organisations and researchers (cf. Szulc, 2008; Bartel 2011; Mathias 2013; NACE, 2016), and – irrespective of the actual taxonomies used – they irrevocably include a discernible common core, which contains: communication skills, new media skills, teamwork, interpersonal skills, cultural awareness, flexibility, strategic planning, self-organisation, creativity, analytical and critical thinking skills and leadership skills. Telecollaboration appears to create opportunities for the development of all these skills, which enriches the likely resulting learning experience.

(Tele)collaboration translation projects largely expand the repertoire of didactic solutions available to translation teachers, as they may be administered in different modes. They may be simulated or genuine, blended with face-to-face work or limited to online work. They may also involve varied teacher roles, as it has been demonstrated. Similarly, as Nord (2005) posits, they offer students an opportunity to play not only various professional roles, e.g. the role of a client, reviser,

terminologist, or documentation assistant, but also experience the part and parcel of the profession, i.e. the negotiation of working conditions, fees and deadlines.

In addition, they may vary in terms of project duration (short-term, mid-term, long-term projects), design (pre-project, post-project stage, follow-up stages), teacher presence (degree of teacher intervention), learner autonomy (role assignment, selection of tools), reflection modes (diaries, journals, TAPs, corpus-based) and assessment modes (self-, peer-, teacher-assessment).

All in all, the multifarious designs of telecollaborative translation projects and the resulting work modes involved in them create "(...) unplanned learning opportunities [which] optimize a planned syllabus by adjusting its goals to the real needs of the students" (González-Davies, 2017: 78).

#### **4. INTEGRATING TELECOLLABORATION IN UNIVERSITY TRANSLATOR TRAINING - THE STUDY**

The data for the present study were collected over a long-term telecollaborative project implemented to assist graduate teacher and translator training. The details of the research context, together with some of the characteristic features, as well as the findings on practical issues of integration of telecollaboration into the modern philology curriculum, are given below. The findings from the telecollaborative study presented below highlight the way translator training telecollaborative projects should be designed, implemented and assessed.

##### **4.1. Research questions and aims**

The aims of the study into supplementing teacher and translator training with the telecollaborative component were as follows:

- to give students the opportunity to evaluate ready-made tests and examinations from different countries and to reflect on their applicability and adaptability in their own context;
- to foster students' skills of designing tests and scoring procedures as well as provide feedback on their peers' products;
- to show students how to tailor assessment to fit the needs of given students, especially in multilingual and multicultural context;
- to examine the change of attitude towards language assessment and peer feedback;
- to see what technologies are selected to mediate student-initiated interaction;
- to investigate the process of knowledge co-construal in the telecollaborative framework;

- to verify the applicability of telecollaboration as a supplement to face-to-face teacher training and investigate the practical constraints of integrating these into the teacher training framework.

Out of these, the current paper deals with the final three objectives, which refer to the selection of technologies, the viability of the process of knowledge co-construction in developing professional skills and to find out solutions to the problems of integration of telecollaborative projects into graduate teacher/translator training. The results of the study as regards the remaining objectives will be specifically addressed in further publications.

#### **4.2. The participants and the instructional context**

The project was conducted at the post-graduate (M.A.) programme in English teacher/translator education, supplementing the course in “Language testing”, taught over the summer semester of 2016/2017 academic year. The course had 9 bi-weekly meetings over the period of the whole semester, followed a fixed syllabus of learning how to design and evaluate testing instruments for specific language subsystems and language skills. Even though more teacher-oriented, the results of the study as given below are applicable to all possible courses of the teacher and translator training university curricula.

The participants of the project were 30 MA students (1 year post-graduate course – Polish, henceforth referred to as PL) and 60 BA students (Turkish – TR). Great care was paid to make sure that the Polish and Turkish partners were matched with characteristics as closely as possible: the same “Language testing” class, a very similar syllabus (which was negotiated by both instructors to fit the project), the same coursebook (H. D. Brown’s *Language Assessment: Principles and Classroom Practice*). However, there were also some differences which had to be struggled with throughout the project:

- day students (TR) vs. extra-mural students (PL);
- three times as many TR students as PL ones;
- undergraduates (TR) vs. graduates (PL);
- pre-experienced (TR) vs. mixed (job-experienced and pre-experienced – PL);
- collaboration-focused vs. assignment-focused (mixed on both sides).

As regards the computer environments in which the participants of the telecollaborative project were gaining knowledge and practising skills, it was decided that the project was going to take place in two virtual spaces – on the one hand, teacher-controlled Moodle set up at the Polish university’s e-learning campus made it possible to provide a wealth of learning resources (readings, videos, PowerPoint presentations, sample materials for analysis) and set up activities serving as data collection points (forums, diaries, questionnaires, assignments).

However, apart from this teacher-controlled learning environment, the participants were free to interact in whatever application they wanted in order to establish relationships, communicate, create the assignments together. As it turned out, most used email or Facebook, some Moodle internal messaging, while others opted for messengers, Skype or Voicethread.

The schedules of partner classes were compared and the following project timeline was created by the two instructors. The timeline took into account different calendars at Polish and Turkish universities, differences between extra-mural and day students' expected workload, reasonable and achievable deliverables as well as most convenient deadlines for them.

As the project yielded a wealth of data whose analysis is still under way, the present study will only focus on the issues of designing telecollaborative exchanges and integrating them into regular study programmes. Therefore, selected pieces of data retrieved from different instruments will be used below to substantiate our discussion.

### **4.3. Integrating telecollaboration into teacher and translator training – quantitative findings**

The quantitative findings from the study were gained from a close-ended, anonymous, post-course evaluation survey, administered to both PL and TR students via Google Forms. The survey was completed by a significant number of project participants – 81 respondents, including 65 (80%) from Turkey and 16 (20%) from Poland, 75% males and 25% females. Obviously, these numbers need to be viewed from the perspective of the sample taking part in the project – given that there were 90 Turkish and 30 Polish participants, the response rates of 72% for the Turkish subsample and 50% for the Polish subsample should be regarded as relatively satisfactory.

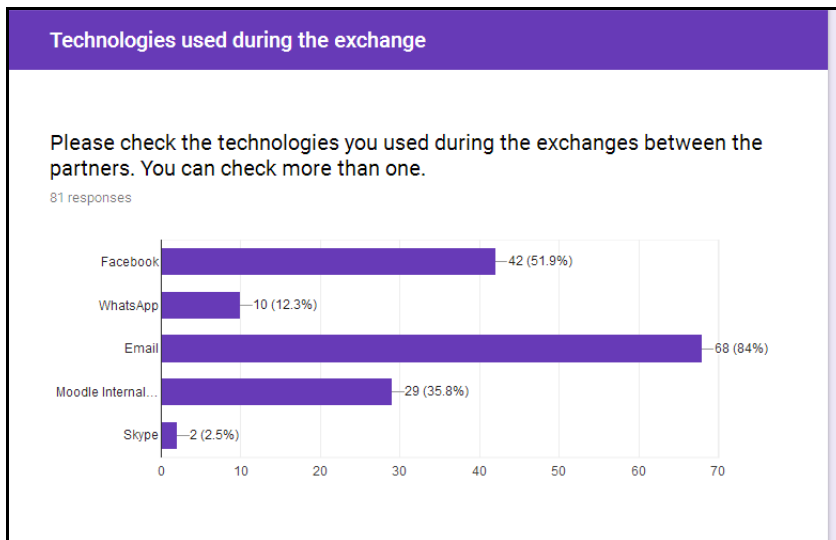
An overwhelming majority of participants (almost 70%) agreed or strongly agreed that working with students from other countries is a motivating experience (Q2), which is corroborated by a similar figure (almost 60%) opting for “Strongly disagree” and “Disagree” in a reverse-coded statement “I am still not interested in problems of students from other countries.” Almost 60% of participants agreed that communicating with partners from a different country helps find creative solutions to classroom problems. In terms of practical aspects of telecollaboration which should be attended to while designing and running exchanges, the following problems of telecollaborative exchanges were perceived by participants:

1. long response times - 52 (64.2%)
2. lack of physical contact - 46 (56.8%)
3. different semester schedules - 41 (50.6%)
4. insufficient or incomprehensible feedback from partners - 37 (45.7%)

5. cultural differences between partners - 11 (13.6%)
6. problems with incorrect language used by partners - 13 (16%)

It is evident that the logistical aspects of online presence have to be given more attention in future telecollaborative projects. Participants need to be informed of different kinds of online learners and of possibly varied intensity of participation. At the same time, clear regulations on response times need to be set in advance by both instructors and included in the syllabus, in order to make sure that once such response lags appear, they are reported by students and instructors take necessary precautions to prompt students to participate.

The second area of interest to think about effective designing, running and evaluating telecollaborative projects in teacher and translator training was the perception of technology-mediated learning environments by participants. As illustrated in Figure 1 below, since students were free to choose technologies for their individual collaboration, they mainly opted for email (two-thirds of the sample) or Facebook (almost a half). Around one third used Moodle's internal messaging system, while WhatsApp messenger was used by only 10 out of 91 respondents. It is quite surprising that Skype was reported by only 2 students – a greater amount of real-time voice/video contact could be expected.



**Figure 3. Technologies selected by project participants for their individual communication and collaboration (N 91).**

*Source: own work*

#### **4.4. Integrating telecollaboration into teacher and translator training – qualitative findings**

The section below will summarise major qualitative results of the study, together with implementation guidelines and project success tips, taking into account the major issues involved in integrating a telecollaborative component into regular study programmes: conceptualising, planning, monitoring and assessing.

##### *1. Include a telecollaborative component in the main class syllabus*

If telecollaboration is supposed to supplement regular instruction, as was the case in the study, both strands need to be regarded as equally important, supporting each other, providing opportunities for more practice in terms of acquisition of knowledge and skills. The relationship between both strands needs to be made clear from the beginning in all possible ways, communicated clearly to students – in the syllabus, in the assessment system, in the workload expected of the face-to-face class. The final aspect is particularly sensitive, as online work generates much more effort and consumes more time than equivalent pen-and-paper or in-class tasks. Hence, sensible precautions need to be made so that the student workload for the F2F+TC course is equivalent to the standard class without the online component. Most importantly, if students are to fully benefit from the synergy between both, they need to clearly see that TC is not only an add-on, on top of regular class instruction, but both are equally important.

The project was designed according to the tri-partite model of Pre-project/Project proper/Post-project, in which the three phases were suited to the timetables of the two classes:

1. Pre-project – explaining the ideas of the project, making students familiar with Moodle tasks and activities, reviewing the concept of telecollaboration, increasing students' awareness of pitfalls of telecollaboration;
2. Project proper – multi-staged procedure, during which student teachers from both countries were involved in the telecollaborative online learning in various modes (whole-class or group Moodle forum discussions, individual Moodle diaries, individual and group tasks);
3. Post-project – evaluating the experience, providing feedback on student-made products, rounding up the whole experience.

In case of the present study, there was a clear assessment scheme that would take into account both strands, F2F workload was significantly reduced only to a minimum set of 1-2 tasks and 1 reading per two meetings, students were instructed straight from the start how the two strands are indispensable for the full success of their competence building.



## *2. Use F2F class time for stimulating reflection and providing support*

Difficult as it may seem due to time constraints, it is necessary to devote some F2F class time to addressing various issues that appear as a result of telecollaboration. This may be a necessity to explain the tasks, to give models, to show students how to solve intercultural communication problems. In-class discussions are essential also to make students develop realistic expectations about their partners' contributions or to make them familiar with specific nature of online learning. Specific cases contributed by different students can be brought up (contributed anonymously before class) as critical incidents, to elicit solutions proposed by students. Participants should be encouraged to reflect on how they felt when they were corrected/corrected others, how to take and give turns in online synchronous interaction, how to handle sensitive comments expressed in direct and indirect way.

Obviously, such cases need to be depersonalised, so that a composite of different people's issues is created for the benefit of the whole class. The instructor should also make sure that in-class reflection time is not only focused on the problems, obstacles and pitfalls, but these negative issues are balanced also by the cases of successful interaction.

In the current study, due to the severe time limitations (only 9 meetings over the whole semester), it was not possible to devote enough time of the F2F classes to the discussion of online issues, which proved to be one of the shortcomings of the telecollaborative study.

## *3. Monitor task progress and partner participation during F2F sessions*

Regular F2F class time devoted to discussing the TC component is also necessary to make sure the groups work smoothly, in accordance with the timeline and in the proper direction. Explaining the task once, during the first class, proved to be insufficient, task explanations, together with models, had to be provided during quite a few classes, especially towards the end of the project, when the participants were already working intensively towards the task completion. This was so even though full documentation was available in the written form on the project's Moodle all the time throughout the study. During those regular meetings the instructor needs to check whether all participants get on with their partners, making sure that there are no cases of non-response on the one hand, but they also understand there are different forms of online social presence on the other. Obviously, instructor availability by email and constant everyday contact by email/Skype/Facebook or any others between both instructors are pre-requisites to prevent demotivation of students due to non-response.

As explained in point 2 above, the research showed that integration of TC into F2F instruction in the extra-mural context can be troublesome for practical reasons. Students have F2F classes every two or three weeks, they might attend to coursework only 2-3 days before each course weekend, without doing any other work in between.

#### *4. Analyse timetables and set realistic deadlines*

The discrepancy between the two partners in the mode of class, coupled with differences in course timetables (the term for TR students lasted since mid-February till mid-May, for PL ones from 1 March till 1 July) and different work intensity periods (TR students were very active just before deadlines, but they could not do telecollaborative tasks during the two weeks of May due to exams), resulted in problems with meeting deadlines and completing tasks for some groups. Even though the two instructors took necessary notice of timetable differences and tried to suit deadlines and workload to them, still meeting deadlines and fitting online work with regular study duties proved to be a problem. Due to the changes in timetables the partners, even though relatively well-matched as for a number of characteristics as outlined above, were in different ‘study mode’ – when Turkish students were completing all tasks and were worried about meeting deadlines, Polish partners were just after a long (almost a week long) “beginning-of-May weekend”, which is, traditionally, the time of short holidaymaking for most Polish people. On the other hand, while Polish students finally started to attend to all the online tasks due to upcoming end of semester, the Turkish students had already completed their term (4-6 weeks ago!) and they were, naturally, unavailable for collaborative work.

When designing similar projects in the future, a good deal of discussion needs to be done by the instructors not only to find out the differences in timetables, but also about festivals, exams, expected additional events such as student culture weeks, which could result in response lags and jeopardise meeting deadlines with collaborative tasks. Consequently, rather than distributing tasks at regular intervals (as was the case in the study, two-week intervals), groups might be presented with the whole task, without sequencing it into substages with their specific deadlines, so that partners could negotiate and decide on the most appropriate time to work on them.

#### *5. Design carefully assessment schemes using a whole range of techniques*

Assessing telecollaborative projects, in particular, balancing assessment of students’ work in the F2F class with that done in the TC component, indicating the relative significance of both components with the assessment scheme, finally, acknowledging and referring to established teacher education evaluation instruments (e.g. *European Portfolio for Student Teachers of Languages* (Newby et al., 2007)), is the highly sensitive area demanding great consideration, careful negotiation between coordinators, as well as awareness-raising and confidence-building discussions with students. Assessment can be institutionalised and culture-dependent, which means that partners may have their evaluation schemes and techniques that are imposed by the authorities and cannot be changed for the purposes of the TC project. At the same time, different assessment instruments (especially alternative assessment techniques such as portfolios, peer assessment or journals) might have varying level of acceptance and suitability in different

countries. Due to that, even though ideally the assessment scheme should be the same for both partners, it is not a must. In fact, a much more sensible solution, adopted also in the current study, was mixing different assessment areas and instruments, ending up with some tasks that are common to both partners but also being flexible about some other components (e.g., using fewer journals and more forums by one class, or expecting students to participate in virtually all forums and diaries vs. giving them the freedom to choose which ones to contribute to).

Moreover, instructors might be free to reflect on which of the following areas of student performance would be assessed and in what proportions:

- language competence (e.g., by referring to CEFR or European Language Portfolio descriptors);
- content of online contributions;
- active participation in online interactions;
- technical mastery and skill (e.g., exhibited while preparing certain multimedia products in telecollaboration).

Assessment instruments might be individual or group, and groups might be either local (created of F2F class members) or remote (composed of participants on both sides). Even when group assessment portfolios or products are used, an individual evaluation element is also important, for instance, in the form of private learning diaries, not assessed with traditional grades, but rather responded to in a more socially-constructivist fashion.

As evidenced by the present study, since there might be asymmetrical participation, motivation and expectations on both sides of the project, the instructors could consider designing the assessment scheme in such a way that the whole range of evaluation instruments encompasses both those that require collaboration with remote partners as well as those that are students' individual contributions. Thus, 2-3 Polish students who were frustrated because of inadequate contribution of their Turkish partners could compensate for the tasks demanding telecollaboration with their increased involvement in individual tasks done online at the project's Moodle.

## CONCLUSION

In the light of the research findings, it may be concluded that from the institutional perspective telecollaborative projects might be difficult to design, implement and evaluate successfully, especially if the two partner classes differ in some of the important features. The study showed that especially great care devoted to planning task sequences, coordinating timetables, drawing up a common syllabi as well as establishing necessary links between the face-to-face component and the telecollaborative module guarantees successful completion of the project in terms of achieving the objectives both on the instructional level (what products remote

groups are expected to produce) and on the individual level (what are the personal gains of students from the partnership in terms of intercultural communicative competence as well as intercultural teaching awareness).

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