Chapter 1
Fostering Audience Awareness and Iterative Collaboration for the Creation of Promotional Texts: An Online Trans–Cultural Writing Project between Theory and Practice

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ABSTRACT
This chapter presents a comprehensive account of an online collaborative project designed to develop students’ rhetorical and linguistic skills in a trans-cultural perspective. This project guided a group of college-level English learners (native speakers of Italian) towards the production of pre-trip promotional materials for the Molise region in central Italy. Thanks to the feedback offered by the American students, the Italian students critically examined the effect of their stylistic choices and the ways in which these choices positioned audiences for particular purposes, revealing and/or shaping attitudes, values and perspectives. The authors believe that the project can be replicated by instructors who are keen to add an intercultural component to their courses.

INTRODUCTION
This chapter presents a comprehensive account of a collaborative project designed to develop students’ rhetorical and linguistic skills in an intercultural perspective. Our project was designed to guide a group of college-level English learners (native speakers of Italian) towards the production of pre-trip promo-
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tional materials for the Molise region in central Italy. More specifically, we asked these multilingual writers to produce a booklet accessible in PDF format that could be distributed through the websites of the major cities of Molise (Campobasso, Isernia, Termoli) and the website of the Molise region. The rationale for introducing learners to English for Tourism (EfT), as well as other types of English for Specific Purposes (ESP), is to connect language teaching with real world contexts and situations. Not only did the Italian students receive a specific task, they also received detailed information about their target audience: American college students interested in visiting foreign countries for their summer vacations. A small but representative sample of this target audience, a group of students enrolled in two different composition classes at an American university, was recruited to act as once as users and editors of the tourist booklet developed by the Italian students.

The two groups of students negotiated a final version of the booklet for electronic/digital distribution on selected websites and in social media groups. A related pedagogical goal was to provide significant opportunities for students to understand how all acts of reading and writing call for an ability to negotiate meaning. More specifically, we wanted students to understand why writers should always try to find ways to involve readers in the composing process. In the case of promotional texts, it is particularly important to show early drafts to prospective users to obtain feedback that can drive subsequent stages of development in an iterative, cyclical process. Prospective users of promotional texts can identify gaps in the information offered by pre-trip promotional materials, problems in the organization of content, as well as rhetorical moves that are not effective in the target culture. In their turn, authors have to be receptive to the feedback offered by readers, which entails relinquishing at least some of their authorial control of the text while embracing a humble and flexible attitude as regards the creative process. Finally, we wanted students to reflect on how using a web-based collaborative platform such as Google Docs to produce a tourist booklet ultimately accessible as a PDF file presents a unique set of challenges when compared to, for example, the development of a more interactive web page. A downloadable booklet cannot be easily updated, and has to contain all the information that a tourist might need in a relatively small space. Consequently, this multimedia project made multiple demands on students with respect to content selection, organization, and design.

In order to study how both American and Italian participants grow and develop into more rhetorically aware writers and readers, our main research questions were formulated as follows:

1. How do Italian students go about the complex task of translating a culture into verbal and visual language using information on audience, context, genre conventions, and stylistic features of EfT?
2. How do American college students respond to tourist booklets created to persuade them to visit foreign countries? How does their interpretation of verbal and non-verbal language differ from the authors’ interpretations?
3. How do authors and editors use a specific platform for collaboration (Google Docs) as they collaborate in a cross-cultural virtual team?

An incentive and a support base for this research project was offered by the teachers involved in the Trans-Atlantic and Pacific Project, or TAPP, a network of universities in several different countries that encourages cross-cultural, international projects in writing, editing, translation, and usability testing (Humbley, Maylath, Mousten, Vandepitte, & Veisblat 2005; Maylath, Vandepitte, & Mousten, 2008; Mousten, Humbley, Maylath, & Vandepit, 2012). Instructors who join this network and organize their collaborative projects to test and validate findings of several other studies conducted by TAPP members