Chapter 4

Meta-Knowledge on the TAPP and ORLIMPA Projects: Students and Their Blogs

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ABSTRACT

This chapter describes how within the framework of distant collaborative projects between European and American universities, combining the activities of technical communication and translation, Paris Diderot students are required to write a blog, to analyze not only the final product but the process they went through. These blogs constitute a source of meta-knowledge about all of the activities taking place over the course of the project. The Paris Diderot students have the task of translating a text designed by technical communicators. However, the final project, the translation, does not reflect the different facets of the project. Asking students to produce a blog in order to gain feedback about the project is rich in learning because students and professors can concurrently analyze the strategies of collaboration employed, the method of translation, the project management and tools used, as well as the creativity of the students and finally, the lessons drawn from these experiences. It is concluded that these elements constitute meta-knowledge as objects of research.

INTRODUCTION

Participating in distance collaborative projects between European and American universities is always a special and important moment in an academic setting because of the rich learning environment and because of opportunities for international and intercultural experience. Projects provide the opportunity to create networks between instructors and students to reflect on new methods of teaching and to undertake interesting research on different subjects. Collaboration strategies between student technical communicators and student translators are a core consideration of certain American universities, such as North Dakota State University, or Central Florida University, Orlando, or of European universities like those of Vaasa in Finland, Limerick in Ireland, Padua in Italy, Paris Diderot in France and Barcelona.
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Tech, a technical university in Spain. The principal objective of these projects is to bring student technical communicators, who develop a technical document and produce usability testing, and student translators who go on to translate the latter documents, into collaboration. The activities are therefore contiguous, and it is interesting to see how a project can stretch from technical communication to translation. The products of this collaboration are deliverables: on the one hand, a technical document, for example, an instruction manual and, on the other, its translation. But merely analyzing the deliverables, the products, alone does not allow a project to be considered in its entire dimension. In fact, the final submitted products only constitute the visible part of the iceberg. The author is especially interested in its hidden side, in particular in the process by which students get a product. Deliverables alone fall short of appropriate feedback for building skills: when a translation is done, the process leading to it may not be clear. One possibility to gain feedback on the process and on the product is to ask students to produce reflective diaries, in the form of a blog, collecting a mine of information to analyze the issues and the relationships between process and product. When collecting information about a project, faculty may analyze it and create meta-knowledge, which is knowledge about knowledge. Training students in this activity may also prepare them for the professional world. The essence of any project is to share information in order to know what work has been done, what should be done and how. This involves not only describing the project but also being able to analyze it. The aspects of meta-knowledge obtained within the framework of these blogs are a rich source of learning both for professors and students.

The objective of this chapter is to analyze the students’ blogs and to see how they first concentrate on concepts that allow for a definition of the notion of feedback in a project and also the issues and relationships between the product and the process and how feedback can address both. The author chooses to analyze the product and also the process, asking students to write reflective diaries under the form of blogs to show the learning process. The author then outlines both the collaborative projects and the analysis carried out by the students with reference to four points: strategies of collaboration, method of translation, creativity, and the lessons drawn, to collect meta-knowledge.

BACKGROUND

In the following section, the background of the collaborative projects with Paris Diderot University will be explained. Then according to the literature review, a link between knowledge and feedback will be created to explain what meta-knowledge is.

The author started collaborations through meetings at international conferences, in 2010 (TAPP), in 2013 (ORLIMPA) and in 2016 as regards the project involving Mercer University, Georgia, United States, which is detailed in another chapter in this book.

In France, the academic delineation for higher education is three years of a primary degree (Licence), called L1, L2, L3, and two years of a Master’s degree (composed of the years M1 and M2). The Department of Applied Languages (EILA) of the University Paris Diderot prepares students for the professional world through a program of apprenticeship training in M2. Apprenticeship has existed in France since 1966 and it allows students to attend a rotation program. They have classes at university and they are hired in companies for a period of generally one year. Students are paid by the company during this rotation program. In the present case, degrees concerned by apprenticeship are M2 level, one in technical communication (Conception de Documentation Multilingue et Multimédia - CDMM), and the other in pragmatic translation (Industrie de la Langue et Traduction Spécialisée - ILTS). Over the
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