Chapter 10

Translating and Networking in Virtual Learning Environments

Gunta Ločmele

University of Latvia, Latvia

ABSTRACT

The chapter describes the experience of three projects carried out at the University of Latvia and their contribution to developing student skills for working in virtual networks. The research is carried out against the background of the rise of a community-based model in translation and increased involvement of virtual networks of translators in solving translation problems and the discussion of broader issues of the profession. The chapter describes the three projects, provides the approach and rationale for their development, dwells on problems faced in the projects and their solutions, as well as shares the lessons learned and recommendations for those who are interested in similar projects. As translation plays an important role for the development of society, acquiring skills for working in virtual translation projects is a key for translators to continue being masters of their profession in a changing world.

INTRODUCTION

The newly revived discipline of translation studies, profoundly comparative in nature, is providing new energy to the humanities, and is rapidly transforming our old notions about cultural as well as academic boundaries. (Lowe & Fitz, 2007)

Connectedness in the modern world allows translators’ work to take on new patterns. Translation is no longer only done by sole translators, not even by project teams working in the same language (Kelly, Ray, & DePalma, 2011, p. 77). Virtual networks of translators are formed for performing specific projects that unite them in different parts of the world. They cooperate and share their knowledge beyond cultural boundaries. New patterns of work require new competences from the participants: besides acting as experts in translation situations (Cnyrim, Hagemann, & Neu, 2013, p. 25), translators need to acquire the experience of working in networks. This chapter aims at sharing the experience of three projects that may contribute to the development of translation students’ competence in performing in
virtual and semi-virtual network environments. Another aim of the chapter is to consider the advantages and disadvantages of the application of the community-based model in translator training and to draw the pattern for its further use.

BACKGROUND

For many years, the translation industry has been applying the translate-edit-proofread model (TEP) in carrying out translation projects (Kockaert & Makoushina, 2008, p. 2). The model was developed for quality assurance in conventional translation projects. However, it has been criticized by researchers for intrinsic factors that impede the quality and speed of its application. The first factor is information. Editors are usually less informed about the source text problems and translation strategies applied than the translators who have worked with the text; proofreaders are even less informed than the editors. That may result in new mistakes added to the translation. The second factor is speed. The work in TEP is performed in stages. Every subsequent participant in the model waits passively for the previous stage to be completed. The third factor is that mistakes are discovered only when checks have been performed within TEP by editors and proofreaders, and sometimes even by clients in the end-client review procedure (described by Bass (2006)) after the TEP model has been completed. When mistakes are spotted in the end-client review, the correction of them becomes very time-consuming and costly (Kelly et al., 2011, pp. 75-76). Another convention of the translation industry is that contacts are organized in the “subcontracting triangle” (Bass, 2006, p. 69). Language service providers (LSPs, i.e., translation companies (Kelly, DePalma, & Stewart, 2012)) engage in direct contacts with clients; however, translators and editors interact with clients indirectly via the LSPs.

Due to the deficiencies of the TEP, the modern translation industry has moved towards a more dynamic community-based model of translation (Kelly et al., 2011; Austermuehl, 2013). The new model is referred to by different names: community-based translation (Kelly et al., 2011), crowdsourced translation (Zaidan & Callison-Burch, 2011; European Commission, 2012), user-generated translation (O’Hagan, 2009), open translation (Cronin, 2010a), collaborative translation (Kelly et al., 2011; European Commission, 2012, p. 23), amateur translation, volunteer translation (European Commission, 2012, p. 23) (see also the discussion in McDonough Dolmaya, 2011, p. 98). The main feature of the model, as captured in most of its names, is that translation is performed in collaboration by a community or crowd. In the community-based model, all participants are more involved in discussions throughout the whole process. The way in which the contacts are arranged among parties is also more flexible and suits every situation that may arise (Kelly et al., 2011).

The new model has its opportunities but also includes risks and raises concerns: fears have been voiced that it might disrupt the translation market, might weaken the status of the profession, and might lower quality standards (see the discussion in European Commission, 2012, p. 23). In order to avert possibly negative developments, professional translator training needs to take on board the community-based model of translation to help professionals remain masters of the new situation.

This chapter describes a venture into teaching translation by applying the community-based model in a semi-virtual environment. The students and the teacher decided to use the model for producing a translation that is needed by both the audience and the student translators themselves. As a result, three projects of book translations using the community-based model were carried out. Based on the same model, each of the projects acquired different features and networks that we set out to examine in this chapter.