

Use of Discussion Board and PaperShow in Translation Class

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Abstract. This report presents how the learning technologies Discussion Board and PaperShow are incorporated into postgraduate translation modules by means of observing their impact on students' learning. Initially and mainly for administrative reasons as well as being encouraged to make use of the university's virtual learning environment (VLE), I set up discussion forums to collect students' translation work. It soon became clear that the forums had the potential to facilitate student-centred learning and increase students' responsibility toward learning. In this paper, the use of Discussion Board on the VLE, which forms the foundation of in-class discussion and student participation, is described. Then, students' learning is evaluated from an 'active learning' aspect. It can be said that Discussion Board enhances students' active learning and promotes quality learning experiences for them. PaperShow, which is used in class to support a student who has a hearing disability, is also discussed. PaperShow is useful for all who wish to revise important points raised in class, which are saved and included in the presentations made available online. Both Discussion Board and PaperShow proved to be more pedagogically useful than initially anticipated. The paper concludes with suggestions for possible areas of language learning in which these pieces of technology could be applicable.

Keywords: translation, active learning, student-centred learning, Discussion Board, PaperShow.

1. Introduction

This paper discusses students' 'active learning' in the two technologies Discussion Board and PaperShow. The background to this study is the notion that the number of students affects the tutor as to how they prepare for a class. When I started teaching

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specialised English-Japanese (E-J) translation, groups were small and collecting students' work was easy. Since then, the class became larger and Discussion Board on the VLE has been used to collect students' work. The initial motivations were mainly administrative reasons. However, the potential it had to ensure student-centred learning and increase students' responsibility for learning soon became clear.

This paper first describes the use of Discussion Board on the VLE which forms the foundation of in-class discussion and student participation in it. Then, students' learning is evaluated from the point of 'active learning' suggested by Fink (2003). Discussion Board can be said to enhance students' active learning and promote quality learning experiences for them. A shorter description of PaperShow, another technology used in class to support a student who has a hearing disability follows. PaperShow is useful to clarify the important points in class, which are then saved and uploaded online for students to go back and recall discussions.

The paper concludes with suggesting other possible areas of language learning where these pieces of technology could be applicable.

2. Class structure of specialised translation modules

Specialised translation modules are offered as part of taught postgraduate programmes at the Centre for Translation Studies at the University of Leeds. These modules are for students to apply the theories and methods they learnt in other modules. One of the learning outcomes of specialised English-Japanese (E-J) translation is for the students to become able to translate texts of a variety of fields written in English into Japanese confidently, which is a subject-specific outcome and closely related to the students' future career.

There is one specialised E-J translation in semester one and another in semester two. They deal with different genres and most students take both. These modules are strongly vocational, and therefore, they are experiential. Students are expected to produce a translation every week. The cycle of one session starts with the students receiving a source text (ST) a week before its translations are discussed in class. Students translate it and post their work on Discussion Board. They then read the translations produced by classmates and leave comments.

The class is for two hours and it begins with a short presentation about the ST of the week by a student in semester one and about a particular issue in translation by

the tutor in semester two, and then a discussion follows. Students are encouraged to take part in the discussion; bringing in the comments they received online, questions that remain unsolved, etc. Following the discussion in each session, students are encouraged to edit their translations to their satisfaction in their own time.

3. Discussion Board in specialised English-Japanese translation modules

3.1. Introducing Discussion Board into the modules

Technology has changed several aspects of the translation process such as communication with clients and colleagues, the speed and amount of information that can be retrieved, and the way texts are created and handled (Gil & Pym, 2006). Translators are expected to be capable of using technology, especially profession-specific Information Technology (IT) tools such as translation memory tools. However, trainees have different levels of experience with computer applications (Knops, 2008). Recently, VLE has been establishing itself as an indispensable learning environment. Although initial motivations to incorporate Discussion Board to the specialised E-J translation modules were administrative reasons, extending the use of the VLE and familiarising students to useful functions available on it were also considered. It is suggested that adding discussion forums does not require a change in the curriculum or focus of the class (Guzdial & Turns, 2000) and they are easy to integrate in existing learning circumstances.

Burston (2006) states that careful examination is needed before incorporating IT into a course because of how it contributes to the realisation of pedagogical aims as well as to how it fits into the academic environment. JISC InfoNet (2006) lists some of the advantages and disadvantages of computer-mediated conferencing, which is similar to Discussion Board.

Advantages

- Time and place independence.
- Time lapse between messages allows for reflection.
- Questions can be asked without waiting for a turn.
- Many-to-many interaction may enhance peer learning.

Disadvantages

- Paralinguistic cues where speakers' intentions are not available.

- The normal repair strategies of face-to-face communication are not available and misunderstandings may be harder to overcome.

As well as being aware of the disadvantages listed above, “recognis[ing] differences in learning styles among students and facilitat[ing] learning across various learning styles” is important (Levy, 2006, p. 22). Students of specialised E-J translation are dominantly Japanese but not exclusively. Students’ first language, background, experience in general and translation vary. Japanese students tend to be quiet and passive in class. Discussion Board is expected to facilitate different types of students with their active and autonomous learning.

3.2. Observation of student participation and learning

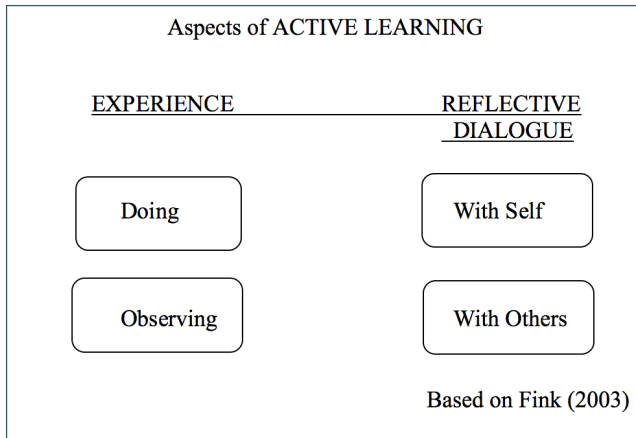
Specialised translation modules are experiential. Source texts as primary resources are provided by the tutor but it is the students who assemble and provide their own learning materials to be used in class. Without the students’ contribution at this stage, classroom discussion will not function. This makes the modules highly student-centred. Students are responsible for their own learning as well as their classmates’.

Students are expected to read all the translations posted online and are encouraged to leave comments on at least one translation before class. It is useful for them to give and receive feedback to/from peers. Their feedback is appropriate in general. They do not hold lengthy discussions online and their comments include suggestions to raise something as an issue or ask questions on a specific subject in class. They create a link between preparation and in-class discussion. Sometimes there are fewer comments than in the other weeks. It could be lack of time, being afraid to appear criticising, or not used to this type of learning. Over time, however, they realise that receiving comments on their own work has positive effects on them and commenting on others’ is the same. They feel less threatened to voice their opinions and a positive group dynamic starts to establish.

Discussion Board facilitates students’ active learning, which Fink (2003) explains consists of four types of learning. The four aspects, as illustrated in Figure 1, exist in the learning process of specialised translation. Students translate a text (doing), read classmates’ translations (observing), reflect their own translation after reading others’ (dialogue with self), and take part in discussion in class (dialogue with others). Amongst these, Discussion Board more strongly promoted ‘observing’ and ‘dialogue with self’ than before it was introduced. Fry, Ketteridge, and Marshall (2003) confirm that “deliberate and conscious reflections are a requirement for

effective experiential learning to take place” (p. 136). Based on these two aspects mentioned above, which are ‘observing’ and ‘dialogue with self’, ‘dialogue with others’ takes place, reinforcing the reflections.

Figure 1. Aspects of active learning (adapted from Fink, 2003)



Dengler (2008) claims that citing comments students have made online allows the instructor to increase the voice of the quieter individuals, which leads them to feel confident in contributing in classes. This happens in specialised translation class. It can be said that the use of Discussion Board facilitates classroom learning by reinforcing students’ independent study.

Students’ feedback indicates the majority of them express gratitude with their learning experiences, both in and outside class.

4. PaperShow

PaperShow is similar to overhead projectors but connected to the computer. Slides from PowerPoint Presentations (PPP) that are printed on the PaperShow printing paper are linked to the projected screen and the comments written on the PaperShow printing paper using the PaperShow pen appear on the screen as they are written. This is useful to make sure that a student with a hearing difficulty keeps up with the class alongside the help of a note-taker in class. PaperShow has a function to save PPPs with the added comments included. Thus, important points of discussion that appeared in class can be recorded and made available on the VLE. PaperShow was originally meant for the student with a hearing impairment. However, it proved to

be useful for others as well. Writing while talking reduces speed but ensures that everyone can reflect on what is important.

5. Conclusions

Discussion Board proved to be more useful pedagogically than initially anticipated. It may be useful for language learning such as reading or grammar exercises. PaperShow also has potential to be valuable but the balance must be measured between the time spent on writing and the importance of the information being written. PaperShow may be suitable for lower level composition as well as grammar exercises.

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