

29 Students' perspective on Web 2.0-enhanced telecollaboration as added value in translator education

Mariusz Marczak¹

Abstract

The development of soft skills, which are the most critical skills in the global job market (Abbas & Hum, 2013), is an essential goal of contemporary translator education (Mathias, 2013). A solution that permits students to simultaneously develop translation skills and soft skills is telecollaboration (Dooly & O'Dowd, 2012), i.e. the use of Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) for collaborative project work. This paper investigates students' views of the usefulness of telecollaboration in translator education, particularly in relation to the development of soft skills. Initially the author introduces the notions of soft skills (Bartel, 2011; Mathias, 2013) and telecollaboration (Belz, 2003; Dooly & O'Dowd, 2013). Then he demonstrates how the latter links to the development of the former (Fleet, 2013; Keedwell, 2013). Finally, he reports the results of a survey study on students' perceptions of the value of CMC in translator education.

Keywords: translator education, telecollaboration, CMC, soft skills.

1. Jagiellonian University of Cracow, Cracow, Poland; mariusz.marczak@uj.edu.pl

How to cite this chapter: Marczak, M. (2016). Students' perspective on Web 2.0-enhanced telecollaboration as added value in translator education. In S. Jager, M. Kurek & B. O'Rourke (Eds), *New directions in telecollaborative research and practice: selected papers from the second conference on telecollaboration in higher education* (pp. 245-252). Research-publishing.net. <https://doi.org/10.14705/rpnet.2016.telecollab2016.514>

1. Introduction

Three major factors affect contemporary translator education: professional reality, educational trends and the demands of the job market. Translation worldwide is a rapidly growing industry, with an estimated annual growth rate ranging from 6.2% (DePalma, Hegde, Pielmeier, & Stewart, 2014) to 10% (Pym, 2016). In effect, speedy, low-cost language service delivery and automated translation are in heavy demand (Choudhury & McConnell, 2013). Moreover, elaborate commissions require joint translation, where all the parties involved in the process collaborate effectively (Beninato & DePalma, 2007), often from distant locations, and an adequate response to the challenges comes from mobile translation technologies (Choudhury & McConnell, 2013).

At the same time, following calls by scholars such as Prensky (2001, 2012) or Tapscott (2008), computer technology has been harnessed to foster education, and as Zappa (2012) prophesises, the trend is to continue until the 2040s. Consequently, it seems justifiable to shift translator education towards telecollaborative methodologies, involving the use of CMC, Web 2.0 tools and cloud computing technologies.

Telecollaboration entails sociocultural learning, i.e. interaction in social contexts scaffolded by the teacher and followed by critical reflection (Guth & Helm, 2010). It may be designed to involve the use of file-sharing media and work modes engaging students in synchronous/asynchronous and oral/written communication (Guth & Helm, 2010). Although telecollaboration is usually utilised with a view to developing intercultural competence (cf. Dooly, 2008; Dooly & O'Dowd, 2012), it may also foster the development of operational, cultural and critical literacies, which correspond to: practical computer and language skills; knowledge of the nature of communication and communication practices; and the ability to reflect on the values and power relations beyond the communication tools used (Lankshear & Knobel, 2006).

Telecollaboration may also further the development of soft skills, i.e. universal, transferrable skills which increase a person's employability, regardless of the

domain. Although various taxonomies of soft skills have been proposed by researchers, e.g. [Bartel \(2011\)](#), [Han \(2011\)](#), [Mathias \(2013\)](#), and business or career advisory bodies, e.g. the Academic Career Advice Office at the University of Łódź, Poland ([Szulc, n.d.](#)) and the Committee for Economic Development from Arlington, VA, USA ([Herk, 2015](#)), a set of core skills can be identified, which includes: communication skills; teamwork skills; interpersonal skills; cultural awareness; flexibility, strategic planning and self-organisation skills; creativity; (analytical/critical) thinking skills; and leadership skills.

2. Method

A survey was conducted in order to answer three research questions:

- Do students perceive telecollaboration as a useful approach in translator education?
- In students' views, which soft skills were actually developed through the telecollaboration project in question?
- What implications do the findings have for course design?

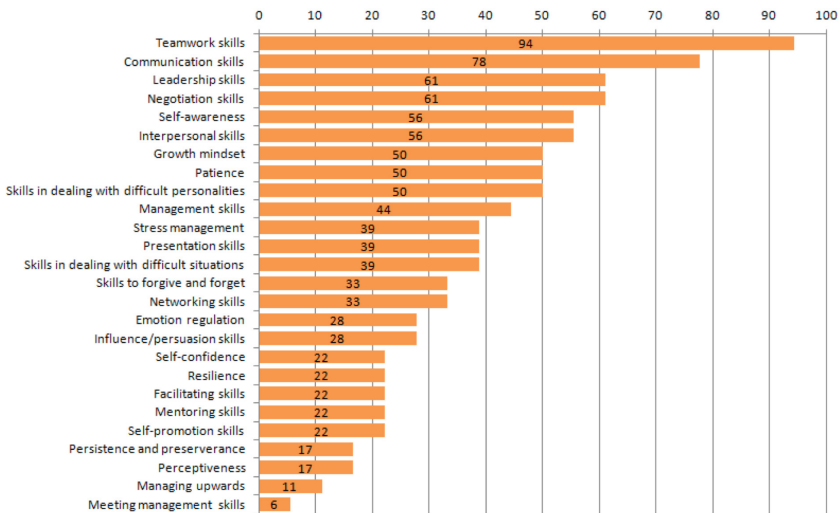
The questionnaire was administered in January 2016 at the Pedagogical University of Cracow on a convenience sample of 18 student translators (N=18) in their first year of an MA programme. The subjects were surveyed online through a set of close-ended questions. Prior to the study, the students completed a telecollaboration project in which they worked in four groups of three, a group of four and a pair, and used online tools, e.g. *Facebook Messenger*, *TitanPad*, and *Google Live Docs*, to compile a term bank containing entries relating to the area of Computer Assisted Translation. The project work involved a number of actions, e.g. online search for reference texts, parallel text alignment, term extraction with Computer-Assisted Translation (CAT) tools (*memoQ* or *PlusTools*), data collection, database creation with CAT tools, and data transfer to a printable format through the *Mail Merge* functionality of *Microsoft Word*. The telecollaboration stage was preceded by

face-to-face instruction in: special purpose languages, terminology and its role in translation as well as CAT/terminology tools.

3. Results

According to the results, all the students (100%) viewed telecollaboration as useful in translator education. As Figure 1 graphically illustrates, they also perceived telecollaboration as a work mode which facilitates the development of a wide range of soft skills – drawn from the afore-mentioned list proposed by Han (2011) – although students differed in their support for the idea with regard to particular skills.

Figure 1. Proportions of students believing that particular soft skills can be developed through telecollaboration, based on their experience of a telecollaborative translation project



Given their experience, the largest proportions of students (over 50% of the sample) believed that telecollaboration helped develop teamwork skills (94%),

communication skills (78%), leadership skills (61%), negotiation skills (56%) and self-awareness (56%).

50% of the students expressed the view that telecollaboration fostered the development of growth mindset – i.e. perceiving challenges as an opportunity to learn, grow, and change – patience, and the ability to deal with difficult personalities. Relatively large proportions of students (over 30%) were positive about the development of management skills, stress management skills, presentation skills, the ability to deal with difficult situations, skills to forgive and forget and networking skills. The smallest proportions of students (below 30%) were convinced about telecollaboration fostering the development of emotion regulation skills, influence/persuasion skills, self-confidence, resilience, facilitating skills, mentoring skills, self-promotion skills, persistence and perseverance, perceptiveness, managing upwards skills and meeting management skills. None of the students saw telecollaboration as a chance to develop savvy in office politics and selling skills.

4. Discussion

The most significant finding of the study is that the students unanimously approved of telecollaboration as an approach with which to facilitate translator education. The remainder of the data gathered indicates which soft skills telecollaboration may improve. In general, none of the soft skills listed in the survey were considered as those that cannot be developed through telecollaboration; however, the potential of telecollaboration for the development of specific soft skills was recognised by different proportions of students, which implies that the skills may be developed to varying degrees, depending on circumstances.

It is worth observing that although particular soft skills were not explicitly listed in the questionnaire, they were – as it were – disguised under different names, and the respondents also recognised that the skills can potentially be fostered by telecollaboration. For instance, skills in dealing with difficult situations and difficult personalities may be viewed as corresponding to flexibility and

management skills; managing upwards skills may be perceived as relating to strategic planning, creativity and thinking skills; while skills in dealing with difficult situations, emotion regulation and stress management may be said to relate to cultural awareness.

5. Conclusions

The findings have a number of implications for translator education. Firstly, students admit that telecollaboration furthers the development of soft skills. However, course instructors should additionally make them aware of the value of soft skills in the professional world, which is likely to increase participation levels and overall student motivation in telecollaborative projects.

Secondly, as particular soft skills were developed to varying degrees in the telecollaboration project under investigation, it may be hypothesised that the degree to which that happens depends on a number factors, including: task design, learner roles, and online tool selection. That is why teachers must ensure that the tasks set are likely to foster the development of a broad range of soft skills.

Thirdly, the development of the soft skills that smaller proportions of students believed to have had a chance to work on, e.g. perceptiveness, might require additional stimulation, which might be achieved through critical reflection on the learning process, analysis of individual learning gains and identification of students' own strengths and weaknesses. Techniques to be used for that purpose could be those that involve the systematic recording of experiences, such as: diaries, logs or think-aloud protocols.

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Published by Research-publishing.net, not-for-profit association
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New directions in telecollaborative research and practice: selected papers from the second conference on telecollaboration in higher education
Edited by Sake Jager, Malgorzata Kurek, and Breffni O'Rourke

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UNICollab logo – Harriett Cornish, Graphic Designer, KMi, The Open University

ISBN13: 978-1-908416-40-7 (Paperback - Print on demand, black and white)
Print on demand technology is a high-quality, innovative and ecological printing method; with which the book is never 'out of stock' or 'out of print'.

ISBN13: 978-1-908416-41-4 (Ebook, PDF, colour)
ISBN13: 978-1-908416-42-1 (Ebook, EPUB, colour)

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Legal deposit, United Kingdom: The British Library.
British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data.

A cataloguing record for this book is available from the British Library.

Legal deposit, France: Bibliothèque Nationale de France - Dépôt légal: novembre 2016.
