It's a *Wiki* World: Collaboration in Translator Training

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Abstract

In many traditional types of translator training, there is a strong focus on individual work undertaken by trainee translators, while pair-work and group-work is used less extensively. Such a focus may, to some extent, reflect the contemporary Western perception of translation as a solitary activity, with a single translator working individually, isolated from the rest of the world. This perception, however, is oversimplified since translation often involves some type of collaboration, such as the translator collaborating with an editor, a copyeditor, the client, or a disciplinary expert. In addition, some emerging trends in translation in the digital age are collaborative in their nature (e.g. crowdsourcing). It seems, therefore, that collaboration is an aspect of translation that needs to be addressed more carefully in translator training. The present paper reports on a study focusing on collaboration in a translation course. The goal of the study was to examine the types of collaboration that trainee translators use when they are presented with a collaborative assignment. In the study, trainee translators were asked to complete two collaborative translation assignments using a *wiki*, which enables monitoring the degree of participation for each *wiki* participant. The first assignment encouraged free collaboration in an attempt to mirror informal collaboration: trainee translators were asked to collaborate in any way they wished. The second assignment was focused on structured collaboration: trainee translators were given detailed guidelines on the types of collaboration expected of them, and on the extent of the contribution they were expected to make. The findings show that the second assignment resulted in more intensive teamwork and promoted more diverse types of collaboration than the first assignment. This suggests that carefully structured collaboration should be given additional attention within the context of translator training.

It's a *Wiki* World: Collaboration in Translator Training

In contemporary Western societies, translation is generally perceived as a solitary activity, with a single translator working individually, isolated from the rest of the world. This view dominates much of translation-related discourse, giving rise to the perception that it embodies the essence of translation. However, an examination of the ways in which translation is understood in non-Western societies reveals that translation is not necessarily identified as a highly individualized activity (cf. Lefevere, 1998; Tymocko, 2005). Furthermore, a more detailed look at translation within the Western world itself shows that the traditional perspective is oversimplified, since translation often involves some type of collaboration, such as the translator collaborating with an editor, a copyeditor, the client, or a disciplinary expert. In addition, some of the emerging trends in translation in the digital age are collaborative in their nature (e.g. use of translation memory, crowdsourcing).

Yet, we find that in the traditional approach to translator training[1] there is a strong focus on individual work undertaken by trainee translators, although the importance of collaborative work in translator training has already been recognized by various scholars from this field (cf. Kiraly, 2000; Robinson et al., 2006). This is problematic because the students of today, who in Prensky's (2001) terms are *digital natives[2],* are very much aware of the new trends in translation, and of the possibilities that new technologies offer (e.g., document sharing, cloud storage,

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[1] While our discussion is limited to translator training, it should be pointed out that translation is making a comeback as an activity in foreign language pedagogy (cf. Cook, 2010): the collaborative aspect is therefore significant not only for translator training, but it is equally relevant for using translation in the language classroom.

[2] "Our students today are all "native speakers" of the digital language of computers, video games and the Internet" Prensky (2001, p. 1).

collaborative writing and editing), so it is not surprising that they seek ways of incorporating collaboration into their translation work. It, therefore, appears that collaboration is an aspect of translation that needs to be addressed more carefully in translator training.

The present paper reports on a study comparing two different types of collaboration, free and structured, used in translation. The goal of the study was to show that structured collaboration promotes more intensive teamwork and more diverse types of interaction than free collaboration. In the study, 14 trainee translators were asked to complete two collaborative translation assignments using a *wiki*. The first assignment encouraged free collaboration while the second assignment was focused on structured collaboration. The findings show significant differences between the two assignments in the amount and type of interaction.

Using *wikis* in language pedagogy

A *wiki* is a "freely expandable collection of interlinked web pages, a hypertext system for storing and modifying information – a database, where each page is easily edited by any user with a forms-capable Web browser client" (Leuf and Cunningham, 2001, p. 14). *Wikis* are primarily designed to encourage collaboration as they allow their users to add new content, edit and/or delete existing content, or comment on or expand the contributions made by other users. The content can be in the form of text, images, or multimedia. The users of a *wiki* can add hyperlinks to external sites or expand the *wiki* by creating additional webpages. A "changelog" that allows the users to keep track of and compare the different versions of the *wiki* is a common feature of many *wikis*.

These features make *wikis* particularly suitable for use in educational settings; Wheeler et al. (2008) provide a comprehensive overview of the ways in which *wikis* can be used to promote collaborative learning by providing support to student-created content. The specific potential of a *wiki* in foreign language teaching and learning has been explored by a number of studies: Kessler (2009), for instance, examines

how *wiki*-based collaborative writing can be used to encourage students to focus on language accuracy, while Kuteeva (2011) explores the changes in the writer-reader relationship initiated by the use of a course *wiki* in an academic writing course. The fact that a *wiki* allows the researcher to gain insight into its revision history makes it a useful tool for research on revisions, particularly relevant to research on writing pedagogy. In a recent study on this subject, Kost (2011) focuses on the writing strategies and revision behaviour of students in collaborative *wiki* projects. In a similar way, insight into revision history can be used to explore the collaborative behaviour in creating and revising a translation.

Method

Participants

The participants were 14 trainee translators whose L1 is Slovene. All participants were first-year master's students in translation from the Department of Translation and Interpreting at the University of Ljubljana, Slovenia. The trainee translators were enrolled in an English-Slovene translation course. They were familiar with the Moodle e-learning software platform, as this is the e-learning platform which is used in all of their courses; however, none of the participants had any prior experience with a *wiki*. The participants received detailed written instructions on how to use a *wiki* and were provided with practical training on working with a *wiki* in the classroom prior to their first assignment.

Data collection

Paired students were asked to complete two translation assignments from English into Slovene. The source text for the first assignment was the patient information leaflet for a pain reliever/fever reducer drug; the source text for the second assignment was a passage from a popular science book on evolutionary biology.

In the first assignment, free collaboration was encouraged: trainee translators were asked to collaborate in any way they wished to complete their translation. Several forms of collaboration were suggested (each pair member translating a part of the text, revising the partner's text, revising the entire text, communicating with their partner about translation problems or issues in revision), but it was also pointed out that it was up to the individual pairs to choose any form of collaboration that would suit them. All 14 trainee translators participated, submitting seven collaborative pair-work assignments in the form of a *wiki*.

In the second assignment, structured collaboration was required: trainee translators were given detailed guidelines on the types of collaboration expected of them, on the sequence of steps that they needed to take, and on the extent of the contribution they were expected to make. They were each required to translate approximately one half of the text and to participate in revision in two different ways. They were asked to revise the text from the point of view of a copyeditor with no regard to the source text, and subsequently, to revise the text by carefully comparing the source text with the target text. Of the 14 trainee translators, 12 participated in the second assignment, submitting six collaborative pair-work assignmentsin the form of a *wiki*. Of the remaining two, one trainee translator was absent because she was involved in an exchange programme, while the other student expressed a preference for individual work.

Data analysis

The target texts produced by the pairs of students for each assignment in the *wiki* format constituted the data used in the analysis. The data consisted of 13 sets of target texts in the form of a *wiki*, seven for the first assignment and six for the second assignments. The target texts were first examined in terms of revisions. The *wiki* format in Moodle allows the viewing of revision history. By comparing the different versions of the translation, it was possible to track all the changes made to the document and to determine which pair member contributed and/or edited which part

of the content. The changes were then coded as additions, revisions of the student's own text, or revisions of the partner's text. The two types of revisions were analysed in terms of the type of editing that they entailed.

Results and discussion

Amount and type of participation

The quantitative results of the analysis of the *wiki* change logs are presented in Tables 1 and 2 and discussed below.

Table 1. Engagement in various types of activities

	Translation assignment 1	*Translation assignment 2*
% of students engaged in all three activities	7%	83%
% of students engaged in two activities	57%	0%
% of students engaged in one activity	36%	17%

The three activities the students could engage in were translation, revisions of the student's own text, or revisions of the partner's text.

Table 2. Percentage of students participating in each activity

	Translation assignment 1	*Translation assignment 2*
Translation	79%	100%
Revising own text	43%	83%
Revising partner's text	43%	83%

The quantitative results presented in Tables 1 and 2 clearly show that structured collaboration encouraged the students to participate in more

activities than free collaboration. In fact, a qualitative review of the changes shows that free collaboration was understood by some of the students to primarily entail reducing the amount of work they would have to complete. Thus, three of the seven pairs participating in the first assignment chose to split the work into translating (carried out by one pair member) and revising (carried out by the other). In practice, however, revising was significant only in one of these three pairs; in the other two, the revisions were minor and very limited in number, indicating that one of the students in those two pairs did very little work. Another interesting point that emerges in the analysis of the first assignment is the relative reluctance of the students to revise their partner's work. It seems possible that the students did not feel confident enough to "correct" their partner's output even though this ultimately affected the quality of the final product. However, the reluctance to revise their own work suggests that the students were perhaps expecting a more profound revision from their partner.

While it is not surprising that all the students undertook translation in the second assignment since they were explicitly asked to do so (although it must be pointed out that not all students followed all the steps in the instructions for the second assignment), it is interesting that the vast majority also revised their own and their partner's text, although they were not explicitly told to revise all of the text. It seems that by receiving clear instructions as to the type of revising that they should undertake in the second assignment, the participants understood revision as a more serious type of engagement with the text compared to the first assignment. The overview of the types of revisions made by the trainee translators further confirms this observation.

Types of revisions

Revisions to both the student's own text and the partner's text were analysed in terms of type: a distinction was made between minor and extensive changes. Changes were classified as minor if they concerned the

formatting, punctuation, spelling, changing the grammatical form of the word or replacing a lexical item with another one. Changes that affected larger chunks of texts (more than one word) were classified as extensive changes. They entailed changing longer structures, such as phrases, clauses, sentences or even groups of sentences. The terminology used (minor – extensive) does not directly reflect the importance of changes.Minor changes can certainly contribute to improving the text, for instance, if an unsuitable lexical item is replaced or a grammatical mistake is corrected. However, extensive changes generally implied a greater degree of involvement in the text, because they constituted complex rewording, whereas minor changes suggested a more superficial involvement.

In the first assignment, the vast majority of revisions made by the students were minor changes; only rarely did the students choose to revise the text extensively. Most students made no more than ten minor changes. Minor changes made in revision concerned mostly lexical items (e.g., the initial translation solution for the source text term *pregelatinized starch* was*predželatiniziraniškrob*, the adjective was then corrected to *predgeliran*), grammatical forms (e.g., changing the pronoun case in the translation solution for the source text expression *every 4 to 6 hours*by replacing <u>*vsake 4-6 ur*</u> with <u>*vsakih 4-6 ur*</u> or changing the indefinite form of the adjective *možen* (Engl. *possible*) to the definite form *možni*) and spelling (replacing *karnauba* (Engl. *carnauba*) with *karnavba*).

In the second assignment the situation was quite different. While a few students still found it difficult to go beyond minor revisions, the majority of students revised at levels demonstrating a thorough involvement with the text. For instance, the translation of the following sentence from the source text was substantially changed in one of the *wikis*: *Wolves were domesticated in Eurasia and North America to become our dogs used as hunting companions, sentinels, pets, and, in some societies, food.* The initial translation attempt contained an error resulting

from comprehension failure (the translations stated that wolves like dogs were hunting companions etc.) and was unnecessarily complicated: *Volkove so v Evraziji in Severni Ameriki udomačevali, da bi jim bili ti, podobno kot psi, v pomoč pri lovu in straži, pa tudi zato, da so jih imeli za ljubljenčke in v nekaterih kulturah celo za hrano.* The revised version conveyed the same content as the original and was considerably clearer and more concise: *Volkovi, udomačeni v Evraziji in Severni Ameriki, so postali psi, naši pomočniki pri lovu in straži, hišni ljubljenčki in v nekaterih kulturah hrana.*

Conclusion

The goal of the study was to show that structured collaboration promotes more intensive teamwork and more diverse types of interaction than free collaboration; the findings of the study provide clear support for the initial hypothesis. The results show that the trainee translators undertook fewer types of activities, and engaged with the text more superficially in the process of revision in free collaboration, while the situation was reversed in structured collaboration. This suggests that carefully structured collaboration should be given additional attention within the context of translator training.

Because of the *limited number* and common cultural background *of the participants* taking part in the study as well as the limited number and format of assignments, the findings cannot be generalized to all students. Nonetheless, the findings provide a solid starting point for further research. Additional research focusing on the behaviour of trainee translators from different cultures would help establish to what extent the results presented here can be generalized. Furthermore, expanding the format of assignments (e.g., including group-work in addition to pair-work) would be needed to gain better insight into the ways in which structured collaboration can be used in the classroom.

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