

# 14 Using Blackboard Wiki pages as a shared space for simulating the professional translation work environment

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## Abstract

The Work-Integrated Simulation for Translators module is part of a three year undergraduate degree in translation. The semester long module aims to simulate several aspects of the translation process using the Blackboard virtual learning environment's Wikis as the interface for completing translation tasks. For each translation task, one of the students is the translator and the other student is the reviser and evaluator. The Source Text (ST) is sent to the students with a translation brief, and they have to co-ordinate between themselves via the Wiki to ensure the whole task is completed within one week. The feedback from the language tutor is also uploaded onto the Wiki, so that both students are able to access the feedback on all parts of the task. The students are also required to reflect on the experience through the journals tool in Blackboard.

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**Keywords:** wiki, translator training, translator competences, procedural knowledge, pair work, reflection.

## 1. Context/rationale

Translation is the “prototypical teleworking profession” (Olvera-Lobo, 2007, p. 518) and the vast majority of professional translations are completed using information and communication technology (ICT), so it is essential that as part

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of the student's training, they are required to use ICT to complete translation tasks. However, in the module in this case study, gaining confidence in using ICT applications is only one of the aims and objectives. The use of the ICT applications provides the platform for allowing collaborative work and it is through the process of collaboration that students develop the other skills which will be needed in professional translation contexts.

Translation is a complex activity that requires the negotiation of various skills or competences. There has been a long debate about what these skills are and various models of translation competence have been proposed. The [PACTE \(2003\)](#) research group<sup>1</sup> whose main research focus is the acquisition of translation skills has proposed a model of translation competence which consists of six sub-categories:

- bilingual;
- extra-linguistic, i.e. knowledge about the world;
- instrumental knowledge about use of documentation;
- ICT, dictionaries, etc;
- transfer, which is the central competence which regulates the other to allow completion of a translation;
- strategic sub-competence, which relates to all the strategies that a translator employs both consciously and subconsciously to resolve translation problems, and psycho-physiological sub-competence, which relates to the psychological attributes required to complete translation tasks.

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1. PACTE is a research group based at the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona. The principle researcher is Amparo Hurtado Albir. The group was formed in 1997 and its main research interests are empirical and experimental-based research on translator competence and also translator training.

Of these sub-competences the last four are all related to procedural knowledge, i.e. knowledge of how things happen which can only be gained effectively through doing. So when considering how to train translators, it is important to give students the opportunities to develop these sub-competences. Using ICT in this module not only ensures that students develop the instrumental sub-competence, but also develop the other sub-competences necessary to become professional translators.

## **2. Aims and objectives**

The module aims to provide the opportunity for students to develop skills and knowledge, which ensures that they understand and are able to explicitly address the different translator competences described above, through teleworking in pairs via a Wiki site to accomplish translation tasks.

They develop instrumental skills by using the tools of translation to complete the tasks such as Wikis, internet research, dictionaries, parallel texts and the in-house style guide provided in the introductory sessions.

Transfer competence is developed by working on all the stages that need to be fulfilled to complete the task, e.g. deciding on what translation tools to use, co-ordinating work between the pairs, communicating clearly, and engaging in revision.

Strategic competence is developed by introducing them via the activity to the various strategies necessary to complete the translation according to the brief provided. The use of reflection, which asks students to explicitly think of strategies for dealing with problems that arise out of the translation task, also develops this competence.

Psycho-physiological competences are developed by allowing the students to complete the tasks by the deadline in any manner they decide, so they must be self-motivated, organised and able to manage their time effectively. The

challenges of relying on others to complete a task and working together are also part of this competence. The use of reflection to underline and reinforce the learning can also be seen as a development within this competence.

### **3. What I did: the translation task design**

In order to clearly explain the module, I will divide this section into three parts: an overview of the whole module in which the translation tasks are set, an introduction to Wikis, and the translation tasks.

#### **3.1. Overview of the module**

The module is designed to introduce the students to the professional contexts and practices of the translation industry. This is achieved through the students engaging in the translation tasks and also through a series of talks by guest speakers who introduce their jobs or companies. Each translation task is undertaken by two students: one working as a translator and the other as a reviser/evaluator. A ST with a translation brief is uploaded by the tutor to the blackboard site. The students then have one week to complete the translation and revision using the Wiki to communicate with each other and store documents. Student one uploads the ST to the Wiki and using a word document creates a translation (TT), which once completed is uploaded onto the Wiki. Then student two is able to download the TT, revise it and also evaluate it by filling out a feedback form. The revision and the evaluation are then uploaded to the Wiki. Then student one has an opportunity to comment on the revisions and the evaluation within the Wiki site. The tutor then uploads feedback on the original translation, the revision and the peer evaluation to the Wiki page, so that both students have access to all the feedback. Another important part of the module is introducing reflective practice as part of continuing professional development and as a way of embedding the experiential learning gained through performing the translation tasks. The students are assessed on a portfolio of four translations which they have either translated or revised and evaluated. They are also assessed on a reflective report they write about the

module and challenges they faced and the strategies they developed to deal with these challenges.

### **3.2. Wikis for teaching**

Wikis can be found on most virtual learning environments (VLEs). They are a series of webpages that can be modified by anyone who has been given access to them, and changes are tracked: “wikis provide a medium for storing, organising and reformulating the ideas that are contributed by each member of a community” (Carr, 2008, p. 148).

In order to use Wikis on this module, I had to set up groups/pairs of students in the module Blackboard site. The groups/pairs would have exclusive access to their Wiki. We discovered that it was not possible to copy and paste documents directly on to the Wiki page as the formatting of the text became corrupted by the difference between the word documents and the Wiki site. All the documents relating to the translation task were, thus, uploaded as links on the Wiki page according to a set of instructions indicating how they should be named. The Blackboard interface sometimes reacted against documents containing Asian characters and/or numbers which, as a consequence, could not be downloaded and opened from the site. Following the instructions on naming documents and uploading them correctly is part of the task. These actions were assessed under ‘professionalism’. Each new translation task can be stored in the same Wiki site on new pages. The Wikis have a comment facility which means that students and tutors can communicate about the task on the page itself, making communication clear and explicit. The tutor is able to assess whether the students have communicated clearly, in a timely fashion and in a professionally appropriate register, and this again is part of the assessment criteria.

### **3.3. The translation tasks**

The module is taught to all students of translation and so has both native and non-native speakers of French, Spanish, German and Chinese. Students are divided

up alphabetically into pairs with the same language combination regardless of whether they are native or non-native speakers. The rationale underpinning this decision is that while within professional contexts the best practice is to work into the L1 (i.e. the native language), translators are often asked to revise work in languages they do not speak, in fact in some countries translators may even translate from L1 into L2.

In the introductory sessions, the students are introduced to the translation scenario. It is explained that they are either a free-lance translator working for a translation company or an in-house reviser. The project manager of the translation company sends a source text with a translation brief. The free-lancer then translates it and uploads it to the company website, where the in-house translator revises the translation and also provides feedback on the translation quality. The translator will be sent the revisions for any comments they wish to make about the choices made during the translation process. The project manager then receives the original translation, the revision and the feedback form. The roles are alternated with each translation task.

By the end of the module, each student will have compiled an e-portfolio of four translation tasks. The portfolio includes a translation of L1 to L2 text, a revision of a peer's translation of a L1 to L2 text, a translation of L2 to L1 text and a revision of a peer's translation of a L2 to L1 text. As well as revising the peer's translation, the student must provide feedback on the quality of the translation and award it a mark. The reviser's evaluation and feedback form part of the assessment. Students are also given two shorter texts through which they familiarise with the practical aspects of the task, such as using Wiki pages.

The texts for translation are chosen by the individual language tutors. There is a team meeting of the tutors to co-ordinate the types of texts used across all the languages. All texts should provide translation and revision issues such as formatting issues, as well as extra-linguistic knowledge issues which will require researching. The texts are 300 words long. All texts are provided with a detailed translation brief.

The translation and revision task should be completed within one week of the source text being posted on the Blackboard module site. This tight deadline creates an added pressure on the students to co-ordinate effectively in order not to miss the deadline. Translating under a time constraint is an important aspect of the professional environment and requires students to deal with time-management.

The professional translation competences are explicitly assessed against grading criteria. Professionalism relates to clear and effective communication between all parties, using appropriate language to provide feedback and corrections, finishing the tasks by the deadline, and following procedures accurately. The students are also assessed for translating according to the brief and for their bilingual skills.

#### **4. Discussion: issues arising from running the module**

From the student's perspective, the module is very popular. They feel that the translation tasks give them real insight into what might be expected of them in the professional environment. They often feel they have learnt useful skills in working with others, such as communication and time-management, and improved their instrumental skills. Here are two quotes taken from the student's reflective logs:

“This module helped me practice skills that would not only be crucial in my professional life but also in my day to day life: communication, teamwork, punctuality, diplomacy and most importantly professionalism”.

“As a future translator, it is unequivocal that I have benefited significantly from this module. The module is different from the courses I have taken in my home university in Beijing. What I have learnt in this module has given me a clearer and more realistic perception of how the translation industry runs”.

These very same positives elements also provide the students with some of their greatest challenges. The students worry that their pair work peer will not complete their own tasks on time. They also find it very difficult to evaluate their peers, especially if they feel the language direction of the translation is not their own L2 to L1. However difficult, these challenges are valuable sources of the learning experience, and are often the subject of their reflective logs. It is also important to have contingency plans for when things do go wrong, to reassure students that they will not be penalised for their peer's non-performance.

The module delivery is quite complex and indeed this could be one of its drawbacks, as it does require a lot of explanation to the students at the beginning of the module and in fact two sessions are devoted to this. This can be problematic as the students can feel overwhelmed at the amount of information and all the new technical skills they need to master. This difficulty can be ameliorated by ensuring that information is given in a staged manner and that all the instructions are clear and that there is plenty of opportunity to practice in class and in the first weeks of term. I believe that this complexity of process can be justified within the aims and objectives of this module as it is something students will be expected to deal with in professional contexts when they are introduced to the in-house translation procedures and the in-house styles of their client agencies. It is explained to the students that following the procedures is an important part of the translation task, and will reflect on their professionalism.

As we, the staff group, have learnt more about the quirks of the Wikis, i.e. not recognising and being able to open documents with numbers or characters other than the Roman alphabet and the limitation of not being able to cut and paste onto the Wiki page, there are very few problems with using the Wikis. The students have an opportunity to practice using the system at the beginning of the semester in the in-class workshop and then with the practice tasks.

The module is run across several languages and each language has two language specific translation tutors to provide texts and feedback. The detailed marking of



each aspect of the translation task means the tutors are required to mark and add suggested corrections to both the translation and the revision, and to evaluate the peer's feedback. This is very time consuming and with large groups may not be practical. The numbers of tutors working on the module makes it quite complex to administrate and quite expensive to run from the department head's perspective.

The university is redesigning modules to fit in with a new model of teaching which has been called *learning futures*. An important aspect of this is trying to assess the students across the modules, i.e. have less assessment attached to a single module, but find ways to assess students combining the learning from more than one module in one assessment. One of the reasons for this is to take the emphasis off the assessments and shift it to the learning process. In this new system and in fact even in the present system, the module is very intensively assessed which has implications for the student's workload and also for staffing costs. It is possible that these task-based translations using Wikis could be incorporated into the language specific translation classes and the translations could also contain a reflective element. It is also possible that this module could become part of a larger assessment strand focusing on the translation profession and employability.

## 5. Conclusion

The Wikis in the Blackboard virtual learning environment provide a very effective platform for carrying out the collaborative translation tasks which simulate many aspects of the professional translation industry. Many of the skills acquired through collaborative learning, such as clear communication and effective critical evaluation, are transferrable to other employment situations. The tasks could be designed to incorporate more aspects of a translation task, i.e. by using the Wikis to store glossaries and parallel texts. The students feel the module provides a new and engaging look at professional translation and they feel they learn a lot from completing it. I will finish with a quote from a student's reflective log, where she concludes:

“The outcome makes me happy and motivates me to pursue my studies further. Also regarding real work life, I gained self-confidence and can see myself working as a translator or interpreter”.

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