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Pathway into translation online teaching and learning: three case-studies

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ABSTRACT

Promoting effective student engagement and learning in the online environment continues to challenge translation instructors. This article shares findings from three case studies conducted over a ten-year period at the University of Quebec in Trois-Rivières, Canada. The underlying concern was to generate meaningful interaction and student engagement in online translation instruction. Initially the discussion board was found to be instrumental for punctual questions, knowledge sharing and course logistics. With larger groups, however, it proved tedious and less effective for promoting higher order thinking for translation problem solving. Incorporating collaborative tasks, using videoconferencing technology enabled the instructor to promote and observe active student interaction and identify obstacles to learning. Two obstacles spring to light: students need guidance for conducting effective teamwork and discussing translation solutions objectively. Providing instructions on teamwork and a framework for approaching translation problems is essential. Further work is envisaged to promote higher order thinking by emphasising metacognitive awareness as students learn by themselves and with others.

KEYWORDS

Online translation instruction, student engagement, discussion board, collaboration, higher order thinking.

1. Introduction

COVID-19 has thrust online pedagogy to the forefront. This paper offers insight into online translation teaching and learning at the University of Quebec in Trois-Rivières (UQTR). It highlights our trajectory in attempting to orchestrate effective online translation instruction over a ten-year period and seeks to disseminate findings that can be useful in organising online translation instruction. Translation enrolment attrition at UQTR, its geographical location, equidistant from two major universities offering similar programmes, and the vocation of the Quebec University network to promote accessibility to tertiary education, all prompted UQTR to switch its 90-credit translation programme to an entirely online format in 2010. The students are mostly from Quebec but a small proportion (2%) hails from other locations both in and outside Canada.

Our foray into the online environment initially felt like a leap in the dark, and morphed into a path of critical reflection and continued refinement of course design and instruction. This reflection is conducted from a three-fold perspective: (1) cultivating a learning environment and a sense of community, (2) orchestrating collaborative tasks to enrich interaction and observing student processes, and (3) probing for evidence of translation learning. Data collected from recordings of asynchronous discussion-board

interventions and synchronous exchanges on a video-conferencing platform (VIA), involving three specific classes and often exceeding 50 students per group, constitute the core of this trajectory depiction.

Drawing on research in both online education and translation learning, these investigative studies share insights on an online teaching journey that can enrich translation teaching and learning, and offer avenues for developing student engagement and higher order thinking. The pathway depicted in this paper presents how the instructor adjusted and evolved their pedagogical practice, hinged on observations of teaching and learning processes and cognitive development. Admittedly, some of our observations/findings are inherently applicable to the face-to-face classroom.

2. Study 1: Cultivating a learning environment

Interaction among peers and with the instructor has proven to be essential to student learning and to building an effective learning environment (Eyal 2012, Law *et al.* 2019). The word *un-distancing* is used to refer to bridging the perceived distance between students in the virtual classroom and the following elements: (1) structure, (2) dialogue and (3) autonomy. These elements of distance characterise the communication gap between students and instructors (Moore 2018: 39). In the online environment this gap can also relate to how students interact with each other, with the course content as well as with the technologies involved (Zhang 2003). An understanding of these elements can guide instructors in their course development to facilitate collaboration that can promote articulation of reasoning, reflection and confirmation of knowledge (Gurjar 2020). These instructional considerations contribute to the development of translation skills. As gleaned from the literature, undistancing entails adopting the appropriate tone for communication and setting students' expectations. It also involves establishing means for attaining learning objectives and devising tasks that elicit engagement with theory learned and personal reflection on the material. Providing appropriate timely feedback and required is also important (Garrison *et al.* 2000, Zhang 2003, Paul et al. 2015, Huang et al. 2016).

This first case study focuses attention on the perceived distance within the online asynchronous environment and its impact on teaching and learning.

2.1 Deeper understanding of distancing

From the inception of our journey, both instructor and students sensed a missing human connection. The first challenge lay in creating a learning environment where students could interact with peers and expert(s) to acquire and to confirm knowledge and skills with others (Garrison *et al*.

2010, Kozan and Caskurlu 2018). The notion of un-distancing within the community of inquiry model (CoI), introduced by Garrison *et al*. (2000, 2010: 2) is conceptualised as cognitive, social and teaching presence. In order to achieve meaningful constructive interactions, students need to be able to make meaning through verbal or textual discourse, demonstrating cognitive presence. To attain a level of connectedness and trust (social presence), participants need to feel inter-personally connected and safe to "present themselves as 'real people'..." (Garrison *et al*. 2000: 89). Finally, this can only be achieved where the instructor is present (teaching presence) to create and facilitate an environment in which students are encouraged to be socially and cognitively connected to subject matter for a clear purpose, in this case to develop their translation skills.

Over the years, other presences such as autonomy presence, emotional presence, and learning presence have been introduced, however many of these new presences are already encapsulated in the original model (Kozan and Caskurlu 2018) and the original CoI model preserves the simplicity and retains the integrity of its collaborative constructivist premise (Garrison 2016, Kozan and Caskurlu 2018). Methodologically and theoretically, this paper is a descriptive study based on transcripts of interactions culled from asynchronous and synchronous mediums, similar to previous research using the CoI model (Kozan and Caskurlu 2018).

Social and cognitive presences are fostered by teaching presence, which is sustained through course design and instructor discourse. The instructor orchestrates purposeful learning activities, which engender both social and cognitive processes, and also sets the rules and roles for learners. In this regard, Engeström's activity model (2001: 135), adapted to translation in Figure 1 below, provides a framework for observing interactions and interactivities as well as the pedagogical-instructional tensions between learning and teaching that can help instructors adjust pedagogical approaches accordingly (Isbell 2018).

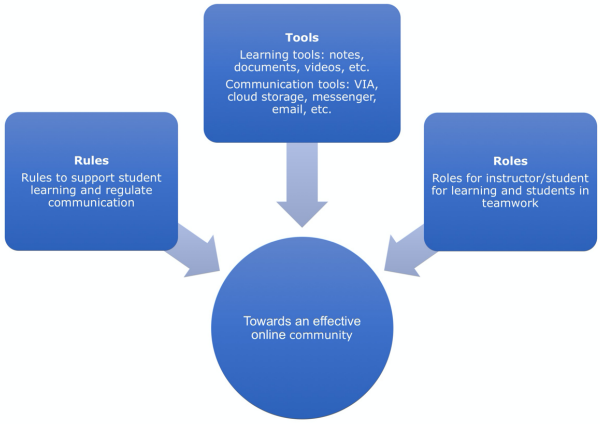

Figure 1. Framework for online interactions adapted from Engeström (2001: 135)

Assignment content and instructions, which are important for supporting online learning (Oh *et al*. 2018, Salmon 2000), contribute to cognitive presence. Translation learning requires cognitive presence that reflects a higher order of reasoning (Angelone 2010, 2018, Tirkkonen-Condit and Laukkanen 1996). Learning objectives to attain this higher order of reasoning are depicted in the translation process and these learning objectives are mirrored in Bloom's taxonomy of educational objectives (Adams 2015, Bloom and Krathwohl 1956, Ghaem and Sadoughvanini 2020, Krathwohl 2002) (see an illustration in Table 1 below). Bloom's taxonomy can influence teaching presence in relation to the choice and presentation of material as well as assessments to shape students' cognitive presence (Stayanchi 2017). Whether it be in the physical classroom or online, the objective of translation learning is to guide students to a high level of critical thinking so they can re-express meaning.

Create	Ability to produce appropriate solutions
Evaluate	Ability to assess options and possible solutions
Analyse	Ability to identify risks and options: style, context, equivalents, etc.
Apply	Ability to apply knowledge and translation strategies
Understand	Ability to extract, interpret and infer meaning
Remember	Ability to use language and previous or current knowledge (factual information)

Table 1. Illustration of Bloom's taxonomy (Krathwohl 2002: 217) related to translation learning

A few theoretical models provide a framework for examining the perceived distance in the online translation teaching and learning environment. Moore's theory of transactional distance provides an understanding of how transactional distance influences the development of rules, roles and tools (Engeström's model). The instructor draws on these three artefacts to design and adjust activities (teaching presence) in order to enable students to constructively and socially feel connected (cognitive and social presence) and meet the higher levels of Bloom's learning objectives. The CoI model provides the dynamics that can help instructors cultivate an active learning forum.

2.2 Context

Our investigative journey into the virtual classroom began in 2010 with an analysis of the discussion board in an introductory three-credit translation course. Also called a forum, the discussion board is a space for exploring the subject matter, forming relationships and collaborating on learning

activities (Covelli 2017, Murphy and Coleman 2004). The discussion board was then the sole repository of the flow of exchanges within the course.

Online exchanges between 53 students enrolled in the first year of the 90-credit translation programme were analysed. The course examines the similarities and differences in French and English grammar and style, to develop awareness of processes at play during inter-language transfer. Course tasks included reading, bidirectional translation exercises (some of which were self-correcting), written assignments, tests and a final exam. Students were encouraged to use the forum to coordinate work, ask and answer questions raised by peers or the instructor. Participation in online exchanges was not graded.

2.3 Method of analysis

Discussion threads were downloaded and examined according to the theoretical framework discussed above.

Threads from the discussion board were counted and parsed to determine (1) the level and type of presences as per the CoI model and (2) examples of knowledge construction in line with Bloom's taxonomy of educational objectives. Additionally, the syllabus, course material and instructions, discussion–board threads as well as the tasks assigned to students were reviewed and grouped thematically by the authors within the prism of Engeström's activity model (2001) to ascertain the level of alignment of the rules, roles and tools with the learning tasks and how these activity components support teaching and learning interaction.

2.4 Findings

A total of 36 of 53 students generated 320 postings on the discussion board. The board was presented as the sole place where students could interact with peers and the instructor.

The postings were parsed according to interaction types and nature of discussion. These classifications are reflected in Figures 2a and 2b (below). A set of postings related to a particular topic is considered a thread.

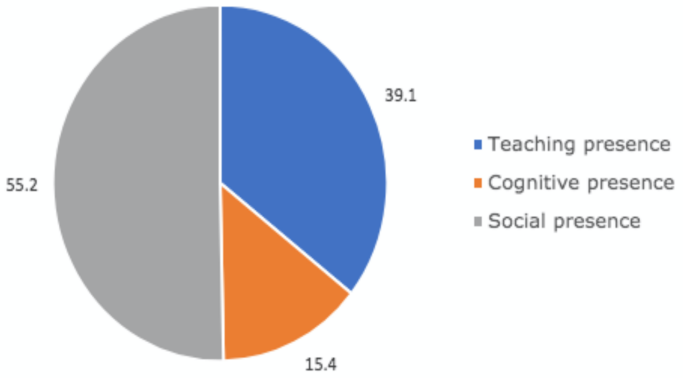

Figure 2a. Discussion thread interactions

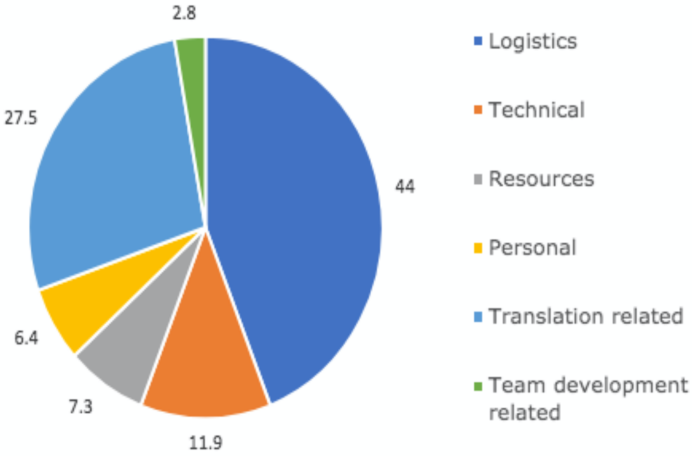

Figure 2b. Nature of discussion postings

The instructor read all the threads and responded readily to address translation issues, acknowledge student interventions and intercede in logistics threads when students could not find answers unaided. The final thread on reviewing key concepts for exam preparation was the most active with 30 postings and 450 hits, understandably, since the final exam was heavily weighted.

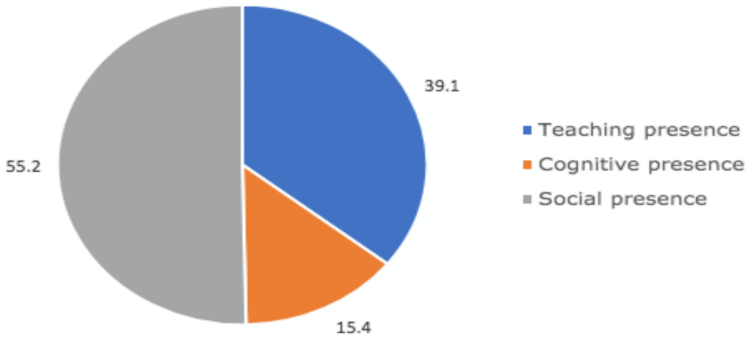

Figure 3. Classification of presences

The discussion threads were classified by type of presence (see Figure 4 above, and details provided below). Those dealing with translation issues were counted as cognitive presence; those with other issues as social presence, and all instructor interactions counted as teaching presence.

2.4.1 Social presence

In the threads examined, social presence was manifested through interactions amongst peers related to:

- Pooling reference sources
- Resolving technical/logistic issues with students
- Interpreting or clarifying instructions (see below for examples)
- Discussing translation as a career choice (see below for examples)
- Exchanging information and offering assistance
- Exchanging wishes and cordial supportive encouragements (see below for examples).

For example, a question about career choice posted by a class member elicited spontaneous personal responses and sentiments, all indicative of the role of socialising and the sense of belonging.

- S1: I was wondering what your goal was in registering in translation …
- S2: I think my science background could be an asset for translating scientific documents.
- S3: My mother and my aunt are both translators …

It is to be noted also that the course ends on a connective social note with warm parting wishes and supportive encouragements as evidenced in the excerpts below:

- S1: Cheers everyone! It was a pleasure working with you. Thanks ☺.
- S2: Thanks for the course. I really enjoyed it. It's my 1st course. I know I've found my niche.

On-line socialisation in which students feel positive support from peers and the instructor fosters learning (Garrison *et al.* 2010, Law *et al.* 2019), intersects with other types of interaction, and is present throughout. Social presence is also reflected in exchanges about sharing and pooling resources, and tools for carrying out various tasks.

- S1: I use Reverso but it's not complete. As the prof. told us, we need to consult various sources.
- S2: I use Word reference.com; Termium is good. I also like the Canadian Oxford Dictionary.

2.4.2 Teaching presence

In this study, the instructor embodies course management and facilitation which both contribute to learning. In a sense, the instructor is a *chef d'orchestre* conducting course organisation, encouraging contributions — as demonstrated by some of the interventions. This immediacy of presence decreases student distance with the instructor (Myers and Goodboy 2014), and suggests that although learning is taking place at a distance, they are not distanced.

Reflected in 40% of the exchanges, teaching presence was exemplified by the instructor's role in guiding or confirming understanding of key concepts. It appears in threads where the instructor was involved which were identified as:

- Setting social norms and tone in virtual environment (see below for examples)
- Adapting exercises and assignments to enhance learning
- Ensuring appropriate behaviour and promoting cordiality
- Supporting student learning by providing references, exercises, explanations and examples (see below for examples)
- Providing material to engage students in inquiry and reflection
- Enabling them to apply translation strategies appropriately.

The instructor establishes the tone for a convivial learning environment (Myers and Goodboy 2014, Violanti *et al.* 2018). This is exemplified in the following excerpt:

> To augment un-distancing, drawing on the metaphor of translation as a journey, I used a travel image in referring to various aspects of the course: Welcoming students on board, requesting them to fasten their seatbelts, pointing out milestones (important dates), signposts (salient aspects of exercises or readings), stopovers (transition points), warnings against delayed departures (submissions). To end my responses on the discussion board, I would use the exhortative imperative *Cheminons* (Onward!, Let's travel together), as a way of engaging students. (Source: instructor)

The sustained travel and journey metaphor used to chart various stages of the course received positive comments from some students (as revealed in a survey conducted at the end of the course) who likened their translation learning experience to a voyage of sorts. Additionally, the immediacy of instructor support through ready explanations, examples and references was important as exemplified in the exchange below prompted by a student query.

> *Elle se plaint de ne pouvoir rien faire.*
>
> Translation options

- She is complaining about feeling powerless to act.
- She complains that she can't do anything.

Student's contribution
Could I have used the present perfect rather than the present progressive? I'm not sure of my verb tenses...

Instructor's reply

The translation here depends on aspect:
- progressive aspect: event unfolding as it occurs: She is complaining ...
- punctual aspect: event perceived as non-durative: She complains ...
- iterative aspect: event occurring repeatedly: She complains (over and over)

Now for the present perfect:

She has complained changes the meaning. This action of complaining is over, although there might be some visible implication. On the other hand: "She has been complaining" would mean the same as "*elle se plaint*" (progressive aspect)

Drawing on online comments by students and the course structure and instructions, the following observations can be made regarding the orchestration of material and setting, using Engeström's (2001) activity model:

Roles

- Generally, students seemed to have understood the necessity to follow the course outline: assignments were completed and uploaded as instructed.
- They expected the instructor to respond to their interventions and provide further explanations.
- As indicated in the course outline, the instructor posted assignments and supplementary questions to guide learning.

Rules

- The exercises focused on understanding, remembering and application.
- One assignment required a higher level of critical thinking.
- Analysis and evaluation skills were required to complete the assignments.
- Students generally read discussion-board postings; some posted responses and suggestions or communicated with others by email.
- Social conduct was established and monitored.

Tools
- The course manual — the principal tool which covered theoretical explanations and exercises.

- Interactive practice exercises were an integral part of the course.
- Supplementary notes, texts and references were provided by the instructor.
- Offline student discussions, and email and telephone exchanges with the instructor occurred regularly.

2.4.3 Cognitive presence

Knowledge construction is directly linked to acquiring know-how knowledge. This can be observed in interventions from participants related to translation problem-solving. Three key tasks were developed for this course and the corresponding activity level is summarised in Table 2 (see below).

	Number of threads	Number of responses	Number of views
Exercise 1	3	14	323
Exercise 2	11	38	1309
Exercise 3	1	15	239

Table 2. Activity level for questions related to key tasks

Exercise 1 involved translating sentences with verb-related difficulties (tense, aspect, mode), exercise 2 addressed difficulties with prepositions and adverbs, and exercise 3 covered translating advertising titles from French to English and vice-versa.

Engaged with the material, students raise questions, analyse and propose solutions for the entire class to see. Nevertheless, the number of knowledge construction postings (see Figure 3b above) was limited (27.5%); most of the clarification and evaluation was provided by the instructor. Only 2% or less of the students were active in any one thread but many, if not all, consulted the board as suggested by the number of views in Table 2[1].

2.5 Discussion

The findings in this case study cast an insightful spotlight on learning and teaching praxis in an online environment.

Initial attention focused on ensuring social presence and decreasing the transactional distance between student and instructor. As asserted by Oh *et al*. (2018), it was noted that the online tone, tenor and demeanour of the instructor can influence the sense of community. The social norms set by the instructor are reflected in the encouraging comments exchanged among peers and with the instructor during the course. One student's spontaneous question to peers about career choice elicited impromptu autobiographies that allowed members of the community to present their real selves.

Students were at ease in sharing information about resources and upcoming activities.

From an instructional perspective, online exchanges and queries offer two-fold indications: active learning related to tasks, and signals of student understanding or the absence thereof. Although the voices of many were not visible on the forum, the threads were consulted, and students tended to connect with one another instead of always deferring to the instructor as the sole purveyor of knowledge. However, it was important for the instructor to respond in a timely manner.

With regard to instrumentation, Engeström's activity model (2001) can offer practical guidance in fostering a constructivist approach, a supported environment for the students to learn (Rozario *et al.* 2016). It offers an elevated view of possible tensions and contradictions that instructors can use to monitor rules, roles and tools to support student learning to meet the desired learning objectives.

The analysis revealed that interaction on the discussion board was guided through instructions (Douglas *et al.* 2020, Stone and Springer 2019). Students read the postings and the instructor provided vigilant follow-up. It was useful for coordinating activities and promoting social connectedness. With regard to actual learning, it served as a space for raising translation problems encountered. Students expected ready and thorough answers from the instructor, which proved to be extremely time-consuming. Furthermore, the open-ended questions and answers required to ascertain co-construction of knowledge on the discussion board is particularly demanding, especially when it involves large groups. In such a context, this tool seems better adapted to scaffolding the lower level of educational objectives of understanding, remembering and applying.

Although it is possible to engage in-depth discussions, as exemplified in the exam preparation thread, the instructor needs to be present to shape each thread (Stone and Springer 2019: 184). Such shaping proves to be time-consuming especially given a recent class size of up to 85 students. The discussion-board is useful for providing specific explanations and coordinating tasks, but it is difficult to scale and to sustain as a tool for promoting a high level of interactivity and student learning (Davidson *et al.* 2019: 8).

Through the lens of Engeström's activity model, tensions required for student learning on the discussion board were (1) instructor immediacy and (2) interactions. The contradiction is the abundant time required of the instructor to continuously fuel those interactions, especially with larger classes. One adjustment entailed exploring and inculcating learning interactions through collaboration by providing teams with models of

interactions and specific instructions pertaining to roles and rules. The use of the video conferencing system (VIA) would enable the instructor to monitor for more coaching and scaffolding opportunities. To augment and observe learning interaction, collaborative work was coupled with the existing discussion board.

3. Study 2: Exploring collaborative learning to enrich interaction

Congruent with un-distancing, social connectedness can be cultivated through teams working synchronously in a community of inquiry (Garrison 2016). As Schrage affirms:

> Collaboration is the process of shared creation: two or more individuals with complementary skills interacting to create a shared understanding that none had previously possessed or could have come to on their own. Collaboration creates a shared meaning about a process, a product or an event (1990: 40).

Collaborative learning also elicits social skills, since participants must be able to respond to differing opinions and resolve conflict and reach consensus to enhance individual learning. Grounded in social problem-based learning (Bilić 2013: 5), it contends that learning is not simply the reception of information, but rather the construction of meaning generated through social interaction. The suggestion is that learners should be encouraged to find their own solutions and build on prior knowledge to attain higher levels of understanding (Neo 2005).

Translation is intrinsically suited to collaboration since there are no one-to-one correspondences across languages (Baker 2018), and meaning is a plural and contingent relation (Venuti 1995). In pedagogical settings, participants should be encouraged to process multiple interpretations to find solutions while expressing agreements or disagreements. As learners justify their choices, they explicate strategic knowledge and apply, albeit incipiently, translation strategies. They make explicit what is often implicit or tacit. This type of exchange illustrates the invaluable triad in translation learning: discussion, interaction, and negotiation. The online environment, unconstrained by the same-time, same-place limitations of face-to-face classrooms, is propitious to this student-student collaboration, although not without limitations inherent to coordination, which can be alleviated through working in small groups.

A collaborative approach allows for more sophisticated assignments enabling students tackling translation problem solving in teams, to build on each other's perspectives as they negotiate meaning-making. It also provides a medium for students to communicate and network with like-minded others.

Drawing on key concepts captured in the CoI model (Garrison *et al.* 2000, Vygotsky 1978), team tasks were developed to stimulate translation learning through collaborative meaning-making activities. To obtain evidence of learning, teams were video-recorded. The videotapes also reveal stumbling blocks students faced as they wrestled with interpretation and application of theory and concepts.

With a view to enhancing translation instruction and developing strategies for acquiring problem-solving skills, various methodologies have been used to investigate the cognitive processes at work during a translation task: think aloud protocols, retrospection and introspection, keystroke logging, eye tracking (Göpferich 2010, Jääskelainen 2000, Lacruz and Jääskelainen (eds) 2018, PACTE 2017, Washbourne 2014). These investigations explore various features ranging from lexicon, syntax, textual elements, etc.

Our observation and analysis of a collaborative task is yet another method of investigating student processes at play. Participants verbalise their thoughts in natural discourse as they discuss problems and justify their solutions. Social interaction and interpersonal relationships also play an important role. The following investigation, in 2014, analyses the exchanges between participants in an online group task to discover the strategies they deploy and determine how this interaction contributes to the final outcome.

3.1 Context

A group of 51 students was required to translate from French to English an excerpt from *L'actualité*, a Quebec public affairs magazine. The text raises a controversial social issue — that attractive physical appearance commands higher salaries.

In a simulated scenario intended to create an authentic situation, the translation brief instructed the students to translate the 200-word excerpt in 130-150 words for a US campus magazine. Five points encompassing grammatical, lexical, idiomatic and stylistic elements were highlighted for special consideration. In teams of three, they were required to provide individual translations of the assigned text, thus ensuring individual accountability (Johnson and Johnson 1999), then compare their individual renditions to negotiate and produce a final common text for each team.

The students had completed 30 credits including introductory translation courses from English to French and vice versa. In this course, Translation into English 2, 90% of the students were working into their L2.

To promote and structure positive social interdependence (Johnson and Johnson 2002: 96), the teams were self-selected and peer-organised. Students enlisted teammates through partner-wanted ads on the forum,

providing self-profiles. Each team was requested to adopt a name using a term linked to linguistics or translation, and provide the definition of the term adopted. Their choices, accompanied with sometimes-humorous overtones when they introduced themselves, contributed to social cohesion.

Working in breakout groups, the teams scheduled their meeting times during the three weeks allotted to the task. Students were requested to indicate the two (of the five) points, which engendered the most discussion. The activity was conducted on VIA, that incorporates live audio and video exchange, synchronous unrestricted discussion and chat, whiteboard capabilities, and session recording with playback functionalities.

The recordings were transcribed and classified according to the problems identified, the proposed solution(s) and ensuing discussions, the solutions adopted and the justification provided. Observations were noted on the nature of the verbal interaction between participants.

Exchanges were conducted in both English and French. The French interventions were translated into English by an independent translator.

3.2 Method of analysis

The analysis was purposely confined to two passages occurring midway through the translation task. It was felt that at this point, teams would have acquired both a modus operandi and a comfortable *esprit de corps* to complete the task. The collaborative production was formally assessed for the course. Individual productions were subsequently graded. The analysis was approached from two perspectives gleaned from an early understanding of cognitive apprenticeship:

- A cognitive/collaborative perspective: observing two passages to note how students negotiated solutions (lexical, stylistic, situational and cultural).
- An instructional perspective: observing and collecting evidence of student learning to inform and adjust instruction

For this investigation, participants were drawn from a convenience sample of nine teams chosen randomly from among the 17 teams involved.

3.3 Findings

3.3.1 Observation of team behaviours

Exchange within teams appeared authentic, un-contrived, and online co-construction seems to have contributed to decision-making (text-construction) albeit in an unstructured way. The teams appeared cohesive

from the outset, perhaps attributable to self-selection and team-building involving the adoption of certain names (with annotations), e.g., the Morphemes, the False Friends (who can work together, nevertheless), the Dangling Modifiers.

3.3.2 Observation of student learning

The dialogue and behaviours exhibited by the participants centred on the problems raised: lexical units, phrasal and stylistic features.

Excerpt selected for this study:

> *Aux États-Unis, 30 % des dirigeants des plus grandes sociétés – presque tous des hommes – mesurent au moins 1,88 m … Être grand, ça aide…Les petites femmes rondes qui se sont hissées au sommet d'une entreprise en raison de leur talent exceptionnel doivent tirer une leçon de ces résultats sur la taille et le poids …*
>
> Possible translation
> In the U.S., 30% of CEOs of major corporations - almost all of them men - are at least 6 feet tall... Being tall helps... Short, full-figured women who have made it to the top thanks to their exceptional talent need to heed the results of this survey about size and weight ...

3.3.4 Lexical units

Dirigeants (CEO)

In the discussion, CEOs, managers, company executives, top managers, top executives, were pitted against one another. Some teams favoured CEO; others mentioned they had seen this term in administrative and legal translation or Termium (the Government of Canada's terminology and linguistic data bank). The options chosen were: company executives, top executives and CEO, based on some of the following evaluative comments: "CEO is used in company texts, and it's shorter", "Managers sounds good", "I like CEO, it sounds cool" (see Figure 4 below).

Grandes sociétés (major corporations)

Debate focused on corporations, major companies, successful companies or top companies. Participants discussed the difference between corporation and company (referring to a previous course). One team queried whether "*grandes*" referred to size or importance. Two teams opted for "top companies", one for "important" and the others for "largest". No particular reason was given.

Figure 4. Lexical units

3.3.4 Phrasal and stylistic elements

Être grand, ça aide (height helps)

Proposed solutions included: it pays to be tall, standing tall helps, the taller the better, being tall pays off, size matters. The proposer of 'standing tall pays off' claimed to "have seen the expression before" and that it offered an interesting stylistic feature: physical height, emotional pride and the dual interpretation of the verb pay off. Another team, decided that "being tall helps" was a "shorter option". Yet another followed the majority: "Two of you like *it pays to be tall*: Sold!". Another participant commented: "I like your *standing tall*".

Les petites femmes rondes (short full-figured women)

One team mentioned the need to be "politically correct", and find an inoffensive epithet. Proposals included "short and plump", "round and curvy", "short and full figured", "fleshy" even "obese". "Obese" was summarily dismissed; "short and plump" was pronounced to be unflattering, so was "short and curvy". Poring over the Webster's dictionary, one participant signalled that "full-figured" is the term used to refer to amply proportioned women, therefore most acceptable. Another participant felt "plumpish was good".

3.4 Discussion

Online collaboration can foster in-depth learning (Harasim 2012) and is useful in translation learning (Huertos Barros 2011, Kiraly 2012). By putting their heads together, students shared a few resources and also helped teammates benefit from group experience and knowledge. The collectively produced texts provide evidence that the final products were, in most cases, better than the individual productions.

From an interactional perspective, self-selected, peer-managed teams contributed to social cohesion. Although negotiation and solution appraisal were present, instructionally, these features appear weak. Students exhibited limited use of resources to support their negotiations, and their justifications, understandably novice-like, were based primarily on how they felt rather than what they had learnt. These observations are congruent with Kirschner *et al*. (2006) according to whom explicit task instruction is necessary for successful student engagement in problem-based learning. Students need a framework for guided decision making (Way 2014) and methodology for approaching texts and evaluating solutions. Without indications to monitor and regulate their action, they tend to adopt the 'just translate it' attitude. Questions, response prompts and examples would help them understand that completing the task is part of developing translation competence (PACTE 2017).

Clearer dialogic prompts aligned with previous work in online teamwork are offered in the next round of activities to encourage groups to exhibit and apply knowledge as they tackle the complexity of the task with more expert-like skills. Such is the objective of the third investigation which follows.

4. Study 3: Continued analysis of translation learning

For this third study, we begin to identify the cognitive and social strategies used by students during the task. To encourage students to apply critical inquiry skills in decision-making based on translational considerations rather than gut feeling, clearer instructions were provided through modelling (Dennen and Burner 2008, Suchanova 2011).

Translation is a higher-order cognitive task with affective, attitudinal, cognitive and emotional components (Angelone 2010, Hubscher-Davidson 2017, Tirkkonnen-Condit and Laukkanen 1996). An interlinguistic conversion process as well as a product, it is depicted as "a chain of decision-making activities relying on multiple, interconnected sequences of problem-solving behaviour for task completion" (Angelone 2010: 17). Problem solving entails problem identification, pertinent information retrieval, and a choice of appropriate solutions, but the students' conceptualisation of translation problems might be problematic in itself (Mellinger 2019).

According to González-Davies and Scott-Tennent, a translation problem is:

> A (verbal or nonverbal) segment that can be present either in a text segment (micro level) or in the text as a whole (macro level) and that compels the student / translator to make a conscious decision to apply a motivated translation strategy, procedure and solution from amongst a range of options (2005: 164).

A strategy can be global or general (dealing with whole texts) or local (pertaining to specific problems such as words, segments or sentences (Bell 1998: 188).

With a focus on translation problem-solving and strategies, and drawing on the theories of online collaborative learning and approaches to translation teaching (González-Davies 2017, Huertas Barros 2011, Kiraly 2012), this activity was further designed to stimulate group interaction, both intellectual and social, through the pooling of resources, and to develop translation skills. This bifocal investigation examined:

- The strategies and text-linguistic behaviours of the participants.
- The dynamics of their interaction and its contribution to the objective of the activity.

The task design incorporates elements of collaborative learning distilled from Johnson and Johnson (1999, 2018): positive interdependence, individual accountability, face-to-face interaction, social skills and processing. Reference to individual accountability underscores that collaborative learning differs from individual work and transcends competition when resolving linguistic, non-linguistic, well-defined and ill-defined problems (Johnson and Johnson 2013, 2018, Qin *et al*. 1995).

4.1 Context

In our 2019 investigation, forty-five second-year BA students, working in groups of three, were required to translate from French to English a real-life text — a website for a non-profit foundation — created after the abduction and murder of a young child. The foundation wanted to raise awareness about child abductions. As the text was 30 pages long, individual teams were assigned portions of about 3 pages; some portions were duplicated. Each group was instructed to provide individual translations of the assigned portion, then meet and compare renditions to produce a final collaborative text. Students were reminded to consider relevant text attributes: an author, intent, target audience, and language use.

In setting the stage for collaboration, and to model the learning activity, the following steps were taken, thus enhancing teaching presence:

- In a distinctive paragraph, the course outline explained the purpose and usefulness of collaboration in translation learning.
- Students were given punctual exercises eliciting reflection and justification of translation choices (grammatical, lexical, semantic, situational, etc.).
- They were instructed to do a test flight on the VIA platform to minimise the technical frustration reported by previous groups.

- To ensure internal consistency of the translation, all teams were instructed to read the entire text. Through discussion on the forum, it was decided how to render multiple occurrences of the same term or expression, and the instructor subsequently produced a document.
- Students were reminded of the importance of rendering the intent and urgency of the message of the original French text. They were not given a word limitation.
- They were warned that "that sounds right" is not an acceptable justification. "It is not a music course," they were told jocularly.

A questionnaire based on Engeström's activity model (2001) was designed to assess student perspective of teamwork, their organisational structure and team processes.

- Who were the members of your team?
- What role did different team members adopt during team meetings?
- How were these roles decided on?
- Name one positive thing you learnt from working in a team to produce a common text.
- Name one negative thing you learnt from working in a team to produce a common text.
- Briefly describe one difficulty your team encountered in the text and how you solved it.
- What tools in the course material did you find useful?

4.2 Method of analysis

Twenty-minute excerpts of 11 team videos, representing 60% of the class population, were transcribed and analysed for patterns to observe how students interact, negotiate and reason to finally arrive at a consensus text. In addition, students were asked to complete a questionnaire based on rules, tools, and roles (Engeström 2001). The reports were compared with observations made by a translation instructor other than the authors of this paper.

4.3 Findings

Analysis of the interactions revealed the reasoning and transactional behaviour exhibited by the participants (see Figure 5 below).

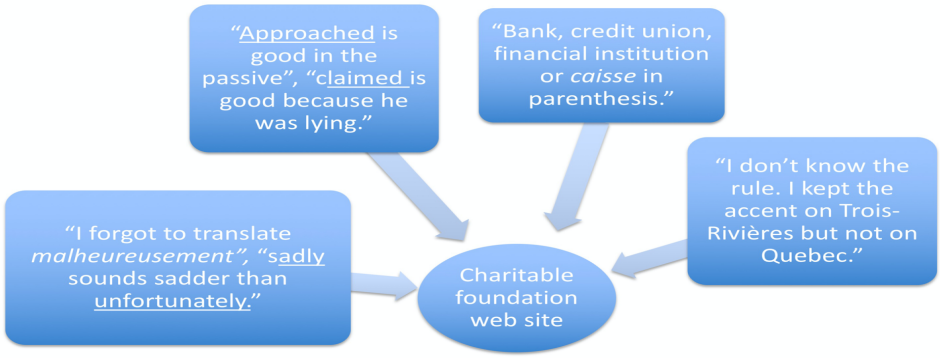

Figure 5. Excerpts of recorded conversations

The following reasoning behaviours were observed:

- Recognizing and correcting oversights and omissions

S1: I forgot to translate '*malheureusement*' …
S2: 'sadly' sounds better than 'unfortunately'; it expresses more sadness

- Assessing stylistic options

Repeating a segment twice in the same sentence, when meaning can be contextually inferred.

(Excerpt from text)
Comme les enfants du voisinage qui jouaient dans le parc du voisinage.
Proposed student translation
(Like the neighbourhood children who played in the neighbourhood park.)

S1: I don't want to repeat neighbourhood twice; the reference is obvious.

- Focusing on lexical choices

Considering the difference between 'bank' and 'credit union' for rendering *caisse d'épargne*.

S1: Would *caisse* be a credit union?
S2: I put bank and *caisse* in parenthesis.
S1: I put *caisse* because on Desjardin's site"[2], they say "find another *caisse*".
S3: I put financial institution
S1: I think that is good; it covers everything.

- Demonstrating the use of parallel texts as a translation tool

Students mention consulting similar websites to confirm certain choices.

S1: I saw this on the Children's Hospital Foundation website.

- Discussing verb choice and inferred meaning

L'enfant a été approché par un étranger qui l'aborda en lui disant qu'une dame avait perdu son petit chien.
(The child was approached by a stranger who claimed a woman had lost her dog.)

S1: I like the passive form because the focus is on her; she is the victim.
S2: I really like 'claimed' (for *disant*). Claim suggests untruth, he was lying.

- Pondering textual problems and expressing the need for processing guidance

Students question how closely they should follow the source text. One suggests seeking guidance from the instructor.

S1: It's always a problem. I'm stuck. Do you think we should write to the prof?

- Discussing typographical rules governing use of diacritics on French words in English texts[3]

S1: I kept the accent on *Québec.*
S2: I don't know the rule. I kept it on *Trois-Rivières* but not on *Québec.*

Students sought the best or most adequate solutions, a process which inevitably raises questions about their perceptions of the best or most adequate solution. They also signalled flaws in the source text, and focused primarily on elements of language and style. Teams generally reviewed the individual renditions line by line with one person acting as scribe. In natural discourse, interspersed with humour, they discussed orthography, vocabulary and word choice, stylistic features and other aspects of text production.

Justifying the use of the passive voice to reinforce the idea that the child was the object of the action, and the connotative nuance expressed by 'claim' instead of 'said' is an indication that students were looking at the overall context. No significant examples of creative leaps were observed except for limited use of parallel texts for specific textual features. Most of their solutions were confirmed from external sources. It is difficult to determine whether this strategy can be attributed to compensation for uncertainty or lack of linguistic knowledge. In other cases, in the absence of plausible arguments or proposals, decisions were reached by majority vote.

Reliance on how something sounds is still manifest but there are attempts at objective justification. While the "it sounds good" evaluative comment from an expert might be acceptable due to experience, this is less so from a novice translator incapable of reasonably justifying their choice.

Admission of omission with some self-confession also contributed to team dynamics because it allowed for amends to be made. Members were accommodating and ready to make the adjustments deemed necessary.

Occasionally, one team member assumed authority for making final changes but also as someone able to cite sources or personal experience, therefore who seemed more knowledgeable and to whom some deference seemed due. This is exemplified in their discussion of the correct way of writing addresses, during which one member referred to the Canada Post website and experience at secretarial school.

With regard to behaviour, interestingly, students working in teams begin to consciously acknowledge gaps in their knowledge as they compare their individual renditions. In so doing, they question their level of language competency, and even reshape their individual thinking about translation, as they begin to develop awareness of their metacognition in the field (Mellinger 2019: 616).

4.3.1 Questionnaire findings

Student responses to the individualised post-assignment teamwork questionnaire was generally positive. Team members simply assumed roles and responsibilities depending on individual strengths. They all found the task time consuming and had organisational problems. Some felt it was important to project a cordial image, and compromise on the final product. Table 2 below presents a synthesis of the questionnaire results:

Roles	Tools	Rules	Benefits	Contradictions
No clear roles.	Shared vocabulary and material from the instructor.	Do individual translations and group meet to produce a common text.	"More heads are better than one."	Time-consuming; "we were not well organized."
Natural selection: roles created and adopted as necessary.	Online dictionaries, thesaurus.	Pay attention to the purpose of the text.	"I was surprised to see there were points I did not think about."	Members not always available; some people dropped course; others joined late.
Voluntary based on strengths and interest.	Exercises for reference.	Follow the harmonisation document for consistency.	"I can learn something new from others."	"Some people talked too long."
	VIA platform, phone, Facetime, messenger.	Avoid "it sounds good" justification.		"Sometimes we compromise too much: not always good."
		We made our own meeting rules.		"I didn't want to appear negative all the time."
	Google docs.	Some compared answers. Some started with one member's answers; in most teams, one member took notes and made the changes.		"I realize that sometimes we were weak in translating idioms."
	Email.	Almost all members contributed to revising the document.		"I realize my English is not so good."
	Moodle, discussion with other teams.	Some put aside problems for later.		

Table 2. Synthesis of student responses

4.4 Discussion

Overall, the instructor's modelling and contextualising of the team task expanded the students' approach, even though decision-making still appeared laboured and at times inefficient. Negotiation prompted some research, and attention shifted beyond word-for-word translation and the 'that-sounds-right' evaluative judgement. Students established good rapport with the community and the instructor, and in their negotiation began to challenge each other's perspectives, sometimes based on prior knowledge. The ancillary exercises and vocabulary harmonisation document created together served as a roadmap of sorts to help bridge the potential abyss.

Time management, team coordination and lengthiness of discussions were apparent issues. Students would need more scaffolding for effective team-building and improved decision-making through appropriate preliminary research, thereby averting lengthy unproductive discussions.

Assuredly, the principal objective of the teams was to produce a final collaborative text for an authentic end user, but also for evaluation by the instructor. They recognised some problems but lacked the skills, knowledge and experience to address them all. They were unable to mobilise everything they had observed in punctual exercises. Despite their good intentions and perceived eagerness, students tended to pronounce judgment on the quality — good or bad — of the translation with little substantiation. In addition, the desire for compromise, in the absence of plausible or convincing arguments, was also evident. This raises questions about difficulties facing help-seekers and help-givers in a collaborative environment. Furthermore, working into their L2 may have compounded these issues in the task.

It should be mentioned here that directionality was not considered, and it may arguably be a confounding variable. Some students mentioned some of their weaknesses in their L2, especially their unfamiliarity with idioms, which they felt was an impediment. While producing the translated text in L2 is expected to entail more difficulty (Kiraly 2014) than when working into L1, and the processes might differ in some aspects (Pavlović 2007), the required skills broadly remain the same.

Students acknowledged that collaborative tasks enable them to expand their individual knowledge, and also help assuage feelings of isolation in the virtual environment. It is noted, however, that teams could benefit from preparation for: (1) organising activities by setting a procedure; (2) managing time to better frame discussion; (3) approaching the problems they identify based on linguistic or textual criteria, and (4) conducting discussions comfortably without feeling obliged to compromise at all costs.

5. Conclusion

In sum, this study focused on creating an e-learning environment in which the instructor strives to orchestrate (1) social or affective presence of the learning community; (2) collaborative tasks to enhance interactions and observe student processes, and (3) instructions that can generate more depth in students' decision-making.

This trajectory charts our pathway into online teaching, first through the attempt to foster un-distancing by cultivating a social atmosphere conducive to learning. This attempt entailed allowing participants to "present themselves as real people" (Garrison *et al.* 2000: 89), creating a journey-travel analogy for course sequence, and setting a professional yet friendly tone. The discussion board, the central virtual classroom space, was found to be useful for peer counselling and knowledge sharing but showed limitations with regard to promoting a high level of student learning (Davidson *et al.* 2019). The second step incorporated collaborative activities, which, when accompanied with convivial team building, can be useful in generating social and cognitive support within the learning community. Students demonstrated some capacity to justify translation solutions and admitted learning from each other. The third step focused on team dynamics and critical thinking skills. It was noted that students needed instructional scaffolding to ensure team dynamics, foster their communication and cognitive skills and learn from each other to reach a higher level of educational objectives. Enhancing the teaching and learning environment by monitoring elements of student learning and making informed adjustments is a continuous effort.

The findings of this trajectory-analysis, based on three investigative studies, do not purport to be generalisable but offer insights into translation instruction in the virtual environment. The study is a reflection on meaningful learning for both instructor and student: For the instructor, assuredly, on learning from experience; for the students, undoubtedly, experience in learning how to become more autonomous and in developing metacognitive awareness.

Now well into the journey, our attention is turning to shaping the metacognitive construct in CoI model (Akyol and Garrison 2011, Cakmakci *et al.* 2020) using phases of inquiry related to translation and building effective learning teams. We continue to gather evidence of how students assess the correctness of the final product with a view to guiding them towards higher order learning objectives. Continuing efforts focus on refining the setting and decreasing the transactional distance by implementing the rules, roles and tools for social cohesion and high order learning.

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Notes

[1] No record was made of those who accessed the discussion board other than those who actually posted.
[2] The Desjardins Group is the leading cooperative financial group in Canada (French: *caisses populaires*). It comprises a network of *caisses*, cf. https://www.desjardins.com/ca/about-us/desjardins/governance-democracy/how-cooperatives-work/index.jsp (consulted 2.06.2021)
[3] In Quebec, in government and official texts, accents are usually retained in French names or toponyms in English texts.