3. Coventry/Nantes: two sides of the same COIL in the negotiation of translation strategies

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Abstract

This paper describes a Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) project between Coventry University (United Kingdom) and the Université Catholique de l'Ouest Nantes (France), entitled 'Negotiation of Translation Strategies in English, French and Spanish' that ran between February and March 2022. This COIL experience was designed during the COVID-19 pandemic to encourage students of French and Spanish to reflect on issues related to textual and cultural comprehension of source and target texts. Three online workshops—on literary, legal and tourism translation—were organised to help students identify translation issues and lead to an exchange of ideas on decisions taken during the translation process. The paper attempts to engage with some current theories on virtual learning and reports on weaknesses and strengths experienced by students and tutors in both institutions. The discussion will consider the extent to which this COIL project proved successful in the organisation and mediation of learning in translation practice.

1.   Introduction

Coventry University's Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) is an emerging digital and pedagogical tool that aligns with the sustainable and equitable actions in higher education predicted by Brandenburg and de Wit (2011) and with de Wit's (2019) expectation for more inclusive and critical approaches to internationalisation practices (Wimpenny et al., 2022). Offering successful 'Virtual Exchanges' and the creation of a Third Space (symbolic in-between space) with international partners, COIL projects strongly contribute to the development of students' 'attributes, qualities and capabilities […] as global citizens and professionals' (Beelen et al., 2021). This paper reports on how the COIL 'Negotiation of Translation Strategies in English, French and Spanish' met said development. The project was co-organised by a professional English-French translator and tutor of specialized translation at the Université Catholique de l'Ouest Nantes (France), and the tutors delivering the Bachelor of Art (BA) Languages for Global Communication course at Coventry University. Second-year students of English, French, and Spanish who were registered in a translation module ('Thème

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français-anglais' in Nantes and 'Translation Theory and Practice 1' at Coventry) attended three sessions on literary, legal, and tourism translation, of one hour and a half each, that ran between February and March 2022. The rationale for this virtual mobility experience was grounded on the lack of social interaction between students of Foreign Languages due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Workshops were designed to encourage students to reflect on issues related to textual and cultural comprehension of source and target texts, to help them identify translation issues, and to share ideas on decisions taken during the translation process. In order to ensure a smooth running of sessions, 35 students (22 at Coventry and 13 at Nantes) were asked to enrol in an Aula link (a virtual learning environment used at Coventry University), on to which the French partner and the Coventry University team had uploaded all the material that was to be used in every session (i.e. PowerPoint presentations, exercises and recommended readings).

Figure 1. Image of Aula link accessed by students
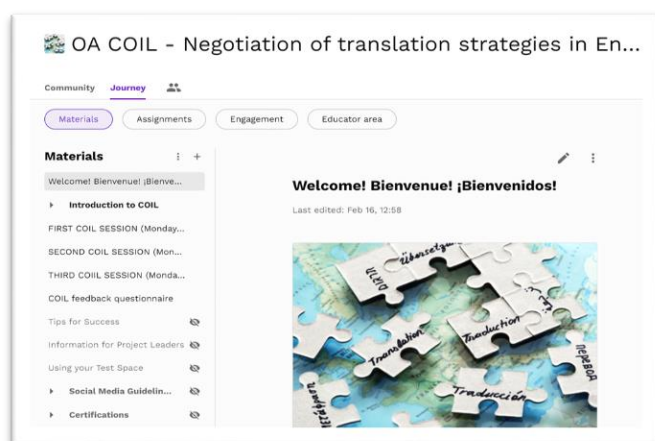
2. Method

2.1. Organisation of material and preliminary arrangements

Aula, the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) used at Coventry University, was used as a repository to support the exchange of materials between the tutors involved in the COIL project in the private tutor area. Once the Aula area for students was populated, students were asked to register and first announcements on session dates, topics to be covered, and meeting places were sent by email and posted on the Aula Community chat. Due to the on-going issues relating to the COVID-19 pandemic, the sessions were designed to be delivered in hybrid format, with students in both institutions able to elect whether to attend face-to-face or online (using Teams).

2.2. Delivery of sessions

2.2.1. First session: Pros and cons of Google Translate for literary translation

This session consisted of two sections. In the first section, participants knowledge-shared on their use of free machine translation systems like Google Translate (https://translate.google.co.uk/) and DeepL Translator (https://www.deepl.com/en/translator). Some key information was delivered via a 20-minute lecture, which intended to explain (1) the main translation strategies adopted by translators and (2) the differences between human translation and computer-assisted translation tools (CATs) (e.g. translation memory software, language-search engine software) versus machine translation. Following this theoretical introduction, tutors in each institution asked their students to discuss the pros and cons of human versus machine translation.

In the second COIL section, participants were invited to apply theory to practice. As an icebreaker, tutors in both institutions invited their students to translate 'anything you can think of (e.g. an introduction of yourself, an excerpt from a newspaper article, technical instructions, etc.) from and into English' and identify some of the translation techniques previously discussed. Preliminary discussions took place in each institution followed by hybrid-mode discussions. Having established that machine translation is unsuitable for the translation of creative writing pieces, students were split into groups (face-to-face in Coventry and Nantes with their respective tutors, and online with the tutor at Coventry). They read and discussed the content and characteristics of some verses by the American poet Robert Frost in the 'The Road Not Taken'. After signalling what potentially would/could (any) be lost in translation (e.g. rhyme), students were asked to use Google Translate to assess their answers. Students were finally asked to translate some sayings from French and Spanish into English. The activity was followed by a group discussion.

2.2.2. Second session: Legal translation

Having experienced the group dynamics of the first session, which will be discussed below (see 3. Results and discussion), the second session focused on the translation of legal texts. It promoted a more active involvement of students in the negotiation of meanings and the application of different translation strategies. The tutor at Coventry delivered a brief theoretical introduction (15 minutes) to define legal translation and differentiate text typology, highlighting structure and specialised terminology in a death certificate and a power of attorney. Having pointed out the main translation tools, students were asked to translate some previously selected keywords and fixed phrases in the analysed texts and look for equivalents in French and Spanish in the EU's terminology database ATE[3] (Interactive Terminology for Europe). Students were given around 20 minutes for this task in Nantes by their French tutor, while in Coventry their Spanish tutor asked them to work first individually (10 minutes out of 20) and then with their own group (remaining 10 minutes). The task was then followed by a group session, face-to-face and online, led by the French tutor. Students were asked to exchange equivalents in French and Spanish (e.g. 'birth certificate', 'acte de naissance', 'partida de nacimiento') and discuss translation options depending on context (e.g. 'acta de nacimiento' in Spanish family law and 'certificado de nacimiento' in the pharmaceutical industry). Finally, students were given a title deed and asked to translate it in pairs into French in Nantes and Spanish in Coventry, and the whole group again shared the results. In this manner, French students taking Spanish in Nantes

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[3] https://iate.europa.eu/home

took notes of the translation into Spanish and students of Spanish taking French in Coventry, the translation into French.

2.2.3. Third session: Tourism translation

The final COIL workshop summarised previous discussions on text types, translation strategies and specific terminology, focusing on tourist texts. In line with the structure of the former sessions, a short introduction on the nature of this type of consumer-oriented texts and an examination of some samples (e.g. excerpts from tourist brochures and travel guides) were provided. Issues in connection with functional theories (e.g. skopos) were also underlined, and students were encouraged to engage with recommended readings. The second part of the session was devoted to analysing common mistakes in connection with grammar, spelling, lexis, semantics, pragmatics and discourse (Durán Muñoz, 2012). Students were also given time to identify some common errors, including omissions, repetitions and additions, and to reflect on the reason why they occurred. As in former sessions, in the third and last part, students put theory into practice, firstly, by analysing a brief excerpt independently; secondly, by working in pairs; and thirdly, by sharing their translation decisions and comments with the group. Tourist texts in English had been carefully selected by tutors to foster discussion. Thus, students in Nantes were presented with brief descriptions of the main attractions in Coventry (extracted from https://visitcoventry.co.uk/things/) and students in Coventry of those in Nantes (extracted from https://www.levoyageanantes.fr/en/).

Having analysed the main features of these texts and whether these coincided in French and Spanish tourist texts (e.g. lexical level: use of superlatives, keywords reinforcing feelings of dream, adventure, and pleasure, and realia; syntactic level: use of nominalization, imperatives, and present tense), students were asked to translate, in pairs, some of the selected passages either into French or Spanish. Students in Coventry were aware that the main tourist website that was being used offered the French and Spanish versions, so they were encouraged to try and translate it themselves and then compare it with the official translation.

3.   Results and discussion

The tutors involved in this project agreed that Aula and Teams proved to be adequate and essential platforms to design, share, disseminate, and discuss the materials with students. The registration process was simple, and students navigated the environments easily. Aula was a good repository for them for the purpose of downloading materials. They also made use of its interactive features, to access the messages that were posted by the tutors, with reminders of classrooms, dates, and topics to be considered in advance. The decision to have only one tutor leading each session worked effectively. No conflicting messages emerged. As for student engagement, issues arose due to the complexity of the hybrid format. Tutors had to be aware of students' interaction in both institutions, face-to-face and on screen. This extra space created confusion in the first session, as tutors found it challenging to engage with students online and in-class simultaneously. Students engaging online were also more reluctant to participate. There were also technical issues: for instance, in the first session, students from Nantes and Coventry failed to complete some tasks set due to the interruption of Wi-Fi connectivity, which also

caused some misunderstandings in relation to task instructions. In order to address these difficulties, the tutors approached the interaction with and between students differently in the second and third sessions. When required, students engaging online worked together only with their face-to-face group (e.g. all students at Nantes with their tutor) and the time for tasks was extended.

4. Conclusions

This COIL project demonstrates the added value of completing translation tasks with intercultural teams. It highlighted to participating students and staff that strategies and negotiation of meaning in the translation process of three text types (literary, legal and tourist texts) could be enriched through teamwork. Despite some issues resulting from the lack of interaction from students online, the three synchronous sessions, combining face-to-face and virtual engagement, provided a fertile ground for students, a hybrid learning environment in both institutions to interact and exchange knowledge. Students at Coventry benefited from the French partner's experience as a professional translator (e.g. use of CAT tools) and students at Nantes were introduced to some translation theories (e.g. functional approaches) by the staff in Coventry.

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