LANGUAGE TOOLS:
COMMUNICATING IN TODAY'S WORLD OF BUSINESS

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Abstract

In a society increasingly mediated by technology, the medium has created unparalleled opportunities. As a result, it has refocused educators' attention on how technological literacy is both an essential learning outcome in all higher education programs, and the intermediary, the means to achieve the digital competences expected from employees. In the field of English for Specific Purposes, and at a time when technology is perceived to enable quick and effective access to a vast number of sources of information and knowledge, teaching a language confronts teachers and students with divergent views that converge into what we perceive to be interconnected paths. We critically reflect upon these interconnected paths in order to obtain further insights on how technology, namely Machine Translation and Computer-Aided Translation, is perceived by business communicators who are learning English in an ESP environment. Within the premises that translation is an act of intercultural communication, our case study addresses mirrored perceptions of the English language, the act of translation, and the use of technological tools. Our study draws on both perspectives and discusses how mirrored images of students and teachers converge through project-based approaches, rooted in practical, short visual tasks with a clear and immediately visible purpose.

Keywords: English for Specific Purposes, Higher Education, Translation, Machine Translation, Computer Aided-Translation, Business Communication, Task-based approach

1. Introduction

If today's society is increasingly mediated by technology, then job opportunities in all fields increasingly reflect this context of emerging forms of new media. The medium has created unparalleled opportunities, redirecting teacher's attention to how technological literacy is not only an important learning outcome in Higher Education (HE), but also the vehicle to achieve the skills expected in the workplace. Current societal pressures challenge teachers of all subject areas to reinvent educational contexts, their educational practices as well as

themselves as individuals by rethinking attitudes, conceptions, methods and their relations in the educational process.

As technology is perceived to enable quick and effective access to a vast number of sources of information, and appears to be readily available (able) to be converted into knowledge, language teachers and students are confronted with deviating perspectives that converge into what we consider to be interlinked trajectories. This is especially relevant in the context of English for Specific Purposes (ESP), in which teachers' perceptions of professional skills needed in today's labor market have repercussions on their course design and the pedagogical strategies implemented.

For 21st-century students, motivation, workflow, learning processes, and attention span, among others, are molded by a silent revolution. Indeed, in today's modern society, the majority of students do not know what it is to live without mobile phones or computers with Internet access. The technology that seeps into their everyday life is gradually changing the way they think, act, interact, learn and live. For these students technological gadgets are an integral part of their lives (Redecker et al., 2009; Oblinger, 2003). Prensky (2001:1) explains that "it is now clear that as a result of this ubiquitous environment and the sheer volume of their interaction with it, today's students think and process information fundamentally differently from their predecessors".

The role of technology, namely Machine Translation (MT) and Computer-Aided Translation (CAT), in ESP is a clear example of the two divergent, yet interconnected paths that teachers and students, as the two main stakeholders in education, pursue. On the one hand, teachers view technology as a means to help with translation tasks and focus on the process and overall student performance. On the other, students search for the tools that will provide them with the needed translation and the final results for a suggested task. Students tend to prefer productive activities where technology assumes a prominent role. Teachers and students assume, what we coined, *mirrored perceptions* of the learning path. Both arrive at the same result trailing different learning paths and strategies.

This reflection is especially relevant for those who also teach translation as a means to communicate globally within business contexts, where the focus is on communication as opposed to the process of translation. Translation is not taught *per se*, but with a view to achieve a business goal. In this case, "the purpose of informal translation differs broadly from that of formal translation since the mental process of translating is activated as a language learning tool rather than as a professional translator's vocational skill" (Plastina, 2006: 87).

2. Current contexts and perspectives

Criticism of the Grammar-Translation Method and the preference given to the Communicative Approach (Howatt 1984), among many others, eventually led to the exclusion of the native language from the classroom. However, at the turn of the century, attitudes towards the effectiveness of translation in the language classroom seem to have shifted. Translation is again being considered a valid pedagogical tool that can be included in communicative and other wide-ranging teaching methodologies with many benefits (McLoughlin, 2014).

Newmark (1991), Hurtado (1999) and Widdowson (2003), for example, have argued that the inclusion of translation activities helps students develop their reading and writing skills, foster linguistic awareness and improvement as well as the development of cultural competence. Duff (1992) argued that translation is text-bound and therefore only develops two skills - reading and writing. However, this claim seems to be no longer valid. More recently, for example, Pintado (2012) claimed that translation is, in fact, a multilevel skill and its pedagogical use in the foreign language learning classroom enables the development of skills that range from the lexicon to pragmatics.

With the widespread use of the Internet and digital technology, translation opportunities and access to language tools are at an unprecedented level (Krajka, 2004). Automatic machine translations, online dictionaries and glossaries, among other tools, thrive at an alarming rate. As access to these free online tools is effortlessly at everyone's fingertips, this may mislead users as to their reliability for competent multilingual communication, especially at a professional level.

Undeniably, the silent technological revolution that has assailed current society has infiltrated classrooms across the globe, at all grade levels and in all subject areas, including language learning and translation. Although some may argue against and pinpoint concrete disadvantages brought on by this silent revolution, the fact remains that the integration of technology in education has been acknowledged to bring forth positive student engagement on all educational levels (Bates & Bates, 2005; Latchman, Salzmann, Gillet, & Bouzekri, 1999; Laurillard, 1993). As students become not only consumers but also active content creators, literature demonstrates that technological integration, especially in the context of HE, may constitute an interesting strategy to motivate and support student learning (see Bates & Poole, 2003; Daniel, 1998; Garrison & Kanuka, 2004; Laurillard, 1993; Rogers, 2000).

The Portuguese HE context and its regulation are clear as to the relevance of technology manipulation and diffusion, as a central objective in HE. Indeed, social demands

have made digital technology the crucial lever of future socio-economic development. It is our opinion too that HE should reflect societal demands for development and, as such, shifts in society will inevitably have repercussions in educational contexts, in an evident and unbreakable connection. The European Commission (with The Digital Agenda for Europe[1], for example), and other worldwide institutions such as the OECD and UNESCO, have emphasized the need for technological integration over the last two decades (see for example OECD, 2010 and UNESCO, 2008). This integration is said to stimulate a more flexible, comprehensive and efficient education, capable of meeting current and unforeseen societal demands, namely regarding what is perceived to become an exponential increase in the need for media and digital literacy development.

From a teacher perspective, students are often seen as more tech savvy than teachers, perhaps because they are born into a technological society. It is, in fact, part of their world, not an outside culture that needs to be studied, learned or apprehended. Prensky (2001), as well as others (Conole, de Laat, Dillon, & Darby, 2008; Redecker et al. 2009) have claimed that today's students are different in terms of cognitive development and information processing, which will inevitably influence and force changes on educational contexts. Within this scenario, the need to break with traditional teaching methods, most often too theoretical and lacking practical application, marked by logical knowledge transmission and relegating students to a predominantly passive role, has become paramount.

In the complex society we live in, with unforeseen future demands and the need for competence development, it has become widely acknowledged that approaches to teaching and learning need to encourage greater student involvement anchored in constructivist perspectives. While traditional teaching and learning approaches seem to ignore or suppress learner responsibility (Armstrong, 2012), student-centered approaches place the learner at the realm of the learning process. However, shifting responsibility to students implies role changes and a responsible partnership between teachers and students.

Additional studies have also shown that learning environments where students collaborate and cooperate in projects and tasks that have interactional authenticity are highly motivational and engaging (Blumenfeld *et al.*, 1991; D'Orio, 2009; Ellis, 2003, 2005; Lourenço, Guedes, Filipe, Almeida, & Moreira, 2007) leading to deep involvement and meaning making, in line with Dewey's (1938/1997) vision on education and the need to learn within practical experience.

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[1] Available at: http://ec.europa.eu/digital-agenda/digital-agenda-europe

This is especially relevant in English for Specific Purposes contexts (such as the case of Business Communication Students), where the goal is to provide students, who aspire to be professionals in the global workplace, with the skills and strategies needed to meet their writing, listening, reading, and speaking requirements, in addition to the specific communicative skills and competences expected of them. Additionally, these students are, as Prensky (2001) has stated, immersed in technology and rely heavily on it to carry out their tasks. Furthermore, we believe this new generation of students, fluttering around with their gadgets, is very much embedded in a fragmented society, where immediacy is the key. That is why consumable knowledge needs to be bite size, concise and direct and all information is a keystroke away.

Thus, within this fragmented, multifaceted, complex society, HE institutions and teachers face great dilemmas: different perspectives on what is relevant for students and their professional future. We believe the answer lies in challenging students so as to develop critical reflective appraisals regarding what they know, see and learn, their interactions and that of the world around them. Facing the challenge will equip them with skills and attributes (knowledge, attitudes and behaviors) that they will need in the workplace and that employers require.

3. The case study of Business Communication

Drawing on the above-mentioned premises, we proceeded to design the Translation and New Technologies (TNT) course for the final-year students enrolled in the Business Communication degree in *Instituto Superior de Contabilidade e Administração do Porto* (ISCAP). This 3-year program seeks to foster and develop the skills and knowledge necessary to work in various business communication and marketing fields. These Business Communication students, who intend to incorporate global or expanding companies, will necessarily resort to English, translation and translation tools in their jobs.

TNT is taught in English, within an ESP approach that focuses on the language user, rather than the language learner. An ESP environment provides flexibility and a variety of different strategies, models and approaches one can use and enables us to meaningfully integrate language and content and to lead students to the desired foreign language proficiency and pluricultural learning outcomes.

As teachers, our rationale is that besides being competent English users, future business communication professionals need to understand the context and challenges of communication in a global market, as well as recognize and understand cultural diversity

within the business world. The course also focuses on the role of translation as an indispensable means of inter- and intra-business communication, as well as business-to-client communication.

Accordingly, the program, delivered in English, encourages students to search for and find tools that will help them to act and communicate, both verbally and nonverbally. Students learn how to use different translation tools and techniques, such as CAT, localization, and audiovisual translation, and then they proceed to editing, revising and controlling the quality of translations, as a means to communicate their business intentions. In sum, the course looks at translation as a means to communicate internationally and strives to use language and translation tools as a means to improve their communication skills and English proficiency.

As can be seen in Table 1, the syllabus encompasses not only intercultural awareness topics, but progressively directs students towards translation in business settings and the technological tools available to help them manage and use specific terminology. Translation is rendered as localized communication.

Table 1. TNT Syllabus

1. Some insights into the global world	5. Business translation and use of translation tools
1.1 How flat is today's world?	5.1 Stages of Translation
1.2 Globalization or globality?	5.2 Introduction to terminology and terminology management
1.3 Implications to international communication	5.3 Validation and terminology storage
	5.4 Search and information retrieval
2. The role of culture	5.4.1 in the World Wide Web
2.1 Cultural Knowledge and CQ	5.4.2 in *corpora*
2.2 Definition, elements and consequences of culture	5.4.2 Text Alignment
2.3 Cross-cultural communication and translation	6. Computer Assisted Translation
2.4 The message: standardization vs. localization	6.1 Translation memories
	6.2 Maintenance of Translation Memories
	6.3 Localization
	6.4 Translation and Localization tools: SDL Trados, Catscradle, Wordfast Anywhere and others.
3. Corporate Language management	
3.1 Policies and strategies	7. Audiovisual translation
3.2 Translation in business communication	7.1. AVT modes and challenges
	7.2. Subtitling: theory and practice
4. Communication and Translation	
4.1 Inter-linguistic, intra-linguistic and inter-semiotic translation	8. Edition and revision of electronic Translations
4.2 Equivalence and types of text	8.1. Quality control techniques
4.3 Human, computer-assisted and machine translation	8.2. Revision techniques

Although the syllabus may seem to bear a heavy load of theory, we felt compelled to provide flexible, practice-based pedagogical approaches, where students are asked to assume a more active and responsible stance to their own learning. Thus, the pedagogical approaches implemented rely on tasks. To complete the task students are requires to have reflected on theory and to apply their knowledge in the creation of a final product. Thus, autonomous learning is fostered and intercultural communication awareness enhanced.

By simulating a professional intercultural communication task, students encounter problems and obstacles (language, cultural and technological) that need to be addressed in order to successfully complete the task. In the section that follows, we describe the tasks Business Communication students are asked to carry out in TNT, which we believe exemplify the questions that we have discussed previously.

3.1 Language tools: a task-based approach

The syllabus is understood as a one-year path from the teachers' perspective, made up of a series of multiple, seemingly unrelated, small tasks, always presented to students with the focus on specific features of global intercultural communication. Students organize, create, present, and report on tasks for which instructions are deliberately scarce and strict deadlines are set, so as to stimulate their autonomy, responsibility and time management skills. Students are assessed for their skills in English as well as for content, as is customary in an ESP learning environment. However, primacy is given to 'fluency' over 'accuracy', where meaning and the students' ability to communicate the conclusions of and their reflections on the performed tasks.

The first task we chose to highlight is a presentation in which students describe the company they supposedly work for, its mission and internationalization objectives and, based on country research, offer specific practical suggestions on how to reach and work in an international market of their choice. Technology is not paramount in this initial task, with students choosing PowerPoint or similar tools to carry it out, and concentrating especially on research about intercultural differences and market expansion strategies. Linguistic competence surfaces in the oral presentation in class as well as in the summarizing and tailoring of information. Peer-to-peer feedback tends to concentrate on content, but teachers complement content observations with insight into the students' oral and writing skills. Students do not need to resort to translation, due to the vast amount of information available in English. Still the more fluent students are usually the ones with higher scores on content.

Linguistic and technological competence becomes more apparent in the following task – the creation of a digital story. Digital Storytelling literally means using ICT tools that allow for the digital manipulation of content – audio, text or images – to tell stories. Following an introduction to the concept of digital stories, students are asked to create a possible storyline that illustrates an intercultural business-related incident they will then create digitally and finally show in class. Most stories will have little textual material, but still teachers will try to lead students to focus on and enhance the narrative techniques that make up an effective story. Students, on their part, will be worried with the digital media and the illustration of intercultural communication theoretical models in the story. In the end, most stories will reveal students technological and theory-to-practice skills. The written story circle, the narration of and/or the dialogues in the audio of the story and the presentation in class allow for teachers' comments and assessment of language skills based on pre-established criteria made available to students. Some of the students will have unconsciously already been resorting to translation when first writing the story and dialogues in their mother tongue.

To complete the third task, students will be given some insight into the issues of how different cultures communicate differently using the same medium – the Internet. Sample studies provided focus on marketing and advertising strategies (such as for example, Würtz, 2005 and Chirkova, 2011). Students' task will be to analyze, describe and decide on different communication styles and on the ways in which they reflect cultural diversity. More specifically, they will choose either a television commercial or a print advert (taken from magazines, newspapers or found online) and write down a one-page report describing both linguistic and visual changes that would have to be carried out for a successful adaptation of the mentioned advert or commercial to another cultural setting. Changes should be based on theoretical models studied, as for example, Edward Hall's (1959, 1979) studies on cross-cultural communication and fruit of comparative analysis between the types of cultures involved. The task greatly focuses on content and language, and is assessed both through the written report and an oral presentation stating the reasons for specific intercultural communication choices. Although creating a new advert is not mandatory, students are encouraged to provide some type of visual support in their presentation.

While focusing principally on content, students begin to feel the need to cater for their language skills to get their messages across efficiently. Translation becomes not only a means to convey a message in a foreign language, but one of the content items of the task - the linguistic changes introduced in the new advert - a point to reflect upon and describe in the work. The teachers' feedback will consequently also emphasize the linguistic quality of

written and oral materials. When compared to previous tasks, which draw on research, task 3 requires students to produce original texts as the result of their reflection and decisions and to translate them into English. It is thus expected that more mistakes are likely to occur. As in previous tasks, the more fluent students are, the more effective their presentations will be also in this task. This makes them more aware of how language competence in English is relevant in effective communication.

It is only by completing task 4 at the beginning of the second semester that students are overtly introduced to the concepts of translation and equivalence, at a point when they have already been doing translation in a more or less intuitive manner. Re-centering the syllabus activities on students' goals of intercultural communication for business purposes means introducing them simultaneously to several CAT and MT tools, such as SDL Trados Studio 2014[2], CatsCradle[3], Google Toolkit[4], or Wordfast Anywhere[5], to support and enhance their completion of this linguistic task.

Task 4 is distributed as a translation project combining pair and individual work: students begin by analyzing the Translation Package – the texts to translate – and to decide on the various tasks and deadlines assigned to the project: check if pre-translation work is needed, schedule and distribute the different phases of the project and establish deadlines for them (pre-translation, translation, revision, final version) in order to meet the delivery deadline. They will each translate one part of the texts and revise their peer's translation. Both translation and revision have to be carried out using CAT and revision tools, such as Paperrater[6] or Reverso[7], among others. In the end, the pair of students meets again to decide on a consensual final version of the translated texts, after analysis of the revised versions. As in previous tasks, an individual one-page report describing the preparation and distribution of the process, the usefulness of CAT and MT tools, and the problems encountered in each phase of the project is submitted with the translation project files. To complete the task, students use technology and complete translation and revision activities, while they are faced with the responsibilities of organizing and managing a complex project and of working with a partner,

[2] www.sdl.com

[3] www.stormdance.net/software/catscradle/overview.htm

[4] https://translate.google.com/toolkit

[5] https://www.freetm.com/

[6] https://www.paperrater.com

[7] http://www.reverso.net/spell-checker/english-spelling-grammar/

of carrying out effective time management and of reflecting about their own and their peer's work. Even though their focus during a significant part of the project is inevitably on organizing and managing responsibilities, in the end, it will also revolve around the linguistic task, when they are asked to revise their partner's translation.

Determined to help students discover the relevance of language and translation in effective international communication, teachers begin at this point to receive feedback from students that reveals their growing awareness of the issues of linguistic competence. In their reports, students frequently comment on the uselessness of CAT and MT tools that do not provide them with adequate translations, thus forcing them to undertake a painstaking process of revision. It is when revising their own and their partner's translations that the consciousness of the limitations of technology and, consequently, that of the relevance of language competence in both their mother tongue and in English gains significance.

In tasks 5 and 6, which unlike the previous ones are individual tasks, the manner in which students and teachers' perceptions finally converge is readily apparent. Students approach task 5 of localizing a web page in the same way as they approached previous tasks. Their perception is that technological tools are a means to succeed efficiently and effectively in an international business context. Nevertheless, they will have, at this point, come to realize that tools alone will not do the work for them, and that more than one tool is necessary to successfully complete the task. They will, therefore, approach the task using several of the multiple tools listed above to localize the webpage of a given company in English. Simultaneously, they will resort to other free online revision tools (also listed previously) that will help them confirm and revise the automatically translated text. At this stage, they will have also tried the terminological tool[8] – SDL Multiterm[9] - that they now activate to complement the linguistic task. Since they are also more aware of intercultural implications in effective communication, students will then answer questions regarding their localization strategy more consistently. Questions may revolve around:

- who the target of the web site is;
- why the webpage is being translated;
- what linguistic lay-out color or icon changes, additions and suppressions will be done and why.

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[8] A list of free online terminology tools, terminology extractors and terminology management systems is available at: http://recremisi.blogspot.pt

[9] http://www.sdl.com/cxc/language/terminology-management/multiterm/

Many students will also use revision tools to improve the quality of the written report in which they present and justify their preferred localization strategy. This consistent use of technological tools reveals how students are now closer to teachers' perception of the paramount importance of language competence in successful communication. This is to say that, at this point, teachers see students finally converging to the teachers' rationale that language and translation are essential skills in successful communication, but using such tools differently to suit purposes that are their own. Students will not build on language competence in English to acquire translation competence and communicate effectively, but will rather utilize technological tools to bridge the linguistic gap and to work on the translated text in order to achieve linguistic competence and communicate more effectively. This becomes, thus, much more a process of revising and confirming the quality of the linguistic materials that support whatever message/content they aim at getting across.

Having already tried out and tested a number of language, translation, revision and localization tools, students are introduced to one more tool and technique - that of subtitling - and required to carry out one final task related to language and translation. In this case, the choice of technological tools is entirely their responsibility. In task 6, which involves students in the design and creation of their own Multimedia CV, they are allowed to freely decide the choice of tools. The only 3 requirements are that:

1. the work must contain a multimedia file;
2. the work must contain an audio file in their mother tongue or English and subtitling in the other language;
3. it cannot be longer than 2 minutes.

The end product results of this final individual task are, in general, good or very good, both in the use of technology and in linguistic competence, further corroborating the mirrored perceptions hypothesis. Such end products also reveal concern with the adequacy and correctness of the texts produced and translated to present themselves professionally. As for the way in which that presentation is done, it could be said that perhaps reflecting about intercultural differences and cultural awareness contributes to enriching students' self-reflection and that this surfaces in their Multimedia CVs.

4. Conclusion

It is especially clear at the end of the course how teachers and students' aims and paths end up by actually converging in an engaging classroom interaction where technology is the

motivating trigger of content-driven tasks that simultaneously enhance linguistic and translation skills, and thus contribute to English proficiency. The completion of the proposed tasks provides students with opportunities to use ESP as a communicative tool as they engage with real-world authentic language use. Orally communicating their findings and writing their personal reflections on the reports help students attend to form while communicating. Thus, processes responsible for implicit language learning development are activated. Additionally, autonomy and responsibility are fostered, so that students' awareness of the relevance of language competence, intercultural differences and technological tools builds up from the completion of syllabus tasks, rather than stem from the traditional knowledge transmission approach. Those teachers who trail a similar path, resorting to technology and following a task-based approach, are likely to contribute to enhancing students' awareness of the importance of linguistic and communicative competence, when interacting in professional international settings.

By following a task-based path, students have also reached the awareness that successful communication is supported by linguistic competence and the consistent use of technology. It is when they converge in the perception that using tools to improve their language skills is extremely relevant for successful international communication that students and teachers at last see one another in the mirror.

We would like to underline that our intention is not to provide general conclusions, nor do we intend to give guidelines for direct teaching. The detailed description of our task-based approach brings to light relevant matters for further thought. We are of the opinion that the approach implemented may, indeed, be relevant to other cohorts of students and not just to those studying Business Communication. In language learning, for instance, adapted technology-based activities specifically designed for interpreter training may prove useful in supporting and enhancing students' oral and writing skills, through note-taking, transcription, active listening or paraphrasing. Web and video-conferencing systems make way to independent learning and foster teamwork in and outside the classroom. In a translation class, in which English is the second language, computer-assisted translation tools not only concur to developing students' digital competence as required by the labor market; they may also serve as a means to enhance awareness of translation issues, such as equivalence and revision. In the same way, Web-based terminology tools are useful to build up specialized knowledge in the foreign language.

Implementing a task-based approach in an English pedagogical environment, where students are able to work with technology that they perceive relevant for their needs, may be

the necessary force to drive their participation and involvement. On the other hand, teacher perception of relevant content and professional skills demanded by today's labor market continues to be crucial for task orientation, language development and student guidance. This corroborates the idea that both teachers and students strive towards the same objective and attempt to reach the same goal although following apparently diverging paths.

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