

Student Collaboration Tasks in the Course of Learning English for Academic Purposes and Translation Training with the Use of Information Technologies

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Abstract-The article describes the examples of collaborative learning with the use of information technologies. In the first example we consider learning English for academic purposes in two teams that prepare reading and listening comprehension assignments focused on the same lexical topic for each other. The assignments are prepared with the use of such Internet resources as online dictionaries, thesauruses and YouTube videos. The groups exchange the assignments in class, do each other's assignments and then get involved in the classroom discussion actively using and consolidating the academic vocabulary from the text and the video. The second example concerns the discipline "Translation training with the use of information technologies", in which student collaboration proves to be effective. Stages of fulfilling joint translation tasks and student-teacher activities are exemplified and briefly described. The third example of collaboration is an examination task in the elective discipline "Electronic resources of translator". This task was initially fulfilled by students at their translation practice according to the algorithm used at one of the translation companies in St.Petersburg, with the use of Memsources system.

Keywords-collaborative learning, internet resources, English for academic purposes, translation training, vocabulary

I. INTRODUCTION

The idea of collaboration, as a general notion of group work, was earlier supported by L.S. Vygotsky, the father of 'social learning'. He suggested assessing students' ability to solve problems, rather than knowledge acquisition [1]. We also believe that collaboration can help to increase students' learning skills and performance. Collaborative learning is known to be more effective for attaining higher level thinking and educational performance as students in groups tend to learn through discussion and evaluation of the others' ideas [2]. The information that is discussed is likely to be better retained in long-term memory. In many cases students who work collaboratively on

educational problems get higher scores than those who work individually [3]. At the same time, students who showed low level of learning achievement, improved when they started working in groups.

First of all, clear goals for the group should be established at the initial stage as well as individual accountability of each student. The rules and codes for communication and collaboration of the students should be worked out to be observed by all. Open communication is of vital importance. The learning process is considered as part of the assessment process. Experts have argued that the psychological effect on self-esteem and personal development are just as important as learning itself. Students need to respect and appreciate each other's viewpoints, so a classroom environment that encourages independent thinking should be created [4]. Nowadays classroom environment is more successfully created with the use of information technologies.

Computer-supported collaborative learning in higher education, being a shift from the traditional face-to-face group work [5], draws on data sharing and is becoming more and more widespread. Researchers of this educational trend are aware of its advantages, such as creating a non-threatening environment fostered through participation in discussions [6], increasing the chances of academic progress through fun and interesting communicative activities in the classroom [7]. In opinion of other researchers, approving of the computer-supported collaborative learning, the key to success in it is facilitation of the interaction among students, and also between tutor and students through the Web [8].

In view of the fact that most of the above authors analyze computer-supported collaborative learning on the basis of teaching foreign languages, we would like to contribute our mite into the same subject by considering collaborative tasks for the students specializing in

translation. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to discuss collaborative tasks for the students doing a course of academic English as part of their preparation for studying abroad as well as for the students specializing in linguistics at Peter the Great St. Petersburg Polytechnic University.

II. COLLABORATIVE ASSIGNMENTS IN THE COURSE OF LEARNING ENGLISH FOR ACADEMIC PURPOSES

Team learning techniques can be applied in teaching a wide range of subjects including English for academic purposes. In team learning “a lot of attention is paid to team success and team goals, which can be achieved when each team member studies autonomously, but interacts with the other students while working on a particular topic, problem or issue” [9, p. 129]. Learning collaboration is relevant when students have to learn, memorize and

analyze large amounts of information and use it in group discussions.

This article deals with involving students in learning collaboration while doing a course in academic English. They can both develop assignments for their peers and do the assignments developed by other learners. The tasks can be developed in the course of doing homework in small groups communicating on the Internet. “Some individuals tend to put in less effort when they work in a team. This phenomenon is referred to as social dependence” [10, p.213]. Therefore, in order to make all the students participate in the teamwork, it is necessary to monitor their individual performance. The teacher can make sure that all the students make a valuable contribution to the group work by checking the evidence of their learning-related communication on the internet in the form of printouts. The process of learning in collaboration can be organized as a series of essential steps illustrated in the table below:

TABLE 1. THE STAGES OF GROUP WORK WITH APPLICATION OF COMPUTER RESOURCES

| # | Group preparing reading comprehension assignments | Group preparing listening comprehension assignments | Computer resources applied on each stage |
|---|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 | Develop reading comprehension assignments | Develop listening comprehension assignments | Online dictionaries, context dictionaries, thesauruses. |
| 2 | Translate difficult words, provide their phonetic scripts. Give explanations for culture-specific words and proper names. | | Online encyclopedias, online dictionaries. |
| 3 | | Write a transcript of the video in small groups | YouTube, automatically generated subtitles. |
| 4 | The students with a high level of foreign language proficiency check and correct the assignments, the translations and the explanations developed by the group. | | Search engine, online dictionaries |
| 5 | The two groups exchange tasks in class | | |
| 6 | The groups participate in the class discussion | | |

First the class is divided into two groups including both the students with the high level of foreign language proficiency, who will act as experts, and the learners with the poor command of English, who will also contribute to the group’s output. Each of the two groups is led by the captain with distinctive leadership qualities, who is appointed by the teacher. Such students exert their authority on the other members of the group and regulate their goal-directed activities [11]. Therefore, if the group’s activities are coordinated and directed by the leader, their overall performance will improve.

The first group works with the text and develops reading comprehension and lexical assignments for the second group. They also need to provide the translation of the difficult words as well as the explanations for some names and facts from the text. The reading comprehension assignments can be in the form of true / false statements and questions, whereas the lexical assignments can include finding the synonyms and the words for the definitions in the text.

The students in the second group collaboratively develop the assignments, the transcript, and provide the translations and phonetic scripts of some difficult words as

well as the necessary explanations related to the video. In the following class the groups do each other’s assignments.

The discussions between the two groups in the next class encourage the students to speak English and use the new words related to the topic, because they focus on the subject that they are extremely interested in rather than on forming sentences with perfect grammar. Moreover, they familiarize themselves with the subject matter and the key vocabulary related to the topic in the course of developing assignments for the other group [12]. Thus “diverging viewpoints lead to verbal interactions in order to resolve a conflict. Social factors can help force the group to find a solution” [13, p.61]. In the discussions described in this article the main social factor is the desire to gain the upper hand over the opponents.

Discussions encourage competitive spirit, because “each group wants to take over the leadership in the learning process. Therefore, each group member feels responsible for the overall performance of the group “[14, p.41]. All the team members try to come up with compelling arguments and beat the other group. The techniques of applying computer resources in collaborative work that we describe in the first example with the students practicing academic English for their further studying

abroad can also be used in the course of translation training. The patterns of collaborative work are based on the principles described in the examples above, whereas the computer resources used by the students specializing in linguistics are mainly designed for professional use.

III. COLLABORATIVE TRANSLATION TRAINING WITH THE USE OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGIES

In the second part of the article we intend to exemplify student collaboration involved in two elective translation practice courses of master degree curriculum. The main purpose of studying the discipline, "Translation training with the use of information technologies", is building professional competence in master level students majoring in linguistics. This discipline is supposed to familiarize students with current peculiarities of translation and interpretation in modern conditions, with English and Russian being the focus languages. The discipline involves the development and consolidation of practical translation skills obtained in the general course of translation practice. The course is aimed at preparing learners for real life translation practice for which it provides various educational tasks to teach future interpreters both skills of psychological self-control in the process of interpretation and skills in the use of modern information technology in written translation. The syllabus of the discipline is compiled in accordance with the curriculum of higher education institutions of linguistic profile. The availability of this discipline in the educational process allows us to expand the boundaries of professional graduate students' competence.

As the result of studying these discipline linguists acquire competence in the effective use of electronic dictionaries and linguistic corpora in translation activities, in applying modern technologies of machine translation and techniques of post-editing machine translation. Information systems and Internet sites (<http://www.abc.net.au/rn/scienceshow>, <http://www.podfeed.net/>, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/>, etc.) are studied for the development of speech technology. The use of Internet technologies and Internet resources (<http://info.ox.ac.uk/bnc>, <http://www.thesaurus.com/>, <https://context.reverso.net>, etc.) is feasible for translating realities. All these Internet resources contribute to polishing translator skills to achieve translation correctness, and all of them may be used in a collaborative mode.

Two examples of collaborative tasks are presented below.

Collaborative task 1. Share information in translation activities as part of regular class. During the Interpreting classes students get involved in the process of collaboration

and information sharing, with a teacher acting as an instructor and coordinator of the process. As part of their homework they prepare informational texts related to the topic under study. The topics usually cover the following: Politics, Social Issues, Mass media, etc. Before the class students are supposed to find and analyze the topical text and highlight the points that may turn out to be challenging for the interpreter, in terms of sophisticated and culture specific vocabulary, terminology, stylistics and grammar structures. Actually, they must prepare a written translation of the text as well as a word list that will be used for the interpreting task. In this respect, they not only conduct a translation analysis of the text developing their translation skills but also expand their vocabulary range.

In class, students start by exchanging information in their word lists and choosing the most adequate translation for the relevant words and word combinations. This task is to be done in pairs. Strict timing should be suggested by the lecturer to make the process of collaboration most effective. At this stage, students can use any Internet sources at their disposal such as Google search engine, online dictionaries, MOODLE platform, chat rooms, social networks, etc.

When the process of searching and exchanging all the necessary information is finished, students switch to interpreting in pairs, with one student acting as a reporter and the other one as an interpreter. As each of them in turn delivers the previously prepared translation of their message, they are both involved in the process of interpreting. Again, strict timing is to be observed at this stage, as well as the manner of speech and information delivery, with all rules of rhetoric.

The interpreting task can also be done in larger groups of students, in language laboratory, with one student acting as a reporter and others as interpreters, all of them wearing earphones and recording their translation (except for the reporter), with subsequent listening and analyzing the omissions and inaccuracies.

There are different ways of organizing the process of peer assessment and self-evaluation. First of all, students can evaluate themselves listening to the recorded consecutive translation and analyze their own mistakes. They can also swap their earphones and listen to the translation of one another putting down most obvious mistakes and reporting them to their group mates and/or the teacher for a subsequent follow-up. If they interpret in pairs, they exchange the results of their interpreting in pairs and report to the group and the teacher for a subsequent follow-up. The following criteria are used for such evaluation: quantities of unnecessary omissions, significant distortions, grammatical, lexical, stylistic inaccuracies, hesitation pauses, wrong pronunciation and intonation. The composition of the task is shown in Table 2 below:

TABLE 2. STAGES OF FULFILLING JOINT TRANSLATION TASKS AND STUDENT-TEACHER ACTIVITIES

| № | Stages of doing the task | Activities |
|----------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 | Homework: individual preparation of the texts | Analysis of the topical text |
| | | Highlighting challenging points for translation |
| | | Written translation of the text |
| | | Preparing final word list |
| | | Self-evaluation |
| 2 | Collaborative class work: exchanging information on translation in pairs | Familiarization with partners' word lists |
| | | Choosing the most adequate translation using any available Internet sources |
| | | Discussion of the most suitable translation variants |
| | | Peer assessment |
| | | Interpreting in pairs, changing turns as interpreter or journalist |
| 3 | Teacher's role as moderator | Timing student activities |
| | | Final evaluation drawing on the selected criteria |

Collaborative Task 2 is for the examination in the elective discipline "Electronic resources of translator". This task was initially fulfilled by students at their translation practice according to the algorithm used at one of the translation companies in St. Petersburg. Memsources system was used for all the translation tasks as it is considered to be the most feasible. At the examination in the above discipline this task is supposed to be done in a computer class of the Polytechnic University. Collaborative mode is provided by 1,5 hour pair work. After that the results of the joint translation work are submitted to the examiners, with the chief examiner representing the translation company and the other one being on staff at the university.

This task is an attempt to achieve the coupling of translation company techniques with those acceptable in a practical university discipline, which enables students to approach the real-life translation practice available at the contemporary labor market. The algorithm of this mutually beneficial task is shown below:

1. Download any foreign policy news (e.g. Brexit issues, Macron's policy, rallies in Germany or France, etc.) in *.html (page only *.html) from cnn.com.
2. Create a glossary for the article BEFORE the translation, in the Memsources system.
3. Create a project in Memsources for translation, then create a Translation Memory database and connect to it the created glossary.
4. Translate the article, adding 10 NEW TERMS to the glossary.
5. The final output of the task: glossary before translation in *.xlsx format, glossary after translation in *.xlsx format, translation in *.html and *.mxliff formats, and Translation Memory base in *.tmx format.

The structure of this collaborative task is still under consideration and some changes are possible, for example, concerning the use of doc format besides *.html at the fifth stage of the task, especially taking into account the general examination requirements, for which this change seems to be more feasible.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

As proved by the practical experience, students highly appreciate collaborative activities and the opportunity to exchange the information with their peers as well as the opportunity to evaluate themselves. Collaborative tasks are good addition both to conventional assignments done by students learning English for academic purposes, and to general translation practice and should be given to students regularly in class and also at the examination. Collaborative tasks are a prerequisite for students' further participation in professional project work, which is usually based on the mutual effort of the participants. Collaboration is also vital for grant application process, in which most students are going to be professionally involved, especially at master level. In view of these evident benefits of collaboration the research into it should be continued.

By definition, learning is social in nature. During the process of studying and developing new ideas we use different media, technical means and Internet resources. We exchange ideas and share viewpoints with others. In opinion of Miriam Clifford, "Collaboration is a learned process. If managed correctly, it is a powerful tool that can allow educators to tap into new ideas and information" [15]. The instructor's role can't be underestimated in organizing student collaboration, either. Instructors are supposed to serve as facilitators providing the necessary scaffolding, which should be higher at the beginning of group work and gradually diminish as the students acquire more responsibility. After all, increased responsibility over learning is a goal in collaboration.

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