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# **COLLABORATIVE TRANSLATION: STUDENT TRANSLATORS' PERSPECTIVE**

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## **Abstract:**

In the globalized world, now more than ever, translation practices have been under constant change. Due to the requirements of modern business trends, the traditional image of translators working alone is now somewhat left behind. The practices of large translation agencies force individual translation to give way to collaborative translation. However, collaboration in translation is still a relatively unexplored terrain, with many of its advantages and disadvantages. Bearing this in mind, higher education institutions should be prepared to tackle the issue of collaborative translation from the aspect of curricula design as well as of market requirements, which requires additional research focusing on collaborative work. This article addresses the study conducted to examine the usage of in-class collaborative translation practices at the university level, and the effects such activities might have on increasing translation competence. It discusses the characteristics of collaborative translation and provides an insight into student translators' perception of the usage of such activities thus attempting to explore the concept of collaboration in translation from the perspective of active participants.

Key words: collaborative translation, student translators, higher education institutions, student perspective

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In the last two decades, translation as a profession has seen multiple changes aimed towards giving translation a full professional status. What these changes have brought is evident in many segments, including translation education at university levels, accreditation systems, professional organizations, codified professional and ethical standards, as well as the creation of a knowledge base and a research community in the field. However, many scholars (see Katan 2011, Dam and Koskinen 2012, Pym *et al.* 2013, Dam and Koskinen 2016) acknowledge the fact that translation as an activity has still to take some steps so as to reach its formal status in the professional world.

This whole process is even more complicated bearing in mind various key players in translation activities. Apart from the traditional division into literary and business translators, there are new factors emerging on the scene. The increasing role of translation technology is changing the nature of the activity while the spread of collaborative online practices seems to be gaining momentum and is no longer on the periphery of the translation field. All these aspects need to be taken into account and must not be ignored when it comes to translation education. As Kiraly (2003, p. 25) states, “starting with observations of what actually goes on in our own classrooms, followed by systematic plans and actions for change, we can create a groundswell of local

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research that can inform our common search for alternative teaching methods and techniques.” The article discusses the attempts to follow Kiraly’s guidelines in attempting to incorporate these new trends in the curricula designed by higher education institutions.

## **2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The concept of collaboration in translation studies can be analyzed from various perspectives. First of all, traditional perspective of collaboration in translation refers to the actual cooperation among professional translators while performing their tasks, or the collaboration between translators on the one side, and authors, editors, reviewers, and professionals in other fields on the other. Another possible perspective refers to the ever-growing collaborative online practices in multiple forms, which come as the consequences of the options created by the availability of worldwideweb. Finally, the third perspective focuses on the issue of collaboration in translation education and research.

The rapid development of new technologies has had profound impact on translation practices, giving rise to a wide range of fascinating phenomena that are reshaping translation practices and public perceptions. What is true is that “world of translation” has been definitely and irrevocably changed, with the industry introducing new business models (Jiménez-Crespo, 2017, pp. 1-

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3). Heavily influenced by this new world, collaborative translation processes saw a radical shift. They evolved into online collaborative practices such as crowd-sourcing, fan-subbing, gaming, software localization, to name just a few. Apart from changing the format, the very nature of translation activities is changed. As Jiménez-Crespo (2017, p. 18) states, “The new emergent collaborative practices mediated through the web are highly diverse and vibrant in nature.” The worldwide web facilitated the platforms which require different sets of skills and competences, in line with the ever-growing demand for immediacy and the provision of global translation services.

A need for closer connection between what happens in the classroom and the real professional practice has been a common standpoint in translation studies for over two decades (see Chesterman and Wagner 2002; Jääskeläinen 2011; Pym 2011; García 2015) and translation scholars often address the issues of curricula development (see Durban et al. 2003; Calvo 2011; Hadžiahmetović-Jurida and Pavlović 2016). This connection needs to link not only the latest developments in the language industries with training, but also with how the findings of research are applied to translation education. As Jääskeläinen, Kujamäki and Jukka (2011, p. 145) claim, we must subject this link between research and the reality of the translation market to careful examination in terms of “how we design and implement research, how we use research findings to

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bring about changes, as well as how we educate future translators.” Academia needs to address these contemporary concepts of translation in its attempt to bridge the gap between theory and practice so as to provide the access to professional community of practice (Jiménez-Crespo, 2017, p. 228).

Some scholars claim that collaborative translation projects reshaped translation education from the traditional “hand-me-down”, teacher-centered approach to models in which translation learning is fundamentally an interactive, collaborative, “socio-personal process” (Király, 2015, p.20). Through interactive learning environment, students are situated at the center of the learning process and are expected to discover knowledge by themselves and collaborate in real life professional translation assignments. As Király (2003, p. 4) states, “The time is indeed ripe to ask ourselves if collaboration represents no more than a passing fad in educational jargon (and in job descriptions), or whether it might not serve as a key to innovation, allowing us to adapt our conventional hand-me-down approach in order to meet the exigencies of a much changed translation market and to address the challenges posed by contemporary views of the translator’s craft.” In under-resourced educational and academic settings such as Bosnia and Herzegovina (see Jahić 2016), where more often than not educators need to find their ways to change the learning process into an effective way of acquiring both theoretical and practical knowledge, accepting new trends tailored to the specific

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limiting conditions may prove to be a potentially valuable resource for the acquisition of the necessary skills and competences in translation.

Over the years, collaboration has been investigated through the prism of translation process-centered research, highlighting the main underlying features of the translation process itself. Relatively recently has this interest shifted towards the participants and the dynamics of the in-group interaction. However, the research in this regard has not fully addressed the student-translator perspective, which is significantly under-represented in academia. Hence, the study we report on is an attempt to shed more light on collaborative translation from the perspective of the participants in the study, and their own perception of this type of activity in translation education.

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

The study aimed at exploring the practical usage of collaborative work in translation didactics focusing on how the actors (student translators) perceive this activity, and how they assess the potential implementation of this method for educational purposes. The study included translation tasks performed by student translators. Two general source texts were chosen, one in English, and one in Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian (B/C/S). The participants were asked to fill out a pre-translation questionnaire after which they collaboratively translated

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both texts. The collaborative sessions were audio-recorded, then transcribed and coded. The target translation texts were collected. After the collaborative sessions, all the participants were individually interviewed, so as to probe into personal reflections of the entire activity. The interviews were also audio-recorded, transcribed and coded, so as to provide the ground for the analysis of both qualitative and quantitative data.

All the participants (10) were student translators majoring in English, and taking translation as an elective course in their fourth, final year of undergraduate studies. The participants used what is known in literature as self-selection (Pavlović, N., 2007, p. 70), thus forming two groups of five students each assigned with the corresponding codes (groups G1 and G2, students S1 through S10). They are all B/C/S native speakers, with previous experience in translation in the education setting that included both individual and collaborative work.

By means of the pre-translation questionnaire, we examined the students' previous experience in translation, the fields of translation, directionality (including their preferences for L1/L2 translation), preferences in terms of working on translation in a group or individually, their attitudes towards collaborative work, and their personal reflections on prospective employment in the language industry. By means of the

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interview, we examined their impressions of collaborative work as such, the participants' attitudes towards the usability of in-class collaborative translation practices, and their self-assessment regarding the potential benefits of such type of activity (tolerance, team-work, etc.). All the data were analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively and the findings were triangulated.

## **4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

This section of the study provides an overview of the results, analysis and discussion divided in two groups, as per the methodology – the questionnaire and the interview.

### **4.1 The Questionnaire**

Concerning the structure of the questionnaire, one part included open-ended questions, while the other was based on the 1-5 scale (see the Appendix). As for the participants' previous experience in translation beyond the educational context, a vast majority reported that they were involved in translation activities outside the classroom, which included fields such as economics and business, tourism, sports, press articles, mathematics, and various specialized topics, as well as the formats



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such as final papers, diploma papers, master's theses, secondary school essays, and seminar papers. One participant stated that she was engaged in consecutive interpreting during the elections in Bosnia and Herzegovina. As for these activities, the interviewees reported translation in both directions to be most required by their clients.

The examination of the participants' preferences regarding the directionality of translation (L1/L2 translation) and group/individual work revealed that there were no particular preferences, except for two participants who explicitly stated that they liked individual translation activity. When asked which directionality they liked and found easier, one half of the participants reported L1 translation, three participants had no particular preferences, while two preferred L2 translation.

By means of the questionnaire, the participants were invited to self-assess their current satisfaction of their command of both their native language and English as their L2. According to their responses, they saw foreign language skills to be more developed over their native language, which may be attributed to them majoring in English as a foreign language and being heavily exposed to foreign language-centered education.

Prospective employment-related questions revealed that seven out of ten participants hope to be engaged in

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professional translation services on a part-time basis. Interestingly enough, of the three remaining participants, one would further pursue translation as a profession, another would like to practice translation on occasion, whereas one has no plans whatsoever of working in the translation industry.

## **4.2. The Interview**

As for the interviews, the questions revolved around a number of major themes which all emerged from the student translators' shared experience of the activity, based on their personal reflections. Student translators first expressed their impressions of the collaborative translation tasks. Generally speaking, as for this point, most student translators found it a rather positive experience, noting that the method was rather interesting and efficient, with a touch of the different which they saw as prominent. This is in line with Olvera-Lobo et al. (2009, p. 179), who claim that “collaborative work environments make the learning process easier, maintaining students' [...] positive attitude towards teamwork and improve students' self-confidence with regards to [...] and translation tasks.” Another important feature that was prominent in their interviews relates to the multitude of choices as an advantage, provided for and by the group work in which they were engaged, which produced some of the following statements:

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S4: ...you learn a little from others (other students)...

S1: ...it was interesting...different from what we usually do...we actually had fun

S8: ...this was rather refreshing, we haven't had such an interesting lecture in quite awhile...

S7: ...I think this is something that should be introduced to classes because it's such fun, I really liked it...in the questionnaire I stated I preferred translating on my own, but now I think I would change that...

When asked to pinpoint the major points of difference between translation tasks that they are usually involved in-class, and the collaborative activity they performed prior to the interview, they highlighted the communication aspect of the group activity, finding the atmosphere much more relaxing, with each participant having their own ideas whilst at the same time listening to what others have to say. In their narratives, student translators stressed that other group members act as a good “resource” when needed.

S3: ...it is easier as, when you translate alone, you sometimes have a block, and then don't know how to go on...and here, if you find yourself in such a situation, you can ask someone in the group...

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S6: ...in this activity, you're not alone with the text in front you, so it's not just my idea and my perception of the source text, but there are other people, too, who help when things go wrong...

In addition, the participants specified some advantages and very few disadvantages of collaborative translation, from their own perspective. Major advantages included the interactive nature of the activity, less pressure, distribution of tasks within the group, communication and assistance from other members of the group, creativity, and ultimately, a larger choice to choose the end product from, thus ensuring a better quality target text.

S10: ...everyone can have a role in the team, someone to look up words online, someone else to write (the final version of the target text), and so on...

S8: ...it's lot more interesting, we have fun during the activity and a good laugh, whereas doing this on your own is a bit one-way street, monotonous...

While some participants saw the distribution of tasks as an advantage, participant S5 recognized this as a disadvantage, claiming that certain members of the group relied on others a lot more, "not investing enough effort", thus not contributing equally to the group dynamics.

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S7: ...the disadvantage is that some students, some colleagues might be more involved than others, so somebody might stay in the shadows...

Most participants drew the attention to time-management as one of the key issues in this activity, highlighting that it was sometimes quite difficult to keep the momentum given that the more group members, the more options to discuss and choose from.

S3: ...it took us a lot of time to solve everything as everyone had their own opinion...we sometimes simply lose track...

S1: ...when I translate alone, it is a bit faster...when in group, I come up with a sentence, then somebody else comes up with their own sentence, and then my sentence somehow simply vanishes in the air...

S8: ...this type of work takes more time, you may lose some time while having fun, it is fun indeed, but may be detrimental to the overall time needed...

In terms of the new knowledge and set of skills potentially developed through this activity, several points featured prominently in the participants' answers. This activity gave them the opportunity to become a team member, familiarizing with the mechanism of team work, improved communication, and reaching compromise (seen as a very important aspect). They also used this working environment as a platform for learning

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how to listen to other people's voice, and saw this as a "real-life experience" (S4). Finally, this activity enabled them to see other people as potential models when choosing translation strategies, whilst at the same time perceiving other group members as a correction factor in the sense of getting instant feedback from their peers.

Finally, in looking at their perception of how exactly they could make use of the acquired knowledge and skills in practice, in terms of facilitating their employability, their awareness was evident of the competitive labor market they are soon expected to enter. What resonated in their interviews was the acknowledgment of the fact that their university education would probably not fully prepare them for their future careers. In line with that, they were fully aware that any kind of activity that would make them closer to the real-work settings is more than appreciated.

S3: ...I think this was a very useful exercise...we could use the knowledge...people expect us to be able to work in a team right after university, to contribute fully, to know how to listen to others...so I believe that this is a very good preparation for practice and future work in translation...

S6: ...apart from the cooperation at the group level and team work, we could learn to critically reflect on the translation, control each other, correct each other...

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All these examples clearly show that the participants are fully aware of the changing trends on the global labor market, not only requiring specific language and translation skills, but also a set of skills and competences (such as effective social interaction and computer literacy) in this complex field. The interview transcripts revealed the student translator's strong positive attitude towards collaborative translation and the potential of such activities in the relevant curricula. Having said that, student translator's voice must be heard by their respective academic environment so as to bridge the gap between the actual needs and the under-resourced academic settings.

## **5. CONCLUSIONS**

As discussed above, the study, although limited in scope, has proven that collaborative translation is a natural work method for the younger generation used to finding their ways around using online communication and resources to perform their translation activities. It may also be concluded that there is a strong preference for exploring new learning methods such as collaborative translation as it offers a number of benefits identified by the participants and discussed above.

Collaborative translation has been seen as a source of multifold benefits. These benefits can be related to the personal aspects of the process, or rather the

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psychological impact they have on the participants, such as feeling less pressure, being relaxed, counting on support from others, and developing social skills. Secondly, the target text may be considered to be gaining in terms of quality, as it contains less incorrect elements. And, finally, the translation process itself turns into a highly positive working atmosphere yielding reliance on colleagues for support and the know-how on an as needed basis.

As for academia, the need to incorporate collaborative translation into the existing curricula is more than evident, as indicated by the participants in the study. It is the student translators whose response calls for action on the part of the academic community that they belong to. By ensuring such learning environment, not only would the academic community greatly benefit from developing student translators' skills and the know-how. The entire community, including student translators as future professionals, on one hand, and their clients in the language industry, on the other, could take an advantage of having fully prepared professionals in this field.



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## Appendix

### *Collaborative Translation: Pre-translation questionnaire*

Please answer truthfully the following questions (you can add whatever comments you might have, either next to the questions or at the end of the Questionnaire).

1. Your name: \_\_\_\_\_
2. Your age: \_\_\_\_\_
3. Your e-mail address: \_\_\_\_\_
4. Your mother tongue: \_\_\_\_\_
5. Where did you learn English?  
 elementary school     high school     faculty     other  
(specify) \_\_\_\_\_
6. Have you taken any exams in translation?  
 yes, but not passed yet     yes, passed (which mark/s? \_\_\_\_\_)
7. Have you ever done any translation outside the university courses?  
 yes     no (If not, skip to q. 8)
- 7.a. If yes, what type of text/s have you translated and in which field?  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 7.b. In which direction have you translated?  
 mostly into my mother tongue  
 mostly into a foreign language  
 in both directions equally
8. Do you have regular internet access?  
 yes     no
9. Do you use Internet while translating?  
 yes     no    (please    provide    details)  
\_\_\_\_\_

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10. Do you like translating *on your own*?  
strongly dislike 1 2 3 4 5 like very much

10. Do you like translating *with others* (in pairs or groups)?  
strongly dislike 1 2 3 4 5 like very much

11. Do you prefer translating on your own or with others?  
on my own with others no preference

12. How do you feel about your knowledge of English at this moment?  
very dissatisfied 1 2 3 4 5 very satisfied

13. How do you feel about your knowledge of B/C/S?  
very dissatisfied 1 2 3 4 5 very satisfied

14. In which direction do you *prefer* translating?  
into my mother tongue into a foreign language no preference

15. In which direction do you find it *easier* to translate?  
into my mother tongue into a foreign language no preference

16. When you graduate, would you like to be involved in translation in any way?  
yes, as a professional translator/interpreter  
yes, part-time, in combination with another, “main” job  
only occasionally, as a favour for a friend or relative  
not at all

#### *Post-translation questionnaire*

Please answer truthfully the following questions (put an x instead of the box):

#### I. About the translation **from English into B/C/S**:

1. How long did you work on this translation (approximately)?

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2. How difficult did you find the task?

very easy 1 2 3 4 5 very difficult

3. Are you satisfied with your final product?

very dissatisfied 1 2 3 4 5 very satisfied

4. Which aspect/s of your final product are you most satisfied with and why?

5. Which aspect/s of your final product are you most dissatisfied with and why?

6. Did you enjoy working on this translation?

not at all 1 2 3 4 5 very much

7. Here you can write whatever additional comments you have about this translation task:

## II. About the translation **from B/C/S into English**:

1. How long did you work on this translation (approximately)?

2. How difficult did you find the task?

very easy 1 2 3 4 5 very difficult

3. Are you satisfied with your final product?

very dissatisfied 1 2 3 4 5 very satisfied

4. Which aspect/s of your final product are you most satisfied with and why?

5. Which aspect/s of your final product are you most dissatisfied with and why?

6. Did you enjoy working on this translation?

not at all 1 2 3 4 5 very much

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7. Here you can write whatever additional comments you have about this translation task:

### III. Overall:

1. Which of the two translations did you find more difficult?  
 English into B/C/S  B/C/S into English  more or less the same
2. Which of the two translations did you like doing more?  
 English into B/C/S  B/C/S into English  more or less the same
3. Which of the two translations do you think you did better?  
 English into B/C/S  B/C/S into English  more or less the same
4. Here you can write whatever additional comments you have:

IV. Collaborative work (please answer truthfully, your colleagues will not be shown your answers):

1. How would you describe the *relations* in your team during your group translation task:  
very conflicting 1 2 3 4 5 very cooperative

How would you describe the *atmosphere* during the group work?  
very creative 1 2 3 4 5 very dull

Are you satisfied with the way your team *worked* on the group translation? very dissatisfied 1 2 3 4 5 very satisfied

2. What aspect/s, if any, of your *work* together were you *most satisfied* with and why?
3. What aspect/s, if any, of your *work* together were you *most dissatisfied* with and why?
4. How much do you feel *you contributed* to the final version of the translation? not at all 1 2 3 4 5 very much



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5. Do you feel that the **other members** of your team did their share of the work? not at all 1 2 3 4 5 very much

6. During the joint task, did you feel you had an opportunity to **say** what you wanted? never 1 2 3 4 5 always

7. Did the other members of the team **listen** to what you had to say? never 1 2 3 4 5 always

8. Were your suggestions **accepted** for the final version of the translation? never 1 2 3 4 5 always

9. When your suggestions were not accepted, were you **happy** with the solutions your colleagues decided on? never 1 2 3 4 5 always

10. Write here whatever additional comments you may have about translating in groups: