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## Social media platforms in translator training

### Socialising or separating?

#### *Abstract*

This article reports on an international online course on multimodality organised for a group of 28 postgraduate students of translation studies in 2016. The course was taught by 13 lecturers from eight different European universities. Lecturers and students joined a closed social media platform, where the students were required to complete translation-specific activities in virtual teams. This article aims to identify ways in which students interact with each other in e-learning environments. The data used for this article has been obtained from the students' discussion in the online platform, their peer grading submissions, as well as the final course evaluation forms filled in by the students. The results suggest that working together in an online environment was the source of both learning challenges and opportunities. Some students reported feeling somewhat distanced by these e-learning environments. Further, many highlighted the difficulties posed by the peer assessment tasks. The article discusses the overall potential of social media platforms in translator training and reflects on how online courses can be designed so that the pedagogical benefits of e-learning tools are duly exploited.

## 1 Introduction

Universities across the world have offered online courses from the mid-1990s (Kentnor 2015: 28). Early e-learning technologies used in higher education settings consisted mainly of learning management systems (LMS), such as Moodle, Blackboard and MyClasses. The use of these platforms has been described as “a transmission-style educational practice” (Poore 2016: 6); that is, the focus tends to be on sending material for the students to download and absorb, during self-study or class time, as prompted by the learning instructor. Even though students are able to send comments via LMS platforms, interaction among students in these environments tends to be minimal (Poore 2016: 6).

In recent years, the pedagogical use of social media applications has been gaining momentum in higher education (Jussila/Aramo-Immonen 2016). Social media, as defined by Kaplan and Haenlein (2010: 61), is a group of Internet-based applications that allow for the creation and exchange of user-generated content. Previous research has identified various social media application categories, including blogs (e. g. WordPress),

microblogs (e. g. Twitter), content-sharing sites (e. g. YouTube), social office tools (e. g. Google Docs) and social networking sites (e. g. Facebook and Google+) (Pirkkalainen/Pawlowski 2013: 7–8). What characterises social media applications as learning environments are their accentuated interactivity and, as the label suggests, their *socialness*: these platforms permit to pave way for active, constructivist pedagogies (Poore 2016: 8).

In this article, we present our views on an international course that was organised online – via a social media platform – for postgraduate students of translation studies in the fall of 2016. The course was hosted by the University of Tampere and taught by 13 lecturers from eight different European universities.<sup>1</sup> Lecturers and students joined a closed social media platform – namely a Google+ Community – where the students worked in virtual teams of three. The course was designed and coordinated by Anne Ketola, and Alejandro Bolaños García-Escribano participated in it as one of the online lecturers.

Interaction between students is often considered as the most important component of online educational settings (Woo/Reeves 2007). In the present article, we set out to examine how the students interacted with each other in this e-learning environment during the course. The remaining part of the article contains four sections. It commences with a theoretical discussion on constructivist approaches to learning, as well as the pedagogical framework on which the online course was based, namely the Community of Inquiry model (Sections 2.1 and 2.2). Secondly, an emphasis will be put on the advantages and disadvantages of peer assessment in online learning environments (Section 2.3). Thirdly, the aims, objectives and implementation of the online course will be outlined (Section 3). The fourth part is a case study on the development and evaluation of the course's sixth unit on audiovisual translation (Section 4). Finally, the conclusion accounts for the overall potential of social media platforms in translator training and offers a reflection on how online courses may be designed in order to exploit the pedagogical benefits of e-learning tools in full (Section 5).

## 2 Theoretical background

### 2.1 Social constructivism and the community of inquiry framework

Higher education has recently built on constructivist approaches to learning, according to which students are urged to be actively involved in their own process of learning, taking responsibility for making sense of their own educational experiences (Swan/Garrison/Richardson 2009: 45). Social constructivist approaches to learning, in turn, emphasise a collaborative construction of knowledge within student communities as a social experience. Learning is, thus, rooted in inter-subjective interaction that takes place between the participants of a learning event (i. e. instructors and students) (Vygotsky

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1934/1986). In translation pedagogy, the social constructivist approach has been particularly exploited by translator trainers Don Kiraly (2000) and Jennifer Varney (2009), both of whom advocate the inter-subjective interaction that takes place between translation students in a specific social setting. As opposed to the transmissionist perspective, whereby the learner is a passive listener and consumer of knowledge, the transformationist position sees learning as “a personal, holistic, intrinsically motivating and socially effectuated construction process” (Kiraly 2000: 23). That is, learning is not transmitted from the teacher to the students, but rather proactively constructed and transformed in collaborative learning processes. Under the socioconstructivist approach, learning activities imitate to a certain extent how real-life projects in the translation industry work, and the classroom is transformed into a forum for guided social and cultural experience. In addition, the different levels of skill acquisition are determined by the student’s expertise.

The Community of Inquiry (CoI) model on which this particular course design was based is social constructivist in nature, too. The original idea of a CoI is grounded in John Dewey’s (1938) notion of practical inquiry, referring to a group of people involved in a process of empirical or conceptual inquiry around a shared problem. Dewey’s framework has since been developed into a so-called CoI model by D. Randy Garrison, Terry Anderson and Walter Archer (2001). The CoI model is one of the few systematic theoretical models that aims to describe and explain the dynamics and processes of student engagement and learning in online learning environments.

The model aims to articulate the academic and social factors necessary for the development of high-quality online education. According to the CoI model, successful knowledge building in collaborative, asynchronous online environments requires three interdependent forms of *presence*: teaching presence, cognitive presence and social presence (Garrison/Anderson/Archer 2001). Teaching presence refers to the instructional orchestration of the online environment: course design, organisation, instruction and discourse facilitation for the purpose of realising personally meaningful learning outcomes for the students (Anderson et al. 2001; Garrison/Arbaugh 2007). Cognitive presence refers to the students’ ability to construct learning experiences through reflection and engagement in the shared discourse of the online community (Garrison/Anderson/Archer 2001: 89).

Finally, social presence – the aspect on which the present paper focuses – is defined as “the ability of participants to identify with the community [...], communicate purposefully in a trusting environment, and develop inter-personal relationships by way of projecting their individual personalities” (Garrison 2009: 352). In other words, social presence infers feelings of connectedness to others in online communities; which may be enhanced among participants, for instance, by addressing others by name, self-disclosing personal information, initiating a discussion and asking questions (Kim/ Song/ Luo 2016: 677). As Garrison, Cleveland-Innes and Fung describe, social presence is “a responsibility of teaching presence” (Garrison/Cleveland-Innes/Fung 2009: 32) – i. e. it needs to be facilitated by the instructional design of the online learning environment – as well as “a condition for creating cognitive presence” (Garrison/Cleveland-Innes/Fung

2009: 32) – i. e. it is a prerequisite for genuinely collaborative inquiry. Social presence is reflected in any online discourse that promotes positive interaction in a collegial environment (Rourke et al. 1999). As Swan, Garrison and Richardson (2009: 46) state, the social aspects of learning call for careful attention in online higher education learning settings, because one cannot assume that all students work towards community building in the way they typically would in a face-to-face setting.

The Col model is based on the premise that knowledge is constructed through critical inquiry taking place in the interaction between the community participants. Online discussions are indispensable in this process, but they need to be structured in order to be effective (deNoyelles/Mannheimer Zydney/Chen 2014: 154). An, Shin and Lim (2009) affirm that if taking part in the online discussion is not required from the students, voluntary participation rarely occurs. Further, deNoyelles, Mannheimer Zydney and Chen (2014: 156) suggest that grading the online discussion, or parts of it, may provide students with the extrinsic motivation necessary to engage in fruitful discussions. In addition to being required to post their own thoughts and comments, the participants of a Col can be required to comment on and assess each other's posts and similar contributions.

In accordance with the Col model, the online course presented in this article was designed to promote collaborative knowledge construction between the students. As further explained in Section 3, the students were required to participate in online discussions, which were ultimately peer graded by other students. Their first task consisted of writing their own reflections as specified in their weekly assignments; whereas the second one consisted of reading, evaluating and marking their peers' reflections. Further, the students were required to write a final essay on one of the course's ten weekly topics. Their work needed to establish links with study materials provided by the teacher, as well as the students' collective online discussion on the topic, hence emphasising meaning construction arising from the interaction between the community participants.

## **2.2 Foregrounding online education**

Distance or Internet-based education are two umbrella terms that encompass many different practices that allow for greater flexibility in terms of students' and teaching staff's geographical location and time availability. In recent years, societal conditions have led to a greater demand of Internet-based academic programmes following the delocalisation and globalisation of both business and persons across the globe. The importance of distance education and learning is central today, especially considering the industry's application of remote and freelance work at a global scale.

Distance learning practices are not new and, some decades ago, distance learners would enrol on courses for which they would receive materials through the post and then liaise with their teachers and tutors through telephone or email. The current funding problems at certain institutions for the purchase of software, which is a key drawback for the teaching of translation technology and Audiovisual translation (AVT), could be addressed by establishing a co-operation framework as described by James:

distance learning agreements can be set up between institutions; staff and student exchanges can be arranged; the home institution could provide the theoretical knowledge and the host institution could provide the opportunity for practical experience. The sharing of resources in these different ways not only brings economic benefits but enriches the student's understanding and appreciation of the other language and culture in question. Teachers can also benefit by an exchange of knowledge and expertise. (James 1998: 256)

An example of a successful online education scheme is that of massive online open courses (MOOCs). As the name suggests, MOOCs are aimed at large, potentially unlimited audiences and can be accessed flexibly via the Internet (Zawacki-Richter et al. 2018: 242–243). These courses have been offered by leading institutions since 2006, although their popularity rose from 2012 onwards, when major education-focused technology companies, such as Coursera (n.d.) and edX (n.d.), were founded.

There are many technologies and tools that can be implemented in remote learning, such as the ones mentioned in the introduction, but one of the best known is undoubtedly Moodle (n.d., acronym standing for Modular Object-Oriented Dynamic Learning Environment). The Moodle-based teaching approach has been utilised and exploited by most universities and vocational institutions worldwide and represents a powerful didactic resource. Examples of using Moodle in translator and interpreter training have been reported, for instance, by Fictumová (2005), Abdallah (2011), and Kajzer-Wietrzny and Tymczynska (2014). The advantages of Moodle platforms, as reported by the above studies, include the following: offering translator and interpreter trainers the tools to organise and distribute practice materials in different file formats, including links to online resources, and allowing the students to submit and resubmit their homework (Fictumová 2005; Kajzer-Wietrzny/Tymczynska 2014). The disadvantages of Moodle platforms have, yet, remained untouched in these studies, but it has been argued that these platforms do not encourage the students to interact with each other, as reported by Poore (2016: 6), who argues that even though Moodle platforms have messaging options, the overall design of the platforms does not promote dynamic interaction between the participants. For this reason, we decided to use Google+ communities, as will be explained further on in this article.

Be it as it may, the use of any Internet-based tools leads to the necessity of being able to share editable formats and its impact on the intended goals and outcomes should be fully understood by teachers and students as they may impinge on the forms of assessment. As foregrounded by Kelly:

education technology probably represents a step forward in the assessment of translation simply because it facilitates the submission or delivery of student translations by the same means as used professionally (email, ftp) and because word-processing software functions such as comment and change-tracing allow feedback from other students and teachers to be made easily also in electronic format. (Kelly 2005: 88)

From what has been exposed above, it can be deduced that distance education will continue to be a significant asset in translator education for years to come. This is why this online course seems to set a precedent in translator training in online environments.

### 2.3 Peer assessment in online learning communities

Receiving feedback may be even more important in online environments than in traditional classroom settings; in fact, the lack of feedback may encourage e-learners to *disconnect* from the learning environment more easily than if they were attending a traditional face-to-face course (Ko/Rossen 2010). Regarding feedback practices, online courses often depend on peer assessment, especially when the number of students is particularly high (Kulkarni et al. 2013). Peer assessment refers to an educational arrangement in which students judge a peer's performance quantitatively or qualitatively, thus stimulating reflection, discussion and collaboration in the learning process (Strijbos/Sluijsmans 2010: 265). Assessment practices may be summative – the one which measures the student's performance with a mark or a grade, usually towards the end of the study unit – or formative – the one that is designed to provide the students with constructive feedback to hone their knowledge and skills (Morss/Murray 2005: 124–125). Peer assessment used in a summative manner is typically amalgamated with marks given by the course instructor in order to guarantee a shared standard for the grades (Morss/Murray 2005: 124–125).

Implementing peer assessment practices does not always happen without difficulties. Should the students put their peers' competence to provide feedback into question, they would be more likely to perceive the feedback as less useful (Strijbos/Narciss/Dünnebieer 2010: 300). Further, and from our personal experience as university staff, undergraduate and postgraduate students often feel uncomfortable when asked to peer assess their peers' work. The reasons behind this discomfort can range from feeling untrained and unqualified for the task to feeling awkward about criticising classmates with whom they socialise (Morss/Murray 2005: 125). However, the reciprocal nature of peer assessment also benefits the student who is providing the feedback – in other words, performing the assessment *is* the learning. As Phillips (2016: 2) asserts, when conducting peer assessment, students are actively engaged in a series of reflective activities from interpreting assessment criteria to identifying strengths and weaknesses. During the process, students extend their own understanding of a subject matter (Roscoe/Chi 2008) and reflect on their own previous work conducted on the subject (Nicol/Thomson/Breslin 2014).

The online course presented in this article counted on two types of peer assessment, summative and formative. Each week, the students were required to comment on two other students' homework assignments, as well as to give them a grade with the help of a grading rubric, introduced in the following section. In the following sections, formative peer assessment – the general comments given for peers' assignments – is referred to as *peer feedback*, and the summative peer assessment – assigning grades for peers' assignments – is referred to as *peer grading*. The decision to implement peer assessment during the course was considered to be in line with the Col model that served as the pedagogical framework for the course: requiring peer assessment from the students is a means to ensure that the students actively engage in collaborative meaning construction in the online community. Peer feedback was considered to contribute towards further reflection



on the topic at hand, and the peer grading was intended to promote the students' extrinsic motivation to engage in the online community.

### **3 The design of the online course**

The online course discussed in this paper was hosted by the University of Tampere in late 2016. The theme of the course was multimodality in translation, comprising of a series of weekly topics that spanned the translation of different types of illustrated texts (e. g. adverts, children's picturebooks, comics and illustrated medical texts), audiovisual translation (e. g. television and opera), and accessible translation (e. g. audio description and subtitling for the deaf and hard-of-hearing). The course featured 13 lecturers from eight European universities, all of whom were experts in different types of multimodal translation. The course had a total of 28 students from the universities of Tampere and Helsinki, Finland, of whom 26 were native speakers of Finnish and two were exchange students from Germany and France. The working languages in the course thus were Finnish, English, Swedish, German and French. The course was, however, taught solely in English throughout.

The online learning platform used on the course was a Google+ community. This was an asynchronous text-based environment, meaning that the students would communicate in writing at different times, as opposed to chatting in real-time. According to the American Consumer Satisfaction Index, users rank Google+ higher than any other social media networks (ACSI 2017). Google+ communities are free to create and use, each of them having an owner (i. e. in this particular community, it was the course coordinator) and moderators (i. e. lecturers). The community employed during the course was a *closed* community, meaning that the students needed to send a joining request to be approved by the owner or moderators. All community members can post to a Google+ community and comment on posts made by others. All posts can be seen by all community members in their home stream at all times. Owners and moderators are also able to modify posts made by community members and ban community members from posting; however, in this community and for the purposes of this course, there was no need for such measures.

The overall structure of the course is depicted in Figure 1 below. The course lasted for 11 weeks of lectures and assignments, hereby referred to as *units* (left-hand side of the diagram). These units were subsequently followed by two weeks of independent work during which students wrote their final essays. Every week, one or two lecturers would offer a lecture – an online introduction to their field of expertise – and send an assignment to the students. Therefore, the course materials typically consisted of one or two short online lectures each week, along with some reading materials assigned by the lecturer(s). The average lecture, in the form of a pre-recorded lesson, was 30 minutes long. Lecturers

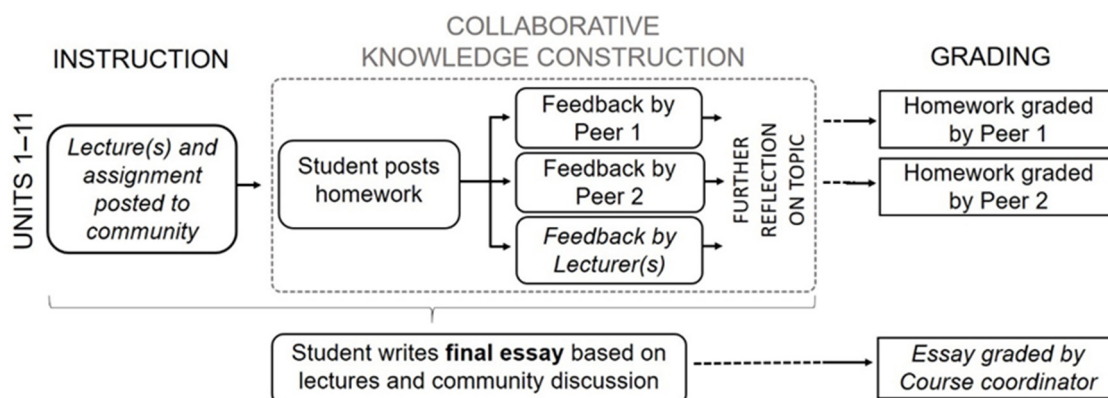


Fig. 1: Structure of the course

would design and record their lesson and then share it via cloud storage, which enabled the students to work according to their own schedules.

Each week, the students were required to complete the homework given by the lecturer(s). The assignments varied according to the topic and pedagogical approach of the lecturers, ranging from practical translation exercises (e. g. advertisements and children's picturebooks) and intersemiotic translation tasks (e. g. audiodescribing visual art) to analyses of multimodal products that have previously been localised (e. g., opera surtitles). In keeping with the learning philosophy of the course, the assignments were shared and discussed within the online community, thus emphasising the interchange of views, ideas and experiences among all the participants. Each week, the students were required to participate in the community in two ways: posting their own homework as well as assessing their peers' homework. Two different procedures were considered for the peer assessment procedure: either allowing the students themselves decide which contributions they wanted to assess, based on which ones they found interesting, or pre-assigning who would assess whom. The latter option was chosen to ensure that each student would be assessed by two classmates. The students were therefore divided into groups of three, in which each student assessed – and was assessed by – the two other group members.

The peer assessment consisted of two parts: commenting on the peer's homework assignment in the community, as well as giving a grade based on the peer's contribution. The comments typically included contributing to a discussion initiated by the peer, contributing to cooperative argument building, questioning the peer's ideas, asking for clarifications, and suggesting alternative ways of approaching the study material of the week. The lecturer(s) also participated in this discussion by writing comments on the students' posts every week. After reading the comments given by the peers and the lecturer(s), the students usually continued the conversation by further reflecting on what had been commented, thus stimulating knowledge constructions beyond what was expected from them.



After reading their peers' contributions for the week and commenting on them, the students were asked to give them a grade, from 0–5, which is the usual evaluation scale in Finnish universities. The grading was done with the help of a peer grading rubric, presented in Table 1 below.

GRADE OUT OF 5 CRITERIA	0	1	2–3	4–5
RELEVANCE (ASSIGNMENT BRIEF)	Student has not posted their answer.	Student has contributed to the task, but their work does not answer the given assignment appropriately.	Student has contributed to the task, addressing the assignment fairly or well.	Student has contributed to the task, going beyond simply answering the given assignment; student attempts to stimulate further discussion.
APPLICATION OF IDEAS FROM LECTURE AND READING MATERIAL	Student has not posted their answer.	Student offers some ideas, but gives no evidence of trying to interpret or analyse them.	Student offers their own interpretations and analysis of the given task.	Student offers an insightful analysis and evaluation of their ideas; student even includes sources outside the ones assigned by the lecturer.

Table 1: Peer grading rubric

The rubric is divided into four grade categories: 0 (to be used only when/if the study partner has not posted their homework assignment on time), 1, 2–3 and 4–5. The main reason behind the joined categories of 2–3 and 4–5 is that the students would decide whether a contribution was on the higher or the lower end of a particular grade category. As discussed in our analysis section, some of the students found this particularly challenging. Every week, each student received grades from two other students. The grades were submitted in an e-form, which also allowed the students to comment on why they had given a certain grade. The peer grading was conducted anonymously: the individual grades and comments were not communicated to the student being evaluated, so that the students would be less likely to give each other higher grades simply for the sake of being polite. In the last part of the course, the students were allowed to choose a specific final essay topic among the topics that were dealt with during the course. The overall course grade was determined by calculating the average of the peer feedback grades and the grade awarded for the final essay.

As mentioned above, the students were on their postgraduate level of training, having completed both theoretical and practical translation courses during their undergraduate studies. In other words, the students were supposed to have already gained some translation experience. Even though the course featured various translation assignments, it was not designed as a practical translation course in the strictest sense. The learning outcomes of the course were defined as follows: in the first place, to encourage students to familiarise themselves with different types of multimodal source texts and the specific translation challenges that the latter involve; and, in the second place, to improve the students' academic discussion and intercultural communication skills, all by working solely within an online environment. If one were to organise a translation course online for a group of students without prior translation experience, the course would have to be designed differently, most likely with less emphasis on peer assessment.

#### **4 Case study: Teaching audiovisual translation online**

In order to posit and exemplify the points made in previous sections, we would like to look at one unit in particular insofar as this allows us to examine more closely how an online lesson is designed and subsequently taught in the online community. Unit 6 was an introduction to AVT, which, as several other units, was warmly welcomed and enjoyed by the students as per the evaluation forms. The main aim of this unit was to provide supposedly uninitiated students with a brief introduction to the study of audiovisual texts as well as the AVT industry. The intended learning outcomes were twofold: firstly, to raise awareness about the importance of audiovisual text exegesis with the aid of Gambier's (2013: 48) model of meaning codes in audiovisual texts, and, secondly, to give the students the tools to identify translation challenges in film excerpts.

According to Díaz-Cintas, "AVT is an academic and professional discipline that involves the localisation of media content by means of different linguistic transfer practices" (Díaz-Cintas forthcoming). It can, thus, be defined as the professional activity which consists of translating audiovisual texts such as films, documentaries, TV series or corporate videos; however, it is also the academic discipline that analyses how these translations are done. In both cases, localising media content requires sufficient awareness of the coexistence of the acoustic and visual communication channels, together with verbal and nonverbal information, inasmuch as these programmes are perceived aurally and visually at the same time. The complex semiotic texture of audiovisual content has been of interest in academia since the end of the 20th century, and the profession has greatly multiplied and diversified ever since then. Also known as screen translation, film translation and multimedia translation, among other nomenclatures (Gambier 2006: 264), the use of AVT responds to the premise that the texts involved in the translation process are considered audiovisual texts – also multimedial, polysemiotic or multimodal texts (Snell-Hornby 2009). Further, audiovisual texts combine two complementary channels and meaning codes whose signs interact and build a semantic scheme of a complex nature (Zabalbeascoa-Terrán 2001; Martínez-Sierra 2008). AVT may well

be considered a translation practice per se, but depending on the medial directionality and function of the linguistic transfer, subsequent sub-modes can be identified. These differ on the nature of their linguistic output and the translational techniques they imply (Gambier 2003), as well as on how they are ultimately consumed by the target audience. Their inner differences notwithstanding, the common axis of all the sub-modes is the multi-semiotic nature of the source and target texts involved in the AVT process (Orrego-Carmona 2013). This is one of its main characteristics: the simultaneous appearance of aural and visual input, as well as the existence of so-called constraining elements that justify the utilisation of AVT-specific tools that allow translators to bridge the technical gap.

#### **4.1 Overall description and aims**

Given its complex theoretical foundations, AVT studies as a whole cannot possibly be fit in a single one-hour lecture. An introductory lesson should be both broad and concise, without ending up being too reductive either. The teaching of an academic and professional discipline that involves the localisation of media content by means of various linguistic transfer practices is often arduous. The AVT instructor should, first and foremost, put the emphasis on the fact that localising media content requires sufficient awareness of the coexistence of the acoustic and visual communication channels, together with verbal and nonverbal information, inasmuch as TV programmes, theatre plays, films, etc. are always perceived aurally and visually at the same time. There is, thereafter, a consensus on AVT encompassing the different translation practices implemented in the audiovisual media whereby a message is transferred from one language to another one in a format that also allows for the semiotic interaction between sound and image (Díaz-Cintas 2007: 13).

Audiovisual consumption has greatly developed in recent years due to the rapid expansion of new technology (Díaz-Cintas/Anderman 2009). As advanced above, these texts are predetermined insofar as they combine two complementary channels and meaning codes whose signs interact and build a semantic scheme of a complex nature. This was one of the key points of the online lecture: making students reach their own conclusions on the importance of visual and aural components of audiovisual texts in regard to meaning creation. A set of examples were included in the presentation, such as excerpts from films and TV series that have been subtitled, dubbed, captioned or described. Also, part of the presentation were theoretical analyses as explained below.

The lecture was given in the form of a narrated PowerPoint presentation that was uploaded to the Google+ Community, where students also had access to reading materials and the tasks they needed to complete by the end of the week. The main points raised during the lecture were the following: the coinage of AVT as a discipline, the characteristics of AVT, the history of AVT, the polysemiotics of audiovisual texts, the four main AVT modes (i. e. revoicing, subtitling, accessibility and game localisation), the language of film, the importance of synchronisms, the basics of film narration, the reading and writing of scripts and dialogue lists, and the main challenges of translating for the

screen (e. g. orality, cultural adaptations, intertextuality and humour, among others). A list of bibliographical references and an optional reading were included in the last two slides of the presentation for the students' reference.

#### **4.2 Assessment of student interaction**

The practical exercise for this unit comprised of an excerpt from BBC's sitcom *Fawlty Towers* (1975–79) titled "A Room with a View" as well as four activities. The latter aimed at highlighting the importance of image and discourse analysis, as well as the identification of potential translation challenges in the exegesis phase prior to translation. Since the online course did not have a predetermined language directionality, the activities integrated all language combinations and questions were open-ended. The first exercise consisted of identifying examples of verbal and non-verbal codes as based on Gambier's (2013) scheme of audiovisual codes. Secondly, the students were prompted to explain whether any of those examples could represent a major translation challenge or not, depending on their language combination. Finally, the last two questions required the students to identify examples of linguistic variation and cultural references in the clip, as well as to offer their insights about how these can be translated for dubbing or subtitling purposes.

According to the evaluation forms, many students claimed that the aforementioned exercises were exhaustive and demanding, but also seemed to acknowledge the importance of text and image. More importantly, all students posted highly elaborated answers on the website and commented on each other's work. The lecturer moderated online discussions in the form of individual answers, which aimed at expanding the student's observations and shedding light on those aspects that could be potentially ambiguous.

As an example of the students' motivation, the average response length was 1,000 words. These interventions were, thereafter, followed by posts that corresponded to the students' peer feedback task, which were of around 500 words each. Some students even commented on more than one thread, stimulating discussion and exceeding all expectations. There have been remarkable interventions, which are exemplary of the students' overall engagement. As an example, some students excelled at exploiting this peer feedback activity, engaging in 1:1 online discussions comprising of up to six posts. This has been particularly fruitful for both the students and tutors, allowing for the identification of the main theoretical bottlenecks and controversial discussion points. For instance, the students' insights were particularly interesting in regard to the treatment of client Mrs Richards's received pronunciation as opposed to Spanish waiter Manuel's thick accent. Further, the students' discussion on the plausible adaptations of cultural references – such as the gardens of Babylon, Torquay and Sydney Opera House – led to magnificent examples of how controverted some translation strategies can be. Also compelling were the students' arguments in favour or against domesticating and foreignising practices in AVT concerning examples of linguistic variation and cultural references.

As a more detailed example of the students' interaction with their peers during the learning assignment, we now examine the discussion that took place between the members of a particular three-person group during this particular assignment. We refer to the participants as Students A, B and C. The students' answers to the assignment ranged from 1,000 to 1,400 words, and their discussion on each other's answers was, in general terms, rather active and elaborate. Overall, the comments included compliments on their peer's ideas as well as spontaneous annotations about aspects of their peers' answers – for instance, some students admitted that they would approach their own assignments differently after reading their peer's work.

The peer feedback grading and comments provided in the e-form, however, did not entirely correspond with the group's online discussion. In fact, Student A, who had commended Student B's answers very positively in the online community, assigned Student B a grade of 5 for *relevance* and a grade of 3 for *application of ideas* (see Table 1), explaining that “the poor grade” of 3 was due to the fact that Student B had “misinterpreted the study material”. Student B, in turn, was very positive in the comments they wrote on the peer grading e-form, arguing that both Student A's and C's analyses were “very good” and reflected that the study materials had been appropriately apprehended. Student B assigned a grade of 3 for both of her study partners and in both assessment categories. Finally, Student C assigned a grade of 5 to Student A, and a grade of 4 to Student B in both categories, but failed to include any explanations.

Their comments reflected the difficulties that assessing their peers' performance posed. In order to be fair, grading should be based on coherent principles. As can be seen in the above example, for Student A, the grade of 3 is “poor”; whereas for Student B, it is “very good”. This points to the inner ambiguity of the peer grading rubric as well as the difficulty of establishing what a good grade should be like. An additional problem that may be inferred from this example is related to how problems about the peer's performance are reported back to the lecturer(s) and coordinator. In the peer grading e-form, Student A reported that Student B had misunderstood the study material; yet, in the online community, the student's comments about their peer's performance had been entirely positive. This reflects that even when students consider that their peer's performance could be improved, they may, nevertheless, feel uncomfortable to bring this to the peer's attention. Unfortunately, from a pedagogical point of view, this is infelicitously counterproductive when one considers that the overall aim of feedback is a means to inform students about their strengths and weaknesses. Further, Student C's grading performance, namely assigning relatively high grades without commenting on them at all, has been reproduced by many other students. This attitude towards peer grading may be due to a lack of effort or involvement in the learning process that will need to be addressed in future editions of this course.

The peer assessment procedure was also amply discussed by the students in the final course evaluation forms. In light of the students' evaluation form comments, the peer assessment procedure seemed to include factors that both promoted and hampered the interaction of the students from the perspective of promoting communal spirit

in the online community. Most students reported that they enjoyed reading and commenting on each other's assignments. Many pointed out that working in the virtual groups of three people throughout the course provided them with a sense of companionship, which would have remained unattainable otherwise. Yet, the grading task was considered infelicitously unappealing. As one of the students wrote in their course evaluation, it was "very challenging to know what the correct grade should have been." Further, as another student wrote, allocating a low grade and negative feedback to someone's work could even provoke embarrassment, because students' ability to provide appropriate feedback may easily be put into question. All in all, these observations suggest that the peer assessment procedure was a fundamentally *social* experience for the students as opposed to being simply another assignment conducted individually: it allowed them to connect with others in the online community.

## 5 Conclusions

Online learning environments differ from traditional face-to-face settings in various ways. Firstly, how the teaching and learning of a specific discipline is achieved via online platforms is somewhat determined by social aspects. Online environments, seemingly cold and unwelcoming, may maximise distances between learners and teachers, thus creating obstacles and impeaching the success of the learning experience. Yet online education is expanding as rapidly as ever before and e-learning instructors are finding ways to bridge the gap between social interaction and knowledge building.

In this article, we have reported on an online course for translation students and discussed how the students interacted with each other in the social media platform on which the course was organised. An essential component of the social interaction between the students was conducting peer assessment. The assessment consisted of two parts: commenting and grading. Whereas the former was positively evaluated by the students, the latter was perceived as more negative and frustrating. Based on the final course evaluation forms, the students seemed to enjoy reading and commenting each other's reflections in the online community. In our experience, dividing the students into groups in advance, so that they interacted with each other throughout the course, was considered to promote the sense of social presence in the online environment. Further, the contents of the peer feedback often reflected that the process of reading others' assignments and giving feedback made the students reconsider their own views about the topic at hand. In other words, the students appeared to learn new aspects about the topic and our starting point was proved to be true in this case study.

Peer grading, in turn, caused confusion and even provoked embarrassment in some students. It could thus be argued that peer grading online courses may make the students feel uncomfortable and could subsequently be removed from e-learning experiences. Yet, there are solid arguments that support peer grading practices: as sustained by deNoyelles, Mannheimer Zydney and Chen (2014: 156), if online discussions are not graded, students might lack the motivation necessary to carry out their tasks and



participate online more actively. Further, if the number of participants in an online course is particularly high, peer grading may be the only feasible option for assessment purposes (Kulkarni et al. 2013).

Instead of dismissing peer grading as an option, we suggest that more emphasis should be put on designing peer grading practices that are more objective and unambiguous. As discussed above, the peer grading rubric used on this particular course had relatively broad descriptions for each grade. The rubric included joined descriptions for grades 2–3 and 4–5 and the students were instructed to decide whether they thought the contribution was on the higher or the lower end of a particular grade category. We, thereafter, recommend the use of clearer rubrics that avoid confusion. Previous research has also suggested that students should be trained to give peer feedback prior to initiating a course (Berg 1999), which could be ultimately applied in designing similar translator training courses in the future.

Online education and e-learning environments hold great potential for translator training, both in national and international educational contexts. When online courses are organised at an international level, these platforms also permit students to enrich their understanding and appreciation of other cultures and languages. Certain translator training practices, such as the teaching of translation technologies and AVT, are constrained by economic conditions (e. g. licences for paid software). In our view, the greatest advantages of social media applications as online instruction platforms lie in their interactivity – these platforms promote active engagement and stimulate self-reflection and discussion among students.

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