Pragmatic Features in the Language of Cross-Cultural Virtual Teams: A Roundtable Discussion of Student-to-Student Discourse in International Collaborative Projects

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Student-to-Student Discourse in International Collaborative Projects

Project participants:

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Hereinafter just referred to as Paris, US, Århus, Trieste.
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Project aims:

Paris: Translation is transmitting a message
US : Texts travel far and wide
Århus: Peer-editing with non-translators
Trieste: Internationalization and localization in multilingual documentation management
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Process:

1) Students getting to know each other
2) Students commenting on each other’s work amongst themselves
   … to each other (self-censoring)
   … to their teacher
3) They follow up (or not) on each other’s comments
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Re 1) Students getting to know each other

Paris: The more often the students exchange, the better the exchange is
US: Lack of awareness of foreigners
Århus: Following the advice to exchange basic data
Trieste: People get down to work soon

And their subsequent communication:

Paris: Maximum time for exchange improves learning
US: Subsequent communication impactful, but lack further communication is disappointing
Århus: Mostly one-to-one exchanges via email, broad variety of experiences
Trieste: Professional and private exchanges in different fora

In future:

Explain how the topic of the text is related to your lives?
Keeping apart the professional and the personal?
Re 2) Students commenting on each other’s work
… to each other (self-censoring)
… to their teacher

Paris: Work done in different media,
instructors see comments, partners don’t
US: Work done at home – peer review
Århus: Without supervision – presentations
Trieste: Without supervision - logbooks

Note:
A weak point we realize, because we only hear comments when something does not work.
3) They follow up (or not) on each other’s comments

Paris: Negative comments kept at one end of the virtual team. Not expressed to virtual team members

US: First impressions are important—lack of dialogue hinders learning

Århus: Comments serve different purposes: questions, permission, clarification, explanation, feedback

Trieste: Hardly any criticism expressed towards cooperating partners, but suggestions taken up with gratitude
Examples of communication:

_Criticism_

Americans tentative in their criticism, but get to the point fast

Danes very comprehensive, from tiny-mini things to criticizing all

The French are generally not particularly apologetic
Examples of communication

*How to give and accept criticism*

**US:** Students do not give criticism to partners

**Trieste:** Tactfulness

**Århus:** Generally great tactfulness, but few exceptions

**Paris:** Criticism given at workstations, but not rendered to the partners
Examples of communication

Praise

Århus: Praise is common. Both in introductions, throughout the text and at the end.

Paris: French students amazed at the praise given by the US students and ashamed that they did not do it themselves to the same extent.

Trieste: Italians good at praising other people’s work.

US: US students good at giving praise.
Examples of communication

Admit ignorance of a particular (culture-specific) item

Paris: Surprised by the focus on certain issues in the US

Trieste: No problem to admit ignorance of culture-specific items

Århus: Distinction between ‘being aware’ and ‘not being aware’

US: The finality of the text is sometimes put into stark relief when cultural differences are strong
Examples of communication

_**Timing issues**_

**Paris.**  Lack of time leads to communication breakdown

**Århus:**  Time is of the essence. Prevalent in communication

**Trieste:**  More time will be given to do the translations because of the need for communication

**US:**  Pressed to start before having sufficient training because of the turnaround time
Examples of communication

*Lack of insight into the translation situation*

Paris: Too often too literal translations

US: Lack of language and cultural awareness

Århus: Multiple causes of lack of insight

Trieste: Literal translations, lack of attention to text type
Examples of communication

*Power issues*

**Trieste:** Students hesitant to think that native speakers make mistakes in texts

**Århus:** Students sometimes ask the obvious question when they can provide the answer themselves as a tactic to point out errors

**US:** Author/ity has power by default through the choice of the topic

**Paris:** Preparing the topic in advance in order to become authoritative
Examples of communication

*Empathy*

Topic-related rather than stereotyped communication.

Acknowledgement of the challenge of the work and the good quality of many renderings of the texts
Examples of communication

*Types of topics that are commented on: terminology, syntax, lexicon, register,...*

Slides with examples
Examples of communication

1. Criticism
2. How to give and accept criticism
3. Praise
4. Admit ignorance of a particular (culture-specific) item
5. Timing issues
6. Assumptions among the translation students and the editors reflect lack of insight into the translation situation
7. Power issue
8. Empathize with the other students
9. Types of topics that are commented on: terminology, syntax, lexicon, register,…
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Types of follow-up:

- Complete follow-up
- Partial follow-up
- No follow-up

Grassroots nature of the projects leads to different approaches to the process, from university to university, instructor to instructor and especially student to student.
Long-term effect

From all participants:

Examples from the exchange exercise are sometimes given by students one or even two years later in other courses as particular cases of certain principles.
Thank you!