Global, international, and intercultural competencies in a Trans-Atlantic and Pacific Project (TAPP) partnership

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Abstract

Virtual exchanges through the Trans-Atlantic and Pacific Project (TAPP) allow instructors to design collaborations that engage students in global, international, and intercultural (GII) competencies, which are increasingly emphasised through the ongoing process of internationalisation of higher education. This article constitutes a practice report that describes two TAPP virtual exchanges designed by an instructor in Spain and one in the United States between master's level translation students at a research university in Spain and 1) undergraduate students enrolled in a specialised technical writing course at a research university in the U.S. and 2) students in a graduate editing course at a regional university in the U.S. A content analysis of pre- and post-learning reports authored by the translation students demonstrates that students engaged in GII competencies such as openness, adaptability, and intercultural communication, which further reinforced the internationalisation of the curriculum.

Keywords: virtual exchange, internationalisation, translation, technical communication, situated learning

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1. Introduction

According to Muñoz-Martín (2005), translation operates as a social construct shaped by implicit agreements and preserved through tradition, all while remaining susceptible to societal changes. An effective way for students to explore the social aspects of translation is through situated learning, defined by González-Davies and Enríquez-Raido (2016) as “a context-dependent approach to translator and interpreter training under which learners are exposed to real-life and/or highly simulated work environments and tasks, both inside and outside the classroom” (p. 1). Situated learning works to immerse students in the work of translators and interpreters as much as feasibly possible.

What is more, situated learning through virtual exchange (VE), as defined by O’Dowd (2018), can work to promote the internationalisation of curricula when projects move beyond national borders. This paper contributes to conversations about the internationalisation of post-secondary education through VE by describing two collaborations facilitated by the Trans-Atlantic and Pacific Project (TAPP), an international network of writing, translation, usability, and other instructors who work to connect students in their home countries to students throughout the world. The collaborations involved two VE projects through the Trans-Atlantic and Pacific Project (TAPP) network. In 2019, a project was designed for students in the MA course “Specialised Translation: Healthcare Domain" and a bachelor’s level course in specialised technical communication, “Writing in the Health Professions.” In 2021, a project was designed for graduate students in intercultural communication, interpreting and translation services in Spain and graduate students in an editing course, which is part of a technical communication Master of Science (MS) program in the United States.

Specifically, this paper provides an analysis of the pre- and post-learning reports authored by students in Spain, and it focuses on learning outcomes related to internationalisation. To understand the process of internationalisation in students’ learning experiences, global, international, and intercultural competencies are explored. These competencies consist of an evolving set of skills and knowledge intended to help students succeed in an increasingly globalised world. Ultimately, this practice report demonstrates one approach to internationalising curricula in translation studies through VE.

2. Objectives

The main objective for both VEs was to cultivate teamwork and cross-cultural communication competencies for students in Spain and the United States. These competencies not only reflect the
“real-life” environment promoted in situational learning, but they are also included in GII frameworks. The VEs in this report highlight one possible approach to internationalising translation and technical writing curricula for students. While there are competing definitions of internationalisation in higher education, this paper uses a foundational one proposed by Knight (2004) in which internationalisation is “the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of post-secondary education” (p. 11). In other words, internationalisation can occur in many areas of post-secondary life, from an institution’s mission down to curriculum choices in a single classroom. This practice report describes the efforts of two individual professors working to internationalise the curricula of their courses.

To help understand the role that an international focus plays in student learning, students’ GII competencies were considered. According to Sanderson (2011), GII competencies stem from a desire to prepare students to work and communicate effectively with others in global business contexts alongside inculcating values of openness, understanding, adaptability and respect, among others. Because there are multiple models of GII, the authors selected the most relevant ones to guide their analysis, the Pyramid Model of Intercultural Competence and the Process Model of Intercultural Competence, both proposed by Deardorff (2006). These models emphasise cognitive, behavioural, and affective skills such as collaborating and teamwork, communicating across cultures and adjusting and seeking to understand new cultures and environments (Esterhuizen & Kirkpatrick, 2015; Soria & Troisi, 2014). As Esterhuizen and Kirkpatrick (2015) suggest, among the most important GII competencies are “self-awareness; cognitive, emotional and cultural intelligence; and critical, cultural, creative and reflective thinking” (p. 213). In conclusion, GII competencies can help educators understand how an internationally infused pedagogy impacts student learning.

3. Context

The VEs took place under the auspices of the Trans-Atlantic and Pacific Project (TAPP). The TAPP is an international network of writing, translation, usability, and other instructors who work to connect students in their home countries to students throughout the world. Right now, TAPP involves 49 universities in 21 countries across five continents (Trans-Atlantic and Pacific Project, n.d.). The earliest focus of TAPP primarily consisted of bilateral technical writing and translation projects between students in the United States and Europe, respectively (Vandepitte et al., 2016). However, with the growth of the network, instructors and students have designed new learning experiences that include courses on editing, stylistics, or usability, implying the design of more sophisticated TAPP projects.
4. Project design

Both VEs were rooted in the situated learning approach. Situated learning attempts to create learning environments that are as close to real-life work environments and tasks as possible. In this approach, students participate in a community of practice as they advance from being learners to experts (Lave & Wenger, 1991). The instructor supports students by providing relevant theories and examples of best practices, and through situated learning, students learn to “think and act like professionals” (González-Davies & Enríquez-Raído, 2016, p.1). Next, the project designs for the first two VEs are described. First, Collaboration 1 (C1), which took place in 2019, and second, Collaboration 2 (C2), which occurred in 2021, are presented.

4.1. Collaboration 1 (C1)

In C1, the MA-level translation students at a university in Spain worked with students in a specialised technical communication course on writing in the health professions at a land-grant research university in the United States. Participation in the VE was compulsory and graded for students in Spain, accounting for 15 percent of the final course grade.

The project design followed this general structure:

1. The students in the U.S. created healthcare brochures in English and prepared translation briefs for their partners.
2. Concurrent with step one, the students at both universities completed pre-learning (PreL) reports and sent them to their respective professors. See Appendix A for the report format.
3. The students in the U.S. sent their healthcare brochures, translation briefs, and PreL reports to the students in Spain, while the students in Spain sent their PreL reports to their partners in the U.S.
4. The students in Spain translated the healthcare brochures into Spanish. During this step, the students in Spain consulted with their U.S. partners about the source texts.
5. The students in Spain returned the translated brochures to the U.S. students.
6. The U.S. students edited the translated brochures, if necessary, and sent the finalised brochures to their partners in Spain.
7. Students in both countries submitted post-learning (PostL) reports to their professors.

See Appendix B for a schedule of the collaboration.
Table 1 below summarises demographics for C1 participants collected from the PreL reports. Because this paper focuses on the work of translation students, we only include demographics for students in Spain.

**Table 1. Demographics for C1 participants in Spain**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of students</th>
<th>Languages spoken</th>
<th>Age range</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>6 (Arabic, Ateso, English, Luganda, Russian and Spanish)</td>
<td>21–37; almost all were under 24.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The majority of C1 students in Spain reported that they lacked translation experience or had only done translation volunteer work. Additionally, some students noted that they had worked as Spanish- or English-language teachers for children, adolescents, and migrant populations for a short period (ranging from one to six years).

After completing the project, the translation students in Spain submitted their translated texts and PostL reports to their instructor. The PostL reports included reflections on their learning experiences. Students were tasked with reviewing their PreL reports and using them as a source for composing a 1000-word PostL document. Following Nord’s (1991) model, the document included a description of the translation assignment and highlighted the translation process in the pre-production, production, and post-production stages.

Additionally, students were required to comment on challenging aspects of the project, skills acquired, and insights gained related to collaboration, cultural differences, language use, email communication, and interactions with previously unknown students in a different country. The PostL reports helped students reflect and consolidate GII competencies, which made them a key component of the learning activity. The PostL reports were used as a data source in this practice report.

### 4.2. Collaboration 2 (C2)

The second TAPP collaboration, C2, took place between students studying English-Spanish translation at the same Spanish university as C1 and graduate students enrolled in an editing course at a regional university in the United States. Notably, this exchange took place during the COVID-19 pandemic in the 2020-21 academic year.

Table 2 summarises the demographics of C2 participants. Once again, only demographics for students in Spain are included.
Table 2. Demographics for C2 participants in Spain

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of students</th>
<th>Languages spoken</th>
<th>Age range</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>14 (English, Spanish, French, German, Russian, Portuguese, Italian, Norwegian, Chinese, Korean, Punjabi, Hindi, Galician and Basque)</td>
<td>20–29; one participant was 43</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In addition to the demographics in Table 2, participants reported that they had little work experience; those with work experience had been language assistants, translators, interpreters, or language teachers.

C2 took place during March and April 2021. It was offered as an extra non-compulsory activity. Unlike C1, C2 students in Spain were paired with master’s level students enrolled in an editing class. See Appendix C for a schedule of the collaboration.

To participate, students in Spain needed to enrol in advance so that the matching with U.S. students could be done in a timely manner. It was estimated that students would spend 25 hours working on the project, out of which three would be devoted to participation in online synchronous group meetings with their instructor (see Appendix D). During these sessions, students would be given instructions and would be able to discuss their progress, doubts, and contingencies.

At the beginning of C2, students in Spain and the United States were matched and got in touch to exchange PreL reports, which took the same shape as the ones used in the first collaboration described above (see Appendix A). Students in Spain received from their instructor a source text in Spanish that had to be translated into English. The texts for each student were different and were taken from the webpage of the Spanish Ministry of Healthcare. They were all brochures with recommendations regarding COVID-19.

Once translated, students in Spain sent their texts to the U.S. students, and the latter revised and edited them. Students in both countries had to discuss and agree on the changes implemented in the texts, and the U.S. students were responsible for submitting the final version of the texts to both instructors. Finally, the translation students in Spain were required to submit PostL reports in which they reflected on their learning experiences (see Appendix E).

This distance and online configuration were decided well in advance, before knowing that the Spanish government would reimpose a state of emergency. Consequently, the pandemic response did not affect the planned development of the activity. However, the situation of confinement provided extra
motivation for the students in Spain, who stated in their reports to have had the need to find activities to distract themselves during long hours at home and who found in this project an opportunity to interact with other students.

5. Evaluation and discussion of outcomes

To evaluate the success of the projects, the authors analysed evidence of students’ achievement in GII competencies. As noted above, GII competencies are used to assess the international components of the collaborations. In line with Soria and Troisi (2014) and Esterhuizen and Kirkpatrick (2015), these competencies include cooperation with their correspondents, teamwork, managing cross-cultural differences, and communication via email. What is more, GII competencies include values of openness, understanding, adaptability and respect (Soria & Troisi, 2014). In addition, this report sheds light on the challenges students experienced as well as their engagement in the projects.

In their C1 and C2 PreL reports, translation students in Spain reported a strong willingness to acquire knowledge and abilities related to internationalisation, as well as being able to work with people from a different country or with a different culture:

• “I expect to learn to cooperate with someone who lives in another country effectively.”
• “I would like to get to know about my partner’s culture.”

Expanding cooperation and communication skills was a key outcome of the TAPP collaboration. Students mentioned in their PreL reports that they expected to learn about these two aspects: “Being able to communicate with strangers and being able to communicate with professionals in other subject areas.”

In the C1 and C2 PostL reports, students expressed their feeling of having acquired professional skills in an international context:

... [the TAPP collaboration] allowed me to acquire a working methodology adapted to the professional reality of this institution to develop translation strategies according to the assignment, taking into account its skopos and always trying to obtain the best possible result.
In the PostL reports, cross-cultural differences were also addressed, with a particular focus on the application of what Venuti (1994) called “foreignizing” and “domesticating” translation strategies; one student described their strategy as “how to find the balance between the cultural marks included in the text.” Student communication through email and video conferences helped students better understand these concepts along with terms specific to translation, such as target audience. As one student commented, “Although we both lived in completely different time zones, we managed to communicate effectively and fluently and be helpful for each other.”

However, the reports also brought several challenges to light. Some students misunderstood the assignment and their roles in the project. For example, in examining the PostL reports of the students in Spain, it became clear that the translation students had different conceptions about the final recipient of the texts and the translator’s role in contrast to their counterparts in the U.S.

As reported by some translation students, the U.S. students in the health professions writing course did not expect them to ask for clarifications regarding the source text, as they were not aware of the complexities of languages and cultural systems. Knowing the cognitive processes behind a translation task helps build cooperation and mutual understanding between future professionals:

I believe [the writing in the health professions] students will become more aware of the interpreter's/translator's role and job in their field as well as translation students will have a first contact with future healthcare professionals and will learn about the dynamics of this relationship.

Additionally, unexpected challenges arose concerning image use and text layout. The translation students in Spain reported that it took them more time than they had anticipated to find and learn to use the most appropriate software tools to edit the brochures. These difficulties posed a challenge not only during the preparation of target texts for delivery but also when handling source texts – most of which arrived in file formats difficult to edit. While the U.S. students received guidance from their translation partners in Spain on the importance of providing easily editable documents for translation, the students in Spain needed to learn new skills to deal with the source texts’ formats. As one student notes:

At the beginning the client sent me a PDF file, so after telling her, she sent me the brochure in JPG format. However, this format did not permit to edit the file, so I had to
lay it out anyway. I had to use an app to lay the brochure out and it was not easy to learn how to manage it.

The students emphasised that Spanish words tend to be longer than their English counterparts, making it challenging to adjust the target text to fit the original layout. In addition to a technical difficulty that helped build interprofessional understanding and cooperation, this also contributed to raising awareness about language differences, which are not as obvious in decontextualised settings, fostering the acquisition of other GII competencies, such as cultural difference awareness.

The PostL reports also demonstrated the impact of varying levels of commitment to the project, evidenced by infrequent communication, inadequate source texts, and translations submitted with inattentiveness and delays. On the other hand, some students acknowledged having learned from their mistakes, particularly in the 2020-21 activity, when students in Spain submitted their texts for improvement by editing students in the United States. As one translation student noted, “The cover letter explaining the corrections and the references she used to check grammar and punctuation was very useful because it helped me to understand my mistakes and make a more accurate translation.”

During C1, students from Spain encountered difficulties with using a Latin American variant of Spanish, while in C2, students had to deal with American English when the most common variety taught in Spain as a second language is British English. As one C2 student explained, “I’m used to work with British English, but I’m keen on learning the American one.”

Perhaps unsurprisingly, students reported challenges related to working in different time zones, which hindered videoconference meetings and led to the perception of delayed responses to emails. These difficulties were, in fact, anticipated in some students in their PreL reports:

- “Time zones in case real time communication will be required.”
- “…time zone, because when the client answered my emails, it was very late at night here in Spain, so I read her emails the next day.”

The TAPP collaborations allowed students in Spain to “put [ourselves] in the shoes of a professional translator.” The authors consider C1 and C2 to be pedagogical interventions that centre international and intercultural learning in courses and believe such interventions can play an important role in the internationalisation of university courses. As Dunne (2011) notes, researchers have proposed
multiple rationales for promoting internationalisation, including creating learning opportunities for all students and promoting attitudes and behaviours which increase cooperation. Internationalisation can lead to local socioeconomic and social development (Jibeen & Khan, 2015), and it is an essential instrument to promote the preparation of university students to face the global challenges of modern societies, which require efforts, capabilities and resources that exceed what is possible at the national level (Dunne, 2011; Islam & Stamp, 2020). COVID-19 has reduced the mobility of both students and scholars, and VE has emerged as an alternative to promote internationalisation in higher education institutions (Lanham & Voskuil, 2022). TAPP partnerships constitute a great opportunity for students to develop their linguistic, intercultural, and academic skills.

In their C1 and C2 pre-learning (PreL) reports, translation students expressed curiosity about other cultures, an awareness of the need for collaboration and teamwork, and a desire to learn a new variety of English, which demonstrated openness to new cultures and languages. In their post-learning (PostL) reports, the students who remarked on cultural differences and the challenges of working across time zones with technologies such as email echo GII competencies such as learning to be adaptable and to accommodate global work practices.

In addition, the translation students’ reports show their willingness to learn from their counterparts in the United States and to negotiate cultural differences. Indeed, the authors agree with Esterhuizen and Kirkpatrick (2015) that two of the most important GII competencies are emotional and cultural intelligence. To succeed in TAPP collaborations, students must be open to learning and responsive to cultural differences. As happened in the collaborations described in this contribution, for the learning process to be complete, students must also receive continuous support from their instructors either during compulsory group sessions or through on-demand individual consultations in email, videoconferences, or office visit format.

6. Conclusion and implications

An increasing emphasis on internationalisation at institutions of higher education has led to the promotion of GII at the institutional and curricular levels. As Sanderson (2011) explains, internationalisation is for all students – not just students who are studying outside of their home countries. The TAPP collaborations described in this report provided students with the opportunity to experience an internationalised curriculum by developing GII competencies through situated learning. These collaborations also provided students with an authentic environment so that they could begin moving from learner to expert in a community of practice. As has been illustrated in
previous sections, the PostL reports of our students contained declarations about the acquisition of abilities regarding teamwork and cross-cultural communication, which confirms the usefulness of this approach.

VEs available through networks such as TAPP must continue to provide students with opportunities to internationalise their education in our increasingly virtual and globalised world. Previous studies in this area have focused on the teamwork and collaboration aspects of VE and internationalisation, but much research in this area remains to be done. Researchers could expand their investigations of GII competencies by designing and reporting on VE projects that emphasise less commonly studied cognitive, behavioural, and affective skills such as self-awareness or cultural intelligence. Additionally, researchers could also expand their methods beyond the content analysis presented here; for example, they could assess student learning with questions from the Cultural Intelligence Scale (CQS) and Openness to Experience (OE) scales (Sternberg et al., 2021). As research in this area grows, instructors can work to expand opportunities for students to learn in authentic, situated, and international environments through VE.

References


Appendix A

Adapted from “Localisation in the classroom: Pre-learning report” with permission of the authors (Maylath et al., 2016a).

Pre-learning report

To get better acquainted with your partner in the US and to understand his/her background, please fill in the following form before you send it to him/her. In the Cc: line, please include your instructor’s address.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What education do you have before university?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What are you studying at university?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How far are you in your studies?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What subjects are included in your studies?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What work experience have you got before university?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How many languages do you know?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you stayed in other countries, and if so, which ones?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other information you would like your cooperation partner to know.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Pre-learning report

Please fill in this page with some of your expectations for learning experience from the project.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What barriers do you expect to meet?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Technical? Please specify!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language? Please specify!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication problems? Please specify!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Differences between countries? Please specify!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other problems or barriers? Please specify!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What do you expect to learn?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
About cooperation? Please comment.

About language use? Please specify.

About cross-cultural differences? Please specify.

About email conversation? Please specify.

About contacting and communicating with an unknown foreigner? Please specify.

What shortcomings do you think your partner may have in relation to the project?

What skills do you think you need for this project?

Language skills? Please specify.

Social skills? Please specify.

Communication skills? Please specify.

Other skills? Please specify.

What skills do you think you need that you do not have? Please specify.

Other comments

Please state all other comments you may have that relate to expectations to the project or reservations about it.

Thank you!

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Appendix B

Schedule of the TAPP activity in 2019

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>29 October</td>
<td>Dr ES matches the translation students to the US students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 November</td>
<td>Dr ES and Dr US share the complete project roster with their students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week of 4 November</td>
<td>US students individually complete the pre-learning report and the translation brief. US students send these two documents, along with the text created for this activity, to their translation team by 8 November. Copy both instructors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deadline 8 November</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Week of 11 November
Deadline 15 November | Translation students individually complete the pre-learning report and send this document to the US students. Copy both instructors.

Until 19 December | US students remain available to answer any of the translation student’s questions until translation student deadline of 13 December.

Deadline 20 December | Translation students send a copy of the translation to the US students. Copy Dr ES. Translation students also send a report to Dr ES detailing and commenting the steps taken along the whole translation task.

### Appendix C

**Schedule of the TAPP activity in 2021**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date (2021)</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8 March</td>
<td>Dr US sends Dr ES class roster with email addresses.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 March</td>
<td>Dr ES matches the translation students to the US students and sends Dr US the complete project roster.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 March</td>
<td>Dr ES and Dr US complete project roster with their students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 March</td>
<td>Students complete the pre-learning report and send it to their corresponding students copying both instructors.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Week of 15 March
Deadline 19 March | Spain students receive source text and translate it. Before the deadline, they send translation to US students copying both instructors. |
| Week of 22 March
Deadline 2 April | US students edit texts. Spain students remain available to answer any of the US student’s questions until deadline. Before the deadline, US students send final text to Spain students copying both instructors. |
| 9 April     | Translation students send report to Dr ES detailing and commenting the steps taken along the whole activity. |

### Appendix D

**Invitation to enrol in the 2021 TAPP activity (C2)**

Situated learning in healthcare translation: Participation in the TAPP project.
Date: 9 March through 9 April
Duration: 25 hours
Professor: Dr ES
Place: Online through the Blackboard Collaborate platform.

More information: Students will take part in a medical translation and edition project in collaboration with Stylistics and Editing students from a regional university in the US. Three online synchronous sessions will be organised with their instructor (9 March 10.00, 16 March 10.00, 24 March 12.00) for the project’s
instructions and follow-up. Communication with US students will develop by means of emailing and videoconferencing along the duration of the project.

Appendix E

Adapted from “Localisation project: Writing, translating, and revising of texts: Post-learning report” with permission of the authors (Maylath et al., 2016b).

Post-learning report 2021

Post-activity report

To analyse and reflect about your learning experience, go back to your pre-learning report and write a 1000 w. report taking into consideration the following aspects:

- Which difficulties you found in the translation phase of your project. Which good experiences you would like to emphasize.
- Which difficulties you found in the review phase of your project. Which good experiences you would like to emphasize.
- What barriers you encountered and how they were different from the ones you expected to meet (technical barriers, language difficulties, communication problems, differences between countries...).
- What you learned about cooperation, language use, cross-cultural differences, email conversation, contacting and communicating with an unknown foreigner and how your learning matches your expectations.
- What skills you have developed and in which way (language, social, communication...).

Send your report to your instructor.