

Personal Knowledge Management and Collaborative Actions: Synergies in Social Networks of Professional Translators

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Abstract: Professional translators are creative knowledge workers. They have to continuously increase the efficiency of their work process in order to stay capable of competing on the market. This also includes the management of their personal knowledge and information resources as finding relevant information and the correct terminology consumes a considerable amount of the time needed for producing high-quality translations. Here, interaction and collaboration with other individuals can be a great source of knowledge and professional support. This paper describes the work in progress of a study on how professional translators can collaboratively manage their personal knowledge and information resources by taking advantage of synergies in their professional networks through social interaction in web-based environments. For this purpose, interaction patterns among translators and their peers will be identified using Social Network Analysis methods. Based on the findings of the analysis, requirements for a web-based environment leveraging synergies within translators' social and professional networks will be derived.

1 Introduction

While organisational Knowledge Management (KM) has enjoyed much attention over the past years, Personal Knowledge Management (PKM), focusing on activities of handling knowledge resources and learning on the individual level, is still an under-researched area [Pa08]. In consequence of globalisation and technological advances the concept of life-long employment has ceased to exist, new types of employment and co-operation emerge (e.g. virtual organisations), and the boundaries between professional and private life become increasingly blurry. The changing labour situation requires knowledge workers to ensure their competitive advantage on the labour market through the constant improvement of their unique selling propositions. Thus, they heavily rely on their personal professional knowledge (PPK), which is defined to be strongly activity-oriented, contextualised, and profession-specific [CY08]. PKM models also include social and collaborative dimensions. However, the majority of KM systems and social media still fall short of supporting natural social interaction patterns and rather force users to follow predefined processes.

The context for the research in progress presented in this paper is the day-to-day business life of professional freelance translators and how they realise PKM in

combination with collaborative actions. This context is of interest from several perspectives: Translating (i.e. the conversion of written material from one language to another) is a creative process [Ri06] and requires various competencies [Bu07]. Translators „make extensive use of their knowledge and skills in their daily work, are life-long learners (...), and proficient at managing their personal knowledge“ [RDP10]. In order to stay ahead of competition, they have to continuously increase the efficiency of their work processes. Freelance translators‘ success also depends on their social and professional networks not only when it comes to generating business, but also as social interaction is essential for knowledge exchange and learning. Thus, the alteri in a social network can be referred to as human knowledge resources. Information and communication technologies have become indispensable when it comes to meeting these challenges. The Web 2.0 with its collaborative and social features supports the collaboration among professionals and their peers. However, professional translators have complex requirements towards web-based collaborative applications, based on the nature of their profession. Through an analysis of translators‘ social networks and interaction patterns and considering the characteristics of the translation process, requirements for a web-based environment supporting synergies within translators‘ social and professional networks will be derived in a combined qualitative/quantitative approach. For this purpose, the method of Respondent-Driven Sampling (RDS), a link-tracing network sampling strategy from the Social Network Analysis (SNA) methodology, is used to recruit participants for semi-structured interviews.

After an introduction of the research in progress in section 1, the paper gives a brief overview of related work in this field in section 2. It then describes the research method in section 3 and concludes with a preliminary future outlook.

2 Related Work

2.1 Search actions and Computer Aided Translation tools

In a previous study conducted by Britta Nord in the late nineties of the past century [No02], translators used knowledge resources 17 times per hour while addressing six resources per query. Nord defines the reason for any research action to be a so-called *cognitive deficit*¹, which means that the translator has a question regarding a source text unit which he/she cannot answer based on their personal knowledge. Such cognitive deficit triggers a search action.

Up to 75% of the overall work process is spent on searching for domain-specific information, the correct terminology, or a way of expressing what the author of the source text originally wanted to get across to the readers [Be06]. Computer Aided Translation (CAT-) tools enable the re-use of vocabulary for new translations and are commonly used in the translation industry.

¹ Typically, in Translation Studies we distinguish between „translation problems“ being verifiable idiomatic, cultural or situational differences between the source and the target language, and „translation difficulties“ caused by translators‘ knowledge gaps.

However, these tools only serve as repositories for terminology used in the past but provide limited support to the translators when they are facing unprecedented challenges with a new source text.²

Nord focused on non-web-based knowledge resources like print dictionaries and reference material only. Her findings don't give evidence on how translators manage the results of their search actions, i.e. their personal knowledge and information resources. Since the Web 2.0 with its social features and the resulting change in internet user behaviour did just emerge when Nord concluded her study, there is also a lack of empirical data on professional translators' usage and interaction patterns in web-based collaborative environments. This makes it necessary to conduct further research.

2.2 Social Networking, Web-based Collaboration, and Social Interaction

When facing a cognitive deficit, having the possibility to ask someone for support or additional information can be of great help to a knowledge worker. However, the majority of freelance translators work remotely or in small translation companies and their collaborative interactions are quite limited. They interact with each other on a frequent basis [St09], [Di02], but still stick to more traditional media like the phone or e-mail. Web 2.0 applications have not been widely adopted [GAB09]. Despite of the fact that online communities dealing with language and translation topics have gained importance during the past decade, translators predominantly use online discussion forums or still refer to the internet as a large information repository instead of a flexible platform for collaboration purposes.

3 Methodological approach

Based on the situation knowledge workers in general and professional translators in this particular research context face nowadays (as explained in section 1 of this paper) the methodological approach strongly considers the nature of translatory actions.

The disciplines Translation Studies, KM, and SNA provide the theoretical framework for the identification of the requirements professional translators have regarding tools to support their PKM activities and collaborative actions.

This research uses a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods. Professional freelance translators and their peers can be referred to as hard-to-reach populations [SH04]. To be able to trace the links of their social networks while at the same time minimizing sampling bias, Respondent-Driven-Sampling methodology [GH08] will be used to collect sample data of translators' social networks. This method employs a link-tracing strategy minimising sampling bias through statistical weighting and many sampling waves. It allows convenience sampling of the initial samples of each network investigated, which will be recruited from online communities. Semi-structured interviews will be conducted with the participants recruited. They will be asked with

² Other areas of concern are e.g. the risks of a missing global text strategy due to an increased focus on text fragments, „lifeless“ translatory actions caused by a limitation of translators' creative actions (cf. [Be06]), or copyright issues (cf. [Ce07]).

whom they interact on a frequent basis, the type of relationship, the type of interaction (communication, professional support, professional cooperation, emotional support, advise, etc.), and the media used. Based on the interaction and communication patterns identified, requirements for a web-based environment supporting collaboration and social interaction will be derived. The possibility of comparing the data collected through the interviews with qualitative data from user statistics of freelance translators' online communities is currently under evaluation and will be considered in the progress of the research conducted.

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