Assignment 1: research scenario

During the last years, many research efforts have been made in order to study collaborative writing and to analyze its social dimension. The focus on aspects such as, writing strategies adopted during the task, division and distribution of work, negotiation problems, sharing resources and exchanging comments are just a few examples. In terms of macro-structure, collaborative writing is analogous to individual writing, as planning translating and reviewing can still be considered as the main constituent stages. The three phases serve the same goals as for solo writing, although co-writers have to cope with additional issues related to social dimension of collaboration. Other research efforts in collaborative writing have focused on reviewing practices; the range of technology that people use to co-write documents; comparative studies of face-to-face and computer mediated collaborative writing.

Despite thorough and detailed, these studies look at collaborative writing through couples of dichotomies, such as synchronous versus asynchronous strategies, face-to-face versus at distance strategies. Very little is said about: (i) how these strategies are intertwined; (ii) how and why people shift from face-to-face to distance working sessions; (iii) what are the affects on the writing activity; how this relates and is affected by the tools available to writers.

Nevertheless, a previous studied carried out in order to study student group work, has highlighted a different scenario. As emerged from the study, in between those opposites there is a variety of ways in which collaborative writing takes place. Modalities of interactions, tools used and strategies differ depending on the places where collaborative writing takes place. During this study, it was noticed that this phenomenon was partially related to the students' lack of a stable and fixed place (nomadcity).

Questions

- What does nomadity mean for collaborative writing? How does it affect collaborative planning and writing?
- What type of collaboration derives from there?
- How can we introduce the concept of nomadity into writing?
- How is collaboration affected by place variability?
- How can we design artifacts that enable to bridge different places?

Emily, Monika and Niclas plan and write a presentation for a course. Emily, Monika and Niclas are three students attending the UCPD course. They have to prepare the presentation about the work done within their group. As planned, they meet in the university library. The first one to show up is Monika who looks for a table in the meeting rooms, or in a quieter part of the library. All the places are taken, so she chooses a table in the cafeteria. The place is very noisy. In the meanwhile the others arrive, but before starting to work on their task, Monika briefly meets up with another member of the group who is there, at the library, to give Monika the video scenario that must be in the presentation. [...] By the end, they have agreed on the topics to talk about and on what should be on each slides, headings included. After they have decided what they should talk about in the presentation and how different topics are going to be interrelated in the presentation, they outline in detail what should be on each slide. Eventually, contrarily to the Emily's initial hypothesis, they end up dividing the work. They will be working alone on their own slides, they will send them to Niclas (who will put them together). On Monday, they will meet half a hour before class, in order to see how the presentation turns out once it has been assembled.
Emily, Monika and Niclas work on the slides. After dividing the work, the three students decide to live and they agree on preparing the presentation during the week-end. Monika is the first one getting the job done, so she sends her slides to Niclas, by e-mail. As she is the first one to make a complete slide available, the others use the same fonts, size, text and background colors as she does. Emily doesn't have PowerPoint, so she sends to Niclas a text file that he, later on, copies and paste on the presentation.

Emily, Monika and Niclas assemble the presentation. On the rehearsal day, just half a hour before the class begins, they meet up, to check out the presentation, to see if there are any mistakes and if it meets the time requirement. No one else from the group is going to check it out (at least for now), “they trust us” Emily says.