

How Non-Francophone Acquires Information in Polytechnique Montreal?

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Abstract

Polytechnique Montreal was known for one of the best engineering school in Canada. However, according to my own experience, non-francophone students might sometimes feel inconvenient. In this paper, I performed some observation sessions that inspired by what I had met before, and discussed what could be improved for the non-francophone students.

1 Introduction

Polytechnique Montreal, one of Canada's oldest high education institutes with an excellent reputation for training engineers, performs the courses mainly in French. Therefore, most of the students in the institute are francophones, and the information is only provided in French. Polytechnique Montreal has started its exchange student program, also known as the International Thematic Cluster, from 2020, which interests many abroad students. However, some of the students from the cluster are not familiar with French and encounters problems receiving information.

As a foreigner, I have difficulty comprehending the mail Polytechnique sent me and acquiring the intended information from the website since most of them are written in French. In most scenarios, I translate the context via one of the most well-known translation services worldwide, Google Translate. Although I can find the information I need eventually, it is much more time-consuming than people familiar with French.

After reading some related articles [1][2][3][4], I decided to make an observation on how people reacted when they had to acquire information from a website that they couldn't understand. I observed and made some suggestions about the question, which I believed would be beneficial for the future students in Polytechnique Montreal.

Research Question: How do foreigners that are not familiar with French acquiring information from Polytechnique Montreal websites?

2 Methods

2.1 Participant characteristics

My target participant was a non-francophone 23-year-old student, who's English level was above average comparing to other students in Taiwan. She was doing her Master's degree in one of the top university in Taiwan and was familiar with searching information from the Internet.

2.2 Data collection procedure

Observational sessions were conducted in my research through Google Meet, where the participant could shared her screen and let me monitored the procedure. Since the participant hasn't accessed to Polytechnique's website before, I scheduled the observation with two sessions based on the difficulty of finding the information.

- **Date of fall break:** Polytechnique didn't provide calendar in English version. Also, translating a pdf file into English is harder than a website.

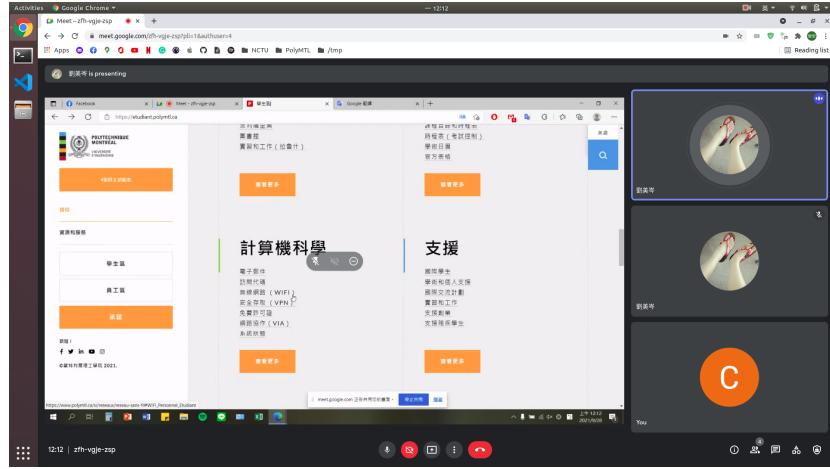


Figure 1: Translated Main Web Page

- **WiFi setup procedures:** The WiFi setup required to download an additional software tool, edroam [5], and the procedures should be done by using the tool. However, the guide of the tool provided on Polytechnique’s website was written only in French.

The main factors while measuring the procedure are the behaviors of the participant and the time period of searching information, which is the duration between comprehending the target and finishing the task. In order to record the procedures thoroughly, I took notes and recorded the sessions after obtaining the participant’s consent.

2.3 Data analysis methods

I read the note I took and watched the session record after the observation in order to ease the evolution of the analysis. My analysis focused on what tools she used and the actions she took to retrieve the information.

- **Tool:** Including the procedures to find the information, such as browsing the websites or searching via Google directly, and the tools and methods used to translate the content, like Google Translate or an online French dictionary.
- **Action:** Including why the participant do the action and the logic behind the movements.

3 Findings

The participant searched the information by browsing the website of Polytechnique [6] and translated it into Chinese by Google Translate, as shown in Figure 1.

3.1 Date of Fall Break

The participant spent about 2 minutes to find the school calendar (Figure 2), but she noticed that the calendar was written in French (Figure 3) and she had no tools to translate a pdf file. After that, she attempted to search an alternative way to acquire the date but in vain, returned to the pdf, and translated the content by typing manually on Google Translate website. Eventually, she spent around 4 minutes to finish the task.

3.2 WiFi Setup Procedures

It only took the participant 2 minutes to find the correct web page (Figure 4), and found out that a setup tool was required in the procedure, so she directed to the website (Figure 5). The participant didn’t notice that the language of the page could be switched to English version and she translated it

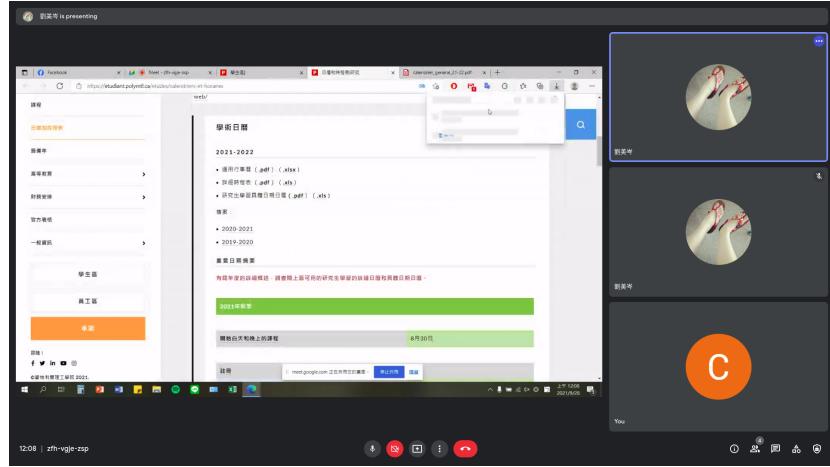


Figure 2: Translated Schedule Page

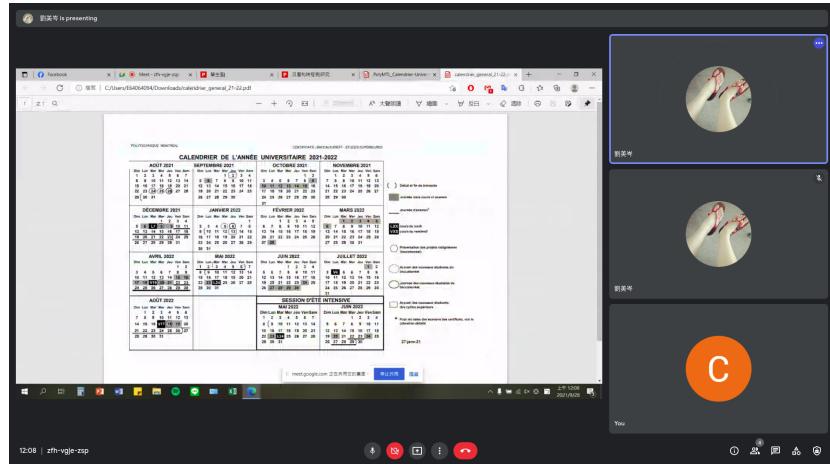


Figure 3: School Schedule

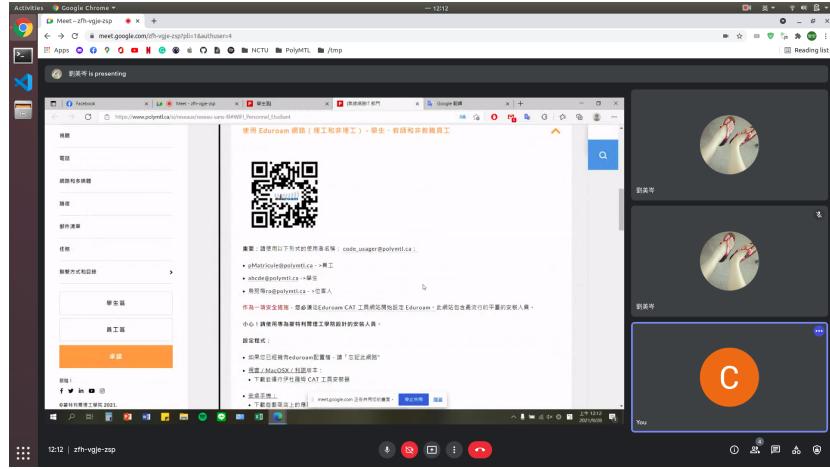


Figure 4: Translated WiFi Setup Page

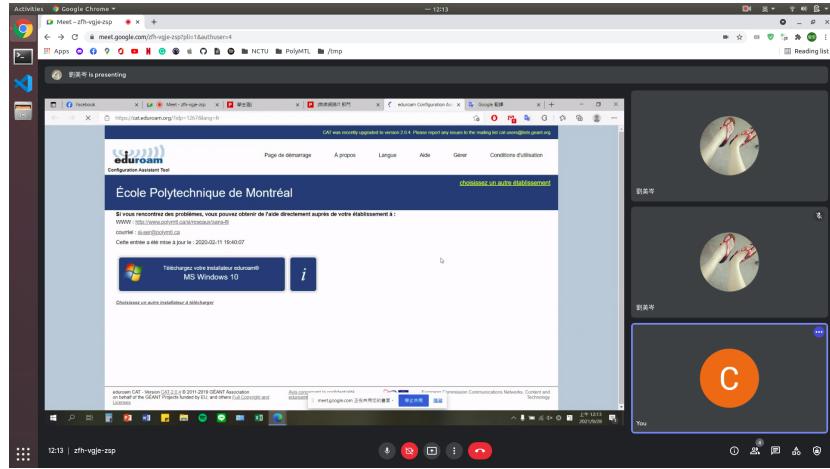


Figure 5: Edroam Website

by Google translate. Although some of the translated terms were quite imprecise, as shown in Figure 6, she still could find the result (Figure 7) after 1.5 minutes.

4 Discussion

Based on the result gained by the above steps, I summarized the problems that the participant encountered and how they might be solved. After that, I drew a sequential model diagram about the first session. In the end of this section, I assessed my procedure of the entire research.

4.1 Problems and Potential Solutions

- I noticed that even though there were some web page of Polytechnique performed English version, the participant didn't use it since a pop-up window of Google Chrome asked her whether to translate or not once she entered the page. I thought it was a smart design of Google Chrome, but the user had to select *Translate the page* while entering a new page was a little bit inconvenient.
- The school calendar was quite important to all students and should be acquired and understood easily. However, Polytechnique only provided French version and pdf format was hard to translate unless specific tools were installed. I suggested that the schedule could be performed in both French and English, or be provided in the form of web pages.

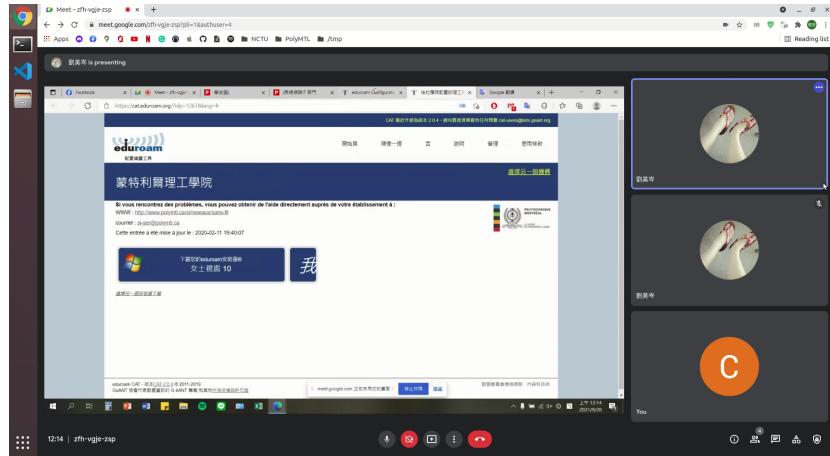


Figure 6: Unclear Translated Content of Edroam Website

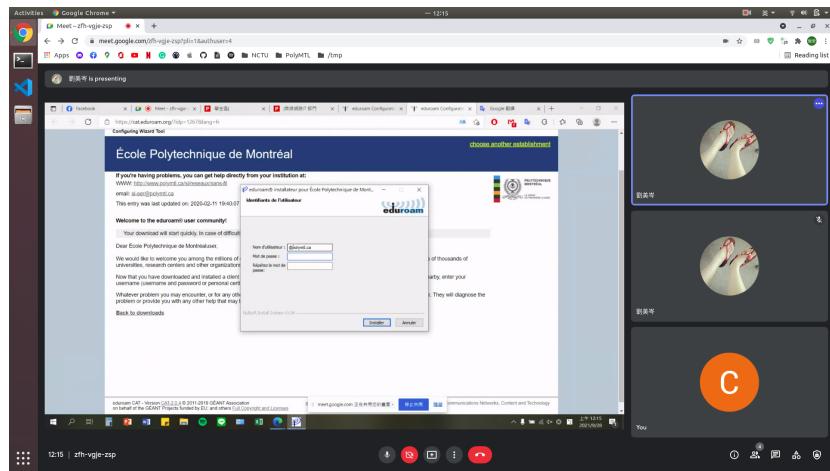


Figure 7: Edroam Setup Daemon

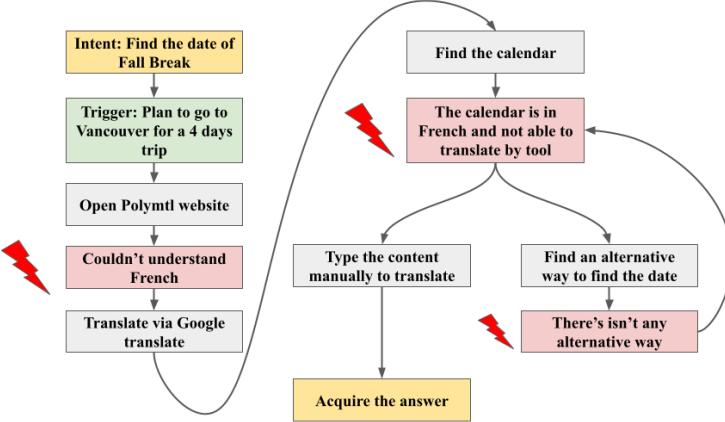


Figure 8: Sequential Model Diagram

4.2 Sequential Model Diagram

Please see Figure 8.

4.3 Self Assessment

- Before the sessions started, I should give the participant some time to manipulate the website. According to the participant's feedback, she thought both of the sessions were not difficult, but she had to spend some time to be get familiar with the website in the first session since she hadn't visited before.
- The second session was done smoothly, but it might cause by I gave too much hints. I should ask the participant to "Show me how to connect to the WiFi" instead of "If you want to connect to the WiFi, you should download a tool and type some information. Please tell me what is the tool and what information I should type." Moreover, the participant could not verify whether the procedures she found were correct or not since she wasn't even in Canada, so it was a little bit inappropriate though.

5 Conclusion

In this paper, I observed how the participant found the requested information and the problems she met. Next, I analyzed the procedures and came up with some potential solutions. As an university that using French as the primary language, it was not possible to force the school to provide all of the information in two languages, but I believed that providing bilingual context for those essential information could significantly improved the non-francophone students' experience in Polytechnique Montreal.

References

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- [4] Wolk et al. “A cross-lingual mobile medical communication system prototype for foreigners and subjects with speech, hearing, and mental disabilities based on pictograms.” In: *Proceedings of Computational and mathematical methods in medicine* (2017).
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