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Learning Portfolios in Translation Classrooms

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Abstract

Learning portfolio is a beneficial alternative for classroom learning and assessment since it enriches students' learning experiences, and it is a sound integration of teaching, learning, and assessment through socially constructed learning. Translation pedagogy can benefit a great deal from the use of portfolios. It develops the students' translation competence, as well as other skills necessary for their translation learning, including decision making, problem solving, self-monitoring, and self-assessing. Using portfolios allows the students to fully participate in their own learning, and at the same time, practice social skills through sharing and collaborating with their peers. The teachers can also ascertain whether and how learning outcomes have been met and make adjustments as necessary. Any learning difficulties that might occur can be communicated to the teachers and can be handled in an appropriate time and manner. Additionally, portfolio use has proved to be an alternative assessment in different translation classroom settings since it is a performance-based evaluation and has quality of test usefulness. Therefore, portfolio use is believed to be an ideal tool in translation pedagogy.

Keywords: learning portfolios, translation pedagogy, alternative assessment, student engagement

Introduction

Learning portfolios have been extensively used as a tool for classroom learning and alternative assessment in different fields of study, both sciences and humanities, as well as language studies. They can serve a variety of functions depending on learning objectives and learners' stages of development from primary and secondary schools to undergraduate and graduate levels.

Translation pedagogy is an area that has enjoyed the benefits of both paper-based and web-based portfolios in recent years. It is beneficial for translation teachers to learn how to incorporate portfolios in their classrooms effectively since they can function as a practical tool for creating an enriched learning environment.

The objective of this review of the literature is to present how portfolios can be used effectively in a form of collaborative learning and performance-based assessment in translation classrooms. This review is divided into five main sections. First, it will discuss current situations of classrooms learning and assessment in translation education. Second, it will outline benefits of learning portfolios as an alternative way of classroom learning and assessment. Third, it will illustrate how portfolios have been used in different translation learning environments. Fourth, the discussion part will elaborate why and how portfolios can be used effectively in translation education. Finally, this review concludes by summarizing the major insights from research on this topic.

Current situations of translation classrooms

Nowadays, translation courses are offered as a part of most degree programs in foreign languages or degree programs in translation, both at the undergraduate and graduate levels. The main goal of the course is to cultivate or enhance translation competence so as to prepare the students to produce quality translation work after graduation, either as a part of their jobs or as a professional translator. In translation pedagogy, there have been discussions among educators and researchers on teaching-learning process and assessment schemes. It is noted that traditional translation classes are teacher-centered and too theoretical. By contrast, the acquisition of translation competence requires a fine integration of teaching, learning, and assessment. Such integration accords with the concept of social constructivism that promotes learning engagement and learning autonomy (Campos, 2004; Johnson, 2003; Kiraly, 2000, 2003; Pym, 2011).

Additionally, there is an issue of subjectivity and reliability of assessment methods and grading process, especially when teachers mark students' exam papers since translation competence cannot be easily assessed using formal exams. Traditional assessment in translation classrooms tests key elements in translation, including the students' knowledge and theory of translation, translation skills and ability, as well as the ability to critique a translation. Test tasks being used vary from translating an entire text, translating passages of a text, or translating sentences. Some tests require students to identify a better translation or errors and give reasons. Some are in a form of multiple choice questions. Such formal assessment in the traditional paradigm has been prevalent, but does not prove to be very satisfactory among translation teachers (Johnson, 2003; Li, 2006; Pym, 1992, 2011). Thus, translation classroom activities should integrate the acts of teaching, learning and assessment, and the nature of portfolios use as a part of learning process and assessment schemes can be one possible alternative to bridge these gaps in translation pedagogy.

Portfolios: alternative classroom learning and assessment

Learning portfolios started to be in use in an educational field where traditional means of assessment did not work very well, such as in music and art. A learning portfolio is a collection of students' work that can exhibit their efforts, progress, and accomplishment (Chappuis, Stiggins, Chappuis, & Arter, 2012). Portfolios are flexible in format and content. Some portfolios show progress towards competence on one or more learning goals by documenting pieces of work in each completed step in a project. Alternatively, others showcase only best work or the students' accomplishment. It is the teacher who selects the type of portfolios that matches with the learning objectives of the course (Salkind, 2013).

Learning portfolios can be collected either in a paper-based or a web-based form. Paper-based portfolios have been appreciated by educators for several decades due to a number of their constructive qualities. However, they still have limitations in terms of data storage, search, and management. Recently, electronic communication advancement brought us a web-based form of portfolios, and now web-based portfolios are finding increasing implementation in a variety of learning contexts since they are easily available, accessible, portable, and interactive (Chang, 2002; Hung, 2012; Pullman, 2002).

One of the greatest benefits of portfolio use is students' learning engagement and learning autonomy. The students fully participate in their own learning and evaluation process. While keeping their portfolios, the students learn to set goals and directions of their own work, reflect on it and assess it, respond to feedback from peers and teachers, and, in turn, learn to give feedback to their peers' work. Portfolio assessment involves an individual student as the person being assessed and the person assessing others. Therefore, the incorporation of portfolios in classroom learning and assessment will provide a good opportunity for the students to take responsibility for the whole course of learning and to be engaged in critical thinking through the acts of reflection and assessment (Johnson, 2003; Ramova & Andrew, 2011; Salkind, 2013)

The use of portfolios for assessment and evaluation can be both formative and summative. It is formative when continuing efforts are evaluated, and it is summative when there is an evaluation of the accomplishment or the final products (Johnson, 2003; Salkind, 2013). However, it is essential that the teachers analyze all the fundamental issues so as to attain quality portfolio assessment. A clear purpose of the assessment must be identified. The teachers need to know how the assessment results will be used, and what detailed information is required. In addition, clear targets must be set so that the teachers could tell what kind of achievement will be assessed.

It is also crucial that the assessment has a good design in order to ensure that it matches with the learning objectives, and both the tasks and the scoring criteria implemented have high quality. More importantly, portfolio assessment could not be successfully implemented without an effective communication with the students. They need to understand the assessment scheme in order to set their goals and directions before working, make adjustment while working, and perform the assessment of their own work and their peers' (Chappuis et al., 2012).

Researchers in a variety of disciplines have explored the quality of paper-based and web-based portfolios. As an alternative assessment, learning portfolios have been proved to be valid and

reliable. In a research study on healthcare education in Canada, the use of paper-based portfolios as a formative assessment of nursing students' competency testified to high inter-rater reliability when accompanied by appropriate supportive mechanisms (Hill, 2012). Web-based portfolios used in a computer course at a senior high school in Taiwan were reported to be a reliable and valid assessment method (Chang, Liang, & Chen, 2013). Another study confirmed that web-based portfolios could allow the teacher to discriminate ESL undergraduate students with different English proficiency levels. The developed portfolio assessment model used in an English composition course had validation in predicting students' future performance. (Song & August, 2002).

Studies on portfolio learning and assessment also demonstrated positive effects on students' performance. In a pre-service math teacher program in Spain, the use of portfolio for the revisions of projects promoted the development of the students' initial ideas (Caceres, Chamoso, & Azcarate, 2010). In an English academic writing class at a university in New Zealand, a group of first-year students learning English benefited from the use of portfolio when performing multi-drafting tasks since it provided a feedback loop and enhanced the understanding of writing as a recursive process (Ramova & Andrew, 2011). In another writing class at the elementary level in Cyprus, a group of 4th grade students were trained to use portfolios, either in a paper-based or a web-based form, as a part of their writing process, from setting goals, documenting their progress, reflecting on and evaluating their own work, accessing peers' work, as well as receiving feedback and support from peers and from teachers. After an academic year of using portfolios, self-efficacy of the students increased significantly, and the increase of writing self-efficacy corresponded to an increase of their writing performance (Nicolaidou, 2012). In a computer class at a junior high school in Turkey, the use of web-based portfolio assessment was investigated, and the result from a survey revealed that portfolio assessment, compared to conventional assessment, had positive impacts on students' goal setting, problem solving, data gathering, reflection, self-assessment, and continuous improvement, as well as work and peer interaction (Chang & Tseng, 2009).

Perception towards the use of portfolio is another topic of interests among teachers and researchers. Perceptions of groups of stakeholders, especially students, in a variety of learning contexts were explored. A group of EFL students at the university level in Turkey were asked about their perceptions towards portfolio keeping. They reported that it was beneficial to the improvement of their vocabulary and grammar knowledge, as well as their reading, writing and research skills (Aydin, 2010). A study on the views of students, teachers and parents towards the use of learning portfolio at the primary level in Turkey indicated that all the three groups believed that the use of portfolios was an important part in the assessment of the students' progress (Ocak & Ulu, 2009). Another study compared the perceptions of primary school students who used paper-based portfolios with another group who used web-based portfolios. There was no significant difference in the students' beliefs about their learning, teacher and educational environment, but the web-based portfolio group perceived exams more positively than the other group did after 12 weeks of portfolio use (Ustunel & Deren, 2010).

A number of research studies analyze factors influencing the effectiveness of portfolios. Two studies elucidate the macro scale of portfolio use. A survey across different types of Norwegian institutions and disciplines explored how university teachers conceptualized portfolio assessment

of writing skills. Information from course leaders in four higher education institutions revealed that 'soft disciplines', such as education and arts, had more varied models than 'hard disciplines', such as math, sciences and engineering (Dysthe, Engelsen, & Limac, 2007). In nursing programs in the UK, the diversity of portfolios use in the assessment was investigated, and what affecting the effectiveness of portfolio use were the language of assessment, the degree of guidance, and the expectations of clinical and academic staff (Endacotta et al., 2004).

There are also studies that bring to light some difficulties of portfolio use. Frustration and anxiety seem to be major obstacles when web-based portfolios were introduced. In an investigation of portfolio assessment in a group of elementary pre-service teachers in the US, despite the engagement in reflective practices and the development of effective learning strategies, frustrations and challenges arose when they created their first web-based portfolios (Lin, 2008). Similarly, in a study on washback of web-based portfolio assessment in a master's program in TESOL, a group of pre-service teachers stated that web-based portfolios had positive influences on building community of practice, facilitating peer learning, enhancing learning of content knowledge, and promoting professional development and critical thinking. However, learning anxiety deriving from larger audience and resistance to technology were also evidenced (Hung, 2012).

In an EFL learning context, perceptions of paper-based portfolio keeping of 204 EFL students in a university in Turkey were explored. The students believed that portfolio keeping improved their use of vocabulary and grammar in contexts, as well as their reading, researching and writing skills. Also problems during the portfolio keeping process were thoroughly discussed. The students complained that portfolio keeping was boring, tiring and took too much time. They also had difficulty providing feedback, using checklists, and analyzing errors. Some complained about pre-writing activities (such as brainstorming and outlining), as well as writing second and third drafts. The participants also mentioned that it was difficult to study with peers. The researcher, therefore, made a recommendation that EFL teachers should concentrate more on motivational issues and autonomous learning (Aydin, 2010).

In a younger group of learners, the use of web-based portfolios in a junior high school in Taiwan was examined. Although there were several positive impacts such as goal setting, problem solving, self-reflection, self-assessment, and peer interaction, peer-assessment performance was still an issue of concern (Chang & Tseng, 2009).

It is noticeable that the drawbacks of portfolio use reported in the above studies vary, depending on the nature of the students, and probably the details of the learning and assessment process in each course. Therefore, the integration of portfolios into any classrooms requires a very well-planned syllabus and a good preparation of the learning tool, which is a portfolio. More importantly, an ongoing interactive communication between the students and the teachers is necessary since it can provide immediate feedback from the students, and it can guide the instruction so that any adjustment of learning activities can be performed when necessary at an appropriate time (Chappuis et al., 2012).

From the literature above, it is apparent that the effective use of portfolios not only benefits the spheres of learning and assessment, but also combines them to create a meaningful classroom

interaction. Students will be trained to be active learners when they fully participate in the whole process of learning, including goal and direction setting, data gathering, decision making, problem solving, continuous improvement, reflecting, self-assessment and peer interaction. They realize the importance of planning and learn how to be well-planned before starting to keep their portfolios. While performing their tasks, they are guided to do self-monitoring. After finishing each assignment, they can reflect on their work. From their participation in the assessment, they learn about the process and practice to assess their own work and their peers'.

Furthermore, portfolio learning enhances social skills as the students are involved in social interactions with their peers and the teachers (Chang & Tseng, 2009; Hung, 2012; Lin, 2008). In doing so, they learn to be open-minded when they receive and respond to others' feedback. When pair work or group work is incorporated, the social interaction will be more meaningful since they can learn from each other through 'sharing and collaborating', another key to successful learning.

Apart from the benefits of portfolio use on learning habits, attitudes and strategies, the improvement of linguistic knowledge and skills, especially on writing performance, is evidenced by research on students at all levels (Aydin, 2010; Caceres et al., 2010; Nicolaidou, 2012; Ramova & Andrew, 2011)

In the assessment domain, test usefulness of portfolio assessment has been verified in its quality of reliability, validity and impacts (Cepni & Cil, 2009; Chang et al., 2013; Chang & Tseng, 2009; Hill, 2012; Song & August, 2002). Besides, portfolio assessment, by its nature, is authentic and interactive since the students' performance in progress and the final pieces of work can be assessed throughout their learning process (Chappuis et al., 2012; Salkind, 2013), and this type of assessment also involves the students' linguistic knowledge, strategic competence, topical knowledge, and affective schemata when the students try to accomplish the task. In terms of practicality, however, using portfolios requires more time for planning and assessing. The teachers' time for preparation and monitoring is essential. The teachers need a good planning, from the analysis of course objectives in order to set appropriate learning goals and targets. Also, it is important for the teachers to specify learning tasks and assessment criteria, and more importantly, communicate them to all the students so that the students can understand their roles in the entire learning process. Nevertheless, it is obvious that all the time spent will be worth investing.

It can be apparent that the effectiveness of both paper-based and web-based portfolios confirmed the importance of having a well-thought-out plan for learning activities and assessment schemes before implementing portfolios in any study programs.

Portfolio in translation classrooms

Portfolios are an effective tool to enhance students' translation competence, and to authentically assess students' performance. Four translation teachers and researchers integrated either paper-based or web-based portfolios in different translation learning environments, and then proposed how portfolios can function effectively and efficiently in translation pedagogy (Campos, 2004; Haiyan, 2006; Johnson, 2003; Rico, 2010).

Johnson (2003) used paper-based portfolios in two translation classrooms in the US. Two types of portfolios were designed to serve the objectives of each course. In another translation course in Costa Rica, Campos (2004) investigated the use of paper-based portfolios in evaluating translation process, and implemented a variety of translation tasks, especially a correction and revision process. With an attempt to cultivate translation competence among English major students in China, Haiyan (2006) explored the use of paper-based portfolios with students who had no experience in translation practices. Rico (2010) integrated 'digital portfolios' in a translation course in Spain, and explained how to design instructional materials along the socio-constructivist lines to create a student-centered learning environment. Task design and assessment schemes of each course will be elaborated in this section.

Johnson's (2003) 'course portfolio' in the Basic Translation Exercises course and 'professional portfolio' in the Advanced Translation Seminar course were developed to be implemented in a graduate program in translation. The course portfolios collect all the work, including the translation drafts and the final versions, all timed translations, other projects related to the learning in this course, materials the students used in the translation, and a self-review at midterm and at the end of the course. The students are closely guided about what to include in the portfolios. The objective of this portfolio use is to show the students' progress through the learning process in this course. By contrast, in the advance course, the professional portfolios contain only 5-8 best translations selected by the students themselves, as well as other information that can be used as business tools for their future career. This type of portfolios focuses directly on accomplishment and professional initiative, with their prospective employers or clients as the expected audience.

In the Translation Technologies course in a degree program in translation, 'digital portfolios' were developed by Rico (2010). This type of portfolio includes the outputs of work in a list provided by the teacher. For example, the students can write a review of a specific translation software application or create and manage a translation memory. However, the list can be expanded according to the students' suggestions. Before starting to work, the students communicate their decision to the teacher, and a working plan is agreed upon, using the learning guide as a reference. Completed outputs are shared using digital platforms, such as presentation repositories (Slideshare), video archives (YouTube), publishing sites (Scribd), or blog-hosting sites (Blogger).

Another translation course for English Major students in China prepared them to do business translation work after graduation (Haiyan, 2006). The tasks are related as closely as possible to the student translators' potential work environments. They are designed on the basis of the latest mistakes exposed in the students' translation or their reports. At the post-task stage, students are required to gather business terms, compare the different versions, and do their home assignments as a part of the final evaluation of their portfolios.

Campos' (2004) translation course in Costa Rica used portfolios to collect class activities. The tasks used vary. Activities in class, based on purposes and objectives, are translation of a text, in pairs or in groups, with the teacher evaluating drafts and providing suggestions. Students are required to write a summary of source text analysis, design specialized glossaries, and do the correction and revision of each work.

In the aforementioned translation courses, the assessment schemes employed vary, depending on the course objectives. Johnson's (2003) course portfolios account for 40% assessment for the course, with 50% as time-translation exams and 10% as sight translation. The four criteria are the average grades on original translation, the learning achieved, the completeness, and the professional presentation. The assessment focuses on both accomplishment as the summative assessment, and progress as the formative assessment, but this type of portfolios emphasizes more on the students' progress. In the advanced level course, however, the professional portfolio is assessed on the two criteria: to what extent the work convinces the students' prospective employers or clients, and to what extent their business research and tools show that the students are ready the job they want apply for.

Haiyan's (2006) study focuses more on the formative assessment aspect. The assessment of each task assesses their current achievement, and indicates what the next step in their learning process should be. In doing so, the teacher's role is to give descriptive comments on the students' translation, so that they learn how to improve their translation and how to finish the tasks more effectively. Scores are given on the overall analysis of the students' competence and their efforts in learning how to translate. It is obvious that the process of giving feedback is significant. The comments with detailed descriptions of what should be done are valuable for the students' learning and development.

Campos (2004) elaborates the differences between qualitative and quantitative evaluation in her research paper. The qualitative evaluation is based on the students' development. The teachers evaluate developmental stages of the students' work and also diagnose problems of the translation process. The quantitative evaluation, in contrast, is based on numerical rating scales. The completed products, which can be the final drafts of their translation with an analysis or the portfolio as a whole, are evaluated. However, the quantitative assessment is optional, as it depends on the purpose, but it is usually accompanied with tests, quizzes, assigned translations or projects. This type of assessment, along with others not included in the portfolio, can be added up as a percentage to obtain a final grade of the course, but when numerical rating is used, the procedure must be clearly specified.

Rico's (2010) study on digital portfolios assessment has a focus on a 'learner diary'. The learner diary contains the students' reflections on how they did the work, what they think of their work, and what they think they demonstrate. In this course, the students are assessed on their capacity to acquire and understand knowledge relating to the course, apply this knowledge to solve problems, gather and interpret data in order to present the ideas, and communicate the information, ideas and, solutions effectively.

Despite the differences of the natures of the courses, the types of portfolios used, and the assessment schemes, the translation classrooms value portfolio use as an alternative learning tool.

Discussion

Based on the above review on the use of portfolios as classroom learning and assessment, both in translation pedagogy and other disciplines, this section will discuss how learning portfolios should be employed in translation classrooms, and their benefits on translation students and teachers.

A well-structured syllabus is the key to success because portfolio use has to meet the course objectives and the learning targets, and the assessment needs to have the quality of test usefulness. Both the tasks and the assessment schemes used can vary, based on the learning objectives of the course. For basic translation courses, which the focus is on students' efforts and progress, the activities need to be carried out in stages. Specific instructions, guidelines, and checklists are necessary. The teachers also need to have a close monitoring system to guide and facilitate the students in the whole course of learning. By contrast, in advanced courses in which the students have more translation experiences, the students should be more independent in choosing the best samples of their work, so that their accomplishment can be evaluated. The collected pieces of work in their portfolios can also become a set of model translations for them to use in the future, as well as a showcase of their work for their prospective employers or clients (Johnson, 2003).

In terms of assessment, it is necessary that the assessment procedures of each section and activity should be clearly specified and communicated with all the students. The assessment procedure must be clearly stated, especially when numerical rating is used. Both the formative and summative assessment can be added as a percentage to obtain a final grade of the course, along with other types of assessments (Campos, 2004; Rico, 2010). When giving comments to the students' work, it is crucial that the teachers provide descriptive comments as they are constructive and valuable for the students' improvement (Haiyan, 2006).

Benefits of learning portfolios in translation classrooms are tremendous. Portfolios engage the students in reflection. Students' reflection enables them to self-observe and self-monitor, which will improve their translation performance. Reflection also benefits the teachers by providing a better understanding of the students' learning process. The teacher can ascertain whether and how learning outcomes have been met. The reflection also reports what and how the student is actually learning, so the teachers can make adjustments when necessary (Rico, 2010). Additionally, the teachers will understand difficulties the students encountered, and the ways in which they have been solved (Johnson 2003; Rico, 2010). Some groups of learners might contend with anxiety and frustration during the portfolio keeping, especially when web-based portfolios are introduced. Such negative feelings can be communicated to the teachers through the students' reflections, and they can be handled in an appropriate time and manner.

Another advantage of learning portfolios over traditional translation teaching and assessment is revision. The students are encouraged to make revisions after receiving feedbacks. They can revise their work until the assignment has been completely satisfied (Johnson, 2003). The revision also promotes good learning habits. Since the focus of translation learning is a process, the students will learn how to revise their work by making use of their own reflections, their peers' feedback and their teachers' comments.

Similar to the use of learning portfolios in other disciplines, translation classrooms can enjoy the benefits from the development of students' performance. Portfolio use has been verified to develop students' translation competence, as well as other skills necessary for the students' own learning, including decision making, problem solving, critical thinking, self-monitoring and self-assessing (Johnson, 2003; Campos, 2004; Haiyan, 2006; Rico, 2010).

The most substantial impact of portfolio use is a psychological one since it promotes social constructed learning. The students can make their own meaning from the learning process when they perform each task and reflect on it. Especially when sharing and collaborating with their peers are involved, the students are provided a great opportunity to expand their views (Johnson, 2003; Kiraly, 2003). With this way of meaningful learning experience, the students can also gain confidence in their own potential, and this confidence can be a force to push them to move towards sustainable learning and development.

Conclusion

Portfolio use can enrich the students' academic experiences as it brings a sound integration of classroom activities and authentic assessment through socially constructed learning. Learning portfolios have also proved to be beneficial as a form of alternative assessment in translation classrooms for they have qualities of test usefulness. Using portfolios is now widely accepted among educators and researchers as a significant learning approach in translation pedagogy since it not only cultivates or enhances all the skills necessary for translation, but also promotes the students' learning engagement and learning autonomy, which will empower them to continuously develop their translation competence.

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