The Effect of Portfolio Assessment on the Development of Metacognitive Awareness in EFL Learners' Translating in the Academic Context

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Abstract

A translation portfolio is a systematic collection of student's translations or reports of tasks to represent a variety of student's achievements in the translation course over a specified period of time. This paper aims to investigate the effect of portfolio assessment in the translating classroom in an attempt to examine its impact on EFL learners' metacognitive awareness. To determine the impact of portfolio assessment on the translation quality and metacognitive awareness of EFL learners, 60 university students majoring in translation were initially selected. After being homogenized for their proficiency level, they were randomly divided into an experimental group (EG) and a control group (CG). As the treatment, portfolio assessment was employed as the teaching technique for the experimental group. Data was then subjected to different statistical procedures. The results of data analysis revealed that the participants in the EG outperformed those in the CG with regard to the achievement in their overall translating ability. Second, the findings showed that experimental groups' awareness to metacognitive strategies significantly increased after instruction. The findings of the present study have implications for learners and teachers in the realm of TEFL in particular and education in general. The results of the present study may have some implications for teaching of translation to EFL learners.

Keywords: Metacognitive awareness; Portfolio assessment; Traditional assessment; Translating ability, Portfolio-based instruction

Introduction

The theoretical foundation that underpins this study is the notion of "constructivism" which refers to more recent views on teaching and learning proposing that all individuals learn by constructing information about the world and by using active and dynamic mental processes (Omalley & Valdez Pierce,1996). This idea led to several alternatives to testing (Omalley &

Valdez Pierce, 1996; Brown, 2004; Leung & Lewkowicz, 2006). Following this line of investigation, many researchers have come to recognize that alternative assessment is an important means of gaining a dynamic picture of students' academic and linguistic development. "Alternative assessment refers to procedures and techniques used within the context of instruction which can be easily incorporated into the daily activities of the school or classroom" (Hamayan, 1995, p. 213). In contrast to traditional testing, through alternative assessment, students are evaluated on what they integrate and produce rather than on what they are able to reproduce and recall (Hamp-Lyons, 1996).

Johnson (1996) defines portfolios as a cumulative collection of work students have done. In other words portfolios show a student's work from beginning of the term to the end. Yang (2003) defined portfolio as a compilation of students' work, which documents their effort, progress and achievement in their learning, and their reflection on the materials negotiated for the portfolio. Crosby (1997) indicates that the primary purpose of portfolios in EFL context is to increase the level of students' motivation and to give them a sense autonomous learning.

Portfolio assessment as one of the alternatives to testing is defined as the systematic collection of student work measured against predetermined scoring criteria. These benchmarks may include scoring guides, rubrics, check lists, or rating scales (O'Malley & Valdez Pierce, 1996). Portfolio assessment is a systematic collection of a variety of teacher observations and student products, collected over time, that reflect a student's developmental status and progress (cited in Shabban, 2001, p. 30).

Among such alternatives to testing, portfolio assessment was singled out in this study because it might have potential effect on instruction. So, this paper aimed to explore the effect of portfolio assessment on the students' translating ability, especially on their knowledge and use of metadiscourse markers.

According to Douglas (2000), portfolio assessment is particularly applicable to foreign-language assessment. Standardized tests, note O'Malley and Chamot (1990), provide foreign language teachers with an incomplete picture of student needs and learning. Hamp-Lyons &Condon (2000) argue that the "greatest theoretical and practical strength of a portfolio, used as an assessment instrument, is the way it reveals and informs teaching and learning" (p.4). Lee (2001) points out that portfolio assessment prioritized student-centered over conventional concept of teaching.

Portfolios as teaching tools demand of teachers and students' rich concepts and a careful consideration about what kind of good works to be put into them. As students and their teachers work together on the development of the portfolio over the term, the teacher is able to assess the student's growth and learning in the course as well as the excellence reached by the end of the course. Portfolios, then, are 'a tool for thoughtful classroom assessment' (Hamp-Lyons, 1996, p.152).

Portfolios have been associated with alternative assessment not only in general education but more particularly in second language education as well (Darling-Hammond, 1994; Hamayan, 1995; Shohamy, 2001). The literature reveals a degree of controversy and confusion concerning the use of portfolio assessment as an alternative to traditional testing. It is argued that portfolio assessment is more than merely one of many homogeneous alternatives in assessment (Brown & Hudson, 1998). As further argued by Lynch and Shaw (2005, p. 264), "…. the portfolio, as an exemplar of alternative assessment, represents a different paradigm or culture that requires an approach to validity evidence (i.e., to establishing the trustworthiness of the inferences made from the assessment process) differing in certain critical aspects from the approach used in traditional testing."

Hamp-Lyons &Condon (2000) believe that in portfolio assessment both reliability and validity are necessary and must be addressed. Williams (1998, 2000) argues that without standards for implementation and outcomes, portfolio assessment will become unfair because "it increases the subjectivity teachers bring to evaluation"(2000, p.136). Reliability needs to be based on performance instead of idiosyncratic scores that have no preset criteria (O'Malley and Pierce, 1996). One of the main problems of reliability in L2 portfolio assessment is inter-rater reliability, consistency of scores because teacher are not used to this new concept of assessment. The psychometric view of reliability is too narrow to take into account the "less standard forms of assessment" such as the portfolio. Portfolio assessment requires that readers be trained to agree and to score papers based on a common rubric that describes numerical points. Rubrics should include development and organization, fluency of idea (problem) description, and mechanics (O'Malley and Pierce, 1996).If readers agree, there is a reliable rate of agreement. If readers do not agree, there is low inter-rater reliability. Without a sufficiently high rate of reliability, scores cannot be considered valid. Portfolios can be used to support or even determine a grade when a well-defined scoring guide or rubric is developed by both the teacher and the learner (Defina 1992, P.37).

Many teachers and experts have offered suggestions on portfolio contents based on their experience with using PA. Portfolios are often grouped into four types according to Mandell and Michelson (1990):

* Showcase—student only puts best example or best product in for each objective

* Cumulative—Student place all work relevant to each objective into portfolio

* Process—Student places pre/post-samples of work for each objective into the portfolio

* Each type of portfolio should include all of the essential components of a portfolio listed above

Crockette(1998) considers portfolio contents to fall into five categories:

- Found samples, which refer to pieces done to fulfill class assignment

- Processed samples, or the students' analyses and self-assessment of a work previously graded by the teacher

- Revisions or samples of student work that have been graded and then revised, edited, and rewritten

- Reflections, which are related to the processed samples but are applied to the portfolio as a whole, providing a chance for students to think about who they are, what strengths and weaknesses are

- Portfolio projects, which cover work designed for the sole purpose of inclusion in student portfolios.

Crockette suggests that the portfolio should include the contents mentioned above as well as other items considered relevant to its specific purpose.

And essential components of a portfolio suggested by Campell, Melenyzer and Nettles et al. (2000) should be:

* Table of contents with page numbers

* Personal introduction describing the student's background and capstone experience

*Program outcomes, with artifacts linked to the outcomes

Each artifact should be described in a short narrative(included with artifact) reflecting upon what it is, how it demonstrates obtainment of the objective, and what the student learned as a result(self-reflective). Requiring more than one artifact/objective increases scoring reliability (Campell, Melenyzer, Nettles & Wyman, 2000).

Portfolio assessment is a systematic collection of a variety of teacher observations and student products, collected over time, that reflect a student's developmental status and progress (cited in Shabban, 2001, p. 30). Genesee and Upshur (1996) provide a plausible reason for the application of portfolio assessment: "A portfolio is purposeful collection of students' work that demonstrates to the students and others their efforts, progress, and achievements in given areas" (p. 99). They maintained that the primary value of portfolios is in the assessment of student achievement because they provide a continuous record of students' language development that can be shared with others.

O'Malley and Chamot (1990) indicated that a key element of portfolios is student self-assessment; without self-assessment and reflection on the part of the student, a portfolio is not a portfolio. Moreover, many researchers (e.g., Genesee and Upshur, 1996; Upshur and Turner 1998; Kormos 1999; Papajohn 1999; Lynch, 2001; Khoshsima, 2006 to just mention a few) investigated the effect of portfolio assessment on learning process in classroom context. Their findings depicted plausible impact on the assessment of students' classroom performance.

The implementation of a portfolio assessment system in many classrooms today is of great interest to teachers and researchers at every level of education. Murphy (1999) states that they are implemented in classrooms in order to accomplish various goals. These goals range from providing students with a sense of ownership, motivation, accomplishment to assessing curriculum needs for demonstrating competency. Because of the number of goals associated with the implementation of portfolios, Murphy categorized them into three groups: "teaching tools, professional development, and assessment purposes" (p. 4).

Following this line of investigations, the current study has taken both the formative and summative functions of portfolio assessment in the classroom so as to clearly portray the translating ability of the students through their real performances during the course and at the end of the instruction. This research specifically focuses on participants' use of "metacognitive strategies". According to O'Malley and Chamot (1990), metacognitive strategies are 'higher order executive skills that may entail planning for, monitoring or evaluating the success of a learning activity' (p.44). Cohen (1998, p. 7) espouses that metacognitive strategies 'deal with pre-assessment and pre-planning, on-line planning and evaluation, and post-evaluation of language learning activities'. Putting these together, metacognitive strategies are defined as thoughts or behaviors consciously employed by the learner to think about the learning task, plan for the task, monitor the task, and evaluate how well he/she has completed the task.

Metacognition can be loosely defined as "thinking about one's own thinking." More specifically, metacognition is "an appreciation of what one already knows, together with a correct apprehension of the learning task and what knowledge and skills it requires combined with the ability to make correct inferences about how to apply one's strategic knowledge to a particular situation and to do so efficiently and reliably" (Peirce, 2003, p. 2). Students who are able to identify suitable learning strategies in the proper situation are using metacognition. For example, a student may understand that he has difficulty in finding the connection between important concepts within a story. If he/she has been taught to use a graphic organizer, such as a concept map, to identify the main concepts and link them together using lines, similar to a spider web, then that student has used metacognition to complete the task (Nelson & Conner, 2008). In general, metacognition is the engine that drives self-directed learning.

The present study proposes seven metacognitive strategies for teaching. The first four strategies might be beneficial to task completion and performance in teaching translation; they include 'Problem identification', 'Planning content', 'Planning language', and 'Evaluation'. First, 'Problem identification' aims to facilitate the global planning of a translator's task by enabling the learner to assess the purpose and expected outcome of the task (Wenden 1998). Next, the learners try out 'Planning content' and 'Planning language' to prepare respectively for ideas and for language needed for the task. Ellis (2005) regards planning for content and planning for language as strategic planning believed to be beneficial to task performance. 'Evaluation' is also targeted for teaching as it may promote reflection after the translation task is completed (Rubin 2005).

The next three strategies are derived from Macaro's (2006) strategy framework which subsumes social strategies and affective strategies (recognized as different categories by O'Malley and Chamot 1990) under metacognitive strategies. Social strategies are 'clusters of cognitive and metacognitive strategies that lead to Strategic Plans' (Macaro 2006, p.

328) while 'affective strategies require the knowledge of oneself as a learner through re- current monitoring of one's learning' (Macaro 2006, p. 328). On the basis of Macaro's (2006) framework, three social-affective strategies i.e. 'Asking for help', 'Giving help' and 'Positive self-talk' were also selected for instruction in this study. 'Asking for help' and 'Giving help' are social strategies that may benefit task performance if students are encouraged to cooperate with peers, to help each other with linguistic aspects of the task, and to offer scaffolded help. Such favorable, social environment may be conducive to task performance. 'Positive self-talk' is an effective strategy whereby the speaker thinks positively to encourage himself/herself to reduce anxiety for the task. The strategy may help students maintain a favorable, psychological state that could facilitate the successful completion of a task.

One of the main struggles that students face in trying to develop an understanding of metacognition and ways to develop strategies that positively impact themselves is an overall lack of awareness to their own learning process. Students, even at a rudimentary level, have some basic understanding of their own knowledge and thinking. Flavell (1979) describes three basic types of awareness, related to metacognitive knowledge. The first is an awareness of knowledge, which is described as an understanding of what one does and does not know, and what one wants to know. Second, there is an awareness of thinking, which describes an understanding of cognitive tasks and the nature of what is required to complete them. Finally, there is an awareness of thinking strategies, which describes an understanding of approaches to directed learning.

Following the above-mentioned studies, the present research tries to investigate the effect of portfolio assessment on using metacognitive strategies. The present study wants to investigate whether metacognitive strategies can help translators to produce better texts and whether the participants who received portfolio assessment could develop a plausible understanding of that knowledge or awareness in translating their texts.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to investigate the implementation of portfolio assessment in an academic context in an attempt to examine its effect on the students' translating ability, especially their metacognitive awareness.

Taking the above purposes into consideration, the present study addressed the following research questions:

1) Is portfolio assessment an effective way of preparation for translating text under examination conditions?

2) To what extent do EFL students develop metacognitive knowledge (awareness) in their translating by the treatment of portfolio assessment?

Methodology

This study is intended to determine the effect of portfolio assessment on the development of metacognitive awareness in EFL learners' translating in the academic context. The design for this study is Quasi-experimental in nature, since the classroom groups are already in place and had to be intact. In order to have a strong quasi-experimental design, internal threats to validity were controlled by use of pretesting. To be confident that there were no significant difference among the subjects of the Experimental Group (EG) and Control Group (CG) regarding the variables under investigation, both groups were pre-tested at the beginning of the experiment.

Participants

The participants in this study were 60 translation students, both male and female, and aged between 20 to 23 years. They were majoring in English Translation at the University of Khorasgan. They were divided into two groups, randomly. One of these groups was as a control group and the other as an experimental one. The control group was taught and assessed based on the more traditional method used before, but the experimental one was exposed to a portfolio based teaching and assessment method with the metacognitive awareness in focus.

Data Collection Procedures

The 60 selected translation students were randomly divided into two groups. They were given a pre-test to be sure about their homogeneity in translating ability. The instructional methods, textbooks, and assignments in both the experimental and the control groups were identical, and both groups were taught by the same instructor. Students in portfolio-based group were advised of format of portfolio based instructional procedures. These portfolios contained all samples of their works including both classroom assignments and homework as well as self-assessment records. Self-assessment records were the students' self-ratings of their own works based on the criteria defined by the teacher at the beginning of the treatment. The study extended over a timeframe of 16 weeks. Scores obtained on the scale of 1-6 comprised students' course grades. In compliance with the class syllabus, the instructor taught students how to do their translation and how to use the metacognitive strategies to produce a better translation. All students translated different texts and a post-test timed translating test during the 16-week semester.

As is common in a translating class with a traditional (non-portfolio) method of evaluation in place, the control group turned in each text as it was due, and the instructor marked and commented on each translated text and then assigned it a grade. In the experimental group, portfolio evaluation was established. Students turned in their translations on the due date, but no

grade was recorded at that time. They submitted one translation each session they met the teacher. They received respective feedbacks (evaluation scales) by the next session that the class met. Students were credited for any revisions made. At certain points during the term, the instructor directed revision by focusing students' attention on certain strategies. Written feedbacks were emailed to students within two days; consequently, students in portfolio-based group had enough time to reflect on their translations and polish them before the next session met. Students could continue to work on previously translated papers until the end of the term. At the end of the term, students presented a portfolio of work to the instructor for evaluation and the term grade. The portfolio consisted of three translations from English to Persian and three from Persian to English. Students selected the three translations which represented the best of their work of the term. Students were encouraged to extensively revise these papers in the meantime.

In order to eliminate instructor bias resulting from factors other than the work submitted (e.g., attendance, participation, student disposition toward the class or teacher) (Baker, 1993); an independent scorer were invited to evaluate final assessment of portfolios.

Results

As mentioned above, this study aimed at examining the effect of portfolio assessment on the participants' achievement in translating in academic context, especially focusing on metacognitive knowledge (awareness). It should be noted that, portfolio assessment here was used as a technique for teaching translating to EFL students and it was not considered in its broader sense as a separate system of assessment.

In order to investigate the null hypotheses, a series of statistical procedures such as t-test and chi-square were run. The descriptive statistics were computed in order to provide the average mean scores for both experimental and control groups. The obtained data are described and summarized in table 1 below.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics: Pre-test and Post-test Concerning CG and EG

Groups	Mean	SD
CG Pre-test	19.5	4.32
CG Post-test	20.10	**3.40**
EG Pre-test	19.7	4.54
EG Post-test	22.53	3.56

The descriptive statistics in Table 1, indicates that there is a difference between the mean scores of the pre-test and the post-test in the control and experimental groups. The participants' performance on the second sample was better than their performance on the first one. Specifically, Table 1, reveals that the participants' translating abilities in the experimental group seem to have improved after being exposed to the treatment in the classroom.

In order to investigate the first null hypothesis, an independent sample t-test was run. The t-observed value for the comparison of the control and experimental groups' mean scores on the test is 2.70. As shown in Table 2, this amount of t-value exceeds the t-critical. It can be claimed that there is a significant difference between the two groups mean scores on the test, so the first null hypothesis is rejected.

Table 2: A Comparison of the Post-test Mean Scores: Control and Experimental Groups

Observed t	D.F.	t-Critical
2.70	58	2.01

N = 60; *p = < 0.05

The findings imply that, the experimental group with a mean of 22.53 outperformed the control group whose mean is 20.10. As a result, based on the analyses, it can be said that the application of portfolio assessment as the teaching procedure in translating proved to be significantly effective and helped the participants in their overall translating ability in the experimental group.

As for the second question, which aimed at investigating the effect of portfolio assessment on metacognitive awareness in the participants' translating, the chi-square test was applied. This statistical procedure was used in order to examine the frequency of metacognitive strategies used correctly and appropriately by the participants.

Through the analysis of a corpus of 120 texts translated by the participants (3 by each), the number of metacognitive strategies appropriately used by the participants was counted. The obtained data were described according to frequencies and percentages (See Table 3. below). Then, a comparison was made between frequencies and percentages of metacognitive strategies in order to observe if there would be any meaningful difference between the control and experimental groups in terms of proper use of them. To do so, one chi-square was run to find the difference between CG and EG concerning the appropriate use of metacognitive strategies.

Table 3: Frequency and percentage of metacognitive strategies

Groups- Meta-discourse	Total frequency	Percentage

CG	331	46.2
EG	385	53.8

The chi-square observed value for comparing the experimental and control groups' appropriate use of metacognitive strategies is 4.07. As Table 4 below depicts, this amount of chi-square value exceeds the critical value of chi-square, i.e., 3.84. It can be claimed that there is a significant difference between the numbers of metacognitive strategies produced by the two groups. As shown in Table 3 above, the experimental group produced 53.8% of correct metacognitive strategies while the control group produced 46.2%.

Table 4: Chi-square metacognitive strategies

Observed chi-square	D.F.	Critical chi-square
4.07	1	3.84

N = 60; *p = 0.05

Discussion and Conclusions

Concerning the first null hypothesis, the finding confirmed significant difference between experimental and control groups. That is, portfolio assessment affected the participants' overall translating ability to a large extent in the experimental group. By further observing the portfolio assessment, it can be said that it not only provides improved information about students' achievement in translating but also makes a positive influence on teaching and student learning. This explanation confirms the argument by Hancock (1994) and Omalley & Valdez Pierce (1996) that alternative assessment has a useful backwash effect on teaching and learning. The results can also be explicated in the sense raised by Genesee and Upshur (1996). That is, using portfolio assessment in second language classroom can have a very specific focus, such as translating, or broad focus that includes examples of all aspects of language development.

Furthermore, step by step observation of the portfolios of the students in the experimental group indicates that the holistic ratings they received after the instructor's assessment were highly correlated to their scores obtained on the last translating sample given to them as post-test. This finding implies that participants in the experimental group had a significant achievement in their translating ability through using portfolio assessment.

It is noteworthy that the metacognitive strategy tuition seemed to have activated the treatment class to deploy or sustain in using a wider spectrum of strategies as compared with that of the control class. This confirms the value of metacognitive strategy tuition in raising learners' awareness in trying more types of strategies. To further enhance the effectiveness of strategies-based instruction, it may, therefore, be desirable that the teacher focuses on helping learners explore a variety of strategies used by their classmates as this may motivate them to deploy not just their own, existing non-target strategies but try out new strategies recommended by their peers. This way, they may become better 'orchestrators' of a range of strategies at their disposal (Macaro and Erler 2008, p. 114).

Moreover, through qualitative analysis of the participants' translations obtained at the end of the experiment, a number of interesting points concerning the use of metacognitive strategies can be raised. It was found that good translations, which favored higher scores, included more metacognitive strategies.

Conversely, lower use of these strategies in lower-scored translations indicates that paying less attention to how the audience will perceive the text would lead to poor rating of these texts by the raters.

Based on findings of this study and the related discussion, it can be concluded that:

1) The use of portfolio assessment in the classroom in an EFL context affected participants' achievements in their overall translating ability and hence led them to create types of discourse appropriate to academic settings.

2) The metacognitive awareness of the participants in the experimental group proved to be significantly enhanced compared with the control group.

Two immediate implications are implied by the findings obtained in this study. First, the application of alternative assessment procedures such as portfolio assessment in classroom can be highly beneficial; this is when assessment is integrated with instruction. Second, portfolio assessment is really an authentic assessment and is a productive and useful tool for assessing the students' progress in class performance.

In fact, findings of this study would propose an integrative model of assessment for classroom application with performance testing such as translating. This can be a significant starting point toward the integration of instruction and assessment. In order to come to sound and unbiased decisions regarding the learners' classroom language behaviors, language testers and assessors should move toward a multi-level system of evaluation that can provide multiple sources of information. This has been, indeed, the concern of most researchers at the turn of the century (e.g., Teasdale & Leung, 2000; Shohamy, 2001; Lynch, 2005; Leung & Lewkowicz, 2006; Lam & Lee, 2009). In other words, educators would require both quantitative information

and qualitative description about language ability in order to better understand the meaning of scores obtained by students.

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