

Portfolio and Self-Assessment to Enhance Cultural (and Language) Awareness: A Case Study in a Translation Class

Harris Hermansyah Setiajid
harris@usd.ac.id
Sanata Dharma University Yogyakarta

Abstract

Learner autonomies have become a major issue in the recent years. Learners are encouraged to undergo a cycle of learning, consisting of learning, experiencing, reflecting, and evaluating. Learner's reflection has become an effective tool for students to measure their progress and to increase to what they have learned. The reflection can be made through portfolios and self-assessment method in which students are able to assess what they have done and to compare it with the teacher's assessment. This will lead to students' understanding of their problem and of weakness they do not realize previously. To some extent, the self-assessment method will also raise students' awareness to what they have learned, and develop them to be autonomous learners, which are essential when dealing with real life tasks. In translation class, this cycle of learning and portfolios and learner self-assessment is beneficial for students in that they can reflect and assess how far they are progressing. Such method helps students to be an autonomous learner and solve the problems independently and enhance the cultural and language awareness. This paper tries to discuss a cycle of learning and to show how portfolios and learner self-assessment work in a translation class.

Keywords: learner autonomy, learning, experiencing, reflecting, evaluating, portfolios, self-assessment, cultural and language awareness

Introduction

The current trend of teaching-learning strategies is the autonomous learning method for learners of English. This method allows students to find their strength and their weakness in their study. Being autonomous learners, students are expected to go beyond what they have learned in the classrooms.

This method also emphasizes on the process of learning, that is, the students are monitored and guided through the well-prepared and well-organized teaching. This process-oriented teaching expects students to grow and develop intellectually and academically. Teachers in the classrooms role not as an omnipotent person who knows everything, but rather as a resource person and manager of the classrooms who facilitate and manage teaching-learning process.

Discussion

1. The cycle of learning

Students are required to undergo a cycle of learning consisting of learning, experiencing, reflecting, and evaluating. The cycle can be diagrammed as follows:

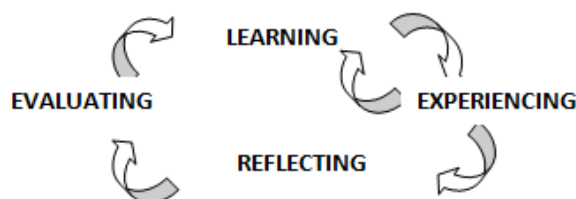


Fig. 1. The cycle of learning

a. Learning

In this initial phase, students learn theories, assumptions, strategies in order to get a common ground for what they will explore in the next phase. Learning phase enables students to discuss and questions the theories presented to them. Students are not only given but also encouraged to state the opinion and express what they know and believe.

Before the class, the students are given some reading assignments related with the topic of the discussion. Teachers give direction, guide the discussion, and redirect when the discussion goes onto the wrong direction.

The weakness of this phase is that inarticulate or shy students sometimes cannot join the discussion happily. They feel forced and depressed. The solution for this is that the discussion is held in groups. In a group, various students are involved: shy, articulate, inarticulate, attentive, inattentive. The group then can choose a member who can express clearly to be a speaker.

b. Experiencing

After students 'master' the theories, they are now ready to experience what they have learned in class. Students are given assignments of real world. In my translation class, I gave the students texts from my clients that I had translated previously. Students were also given a time limit. The situation was created in such a way that it recreated a real translator-client situation, except for price negotiation.

This experiencing phase is to train not only students' skill to apply the strategies they have learned in class, but also their soft skill, i.e. their professionalism in getting the job done. Students are expected to feel as if they are in the real world, not just learning and studying in the classrooms aloof from the real problem they might encounter when they leave the university.

The opponents of this cycle state that this experiencing phase might give an impression of being the same with that of vocational institutions. University students should learn the academic side, not the mechanical things. We cannot remain deaf, however, to the real job-market which demands university graduated students who are already prepared to fill the vacancy. Some university students, job-markets say, do not know anything about real world so they have to be trained first. This will cost them a lot of money, let alone their waiting period. The experience phase gives students pictures of what they might face when they mingle with the real world.

The phase learning and experiencing actually can be changed over. Students might experience first before they learn. From that experience, they will learn how to handle the problem. This will eventually lead them to a better understanding of the ground they study.

c. Reflecting

After they learn and experience or experience and learn, the students are given opportunity to reflect what they have done so far. This is called reflecting phase. Students are able to identify the difficulties and problems and find a way to solve them. Teachers' role in this phase is to guide and give direction to the students lest they get lost in their study.

d. Evaluating

Evaluating the process-oriented learning is difficult. The evaluation must come along the way with the learning process. Students are evaluated and assessed in every step of the process. Summative test which is done at the end of the learning process will be unfair to the students. Their activity and achievement in each step will be overlooked by such test. One method to assess and evaluate such kind of learning is by portfolio and learner self assessment. This method emphasizes on the process the students undergo during their study.

The paragraphs to come will discuss the portfolio and self-assessment and their application in my translation class.

2. Portfolio and learner self-assessment

Coombe and Barlow say “portfolio assessment is in the forefront of alternative assessment approaches.” (in Khan and Veetil, 2006). It is an appropriate method of assessment in the process-oriented learning. Combined with reflective learning, the portfolio and learner self-assessment will be an adequate method of assessment.

Khan and Veetil further say that “it is important that learners become aware of their own progress and reflect upon their learning strategies.” Students can use the data they gather in their portfolio as their reflection tool. This will lead them to possess “higher order thinking skills”, things which are needed in professional world.

Portfolio is an “ongoing collection of works done by individual students”. Portfolio shows evidences of students’ learning process. A portfolio should reflect the five characteristic as follows (Moya and O’Malley, 1994, cited in Coombe and Barlow, 2004 in Khan).

a. Comprehensive

The potential for determining the depth and breadth of students’ capabilities can be realized through comprehensive data collection and analysis.

b. Predetermined and systematic

A sound portfolio is planned prior to implementation. This includes information such as purpose, contents, data collection schedule and student grading criteria.

c. Informative

The information in the portfolio must be meaningful to students, teachers, and sometime parents.

d. Tailored

An exemplary portfolio is tailored to the purpose for which it will be used, classroom goals and objectives and individual assessment needs.

5. Authentic

A good portfolio provides student information based on assessment tasks that reflect authentic activities during classrooms instructions.

Meanwhile, learner self-assessment as an approach to learning is “that students take some significant responsibility for their own learning over and above responding the situation...[and] in order to assume greater control of their learning, learners need ways of assessing the quality of their language performance” (Cotterall 1988 in Khan). Self assessment is a way for students to know their progress in learning.

3. Portfolio and learner self-assessment in my translation class

In the first meeting of the class, I usually gave a student a kind of questionnaire to know what the students expect from the translation (English-Bahasa Indonesia) class. This lets me know an approximate picture of the students’ expectation and whether my syllabus will meet their needs. The choices I provided for the question “what do you expect in the translation class?” are: (1) to better understand English through Bahasa Indonesia, (2) to learn how to translate well, (3) to understand English culture, (4) to learn how to be a translator, and (5) others.

Most of the students answered that they want to learn how to translate well (83%), to better understand English through Bahasa Indonesia (10%), to learn how to be a translator (3%), to understand English culture (3%) and others (1%).

The students’ answers for ‘others’ are: (1) the required subject in the curriculum, (2) “go with the flow”, (3) no expectation, (4) not to sleep during the class, (5) “meet my favorite teacher” (6) others.

The result shows that the majority of the students expect to learn how to translate English into Bahasa Indonesia well. When pursued “how well”, they answered that at least they know the strategies to translate various English texts into Bahasa Indonesia so that they will have sufficient equipment to be a translator. This will eventually be the same with the choice “to learn how to be a translator”.

The students’ expectation worried me because according to ATA (American Translators Association) “completing a translation program does give a student skills but does not provide any assurance that these skills will find a ready market” (my emphasis, Tinsel, 1973 in Hubscher-Davidson, 2007). The ATA further advises “institutions to provide students with as much ‘real-world’ practice as possible” (in Hubscher-Davidson, 2007) to anticipate the uncertain job-market.

Sewell and Higgins (in Hubscher-Davidson, 2007) state that “in recent years universities have been increasingly aware of the needs and practices of professional life”. Consequently, the students expect the course will equip them with the skills needed for their future career. That is why ‘experiencing’ real-life situations with the real life-life tasks is imperative.

Therefore, I designed my syllabus to meet the students’ expectations after long years of teaching translation classes and observing the students’ expectations and interests. This course is meant for fourth-semester students whose English proficiency should be in advanced level. The materials include grammatical and cultural difficulties, strategies to overcome difficulties, and translation of texts of different registers. Most of the texts provided are the texts from my clients ranging from literary texts to legal documents. All of them are translated using different strategies based on the context.

In line with the portfolios method, students are also given opportunity to reflect upon what they have done. The questions for reflection include (1) the difficulties the students encounter during the translation process and (2) how the students solve the difficulties. I also apply TAP (Thinking-Aloud Protocol) in order to know how students translate. TAP is a method to understand the process of translation which takes place in translators’ mind. The verbalization of what is going on in the students’ mind turned out to be an exciting activities for my translation students. They were eager to share what they had in mind while translating. This activity also enhances students’ cultural and language awareness as well.

When it comes to evaluating, the students are given opportunity to assess their own translation. According to Khan and Veetil, the learner self-assessment “is done in a stress-free environment...which provides lots of opportunities for student reflection [so that] a positive and non-threatening learning atmosphere could be established.” By this method, the students do not feel threatened by the teacher assessment.

To guide the student assessment, a grading criterion is given. The criteria for translation include (1) accuracy, i.e. message conveyed, terminology, (2) readability, i.e. understandable or not. Naturalness, (3) completeness, i.e. all ideas/messages conveyed, and (4) grammatical correctness, i.e. spelling, punctuation, grammar and other mechanics. The learner self-assessment is then compared with the teacher assessment.

At the end of the course, the students are asked to organize the portfolio by choosing the best translation for each different register. The reason why they choose the particular work must be written.

Concluding remarks

The cycle of learning enables students to gain a better and deeper understanding of what they have done in the classrooms. The experience phase enables students to have a real-life assignment, while the reflective element improve the students’ analytical skills.

The evaluating phase using portfolio and learner self-assessment encourage students to know their progress in a non-threatening fashion. They can identify their own weaknesses and strengths and eventually pursue the improvement. In line with the growing demand of the job-market for well-equipped and well-prepared graduates, the learner self-assessment combined

with reflection and experience element enables students to be autonomous learners to accomplish a larger objective which eventually enhances the students' cultural and language awareness.

Bibliography

- Basnett, Susan. 1991. *Translation Studies*. London: Routledge.
- Bell, Roger T. 1991. *Translation and Translating: Theory and Practice*. London: Longman.
- Hubscher-Davidson, Severine. 2007. "Meeting Students' Expectations. *Translation Journal*. www.accurapid.com/journal. Accessed 13 Feb 2007.
- Khan, Khader Nawaz and Mahija Nambiar Veetil. 2006. "Portfolios and Learner Self-Assessment". Paper presented in *TEFLIN International Conference 2006*. Salatiga.
- Suryawinata, Zuchridin dan Sugeng Hariyanto. 2003. *Translation. Bahasan Teori dan Penuntun Praktis Menerjemahkan*. Yogyakarta: Penerbit Kanisius.
- Venuti, Lawrence. 2002. "The difference that translation makes: the translator's unconscious". *Translation Studies: Perspectives on an Emerging Discipline* editor Alessandra Riccardi. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Appendix 1
TRANSLATION
SELF ASSESSMENT SHEET

Name :
Date :
Text register :

Tick the appropriate column for each statement given below

No	Statement	Always	Sometimes	Not sure
	All have been translated			
	All have been translated accurately			
	The translation result is readable			
	No mistakes in grammar, spelling, punctuation and other mechanics			
	I understand complicated English structures			
	I found culturally-loaded words			
	I found science-related words			
	I found legal terminologies			
	Able to translate culturally-loaded words			
	Able to translate science-related words			
	Able to translate legal terminologies			
	I just copy from my friends			

My Reflection:

1. The difficulties I encountered while translating

2. How I solve the difficulties

3. How I feel about my translation skill for this text

4. What I will do to develop my translation skill

5. How I grade my translation

Excellent Very Good Good Weak Needs to improve

Teacher Comments:

Grading criteria: (by teacher)

1	Accuracy	1	1.5	2	2.5	3	3.5	4	4.5	5
2	Readability	1	1.5	2	2.5	3	3.5	4	4.5	5
3	Completeness	1	1.5	2	2.5	3	3.5	4	4.5	5
4	Grammatical correctness	1	1.5	2	2.5	3	3.5	4	4.5	5

Appendix 2
TRANSLATION
POST SELF-ASSESSMENT SHEET

Name :
Date :
Text register :

1. What are my teachers' comments on my translation?

2. What did I do to improve my translation?

3. How did I grade my translation BEFORE getting teacher's comment?

Excellent *Very Good* *Good* *Weak* *Needs to improve*

4. How do I grade my translation in the light of the teacher's comment?

Excellent *Very Good* *Good* *Weak* *Needs to improve*