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The Integration of Interpretive Teaching and Assessment: Instructed by Portfolio Assessment

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Abstract

Portfolio assessment focuses on the learning process, which combines comprehensively both the process and outcome. By means of test, questionnaire and interview, this study employs both qualitative and quantitative methods to explore the impacts on the learners' interpretive ability and learning autonomy instructed by portfolio assessment, finally resulting in the integration of interpretive teaching and assessment. The results show that the post-test scores of the Experimental group are higher than the Control group, particularly in terms of listening and analysis, plus translation, and also significantly higher than the pre-test scores of the Experimental group. In addition, the questionnaire and interview reveal that the testees not only increase their activeness in interpretive training but also develop their strong autonomy in learning, thus enhancing their meta cognitive ability in the interpretive training.

Keywords

portfolio, assessment, interpretive ability, learner autonomy

1. Introduction

The progress of higher education for the open assessment and productive teaching outcome reform put forward the new request for teaching assessment, i.e., with the emphasis on both assessment result and assessment process. As an effective means of formative assessment, portfolio assessment has come into being under this circumstance. Its appearance does not only update the assessment approach, but more importantly, creates an in-depth reform on assessment concept, which is an embodiment of fundamental transformation from the traditional mode to a brand new assessment adapted to the international education development. Portfolio assessment among other things has been extensively applied to the teaching of reading and writing for EFL learners. However, it is hardly found in the teaching of translation in China, to say nothing of the interpretive teaching in higher education.

Based upon constructivism and multiple intelligence theory, portfolio assessment is characterized by its richness in content, openness in assessing process and assessment of multi-agents, which lay the solid foundation for its application. This study assumes that portfolio assessment will be an indispensable

complement for the summative assessment through its practice in interpretive training, thereby strengthening the learners' interpretive ability and autonomy awareness. More extensively, it will further deepen and enhance the efficiency of teaching, thus making the great contribution to the cultivation of innovative high-level interpretive talents for the country as a whole. To sum up, this study has both theoretical significance and practical values.

2. Definition and Related Studies

Paulson, Panlson and Meyer (1991), and Arter and Spandel (1992) all describe a portfolio as "a purposeful collection of student work that exhibits the student's efforts, progress and achievements in one or more areas of the curriculum". Portfolio assessment is a comprehensive assessment system integrated with the concept of facts, quality, development and multi-evaluation according to Zhang and Wang (2004). A portfolio often documents a student's best work and may include other types of process information, such as drafts of the student's work, the self-assessment, peer assessment, teacher assessment of the work, students' in-class performance, study plan, and feedback from the peers and teachers etc. The students must get involved in the whole process, presenting viewpoints in terms of content collection, criteria, appraisal and feedback.

There are abundant studies abroad focusing on the portfolio assessment, and the overseas research should be dated back to the 1960s and boomed at the beginning of the 1990s. Most of the studies have much to do with writing assessment in classroom teaching. Koelsch and Trumbull (1996) have found the students using portfolio assessment are better equipped with perspectives, contents as well as structures; Song and August (2002) attached importance to the effectiveness of classroom writing portfolio; Yang (2003) and Lo (2010) further elaborated the efficacy of stimulating the learner autonomy; in addition, Lam and Lee in 2010 have studied how to achieve a balance between formative and summative assessment. Until 2014, Kelly has introduced the alternative method to translation assessment by using portfolio in her book *A Handbook for Translator Trainers*, yet failed to demonstrate how it can be applied in class and how effective it might be in classroom teaching. And it is hardly found any relevant study regarding the application and demonstration of interpreting portfolio in recent decade.

Studies on portfolio assessment in China started in 2000, most of which remained in the elementary and secondary schools. In recent years, there emerged a number of research results concerning English classroom teaching with the help of portfolio assessment in universities (Hong, 2011). The contents range from field to field, such as the use of E-portfolio in the multimedia teaching (Lin & Wang, 2006), the application in postgraduate English teaching (Fu, 2009) as well as problems and countermeasures (Yuan, 2008). Most of the domestic researches mainly focus on the portfolio theory, covering theoretical basis, teaching approaches, implementation principles, especially in the field of English writing (Chen, 2009) and reading (Hong, 2011). It is noteworthy that Zhang (2014) has conducted an experimental study on the relations between portfolio assessment and learners' autonomy; however, it

was only based on self-access extensive reading, presenting no enlightenments on interpretive teaching and learning. The literature review has shown that there is the rare study conducted on the employment of portfolio assessment in translation, except that Wen (2006) explores its feasibility in translation course, plus Cao and Chen (2013) studies its trial application in interpretive teaching as a mode of formative assessment.

3. Procedures

3.1 Objectives

The purpose of this study is to explore the guidance of portfolio assessment applied in interpretive teaching, attempting to find how the portfolio assessment affects and improves the learners' interpretive ability and autonomous learning awareness, thereby achieving the integration of interpretive teaching and assessment.

3.2 Hypothesis and Research Questions

The central hypothesis is: Translation majors confirm the positive role of portfolio assessment in light of the improvement of their interpretive ability and the promotion of learner autonomy. More importantly, this assessment brings forward the similar or more favorable learning outcome compared with the traditional mode. Thus, research questions are:

(1) What is the current implementation of portfolio assessment in interpretive class for Translation Majors?

(2) Is it true that the practice of portfolio assessment will promote learners' interpretive ability (listening and analysis, expression and translation)? Which one is mostly affected?

(3) Is the application of portfolio assessment conducive to the development of learners' autonomy awareness?

3.3 Methods

This study employs both the qualitative and quantitative method to collect and record the raw data by means of test, questionnaire and interview, and comes up with the results with the help of SPSS17.0 software, having a thorough understanding of students' reflection towards the portfolio assessment and analyzing the effects upon interpretive competence and learner autonomy.

3.4 Process

This study was conducted in two universities in Shaanxi Province in China, focusing on four interpretive courses, specifically, basic interpretation, consecutive interpretation, conference interpretation and simultaneous interpretation. Portfolio assessment was used as a major approach combined with the traditional mode, to probe into the cultivation of interpretive ability and learner autonomy.

The experiment lasted a semester, starting from September 2014 to January 2015. There are a total of 129 subjects, including 66 students in Grade 3 and 4 from the School of Translation in University A, and 64 students in Grade 2 and 3 from the Department of Translation in University B. Then 63 from

two universities are randomly categorized into the Experimental group and another 66 in Control group (Table 1). Both groups are taught by the senior interpretation teachers equipped with rich interpretive experience. Teachers in either group had the in-depth discussion about teaching process with the students and the consensus was finally reached before hand concerning the same teaching system and teaching procedures. Yet, teachers always encourage and remind the students in Experimental group to further digest materials used in class and collect more sources up to their interpretive level after class. Obviously, both groups were having the interactive learning practice and training within class during the experiment.

Table 1. Component of Subjects

Group	Control Group (n = 66）	Experimental Group (n = 63）
University A (n = 65)	38 (Grade 3）	27 (Grade 4）
University B (n = 64)	28 (Grade 2）	36 (Grade 3）

According to the Effort Model provided by Daniel Gile (1995), the interpretation process consists of listening, memory, production and coordination, any of which would have an effect on the quality of interpretation. It's only possible for interpreting to be conducted in smoothness and high quality only when the combination of all capabilities is far greater than the requirements for interpretive task. Thus the interpreting course mainly puts emphasis on the cultivation of interpretive skills and language ability. At the beginning of the semester, a pre-test, following the same form and same content, was held for both Control and Experimental groups with the emphasis of basic language ability, including Listening and Analysis (L&A) (30%), Expression (30%) and Translation (40%). The pre-test is divided into three parts: part one is a retelling in target language. The testees are asked to listen to a 2-minute English passage once and then to retell it in Chinese (focus on L&A); part two is to listen to a 1-minute Chinese passage once and then summarize it in English in his or her own words (focus on the Expression); part 3 is to require students to translate an article of 120 words from English to Chinese in 5 minutes (focus on Translation). Three parts are examined by two senior interpretation teachers according to the scoring rubric, and the average is regarded as the final so as to ensure the validity and reliability of the test.

Independent samples T test was taken to validate no significant difference between the experimental and Control group at the start of the semester. Moreover, there is no any significant difference in each item (L&A, Expression and Translation), which implies that both groups do not differ from each other in basic interpretive abilities (Table 2), thereby providing the feasibility for the second stage of the study.

Table 2. Independent Samples T-Test of Pre-Test for Experimental and Control Group

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variance		T test for Equality of Means		
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Listening and	1.029	0.312	0.235	127	0.814
Analysis			0.236	126.115	0.814
Expression	4.74	0.031	-0.418	127	0.676
			-0.421	120.05	0.674
Translation	1.266	0.263	-0.785	127	0.434
			-0.782	121.858	0.436
Total	0.868	0.353	-0.483	127	0.63
			-0.484	126.151	0.629

* The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.

During the experiment, the Control group follows the conventional interpretive teaching mode, without being informed of the experiment; while the Experimental group is related in clarity about the use and content of portfolio assessment in the first class, in addition to the conventional teaching. Students are required to collect the practical materials in the course of the semester (including video, audio, and text), and must include them all in the portfolio. Two points are stated: one is that teachers will supervise and check the Weekly Self-reflection Form and interpretation training in the last week of each month; the other is an organized portfolio folder must be handed in at the end of the semester, which will account for 20% of the total. The main contents regarding portfolio collection are as follows (Table 3):

Table 3. Inventory of Portfolio Collection

Completion Stage	In-class	After-class	End of Semester
Main Content	Lecture Summary	Weekly Self-reflection	Summary
	Group Presentation PPT	Form	Peer reflection paper
	Video/Audio for Group	News	Self-reflection Paper
	Presentation	Vocabulary list	Others
		Famous Speeches	
		Self-recording Clips &	
		Transcripts	

During the entire experiment, the normal interpretive teaching and learning undergo naturally among the Control group; while for the Experimental group, the author tracks the students' learning outcome, including the checkout of their Weekly Self-reflection Forms, collection of materials, solution to the

problems, etc. After the experiment, post-test is conducted for both groups, covering the similar interpretive task yet with the different items. Likewise, two senior interpretation teachers respectively correct all the papers, the average score of which is final. The Experimental group is asked to hand in their portfolio folders apart from a summative test held only by the Control group. Furthermore, questionnaire and interview are both employed to find out the attitude and reflection for portfolio assessment.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Comparison of Paired Samples T-Test for Pre- and Post-Test

A contrastive analysis has been conducted on the scores of pre- and post-test for the Experimental and Control group. Table 4 and 5 statistically indicate that the average post-score of Experimental group is 78.2222, 7.9841 higher than the pre-test of 70.2381. Two tailed T-test value for the variance of pre- and post-test shows the significant probability of 0.000, less than 0.05, which implies there is the statistically significant difference. It proves that interpretive ability of subjects in the Experimental group is obviously improved through a semester of training, In addition, Table 5 demonstrates only L&A, and Translation present the very significant difference (P = .000 < .001) in the paired samples t-test measured, showing that the subjects in the Experimental group received the significant improvement in two aspects, namely, L&A and translation under the guidance of portfolio assessment. Expression capacity by contrast has increased slightly, rather than an obvious progress, so that there is no significant difference (P = .096 > .05) as we see in Table 5.

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics of Paired-Samples T-Test for Experimental and Control Group on Pre- and Post-Test

		Subjects	Mean	SD	SE
Control Group	Pre-test	66	70.7879	6.85793	.84415
	Post-test	66	71.8636	5.78562	.71216
Experimental Group	Pre-test	63	70.2381	6.02606	.75921
	Post-test	63	78.2222	6.49676	.84168

Table 5. Paired-Samples T-Test for Experimental Group (E.G) and Control Group on Pre- and Post-Test (C.G.)

	Paired Difference		t	df.	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	SD			
E.G. Pre-test L&A-Post-test L&A	-2.33333	3.16737	-5.847	62	.000 *

E.G. Pre-test Expression-Post-test Expression	-.65079	3.05941	-1.688	62	.096
E.G. Pre-test Translation-Post-test Translation	-3.44444	3.83439	-7.130	62	.000 *
E.G. Pre-test Total-Post-test Total	-7.98413	6.32326	-10.022	62	.000 *[*]
C.G. Pre-test L&A-Post-test L&A	-.51515	3.47405	-1.205	65	.233
C.G. Pre-test Expression-Post-test Expression	-.21212	3.05093	-.565	65	.574
C.G. Pre-test Translation-Post-test Translation	-.34848	3.91247	-.724	65	.472
C.G. Pre-test Total-Post-test Total	-1.07576	5.95447	-1.468	65	.147

* The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.

In contrast, the average post-test score of the Control group is 71.8636, an increase of 1.0757. The two tailed t-test value for the variance of pre- and post-test remains at -1.468 (P = 0.147 > 0.05), which fails to demonstrate a statistically significant difference even after a semester of training. Specifically, the significant probability of two tailed t-test values higher than .005 in all aspects, failing to show an obvious increase.

4.2 Comparison of T-Test Results for Post-Test Scores

As further show in Table 6, there is a significant probability of improvement for both groups after the experiment, specifically P = .000, far less than 0.001. L&A and Translation among other things rank significantly after the test, with the probability of 0.000, less than 0.001, implying the subjects have made progress in these fields; while there is no significant difference in Expression compared with the Control group (P = .645 > .05) even if there is an increase of mean score.

Table 6. Independent Samples T-Test of Post-Test for Experimental and Control Group

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variance		T test for Equality of Means		
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
L&A	2.438	0.121	7.198	127.000	0.000 *
			7.22	126.123	0.000 *
Expression	0.394	0.531	0.462	127.000	0.645
			0.462	125.982	0.645
Translation	0.001	0.981	9.787	127.000	0.000 *
			9.772	125.422	0.000 *
Total	0.550	0.460	6.335	127.000	0.000 *
			6.314	122.610	0.000 *

* The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.

4.3 Questionnaire and Interview

63 subjects in Experimental group completed the questionnaire in the last class of January 2015, which consist of two parts, the reflection on Weekly Self-reflection Form and the feedback on the portfolio assessment. The results indicate a highly confirmative response (98.4%) and positive attitude (100.0%). 96% of subjects admitted that they began autonomously to find out the proper materials here and there, and practice on their own. 9 subjects in Experimental group were selected at random to take part in the interview, and they are all (100.0%) in favor of the employment of portfolio assessment in interpretive course, claiming to become more enthusiastic and independent in interpretive practice.

5. Conclusion

Admittedly, it is the first time to have used the portfolio assessment in interpretive teaching in China. Thus its accomplishment provides the powerful and effective complement for the assessment mode, contributing greatly to the development of interpretation teaching. What's more, interpretive teaching reform in higher education is thereby strengthened, and the application of portfolio assessment has further brought forward the methodological and pedagogical values. Practically speaking, interpretive learners benefit from the portfolio assessment, with the proof of interpretive ability improvement (especially L&A and Translation) and learner autonomy enhancement. All in all, this research has important theoretical and practical values with the extensive application prospect. But due to the limitations of curriculum, the study only lasted for one semester on the limited focus, and the conclusion may be biased. It is recommended that the whole project undergo further refinement and revision. And the author is no doubt looking forward to a prolonging study in the near future by expanding and exploring the scope in-depth.

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