ePortfolios in Translators' Training and Assessment

C. Tavares, M. Silva, A. Albuquerque

Abstract — Translator's training and assessment has used more and more tools and innovative strategies over the years. The goals and results to achieve haven't changed much, however: translation quality. In order to accomplish it, the translator and all the tasks and processes he develops appear as crucial, being pre-translation and post-translation processes equally important as the translation itself, namely as far as autonomy, reflexive and critical skills are concerned. Finally, the need and relevance of collaborative tasks and networks amongst virtual translation communities, led us to the decision of implementing ePortfolios as a tool to develop the requested skills and extend the use of Internet in translation. In this paper we describe a case-study of a pilot experiment on the using of e-portfolios as a translation training tool and discuss their role in the definition of a clear set of objectives and phases for the completion of each task, by helping students in the management of the projects deadlines, improving their knowledge on the construction and management of translation resources and deepening their awareness about the concepts related to the development of eportfolios.

Index Terms — ePortfolio development, Project-based learning, Translators' training, Virtual communities

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1 INTRODUCTION

The use of technology as a path to achieve success in education is quite normal and adopts several different formats and approaches, some of them better succeeded than others.

The ePortfolio comes forward as one of the initiatives which over the years gained acceptance and popularity in different communities. In fact, the European Institute for e-learning (EIFEL) supports ePortfolio initiatives and desires to achieve the number of one ePortfolio for each European citizen by 2010.

In this context, higher education institutions need to act proactively in order to provide suitable educative offers and opportunities in this domain. Schools are also confronted with the need to implement different activities and projects so as to motivate today's students and contribute to the acquisition of new and complementary knowledge. In this process ePortfolios appear as a "reactionary response to fundamental shifts in learning, teaching, technology, and learner needs in a climate where learning is no longer perceived as confined to formal education", as Siemens stated. [1]

In fact, a good definition eportfolio would be the one proposed by the National Learning Infrastructure Initiative and quoted by Barret & Carney, stating that it is "a collection of authentic and diverse evidence, drawn from a larger archive representing what a person or organization has learned over time on which the person or organization has reflected, and designed for presentation to one or more audiences for a particular rhetorical purpose" [2].

This definition points out some ways in which ePortfolio can be useful and lets us understand that the introduction of this technology in the learning process is mainly supported by the acquisition of parallel and transversal competencies by the student. As Siemens states, the use of an ePortfolio is important due to "the dynamics of functioning in a knowledge economy, the changing nature of learning, and the changing needs of the learner" [1].

In this framework, we decided to introduce the use of ePortfolios at School of Accounting and Administration of Oporto (ISCAP) as a structural activity in the early training of translators. This paper will thus analyse the implementation results of this new educational approach to a highly technological area, as it is now the Computer Assisted Translation teaching.

It will also demonstrate the assessment methodology implemented in order to evaluate the development of the eportfolio in this particular subject.

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2 IMPLEMENTATION CONTEXT

2.1 ePortfolios at ISCAP: first steps

This project was implemented in ISCAP during the winter semester of the 2007-2008, by suggestion of the unit that supports e/b-learning activities and other online initiatives and projects. This unit, called Online Support Project (PAOL – www.iscap.ipp.pt/paol), implemented the ePortfolios initiative as a pilot project in order to assess the results and define models and approaches to support and disseminate the use of this tool by other students and courses. These first steps considered the words of Siemens, who states that "to give an institutional approach to ePortfolios can be a difficult task as, to be effective, the concept needs to be embedded into the process of instruction and assessment".

In order to implement this project, we compared and analysed several platforms and decided to use the platform ELGG, as it is, according to EIFEL, one of the platforms that matches all the criteria needed for this kind of projects and also on account of being an open source social platform, "based around choice, flexibility and openness: a system that firmly places individuals at the centre of their activities". [3].

Moreover, this tool represented the kind of the technology required to support the adoption of ePortfolios, as it allows each student to manage:

1. a personal and academic profile;
2. a weblog;
3. discussion communities;
4. files and videos, among other possibilities.

Finally, it seemed to be a very attractive platform, which enhanced the social component of the ePortfolio allowing students to interact within their ELGG community.

In order to ease students' adaptation to the platform and prepare future work a guide was developed for both students and teachers. Three short training sessions were also carried out to present and explain the use of ELGG, and bring some light about the concepts inherent to ePortfolios working and sharing virtual environment.

2.2 Scope of the project

This experiment was carried out in the course of Electronic Tools for Translation aiming at providing the students with a professional learning environment. Therefore, they are assigned projects in which they are to explore open-ended professional situations and train their translation skills in all stages of the translation process, namely pre-translation, translation and post-translation.

In order to improve students' training in the pre-translation process, namely in the development of terminology and terminological databases, we decided to assign the construction of an ePortfolio, with the purpose of structuring the problem solving activities, developing critical thinking, as a tool to guide students' research and as a strategy to develop students' skills in obtaining rapidly and efficiently, in both source language and target language, the background knowledge (facts, terminology, language conventions) necessary to produce a translation of professional standard.

2.3 Case-study

The selected classes attended the course "Electronic Tools for Translation". The case study was carried out during the winter semester of 2007-2008 by 2nd year students of the 3-year degree in Administrative Assistance and Translation. The two classes, a day and a night class, allowed us to work with students of different ages, different sensitivity for the use of technology and different requirements in terms of deadlines and available time.

As a first step, it was necessary to make students aware that the process of translation involves the use of carefully selected resources to ensure quality translations, done in accordance with the client's needs and requests and within the established deadline. To successfully achieve these aims the use of electronic tools to assist in the process is essential. In fact, computer assisted translation, machine translation or localization tools are a common to the translation process, due to the possibilities they offer in terms of management, storage and data reuse and the benefits they bring in terms of productivity, cost and time savings and quality of the translation output for all the players in the translation industry: translators, language service providers and their clients.

In this process, one of the main tasks was the analysis, selection, retrieval and storage of terminology. The cautious development of this process, which happens mostly in the pre-translation stage, but crosses all moments of the translation work, is critical to the quality of the final product and to its homogeneity, mainly when carried out in a network, what demands a collaborative work to solve a shared task.

Thus, students were asked to develop an

ePortfolio in ELGG platform, with the following compulsory items:

1. critical description of all the pre-translation tasks developed in the collection, translation and validation of terms for the Terminological Database;

2. digital library of the translation resources used;

3. other reflections on the translation process;

4. creation of a translation community in ELGG

3 METHODOLOGY

In order to test and analyse the effectiveness of the ePortfolio, a case-study approach was chosen, for its "ability to deal with a full variety of evidence – documents, artefacts, interviews, and observations" [4]. To prevent a diffusion of the study in the pilot stage, that could compromise its expected development and assessment, we decided to involve only a small group of students (15) and teachers (2), in a total of two classes.

The development of an ePortfolio by each student was implemented as part of the continuous evaluation process totalizing 30% of the assessment. This part of the assessment focused mainly on a qualitative analysis. As Mason stated "the idea that qualitative research necessarily has inherent weaknesses is based on a misunderstanding of the logic of qualitative enquiry. It fails to see the strategic significance of context, and of the particular, in the development of our understandings and explanations of the social world" [5].

So, we adopted qualitative assessment as the use of the ePortfolio implied dealing with different contributes, that had to be assessed mainly through their quality and not through the number of files and posts added to the ePortfolio.

However, we were aware that it would be necessary to classify the level of quality of each work. Therefore a grid was developed in which the parameters were related with the specific subject, also taking in consideration the quality of the blog entries, their profile, and the reflections in the ePortfolio. (see 5.1)

4 DEVELOPMENT OF THE PROJECT

During the Winter Semester students should get acquainted with the profile of a translator, as far as competences, skills, activities, attitude, strategies and, of course, tools are concerned. Therefore, the attention was focused on web search optimising strategies, on terminology mining and management and, being a translation course, a great deal on problem-solving tasks. For that they are asked to carry out translation projects reflecting real-world practices, in which they are to solve problems and develop higher-level thinking and cooperative work.

This semester one of the new-implemented strategies was the reflection about this process in the individual ePortfolio. Not only was it seen as a fundamental means of communicating between a translator and clients, but it also seemed to be a suitable tool to store and organize information and resources in a project-based and cooperative learning environment (similar to professional).

Being the use of ePortfolios already well known amongst most educators as an "reflection-oriented" and a web-based activity, it was the first time we decided to use it as a project-based strategy or, in other words, a process-oriented experience, as part of the project-based learning approach.

This approach, which is a comprehensive instructional way to engage trainees in a sustained and cooperative learning experience, fostering the idea of community, uses small projects/activities as a starting point. These projects have two essential components:

1. A driving question/problem or case-study that serves to organize and determine various activities, which taken as a whole amount to a meaningful project.

2. Culminating product(s) or multiple representations as a series of results or consequential tasks that meaningfully addresses the driving question [6].

In our experiment the driving question – "what are the contributions of pre-translation tasks to the translation process" - anchored in a real-world case-study and used, as proposed by this methodology, multiple content areas in order to lead to:

1) opportunities for trainees to make active investigations that enable them to learn concepts, apply information, and represent their knowledge in a variety of ways;

2) collaboration among trainees, teachers, and others in the community so that knowledge can be shared and distributed among the members of the "learning community;

3) the use of cognitive tools in learning environments that support trainees in the representation of their ideas [7].

Students were thus divided into groups of five and assigned part of a translation of the Secretaria Online, the school management system, a real-world case study.

Students were expected to manage the entire process and develop the task outside the classroom. For that purpose, students were advised consult with the teacher only in more problematic cases.

4.1 ePortfolio's role in the learning process

As Virolainen we believe that "Assessments are the "Backbone" of the course. When thinking about suitable task it's important to remember that every task should support the achievement of learning goals. Tasks are not self-valuing by themselves."[8] Therefore we used the ePortfolio as a complementary way of developing several skills that can help a student to better master the translator skills.

Through the ePortfolio, students were asked to conduct a reflection process in which they had to develop critical thinking about translation, translators and the market of translation. Each student's reflection could be viewed by all his or her classmates, which also increased the sense of responsibility.

Along the process, students were also expected to build up their thematic and communicative competence and, in parallel, widen their competencies and master computer-assisted translation and terminology tools, as well as standard office-automation software.

The sense of responsibility could also be increased by the fact that each student's eportfolio could work as a window to the world, not only revealing their translations, reflections and other works to their classmates, but also by showing it to a wider audience, such as future employees. Students were aware of this as they knew they could "make modifications on a regular basis to suit their needs and the expectations and requirements of different audiences. For example a tutor and a prospective employer/interviewer will have different expectations of the portfolio" [9].

The fact that students could run a weblog in ELGG was also an excellent way of promoting problem solving platforms, knowledge transference and collaborative work in a constructive learning atmosphere.

Moreover this resource was also important as a support for storing data that would otherwise be forgotten in the near future. As Flaningan and Amirian stated "It served not only as an archive for precious material that may be otherwise lost over the years but is

also served as an organizing principle" [10], and that's a quality that all translators should preserve, organization.

5 ASSESSMENT

During this process of project-based learning, students were expected to use all previously acquired competencies, improve their knowledge research and master the use of the platform ELGG and develop organization and archive skills, through oriented reflective work.

The development of a pre-translation process in a cooperative and collaborative working environment, where the ePortfolio plays a significant part, in the context of a translation class, arose as a multifaceted task, with several purposes and applications, ranging from the development of the basic skills required of a professional translator to the electronic handling and management of document and translation systems and the use of the Internet as an information, management and storage source.

5.1 Assessment criteria and parameters

To assess students' work in the ePortfolio, a grid was developed to evaluate the students' profile, reflections and blog posts.

The criteria used are in Tables 1 to 3.

TABLE 1
GRID OF ASSESSMENT

Profiles	
	Indicators
A – more than enough Information	Much general data
	Much personal data
	Reveals reflection about the inserted data
	Indicators
B - Enough information	Enough general data
	Enough personal data
	Reveals some reflection about the inserted data
	Indicators
C - Not enough information	Not enough general data
	Not enough personal data
	Reveals almost no reflection about the inserted data
	Indicators
D - Almost no information	Almost no data
	Reveals no reflection about the inserted data

TABLE 2
GRID OF ASSESSMENT (PART 2)

Blog entries	
	Indicators
A - Excellent contribute. Shows relevance in the blog entry.	Directly related to the course contents
	Reveals reflection over writing
	Contributes to collective knowledge
	Indicators
B - Good contribute. Shows involvement in the blog with different issues	Not directly related to the course contents
	Revels reflection over writing
	Contributes to collective knowledge
	Indicators
C - Attempt of involvement in the blog with low interest	Not directly related to the course contents
	Revels no reflection over writing
	Doesn't contribute to collective knowledge
	Indicators
D – Irrelevant	Not directly related to the course contents
	Reveals no reflection over what was inserted in the blog
Digital library	
	Indicators
A - Excellent contribute. Reveals understanding of and research on the proposed task	Different sources of reference
	Classification of the resources
	Excellent graphical presentation
	Excellent writing
	Indicators
B - Good contribute. Reveals understanding.	Different sources of reference
	Classification of the resources
	Good graphical presentation
	Good writing
	Indicators
C - Attempt of accomplishing the task, without much commitment.	Similar sources of reference
	Inexistence of resources classification
	Medium graphical presentation
	Good writing
	Indicators
D - Lack of research, with no relevant contribution to the task.	Similar sources of reference
	Inexistence of resources classification
	Weak graphical presentation
	Poor writing

TABLE 3
GRID OF ASSESSMENT (PART 3)

Reflection Files	
	Indicators
A - Excellent contribute. Reveals understanding of and research on the proposed task	It reveals effective research on the subject
	Reveals critical thinking
	Excellent writing
	Indicators
B - Good contribute. Reveals understanding.	It reveals some research on the subject
	Reveals some critical thinking
	Good writing
	Indicators
C - Attempt of accomplishing the task, without much commitment	It reveals some research on the subject
	No critical thinking
	Poor writing
	Indicators
D - Lack of research, with no relevant contribution to the task.	It reveals no research on the subject
	No critical thinking
	Poor writing

6 CONCLUSION

The introduction of a new assessment tool, along with a new pedagogical approach, has to be supported by objectives which are clear to students, teachers and the school. Indeed, the ePortfolio tasks were designed to help students in the definition of a clear set of objectives and phases for the completion of each task, by helping them in the management of the projects deadlines, improving their knowledge as far as the translation process is concerned and, finally, deepening their awareness about the concepts related to the use of ePortfolios.

With this project we were able to understand that the use of ePortfolios, if well conducted, can really motivate students to engage themselves in a more active learning.

Although they were reluctant at the beginning, most of them enjoyed the experience and continued developing their ePortfolio.

We also realised that the night students (older) were much more committed to the tasks that were proposed, than the daily students (younger).

Students were also trained and able to complete one of the most important pre-translation tasks: research, collect and manage terminology and diverse translation resources. They also acquired a working knowledge of and sufficient practical skills in computerized document handling, the use of information networks, translation tools and technologies with the use of the ePortfolio.

The development of these projects, which engages students in group work in a cooperative and virtual environment (ELGG), helped them to combine the acquired translation-related knowledge and skills and refine them further through guided translation assignments. It also enabled trainee translators to start developing into translation professionals who are capable of producing functionally adequate and commercially acceptable target texts as part of a network.

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