

## The Reflective Learning Journal in the Classroom

**Vivian Lee**

*Hankuk University of Foreign Studies*

**Eiko Gyogi**

*Akita International University / SOAS, University of London*

### Reference Data:

Lee, V., & Gyogi, E. (2016). The reflective learning journal in the classroom. In P. Clements, A. Krause, & H. Brown (Eds.), *Focus on the learner*. Tokyo: JALT.

In this paper, we highlight the role of the reflective learning journal in 2 different classrooms: a translation classroom in Seoul and a Japanese-language classroom in London. In both classrooms, the learning journal was assigned to students for the duration of 5 classes. Excerpts from 5 students' journals from both classrooms are presented and discussed with reference to Moon's (1999, 2004) map of the reflection process to offer student perspectives and identify how the learning journal helped in the areas of interests identified, doubts encountered, and strategies explored for obstacles. The results from both classrooms show that reflective learning journals enabled a greater focus on the learner by both the teacher and the learner. By reflecting on their own work, learners can discover more about their selves during the process of learning. For the teacher, this reflection can provide insight to the learners' process of learning.

本論では、ソウルの翻訳クラスとロンドンの日本語クラスという2つの異なるクラスの計5回にわたる授業から得たデータをもとに、内省的ラーニング・ジャーナルの役割について検討する。具体的には、Moon (1999, 2004) の内省プロセスを参考に、各クラス5名の学習者の内省的ラーニング・ジャーナルがいかにより学生の意見を引き出し、学生の興味関心の向上や疑問、問題解決などに役立つのかを分析した。この結果、両クラスとも内省的ラーニング・ジャーナルを通して学習者に焦点を当てることができ、学習者・教師双方有益であったことがわかった。学習者は自らの学習を振り返ることで、自己についてより知ることができ、教師側もまた、教室内だけでは捉えきれない学習者の学習プロセスについて知ることができた。

In this paper, we highlight the role of the reflective learning journal in two different classrooms: a translation classroom in Seoul and a Japanese language classroom in London. There have been studies that showed the advantages of using the learning journal (e.g., Lee, 2014; Li, 1998). This study was aimed at finding additional ways the learning journal can be used and applied in and across different contexts. Included are excerpts from five randomly selected students' journals from each classroom using Moon's (1999, 2004) map of the reflection process as a framework. The results show that reflective learning journals enabled a greater focus on the learner for both the teachers and the learners. By reflecting on their own work, learners can discover more about their selves during the process of learning; for the teacher, this reflection can provide insight into the learner's process of learning.

### Background

A learning journal—otherwise called a learner diary, learning diary, or logs—is “an accumulation of material that is mainly based on the writer's processes of reflection” (Moon, 1999, p. 4). The reflective learning journal has been used in various practice areas, work-based areas, or both, including in professional education such as nursing and teacher training (Shih, 2011). It has also been used by various scholars and practitioners in the field of translation studies (Adab, 2000; Fox, 2000; Lee, 2014; Martínez Melis & Hurtado Albir, 2001) and language pedagogy (Orem, 2001; Pearson-Evans, 2006; Tuan, 2010). For example, Pearson-Evans's (2006) study used the diaries kept by six Irish university students to observe cross-cultural adjustment and learning during their year abroad in Japan. As McKay (2009) wrote, the learning journal is an easily collected form of data that can give valuable insight into students' perspectives.

According to Li (1998), the journal can promote students' critical and reflective thinking. Li also found that the reflective learning journal can draw students' attention to the process of translation. Lee (2014) conducted a study of postgraduate students of trans-

lation and interpreting studies in South Korea and found that the journal enabled them to analyse and review their own work and performance, recognize change and development, and set future goals. Although many studies report that the learning journal is a useful tool in the classroom, some studies have also pointed out its limitations, including concerns over honesty on the part of students (Creme, 2005) and the issue of variability in the depth of journals (Fry, 1988).

Moon (1999, 2004) also argued for the role of learning journals in promoting students' reflective thinking. Moon (1999) further examined how such a reflection occurs by creating a map of reflective process. According to Moon's map (1999, p. 35), the reflection process includes the following stages:

1. The description of event or issues focuses the considerations;
2. Additional ideas are fed in;
3. Reflective thinking occurs;
4. Other processing may occur (such as testing of new ideas); and
5. A product results.

At stage 5, students feel that they have learned something or identified an area for further reflection.

Taking into account these advantages and pitfalls, this study was aimed at giving additional evidence of how the learning journal can be used and applied in and across different contexts, especially focusing on its advantages.

### Research Questions

The purpose of this paper is to address the following research question:

What role did the learning journal play in students' learning process in two different classrooms in Seoul, South Korea and London, UK?

The purpose of this study was to examine the areas in which the learning journal can be useful through the analysis of data from two different classrooms in Seoul, South Korea, and London, United Kingdom. The research question was intentionally open-ended to allow the researchers to openly examine and assess the role of the learning journal in the classroom.

### Methodology

#### Participants

Participants were undergraduate students at Hankuk University of Foreign Studies in Seoul, South Korea, and SOAS, University of London, United Kingdom. Both universities are renowned for foreign language learning. Table 1 shows the details of these classes.

Table 1. The Classrooms in Seoul and London

Detail	Class in Seoul	Class in London
Number of students	10	14
Participants and setting	Undergraduates at Hankuk University of Foreign Studies in Seoul, South Korea	Undergraduate students at SOAS, University of London, United Kingdom
Class description	Extra translation class on a voluntary basis	
Students' background	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All share Korean as their first language</li> <li>• All have an English level of intermediate and above, majoring in English interpreting and translation</li> <li>• All have had prior experience of taking a translation class for their course</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All share English as either their first language or working language</li> <li>• 9 out of 14 students' first language is English</li> <li>• The remaining 5 students' strongest language is one other than English, such as Portuguese, Polish, German, or Chinese</li> <li>• All have a Japanese level of intermediate, majoring in Japanese</li> <li>• All know or have had experience of learning languages other than English and Japanese</li> </ul>
Sex	1 male and 9 female students	3 male and 11 female students
Age	Between 19 and 24, except for 1 student who was 28	Between 19 and 20, except 3 mature students who were aged 22 to 26

### Context

In both classrooms, an extra translation class consisting of a series of five classes was implemented. The participants were recruited on a voluntarily basis. The five translation classes in Seoul involved the translation of various news articles on topics in the business, culture, society, and education fields from Korean to English. For each class, a translation brief was given and students had a pretranslation and posttranslation discussion that enabled them to analyse the translation brief, considering factors such as the intended source text message, target reader groups, and whether their translation communicated the source text message or not.

The five Japanese language classes in London involved the translation of various authentic texts, such as blogs, newspaper articles, and TV commercials, in both directions: from English to Japanese and Japanese to English. For each class, similar to the class in Seoul, a translation brief was given and the students had a pretranslation and posttranslation discussion. During the translation, the teacher instructed the students to think about the target reader and the purpose and mode (the channel of communication) they were translating for.

### Procedure

In both classrooms, the learning journal was assigned to the students. The students in Seoul were given the following prompts for their learning journal, which they could write in English, Korean, or both:

1. How was today's class? What did I learn?
2. What did I find most interesting?
3. What did I find most challenging?
4. How was my translation performance today?
5. What points did I focus on in class today? For what reasons?

They were also encouraged to include any other points that came to mind and were asked to think of the learning journal as their *study diary*. With regard to length, in order to guarantee students would write entries of sufficient length, they were given minimum word guidelines of 300 words when writing in English or 15 lines in Korean in a 12-point

font. All the participants submitted their learning journals, writing at least 300 English words or 15 Korean lines or more. The prompts were given to the students in a learning journal template, which they received after the first class and added their entries to after each class thereafter. The prompts had been used in the researchers' previous translation classes and were provided as suggestions to help students think about what to write.

The students in London were instructed to write about their learning from the class in their learning journal. The students were given explanations about what a learning journal was and provided with possible topics to be included in the learning journal at the beginning of the project. However, there were no specific prompts about things to write about in order not to control the students' responses. Like the students in Seoul, the students in London could also choose the language(s) of the learning journal: English or Japanese or both. There was no requirement with respect to length. All 14 students submitted learning journals; the average length of each entry was about 319 words (half an A4 page).

### Data Analysis

Five students' journals from each class were randomly selected for analysis. The data were openly coded by the both authors sentence by sentence and separated into different categories. These categories were integrated or subcategorised as necessary. After that, in order to see how each student's reflection developed and changed throughout the classes, the data were mapped according to Moon's (1999, 2004) map of reflection process.

### Findings/Discussion

#### Overall Results

Despite the difference in contexts, the learning journals analysed from both classrooms largely corresponded with Moon's (2004) map of the reflection process, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Results of Coding

Map	Code name	No. of instances
(1) The description of event or issues focuses the considerations	Things I learnt	22
	Identifying difficulty/weakness	12
(2) Additional ideas are fed in	Making new observations	16
(3) Reflective thinking occurs	Reflecting and contemplating of	
	Own translation	31
	ST/TT words and other linguistic features	23
	Target reader	20
	ST/TT context	18
	ST message/intention	14
	Translation products	10
	Translation/language use in general	8
	Exploring ways to	
	Overcome obstacles	12
	Improvement	7
Reinterpreting from a different view	2	
(4) Other processing may occur	N/A	
(5) A product results	Making a hypothesis	6
	Change in translation	4

Note. The map of reflection process used was from Moon (2009, 2004).

As shown in Table 2, at the description stage the students stated what they learnt in each class and identified difficulties and weakness. Then for additional ideas, some students mentioned new observations that they had not noticed before the class. For reflective thinking, students reflected on and contemplated various issues on translation, including the target reader, their own translations, source and target context, words and other linguistic features, source text message and intention of translation prod-

ucts, translation, and language use. They also explored ways to overcome obstacles and improve their translation and tried to reinterpret a phenomenon or text from a different point of view. Their reflection and contemplation sometimes led to a change in translation or formulation of a hypothesis on a cultural event. The following sections present one student from each class to show this process in detail.

#### Case 1: Seoul Student 4

An example of Seoul student 4 shows how the learning journal helped both the learner and the teacher to observe the learner's progress, especially in relation to the importance of translation briefs and the consideration of the target reader. In the first week, student 4 wrote about her experience of the class. She mentioned that it was the first time for her to hear about translation briefs, and she mentioned how the brief enabled or required her to think about the target audience.

Description of an event: Week 1—I really enjoyed the class because the translation classes I took so far were somewhat unhelpful. I did not even know what translation briefs were until now and the fact that I had to think about the specific audience that I was translating for. It was very interesting when we did the group discussion. There were parts that I totally missed but others pointed out.

The student also mentioned subjective aspects of her observations—through the group pre- and postdiscussions, she felt that she had certain areas that might need improvement.

And after taking the class, I felt that I have significantly less [sic] ideas and opinions compared to other people. I realized that I do not put enough care and thought when I translate. I also realized that my thoughts do not come out effectively as words; I think taking this class will really help me a lot.

An excerpt from the student's Week 2 entry shows how additional ideas were developed:

Additional ideas: Week 2—I realized today that I really need to work on my Korean as well as English. I think I need to read various kinds of articles with various purposes. When I was talking to my group, I realized that I did not read the article carefully, and did not even think about mentioning the lunar calendar system or why Shin thought of traveling with his parents. Last week, I had thought that I was pretty good at translating, but today's class proved me wrong. I am glad that I am participating in this research since it is giving me insight on my abilities.

Lee & Gyogi: *The Reflective Learning Journal in the Classroom*

Through the translation classes, the student formed additional ideas during the process of her learning. Through her participating with her peers, she learned more about herself and her weaknesses and realised what she needed to do more in order to be a better translator. Further, the class enabled her to discover things she was not previously aware of. One example was information she had previously taken for granted such as cultural-specific background information easily understood by readers of the source text language but that would require more explanation for the target language reader.

In Week 3, we can see reflective thinking occurring:

Reflective thinking: Week 3—I think that my word choices were good for some expressions like using “cramped” for *jobeun*, and “unsafe” for *bangbeomedo chui-yakhan*. But overall, I do not think I translated it that well. I was not aware of the fact that rooftop houses and semi-underground houses were specific to Korea and that foreigners may not have an idea about these kinds of houses. And for the word *nangman*, I thought using “romantic” for the word was slightly awkward because it is usually used in the topic of love. I thought of the word “charming” as a replacement, but I am not sure if it gets the meaning across. And I also misinterpreted the act of TV shows. I thought they intended to advertise and romanticize the rooftop houses, but actually it was unintended.

This excerpt shows the student’s reflective thinking about her own translation. She evaluated her translation, and it appears the translation class in Week 3 brought forth some new information—the culture-specific concepts contained in the source text that she had not previously been aware of. Through the translation task, she was able to consider her choice of language in choosing the most appropriate words for translation from the source into target language while thinking of the nuances of words.

Product: Week 3—I was able to understand more about the translation briefs than I did in the previous classes. I tried to use rather informal and friendly words (colloquial form!) for both briefs because they were meant for people from many different countries.

In Week 3, a “product” can be observed: The student appears to have learnt something and progress is evident. She developed her understanding of the translation briefs assigned for the translation task and of their purpose: She was making an effort in her language selection to choose words for the target readers.

Product: Week 4—I think that the more I translate, the more difficult it gets. I used to think of translation as something that was different from writing. As of now, I think that it is something that is harder than just writing since I have to consider

the audience and what kind of information and message they need, along with the author’s intention.

In Week 4, she showed further signs of progress and development. She shared her new thinking of translation, and it appeared the five classes encouraged her to gain this new perspective.

### Case 2: London Student 1

The example of London student 1 shows how the learning journal became a pedagogical tool to understand her development and the expansion of her ideas about translation over the five classes. The student wrote about the teacher’s instruction (i.e., to think about purpose, etc.) as well as her belief about translation in the first class.

Description of an event: Week 1—In translating, I thought the table with what to consider when doing a translation was quite informative (the one with purpose, target audience, and mode). However, for me, I most strongly feel that there is an inherent struggle to balance naturalness of the translation with loyalty to the original.

This class was her first time to engage in translation with a real-world task in the classroom context. In the first class, partly because the class emphasised the importance of the multiple functions that the text plays (rather than only syntactical structure and lexical items), she noticed the importance of pragmatic factors at stake for the first time.

Additional ideas: Week 1—Translation isn’t really about adhering to original sentence structure or vocabulary, but being able to write a pragmatic equivalent of the original. That’s something I have never really realized before, and it changes the way I think about translation now.

As she noted, this new idea served to broaden and change her definition of what is meant by translation. In Week 3 when she translated a manga, she noticed another new dimension at stake in translation: creativity.

Additional ideas: Week 3—This was a really interesting class because I think I realized how important creativity can be in translation, which is something I never really realized before.

As shown below, she contemplated translation of a comic manga with a man trapped by a snake based on what she had noticed so far.

Reflective thinking: Week 3—As for the translation we did in class of one guy being trapped by a snake, although Alex’s translation was the most different from the

Lee & Gyogi: *The Reflective Learning Journal in the Classroom*

original meaning, the fact that everyone laughed was probably an indication that it might have been the best translation. After all, isn't the original point of a manga to be humorous and to entertain people? So the priority isn't really to be syntactically and semantically accurate . . . And since Alex's translation was really funny, I think it exemplified how successful translations can be quite loose interpretations of the source material.

In this excerpt, considering the importance of pragmatic and creative functions at stake in translation, she assessed her peers' translation not only from the perspectives of faithfulness or naturalness, but also from pragmatic and creative points of view. This led her to redefine and reconceptualise her idea of translation.

Week 3: Product—It's natural that translating into another language would lose some of its original meaning and form, but at the same time, maybe the process shouldn't just be thought of as translation. Instead, it should be a process of looking at the original and then rewriting it in a way that suits the target language.

Although a "product" can be observed from the learning journal of Week 3, she entered into a reflective process again, contemplating on the liberty that the translator can exercise in translation. In that week, she translated a TV commercial for localization purposes.

Week 5: Reflective thinking—I enjoyed this translation the most because I felt like I could make the freest translation so far as long as I adhered to the tone of the original . . . In comparison, when translating written pieces e.g. interviews, it is less easy for me to do a free translation as I wouldn't want to take too many liberties with portraying what the person said.

Although she enjoyed the rewriting process, she contemplated that the liberties she can exercise depend on the context of the text. This brief example shows how a student perceived and interpreted what she had learned in the class and how she developed and expanded her own idea of translation through the classes.

## Conclusion

As in previous studies (e.g., Li, 1998; Lee, 2014), the analysis from each class shows the potential usefulness of the learning journal in the classroom. The differences in the two classrooms further demonstrate the effectiveness of the learning journal across class types to enable focus on the learner and insight into the learner's process of learning. Specifically for learners, the learning journal can offer opportunities to reflect on their

own learning, be aware of challenges, and explore ways to overcome such challenges, as shown in the case of the student in the Seoul classroom. It can also provide a chance to reflect upon, modify, and redefine the student's previous beliefs and assumptions, as shown in the London student's case.

The reflection elicited through the learning journal has pedagogical implications for a broader educational trend. Phipps and Gonzalez (2004) argued that recent practical orientations in higher institutions, with strong concern for cost-effectiveness, have the risk of transforming languages into commodities. In particular, beginner and intermediate classrooms tend to be focused on the practicing of forms and memorization (Kern, 2002). The learning journal can be used as a pedagogical tool to promote reflection among students. The learning journal has its limitations, such as honesty on the part of the learner and variability in the depth of journals. However, the results of this study suggest that the learning journal can be a helpful tool to gain insight into students' perspectives, which otherwise may not be known to the teacher. The learning journal can help the teacher keep track of the student's understanding, development, and challenges, thereby enabling the teacher to tailor feedback to the needs of each student.

Despite its small scale, this study provides additional evidence that learning journals can be a helpful pedagogical tool in and across various types of classrooms. Further studies could be carried out to evaluate how the learning journal can be used in different contexts and investigate its advantages and pitfalls.

## Bio Data

**Vivian Lee** is an assistant professor at Hankuk University of Foreign Studies and a PhD candidate at SOAS, University of London. She has taught adult EFL learners, undergraduate and postgraduate courses in ESP and Korean, and English interpreting and translation in South Korea. <Vivian\_Lee@soas.ac.uk>

**Eiko Gyogi** is a lecturer at Akita International University where she teaches undergraduate Japanese courses. She is a PhD candidate at SOAS, University of London. She previously taught undergraduate Japanese courses at SOAS, University of London from 2010 to 2014 as a teaching fellow and graduate teaching assistant. <egyogi@aiu.ac.jp>

## References

- Adab, B. (2000). Evaluating translation competence. In C. Schäffner & B. Adab (Eds.), *Developing translation competence* (pp. 215-228). Philadelphia, PA: John Benjamins.
- Crete, P. (2005). Should student learning journals be assessed? *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 30, 287-296. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02602930500063850>
- Fox, O. (2000). The use of translation diaries in a process-oriented translation teaching methodology. In C. Schäffner & B. Adab (Eds.), *Developing translation competence* (pp. 115-130). Philadelphia, PA: John Benjamins.
- Fry, J. (1988). Diary studies in classroom SLA research problems and prospects. *JALT Journal*, 9, 158-167.
- Kern, R. (2002). Reconciling the language-literature split through literacy. *ADFL Bulletin*, 33(3), 20-24.
- Lee, V. (2014). A model for using the reflective learning journal in the postgraduate translation practice classroom. *Perspectives: Studies in Translatology*, 23, 489-505. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0907676X.2014.948884>
- Li, D. (1998). Reflective journals in translation teaching. *Perspectives*, 6, 225-234. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0907676X.1998.9961338>
- Martínez Melis, N., & Hurtado Albir, A. (2001). Assessment in translation studies: Research needs. *Meta: Journal des Traducteurs*, 46, 272-287. <http://dx.doi.org/10.7202/003624ar>
- McKay, S. L. (2009). Introspective techniques. In J. Heigham & R. A. Croker (Eds.), *Qualitative research in applied linguistics: A practical introduction* (pp. 220-241). Hampshire, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Moon, J. A. (1999). *Learning journals: A handbook for academics, students and professional development*. London, UK: RoutledgeFalmer.
- Moon, J. A. (2004). *A handbook of reflective and experiential learning: Theory and practice*. London, UK: RoutledgeFalmer.
- Orem, R. A. (2001). Journal writing in adult ESL: Improving practice through reflective writing. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, 90, 69-78. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/ace.22>
- Pearson-Evans, A. (2006). Recording the journey: Diaries of Irish students in Japan. In M. Byram & A. Feng (Eds.), *Living and studying abroad: Research and practice research and practice* (pp. 38-63). Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters.
- Phipps, A., & Gonzalez, M. (2004). *Modern languages: Learning and teaching in an intercultural field*. London, UK: Sage.
- Shih, C. Y. (2011). Learning from writing reflective learning journals in a theory-based translation module: Students' perspectives. *The Interpreter and Translator Trainer*, 5, 309-24. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13556509.2011.10798823>
- Tuan, L. T. (2010). Enhancing EFL learners' writing skill via journal writing. *English Language Teaching*, 3(3), 81-88.