A wiki-based process-oriented approach to writing pedagogy in foreign language learning

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Abstract

Wiki is an open source content-oriented platform which can be used in foreign language learning to promote collaborative authoring by enabling learners to create and edit documents online. Its developmental writing mode not only exposes learners to the social dynamics of collaborative writing but also supports the dynamic and recursive process approach to writing. Drafting, revising and editing, all steps of process writing, are easily afforded by the wiki facilities. Due to wiki's versioning capability, learners can interact with the web page and its content in terms of both linguistic and rhetoric features to produce a writing piece of high quality in the foreign language. Wiki assists learners and minimizes their difficulties in tackling writing, increasing at the same time their motivation and involvement. In this regard, a wiki can serve as a powerful mediator towards fostering foreign language learners' writing skills by facilitating the process-oriented approach to writing pedagogy.

Keywords: wiki, collaboration, writing skills, process writing, open-editing

Introduction

Wiki is a web 2.0 tool which provides an online space for asynchronous online collaboration by engaging several users to edit, create, view and modify web pages easily using any web browser (Godwin-Jones, 2003; Lund, 2008). Due to its 'open editing functionality' (Leuf & Cunningham, 2001), wiki offers foreign language (FL) teachers new opportunities to develop their learners' writing skills such as grammatical accuracy, appropriate use of grammatical forms in different contexts, audience awareness as well as multiple drafting and revising through peer interaction and collaboration (Lund, 2008).

In particular, developing FL learners' writing skills is an especially complicated and demanding process which requires the acquisition of a range of linguistic abilities, including grammatical accuracy, lexical knowledge, syntactic expression and planning strategies (organization, style and rhetoric) as well as meaningful contexts and authentic purposes for writing (Aydin & Yildiz, 2014; Hyland, 2003). Research shows that wiki encourages collaborative writing in FL learning by creating a sense of community among learners-writers which requires reflective thinking, while the exchange of feedback among learners in a group project allows them to notice linguistic and organizational problems in their writing towards achieving error correction and grammatical accuracy (Storch, 2005; Swain and Lapkin, 1998).

In light of the above, the purpose of this paper is to discuss the potential of wiki to effectively support the process writing as well as its pedagogical advantages to the benefit of FL learners in the new Web 2.0 era. Given that writing is a much neglected skill (White and Arndt, 1991), mostly limited to homework assignments and to tasks that involve marking (Kontogeorgi, 2014) and often viewed as the most difficult skill to master in FL learning (Nunan, 1999), wiki proves to be a valuable pedagogical editing tool to help foster FL learners' writing skills in a collaborative and motivating way.

A wiki-based approach to writing pedagogy in FL learning

Pedagogical advantages

Wiki provides FL learners with an online space for asynchronous writing through networked computers (Hyland, 2003). The major advantage of asynchronous writing is that a text can be composed and edited at a more leisurely pace activating less proficient learners for greater participation (Hyland, 2003). Due to its innate features of unlimited editing and updating, the use of wiki in developing FL learners' writing skills has a wide range of possibilities to cater for all learning styles (Gardner, 1983). Learners can add life to their texts by inserting images, music, text, audio files, videos and links as web designers. This functionality increases motivation as it frees learners from error-making anxiety and gives them a realistic purpose to write in the target language (Slaouti & Bouboureka, 2005).

Specifically, wiki facilitates the online editing process enabling learners to participate in collaborative work (Raitman et al., 2005). It triggers collaborative writing providing open-editing, allowing non-liner text structure, encouraging multiple modalities and providing a simple peer-editing environment (Keith, 2006; Lamb & Johnson, 2007). The collaborative wiki-based context stimulates learners to negotiate, collaborate with their peers as well as to learn from each other practising FL structures and lexis in a real-life way (Keith, 2006).

Several researches have explored the use of wiki as a user-friendly learning tool and have indicated its positive contribution to FL learners' writing performance (Ahmadi & Marandi, 2014; Kessler, 2009; Lee, 2010). Particularly, it provides the opportunity to collaborate on a task, view other classmates' work and give feedback on it (Sol, 2011). Wikis are ideal for project-based learning engaging learners in designing, planning and carrying out a project producing a publicly-exhibited output (Patton, 2012). They can also serve as writing portfolios to be viewed not only by the teacher or the classmates but by the whole world. Publishing encourages learners' responsibility making them more creative and thoughtful as long as they have a real audience (Godwin-Jones, 2003). Previous studies have revealed positive results regarding writing production and confidence, writing strategies and overall writing abilities using the self-paced and interactional affordances of technology-mediated approaches (Kessler, 2009; Lee, 2010). Through peer discourse, learners come into contact with new perspectives collaboratively creating or 'authoring' the materials from which they learn and through which they share, discuss and negotiate perspectives on FL and culture (Kohn & Warth, 2011). This emphasizes FL as a means for social and interpersonal communication; to negotiate and co-construct meaning; to build relationships and express emotions or empathy – always in exchange with 'the other' (Kohn & Warth, 2011).

In the same vein, Fountain (2005) argues that the use of wiki as a writing tool maximizes the advantages of reflection, reviewing, publication and observing cumulative written results as they unfold. All in all, motivation reaches its highest peak. FL learners gain confidence enjoying 'pride of authorship' (ibid.), while publishing their work and sharing it even with native people speaking the target language.

Writing as a process

Wiki emphasizes the process-oriented writing (Lamb, 2004) as learners can change both their own and their peers' work using the open-editing functionality. In process writing, there is a shift from the end product to the actual process of writing focusing on fluency which is of primary importance in FL communication (Hedge, 2005; White & Arndt, 1991). The writing process is seen as a cyclical, recursive process, divided into stages (drafting, revising, and editing) that learners need to go through again and again to reach their final

product. Brainstorming plays a major role towards promoting productivity and creativity (White & Arndt, 1991) helping FL learners identify the purpose and audience as well as develop the topic and organize ideas in their writing task (Kontogeorgi, 2014).

As previous studies have indicated (Chin et al., 2015; Kontogeorgi, 2014; Lee, 2010), wiki proves to be a perfect tool for process writing because of the way it is designed and functions. There is a toolbar which allows FL learners to format the text, create a link, insert an image, a file, a widget or a table, as well as preview, cancel or save their work on the wiki page to edit it at a later stage. In this way, learners are initiated to the idea of process writing through constant editing, drafting and redrafting. Wiki also offers learners the chance to save their writing projects and re-edit them without time and place constraints. Both the teacher and learners can monitor the progress of the whole writing process through the history tab which includes information such as the author, the time and date of the change also offering the possibility to compare revisions and provide feedback. Revising is part of the writing process which entails assessing what has already been written and is an important source of FL learning (Hedge, 2005).

Editing facilities also aid FL learners while redrafting as they have the opportunity to receive feedback having the experience still 'fresh in the mind' (Hedge, 2005). Furthermore, by inviting other learners to their wikis, learners can effortlessly receive feedback from their peers. The teacher can encourage peer feedback as part of process writing, having learners spot and correct each other's errors on the wiki page. By providing learners with the opportunity to correct and provide feedback on their classmates' FL texts, they are learning by doing and as Hedge (2005) points out, 'accuracy work which is comparatively spontaneous [is] certainly more meaningful and motivating'.

As far as linguistic features are concerned, wiki can foster the formal FL use as it is characterized by a more formal, depersonalized form of exchange (Warschauer, 2010). Its topic-centric layout allows the learners-authors to present much more formal pieces of writing in the FL without space limitations while the use of hyperlinks and hypertexts, enables them to join pages, redirect them and 'weave' in this way their own piece of writing. All in all, both the quality and quantity of the writing load are improved due to the open editing function of wiki which facilitates the co-creation of written work throughout authentic real-life topics which enhance learners' motivation while addressing at a wider authentic readership or audience (Parker & Chao, 2007). This bolsters their extrinsic motivation establishing a real-life purpose to use the FL and refine their written product.

Conclusion

Wiki empowers learners with a sense of ownership and authority promoting their responsibility toward FL learning in a relaxed collaborative environment (Bold, 2006; Raitman, Augar, & Zhou, 2005). In fact, the most convincing argument for using wiki in the FL classroom is the impressive effect that this state-of-the-art web 2.0 tool has on 21st century learners offering them the chance to type and publish their writing projects. In this regard, it functions as a partner assisting FL learners to develop a skilled writing process for generating, formatting and managing documents which evolves to a writing process that focuses on developing and refining content. It also opens the way for collaborative writing activities and offers a supportive learning environment stimulating conversation among learners and affecting positively their attitude towards both the process and product of writing.

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