

# **Transformation of Our Understanding and Impactful Influences**

**B. MEDIC, M.A., M.SC. D.SC.**

The University of Manchester, The United Kingdom

[medic.tesol@gmail.com](mailto:medic.tesol@gmail.com)

ORCID ID: 0000-0002-1937-0947

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Web 2.0 technologies have transformed the landscape of personal and organisational communication and collaboration (Chugh and Ruhi, 2018). Both staff and learners have been increasingly using social media applications in daily life (Manca, 2020). The author is not an exception. Certainly, Web 2.0 is not constrained to networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter, although this is the most widely adopted social media group. There are eight more domains of social media, including social knowledge (wikis), social bookmarking (Reddit) and social publishing and news (blogs) (Chaffey and Smith, 2017). Among them, wikis, with the most popular wiki-based website – Wikipedia, provide astounding opportunities for developing collective knowledge, frequently used by millions netizens as an accessible information source. I can only agree with research, showing that the vast majority of students use wikis, because they are convenient, useful, informative, and overall, bringing positive experiences (Lim, 2009).

It comes as no surprise that commercial social media has been increasingly adopted in learning settings even though it has not been specifically established for education (Manca, 2020). While highly popular Web 2.0 applications such as Facebook have been extensively studied for their educational benefits (Manca, 2020), other valuable platforms such as wikis are somewhat in the periphery. A personal interest in wikis, as well as an exploring personality type, drives my continuous interest to find missing pieces in the educational puzzle.

As a professional, one of the most important questions in foreign language education is how to keep students involved and engaged. In his Theory of Student Engagement, Astin (1984) suggests that the best learning environment is the one that makes it possible to increase learners' engagement. Bridging formal in-class educational will less formal out-of-class experiences is seen as one of the promising strategies to offer coherent meaning-making, engagement, community-building and interactions (Lai, 2014; Chartrand, 2012). Therefore, it is also my professional obligation to explore new technologies and how they can fit inside and outside the foreign language classroom.

## **2. A REVIEW OF AVAILABLE SOURCES**

Since the mid 2000s, the Internet has been evolving from a read-only source of information to the read-write web, or Web 2.0. Whereas in past content was mostly developed by professionals, today Web 2.0 platforms have turned into collaborative venues for participation (Faizi, 2017). These changes resulted in exponential growth of the Internet, and have deeply reflected what happens in and outside the foreign language classroom.

Some theorists such as Chaffey and Smith (2017) or Faizi (2017) have come up with classifications of Web 2.0 technologies. For example, Faizi (2017) suggests that there are three broad groups: social networking sites (Facebook, Twitter), content sharing and organising platforms (YouTube, Dropbox, Slideshare) and content production and editing websites (forums, wikis, Google Docs). However, as Faizi (2017) admits, the characteristics and functions of these tools often overlap, so one application can often fall into multiple categories.

What matters for educators is that all these Web 2.0 applications present pedagogical opportunities for collaboration, co-creation and open publishing (Waycott, et al., 2010). They are inexpensive or free, and do not require extensive publishing or design skills. Broadly speaking, anyone with Internet access can easily use them to create content and communicate with others (Faizi, 2017).

Web 2.0 technologies offer engaging means for blending in-class with out-of-class interactions. As Colley, Hodgkinson, and Malcolm (2003) state, all learning features formal and informal aspects that complement each other. That said, it is rather unfortunate that most scholarship focuses on formal in-class foreign language learning (Lai, 2014). The present paper will address this gap by discussing how Web 2.0 platforms like wikis can facilitate both formal and informal foreign language learning, providing some hands-on insights for practitioners.

## **2.1. Web 2.0 applications in the classroom**

Research on foreign language learning has demonstrated various ways Web 2.0 technologies are deployed to encourage and ease interactions and facilitate cultural information exchange. These are among the main aims of language learning (Kuznetsova and Soomro, 2019). Even if Web 2.0 applications are not meant to transform language teaching (Platon, Caranica and Catană, 2018), they have found their place in traditional in-class instruction. Among the most popular technologies used in the foreign language classroom are videoconferencing tools, wikis, blogs, and social networking sites (Orehovački, Bubaš and Kovačić, 2012).

Web 2.0 tools are varied, and so are the tutors' ways to use them. It should be noted that for long, the theory of behaviourism has been widely used in language instruction (Beatty, 2003). It is based on concepts such as mastery learning and following a "one size fits all" programmed instruction. Technology like videoconferencing is indeed often used as a broadcast tool, where the teacher is leading the learning process and spontaneous interactions between participants are limited (Whyte, 2011).

More recently, there has been a shift to constructivism in education, which highlights the importance of the learning environment for students' progress. Under constructivism, learners are unique and construct varied knowledge, because of their specific beliefs and experiences. Therefore, they should play an active role in the learning process (Bofill, 2013). Tools like wikis are believed to have great potential of collaboration to advance in the target language (Hudson, 2018).

Wikis, or those websites that let anyone to participate in a project creation and edit it (Ducate, Anderson and Moreno, 2001), have been used in class mostly for writing projects (Hudson, 2018). Writing used to be somewhat neglected in traditional foreign language pedagogy, mostly limited to homework and marking tasks (Kontogeorgi, 2014).

Wiki-mediated classroom tasks not only broadened the writing repertoire. They are effective, because they require each participant to contribute with a portion of the content to reach the outcome (Aydin and Yildiz, 2014). Unlike offline writing tasks, wikis offer the advantage of allowing participants trace the changes, comments and feedback of others. Therefore, foreign language teachers can use wikis as a process, or a space for study, review and discuss (Ferris and Wilder, 2006)

Another widely-adopted in-class use of wikis is for collaborative problem-solving in groups. Shared documents (e.g. using Google Docs) are ideal for activities like brainstorming, agenda setting, planning, notes taking. Less popular tasks in foreign language learning include case libraries and assignment submission, where peer ratings are allowed (Ferris and Wilder, 2016).

During wiki-facilitated tasks the role of the instructor as a moderator is crucial to ensure effectiveness. The observation by Hudson (2018) on how 12 foreign language learners work on a wiki project regularly required the tutor's assistance, and his higher participation was positively evaluated. Indeed, most wiki tasks are asynchronous and can be used as out of class activities. For their success, however, the instructor's role to familiarise students with the wiki technology and set the rules and boundaries remains crucial (Kontogeorgi, 2014).

## **2.2. Web 2.0 applications outside the classroom**

Although the in-class use of wikis is well-documented, their potential to build an out-of-class online learning experience and community is still overlooked by academics (Lai, Hu and Lyu, 2017). In comparison to in-class learning, situations out of the class have outstanding benefits as they allow for authentic language exposure. Autonomous learning in less formal environment improves students' motivation, enjoyment, engagement and confidence in language learning (Richards, 2015). Along with affective benefits, out-of-class learning brings language learning gains, such as vocabulary outcomes (Sundqvist and Wikstrom, 2015).

Moreover, there are some practical considerations that require increased attention to out-of-class language learning. Richards (2015) rightly points out that the large size of foreign language classes in some societies make authentic interactions difficult. Time is also limited, e.g. most programmes only allow for a few hours per week for English classes.

Like other Web 2.0 collaboration tools, wikis are means for blending in-class learning with out-of-class experiences (Kennedy and Miceli, 2013). Among the few academic works to study such blending using empirical data is the recent one conducted by Alghasab, Hardman and Handley (2019). They assigned their high school level participants the collaborative task to make a poster about Kuwait as a tourist destination. Then, the scholars used discourse analysis to study teacher-student-student discussions. They identified the great potential of wikis for interactive pedagogy, especially in societies like the Kuwaiti one, where instructor-led English language teaching is the dominating paradigm. Findings clearly show that when teachers are more

interactive and engage in a dialogue with students, the collaborative writing process is triggered and results are better. On the other hand, a more directive approach hinders collaboration (Alghasab, Hardman and Handley, 2019).

Likewise, Zanatta (2019) asked her sample of 63 first-year university students, enrolled in an English language course, to participate in a wiki-facilitated project called “Touropedia”. It involved the collaborative writing of texts on tourism topics. Students received in-class training on how to use the tool, while the project development took place out of the classroom. Such practice is in line with the recommendation by Lai and Gu (2011). Findings from their study with university-level language learners revealed that wikis are seen as formal and time-consuming. So, the scholars recommend using wikis in class. If used out-of-class, the instructor should first introduce the tool in formal instructional context.

Despite the suggested simplicity of the wiki tool, students are slow to understand and master it, only using a limited set of functionalities. Like Alghasab, Hardman and Handley (2019), Zanatta also identifies “patterns of interaction”, although the authors faces some difficulties to explain what they are, perhaps due to the lack of a rigorous methodology. Nevertheless, learners saw the out-of-class use wikis as valuable for writing, reading, and grammar language competency and overall, had a positive experience with the platform.

### **3. RAISED AWARENESS**

In this research paper, a paradox was identified. Although foreign language teaching is intended for uses outside the classroom, much of the teachers’ focus is on what happens in the classroom. As Richards (2015) simply puts it, “There are two important dimensions to successful second language learning: what goes on inside the classroom and what goes on outside of the classroom.” (p.5).

Therefore, the research in the present paper helped me broaden my perspectives regarding the use of wikis. This Web 2.0 tool can also facilitate informal interactions and authentic collaboration outside the foreign language classroom. Wiki-enabled writing exercises are powerful for developing online communities even in a culturally diverse classroom, as Farabaugh (2007) reports. He writes that “The editability of wikis and the presence on the page of all discussion (...) lessens students’ sense that this is only a formal space for posted pre-written paragraphs, yet it suggests, because it is on a formal class site, and open to the community, that replies should not be entirely careless” (p. 48). Farabaugh’s argument is that this hybrid environment is ideal for reflection, collaboration and community-building.

When it comes to actual learning outcomes, however, the use of wikis is somewhat controversial. The successful collaboration and knowledge generation through Web 2.0 technologies cannot be taken from granted. It requires from instructors to pay particular attention on the wikis integration into the foreign language course, initial training and ongoing support (Kennedy and Miceli, 2013). Therefore, in the next sections some possible interventions of practical value are highlighted.

### **4. POSSIBLE INTERVENTIONS**

#### **4.1. Initial training**

Regarding initial training, no matter if young people today (or Generation Zers) are supposedly “digital natives”, literature warns that some might not be aware on wikis, or see them as formal and demanding (Lai and Gu, 2011). In fact, the wiki technology was gaining popularity in the early 2010s. More recently, it seems that other Web 2.0 applications become prevailing, with the apparent example of social networking sites. So, it is likely that many young people are not formally familiar with wiki tools, even if they have encountered them and used them.

Despite their great expectations, Kennedy and Miceli (2013) found that their sample of beginner Italian learners are not so tech-savvy and confident as expected. They are indeed experts in social networking sites, and apply this knowledge to the wiki environment. The knowledge transfer process, however, is far from seamless. Because of this, it is recommended in the present paper that when the teacher decides to use wikis to encourage out-of-class language work, an initial proper guidance in formal settings should take place (Lai and Gu, 2011).

#### **4.2. Ongoing support**

Although the instructors are encouraged to assign wiki-enabled tasks outside the language learning classroom, they also need to keep an eye on some ongoing factors that can limit the effectiveness of such exercise. Among them, scholarship warns about

reluctance or shyness to change the work of others (Ducate, et al., 2011); or the contrary – tendency to take ownership of collective work (Bruns and Humphreys, 2005).

Specifically, during the wiki project, tutors engage in two groups of moves. The directive repertoire consists of actions such as adopting the editor role, asking for individual contributions, prescribing form and content, and monitoring. The dialogic range involves moves like encouraging joint construction, guiding the writing steps, praising, and feedback provision. The success lies in striking a balance between these two groups. Still, teachers are encouraged to adopt a more dialogic approach as it reportedly delivers better results (Alghasab, Hardman and Handley, 2019).

Alternatively, educators may decide that using wikis outside the classroom is risky and does not fit into the needs of their pupils. However, by simply ignoring more creative use of wikis, teachers might well miss vital opportunities for engagement and authentic learning.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The present research paper discusses the well-established topic of the use of Web 2.0 tools in the foreign language classroom from a different angle. By using wikis as an example, the benefits of extending technology-enabled tasks outside the formal classroom settings were highlighted. To name a few, out-of-class collaboration fosters productive dialogue, community building, affective gains such as motivation and engagement, as well as knowledge gains like vocabulary, grammar and writing skills.

It goes without saying that the use of wiki technologies itself does not necessarily result in the above-mentioned benefits. The discussion so far revealed the heightened role of the instructor in out-of-class wiki-facilitated tasks. Foreign language professionals are encouraged to utilise the full potential of wikis, but some extra attention is needed for initial guidance, monitoring and actions repertoire. That is because wikis are reportedly simple and easy to use, but empirical data revealed that even the digital natives have difficulties in using the tool.

From personal perspective, the work done so far helped me to gain critical awareness on yet another Web 2.0 application and its possible impact in formal and informal contexts. Thus, I am one step closer to my aim, i.e. to track the ways in which Web 2.0 has been changing the world of knowledge and education. The limitations of time and available literature, however, remain. So, I was restrained to go deeper into the topic of how the out-of-class use of wikis compares with other Web 2.0 tools like blogs, for example.

## References

1. Alghasab, M., Hardman, J., & Handley, Z. (2019). Teacher-student interaction on wikis: Fostering collaborative learning and writing. *Learning, culture and social interaction*, 21, 10-20.
2. Astin, A (1984). Student involvement: a developmental theory for higher education. *Journal of College Student Personnel*, 25(4), 297–308.
3. Aydin, Z., & Yildiz, S. (2014). Use of wikis to promote collaborative EFL writing. *Language Learning & Technology*, 18(1), 160-180.
4. Beatty, K. (2003). *Teaching and researching: Computer-assisted language learning*. Longman.
5. Bofill, L. (2013). Constructivism and collaboration using Web 2.0 technology. *Journal of Applied Learning Technology*, 3(2), 31-37.
6. Bruns, A. & Humphreys, S. (2005). Wikis in teaching and assessment: The M/Cyclopedia project. In *Proceedings of the 2005 International Symposium on Wikis*. San Diego, CA: ACM Press.
7. Chaffey, D., & Smith, P. R. (2017). *Digital marketing excellence: planning, optimizing and integrating online marketing*. Taylor & Francis.
8. Chartrand, R. (2012). Social networking for language learners: Creating meaningful output with Web 2.0 tools. *Knowledge Management & E-Learning: An International Journal*, 4(1), 97-101.
9. Chugh, R. and Ruhi, U. (2018). Social media in higher education: A literature review of Facebook. *Education and Information Technologies*, 23(2), 605-616.
10. Ducate, L., Lomicka, L. & Moreno, N. (2011). Wading through the world of wikis: An analysis of three Wiki projects. *Foreign Language Annals*, 44, 495–524.
11. Faizi, R. (2018). Teachers' perceptions towards using Web 2.0 in language learning and teaching. *Education and Information Technologies*, 23(3), 1219-1230.

12. Farabaugh, R. (2007). 'The isle is full of noises': Using wiki software to establish a discourse community in a Shakespeare classroom. *Language awareness*, 16(1), 41-56.
13. Ferris, S. P., & Wilder, H. (2006). Uses and potentials of wikis in the classroom. *Innovate: Journal of Online Education*, 2(5).
14. Hudson, J. (2018). Using Wikis for collaborative writing in the ELT classroom. *International Journal of Pedagogy and Teacher Education*, 2(2), 413-426.
15. Kennedy, C., & Miceli, T. (2013). In piazza online: Exploring the use of wikis with beginner foreign language learners. *Computer Assisted Language Learning*, 26(5), 389-411.
16. Kontogeorgi, M. (2014). Exploring the use of Wikis in developing students' writing skills in the EFL classroom. *Research Papers in Language Teaching and Learning*, 5(1), 123.
17. Kuznetsova, N., & Soomro, K. A. (2019). Students' Out-of-Class Web 2.0 Practices in Foreign Language Learning. *Journal of Education and Educational Development*, 6(1), 78-94.
18. Lai, C., & Gu, M. (2011). Self-regulated out-of-class language learning with technology. *Computer assisted language learning*, 24(4), 317-335.
19. Lai, C., Hu, X., & Lyu, B. (2018). Understanding the nature of learners' out-of-class language learning experience with technology. *Computer assisted language learning*, 31(1-2), 114-143.
20. Lim, S. (2009). How and why do college students use Wikipedia?. *Journal of the American Society for Information science and Technology*, 60(11), 2189-2202.
21. Malcolm, J., Hodgkinson, P., & Colley, H. (2003). The interrelationships between informal and formal learning. *Journal of workplace learning*.
22. Manca, S. (2020). Snapping, pinning, liking or texting: Investigating social media in higher education beyond Facebook. *The Internet and Higher Education*, 44, 100707.
23. Orehovački, T., Bubaš, G., & Kovačić, A. (2012). Taxonomy of Web 2.0 applications with educational potential. *Transformation in teaching: Social media strategies in higher education*, 43-72.
24. Platon, O., Caranica, C. & Catană, A. (2018). Social media tools used for teaching and learning in the higher education system. *eLearning & Software for Education*, 1, 453-456.
25. Richards, J.C. (2015). The changing face of language learning: Learning beyond the class- room. *RELC Journal*, 46, 5-22.
26. Sundqvist, P., & Wikstrom, P. (2015). Out-of-school digital gameplay and in-school L2 English vocabulary outcomes. *System*, 51, 65-76.
27. Waycott, J., Bennett, S., Kennedy, G., Dalgarno, B., & Gray, K. (2010). Digital divides? Student and staff perceptions of information and communication technologies. *Computers & education*, 54(4), 1202-1211.
28. Whyte, S. (2011). Learning to teach with videoconferencing in primary foreign language classrooms. *ReCALL: the Journal of EUROCALL*, 23(3), 271.
29. Zanatta, A. (2017). Cultivating collaboration using wikis for group writing in the foreign language classroom: A case study. In *10th annual International Conference of Education, Research and Innovation*.