

Chapter 55

Web 2.0 for Language Learning: Benefits and Challenges for Educators

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ABSTRACT

This literature review study explores 43 empirical research studies that report on the integration of Web 2.0 tools into language learning and evaluate the actual impact of their use. In particular, this review aims to identify the specific Web 2.0 tools integrated in the educational settings, theoretical underpinnings that are commonly used to frame the research, methodologies and data analysis techniques that scholars employ to analyze their research data, the benefits and challenges scholars spotted in their research findings, the pedagogical implications in using Web 2.0 for language learning and future research directions that scholars offer from their research.

INTRODUCTION

Since 2004, a variety of Web 2.0 technologies have been rushing into people's daily lives. The concept, Web 2.0, comprises a multitude of different connotations resulting in an increased emphasis on user-generated content, information sharing, collaborative and cooperative effort, learner-to-learner and learner-to-instructor interactivity, and informal and formal learning, which altogether potentially formulate a newly-emerging paradigm of Web 2.0-based online learning compared to traditional Web-based or e-learning paradigms (Brown, 2010; Craig, 2007; Greenhow, Robelia, & Hughes, 2009; Olaniran, 2009; Selwyn, 2008). In the language learning domain, the practice of

using Web 2.0 tools has been widespread. Web 2.0 tools, interchangeably named social media or social technologies, are penetrating all aspects of language classroom activities. Although there exists continued awe and apprehension about their effects, it is inevitable to find that more and more language educators are using Web 2.0 tools in their teaching (Thomas, 2009).

The wedlock between Web 2.0 and language education does not exist in a vacuum. As Thomas (2009) posits, the underpinnings reside in the fact that only through the medium of language can the web make all the acquaintances we have and all the communities we build possible. In other words, the practices of learning a language can be carried out on the web, which builds a natural

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connection between language learning and Web 2.0 integration.

The innate characteristics of Web 2.0 also echo the essence of language learning. As a social tool that provides numerous opportunities for language learners, the web fundamentally “decentralizes the role of the language classroom” (Thomas, 2009, p. 21). Specifically, the process of learning that conventionally takes place in-classroom has been replaced by the web, a student-owned territory that operates as a much larger, more engaging and more inclusive provider of power than a traditional classroom setting. This is evident in language learning as it is essentially a process in which a target language is often practiced and acquired within communities and group settings that are commonplace on the web.

It is only in recent years that researchers have started to conduct empirical and exploratory research studies to assess and evaluate the actual impact of using Web 2.0 tools in language learning, both in and outside of classroom settings (Lomicka & Lord, 2009). Although scholars have asserted that language learning research in the realm of Web 2.0 is still in its embryonic stage, we have seen a soaring increase in research where the attributes of Web 2.0 have been investigated in conjunction with the instructional and pedagogical implications of language learning. This change, in the meantime, denotes a new paradigm shift in CALL research in which new interactive and multimedia Web 2.0 tools are being adopted by language educators (Wang & Vasquez, 2012).

This literature review particularly aims to delve into the most current research investigations revolving around Web 2.0’s integration into language learning and teaching settings, seeking to answer the questions of why and how Web 2.0 tools are being adopted by language educators. In an earlier study, Wang and Vasquez (2012) provided a solid synthesis of studies on Web 2.0

research in second language learning mainly published from 2005 to 2009. Although the current research shared similar goals and pool of review studies with Wang and Vasquez’s (2012) study, this research expands the scope of reviewed studies to encompass all eligible research in all-inclusive language learning settings rather than focusing on second language learning. More importantly, the current study addresses articles from later dates (from 2008 to 2012) to keep abreast with the ever-changing technology development. As suggested by Thomas (2009), due to the fact that the development of technology continuously outpaces scholarly research investigation, it is necessary to constantly reflect on the current state of research, synthesizing and summarizing the research development paralleled with the most up-to-date technology enhancements. Furthermore, in addition to addressing research questions including theoretical and methodological issues, and benefits and challenges of using of Web 2.0 technologies that are analogous to Wang and Vasquez’s study (2012), this current study overtly highlights the pedagogical implications and suggested directions for future research. The specific research questions of this literature review study are:

1. What are the theoretical underpinnings that scholars used to frame their research?
2. Which Web 2.0 technologies were examined in these studies?
3. What methodologies and data analysis techniques did scholars employ to analyze their research data?
4. What were the benefits and challenges of using Web 2.0 for language learning and teaching as identified in these studies?
5. What implications and recommendations did the current research have for future research directions in Web 2.0 for language learning?

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