

Chapter 8

Web 2.0 Technologies and Foreign Language Teaching

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ABSTRACT

This chapter looks at the potential of two Web 2.0 tools: forums and the social networking website Facebook for foreign language learners and educators. It highlights how these technologies provide authentic settings that are dynamic and communicative as they facilitate the cultural enrichment of learners, enhance their socio-pragmatic awareness, as well as develop their multiliteracy skills in a second language. The chapter contains an examination of various recent studies which investigated or underlined how technological inclusion of forums and Facebook complements traditional classroom instruction, and how it allows students to extend their learning experience outside of this typical environment in order to supplement their linguistic abilities and to become autonomous learners.

INTRODUCTION

Computer use has become and continues to be part of everyday life. Today's students rely on a variety of Web 2.0 technologies for information gathering, to stay updated on social concerns and national issues, for inter-personal communication, and, of course, as a way to learn. It is not surprising to find a similar trend in the academic world, while none of these technologies were developed to initially support language learning,

they have been used, to a certain extent, in the field of Second Language Acquisition (SLA). The Internet has opened multiple windows for all genres of self-expression and social interaction that support meaningful educational experiences and encourage foreign language acquisition. In the last decade, research has illustrated how communication technology offers second language (L2) learners the opportunity to observe and interact not only in the target language, but also with culture, as they provide a powerful and authentic representation of how languages are embedded in

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-61350-068-2.ch008

a social context (Belz & Kinginger, 2002, 2003; Blattner & Fiori, 2009; 2011; Chun, 1994; Hanna & De Nooy, 2003; Kinginger, 1998; Kramsch & Thorne, 2002; Lord, 2008; McBride, 2009; O'Bryan & Hegelheimer, 2007; Stevenson and Liu, 2010; Thorne, 2003; Warschauer, 1996).

Web 2.0 tools are more prominent than ever in higher education as they have been recognized as meeting the high connectivity demands that today's students expect; however, they are still underused in foreign language learning and teaching. Some Web 2.0 media provide language learners with unprecedented opportunities to enrich their learning experience in a more dynamic and communicative environment. Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) technology such as chats, forums, blogs, wikis and various social networking communities (SNCs) can all positively impact foreign language classrooms by offering meaningful social experiences. In this chapter, the pedagogical potential of forums as well as the social networking community Facebook is explored. I highlight how these emerging tools promote the development of multiliteracy skills, socio-pragmatic competence, and cultural enrichment in a foreign language while promoting a sense of community among the learners which, in turn, are essential elements to reach native-like communicative competence in today's technologically-driven society.

Specifically, this chapter draws attention to the importance of the participation and socialization of foreign language learners in authentic contexts (Hall, Cheng, & Carlson, 2006; Swain & Deters, 2007) through the use of different forums and the social networking site Facebook, and it illustrates how these mediums of communication can be efficiently integrated into foreign language classes to create a dynamic learning environment. Electronic media allows students to observe how learners and native speakers use a foreign language in online contexts and gives them an opportunity to interact and engage in real meaningful communication with a variety of interlocutors that embrace the notion that language learning happens through

social interactions. The strength of Web 2.0 tools is their ability to help language learners understand and use language in different technology-mediated environments that present specific discursive and interactional rules and conventions that are rarely covered by traditional language textbooks or in classrooms (The New London Group, 1996; Kern, 2000; Gonglewski & DuBravac, 2006). Becoming familiarized with new voices and new genres of discourse that are yet to be considered standard language, despite their wide usage, allows L2 learners to gain cultural and linguistic knowledge about electronic language and to become members of online communities. Given the changing nature of the way we communicate, this process is, in the present day, a required step to fully experience language as a social practice and to produce competent speakers of an L2.

BACKGROUND

Web 2.0 in Higher Education: A New Way of Teaching

The growth of the Internet and the evolution of CMC have opened new doors for communication in general and arguably, for language learners to interact in a foreign language beyond the traditional classroom setting. As researchers pointed out (Blattner & Fiori, 2011; Blattner, submitted; McBride, 2009), Web 2.0 tools allow students to be involved in their own learning process by engaging with instructors, classmates, and other speakers through authentic interaction, transcending the spatial and temporal confinement of traditional language classes. Relatively little is known about how these web-based services can be beneficial to teaching and learning. Nevertheless, in the last few years research (Buffardi & Campbell, 2008; Stutzman, 2006; Tufekci, 2008) has pointed out the enormous amount of higher education students and educators who have become active members

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