

Can Web 2.0 Tools Help L2 Learners Improve their L2 Skills?

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Introduction

The number of Internet users is growing around the world and the younger generation is not an exception, so should we somehow incorporate use of the internet into learning to fit into the students' life styles? Internet access has gotten easier due to the expansion of personal mobile electronic devices such as smartphones, tablets, and light weight laptops. It is not uncommon among younger generations in particular to perpetually stay connected to the Internet to be close with friends 24/7 in social network sites such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, etc. which are so called Web 2.0 tools. Even when they are sitting in class, they often are busy checking out their network site behind the textbook instead of paying attention to the lecture and it can disturb them from studying. If they like it so much and if they are already using it, why don't we use it as a learning tool?

According to Chang, Farha & Pearman (2012), people "today are very comfortable using many communication technologies and are capable of, and very amenable to, adopting new technologies as a part of their learning process" (p. 61). They actually prefer class activities using Web 2.0 tools such as social networking sites, discussion boards and blogs (Vance, 2012, p. 489). Web 2.0 tool based instruction seems to be beneficial in English learning. However, it should be recognized as "simply one type of supplement to the regular curriculum in teaching English Language Learners" (Green & Ybarra, 2003) and not a main teaching method.

In this paper, the authors introduce an activity using one of the most popular Web 2.0 tools, Facebook, in an ESL reading class.

Web 2.0

While Web 1.0 is the original version of World Wide Web and provides only one way communication like a poster and brochure (GIG Global, 2015, para.3), "Web 2.0 describes World Wide Web sites that emphasize user-generated content, usability, and interoperability. The term was popularized by Tim O'Reilly and Dale Dougherty at the O'Reilly Media Web 2.0 Conference in late 2004, though it was first coined by Darcy DiNucci in 1999" (Wikipedia, 2015, para. 1). Web 2.0's types are Blogs, Podcasting, and Social Networking (Vance, 2012, p. 484). Craig (2013) described Web

2.0 tools' characteristics as follows:

- They are used for productivity as well as pleasure,
 - They all involve shareable content created by users,
 - They involve social networking and web-based communities, and
 - They help to facilitate interactive information sharing and collaboration.
- (p. 5)

Benefit of Web 2.0 in English as a Second Language Learning

Real Context

Another reason that Web 2.0 tools should be used in language learning is that Web 2.0 tools can easily provide students a natural context of the target language. It often seems in foreign language classes that the students do not have an opportunity to apply language skills and knowledge that they learn in class in a real life situation. Hence they can neither develop nor master the foreign language skills and knowledge and sometimes they do not even know what they are learning this language for. Web 2.0 tools enable students to practice or use the target language in an authentic social context (Shih & Yang, 2008, p. 56; Cielocha, Dean & Handsfield, 2009, p. 50), which is the “most effective way to learn a language” (Shih & Yang, 2008, p. 56).

Motivation

Web 2.0 tools also motivate the students to study. Their personal entertainment devices suddenly turn into the learning tools, which may make them a little more excited than just looking at a textbook. According to Bista (2011), the role of Web 2.0 tool based learning activities in the ESL learning process increases the students' motivation (p. 7). “When the contacts were positive and pleasant, the experience led students to interact more frequently in the foreign language both outside and inside the classroom. Because the experience was enjoyable, the increased self-confidence of the students, in turn, affected their motivation in a positive way. Therefore, successful interaction with native speakers can relieve student hesitancy to express themselves and increase their confidence in using the language” (Marek, Wu & Yen, 2011, p. 120).

Critical Thinking & Reading Skills, Writing, Oral language development

It also helps them develop vocabulary (Green & Ybarra, 2003), critical thinking skills (Bista, 2011, p. 7), critical reading and writing skills (Chang, Farha & Pearman, 2012, p. 7; Cielocha, Dean & Handsfield, 2009, p. 50) along with oral language skills (Chang, Farha & Pearman, 2012, p. 7; Green & Ybarra, 2003).

Collaboration & Communication skills

Regarding collaboration and communication skills, Craig (2013) said: These tools in particular promote the creation of content and easily allow for communication and interaction. It is the Web 2.0 tools that work especially well with second language learners because of the skills involved in use. For example, blogging encourages writing, reviewing, and responding. Wikis enable students to use language learning strategies and skills in conducting research and creating entries. In further exploring the processes involved in second language learning, there are three areas which are closely aligned with Web 2.0 tools: a) language feedback, sharing, interaction, and contribution, b) language production, and c) language reception (p. 5).

Explanation of Activity, Reading Room

Objectives

After the students master this activity, they will:

- Be able to express their opinion in written form following a given format
- Be able to communicate in written form with classmates appropriately through Web 2.0 tools
- Be able to read electronically formatted articles critically
- Be able to search articles comfortably using electronic English media
- Be able to open and lead a discussion in written format using Web 2.0 tools

Instruction

This reading activity, “Reading Room,” is given as a reading supplement in ESL advanced level reading classes. One set of the activity is completed each week. Each student takes turns as “a host” of the Reading Room page set up on Facebook and is responsible for a week for choosing and posting an article along with his or her opinion about the article and a few questions for the others. The article topic can be chosen from any field as long as it is appropriate to share in class. The host’s opinion needs to be expressed clearly along with the reasons for the stated opinion. For example, “I think/don’t...because..., I agree/don’t agree with... because..., I like/don’t like...because.” The questions for the other students need to be specific instead of asking broadly, “What do you think about this article?” The rest of the students, who are not hosting Reading Room for the week, are required to read the article and the host’s comment and post answers to the questions.

Implementation of Activity, Reading Room

Subjects

The activity participants were fourteen ESL students who enrolled in an

advanced reading class in an intensive English program at a private university in the US. There were nine males and five females from various countries who were expected to attend a university in the US after they passed an English proficiency level set forth by a university. They all have a high school diploma and three of them were college exchange students. They all had spent at least a semester in an English training program in the US.

Procedure

To prepare for a Web 2.0 based activity, the following requirements were considered beforehand: “a) access to technology, b) connectivity, c) language diversity and proficiency, and e) prior experience” (Craig, 2013, p. 4). There are several computer labs with Internet access available on campus. Therefore, everyone should be able to participate in the Web 2.0 based activity. The class was arranged according to the English proficiency, so the students in the class had similar proficiency levels. Prior experience of Web 2.0 tools may vary in the ESL classroom. It should be asked in class and it may require some of them to play with it and be familiar with the Web 2.0 tools if they have little or no prior experience in using them.

On the first day, the instructor asked the students whether they were familiar with Facebook and had an active account. Everyone except for three female students answered that they had an account and had used it before. The three female students had accounts but claimed that they were not active users because of cultural and religious reasons that prohibit females from showing their face in public. After the instructor explained that their Facebook page can be set as private and limited to the class members only to view, everyone agreed that they could use Facebook for the class activity. The instructor created a private page on Facebook and named it “Reading Room” and added all the students in the group. The class also decided who would be in charge of each week throughout the semester. To customize the page, a group photo was posted on the page.

Sample Discussion 1

First week: Chosen Article: The Worms that Invade Your Brain – CNN.com

Host Student A₁: This is the new article.

dont now about you guys. But I thought that this is little bit creepy.

I mean I now that there could be worm in the stomach. But in the brain!!!. It's freak me out. So tell me what do you think ? In your opinion, how can we prevent this from happening to anyone? Share your thought, opinion and comments down below

- Student B₁ I though this new disease is very scary. The name of Japan showed up, that's also made me scared! I don't know how to deal with this disease so I just hope that effectively drugs are found soon!
- Student C₁ I think this a really dangers worms and i guess disease could be in every part of our body and to avoid that creepy worms we should go to see the doctor at least every 6 months.
- Student D₁ It scary topic and picture. Interesting point of this topic, usually people say Japan is one of develop country, but this third part opinion said many Asian country is career of some parasite. The topic of pork sentence, said pork have two form to infect human. Of cores almost flesh food and material is danger, but as you know Japan was basically ate fresh and raw material, food and animal. Japan has traditional how to cook fresh animal material. Almost older people said pork need long time heating. I don't know why heat more and maybe doesn't know older people some question, but that is correct cook on pork.
- Student E₁ OMG i thought it attack just dogs this is really scary i am really happy for being in america away from these worms i think we should be more careful and go to see a doctor as soon as passable
- Student F₁ I do agree with my friend *(Student's name). That's might be weird. We have heard about the worms in the stomach, but in the brain i don't know too!! Anyways i wish that no body get this disease "If it's true"
- Student G₁ I thought it just attack cats and dogs.
unfortunately, it can be attack the human being. They thought it's more common in parts of Asia. However, the attack can be by water that polluted by animals who have this worms. Also, it can be attack by the pork meats. to avoid it 1- cook the pork for long time. 2- get away from animals they may have it.
- Student H₁ Scary topic!
We need to be careful what we will eat, for example dirty vegetables or uncooked food.
- Student I₁ That sounds really dogmatic !!! Worm eats brain !!! I have heard that most of rare food can influence our health, but

that much. For example, eating a rare egg is healthy because cooking burns a lot of protein that is needed for our bodies. However, it also unhealthy for the liver. Scientifically, eating uncooked food might also cause Renal failure, so we need to be aware of what we eat to avoid health consequences.

Student J₁ This really scary. I think we should to choose a good way to cook the food and improve our health

Student K₁ That is a very creepy warm. I think that we need to be careful what we eat and be away from the raw meat. Clean your hand and clean the vegetables and meat very well.

Sample Discussion 2

Second Week: Chosen article: “Laser-Transformed Metal So Slick That Water Bounced Off” from CNN.com

Host Student K₂ That project is very interesting. Do you think that metal will be helpful in another ways that they didn’t mention?

Student L₁ I think that metal can be for a bicycle chain because sometimes bicycle gets rusted from rain. And then this bicycle will not work. I guess that metal can prevent that thing.

Student C₂ This artical is hard a lil bit for me however i would like to use metal in all the Electric Machine so whenever the water goes on it, it does not effect the machine

Student I₂ This is really interesting!! I think it would be useful in some transportation. For example, airplanes have some problems with rain and snow so I think that would be a good way to solve their issues.

Student J₂ I like this article, and I think this project is an extremely helpful. We lost a lot of things that we use it daily because the rust. If this project is achievable, I think we won’t lose the things made by Mital. For example, in kitchen, car, and machine all of them will live longer than now if that happens also we can save money.

Student D₂ As I read this article, I have the same opinion as the Dr. Guo said in the first paragraph about kitchen knives. Quoting what he mentioned in his article, “Kitchenware, of course. Airplanes: No more worrying about de-icing, because water won’t be able to freeze on aircraft in the first place,” Nearly two weeks ago, I chapped my fingers because of

- washing dishes. I wish it will be easier to do kitchen work in the future than now. I prefer the life surrounding us to be better to improving the technology to the neo-futuristic level.
- Student M₁ This is very interesting article. I think, they will use it for electronic device in the future, because water can't go in side
- Student F₂ I think it is useful. Also, it is become more easier than before. Even in emergncy issues.
- Student G₂ This is very interesting. I believe that will be useful for everything. Also that is solution to some problems with rain at airplane.
- Student H₂ I like this article And I think yes it is helpful in many ways and keep any material live more than usual time .
- Student E₂ wow i am looking i am liking that's amazing i agree with my classmates it would be very good for airplanes and electronics

Sample Discussion 3

Week 3: Chosen article: "Sitting Will Kill You, Even If You Exercise" from CNN.com

- Host Student E₃ whaaaaaaat i love sitting and laying dawn some times i hate any reason makes me stand for there any lazy person like me ,what do you think you should do after you read this !!!
- Student H₃ Wow, interesting article. I like it and I know now why the exercises is important in life. Actually I move all the time not because this reason but I need to check my daughter every 15 minutes LOL
So that's good for me to keep my healthy in a good way.
- Student K₃ I like to sit and watch TV but I usually move to have something to eat every time there is commercial or I pause the play to move a bit. It is interesting because there is some people how don't move that much and they suffers now.
- Student F₃ Oo. I like it, but the problem is i spend half of my day laying down, and chiling. I think i gotta stand up all day long, and i think im gonna stand up while im sleeping Lol. My opinion is if we want a good health and don't be killed, do some exercises even at home.
- Host Student E₄ hahaha you don't need to stand up while you sleep but i think drinking water is the best idea because if you drink a lot you will have to go to bathroom every while grin emoticon

- Student B₂ I read this article I thought I'm sitting or I'm always on the bed and relaxing. I didn't know sitting is also bad and that make us sick! I'll try to improve my habit and do exercise regularly!!
- Student I₃ Well I didn't know that sitting can affect that much. I knew that exercise is healthy, but I thought that would be enough. However, that's really hard to stand up or to walk around while commercials because it would be the best chance for me to sleep
- Student N₁ wow, what a wonderful article I like it. You encouraging me to go to the gym. No laying down anymore.
- Student G₃ Well I think isn't effects as much as they say in the article. I believe even you want to sitting that long you to move at least going to restroom.
- Student C₃ This article is really helpful for us because as i read in my classmate comment is most of us love laying dawn for so much hours and i guess we should fix that guys and we should start working out
- Student J₃ uh Oh!! I think that's the bad news for me because I'm always on my bed even when i studying. I hope I can change this behavior and I'll work hard to do exercise:(
- Student D₃ I understand long tome sitting or keeping same style is danger, from I read the news topic. I feel all of opinion are correct, especially danger and nearly for us problem is airplane. That reason we are international student, usually we use airplane for go to America and back to our country. Air plane is one of most popular transportation system. It mean many people use this system. For example I used airplane last December, total time was about thirty hours on round trip between America to Japan. I was so tired that travel, and so long time sleep in sitting style. Today I read the news, so scary my physical. But I keeping use international airplane in my life since five years ago, never have problem yet. Same time in the plane I did stretch for blood flow. I don't know detail of stretch in the airplane, but maybe good action for our body.

Result

When Reading Room was introduced to the class, many of the students

seemed either quite excited for or confused with the unfamiliar learning style activity. Once the first article was posted and discussion began on Facebook, the students who seemed confused earlier quickly figured out how the activity worked and almost everyone participated in the first discussion. Surprisingly some of the students who were normally very quiet in the classroom expressed their emotions and opinions very well in the written discussion and even when the instructor brought up the activity in the classroom and threw in some suggestions or questions, they were ready to talk and did not hesitate to express their opinions. Overall, after one week of the Reading Room activity, the actual in-class discussion dramatically improved.

The article selections based on the students' interests varied widely. As the instructor used CNN.com as an example of the source of the articles, most of them except for four students used an article from CNN.com. The reading difficulty levels of the articles were almost all the same. Some of the article topics seemed a little difficult for a few students to understand fully but they managed to pick up the main idea and post their opinions.

Most of their writing styles were casual and contained numerous grammatical mistakes. However, in an effort to avoid causing the students, fear of making mistakes to negatively affect their confidence in expressing their opinions freely, which could prevent them from having an active discussion, their mistakes were not corrected. Also the students, especially the host, were encouraged to re-reply to some of the comments but it seemed difficult for them to do so because of the amount of the reading.

Regarding their comments, it was seen more than a few times that some of the students just repeated the previous student's comment by writing "I agree with (the student name)" without giving their own reasons or opinions. The instructor repeatedly pointed it out in the classroom and suggested that they come up with their own reasons and write them in the discussion. The instructor also often reminded the host students to have more unique or specific questions instead of throwing out a simple broad question such as "what do you think about this article?"

Students' Opinions about the Activity, Reading Room

After they experienced the Reading Room activity for a semester, the instructor posted on the Reading Room page some before and after questions concerning the Reading Room activity experience. The semester was already over and there were only four students who answered the 'before' question and two students who answered the 'after' questions. The following are their responses to the 'before' question, "How did you feel about the Reading Room activity when the instructor introduced it to you for the first time?"

- "It was interesting, because it makes us share our articles and then share

our ideas in class.”

- “It is a interesting. Student cheese (*choose) who’s interested topic and then other student read that one. It is communication of idea.”
- “It was good! Because I liked to read the article someone interested in!”
- “It was really interesting because it makes is share our articles and then share our ideas in class.”

Here are some ‘after’ questions and their responses:

“Do you think that the Reading Room activity helped you develop your reading skills? If so, how?”

- “Yes, Nowadays I have a government class and I have to do the same thing to look up some articles or news to share with the class and I always be ready for that because I did it before with you.”
- “Yes. Cause almost contents from academic things.”

“Do you think that the Reading Room activity helped you develop your discussion skills? If so, how?”

- “Yes, debating is one of the thing that I will have in government class. I think I am ready, because I already know how to ask questions and share my ideas and knowledge.”
- “Yes. Discussion needs summaries information, a class had that practice.”

“How did you like the Reading Room activity?”

- “If the traditional assignment was reading the textbook, we will be bored and maybe sharing ideas will be limited in on topic or article. I think it is a good idea to improve reading and communication and it was interesting for me.”
- “It was easy to do because it was easy to access to Reading Room on Facebook. Used to Facebook was interesting thing. SNS is useful tool at today’s social. Use “Useful tool” is better.”

Conclusion

Firstly, the activity on the Internet itself did not facilitate a discussion in electronic written format. If it was a smaller group size instead of a whole class, it might have been easier for them to participate in the discussion. However, some improvement could be seen in the actual ‘in-class’ discussion after the first week of the Reading Room activity. Therefore it can be concluded that Web 2.0 tools can help L2 learners improve their discussion skills.

Secondly, the topics of the chosen articles were pretty broad since each student chose an article based on his/her interests. It certainly exposed the students to a variety of topics and writing formats and it can be assumed that it helped them build their vocabulary and improve their reading and writing skills.

Thirdly, as one of the students mentioned when answering the ‘after’ questions, the activity was good preparation for L2 learners before they start taking classes in college in the U.S. It was clear that the students could quickly adapt and work with the new technology. Also, from their comments towards the Reading Room activity itself, it shows that the students liked the student-centered activity which had students choose what to read and what to discuss instead of it being assigned by the instructor. As Bista (2011) said, “if the learners are given the opportunities to be responsible for their learning according to their needs and choices, the learning would be more fruitful and students would be responsible for their own learning” (p. 5).

Lastly, upon reflection and for future research, the results of the activity were subjective this time. By using assessment tools and comparing the students’ abilities before and after the semester, this study can better obtain objective results. Also, the activity could be advanced by adding some native speakers to the group. It may promote the students’ motivation and improve their discussion skills since Web 2.0 tools “allow language learners to repeatedly engage with multiple native speakers in different contexts where they must make themselves understood in order to take part in collaborative projects and discussions” (Chang, Farha & Pearman, 2012, p. 52).

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Web2.0ツールは第二言語学習に役立つか？

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スマートフォン、タブレット、軽量ノートパソコンの普及により、ソーシャルネットワークサイトやブログといったWeb2.0ツールを駆使したウェブサイトの利用者が年々増加している。特に若い世代は24時間接続した状態のままでも多く、授業中でもそのようなウェブサイトを学習以外の目的で利用している姿がみられるのも少なくない。その使い易く利用者が多いという特性を活かし、代表的なソーシャルネットワークサイトのひとつであるFacebookを英語学習に利用できないかと考え、主にコミュニケーション（ディスカッション）、リーディング、英語メディアの利用力の向上を目的としたアクティビティを考案し、ESL (English as a Second Language) のリーディングの授業で実際にどのように行ったかと、学生の意見を含むアクティビティの結果を検証した。