Learners’ Perceptions of the Effectiveness of Blogging for L2 Writing in Fully Online Language Courses

Lina Lee, University of New Hampshire, Department of Languages, Literatures, and Cultures, Durham, NH, USA

ABSTRACT

The study explores how the application of blog assignments facilitated the L2 writing process and how blogging affects the way students view blog-based L2 writing instruction and peer feedback. The results showed that beginning students had a positive attitude toward the use of blogs because it gave them agency over their learning, and engaged them in co-construction of knowledge with their peers. While scaffolding through peer feedback affected students’ self-regulated efforts to make improvement on written content and increase language accuracy, strategies for effective use of feedback from the instructor was important. This study concludes that blogging not only empowers students to be creative with the content, but also promotes attention to language forms. L2 educators are strongly encouraged to take full advantage of the widely available blog technology by incorporating it into their teaching methods to further promote critical reflection and collaborative interaction within socially bounded online learning environments.

KEYWORDS

Blogs, Fully Online Learning, L2 Writing, Peer Feedback, Task Design

INTRODUCTION

The primary goal of foreign language (L2) instruction is to develop learners’ communicative competence, including writing proficiency. Writing in L2 is often perceived as a challenging task because it requires the learner not only to generate and organize ideas, but also to use linguistic knowledge to express meaning effectively. In recent years, the process-oriented approach to writing has gained in popularity, as this approach stimulates learners to become more actively involved in the writing process. As learners go through multiple stages of planning, drafting, receiving feedback, revising, and publishing (Cumming, 2009; Williams, 2005), they improve the quality of writing through constructive feedback, by reflecting on the applicability of the comments, and incorporating them into revisions (Ferris, 2003; Lam, 2013). According to Hyland and Hyland (2006), peer feedback increases learners’ autonomy and the ability to edit their own writing. Despite its potential benefits, writing through a cyclical approach is a time consuming task. For example, in the traditional classroom setting, scheduling one-on-one or small group conferences with students to provide feedback on their writing is a labor intensive process. For this reason, computer-mediated writing, including blogging, affords the opportunity for students to work independently (e.g., content creation), and collaboratively (e.g., peer feedback), during the writing process (Armstrong & Retterer, 2008; Lee, 2010).

L2 blogs have been increasingly used for different pedagogical purposes. While personal blogs foster self-expression and self-reflection (Lee, 2012a; Murray & Hourigan, 2008; Yang, 2009),
collective blogs promote co-construction of L2 knowledge through social interaction (Lee, 2011a; Richardson, 2011). Through blogging, students not only create and update content, but also share and exchange ideas with others within a virtual learning community. Given that blogs are asynchronous modes of computer-mediated communication (CMC), students write at their own pace without time pressure, which allows them greater freedom to reflect critically upon the content and form. The instantaneous nature of content publishing for a broad audience rather than for a sole instructor increases students’ motivation to produce quality work. Archived entries that document students’ work over time enable teachers and students to assess writing in progress as well. Additionally, through the process of blog writing, students assume multiple roles, as they post their own entries, and read and respond to each other’s postings. Through asynchronous CMC feedback, students negotiate both meaning and form, and further help each other develop new ideas and identify linguistic problems (Dippold, 2009; Lee, 2012b). As stated by Ware & Kessler, (2013), feedback through asynchronous interaction tends to focus on linguistic adjustments. As a result, students strengthen their writing skills by expanding their lexicon and improving their grammatical accuracy (e.g., Armstrong & Retterer, 2008; Lee, 2010; Lin, 2015; Sun 2010).

With the aforementioned advantages, L2 researchers have investigated the impact of blogging on learners’ writing fluency and intercultural competence (e.g., Bloch, 2007; Elola & Oskoz, 2008; Hegelheimer & Lee, 2013; Lee, 2012; Murray & Hourigan, 2008). Research findings show that personal blogs foster self-reflection and collaborative learning (Lee, 2012a; Stickler & Hampel, 2010). Ciftci and Kocoglu (2012) examined the effects of peer feedback via blogging and found that students showed increased performance during the revision process. Furthermore, blogging promotes autonomous learning, and learner motivation and interaction, to engage learners in the practice of writing (Lee, 2016; Zhang, 2009). Although the existing research is valuable to understanding blog technology in L2 instruction, most blog studies focus on advanced learners in blended learning settings. As of yet, no study has closely examined the effectiveness of blogging for L2 writing within a fully online context at the beginner level in university students. Thus, the current study aims to explore the use of personal blogs for L2 writing in two fully online elementary language courses. In particular, it examines the role of task, peer feedback and other factors that influence students’ engagement in the writing process and their writing performance.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Blogging for Writing Instruction

Blogs have been employed progressively as a learning resource in L2 writing instruction (e.g., de Andrés Martínez, 2012; Murray & Hourigan, 2008; Lee, 2011a; Pinkman, 2005; Vurdien, 2013). Blogging is conducive to promoting the process approach to writing, focusing on the writing itself rather than the final product, because it involves a cycle of writing entries, reading and commenting on others’ posts, and making revisions (Hegelheimer & Lee, 2013). Research findings to date promote a positive disposition toward using blogs as a means to improve student writing in L2, demonstrating that blogging enables students to develop their own personal writing style and reflective skills, and gain greater confidence in L2 writing (Hourigan & Murray, 2010). For example, in their recent study, Sun and Chang (2012), explored how students’ collaborative dialogues via blogging encouraged them to actively and reflectively engage in the writing process by sharing and reconstructing L2 knowledge. Similarly, Stickler and Hampel (2010) reported that blogging allowed the online intermediate German students to reflect on both language and form through social interaction. Students develop interpretative and critical thinking by being exposed to multiple views thought blogging. Research also shows that learners are more motivated to write due to the awareness of authorship and the existence of a real audience (e.g., Chen & Brown, 2012; Lee, 2012a).

Despite the fact that previous research has shown the potential of blogging for L2 development, several challenges have been identified. For example, students may not feel comfortable having others read their writing due to the nature of blogs as an open platform (Blackmore-Squires, 2010).
The Effect of Feedback in Teaching Thai as a Foreign Language
www.igi-global.com/chapter/effect-feedback-teaching-thai-foreign/58769?camid=4v1a

Australasian Language Learners and Italian Web Sites: A Profitable Learning Partnership?
www.igi-global.com/chapter/australasian-language-learners-italian-web/19801?camid=4v1a