Chapter 11
Meeting at the Wiki: The New Arena for Collaborative Writing in Foreign Language Courses

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ABSTRACT
This chapter introduces the use of wikis and written and voice web applications as supporting tools for collaborative writing. It reports on a study examining the processes advanced Spanish foreign language learners engage in while working collaboratively using wikis and chat to complete a writing assignment. Through analysis of students’ essays, wiki-based drafts, chat transcripts, and questionnaire responses, it was observed that students maintained an interest in their essays’ accuracy as well as a focus on global rather than local aspects. In addition, the combination of wikis and chat provided students with an environment in which to state a clear thesis, provide supporting evidences, and refine the organization of the essay in a manner often missing in individual work. The authors expect that the benefits observed when using social web applications while working collaboratively will provide more evidence for pedagogical shifts that will help students become better writers in their second language.

INTRODUCTION
The burgeoning interest in Web 2.0 technologies such as Flickr, Facebook, blogs, and wikis is indicative of the growth of participatory, collaborative practices in society at large (O’Reilly, 2005). However, within the realm of foreign language (FL) education, the practice of collaboration, in particular collaborative writing—two or more people working together to produce a document with group responsibility for the end product (Bosley, 1989, cited in Ede & Lunsford, 1990, p. 15)—has only been cautiously approached to date. Yet, scholars in first language (L1) and second language (L2) writing have shown that collaborative writing promotes reflective thinking, focuses attention on grammatical accuracy, lexis, and discourse, and encourages a pooling of knowledge about language (Donato, 1994; DiCamilla & Anton, 1997; Hirvela, 1999; Storch, 2005; Swain
The success of a collaborative writing endeavor is evidenced by students being truly involved and engaged in the activity (Forte & Bruckman, 2006; Schaffert, Bischof, Buerger, Gruber, Hilzensauer, & Schaffert, 2006). Collaborative writing has been recently aligned with Web 2.0-based social software applications such as blogs or wikis (Alexander, 2006). These applications provide for authoring flexibility, content creation, and the generation of new knowledge. The open editing and review structure of wikis makes them the most suitable tool to support collaborative writing (Parker & Chao, 2007). Their collaborative value can be further enhanced when accompanied by the use of web-based audio applications such as Voice Direct, a synchronous voice conferencing/chat facility (see University of Maryland Baltimore County, n. d.). This combination of tools can lead to increased levels of interaction and accountability of the participants (Rick, Guzdial, Carroll, Holloway-Attaway, & Walker, 2002). At the same time, however, wikis challenge some of the traditional notions of authorship as understood in Western literary theory in a way that tends to unsettle the student-endorsed model of solitary authorship. Therefore, given the increasing use of social software for L2 educational purposes, there are questions and concerns about its viability in the classroom and the benefits that its use may bring to the L2 writing process.

Within this context the study outlined in this chapter expands upon a growing line of research in education, namely the benefits of using wikis for collaborative writing purposes, but with an emphasis on FL environments. Set in a social constructivist paradigm, the collaborative approach to learning enables students to be connected and participatory in a dynamic, evolving community of practice. This chapter examines FL learners’ writing processes while working collaboratively on a task that requires either the discovery of a solution to a given problem, or development of a written text based on a given argument (Trentin, 2009). In particular, it focuses on advanced Spanish second language learners at the tertiary level who were required to use wikis and web-based communication utilities to complete a writing assignment as part of their course. In this process an attempt is made to form a response to the overarching question,

To what extent does students’ knowledge about writing in Spanish benefit from the use of wikis and chat?

This is further subdivided into the following, more specific questions:

1. How do these students approach a collaborative writing task (e.g., what writing processes are observed) when using wikis and chat?
2. What are the differences in terms of fluency, accuracy, and complexity between the first and final turn-in drafts when writing collaboratively in wikis?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Wikis

Wikis are collaborative web-based environments consisting of pages that potentially anyone can edit. The most well known wiki, Wikipedia (http://www.wikipedia.org/), is a user-edited online encyclopedia founded in 2001, in which readers elect to write texts and improve the content of existing ones. As modeled in Wikipedia, wikis support collaborative writing in educational settings by providing students the opportunity to co-author a document (Farabaugh, 2007; McLoughlin & Lee, 2007; Parker & Chao, 2007; Trentin, 2009). An important application of wikis for educational purposes is to provide students with both the possibility and accountability to create, transform, and erase their work. At the same time a tracking system allows teachers and researchers to follow...