

Chapter 1

Exploring Discourse and Creativity in Facebook Creative Writing by Non–Native Speakers

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ABSTRACT

Facebook and other social media sites have been used by young Arabs for many purposes such as exchanging ideas and information, reporting breaking news, posting special events, launching political campaigns, announcing family gatherings, and sending seasons' greetings. Another emerging type of timeline posts is creative writing in English. Some Arab Facebook users post lines of verse, short anecdotes or points of view, express emotions, personal experiences, and/or inspirational stories or sayings written in literary style. A sample of Facebook creative writing pages/clubs and creative timeline posts was collected and analyzed to find out the forms and themes of creative writing texts. A sample of Facebook Arab creative writers was also surveyed to find out the reasons for their creative writing activities in English. This chapter describes the data collection and analysis procedures and reports results quantitatively and qualitatively. Implications for developing creative writing skills in foreign/second language learners using Facebook and other social media are given.

INTRODUCTION

Writing in a foreign/second language (L2) is a difficult task for many students, because they are inhibited, afraid of making mistakes, have insufficient grammar and vocabulary knowledge, or because they are incapable of generating ideas. To enhance students' writing skills, in general, and creative writing, in particular, researchers and teachers have utilized several instructional strategies and practices, such as using wordless picture books (Henry, 2003), plot scaffolding (O'Day, 2006), collaborative creative writing activities, assignments and projects (Vass, 2002; Feuer, 2011; Bremner, Peirson-Smith and Bhatia, 2014; Arshavskaya, 2015), the integration of cooperative learning and journalizing (Bartscher, Lawler, Ramirez and Schinault, 2001; and Racco, 2010;), learning about photography and using it as

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inspiration for students' creative writing (Haines, 2015), the cluster method (Sahbaz and Duran, 2011), the integration of creative and critical written responses to literary texts in different genres (Racco, 2010; Wilson, 2011), incorporating journal and/or personal letter writing from the perspective of people that have been marginalized in the students' dominant culture (Stillar, 2013), developing a creative writing instructional program based on speaking activities (Bayat, 2016), using a semiotic analysis theory-based writing activity in which cartoon caricatures are selected as visual texts for analysis (Sara Kuzu, 2016), using nonfiction mentor texts to assist students in writing their own creative informational texts about animals (Dollins, 2016), inviting students to write poetry across the curriculum (Bintz, 2017), and analyzing song lyrics containing vivid details, using a graphic organizer, and a kinesthetic activity to help students devise similes and metaphors and construct vivid sensory details in their fiction and creative nonfiction writing (Del Nero, 2017).

In addition to the above classroom techniques, several technologies have been integrated in writing instruction. Two decades ago, word processors, e-mail, specially designed software and Powerpoint presentation were utilized to develop L1 and L2 students' writing skills (Casella, 1989; Gammon, 1989; Scott, 1990; Owen, 1995; Keiner, 1996; Hodges, 1999; and Biesenbach-Lucas and Weasenforth, 2001). At a later stage, online journal writing, computer labs, online courses, online discussion boards, special software, wiki projects and school blogs were used to enhance students' writing skills. For example, adolescents in Guzzetti and Gamboa's (2005) study used online journal writing as a literacy practice, and for social connection, identity formation and representation. Online journal writing proved to be effective in developing students' writing skills. Pifarré, Marti and Guijosa (2014) found that the wiki environment helped develop an effective and creative online collaborative learning community among secondary school students. Even seven-year old children who used Kodu code-based software to create imaginary worlds, characters and story lines, and translated their video game-like creations into dynamic short stories excelled in producing sophisticated short stories that were not expected from them (Salcito's (2012). Likewise, 10-16-year old students in India reported that OmmWriter (a minimalist text editing tool) was an effective tool for feeling better (with music), happier and more relaxed, as it helped them avoid distractions that often come with technology and the internet. It also reduced writing distractions, gave a relaxing writing experience by offering three different writing soundtrack options, as well as three different keyboard-typing sounds (Gonçalves, Campos and Garg, 2015). Elementary school students participating in school blogs reported that blogging enthused them, and gave them access to new kinds of writing and new audiences (Barrs and Horrocks, 2014). Furthermore, Sessions, Kang and Womack (2016) found that fifth grade students with iPad applications wrote more cohesive, sequential stories using more sensory details than students who wrote with paper and pencil. iPad applications also affected students' motivation to write, and made the writing process more social and engaging.

Not only were technologies used to enhance the writing skills of English native-speaking students, but they were also used to help ESL college students develop their writing skills. For example, Al-Jarf's (2007) found that use of *Nicenet*, an Online Course Management System, as a supplement to in-class instruction encouraged Saudi freshman students of different proficiency levels to write poems and short stories in English as a foreign language (EFL). In another study, Yunus, Salehi and Chenzi (2012) found that the integration of an online discussion board in ESL writing classrooms helped broaden Malaysian students' knowledge, increased their motivation, and enhanced their confidence in acquiring writing skills in ESL. In Oman, Jayaron and Abidin (2016) found no statistically significant differences in writing performance and linguistic complexity between EFL post-foundation level students involved in a synchronous online discussion forum and students engaged in an asynchronous blog. However, use of

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