Chapter 7
An Exploratory Study of Using Personal Blogs for L2 Writing in Fully Online Language Courses

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ABSTRACT

The chapter reports the results of an exploratory study examining the use of personal blogs for the development of L2 writing skills in fully online language courses. The chapter outlines the methodology of the blog project including pedagogical objectives, task design, selection of digital tools, and implementation. The study involved 48 beginning students who used blogs for their writing assignments over the course of two consecutive summers. Both quantitative and qualitative data collected from post surveys, blog entries, and comments, and final interviews were analyzed. The results indicated that students perceived blogging as an effective tool for building their writing skills. Moreover, the chapter revealed that feedback scaffolding affected students' efforts to make improvement on both content and form. The study concludes that while writing performance can be assessed by the implementation of a well-designed blog project, sufficient time for feedback interaction and strategies for effective use of feedback are vital to foster reflective thinking and collaborative learning.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the process-oriented approach to L2 writing has been well received in the field of language teaching because it encourages students to actively participate in the writing process of planning, drafting, revising and editing. Upon receiving feedback from the instructor, students reflect on the comments and incorporate them into revisions to improve the quality of writing (Lam, 2013). Nevertheless, writing through a cyclical approach is a time-consuming task in the traditional classroom setting. Given the rapid growth of emerging technologies, computer-mediated communication (CMC) technology has been integrated into today's language classroom to support L2 writing (Çiftçi & Aslan, 2019; Godwin-Jones, 2018). Among other CMC tools, blogs have received substantial attention from L2 practitioners.

The use of blogs 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; Richardson, 2011). In the process of blogging, students assume multiple roles, as they post their own entries, and read and respond to each other's postings. According to Lee (2014), blogging is not simply a process of practicing writing skills. Rather, it is a socially mediated activity through which ideas are circulated, shared and exchanged with a global audience. To this view, network-based writing encourages students to pay attention to the writer-reader interaction, and to think critically about how their writing might be reflected by their readers. As a result, students tend to produce more thoughtful responses. Also archived posts in reverse chronological order empower students to use metacognitive skills to monitor and assess their own writing performance (Sun & Chang, 2012).

As to feedback on CMC, L2 researchers have underscored that scaffolding feedback through asynchronous interaction draws students' attention to focus on linguistic problems and make necessary adjustments to improve their communicative competence (Lee, 2008; Vinagre & Muñoz, 2011; Ware & Kessler, 2013). Peer feedback through blogging strengthens learners' writing skills by expanding their lexicon and improving their grammatical accuracy and further develops their interlanguage (Alsubaie & Madine, 2018; Çiftçi & Kocoglu, 2012; Lee, 2010; Lin, 2015). In addition, network-based publishing also fosters learner autonomy, as students to take charge of decision-making on what, how much and when to publish their work (Lee & Markey, 2014). Given that blogs are asynchronous CMC, students write at their own pace without time pressure so reducing writing anxiety (Cequena & Gustilo, 2014). Finally, the instantaneous nature of content publishing for a broad audience rather than for a sole instructor increases students' motivation to produce quality work (Lee, 2016).

To date, L2 researchers have found that blogging has a positive impact on the development of writing skills and intercultural competence (e.g., Elola & Oskoz, 2008; Hegelheimer & Lee, 2013; Lee, 2017; Shao & Crook, 2015). For example, personal blogs foster self-expression and self-reflection (Stickler & Hampel, 2010). The use of blogs also promotes learners' interaction and collaboration through computer-mediated feedback in the process of L2 writing (Lee, 2016; Sun, 2010). Although the existing research is valuable to understanding blog technology in L2 instruction, most studies focus on advanced learners in blended learning settings. Studies on using asynchronous CMC for L2 writing within a fully online context at the beginning level is clearly needed to bring new insights into the impact of blogging on the development of writing performance. 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

Personal Blogs for L2 Writing

Blogs haven been increasingly implemented in L2 instruction (e.g., Aydin, 2014; de Andrés Martínez, 2012; Lee, 2011a; Murray & Hourigan, 2008;; Pinkman, 2005; Vurdien, 2013). According to Hegelheimer and Lee (2013), blogging promotes the process approach to writing and focuses on the writing itself rather than the final product, as it involves a cycle of writing, reading and commenting on each other's entries, and making revisions. Among many benefits of using blogs for L2 writing, researchers

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