

## Chapter 35

# The Meeting Point of Second Life<sup>®</sup> and Web 2.0: Self-Discovery for Writing

**Ya-Chun Shih**

*National Dong Hwa University, Taiwan*

### **ABSTRACT**

*Researchers and practitioners endeavoring to incorporate Second Life<sup>®</sup> (SL) and Web 2.0 into language classrooms promise greater practical value from computer-assisted language learning (CALL). This chapter provides an innovative approach to blog writing, exploring SL as an immersive experience that stimulates follow-up description, imagination, and writing creativity. Drawing on experiences in 2009 and 2010 in linking SL and Web 2.0 applications to inspire the writing of EFL (English as a Foreign Language) graduate students, this chapter describes the characteristics of descriptive writing and presents the process of learning and writing of these students in cooperation with their peers in order to discover within themselves the motivation to be creative writers.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

One of the fundamental challenges facing instructors is teaching students how to write naturally and instilling in them the pleasure of writing. This paper proposes a blended learning solution to inspire internal motivation and self-discovery for descriptive writing through the integration of various learning approaches, within a multi-user virtual environment (MUVE) or collaborative virtual environment (CVE), under Web 2.0. This approach emphasizes writing the act of self-discovery, through participation in task-based

activities involving blogs, YouTube, Flickr, and 3D MUVEs or CVEs, such as Second Life (SL). The introduction of these technologies enables students to take the initiative in describing their perceptions to overcome the hurdles associated with natural writing.

This long-term case study collected writing samples from four graduate students, following their discovery of a virtual world, as expressed through the blog entries made describing their experiences. This study employed a variety of data collection strategies to gain insight into the experiences of students with regard to coopera-

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tion with peers and self-discovery through virtual learning. The data collection strategies included interviews, observations, and writing samples from student blogs, with their reflections on the discovery of a virtual world. This investigation centered on student writing motivation, attitudes, writing features, and creativity. Observational checklists and rubric analysis of writing samples were used to investigate the progress of students in acquiring writing skills and developing creativity. The current work shares the latest study results using SL and Web 2.0 to practice descriptive writing, addressing the following research questions:

- How will linking Second Life and Web 2.0 develop descriptive writing?
- What are the characteristics of descriptive writing as performed by students?
- What is the linkage effect on the writing attitudes and practices of students?

### **Empowering Language Learners with Web 2.0 Technologies and Second Life**

Researchers predict that a new generation of language learning will be ushered in on a Web 2.0 platform featuring MUVES, such as SL. Graham Stanly (2006) indicated that emerging Web 2.0 technology such as Blogs, Wikis, Podcasts, and SL, labeled “Web 3.0” provided a “prototype” for future learning that would serve as an important resource and platform for language learners in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Lim (2009) provided a “Six Learnings framework,” consisting of “learning by exploring,” “learning by collaborating,” “learning by being,” “learning by building,” “learning by championing,” and “learning by expressing,” for the design of curriculum in a virtual world. Lim (2009, p. 9) claimed that “Learning by expressing,” covers sharing and expressing experience gained from virtual world activities through creating and publishing blogs, podcasts and *machinima*. The learning results would be related to the develop-

ment of students’ abilities in the literary criticism and creative writing emphasized by language departments. In-world curriculum, exploration, discussion, interaction, and collaboration followed by “learning by expressing” via Web 2.0 tools could provide students with an effective means to learn a language through methods, such as creative writing.

### **Second Life for Language Learning**

Second Life (Linden Research, Inc., n.d.) is an avatar-based MUVE or CVE, launched on June 23, 2003 by Linden Lab. Users of SL are referred to as residents who interact with one another through text chat, voice chat, limited avatar body language, instant messaging, and notecards. SL allows residents to explore a vast virtual world, socialize with others, and join events and activities in thematic communities. These communities are categorized according to their emphasis on a variety of special interests, themed attractions, and the trade of virtual property. Simultaneously, SL invokes immersion, (social) interaction, engagement, and (multimodal) communication, which together represent the driving force behind all successful language learning. Hundsberger (2009) indicated, “Foreign language learning is a strong feature within SL due to its interactive and immersive nature. The 3D effect intensifies communication and contributes to social interaction” (p. 5).

Two recent projects, “Talk with Me” and AVA-LON, funded by the European Commission, are devoted to virtual reality assisted language learning (VRALL) and practices in SL, and a great many researchers and practitioners are already involved in advancing this goal. The aim of “Talk with Me” project (<http://www.talk-with-me.eu>) is to provide a blended learning experience by connecting SL, Moodle (Modular Object-Oriented Dynamic Learning Environment) and other platforms such as Facebook for the learning of foreign languages, including Czech, Slovak, Hungarian and Slove-

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