

Chapter 11

How Wiki-Based Writing Influences College Students' Collaborative and Individual Composing Products, Processes, and Learners' Perceptions

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ABSTRACT

Recently, wikis have been claimed to facilitate collaborative-writing projects and bring positive impact on student learning. While most previous exploratory studies conducted in L2 classrooms focused on students' perceptions and their collaborative process, students' produced texts have seldom been carefully examined from linguistic perspectives. To aim towards a more comprehensive understanding of wiki-based collaborative writing, this study compares collaboratively and individually produced texts, explores the nature of the two different writing processes, and investigates students' perspectives. An intact class of eighteen EFL college students participated. They completed two writing tasks collaboratively and individually on wikis. Both qualitative and quantitative measures were adopted to analyze the data in order to probe students' writing products, composing processes, and perceptions. Results of this study revealed that wiki-based collaborative writing tasks have offered students good opportunities to learn from each other and students believe such collaborative activities improved their writing.

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INTRODUCTION

The concept of collaboration has been valued in language learning pedagogy for a long time (e.g., Posner & Baecker, 1992). In an L2 writing class, collaborative activities are mostly limited to pre-writing and rewriting stages, not yet applicable to the writing stage itself regardless of being in classrooms or with computer-mediated tools (Storch, 2005; Wigglesworth & Storch, 2009). Thus, very little research has been conducted to help us understand the influence of collaboration on the writing stage itself. In fact, it poses a great challenge to researchers who desire to explore this issue because the co-authoring writing process is difficult to monitor in traditional classrooms.

Recently, with the increasing use of Web 2.0 technologies, much potential for collaborative writing in L2 classrooms is promised (e.g., Arnold, Ducate, & Kost, 2009; Pai & Liou, 2009a). Among the Web 2.0 technologies, wikis have drawn many researchers' attention as a good platform for collaborative-writing projects due to their functions of allowing multiple users to create content on the same document easily, tracking histories of user actions, and keeping good revision records among different users (Boulos, Maramba, & Wheeler, 2006; Godwin-Jones, 2003; Lamb, 2004). These functions not only help foster a sense of community among members but also make it possible for teachers and researchers to monitor learners' co-authoring process. Several wikis studies were conducted to explore the potential of wikis for L2 writing; but few of them considered students' produced texts with only data on students' perceptions and their text production process (e.g., Carr, Morrison, Cox, & Deacon, 2007; Mak & Coniam, 2008; Pai & Liou, 2009b).

With the assistance of wikis, it is feasible to implement a collaborative writing task as an after-class assignment where the collaborative process can be lengthened and student's behavior can be observed and interpreted more systematically. The current study thus aims to compare collaboratively

and individually produced texts, explore the nature of the two different writing processes, and investigate learners' perceptions. Three research questions guided this study:

1. What are the differences between the collaboratively and individually produced texts on wikis?
2. How do learners engage in the wiki-based collaborative writing task?
3. What are their perceptions on wiki-based collaborative writing? What do they think they learn from such collaborative work?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The application of collaboration in language learning classrooms has long been valued. From theoretical perspectives, the use of collaboration is substantially rooted in Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory (1978). According to the theory, knowledge is constructed by the interaction between individuals in a society or among pairs or groups. When this concept is applied to L2 classrooms, students engaging in collaborative tasks are expected to co-construct knowledge and scaffold each other's language use. From pedagogical perspectives, collaborative learning is supported by the communicative approach to L2 instruction. Researchers have found that collaboration promotes students' intrinsic motivation and lowers their anxiety, and accordingly, students' learning is facilitated (Oxford, 1997).

Among three major writing stages, pre-writing (or planning/brainstorming), writing (drafting/composing), and re-writing (revision/peer review), collaboration is often adopted in the pre-writing and re-writing phases (Storch, 2005). Very little of the collaborative writing stage itself has been investigated in L1 contexts, let alone L2 contexts. Storch (1999, 2002, 2005) has long made efforts to explore the differences of individual and pair writing. A number of important findings on posi-

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