

Beyond the Classroom Writing via Web 2.0 Tools

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Abstract

Recently, foreign language (FL) learning/teaching have been shifted from merely focusing on repetition and habit learning to constructing knowledge through experiences within a social world. Thus, within a social constructivist approach, interaction while learning FL has become prominent in that students need to go beyond the classroom and communicate with others to facilitate their language skills. In this sense, Web 2.0 tools have been welcomed as avant garde in FL classrooms, and declared to offer new opportunities for collaboration and interaction (Nagy & Bigum, 2007) especially for enhancing language skills. On the other hand, productive and interactive skill, writing, merits attention as a medium of communication however it has been constrained within scope of classroom environment. Students become passive producers of the writing pieces whom just try to make up to teachers. Thus, there emerges a need to encourage students to be aware of their audiences' presence, write for them, and negotiate the meanings with others to carry writing classes to interactive and collaborative environment. Therefore, the present study investigates the impact of Web 2.0 tools-"Showbeyond" and "Blog" on students' audience awareness, and students' experiences while using them for creating stories and sharing them with others. Hence, paper-pen narrative stories and stories created via "Showbeyond", logs and semi-structured interviews of 8 learners of English as a foreign language (EFL) are collected and analyzed through discourse and phenomenological data analysis. The results show that though students' awareness of their audiences while creating stories on "Showbeyond" is limited, motivation, collaboration, and negotiation for meaning are found to be the most recursive themes when their experiences of using Web 2.0 tools considered. It may be suggested that Web 2.0 tools can be used in EFL writing classrooms to enhance learners' audience awareness, and to establish a community in a motivated way.

1. Introduction

Growing body of tools and advancements in technology has been used to cultivate foreign language learning in recent years. In this sense, Web 2.0 tools have been much thought of in FL setting as there is need to go beyond the classroom and interact with other people. Herein, new technological Web 2.0 tools referring interactive information sharing, user-centered design, and collaborative applications on the World Wide Web offer rich opportunities for FL learners as they enable learners to cross the boundaries of classroom writing via Internet. Web 2.0 is the medium of organizing, exploring, analyzing, creatively deriving meaning from knowledge presented, and in which learners create their own visualizations, analyze the insight, others can gain insight through presented visual material [1] (Sorapure, 2010). Therefore, the growth of Web 2.0 tools has made the web an important educational medium.

Parallel with the social constructivism, these technological tools encourage students to explore both written texts and their own identities in new ways and from multiple angles. Rather than incorporating knowledge in writing, learners render meaningful knowledge for a particular audience and context; create a shared community and context for knowledge construction. In this respect, learners are both involved in their own learning and others' learning processes [2] (Rubio et al., 2007); they act as

interdependence within a social context where they share their knowledge and negotiate on different meanings. Moreover, with the adaptation of Web 2.0 tools in foreign language classes, new opportunities for and different modes of collaboration and interaction, which enable FL learners to construct knowledge [3] (Nagy & Bigum, 2007), are created; in other words, Web 2.0 tools enable learners to access, create, edit, participate, and comment within a community interactively. Among these, "Showbeyond" is a Web 2.0 tool which provides learners to write their own narration and share with a community. The importance of searching "Showbeyond" and narrative writing is that narrative writing is the genre that learners are less engaged in audience awareness or consideration than all other types [4] (Carol, 1981). In addition, "Showbeyond" can be embedded into blog page in order to stimulate learners to comment on each other's narratives by encouraging them with real and responsive audiences (Beach et al., 2008; Lundin, 2008 cited in Sorapure, 2010) and by providing an ideal structure to acquire social skills and a sense of responsibility (Rubio et al., 2007) for established community. While "Blog" have been concerned for some time, there is no research concerning "Showbeyond".

Therefore, 8 EFL college students' narrative writings in terms of audience awareness and their experiences while using "Showbeyond" and "Blog" are explored qualitatively. The research questions are followed as:

1. Is there a difference between EFL learners' paper-pen narrative stories and narratives created through "Showbeyond" in terms of audience awareness?
2. What do EFL learners experience through "Showbeyond" and "Blog"?

2. Method

The study is conducted in one of the universities located in southern part of Turkey; Mersin University in English Language Teaching (ELT) Department. The ELT Department is designed based on 4+1 year education as 4 year is undergraduate program and one year is preparatory program for 4 year education. Participants of the study are 8 EFL learners attending preparatory program in ELT Department. Their age ranges from 18-20. They have been taking writing course for almost nine months until the study is conducted. Based on "standards" and "benchmarks" prepared for preparatory program for learners overall expected behaviors, learners have learned how to write paragraph at first, then moved to write essays. The data is gathered through learners' paper-pen narrative writings, "Showbeyond" narratives, logs, and semi-structured interviews. For the qualitative analysis of the obtained data, first of all, discourse analysis is applied for learners' paper-pen narrative stories and stories created via "Showbeyond" in order to compare these two narratives in terms of audience awareness cues. Then, learners' interviews are transcribed and analyzed.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Is there a difference between EFL learners' paper-pen narrative stories and narratives created through "Showbeyond" in terms of audience awareness?

According to Genre Theory in writing, different kinds of communicative purposes result in different types of discourse, and these have their own distinct characteristics within themselves [5] (Nunan, 1999). Hence, learners' paper-pen narrative writings and stories created via "Showbeyond" are compared to see if there is any difference between these two in terms of audience awareness. Some extractions from learners' paper-pen narratives are presented as follows:

"Everybody in the room went out. The view was so awful that dead body was on the ground. His father embraced him and went out to the hospital. (Dilek)

"As everybody knows birthdays take important place in people life. These surprises make people happy....When I remember this day, I can't help smiling" (Kader)

In general, it is found that learners use "distant pronouns" such as "we", "she" and "they" by eliminating any relation with characters in the story. They do not introduce the characters for the audience to follow the story easily, and understand the relations better. They also write short sentences without cohesive devices such as, and, but, etc. to link sentences together for the sake of fluency in writing. Moreover, learners do not regard audiences when they write about time and place in their writing. They use deixes such as, there, today, that day, in the past, and here by ignoring audiences background knowledge and scheme about the story.

However, it is noticed that "Blogs" provide learners "reflect on the quality of their writing and the language being used, be more attentive to their audience and more selective of their sources" [6] (Arena & Jefferson, 2008 p. 2). The reason for such emergence of awareness can also be due to the ways in which learners narrate events with more visual language and moving images that allow them to present information differently to make a point.

It is found that while creating stories via "Showbeyond", they favor to use cohesive devices such as However, for example, and etc. and they prefer using close pronouns as "I" and "you". They try to attract the audiences' attention by writing poem for their stories. Some examples taken from learners' "Showbeyond" stories are shown below:

"You must read it....I have some memories about my childhood. For example, I used to sleep...." (Ayten)

".....Thus, we thought that we deserved good picnic to enjoy.....We forgot about exams and lessons..." (Kader).

Yet, there are still some problems with learners' narrations. They still form short sentences and do not concern about fluency of story. Clarifying time, place and person in narration for audiences lacks in most stories. However, when logs of learners are looked over as presented below, it is seen that thank to visuality, stories are appealing:

"good job with suitable photographs!!" (Sibel)

"it must be a fascinating activity to "go angling "(thanks for teaching this word) never have I done it. your story is very good. thanks :)" (Bahar).

Learners acting also as audiences in "Blog" page for their peers are happy with stories, and they follow every story with great enthusiasm. They both entertain themselves and learn from each other. Through blogs learners construct knowledge collectively as they post entries that increase reflection, analysis, and discussion.

3.2. What do EFL learners experience through "Showbeyond" and "Blog"?

As learners construct their own knowledge through experiences and sharing the events and knowledge within the frames of social contexts, it seems prominent to understand and describe in depth "Showbeyond" and "Blog" phenomena and experiences of learners while writing and sharing their stories. It is noticed that "Showbeyond" and "Blog" page have many contributions in terms of motivation, collaboration, and negotiation of meaning.

"The things we wrote or created on paper may not attract audiences. They may some pictures on his/her mind; however, there is no chance to check if they are alike with what we want to picturize. But, if we enrich our stories visually with our own pictures, it becomes much more attractive, and we have chance to convey what we exactly mean for". (Meral)

Moreover, it is discovered that students often check an online communication site to see whether their own posts are replied by other peer students similarly in [7] Pena-Shaff et al., 2005 cited in Kim, 2008.

"I got so excited when I first post my Showbeyond to you and saw my story on the Blog page. I waited the others' comments. I immediately logged in Blog page when I turn my laptop on" (Eser).

Emerging technologies foster interaction and collaboration among learners [8] (Beldarrin, 2006 cited in Bolliger 2010). They construct and share their knowledge by working together; that is, they develop interdependence in the learning process. Learners' learning becomes more effective with the help of the others in a context of social interaction.

"Process was so enjoyable for me. We search for pictures, looked for narratives, and shared our experiences with each other. It was great to comment on each other and share videos together" (Kevser).

Participants of the study state that "Showbeyond" provide them a platform of communicating with other people, and share knowledge with them. As for writing Cohen and Riel (1989) claim that learners write better when they consider their peers as audience instead of teachers [9] (cited in Nehal, 2004).

One of the important problems with EFL learners' writing is that they combine word and phrases together so as to form a sentence or sentences; however, they ignore the meaning that sentences carry. Language is not a chunk of sentences formed in strict grammatical rules, but it is a way of communication with others. "Showbeyond" and "Blog" pages together enable learners to compromise on meaning. In this sense, there seems no problem for extra effort for audience consideration. As learners know that their stories are uploaded to the "Blog" page and shared there, they care about the midpoint of the intended and conveyed meaning.

4. Conclusion

Narrative writing become more demanding and problematic for learners because one the one hand, they both have to write their own story and convey the meaning to the audience, on the other hand, they have no audience, but the teacher. That is why, in the present study, within the frames of social constructivism, two Web 2.0 tools; "Showbeyond" and "Blog" are utilized for enabling learners with the opportunity to share their narrative stories with other people as audiences. When they create narratives on "Showbeyond", they somewhat start to concern whom they writing for probably due to their being conscious of sharing within a community although still their awareness for audience is not wholly developed. However, learners willingly attend to watch and read narratives on "Showbeyond" as visual pictures and music accompany with story. Besides, experiences of the learners on "Showbeyond" and "Blog" show that learners are much more motivated, work collaboratively, and negotiate on what they intend and what they convey throughout the process. The present study paves the way for using and integrating "Showbeyond" and "Blog" for creating narrative writing and sharing it within a community.

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