
This paper presents a case study that examined the use of one of the Web 2.0 services, a social networking site (SNS), in an adult ESL writing class. The main purpose of this study is to investigate and describe how the SNS was implemented, and how the students perceived its use for their learning. Data were collected over a five-month period, including classroom observations, online artifacts, and interviews with the instructor and the seven ESL students. Drawing on activity theory (Leontiev, 1981) and situated learning theory (Lave & Wenger, 1991), the researcher analyzed factors that contributed to the unsuccessful use of the SNS in this particular writing class. The findings of this study show the major conflicts that existed between the English teacher and the ESL students in terms of their ontological views on learning, which resulted in reducing the students’ sense of achievement, belonging, and recognition in the process of learning to write with the SNS. The educational implications for using Web 2.0 services in L2 classes have been discussed.

I. INTRODUCTION

The Internet of the twenty-first century, particularly known as Web 2.0, the second generation of the Web, is differentiated from its earlier version, Web 1.0. (Benito-Ruiz, 2009; O’Reilly, 2005, 2006; Warschauer & Grimes, 2007). When personal computers (PCs) and the Internet started to be popularized in the late twentieth century, people were excited about the unlimited accessibility to a plethora of information on the Web. The
Web was normally considered as a space where information could be retrieved, and the Internet users mainly as consumers of knowledge that had already been prepared and published by so-called experts. Although Web 1.0 tools such as personal websites allowed the public to write and post their own content, this was most often restricted to experts who had access to hardware and software and had skills and knowledge about them. In addition, the publishing activities were mostly unidirectional from a specific author to consumers, so that the information on the Web stayed stable and isolated. Benito-Ruiz (2009) summarizes the characteristics of Web 1.0 as “Web as read-only” “Web as medium,” “Web of geeks and techies,” and “Web as static” (p.65).

On the other hand, Web 2.0 tools (such as blogs, wikis, and social networking sites), which were mostly created and popularized in the early 21st century, have provided a platform where ordinary Internet users can not only read but also easily write, publish, and share their own content with other users (Benito–Ruiz, 2009; O'Reilly, 2005; Throne, Black, & Sykes, 2009; Warschauer & Grimes, 2007). Web 2.0 has provided a place where consumption, creation, and sharing of information and knowledge can arise simultaneously. In addition, the media of content creation are not limited to written text anymore. Web 2.0 environments support multimodal ways of meaning making process, such as posting and distributing images, audio tracks, and videos. Benito–Ruiz (2009) identifies Web 2.0 as “Web as read–write,” “Web as platform,” “Web of anyone willing to try,” and “Web as dynamic” (p.65).

Along with the popularization of large–scale publishing and sharing activities on the Internet, Web 2.0 has also provided its technical support and environments for connecting people through many–to–many communication. Wesch (2007) emphasizes on his Youtube video clip that Web 2.0 is not just linking information but linking people. It promotes environments to weave a web of people and to build new communities in which people can participate through active interactions and collaboration.

With this growing recognition of the characteristic architecture of Web 2.0 that “allows more interactive forms of publishing (of textual and multimedia content), participation, and networking” (Warschauer & Grimes, 2007, p.2), its potential for second language (L2) learning has been recently recognized and welcomed in the field of L2 education (e.g., Kern, 2006; Murray, 2005; Thomas, 2009). For example, Web 2.0 allows L2 learners more easily to stay in contact with not only native speakers of the target language but also other L2 learners all around the world and to sustain meaningful interactions with them in a variety of ways. However, due to its recent debut on the stage of L2 education in history, the research on Web 2.0 and L2 learning has been still in an infant stage, and it