Using Wiki to Develop L2 Chinese Composition Writing Skills

应用 Wiki 发展汉语二语写作技能

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Abstract

Second language (L2) writing is often deemed an individual act, especially in L2 Chinese teaching. It is however advantageous to engage L2 learners in collaborative writing because writing is essentially a social act (Hyland, 2002; Weissberg, 2006). As a CMC (computer-mediated communication) tool, Wiki not only provides a collaborative writing environment, but also allows L2 learners to comment and edit each other’s writing (Godwin-Jones, 2009; Kessler, 2009; Schuetze, 2011). The entire editing history is also recorded. Based on the framework of sociocultural and constructivist theories, this study explores the effects of using Wiki-based peer editing and coaching to facilitate the development of L2 Chinese composition writing skills. Two research questions are asked:

What are the main characteristics and focuses of peer editing and coaching in an L2 Wiki learning environment?

Does Wiki-mode peer editing have an impact on the development of L2 Chinese composition writing skills? If so, in what aspects?

Ten intermediate college L2 Chinese learners participate in this study. Each learner completes a weekly composition writing task via Wiki over the course of one semester. In each task, learners first individually write a 400-character composition in Wiki based on a specified topic. Learners are then paired to work as editors, and provide editing and correcting for each other’s compositions. An editing guideline is provided. Learners are also required to give written explanations for each editing entry they make to allow a more informative peer learning experience. Instructors serve as the facilitator of the editing process. Finally, students are asked to rewrite the composition based on peer editing features.

To answer the first research question, the peer editing features are analyzed for salient themes and categories. Descriptive statistics are provided. Characteristics of collaborative writing and editing are identified qualitatively in line with sociocultural theory. To answer the second research question, comparative assessment is conducted on students’ pre- and post-editing compositions based on the L2 writing constructs, and the differences are linked to the collaborative performance in Wiki. The way in which learners construct and monitor their composition writing process based on the peer coaching is explored in line with constructivist theory.

The findings show that through the Wiki peer editing learners empower themselves, participate actively in writing, and provide scaffolding and coaching to each other. The peer editing effort is primarily focused at the vocabulary and grammar level, and the main types of
editing made are deleting and replacing. The Wiki-based peer editing prepares learners with enhanced linguistic resources and content ideas for composition writing. Learners engage themselves in different ways through the Wiki writing experience, and also incorporate their peer’s comments to different degrees. Given the challenge that writing in Chinese presents for speakers of Western languages, this research adds knowledge to our understanding of how collaborative mechanisms in Wiki can transform the approach to individual L2 composition writing. It also helps to communicate to Chinese teaching practitioners how L2 Chinese writing skill may be nurtured through computer-based collaborative tools.