The Impact of Interactive Planning on L2 Chinese Composition Writing

Abstract

In second language (L2) Chinese classrooms, the learning of writing is often treated as an individual act. However, researchers have argued that writing should also be socially situated, and L2 learners may experience unusual difficulty when they write in isolation. Grounded in both interactionist and collaborative learning theories, this study empirically investigates the effects of L2 collaborative planning on subsequent individual L2 Chinese composition writing. Two forms of interactive discussion were investigated: face-to-face (FTF) oral discussion; discussion by means of synchronous computer-mediated communication (S–CMC), that is, online text chat. The impacts between the two types of interactive mediums were also compared.

Six third-year Chinese L2 learners participated in this study. The participants conducted five online-chat and five FTF pair discussion tasks for a total of ten sessions. The online-chat and FTF sessions alternated. Each interactive session lasted for 20 minutes. To observe the impact of interaction on individual writing, upon completing each interactive task (i.e., online chats or FTF oral conversation), students immediately wrote a 350-character composition independently on the topic that was addressed in the interactive session. A 30-minute timeframe was allowed for each composition writing. The ten task sessions were administered in ten consecutive weeks during the spring 2009 semester. A 30-minute semi-structured interview was also conducted individually with the participants to discuss their perceptions of using online chats or FTF conversation as tools for learning Chinese L2 writing.

Qualitative analysis was the primary analysis method used and some descriptive statistics was also used. Using the framework of interactionist learning theory, the impact of learner exposure to comprehensible input, output, and negotiation of meaning on Chinese L2 composition writing was examined for both chats and FTF interaction. Based on the principles of collaborative learning theory, what Chinese L2 learners benefited from the social interaction was explored for both mediums. Data were also compared between online chats and FTF oral conversation. The findings suggest that both computer chat medium and FTF conversation had benefits for Chinese L2 writing development, including enhancing linguistic quality, increasing content richness, improving L2 writing fluency, and facilitation a higher motivation for learning L2 Chinese writing. Furthermore, the interactive planning modified learners’ approach to developing L2 writing production. On the other hand, the two mediums also displayed differences in learner participation and learning transfer patterns. Their impacts on the development of lexical and syntactic features as well as textual structures as displayed in students’ compositions were also different between the two mediums. Given that L2 Chinese writing skill is a weak link in L2 Chinese teaching and research, the current study provides useful information to L2 Chinese writing pedagogy and SLA writing research with respect to Chinese composition writing. It also facilitates an understanding of the interplay between the acquisitions of different L2 skills, in specific between Chinese L2 writing and speaking, and between Chinese L2 interactive skill and writing skill.
References: