Shared Identities: Our Interweaving Threads

Effective Writing and Responding Online

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Reference Data

Web-based writing and its impact on student revision capabilities is a fast developing area of second language writing research. A number of web-based writing applications now exist; advances in technology have impacted the way second language writing is taught and learned. Previous methods of teaching and learning writing restricted the kinds and amounts of interaction that participants could experience. Teachers often responded once or twice to a paper written document and peer review sessions had be face to face. Web-based systems increase the amount of interaction throughout the learning and teaching process. Since the beginning of the 21st century researchers have investigated web-based writing using a number of different systems with varying results. Many students saw the benefit of online writing while others preferred the more traditional writing methods. Although some teachers still use the older web-based tools to teach writing like forums, some newer tools have recently become available. The age of web-based writing has emerged and need investigation; this paper begins with a review of online writing and responding studies to date and then proceeds with a review of the some of the newer online writing systems like Google Docs and Zoho. the results of a use preference study where students used these online word processors for 2 semesters and described their writing preferences rounds out the end of this paper.

　ウェブ基盤ライティングとその学生の校正能力への効果は第二言語ライティングで急速に発達している領域である。現在、多数のウェブ基盤のライティング・アプリケーションが存在する。本稿の重要点は、どちらのアプリケーションを学生が好み、どちらが第二言語ライティングの習得により大きな効果があるかにある。テ　クノロジーの進歩は第二言語ライティングの教え方や学び方に影響を与えている。以前のライティングの教え方や学び方は、教師と学生が持つことができる相互　作用の種類と量を制限した。しばしば教師は学生の作文に一、二度だけ対応し、学生同士の批評会は差し向かいで行われた。ウェブ基盤システムは学習・教授過　程の間中、相互作用量を増大する。２１世紀初頭から、研究者たちは様々なシステムを用いてウェブ基盤ライティングを調査し、結果も変化していった。多くの　学生はオンライン・ライティングの有利点を見出す一方、より伝統的なライティング方法を好む者もいた。ライティングを教授するのにフォーラムのような古い　ウェブ基盤ツールを今なお使っている教師がいるが、最近新しいツールが利用できるようになっている。ウェブ基盤ライティングの時代が現れ、調査の必要もある。当研究は、どちらのシステムが好まれ、どちらのシステムがライティング技能を習得するのにより良い助力となるかを発見するため、ウェブ基盤ライティングの旧型とGoogle Docsのような新型システムの比較を含む。
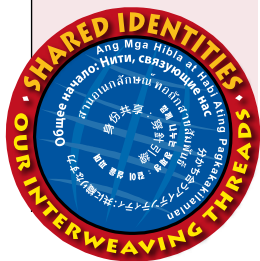
"E-Learning based SLA and e-feedback appears to stand on the edge of major changes from the traditional feedback to an Internet intensive form of feedback. Current research and development exists on a number of e-feedback systems that work via the standard browser" (Lynn, Tuzi, 2007).

Online writing systems are not new in the digital sense. For more than 10 years, teachers and linguists have adopted web-based communication tools. These more traditional digital tools include email, forums, and CGI forms. These communication tools are excellent tools in their own right and were adapted by language teachers to encourage second language writers. There are numerous articles describing their use in second language education; however, these tools were not designed for academic or business writing, and certainly not designed to assist language learners to write. Yet email, forum, and CGI usage in second language education flourished, and continue to be used today.

Research in teacher and peer feedback on second language writing is robust and much of the research indicate that there are substantial benefits to the more traditional feedback. Oral and written feedback, for example, benefits language acquisition and writing abilities because of the increased opportunities for negotiation and scaffolding (Mendoca & Johnson, 1994; Carson & Nelson, 1996). Additionally, oral feedback aids in developing critical reading skills, analyzing writing skills, recognizing audience needs, developing social interaction skills, solidifying writing as a process (Ferris & Hedgecock, 1998; Mittan, 1989; Villamil & Deguerrero, 1996; Parks, 2002).

Other discoveries highlighted in the literature include the fact that students often prefer teacher feedback more than feedback from their peers (Carson & Nelson, 1998; Paulus, 1999). Even more interesting is the fact that combining a writing conference with peer-teacher feedback was the most desired form of feedback that many students prefer (Hedgecock & Lefkowicz, 1994), and that combining different feedback formats yielded a greater impact on revisions because the comments contained a more focused message with extended suggestion filled ideas (Duppenthaler, 2004; Levis & Levis, 2003; Ferris, 1997).

The transition to electronic feedback (e-feedback) brought new advantages and problems. One possible benefit arises from the proximity the responder is from the recipient. E-feedback distances the two parties making it easier to offer critical comments, especially for writers in cultures that prefer harmony, and therefore have more difficulty critiquing writers in closer proximity (Tuzi, 2004; Garrison & Anderson, 2003). Another benefit researchers mentioned was that e-feedback provided "a better means of monitoring conversations" (Lynn & Tuzi, 2007). In other words, students who know their comments were being monitored felt encouraged to stay on task. Students also liked that e-feedback not only allowed them to respond immediately, but also give them time to ponder their comments in a low affective environment (DiGiovanni & Nagaswami, 2001).

Although e-feedback tools do provide benefits to second language writers, several researchers recognize that many of these tools are not designed for e-feedback, collaboration, composition instruction. Language teachers wisely take these tools and modify their teaching to suit their teaching needs;

however, the opposite should be the norm. Felix rightly suggested that innovation is driven by many different factors, "but not one of them concerns a pedagogical imperative" (2003, ix). Software developers should mold the technology to meet students' needs; we should not mold students to accommodate technology (Tuzi, 2004; Hanna et al, 2000).

Enter web-based writers

Today there are new, completely online applications that are designed for writing; these Internet word processors (IWP) are an attempt to replace the traditional PC-based office applications like Microsoft Office or OpenOffice. These new applications not only enable students to write via the web using many of the traditional tools and buttons in PC-based applications, but also allow them to write without any specially installed applications, and allows them to write from any web-accessible system at no cost. users can access the IWP via a Microsoft, Apple, Unix, or Linux-based computer. In other words, IWPs are not limited by an operating system, location, time or money. Users are free to use whatever computers system they desire from any web-accessible location without the need to purchase any writing software.

Traditional word processors, which were designed for professional and academic writing, include functions and tools that traditional communication tools like e-mail and forums do not have or emphasize. These functions and

Table 1. Summary of Internet office systems

IWP	Multilingual interface	Revision history	Share capability	GUI Rich	Security	License Fee	Special Features
AjaxWrite	NO	NO	NO	Some	NO	NO	
Flysuite	NO	YES	YES	Yes	NO	1 time fee	
GoogleDocs	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO	NO	Many
iNetWord	NO	YES	YES	YES	NO	NO	Online Publish
Peepel	NO	YES	YES	YES	NO	NO	DTP functions
ThinkFree	NO	NO	YES	YES	Java	Yes	Publish Sync
Zoho	YES	YES	YES	Excellent	YES	NO	Many
Buzzword	Eng, Ger, Fr	YES	YES	Excellent	Flash SSL	NO	Many
J2e- just too Easy	NO	YES	YES	Excellent	NO	Individual - No School - No	Object oriented single & school
Solodox	CZ, Eng, JP	YES	YES	some	NO	NO	

tools also exist in web-based office applications. IWP users can format characters, add pictures, tables, headers/footers and hyperlinks. These tools look and feel similar to the PC-based word processors that they have been using. This commonality makes the transition to IWPs easier for users.

Web-based office applications continue to emerge; it appears that the browser wars of the 1990s has re-emerged again with new participants vying for users and usage. Of the dozen or so IWP systems that currently exist, they can be grouped into three types: Ajax based, Flashed based, and Java based. The online office systems listed in Table 1, have many of the same functionality.

The AJAX systems rely on JavaScripting to perform most of their functions. They include many functions comparable to standard functions in pc-based word processors like fonts, paragraph settings, tables, pictures, etc. Most AJAX systems also have a share capability, revision history, and the save as function. The other two engines are Adobe Flash and Java. Both of these engines require a plug-in to the browser, which is a simple installation process. Both Java and Flash take longer to load into the browser, but once loaded, the interface is more robust than the AJAX IWPs. Of the systems reviewed, only Buzzword includes security enhancements. Users, teachers, or publishers who demand such capabilities may want to consider using this system. Only J2E includes desktop publishing capabilities similar to Scribus or PageMaker. J2E is also the only system to include school group functionality. Schools can register their entire school and all appropriate classes quickly and easily. J2E allows the school to have an administrator to manage their data. There are advantages to all three types of systems. The

web-based application wars are just beginning; time will tell what functionality is preferred. Much will depend on brand name, ease of use, and interoperability.

A final web-based writing tool exists in content management systems (CMS) and course content management systems (CCMS). Dozens of CMS's exist that allow people to produce, blogs, wikis, websites, and allow visitors to these sites to contribute via a web form that includes an html editor like FCKeditor. These editors include many of the same features that typical PC-based word processors have. The documents created by these html editors are saved into the website's database or as an html file and are not typically exportable to PC-based word processors.

Second language writer and web-based writing

Web-based writing for second language writers has emerged from its infancy and moved into a pre-intermediate stage that will expand the opportunities these students and teachers will encounter. "In the future writers will no longer need to purchase a word processor or limit to their writing to a single PC or to e-mail; their documents will be available via the Internet to be read, revised and responded to"(Lynn, Tuzi, 2007). What the impact will be from these emerging opportunities remains to be seen. Some of the benefits have already been highlighted in recent studies. 2LL can write collaboratively by allowing students to write,edit, share, and assess writing (Godwin-Jones, 2008). IWPs are particularly well suited to take advantage of document sharing. Web-based file sharing and email attachments require students to check out a document, download to the users PC and

modify it offline and re-upload again. The newer IWP have no such limitations; the document creator/owner creates the document and invites anyone with an e-mail address to view or collaborate on a document. Students can read and respond in the very document that their peers are writing. Students can co-write a document, literally at the same time. Students can read and respond, adding comments and highlighting into a peers comments.

This web-based e-feedback provides even more advantages because writers receive multiple, often redundant comments that help verify areas that need improvement (DiGiovanni & Nagaswami, 2001; Tuzi, 2004). These added responses tend to increase writing motivation, strengthen writing confidence, and encourage extensive writing (Paulus, 1999; Hu, 2005; Tsui and Ng, 2000; Warschauer, 1996). This kind of system can benefit anyone writing documents; students, teachers, researchers, editors, and administrators can take advantage of these easy access, share capable tools designed specifically for writing.

2LWs that share web-based documented will also increase noticing and modeling. As more opportunities for cross classroom collaboration emerge, students and classes can interact with other language learners; these interactions increase not only collaboration, but opportunities for learners to notice differences between their writing and that of their peers, thereby assisting them to improve their writing. And the assistance that e-feedback can offer lies not only in the comments they offer but in their shared writings. Student read and respond to each others papers. Viewing their peers papers can provide mini models. For example, Student A notices how student B uses the connection, "After mixing the ingredients,". Student A decides that the construction is valuable and appropriates it for her own writing. This type of modeling has already existed, but it should be more beneficial since the amount of collaborative interaction is increased.

Certainly there other applications that teachers can also employ to teach writing, negotiation and collaboration. These include wikis, blogs, email and other sites that share pictures, videos, and presentations. They are more often used as communications and collaborations tools where users can post, respond, contribute, and debate with these systems. These types of applications have a place in the language teachers toolbox, but they are not designed for writing in the traditional sense where students learn to write in a specific format, where they are required to deliver documents for academic, scientific or business environments.

Potential drawbacks

Online office applications clearly have advantages that their predecessors lacked. Yet they are not the panacea to the problems 2L writers and teachers encounter; there are issues with IWP and other online applications. The most obvious issues is that taking full advantage of these applications requires an Internet connection. Continuous Internet access is becoming more of the norm, but there are students and teachers who have limited access to the Internet. Working in a limited web-accessible environment means that the impact of the advantages of IWP is also limited.

A major red flag for some 2L writing teachers is that e-responders can not only read and respond to a peer's

documents, they can also edit the document they are reading and responding to. Ambitious readers may decide to assist writers by actually adding to the content of the paper. Less virtuous readers may decide to delete all the content and revisions. Typical IWPs allow document owners to share their documents to others and give limited or complete access to the document. Invited readers can only read, but invited editors have full access to the text. Full access allows editors to read and post comments - and allows them to contribute or delete content. Teachers need to seriously consider the impact of this authority before encouraging students to grant editing authority.

A major logistical issue that some teachers and students have is the frustration of exporting IWP documents to a PC-based application. There are occasions when IWP users must export their documents to PC-based applications, but the conversion process changes fonts, font sizes, graphics, etc. Some users are very irritated by these changes and therefore prefer to use PC-based systems exclusively. Doing so will eliminate the benefits that IWPs offer.

Despite the difficulties that IWP currently have, students teachers, and schools should can and will take advantage of these applications. Since IWP combine many of the functions inherent in traditional word processors with the time/space independence and simultaneous collaboration capabilities of web-based applications all at no cost, the real question is why would anyone or any school pay for an office package when comparable systems exists online.

Research summary

Although teachers are beginning to utilize IWP (Godwin-Jones, 2008), no studies on their effectiveness, usability, or likeability yet exist. Thus, the focus of this research centers on writers' preference for IWP. This study, conducted at an undergraduate liberal arts college in Tokyo, was an exploration of student preferences for IWP. After the students used several IWP for two, 10 week semesters, they participated in a questionnaire and interviews regarding their word processor preferences.

The participants included 15 first and second year college students taking required ESL courses. The group, which included eight females and seven males, had never used an IWP before. All of the students had the required computer ability to use IWP; they could a word processor and all had experience using a word processor.

Procedures

During the first semester of the school year, the students received writing homework and were introduced to GoogleDocs. The teacher modeled how to become a Google member and how to use the system, including how to invite collaborators to view and comment on their peers' documents. Following the 25 minute demonstration, the students signed up and began playing with the GoogleDocs interface. At the end of the class, the teacher assigned students to write taks and asked them to share their document with the teacher and at least two other peers. Students and the teacher took the responsibility for reading and responding their partners' papers. The students

used GoogleDocs for the remainder of the semester and completed a total of three writing tasks. During the following semester, students again performed a number of writing tasks, but this time with Zoho Writer.

At the end of the second semester, students took a questionnaire about their experiences using IWP. Additionally, a number of students participated in interviews and discussed their word processor preferences. Throughout the academic year, the researchers also conducted spot interviews and took notes on the activities students participated in and on their observations of the students during class time.

Results

The questionnaire results, displayed in table 2, suggest that IWP are not significantly preferred or liked by these students. The results show that a similar amount of students preferred IWP (6) and PO-based (8) processors. Additionally, a nearly similar amount of students preferred GoogleDocs (8) and Zoho Writer (6).

Looking at the computer skills and gender of the participants also did not reveal any significant differences. Three out of eight males students and three out of six female students preferred IWP. Perceived computer abilities also did not appear significant. Three students who scored their computer skills below 50 preferred IWP while four preferred PC-based; three students who scored their computer skills

Table 2. Student preferences for IWP and PC-based word processors

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Unsure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	NA
GoogleDocs or Zoho are better than Microsoft Office or OpenOffice		6	4	2	2	1
I prefer writing with an online word processor (like GoogleDocs or Zoho)	1	6	1	4	3	
Web-based word processors are more convenient than computer-based	1	6	3	3	2	
Web-based word processors are easier to use than computer-based word processors	1	2	4	2	3	
I can write better with a web-based word processor.	1	6	2	3	3	
The collaborative comments I receive in Web-based word processors help me write better.	1	7	4		3	
Which word processor do you prefer? PC or IWP	8	6				
Which web-based word processor do you prefer? GoogleDocs or Zoho Writer	8	6				

above 50 preferred IWP and four preferred PC-based. Age may have been n determining factor. Two of the students were 50+ years old, and neither preferred using IWP.

The interviews provided a clearer picture for these students' preferences. Ironically, participants quoted many of the same reasons for their preferences. Some students believed that IWPs were easier to use; others thought that PC-based systems were easier. A few of the students did not really have a preference over one particular system. Rather, because they were too busy, they did not want to learn a new system of writing. Even though they had ample time to practice in class, they had an aversion to learning to new technologies.

Recommendations for future study

The influence and impact of web-based writing is still in its infancy, so the opportunities for research with these tools is substantial. There are two main categories related to web-based word processors that researchers need to investigate, which are usability studies and impact studies. Applications, like any tool, should be designed to be minimally distractive to the task at hand. Although we are not Apple users, one reason for their popularity is that they just work, that they are easy to use, that they do not interfere with the user while they are trying to complete a project. Web-based writers should be investigated to determine how they aid or hinder the writing experience.

In addition to the traditional usability studies that researchers should conduct with web-based writers, investigations on the impact that these systems have on 2L writers abilities to acquire writing skills also needs investigation. Will the added functionality and added access impact the students abilities to writer better documents? Will students acquire writing at a faster rate? Will the added layer of the Internet overwhelm students and actually hinder their writing skills? Does the added layer of interaction enhance the learning environment or will it raise the affective filter and hamper students? We look forward to new studies that investigate this category.

The unique collaborative capabilities that web-based writers contain also merit investigation, Collaborative opportunities between students, classes and schools from any location are becoming a greater probability with the emergence of these tools. The fact that teachers and researchers can collaborate with classes in different cultures and time zones is no guarantee that the collaboration will positively impact language acquisition. It is true that web-based writing applications do contain document comparison, document history, and collaborative writing functions which enhance the writing environment. It is still unclear whether the added audience and functions are necessary. Will students collaborating with peers across the globe do any better that students collaborating with peers in their own classroom? More studies comparing collaborative efforts in one locale versus multi-web locations also merits investigation.

Conclusions

There is little doubt that the use of web-based writing is increasing; the apparent benefits are enticing. Students and teachers will begin adopting their use in classes, and school

administrators may develop policies on their use. It appears that the golden age of PC-based word processors is coming to an end. Second language students will eventually need to acquire knowledge and skills related to their use.

The current study, although not nearly large enough to generalize results, seems to indicate no specific preferences for any specific word processor. What is learned first, what skills are acquired first appear to be the applications that students prefer. Some of the computer loving students will adopt these new web applications; others with less of an affinity for technology will balk at having to learn something new.

Teachers as well may have different reactions to these new applications. There will be the techno-teachers who may push these applications on students. I suspect that many, however may be reluctant to adopt these new tools. Some teachers simply do not like change. PC-based systems are sufficient and do not need replacement. Others may prefer PC-based systems because they prefer simpler systems. The added web layer of these applications introduces an added layer of frustration.

The real questions we teachers and educators need to address is what benefit does knowing these applications have for 2L writing students.

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Appendix 1

Web-based writers' writing preferences questionnaire

1.   Age: Ave-30   2. Gender: M-8 F-6

3.   What do you believe your computer abilities are?
   0 = 'I know nothing' 100 = 'I am a computer genius'

4.   Student writer preferences

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Unsure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	NA
GoogleDocs or Zoho are better than Microsoft Office or OpenOffice		6	4	2	2	1
I prefer writing with an online word processor (like GoogleDocs or Zoho)	1	6	1	4	3	
Web-based word processors are more convenient than computer-based	1	6	3	3	2	
Web-based word processors are easier to use than computer-based word processors	1	2	4	2	3	
I can write better with a web-based word processor.	1	6	2	3	3	
The collaborative comments I receive in Web-based word processors help me write better.	1	7	4		3	

5.   Which word processor do you prefer?

   A. Computer-based (e.g. Microsoft Office, Open Office)   B. Web-based (e.g. GoogleDocs, Zoho)

6.   Check the reasons you prefer (Check all that you like)

   It is easy to use

   I can receive quick collaboration

   I can access my work from anywhere

   I do not need the Internet to use it

   Other _____

7.   Which web-based word processor do you prefer? A. GoogleDocs   B. Zoho Writer

8.   Check the reasons you prefer that web-based word processor (Check all that you like)

   It is easier to use

   I can receive quick collaboration

   I can access my work from anywhere

   I do not need the Internet to use it

   Other _____

9.   What do you NOT like about web-based word processors – (Check all that you like)

It is harder to use

I don't like going online to work

I can't print my paper easily

I don't want people to see my paper

I don't like learning new technology

Other _____

I like everything about web-based wordprocessors

Appendix 2

Resources
Scribus - http://www.scribus.net/
PageMaker - http://www.adobe.com/products/pagemaker/
FCKEditor - http://www.fckeditor.net/

Online word processors
GoogleDocs - http;//google.com
Zoho - http://zoho.com/
Peepel http://www.peepel.com/
Flysuite - http://www.flysuite.com
iNetWord - http://www.inetword.com/
AjaxWrite - http://us.ajax13.com/en/ajaxwrite/
Solodox - http://www.solodox.com/
J2E – Just 2 Easy - http://www.j2e.com/
Adobe Buzzword - https://buzzword.acrobat.com/

Bibliographic/annotation
Zotero - http://www.zotero.org/