Chapter 1

Introduction to Social Networking, Collaboration, and Web 2.0 Tools

LARA LOMICKA
University of South Carolina

GILLIAN LORD
University of Florida

1. Defining the Next Generation of the Web

The first question we must ask in the introduction to a volume such as this is, necessarily, what is Web 2.0? Perhaps an appropriate place to begin searching for definitions is on the Web 2.0 tool extraordinaire, Wikipedia—*the free encyclopedia that anyone can edit.* As of this writing (thus is the joy and curse of Web 2.0—a citation can be as fleeting as a thought, and a user could log on 2 minutes from now and change the definition), Wikipedia maintains that the term Web 2.0 describes the changing trends in the use of World Wide Web technology and Web design that aim to enhance creativity, communications, secure information sharing, collaboration and functionality of the Web. Web 2.0 concepts have led to the development and evolution of Web culture communities and hosted services, such as social-networking sites, video sharing sites, wikis, blogs, and folksonomies. The term first became notable after the O’Reilly Media Web 2.0 conference in 2004. Although the term suggests a new version of the World Wide Web, it does not refer to an update to any technical specifications, but rather to changes in the ways software developers and end-users utilize the Web. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Web_2.0)

---

1 Lest anyone doubt the massive popularity and success of an encyclopedia created by and for the people, one only need to check the statistics: Wikipedia owes its success to about 150,000 volunteers who share their knowledge freely by writing articles. Over the past 8 years, those volunteers contributed more than 11 million articles in 265 languages for the more than 275 million people that consult Wikipedia each month (Wales, 2008, ¶3).
After the Web 2.0 conference mentioned in the Wikipedia entry, along with numerous definitions of the term, O’Reilly (2005) made available the following meme map to highlight the applications as well as the attitudes that are relevant to Web 2.0.

Figure 1
Web 2.0 Meme Map (O’Reilly, 2005)

Other definitions are possible, but the Wikipedia explanation, along with O’Reilly’s meme map, cover the essential basics. A recent volume (Jones, 2008) approaches the difficult task of defining Web 2.0 by interviewing the leaders in Web 2.0—engineers, developers, bloggers, and others involved directly in the applications and tools discussed here. Interestingly, even among these leaders, there is no consensus as to the precise meaning of the term, nor with respect to where the web is headed from here. Nonetheless, what they do all agree on, Jones notes, is that “the Web has evolved and is evolving. Technology has made the Web more dynamic and more responsive. However, it is the social interaction occurring on the Web that is changing it even more” (p. xiii). The social aspects of the web are what most definitions do agree on, and what interest us in this volume.

From this social essence of Web 2.0, we have come to know blogs, wikis, podcasts, tagging, and the like. There is no doubt that the Web 2.0 bubble continues to expand rapidly. Every day seems to bring several new applications for social networking, collaborating, sharing, or discussing. It is virtually impossible for the average user to keep up with them all. The website Go2Web2.0 (http://www.
go2Web20.net), begun in 2006, claims to offer a regularly maintained directory of Web 2.0 applications and services. As of January 15, 2009, the website has links to 2,759 services and sites that fit the various definitions of Web 2.0—a dizzying number, the majority of which even the most tech-savvy user does not know or use. The site allows sorting by date or by tag (yet another Web 2.0 feature that we have readily adopted into our daily lives); for purposes of illustration only, selecting the “collaboration” tag reveals no fewer than 117 Web 2.0 services and applications (see Figure 2). Some of these have become fairly commonplace, such as Google Docs, while others are less well known.

Figure 2
Web 2.0 Applications and Services Tagged Under the Collaboration Tag in Go2Web2.0

It is a safe assumption that these kinds of applications will continue to multiply as more users find more uses, more ways to share, and more ways to involve themselves in the collective crowd. The uses of and for these applications will also continue to grow, from commerce to teaching, and, most importantly for us, language teaching and learning.

Nonetheless, the term Web 2.0 remains, as one blogger has pointed out, a “cunning moniker” (Davis, 2005, ¶2) in that there is still little agreement regarding what the term exactly means. Over the last 5 years, many researchers, developers, and users have come up with their own definitions of the term. Any web search of the term will yield a daunting number of definitions, terms, and tools, as well as personal opinions and perspectives (e.g., Hinchcliffe, 2005; Kroski, 2006; Mac Manus, 2005; among others). Some think it refers best to applications such as those shown above, others to the services made available through these applications, yet others to those who use such services, and still others maintain that the true Web
2.0 is a combination of these. A useful idea, which has gained popularity in Web 2.0 literature, is that Web 2.0 is an attitude not a technology: “It’s about enabling and encouraging participation through open applications and services” (Davis, 2005, ¶2). Thus, it is not so much about a new technological invention or platform but instead the ways we use existing technologies or platforms to do more and different things. In fact, Tim Berners-Lee, the inventor of the world wide web, has questioned whether it is even possible to use the term Web 2.0 in any meaningful way since many of the technological components of Web 2.0 have existed for years—even before the advent of the term Web 2.0 (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Web_2.0). In reality, most of the chapters in this volume do not present new tools or technological developments; rather they offer new perspectives on increasingly collaborative and social ways to use these tools in language learning and teaching. Therefore, it is the attitude rather than the technology that this volume addresses, and how that attitude can change the way we teach and learn languages.

This Web 2.0 attitude revolves not so much around the individual as it does around the individual as an integral part of the collective whole. When we think of Web 2.0, we think of the user no longer as the end user but rather as “the center of the virtual universe. It is an inclusive universe, taking into account the needs of all users, not just those which make up the mainstream” (Kroski, 2006, ¶ 1). In other words, Web 2.0 supports the wisdom of crowds (Surowiecki, 2005) and the idea that large groups of people are smarter than an elite few, no matter how gifted those few may be.

Such an attitude has resulted in, essentially, a fundamental shift in how we think about and use the web. We no longer interact only with static webpages to retrieve content. Instead, we catalog, organize, and share content; we create, modify, and publish new content; and, most importantly, we collaborate in these processes. We have become the crowd with the wisdom.

These new Web 2.0 tools and applications allow everyone to find what they are looking for, to connect to that to which they long to be connected, and to collaborate at previously unheard of levels with previously unconnected and unknown users. Together, these connected users form a powerful crowd that has shown it can change the web and our attitudes toward the web. For this reason, some have called Web 2.0 the Social Web, focusing on its power to unite people with similar interests or goals. In this capacity, Web 2.0 seems ideally suited to foster the ideal language-learning environment, one that encourages interaction and collaboration—the major goals, after all, of language itself.

As with any technology, we expect that by the time this volume comes out in print (or online!), at least a part of what we discuss will be, to some degree, outdated by new advances. That fact is a risk we gladly accept, as the continued advancement of web tools, 2.0 and beyond, opens more doors for researchers and scholars. At the same time, we humbly accept that this work represents a static snapshot in the dynamic movie of technological trends and developments. Our

---

2 In this volume we use the term Web 2.0 for simplicity’s sake, recognizing that it is a problematic term for some and getting more problematic all the time.
hope is that through this volume, we allow for the beginnings of continued exploration into the role of the next generation of the web, and the next, and the next, in the realm of language learning.

2. Language Learning and Teaching in the Next Generation

With a better understanding of what Web 2.0 means and all that it entails, we now approach the critical question at the heart of this volume: What does Web 2.0 mean for language educators, language learners, and researchers? The primary goal of the volume is to establish where we are in terms of Web 2.0 tools for teaching and research, as well as to discover where that path will, or should, lead in the future. Over the past 5 years or so, research has begun to emerge showcasing Web 2.0 tools and practices in language classes, many offering great insights into how these tools can be used and what can be learned from their incorporation. As of yet, however, there is not a solid base of well grounded research investigating Web 2.0 tools in language learning from theoretical and empirical perspectives.

With the advent of any new pedagogical tool or ancillary, such empirical research is slow to come, particularly in the field of computer assisted language learning (CALL). Levy (2007) asserts that “generally speaking, the researcher’s approach and goals tend to differ according to whether the technology is more established or emerging” (p. 183). He further explains that emerging or new technology often begins with pilot studies or investigations of attitudes and perceptions (e.g., surveys). A review of previous research reveals four general phases in the development and publication of such studies. The first wave of publications (scholarly and otherwise) addresses the potential benefits of and possible drawbacks to the tool and question whether we should adopt it and use it. The next phase tends to consist of anecdotal accounts of what teachers have done with the tool, how they have made it work in their classrooms, and what kind of lesson plans and activities they developed in doing so. Third, we see studies that begin to examine the student perspective of the tool’s adoption, namely, the students’ reactions to and attitudes towards the tool and/or learning language with the tool; this phase also examines teachers’ reactions and attitudes.

After and only after the three phases above have run their course, research investigating second language acquisition (SLA) through the use of the tool begins to emerge. In spite of how long Web 2.0 tools and applications have been around and been a part of our daily lives (and the daily lives of our students), we have only begun to scratch the surface of this last phase. This volume is intended to take that scratch and make a significant dent, shedding light on what we currently know and opening the door for future research that is based on sound theoretical premises. The reader will nonetheless note that with many of these tools, particularly the newer ones, the research has not yet reached the end of the three phases. Nonetheless, the chapters presented here push the existing works to the edge of what we know and what we have accomplished, and, in so doing, set the stage nicely for future endeavors.
2.1 Intended Audience

We cast our net widely in designing the volume, and we anticipate that our audience will come from all areas of SLA teaching and research. While most readers will likely be familiar with at least some of the tools discussed here, others will already be well versed and avid users of many Web 2.0 applications. Still others will not yet have taken the leap to integrate these socially collaborative tools into their classes (but we suspect that they may be using them at least in their personal lives). It is our hope that there is something for everyone in this volume. For those less familiar with the particular tools and terminology, we have included a glossary at the back of the volume for reference. Each chapter lists several key words, which are defined in the glossary as well as in the text when necessary. Further, there is an annotated bibliography at the end of the volume, so that those interested in pursuing further research can readily access the relevant primary works identified by the chapter authors. Finally, as teachers ourselves of graduate seminars on technology in language education, we recognize the value of a volume that is not just a research volume, but also an educational tool. To that end, each chapter closes with a series of discussion questions to encourage the reader—students or otherwise—to engage in further critical thinking, to consider other possibilities, and to expand their own teaching and research horizons.

2.2 Goals of the Volume

With the above in mind, the essential goals of this volume are threefold. First and foremost the volume will introduce readers to new tools that they may not be familiar with or to present those tools to them in a new light. With the difficulty of defining the Web 2.0 term, the umbrella of its various meanings can be a broad one, so it is likely that many readers will encounter something new in these pages. Second, the chapters in this volume showcase the latest techniques for incorporating Web 2.0 tools in the service of language learning and teaching and offer insight into the results of such incorporation—from student attitudes to linguistic gains to pragmatic outcomes and everything in between. Finally, and perhaps most important, this volume offers readers an array of options for carrying out SLA research within this generation of web tools. Through the chapters contained here, the reader will see what has been learned, what is currently being investigated, and what remains to be discovered in terms of our CALL research agenda.

Throughout the volume, though, we adhere to Blake’s (2008) directive to the language profession, that we must “move beyond a simple computer functional competence (knowing how to use the tools) toward both a critical competence (realizing what the tools are good for) and then, finally, to a rhetorical competence (understanding how these tools will help transform the learning environment)” (p. xv). Blake’s use of the word ‘rhetoric’ here implies not speech but rather skill in using technology for language learning and requires all of us—teachers, students, and researchers—to “put into action a new way of viewing the world mediated by a new language and a new technologically assisted learning environment” (p. xv).
Thus, our goal in putting together this volume is to provide a number of examples of how the world can be mediated and investigated through these Web 2.0 tools, and what that mediation means for our language learning.

3. Contributors to the Next Generation

This volume consists of 10 chapters, including an annotated bibliography. Each chapter presents a different tool and discusses how it relates to Web 2.0 applications. All chapters begin with a review of pertinent literature. Some chapters present original research and begin to pave the way for future Web 2.0 projects, while others are more practical, offering thought-provoking ideas and suggestions for language teaching. At the end of each chapter, readers will find discussion questions which can be used to stimulate further discussion whether by individuals or in classroom settings. At the end of the volume, there is a glossary of terms as well as an index.

In Chapter 2, Fernando Rosell-Aguilar re-examines the potential of podcasting in language learning. This chapter outlines how podcasting fits with various language-learning theories, the potential benefits of podcasting for language learning, and the specific evidence available that supports podcasting as a viable tool for language learning.

In Chapter 3, Kara McBride focuses on social-networking sites and what they can offer to language learning. She begins the chapter by defining and describing social-networking sites. Then she presents particular challenges that social networking might have in the language classroom. Finally, she describes a few projects that use social networking and engage students in language learning and includes additional ideas for implementation of social networking projects.

In Chapter 4, Enza Antenos-Conforti offers an original account of using Twitter in Italian language learning. She first situates twitter and microblogging in the realm of Web 2.0. She then focuses on the distinctive features of Twitter and its potential as a language learning tool and provides an example from her own teaching. The study she reports on in this chapter is based on work by students who were enrolled in two intermediate university level Italian courses and who tweeted over the course of a semester. Results indicate that regular use fostered real-life language use and created a sense of community in which students willingly participated.

In Chapter 5, Esperanza Román Mendoza discusses RSS and feed aggregators. She first defines RSS and its value in Web 2.0 technologies. She clarifies how RSS and feeds relate to other social applications, such as blogs, wikis, and additional social-networking applications. In a final section of the chapter, she presents applications for language learning as well as a project that uses Pageflakes, a feed organizer that allows users to read, see, and share their favorite information from the web.

Readers looking for additional Web 2.0 tools may wish to consult Kathy Schrock’s website which provides a detailed list of Web 2.0 tools that are free and available to educators (http://school.discoveryeducation.com/schrockguide/edtools.html).
In Chapter 6, Nike Arnold, Lara Ducate, and Claudia Kost discuss online collaboration and revision processes in language learning. They compare two wiki projects in intermediate German classes. Each project used small groups of students who collaborated on wikis to research cultural and historical topics related to a German novel. Results suggest that students engaged in a large number of revisions, found their experience to be positive, and valued the feedback they received.

In Chapter 7, Lawrence Williams and Rémi van Compernolle present a study on student interaction with chatbots. Specifically, they look at the discourse during interactions in French with a French language chatbot. They examine how well (or not so well) suited the chatbot is for fostering dynamic negotiation of meaning or corrective feedback. Findings suggest that learners at lower levels of proficiency may be better suited for interaction with language chatbots than those at higher levels of proficiency.

In Chapter 8, Lisa Kuriscak and Christopher Luke offer a glimpse into the virtual world of Second Life and discuss its potential for language learning. They then discuss a study in which intermediate-level learners of Spanish engaged in weekly chats in Second Life. Data were collected to elicit learners’ attitudes toward computers and language learning, Second Life, and corrective feedback. Results suggest that learners who chatted mainly with NSs (as opposed to NNS peers) had a more positive experience in this virtual environment.

In Chapter 9, Julie Sykes examines multiuser virtual environments in language learning. She examines their role in language learning and their importance to interlanguage pragmatic development. Her chapter investigates the effects of the use of a synthetic immersive environment on Spanish learners’ abilities to make requests in the target language. Using a pretest/posttest design, as well as interview and observation data, she analyzes the pragmalinguistic abilities of 25 learners of Spanish. Results suggest an increase in learners’ pragmatic abilities.

At the end of the volume, readers will find several resources: (a) an annotated bibliography (also available in PDF at the CALICO website [https://calico.org] compiled with the help of Moniqua Acosta-Heyman and Maria Ida Fionda, graduate students at the University of Florida), (b) a glossary of key terms related to each chapter in the volume, and (c) an index to terms discussed in the volume.

4. After the Next Generation

While we hope that this volume helps push us toward the next generation of CALL, we are in fact far from being in a perfect Web 2.0 world. Because of the novelty of many Web 2.0 tools, neither research nor practice have reached their full potential yet. A host of factors that come into play with Web 2.0 tools bring with them new parameters for how teachers will need to rethink teaching and learning. Web 2.0 learners collaborate and become collaborators, they participate and become participatory, they contribute and become contributors, and they create and become creators. In short, the social web changes both how and why content is created.
Crook (n.d.) identifies four principal dimensions of a learner’s experience with Web 2.0: collaboration, publication (both social), literacy, and inquiry (cognitive). According to Crook, collaboration may take place on a variety of levels, and learning may achieve higher levels of classroom community building. The publication dimension opens student work to a wider audience and display of classroom activities. Students can “publish and discuss the products of their study” in an “unbounded space” (p. 9). The dimension of literacy includes interaction and writing with all types of digital artifacts. Finally, inquiry brings new tools, sources, and authority forms to the learner, who is both empowered and independent. As learning takes on new characteristics in the Web 2.0 classroom, we must also realize that assessment must change as well. Selwyn, Crook, Noss, and Laurillard (n.d.) suggest Web 2.0 tools bring “new forms of assessment in areas such as decision-making, adaptability and cooperation” (p. 25). We must keep these in mind, both as teachers and researchers, as we approach Web 2.0 tools and incorporate them in our classes, our lives, and our work.

4.1 Future Directions in Collaborative Networking

CALL research, design, and practice continue to move forward, propelled by those who are already in the process of exploring the potential of Web 2.0 tools for language learning. The authors whose work is showcased here are among those leading this wave, yet there remain many unanswered questions regarding the role of Web 2.0 in CALL. It is our hope that the chapters in this volume encourage others to begin those investigations. For example, future research in this area could consider:

- How are Web 2.0 tools being used in today’s language classroom?
- What are the best ways to incorporate Web 2.0 applications in language classes?
- What linguistic benefits do Web 2.0 tools offer language learners, and how?
- What are the theoretical underpinnings of Web 2.0 tools in SLA?
- What areas of language learning are most suited to teaching through Web 2.0 technology, and which areas may not benefit as much?
- What challenges do educators face in using Web 2.0 tools?
- What role does the teacher play in integrating Web 2.0 technologies into the classroom?
- How can we best train teachers to incorporate Web 2.0 technologies in their teaching?
- How can we best train students to effectively use Web 2.0 technologies?
- What revisions are needed in terms of assessment techniques in order to accommodate Web 2.0 tools and applications?

As mentioned earlier, we are only beginning to scratch the surface of research with Web 2.0 tools. Levy (2007) advocates that even though technological tools may be widespread and accepted, that does not necessarily mean they are effective or valuable in educational contexts. We need to be cautious of these social
tools, evaluating them on an educational level rather than on a personal level. Levy further points out that “our goal should always be to build upon what has gone before” (p. 188). We hope that researchers can take and build upon the work offered in this volume in order to make even more significant advances in CALL research.

The chapters in this volume begin the crucial investigation of some of the concepts that are key to Web 2.0 technology: collaboration, participation, contribution, and creation. We also hope that this volume will be one that serves a wide readership—from researchers to teachers to students. It is our belief that the Web 2.0 is bringing a much needed change to the field of CALL, and it is with solid research and pedagogy that this change will filter into classrooms worldwide.

Discussion Questions

1. What images, words, or phrases come to mind when you think of the term Web 2.0?
2. How would you define the term Web 2.0? How has your understanding of Web 2.0 changed after reading this chapter?
3. Generate a list of Web 2.0 tools and discuss some of their perceived benefits and drawbacks for language teaching.
4. What Web 2.0 tools do you regularly use in your daily life? How conscious of their Web 2.0 nature are you? If you teach, what Web 2.0 tools form a part of your students’ daily lives?
5. What tools would you like to see researched from an SLA perspective? What linguistic or extralinguistic factors do you think need to be investigated through the Web 2.0 tools mentioned in this chapter?

References


### About the authors

Gillian Lord is Assistant Professor of Spanish and Linguistics at the University of Florida, where she also coordinates the intermediate Spanish program. Her primary interests are in second language acquisition and teacher education, and she has published articles relating to the acquisition of second language phonology, CALL and study abroad.

Lara Lomicka is Associate Professor of French at the University of South Carolina, where she is the MAT advisor for Foreign Languages. She regularly publishes in the areas of teacher education and technology with specific interests in blogs, wikis, podcasting, and intercultural learning.
Social Networking, collaboration, and Web 2.0