USING WIKIS FOR COLLABORATIVE ESP WRITING
WITH PSYCHOLOGY STUDENTS

Redkina Ekaterina
Senior lecturer
Faculty of Psychology
Lomonosov Moscow State University
125009 Russia, Moscow, Mokhovaya st. 11/9
kate.redkina@gmail.com

This paper aims at analyzing the role of e-learning instruments, in particular, wikis, in teaching CLIL and ESP to psychology students at Lomonosov Moscow State University. Recent studies have shown that a wiki can be a valuable and effective tool for improving writing skills in L2 (English). This paper presents the results of the study conducted with first, second and third year students creating a series of collaborative writing tasks on different psychological topics. This research gives insights into benefits and drawbacks of using wikis for developing writing skills on content-specific and professionally oriented topics at the university level.

Key words: e-learning instruments, wiki, collaborative writing, teaching CLIL, teaching ESP, psychology students

Over the last decade, technology has had a massive impact on teaching English. Some teachers question the benefits of these changes, others, on the contrary, welcome them. What is sure is that the "pressure on teachers to take up technology is becoming increasingly difficult to resist" [5, p.143].

New technologies have influenced all the skills. In particular, "they have had a fundamental influence on the ways we write, the genres we create, the forms our finished products take, and the ways we engage with readers" [5, p.144]. One of the instruments of writing development is a wiki, which has become popular together with blogs and Youtube channels. In short, a wiki is a page that can be accessed and modified online by anyone. So, "wikis permit group collaboration across the Internet and provide users with both author and editor functions" [5, p.2].

Although in real life students usually have to write on their own, they can benefit a lot from cooperative or collaborative writing. As studies show, in collaborative "individual students also found themselves saying and writing things they might not have come up with on their own" [3, p.328]. According to L.Vygotsky's theory, collaborative writing falls within the zone of proximal development. Working with someone who knows more (either a teacher or a peer) helps to progress faster, lowers individual anxiety and works as a scaffolding. According to some authors [3, p.329], cooperative writing is especially successful when it is done on the computer, which only proves that the use of wikis can lead to high writing production.

There is no doubt that writing is essential; however, it can be approached in different ways. Jeremy Harmer, for example, distinguishes two primary purposes of writing, i.e., writing-for-learning and writing-for-writing [2, p.31]. In the first case, writing helps students to study language or to test their language. This type depends a lot on the students' ability to write already. Writing-for-writing, on the other hand, is aimed at developing writing skills per se and at helping

students become better writers, e.g., how to use different registers and styles. It could be done as process, genre or product writing. Both models work well and are necessary for the EFL classroom.

In the context of ESP and CLIL, taught at universities, these two types are also successfully used. However, due to the nature of these classes, it seems that these two types of writing are not enough. We suggest coining another type, which could be called "writing-for-content." Being one of the underlying principles, together with cognition, communication, and culture, content-specific content can be challenging to grasp. Professional texts at the university level are often big in size, and the content is complicated because of the content-specific and content-obligatory language [1, p.11]. Vocabulary and grammar are interdependent and need to be focused on in chunks. All this often makes dealing with content very challenging. Writing, in this case, can be a useful tool.

To help to deal with the content, the writing activity can be organized in the following way: students are distributed small texts that altogether refer to the bigger topic studied (e.g., Gestalt psychology, psychoanalysis, cognitive psychology - are all Schools of psychology). The students do not see each other texts and do not know what they say. However, they need to reconstruct the whole text together in writing by sharing ideas with each other and by complementing each other's excerpts. Obviously, such a task can be done in class on paper in pairs/small groups. However, wikis make it much more exciting and productive. First of all, it helps to break the routine the students are used to. Second, many students are digital natives, and have little interest in traditional manual writing, whereas writing online motivates and challenges them. Third, time in the classroom is limited, and there is often simply not enough time for the teacher to check and control all the pieces of writing in terms of grammar, vocabulary and content acquisition. Bringing these papers home reduces immensely the interactive component that students appreciate, and the task becomes more like traditional writing many of them feel bored with. The opposite, doing the same task collaboratively at home through a wiki helps to overcome these difficulties and leads to overall better results.

The benefits of using wikis to develop writing skills in students are multiple. Firstly, it helps to break the regular pattern of writing. This novelty boosts the students' motivation, and teachers might experience unexpected results from the students that have never demonstrated enthusiasm for writing earlier. Secondly, the factor of anonymity in writing online lowers students' anxiety and helps them express themselves without being afraid of making mistakes. The reverse side of this anonymity is that the teacher cannot assess each student individually because they do not know who wrote the text. However, if the teacher notes who the pieces of the text were distributed to at the very beginning, it will be somehow possible to track the progress of each student.

Another obvious benefit of writing through wikis is that students do it for themselves rather than for the teacher. They know that the text they created will stay there forever and they can always refer to it before the exam or during the course. So, it differs a lot from the regular pattern when the teacher collects writings, and they either stay there or get lost by the students. What is more, and this factor is probably one of the best in wikis, the students can do peer correction. In most cases, they are happy to correct each other mistakes, and as they also do not know who they correct, there is no stress and anxiety about being not nice to their peers. As a result, it boosts their interest.

Another reason for using a wiki is that it is simple for the teacher: it is easy to assess, to mark the mistakes, and, what is more important, it reduces the amount of paperwork to a minimum. As for the content and the meaning, a wiki could serve a feedback instrument for the teacher, e.g., what areas of the content material need to be developed further, which areas cause problems and difficulties.

Why might collaborative writing through wikis not work? There are several reasons. First of all, it depends a lot on the student group, on the rapport between the learners and the attitude to the Internet writing in every one of them. It happens that in some university groups students prefer to work individually, rather than together. This might also concern groups, where students are new to each other, and it is a good idea to postpone collaborative wiki writing till they get to know each other better. In rare cases, there could be no access to the Internet at home. Then, probably, the teacher needs to think of the possible ways to deal with this problem.

How is it technically done?

Different services help to create online wikis; however, the simplest and the most accessible tool is Google Sites. This instrument makes it possible to design a site online using various templates, styles, and layouts. It could be open or closed to the public, depending on the purpose of the writing and the agreement between the teacher and the students. To create a Google site, the instructor needs a Google account; the rest is done very quickly. After the site is created and named (the name could be any, e.g., an academic group number or the content topic), the teacher needs to send the link to the students, who later can access it anywhere and anytime from their devices. The only requirement for them is Google account as well.

As it is the teacher, who is primarily responsible for the way the site looks, it is a good idea to create necessary fields and subfields depending on the topic that is studied. Later, when the students start writing, they put their text under the corresponding category, which makes it easier to mark for the teacher and to use later for the students themselves. For example, if the general topic studied is "learning theories," the tabs might include the following areas: behavioral approach to learning, cognitive approach, social approach, etc.

As for marking and error correction, color coding works particularly well. On the first page, the teacher might suggest the system of color codes they are going to use, for example, red - to delete, yellow - errors to correct, green - minor errors/typos that have been corrected by the teacher, grey - plagiarism issue, etc. The latter is essential to include, as it is crucial to teach students to respect the copyright and thus encourage their autonomy and individual style. Checking for plagiarism is quite easy as well because the only thing that the teacher needs to do is to compare the final text with the original text excerpts that were given in class. It takes time to do, but it is worth doing.

Color coding for assessment works well not only because it is effortless for the instructor, but also because it makes the assessment visual and objective for the students. Later they can edit their joint text following the color clues. It is essential to encourage students to correct not only the parts they have written, but any errors they have come across. It helps to distribute responsibility among the members of the group and to strengthen the idea that all the students are responsible for their collaborative text.

As for two types of writing suggested by J.Harmer (writing-for-writing and writing-for-learning), wikis work well too. As the text is online and there is open access to it, it can be edited

as many times as possible on language, genre or register. The initial marking can also be done by the teacher using color coding or simply by putting in comments inside the text, for example, "try using a synonym," "think of a better term," "is it a good idea to use this expression here?", "what about changing the order of the paragraphs in this piece?", "think of a more appropriate linking word," etc. Students then look through these notes and make the corrections. An interesting part is that it could be done in real time if the instructor and the students are online at the same moment. Then, it reminds chatting, which students like a lot.

What preparation is needed before the writing itself?

Before the class, it is necessary for the teacher to choose an appropriate text. It could be a text from the textbook if there is one, which is not a typical case for CLIL/ESP classes at the university level, or a text that the teacher chooses. Then this piece of text should be divided into smaller parts, which are later going to be distributed among the students. In class, the students read their excerpts and then discuss them in small groups. They might exchange the main ideas, but most importantly, they need to decide how their final text is going to be organized. So, at this stage, they collaboratively plan their writing in terms of order, structure, and content. Though it is a pre-writing activity, it can also be used as a speaking booster, with attention drawn to the functional language and turn taking, for instance.

To conclude, it can be said that among various e-learning tools used now for the development of writing, a wiki seems particularly. It helps to develop individual writing skills through the stress-free, interesting collaborative writing. Besides, it rises learners' autonomy, motivation and helps to break the routine of the writing process, often unpopular among students. Wikis work well in content-specific contexts, such as CLIL/ESP lessons at the university level.

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