



Double Wiki Grammar Teaching

Daniela Munca explains how to design task-based instruction for teaching grammar using Wikis

Wiki

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

A wiki is a collection of web pages designed to enable anyone who accesses it to contribute or modify content, using a simplified markup language. Wikis are often used to create collaborative websites and to power community websites. The collaborative encyclopedia, Wikipedia, is one of the best-known wikis. Wikis are used in business to provide intranets and Knowledge Management systems. Ward Cunningham, developer of the first wiki software, WikiWikiWeb, originally described it as “the simplest online database that could possibly work.”

“Wiki Wiki” (/wi_ki_wi_ki_/) is a reduplication of “wiki,” a Hawaiian word for “fast.” It has been suggested that “wiki” means “What I Know Is.” However, this is a backronym.

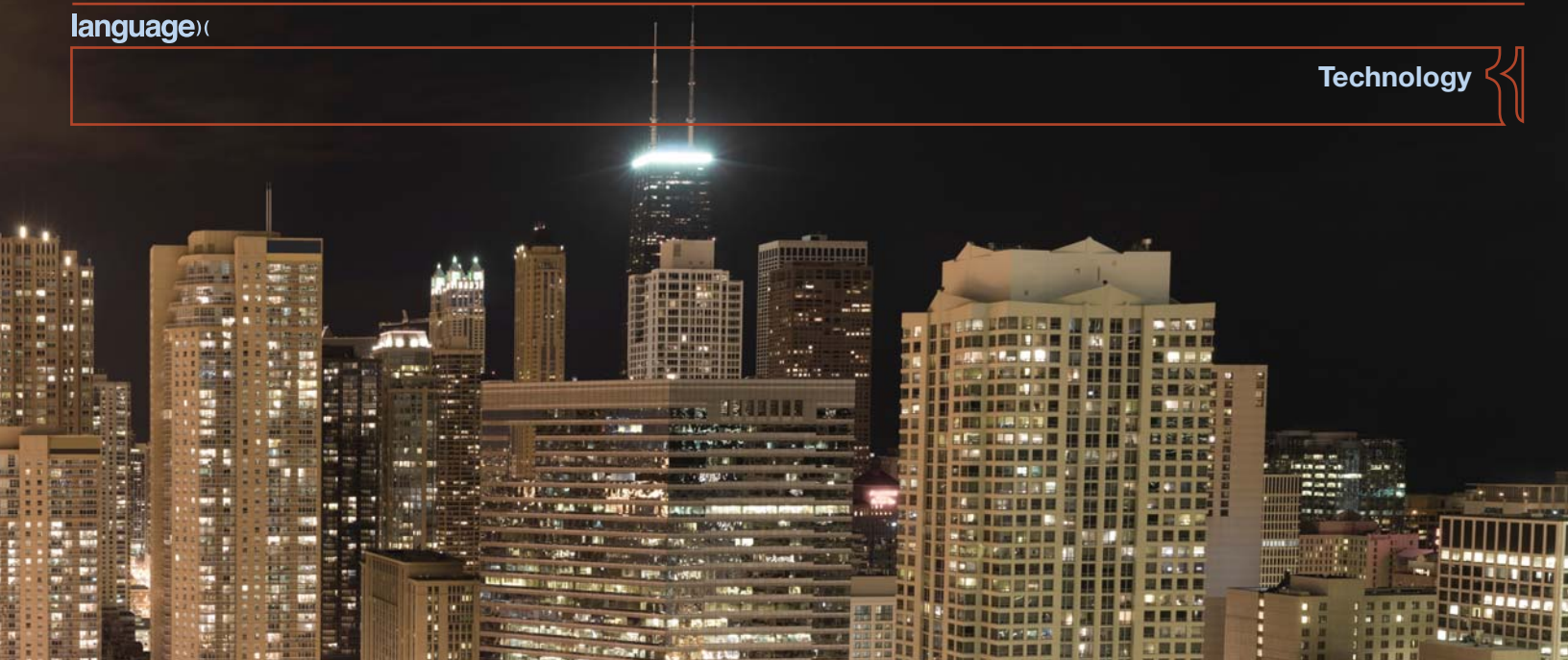
The emerging Web 2.0 technologies such as blogs and wikis

have created new opportunities for language teachers and instructional designers, as well as students, to extend the learning process beyond the classroom, and engage in authentic, real-life collaborative online experiences. However, in order for wikis to function as effective tools for successful second language acquisition, specific tasks need to be designed to involve language learners in activities which follow an interactive model incorporating all the attributes of second language (L2) acquisition. Teachers adopting a task-based approach to integrating wikis in teaching grammar at the intermediate level.

After revising several articles on task-based instruction and designing tasks for CALL activities, I designed my own model of implementing a task-based approach to integrating wikis in the ESL classroom, which is based on Nunan’s model of a “task” including “goals, input, and procedures.” To this model, I have added Hampel’s three-level “approach, design, and procedure” process and elaborated the following structure of a task development process in CALL:

1 The first level, “approach,” refers to “theories about the nature of language and language learning” (as cited in Hampel, p. 107). While designing my blogging and wiki tasks, I followed Chapelle’s model of basic components in the SLA process. After examining in detail the second language acquisition theories articulated by Krashen (1982), Long (1996), Swain (1985), and Pica (1994), Chapelle created the following model which summarizes a consensus view among these interactionist researchers:

Much target language input goes over the learners’ head but only that which is apperceived has the potential to be acquired. According to this model, a successful language learning environment should include features that prompt learners to notice important aspects of the language, a process identified as “appreciation” (Chapelle, p. 23). The definition provided by Nunan implies that task-based language teaching should be devoted to opportunities for subconscious acquisition rather than conscious learning. Learners should be engaged in meaning-focused, communicative tasks, rather than form-focused drills and exercises (Nunan, p. 77). Hampel summarizes the definition of tasks as “meaning-based activities closely related to the learner’s actual communicative needs and with some real-world relationship, in which learners have to achieve a genuine outcome” (p. 109). However, while teaching my grammar class, I had to design tasks that would also be form-focused and combine both syntactic and semantic processing of information. Chapelle also supports the idea that for input to



become intake “comprehension” it should take place through a combination of semantic and syntactic processing. Semantic comprehension alone is not expected to help in the acquisition of the syntactic system because it may be accomplished through the recognition of isolated lexical items and interpretation of non-linguistic cues (p. 23).

The “integration” stage is required for the intake to influence the development of the linguistic system of the learner, which in turn affects the L2 output. It refers to the processes when intake is being processed and tested. While designing tasks for wiki activities, it is important to make sure grammatical input for learners is immediately followed by activities which allow them to process, test, and experiment with different contexts to formulate hypotheses on how language works, and how it can work better for each of them.

The output is probably the most important stage in second language acquisition, as it is an observable result of the process. Chappelle identifies two ways in which output should be considered as an important contributor to linguistic development. First, producing linguistic output forces learners to use the syntactic system and therefore to develop this aspect of their ability. Second, it elicits subsequent input from interlocutors, some of which may contain indications of problems with the learner’s output which will result in the learner’s noticing aspects of the linguistic form, making new hypotheses, and producing more output. This process, referred to as negotiation of meaning, is believed to facilitate L2 development (Long, 1996, as cited in Chappelle, p. 23). Just like other Web 2.0 applications, any ESL grammar wiki has the potential to create optimal conditions for collaborative meaning construction and negotiation. The “thread communication” feature presented on wikis allowed me to design different tasks aimed to engage learners in exchanges of comments focused on both content and form; they were able to ask for more information related to various grammatical issues, suggest improvements and get feedback on what they had created and posted online. Since all the students’ posts related to a specific grammar unit were saved on the same page, everybody in class had access to the overall work of the entire group, which also created optimal conditions for collaboration, peer editing, information request, etc.

2 “Goals” are defined as general intentions behind any learning task (Nunan, p. 41). Hampel refers to this stage as “design” and states that it should consider what the objectives of the methods are, the types of learn-

ing tasks and teaching activities the method advocates, and the roles of the teachers, learners, and instructional materials (p. 107). While designing tasks, I formulated goals which would rather refer to specific outcomes. It was necessary for my learners to perform tasks which would develop certain writing or speaking skills, while providing them with more opportunities for semantic and syntactic processing of the input. For example:

- After completing task 1, the learners should be able to identify major differences between past simple and present perfect tenses.
- After completing a power point presentation on relative clauses, the learners should be able to identify correct usage of commas with non restrictive relative clauses.
- After putting together a voice project on past perfect, the learners should be able to use it accurately in conversations while exchanging information about their past experiences.

3 The “input” stage required language learners to process the written, visual, and audio information (Nunan, p. 47). In my case, the input was provided by (a) a short introduction to a specific grammar unit posted on a separate wiki page, (b) links to other authentic resources posted on same wiki page and (c) information from the textbook learners had to research on by themselves while completing the task. The main advantage of integrating wikis in teaching grammar is

the fact that they can provide language instruction with a wide variety of sources allowing learners to choose the ones they feel more comfortable with or find more effective for personal use. Whenever the learners needed more input than the one provided by the textbook, they were able to check on the wiki unit covering the same topic and find other relevant resources for a deeper processing.

4 The “Procedure” stage refers to “what learners will actually do with the input that formed the point of departure for the learning task” (Nunan, p. 52). Hampel calls it “practical realization of the method,” which encompasses “the actual moment-to-moment techniques, practices, and behaviors that operate in teaching according to a particular method” (p. 107). I chose to create a wiki to teach my grammar class because of the interactive nature of this online tool. Not only could I offer my language learners access to a wider variety of information (video, audio, graphic, etc), but I could also design tasks which undoubtedly extended the possibilities of the learning environment provided by the textbook. The tasks:

- Allowed students to practice several skills at the same time: writing, lis-



Figure 1