The impact of Web 2.0 in Education and its potential for language learning and teaching

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El impacto de la Web 2.0 en la educación y su potencial para la didáctica de lenguas

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Abstract: The arrival of technology has transited the path for an increased use of the Web, allowing for access to diverse kinds of information and materials. With this advent of technology, a significant number of distinct technologies have been introduced to assist in human communication and interaction. Since the genesis of Web 2.0 technologies, people all over the world now have the Internet at their finger tips, and can execute communicative acts with little or no difficulty. In educational contexts, Web 2.0 is making great in-roads even though its full effectiveness still needs to be further researched in the said environments. The plethora of didactic technologies offers new and exciting opportunities for students and teachers. Since Web 2.0 is having a profound impact in educational institutions, and is yielding promising results, then there is a very strong possibility that it has the potential to impact significantly on the language learning and teaching process. Bearing in mind the afore-mentioned, this paper seeks to discuss the impact of the Web 2.0 in education and its potential for language learning and teaching.

Resumen: El advenimiento de la tecnología ha transitado el camino para un mayor uso de la Web, que permite el acceso a diversos tipos de información y materiales. Con la venida de la tecnología, un número significativo de distintas tecnologías han sido introducidas para ayudar en la comunicación e interacción humana. Desde la génesis de las tecnologías de Web 2.0, todas las personas, por todas partes del mundo, tienen acceso rápido al Internet y pueden realizar actos comunicativos con poca o ninguna dificultad. En contextos educativos, la Web 2.0 está ganando terreno aunque se necesita investigar aún más su plena efectividad en dichos ambientes. La plétora de tecnologías didácticas ofrece nuevas y emocionantes oportunidades para estudiantes y
profesores. Debido al impacto profundo que la Web 2.0 está ejerciendo en instituciones educacionales, y está dando resultados alentadores, por tanto hay una posibilidad muy fuerte de que tenga el potencial para impactar significativamente en el proceso de enseñanza-aprendizaje de lenguas. Al tomar en cuenta todo lo anteriormente mencionado, este artículo tiene como finalidad discutir el impacto de la Web 2.0 en la educación y su impacto potencial para la didáctica de lenguas.

**Keywords**: web 2.0, web 2.0 technologies, web 2.0 tools, education, language learning and teaching, language teaching, language learning, technology, information and communication technologies (ICTs), computer mediated communication (CMC), computer-assisted language learning (CALL), mobile-assisted language learning (MALL).

**Palabras clave**: web 2.0, tecnologías de Web 2.0, herramientas de Web 2.0, educación, enseñanza-aprendizaje de lenguas, enseñanza de lenguas, aprendizaje de lenguas, tecnología, tecnologías de comunicación e información (TIC), comunicación mediada por computador (CMC), aprendizaje de lenguas asistido por computador (ALAC), aprendizaje de lenguas asistido por móviles (ALAM).

1. Introduction

Decades ago, all learning and teaching embraced the traditional approach which espoused teacher-directed pedagogical practices (Smith, 2000). In this scenario, a body of academic, theoretical and discipline-specific knowledge was provided for students to learn. Such pedagogy did not lend itself to innovation. With the passage of time, there were fervent calls for educators to rethink their pedagogical methods used to maximise student learning, since there was a growing concern that students were not adopting deep approaches to learning (Biggs & Tang, 2011). There was consensus that the traditional approach was no longer adequate to effectively address and improve student learning outcomes. As a result, a number of dramatic changes began to occur in education, beginning from the year 2000.

Biggs and Tang (2011: 3) ascertain that “Since 2000 there have been dramatic changes in the nature of higher education. It is not just that participation rates are higher than ever […], but that these and other factors have altered the main mission of higher education and modes of delivery”. Consequently, a continuous call for learning and
teaching effectiveness has been issued. The view is held that, in this age of revolution, student-centred approaches must replace teacher-centred strategies. The emphasis should no longer be on the teacher, but on the student and student learning. This is primarily because students possess different learning styles and abilities, and the 'one-size-fits-all' approach is irrelevant and obsolete.

With the arrival of technology, Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) came into existence. ICTs in Education embrace various styles of learning (Sharma, 2008). The idea for the use of ICTs is to help students and teachers to make that transition – either partially or fully – from the actual classroom to the virtual classroom. A virtual environment would cater for the optimisation of student autonomy, independence, collaboration, interaction and communication (Laurillard, 2008), while relinquishing the teacher from full control of the classroom.

In the language education arena, using computers in the language learning and teaching process has caused key changes in the way that languages should be taught and learnt: better learning in a shorter period of time, lasting learning experiences, and improved students’ communicative competence, among others (Levy, 1997; Warschauer, 2000; Chapelle 2001, 2003). The use of the computer and its tools has become a new means for shaping communication processes. Since multimedia technology has paved the way for fresher and more authentic communicative opportunities between teachers and students, many language teachers are now cognizant of the potential impact of language learning through Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) (Levy, 1998; Warschauer & Healey, 1998; Warschauer & Kern, 2000).

Due to the continued experimentation with, and development of, technology, Web 2.0 technologies emerged, paving the way for the use of the social web and its networks as an integral part of the learning-teaching process.
2. The Impact of Web 2.0 in Education

The advent of technology has paved the way for an increased use of the World Wide Web (WWW), and for greater accessibility to information and materials. Since this time, there has been an introduction of various kinds of technologies to aid human interaction and communication. Due to this development, millions of people now have the privilege to navigate the Web, on a daily basis, for their own specific and personal purposes. In the field of Education, Internet-based education has come of age and is now being used for educational delivery (Raturi, Hogan & Thaman 2011a, 2011b; Lai, 2011; Laurillard, 2012). In fact, the wide range of teaching technologies for technology-based education offers fresh and stimulating opportunities for both teaching faculty and students.

Over the last decade, there has been much talk of a specific kind of learning technologies, Web 2.0 Technologies, which has formed the basis for the social web systems, and which has the potential to improve student learning outcomes (OEDb Staff Writers, 2003; O’Reilly, 2005a; Anderson, 2007). So what really is ‘Web 2.0 Technologies’? How did it come into being? What are some of the kinds of Web 2.0 technologies/tools that have the capacity to aid the pedagogical process? How important is it in (technology-based) education? The discussion below will strive to answer these questions.

2.1 The advent of the concept ‘Web 2.0’

According to O’Reilly (2003, 2005a, 2005b), the concept of ‘Web 2.0’ germinated during a conference session between O’Reilly and MediaLive International, after the collapse of the ‘dot-com’ fever in the fall of 2001, which signalled a turning point for the WWW. The term was made popular by Dale Doherty, a web pioneer and Vice President (VP) of the publishing and consulting firm, O’Reilly Media Inc. (the company famous for its technology-related conferences and high-quality books). Doherty noted that the Web was now far “[...] more important than ever before, with new and exciting applications and sites popping up with surprising regularity” O’Reilly (2005a: 1). As noted by O’Reilly (2005a), “Could it be that the dot-com collapse marked some kind of new turning point for the web, such that a call to action such as Web 2.0 might make sense?” (p. 1). It is
from this session that the Web 2.0 Conference emerged. Anderson (2007) pointed out that the team wanted to capture the feeling that despite the rise and subsequent collapse of ‘dot-com’, there was still hope for the Web to survive. It has been noted that since the coining of the Web 2.0 term, it has firmly taken root in the world of technology, with more than ‘9.5 million citations in Google’ (O’Reilly, 2005a; Anderson, 2007).

2.2 Defining Web 2.0

While Web 2.0 originally came into existence, outside of the educational context, the term has taken root in pedagogical vocabularies for online instruction. Web 2.0 refers to a new version or generation of web technology which came about due to cumulative changes in how the web is used and designed (O’Reilly, 2005a, 2005b; Anderson, 2007). Unlike the static pages of earlier systems, Web 2.0 functions as a platform for the sharing and networking of interactive and user-generated content (O’Reilly, 2006a). Anderson (2007: 4) establishes that “Web 2.0 is a more socially connected web where everyone is able to add to and edit the information space”. Web 2.0 offer a novel, more social, and engaging, collaborative approach to interaction. It is the new response to its previous version, Web 1.0, which only offered limited communication. Gaffar and Singh (2013: 66) reveal that “Ever since, Internet users have come to rely heavily on this ‘new web’ for their communication and social needs. Web 1.0, previous ‘version’ of the web, provided largely a ‘one-way’ communication channel between authors and consumers of web content”.

The advent of Web 2.0 has resulted in a new dimension of the WWW. Internet users have now become quite active in the online world (Collins, 2009). As noted by O’Reilly (2005a), Web 2.0 does not mean the same thing for everyone; in fact, depending on individual interpretation, it can either be used to bolster personal and professional development, or it can be used mainly as a tool for socialisation purposes. Some authors even postulate that Web 2.0 caters for interaction and interactivity, while allowing users to control their own data and information (Madden & Fox, 2006; Maloney, 2007). Others authors see Web 2.0 as a set of tools that demand active participation from its users (Pence, 2007; Collins, 2009; Mason & Rennie, 2010). Notions like
‘sharing’, ‘collaborating’, and ‘socialising’ have emerged from the Web 2.0 concept and have taken priority in its discourse. From the above, it is not unjust to assume, from the recognition and attention that Web 2.0 is receiving, that it will be the defining technology to lead us into this century and beyond.

2.3 Web 2.0 and the Social Web
Since the emergence of Web 2.0, the use of online social networks has intensified, allowing users newer and efficient ways to maintain contact with family, friends, and work, among other things. A phenomenal growth in the number of online networks has been evidenced, with more than 200 such tools that are quickly becoming popular, particularly among the younger generation (OEDb Staff Writers, 2003; Pence, 2007; Chan-Meetoo & Rathacharen, 2011). As noted by Mazman and Usluel (2010), the use of these social sites is more ubiquitous than ever; in fact, users are extremely diverse, coming from different educational and social backgrounds, and from extremely diversified demographics.

Given the features that the social web possesses, young people are continually being attracted to it. In the educational context, based on research done, social networking systems (SNS) have been proven to be very useful, based on sound pedagogical practices and proper supervision by teachers (Anderson, 2007; Gaffar, Singh & Thomas, 2011; Laurillard, 2012). The fact that social networks seem to have taken over the world by storm, and its increasing use in educational contexts (Collins, 2009; Lai, 2011; Gaffar & Singh, 2012), is indicative of the fact that it does have potential for success in learning and teaching.

Examples of these SNS include Facebook, Twitter, My Space, Tagged, Google Plus, and Hi5, among others. All these networks are as a result of the advent of Web 2.0 technologies. These sites possess a number of features including walls, instant messaging, groups, photo uploads, online profiles and news feeds. Facebook seems to have dominated the social web, having some 1.35 billion active users as of December 2014 (Facebook Press Room, 2014). YouTube, Skype, Twitter and Instant Messaging
are also quickly gaining momentum. Bearing this in mind, it would not be unfair to say that these social networks have the potential to be very useful for executing educational purposes and for supporting learning and teaching, by facilitating high levels of student-teacher interaction. This is an avenue that needs to be further explored.

It is important to note that Web 2.0 cannot be separated from the social web. The social web and SNS exist only because of the advent of Web 2.0 technologies. Web 2.0, as has been established, has the primary objective of fostering interaction and interactivity through social networks and connections that were not possible before. It would not be unfair to say that without Web 2.0, there would be no social web, since Web 1.0, as has already been highlighted, was mainly for one-way communication between users.

2.4 Web 2.0 Tools
Web 2.0 also presents a number of tools that can be used in the learning-teaching process. As espoused by OEDb Staff Writers (2003), online tools and resources greatly facilitate the instructional process since they allow for interaction and collaboration between learners, content, and teacher. These tools take up very little space on the computer; in fact, since some of these applications are Internet-based, learners can access them from any computer, anytime and anywhere, at their own convenience.

OEDb Staff Writers (2003) present 101 Web 2.0 teaching tools, divided into various classes. Examples of some of these different classes of tools, along with some examples of tools from each class, are as follows: (1) Aggregators help you to stay up-to-date with latest news and events: Blog lines, Feed Reader, and Wiki News, among others; (2) Bookmark Managers allow for the construction of personal directories where information can be saved, accessed, and shared: Facebook, Flickr, Tagged, Google Plus, LinkedIn, Twitter, Hi5, and My Space, among others; (3) Collaboration Tools, as the name suggests, aid collaboration, interaction and communication: Edmondo, Skype, Chat, and Instant Messaging, among others; (4) Course Management Tools are those that allow for a multiplicity of functions in the pedagogical process: ATutor, Merlot, and Moodle, among others; (5) Office Suites are free, commercial applications: Google
Docs, Apache Open Office, and ZOHO, among others; (6) Office Tools include file converters, presentations tools, file managers, and so on: Cute PDF, Email, and Document Converter eXpress, among others; (7) Public Content Management Tools are blogs used to teach, to build classroom community, to create class projects, and more: EduBlog, Geeklog, and WordPress, among others; (8) Storage Tools are those used for backing up files and documents for subsequent retrieval: 4Shared, Flip Drive, and Scribd, among others.

To further establish the importance of these tools in the learning-teaching process, Anderson (2007) highlights the “Key Web 2.0 services/applications” (p. 7). These are (1) Blogs; (2) Wikis; (3) Tagging and Social Bookmarking; (4) Multimedia Sharing; (5) Audio Blogging and Podcasting; (6) Rich Site Summary (RSS) and Syndication; (7) Newer Web 2.0 Services and Applications which include Social Networking, Aggregation Services, Data ‘Mash-ups’, Tracking and Filtering Content, Collaborating, Replicating Office-Style Software in the Browser, and Source Ideas or Work from the Crowd. Anderson (2007) points out that these names that have been used merely to describe the functions of these tools.

As can be seen from the examples of tools presented by both OEDb Staff Writers (2003) and Anderson (2007), there is a plethora of them from which to choose to enhance the learning-teaching process. Choosing the specific set of tools to use must be done thoughtfully, in conjunction with learners’ needs. Web 2.0 tools are here to stay, so it is wise for all stakeholders to take advantage of them, carefully selecting those that would benefit their respective educational contexts.

2.5 The Importance of Web 2.0 Technologies in Education
Web 2.0 was not originally devised for educational contexts. The design of the tools, however, seemed to cater for pedagogical settings. Web 2.0 has been gaining a lot of traction over the past decade, and has made significant strides in educational contexts. Evidence from research is beginning to establish the potential benefits of Web 2.0 to support authentic learning experiences. In educational contexts, stakeholders are
beginning to realise the necessity of incorporating Web 2.0 technologies into the didactic process to ensure students of a more emancipatory approach to learning (Carlson, 2005; Oblinger & Oblinger, 2005). Further, proponents of this new technology affirm that “[…] the central principle behind Web 2.0 is its power to harness and disseminate collective intelligence through networking, user engagement and blogging” (O'Reilly 2006c: 1). These technologies allow users to be more socially connected, encouraging active collaboration and greater content creation and contribution (Anderson, 2007). These authors all point out that Web 2.0 allows for meaningful interaction and communication with its users where they are allowed to be active participants in learning, rather than passive learners, as in the case of Web 1.0. Such a situation does present promise for educational institutions, teaching faculties and students all across the world.

Educational experts debate the role of Web 2.0 in instructional practices and learning strategies. Regarding the role of education in this age of ‘network society’ and ‘digital culture’ (O'Reilly 2006b, 2006a), some scholars highlight the value of teaching creativity and innovation through 21st century skills (OEDb Staff Writers, 2003; Rudd, Sutch & Facer, 2006; Owen, Grants, Sayers, & Facer, 2006). They agree that some potential benefits of Web 2.0 include the (1) provision of flexible ‘anytime/anywhere’ learning; (2) freedom for students to self-publish and construct knowledge; (3) granting of access to large amounts of information, and (4) extension of learning to traditionally excluded groups (Owen et al., 2006; Mason & Rennie, 2010).

Other advocates affirm that user-generated content and learning networks support constructivist theories of learning (Davis, 2011; Orlando, 2011). Davis (2011) cites Mason and Rennie (2010) who affirm that “Web 2.0 tools provide students with the opportunity to collaboratively negotiate knowledge and to contextualise learning within an emergent situation” (p. 3). Still, other specialists also agree that Web 2.0 tools support pedagogical models which accentuate learning as an active process of knowledge construction. Web 2.0 is inherently participative and encourages learners to
be interactive (Carlson, 2005; Rudd, Sutch, & Facer, 2006; Owen et al., 2006; Laurillard, 2012).

From the discussion above, it is quite clear that Web 2.0 hinges heavily on collaboration, interaction, interactivity and social networking. It seems to embrace the social constructivist theory of Vygostky (1978). To further add credence to the constructivist approach, and in support of the relevance of learning networks in the pedagogical process, Rudd et al., (2006) emphasise that learning networks are important in the learning process because: (1) social, technical and leisure life is increasingly organised around networks; (2) learning, in most cases, is already about networks, collaboration and connection; (3) social mobility and social capital are achieved through building and mobilising networks of expertise and, (4) full personalisation cannot be achieved through schools disconnected from communities. In relation to the interaction and interactivity that Web 2.0 affords, there is also slowly increasing research on the experimentation with Mobile Learning (ML) (Crescente & Lee, 2011; Crompton, 2013) in educational contexts. Since the use of mobile devices is on the increase, this is an area to be further explored, with regard to learning and teaching.

Just as there are advocates of Web 2.0, there are also experts who have shown some amount of skepticism to its use in Education. Meyer (2010a, 2010b) conducted a study in which he investigated the use of Web 2.0 with some doctoral students using a number of Web 2.0 tools like Wiki, Blogs and Online Discussions to assist them in writing their research papers. Based on the findings, many students were able to manipulate the tools, confirming that they were able to interact meaningfully with each other. Unfortunately, however, some students did not at all share some of those views as they felt uncomfortable with these new tools. Another study was executed by Kumar (2009), in which students were exposed to blogs, podcasts, sharing, and so forth. The results highlighted that students had difficulties in understanding the use of Web 2.0. Even thought they felt that the tools did promote diversified learning and teaching, some
of them felt that it should be relegated only to social communication and not be used in educational environments.

A study conducted by Levy and Hadar (2008) seem to confirm the tendencies highlighted above. In yet another study, Tzeng, Liu, and Lin (2009) introduced an educational model using Web 2.0 which included ‘website users, content, virtual community and tools’. While Tzeng et al. (2009) purport that Web 2.0 will exert a massive, positive influence in the field of Education, they also note some potential challenges that educators may face in technology-based environments, including (1) premature hardware development and (2) deficiency in basic computer skills. They contend that Web 2.0 technologies have proven to be somewhat difficult for juveniles and senior students.

The issues raised are not superficial, since teething problems with always arise with any new educational initiative or any new technology software. This does not mean that Web 2.0 is not effective for educational purposes. In fact, many proponents have done research using Web 2.0 tools, as has been earlier established in this discussion, and the results are very encouraging. This success can only come about if it is properly harnessed and channeled to engender significant educational experiences. For this to happen, further research needs to be done to ascertain its full impact and effectiveness in Education.

3. The Potential Impact of Web 2.0 for Language Learning and Teaching

Language Learning and Teaching (LLT) over the years has transformed significantly. Many decades ago, LLT was firmly rooted in the Grammar-Translation Method, the learning of grammatical rules to complete translation exercises. The only tool being used at that time was the blackboard, the perfect vehicle for the one-way information transmission method. With time, the overhead projector came into play, another excellent medium for teacher-dominated sessions, followed by earlier versions of computer software programmes of ‘drill and practice’ exercises. Subsequently, the audio-lingual method came to the fore, however this method also did not do much for
LLT. There were clamours for more effective language teaching methods, methods that would engage students actively in authentic and meaningful interaction. Consequently, the 1980’s saw the birth of the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) method which sought to enable students to attain a certain level of communicative competence in the language (Ellis, 2003; Willis & Willis, 2007; Livingstone & Ferreira, 2009). With CLT came many other effective teaching approaches like Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), Cooperative Language Learning (CLL), and Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL), among others, all with a view to empowering the students to take control of their own learning, while providing them with rich, authentic linguistic input (Krashen, 1987).

Since technology was becoming the buzz, CALL began to exert a powerful influence in LLT, since it was felt that this method could indeed optimise linguistic and communicative competence. Many phases of CALL emerged, like Behaviorist CALL (Chapelle, 2001 & 2003; Levy, 1997; Warschauer, 2000; Taylor 1980) which focused on the development of language skills, Communicative CALL (Underwood, 1984; Warschauer, 1996; Levy, 1998) which hinged on creativity of expression and meaning negotiation, and finally Interactive and Integrative CALL (Pennington, 1989; Garrett, 1991; Warschauer, 1996), which concentrated on the use of computers with multimedia technology and the Internet. This type of CALL generated, and continues to generate, a large number of advantages for LLT. Many studies have been done using some form of CALL for learning learning (Warschauer, 2000; Chapelle, 2003; Kern, Ware & Warschauer, 2004; Morales & Ferreira, 2008; Ferreira & Kotz, 2010, Guillén, 2015), highlighting its effectiveness and the need for further research in the area.

With the increased use of Web 2.0 technologies and its tools in the last decade, LLT is now faced with the challenge of integrating these new set of tools to enhance the learning-teaching process. The challenge is to how to combine these new features with CALL to make pedagogical practices more effective. As seen from the discussions above, the social web, through Web 2.0, has been making many in-roads into the educational context. Language teachers, especially those who really do want to do
everything to improve their students’ learning experiences, are availing themselves to trying these new tools (Kenning, 2007; Zhang, 2012; Domalewska, 2014).

There are those language teachers who still have issues with technology, as they prefer to remain with the traditional approach to LLT. From personal experience and observation, many feel uncomfortable with experimenting with technology in the classroom and many see it as a form of relinquishing control of the classroom, a position not too well accepted. In this age of technology, many young people are very well au-fait with these new technologies and the social web. As noted by Facebook News Room (2014), the majority of Facebook users are young people. It would not be unfair to say that were a study to be done on the age ranges of social web users, it would be established that young people are in the majority. Such a tendency should encourage language teachers to get involved, with the view of using these tools for effective LLT.

It is also understandable that some teachers find these technologies difficult. Setting up a blog, for example, is relatively easy. However, after setting it up, the teacher may be confronted with difficult technical terms, such as RSS. Those teachers having difficulties with the concept of RSS, and the supporting technologies involved in its use, may not be able to appreciate its potential in language learning. To this end, it is important to understand that for many teachers, and even students, to a point, Web 2.0 may seem to be another technological innovation which will quickly pass into oblivion.

Such negative perceptions of technology tools highlights an important issue that is sometimes overlooked in the language learning and teaching with technology process: the relevant training and support for both language teachers and students (Illinois Online Network, 2010; Livingstone, 2013). It is not right to assume that because students use these technologies, that they will necessarily know how to use them for educational purposes. The same applies for teachers. More support would be needed for those teachers who are apprehensive towards the use of technology in their classrooms. This therefore means that training and support will have to be a continual
process, so that both students and teachers can become confident and proficient in the use of these tools for LLT. Further to this, many other issues will have to be addressed like administrative and developmental issues and organisational and leadership issues (Livingstone, 2013). Said differently, teachers’ and students’ perceptions of these technologies, and their utility in fostering instruction, learning and communication, will have to be studied, in order to experience the profound impact that these technologies can have on the LLT process.

Despite these issues, the fact cannot be ignored that the very nature of Web 2.0 is its features that promote collaboration, active engagement and interaction, interactivity, and user-generated content. There is research evidence that highlights the slowly increasing use and benefits of key Web 2.0 technologies (wiki, blog, podcast, instant messaging) in language education (Kenning, 2007; Chang & Kuo, 2009; Evans, 2009; Thomas & Reinders, 2010; Zheng, 2012; Wang & Kim, 2015; Ota, 2015).

From the discussions above, and based on the need to provide students with a greater autonomy over their learning, and with significant educational experiences, Web 2.0 tools seem to offer language teachers what they would need, to be able to support learners’ language development: (1) learning can be distributed, allowing students to be regularly connected with a wide community of learners; (2) an easier connection can be fostered between the classroom and the ‘real’ world; (3) learning would be autonomous, making students protagonists of the learning process, making use of exciting tools that they use daily; (4) active engagement is emphasised with the use of these tools; (5) engaging learners, through these very tools, to take their discourses from the actual classroom to the virtual classroom.

Based on literature reviewed, it is just to purport that the nature and potential of Web 2.0 in LLT hasn’t been extensively investigated. Most of the existing literature is in the field of Education, and it focuses mainly on the digital generation and tertiary education (Oblinger, & Oblinger 2005; Bryant, 2006; Gaffar & Singh, 2012; Singh & Gaffar, 2013). Despite this fact, the potential of these tools is being continuously acknowledged. As
highlighted by Kern, Ware and Warschauer (2004), these can allow students to be exposed to, and consequently to produce, authentic language from real life socio-cultural Internet contexts. Additionally, these tools offer language learners opportunities to use language as it is used on the WWW, thus exposing them to different varieties of emerging language use. Such opportunities for rich language input (Krashen, 1987), noticing, and negotiation of meaning (Ellis, 2003) are indicative of how second language acquisition (SLA) occurs.

In LLT, Web 2.0 tools seem to be included in the umbrella terms CALL and CMC. However, it is important to point out that Web 2.0 technologies ought not to be separated entirely from CALL, and its achievements to date, just as Web 2.0 is seen as a development of Web 1.0, possessing some of its features. In fact, CALL, over the years, has been promoting the widespread use of technologies to foster language learning, making use of an extensive number of tools to achieve this purpose (Pennington, 1989; Garrett, 1991; Levy, 1997; Warschauer & Kern, 2000; Chapelle, 2003; Kern, Ware & Warschauer, 2004; Ferreita & Kotz, 2010). The defining difference between Web 2.0 technologies and CALL is the way in which the learners more easily manage Web 2.0 tools and generate materials.

Text editing features, for example, are integrated into Blogs, Wikis and Discussion Forums. These features can help learners to “correct linguistic output and engage in target language interaction whose structure can be modified for negotiation of meaning” (Chapelle 1998, p. 23). Bearing in mind these opportunities for superior levels of real, autonomous language engagement, the language teacher will have to place more emphasis on the development of learners’ metacognitive skills. The good thing about Web 2.0 tools is that most of them possess these integral features. In light of that, it would not be thoughtless to say that Web 2.0 may offer the most authentic medium yet for tearing down walls between the classroom and real-world contexts, since not only is the language learner able to use the language in a genuine medium, but also that very medium offers him the tools necessary for focusing on authentic language use.
With regard to the use of Blogs in the language class, a study was conducted by Domalewska (2014) with University-level Thai students who were learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Through the use of a learning management system (LMS), a corpus containing 63 blog entries and 30 comments, all from the students, were analysed to assess the degree of effectiveness of this Web 2.0 tool for language learning and language acquisition. Students were encouraged to post at least six blogs and comment on their colleagues’ blogs. The subject matter for the blog was left up to the students. The results showed that the level of interaction was below what was expected. In other words, the expected collaboration and interaction was not achieved. In some cases, students barely commented on their colleagues’ posts, writing a few lines, or even a few words. Some students just posted the required amount of posts and comments, and did not venture beyond that. According to Domalewska (2014), it seemed that the task was just completed to satisfy the course requirement. Despite unfavourable results, the study also highlighted that some students, referred to as “the most active learners” (Domalewska 2014: 25), did go beyond the required number of postings and did manage to interact with a few colleagues. This author opined that certain blogging issues would need to be addressed, if students were to successfully build a learning community via that tool. In relation to Blogs, other studies have been done that have produced favourable results (Pinkman, 2005; Blackstone, Spiri & Naganuma, 2007), highlighting that the use of Blogs does engage students actively.

Concerning the growing use of Web 2.0 tools in language education, another such tool being used is Facebook (Wang & Kim, 2015) for Chinese as a Foreign Language (CFL). Their study produced favourable results, highlighting that Facebook allows for the construction of authentic language learning tasks. In other words, Facebook promotes knowledge construction and meaning negotiation through active engagement and collaboration. The success of Facebook, and other similar tools, would therefore heavily depend on task design. As has been earlier highlighted, Facebook is one of the most prolific and ubiquitous Web 2.0 tools. Such a tool should be further researched to evaluate its effectiveness in other areas of language learning and teaching.
The use of mobile devices in language didactics (Zhang, 2012; Kaya, 2013; Ota, 2015), duly referred to Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL), is slowly gaining momentum. MALL, channeled by mobile devices, and one of its primary features being Instant Messaging (IM), is apt for the LLT process, since this is one of the tools that most young people use with skillful ease. It would not be unfair to suggest to some of these young people are language learners. Given that scenario, this technology could be harnessed to contribute fresh, rich and novel learning experiences for language learners. Ota (2015) conducted a survey with Japanese foreign language students at a university in Australia, using smartphone and tablet apps. While one concern noted was that these apps did not suit every kind of task, the survey responses showed that many students do find these apps to be very beneficial to them, in some contexts. These and other kind of mobile apps need to be further investigated to observe their effectiveness in language pedagogy.

Stemming from the discussion above, it is necessary to establish that Web 2.0 allows for synchronous communication (Skype, Google Hangout, and Chat, among others) and asynchronous communication (Online Discussion Groups, Forums, Wikis and Blogs, among others). These technologies have the ability to engage language learners, teachers and content in a teacher-teacher interaction, content-content interaction, student-teacher interaction, student-student interaction, student-content interaction and teacher-content interaction (Anderson, 2004; Lee & McLoughlin, 2010). Language teachers, in collaboration with their students, can create discussion groups and forms for the free exchange of ideas and information. Raturi et al. (2011a, 2011b) corroborate that such groups foster learning communities and encourage students to construct their own knowledge and negotiate their own meanings, while developing critical thinking skills. Added to this, language teachers can even create forums where they themselves exchange ideas on pedagogical practices, promoting professional development and the need to continually be engaged in transformative reflection, with a view to maintaining best practices in LLT.
For these tools to be effective in LLT, they must be harnessed in a particular way, relevant to the learning-teaching context, since they offer teachers a flexible medium for moulding learner development. The way in which the instructor designs and scaffolds tasks and activities, through these tools, will have a defining effect on the extent of how learners participate. It is the teacher’s understanding of how best to use the medium that will determine its efficacy in the language context. In other words, it is absolutely necessary for the processes and tools to be applied in the appropriate contexts, supported by suitable facilitating systems, to ensure that they have the desired impact on the learning-teaching situation. While technology may not be the solution to correcting educational problems, it must be visualised as a tool and useful resource for effecting change in the language learning-teaching process.

Taking into consideration the deliberations throughout this paper, it is just to claim that since Web 2.0 is having such an impact in Education, even though there is more investigation to be done in the area, the literature reviewed and research done thus far are primary indicators that Web 2.0 can have the same impact in language didactics.

4. Concluding Remarks

Over the past two decades, technological innovations have allowed for the exploration of various approaches in educational contexts, with respect to the design, delivery and evaluation of the learning-teaching process. With the arrival of Web 2.0 technologies, the way has been transited for a movement from the mere delivery of content to the creation and facilitation of rich and diverse kinds of interactions between student, teacher and course content.

This paper has sought to discuss the impact of Web 2.0 in Education and its potential for language pedagogy in this era and beyond. The development of more innovative and learning technologies has been engendered, due to the mounting interest in their use in educational contexts. Both students and teachers are now faced with a range of possibilities and tools that cater for pedagogically diverse approaches, with the principal objective of allowing students to be autonomous, motivated, and actively engaged in the
learning process, vital components absent from the traditional approach to learning and teaching.

It must be noted that Education has a role in preparing people for work, and that must affect both what and how students learn. Web 2.0 environments can provide alternative ways of offering a more authentic learning context. Web 2.0 in Education has paved the way for a reformation of pedagogical practices in learning and teaching. Research done has established that it is a powerful means for students to engender significant educational experiences. One of the principal uses of digital technologies in educational practices is to enhance intellectual expressiveness and creativity. It is oriented towards the role of technology to enable new types of learning experiences and to enrich existing learning scenarios.

Language Education is another area that could certainly use this fresh infusion of Web 2.0 technologies and the corresponding tools. As already discussed in this paper, while there have been some attempts made to use them in language pedagogy, and research carried out to observe its effectiveness, its true impact is yet to be experienced in the LLT process. The fact that it is gaining momentum in Education signals that it can also gain traction in LLT. It is important to recognise in the LLT process, however, that the mere use of these technologies will not foster significant learning experiences. These technologies and tools need to be used wisely. These tools, in themselves, cannot cause learning to take place, since they are only mediums. The quality of the learning experience could be improved, if these technologies are used as participatory, communicative tools to foster knowledge construction, through interaction and collaboration. In other words, the emphasis should be placed on the delivery of the right material, to the right students, and with the appropriate technological support.

Since this Web 2.0 phenomenon is still relatively new to language learning and teaching, it is advisable to introduce its use gradually, so that both students and teachers can familiarise themselves with it. This will certainly allow them to be comfortable with these new tools and will undoubtedly boost their confidence and
motivation with their continued use. It is important to note that language learners are being prepared for a world in which technology is increasing the speed of innovation and change, but they are being prepared by education systems that are not necessarily oriented towards rapid change in the way they are managed and operated. Web 2.0 technologies, used correctly, could help the LLT process adapt to a world that is rapidly changing in response to technology.

Training of language teachers to use Web 2.0 in their classrooms is of paramount importance. As already highlighted in this paper, necessary training to use Web 2.0 tools for the LLT context may very well accelerate its adoption, while, at the same time, the ever vital technical and pedagogical support should be given. In this regard, there is also need for a paradigm shift, a consciousness raising among language teachers as to the need to do everything in their power to improve their didactic practices, with a view to ensuring that their students’ learning experiences are significant and optimum.

The Web 2.0 phenomenon is a reality that none can escape. These technologies are inserting themselves in our everyday lives, whether deliberately or accidentally. Young people are using them with great ease; in fact, it is always amazing to see how they operate these tools and gadgets with agility and skill. These are the kinds of technologies that should be used in the learning process, since the young people seem to have an affinity to them.

That being said, personal experience with Web 2.0 technologies in educational contexts, coupled with rising evidence and theoretical perspectives from the literature, suggest that their impact will continue to be experienced in the pedagogical arena. The impetus is now for language teachers to move forward and upward, by embracing these technologies, recognising them as indispensable tools for their pedagogical practices. They must do so, in order to ensure that their students get the most effective teaching possible, so that effective learning could be engendered. These new technologies can definitely help to improve the LLT process, as has been highlighted in this discourse. Language teachers need to feel confident, knowing that, while these technologies can
certainly enrich students’ language learning experiences, in no case can these technologies become a replacement for them.

References


