EXAMINING COLLECTIVE AUTHORSHIP IN COLLABORATIVE WRITING TASKS THROUGH DIGITAL STORYTELLING

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Introduction

The potential of Web 2.0 tools for collaborative writing as a way to enhance learning has raised a lot of interest among Foreign Language Teaching researchers and practitioners over the past few years (e.g., Kessler, Bikowski & Boggs, 2012; Wigglesworth & Storch, 2012; Elola & Oskoz, 2010; Arnold, Ducate & Kost, 2009). Seemingly, the advent of Web 2.0, the social web, has fostered the emergence of a new collaborative culture shared by internet users worldwide in which the notions of intertextuality and hypertext have evolved, resulting in the reconsideration of authors and their role in text production. Collaboration has also positively contributed towards establishing the foundations of both free software and free art movements (Dusollier, 2003), while having a considerable impact on education. In the foreign language classroom, it is becoming increasingly common to access, reinterpret and modify contents and texts which have an unidentified, collective author. Moreover, collaborative writing very often involves collective authorship. Thus, the idea behind this is that what really matters is the actual collective effort towards meeting a common goal or towards achieving a final product. Therefore, the identities of the individual authors and their individual contributions are no longer important.

The numerous affordances of digital storytelling for writing collaboratively and for working to reach a common goal i.e. collaborating in creating a common final product make it a very suitable and comprehensive educational activity which is "in tune with the needs, interests and skills of nowadays' technology-savvy students" (Castañeda, 2013), most of whom are immersed in a "hyper-collaborative participatory culture that has become ubiquitous across the Internet" (Kessler, 2013). The opportunities to write collaboratively and to benefit from collaborative autonomous language learning are enhanced by the use of technology and multimodality, which allow students to develop their creativity, linguistic skills and 21st century literacies (Castañeda, 2013) when producing, adapting and combining different elements such as audio, images, videos, sound or visual effects, textual materials, etc. These elements are put together to create stories from a very personal and in-depth perspective, the creation of which requires the students to work collaboratively while developing a set of linguistic and non-linguistic literacies. In Castañeda's (2013) words, the different elements are combined to create a "compelling, emotional, and in-depth story" which helps students "build 21st-century literacy skills in the foreign language".

This paper examines collective authorship and collaborative writing within a digital storytelling project carried out in a foreign language learning context in Spain. In this project, participants had the opportunity to write collaboratively and to become collective authors thanks to the use of technology and multimodality for the creation of their digital stories. This new way of writing has favoured the emergence of new notions of authorship which can be related with the creation of a new collaborative culture resulting from the advent of Web 2.0. In fact, in the project it was noted that the notion of authorship of the contents created and shared through digital technologies shifted and evolved towards a state of being nearly invisible. Moreover, collaboration and collective writing allowed participants to assume different roles at different times, enabling participants to switch back and forth between the roles of Writer, Editor, Reviewer, Team Leader and Facilitator.

The notion of author

The issues of how the term "author" should be defined and what the functions of an author are have been a major concern for over half a century for philosophers, theorists and writers

of the size of Derrida, Foucault, Barthes, Benjamin, Eliot, Coleridge, Shelley and Bloom, to name a few. As early as in 1967, the "Death of the author" was proclaimed by Barthes, whose work intended to unveil the ideologies hidden behind the meaning production of what we perceive as "natural" (Barthes, 1994). Barthes considers that the idea of "authorship" is just a cultural convention which reflects the capitalistic ideas of ownership and individual prestige, and suggests that language and tradition are indeed the elements which speak and create multiple writings, and not the author. Therefore, it is believed that through the act of writing and the subsequent reading, every voice and every point of origin are destructed, together with the author, who becomes for the reader an irrelevant (as well as inaccessible) referent and is, therefore, no longer seen as a person. In Barthes' words (1994), *"la naissance du lecteur doit se payer de la mort de l'auteur"* (*the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the author*).

In 1969, Foucault took the author debate further in his seminal conference *"Qu'est-ce qu'un auteur"* (Foucault, 1983). Nevertheless, instead of focusing on the author-reader duality, as his predecessors had done, Foucault's main interest when studying the notion of "author" is related to the author's function. He highlights the fact that every text is made of multiple texts that have preceded it. In addition, he states that even though there is a relation of attribution between the name of the author and the text, the author should be considered neither the owner nor the person responsible for the text, as every text bears a relation of intertextuality with many others. This, translated into the current context of the ubiquity of the internet, would mean that every text is in fact a hypertext as well as the result of the socio-cultural context in which it has been produced. Dusollier (2003) makes this connection between the post-structuralist "juxtaposition of notions of the author, the work and the user" underlining that, thanks to the reconsideration of the author in the works of Foucault and Barthes, the notions of "hypertext" and "intertextuality" emerge from the new vision of a text as having an "evolutionary, modifiable and open nature" (Dusollier, 2003) and the notion of the public as being the actual author of the work. These notions are considered by this author "the founding principles of both free software and free art movements" (Dusollier, 2003), which she relates to Web 2.0 and to the new collaborative culture shared by internet users worldwide.

Methodology

Since the first "Digital Storytelling for Aerospace Engineering" project was completed at the Universitat Politècnica de València (UPV, Spain) in 2011, different digital storytelling projects have been carried out in the contexts of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and English for Specific Purposes (ESP) in higher education settings in Spain (Sevilla-Pavón & Serra-Cámara, 2013) as well as in teaching training courses for teachers of both secondary and primary education in Brazil (Sevilla-Pavón, 2014), following similar steps in all cases. The digital storytelling project dealt with in this paper was the last of the three projects carried out at the UPV so far. A qualitative study was carried out and the data was gathered by means of questionnaires, direct observation, learning journals, field journals and focus-group interviews.

One of the main steps of the project had to do with the essential element of digital stories: the scripts. The collaborative writing process of the script involved several actions which are identified as "the common activities of collective writing" (Pinheiro, 2012) for every group: brainstorming, which served to develop ideas about the topic they would deal with, the way they would approach the topic, the kinds of multimedia elements and the software they would need to use in order to deal with the topic in each of the suggested ways; converging on brainstorming, which involved negotiating and deciding which ideas would be chosen for the script of their digital stories; outlining, a task related to specifying the direction the script would follow, such as including major sections and subsections, as well as determining the order of the events and the duration and main features of each scene and sequence, which resulted in a storyboard-like document; drafting or composing, that is, writing the first (incomplete) version of the script; reviewing, by which the students would read and annotate

document draft sections for content, grammar, and style improvements; further reviewing, which involved undergoing a process similar to the previously described one but bearing in mind the teacher's comments, annotations and feedback; revising by means of producing a second version of the script, which involved responding to review comments by making changes in the draft that reflected the review comments. This version was then reassessed and further corrected by the teacher; producing the final version of the script, bearing in mind the teacher's further corrections and feedback on the second version; and copyediting the script, which is defined as "the process of making final changes that are universally administered to a document to make a document more consistent (such as copy edits, grammar, logic)" (Pinheiro, 2012).

40 students aged between 18 and 20 who were enrolled in the subject "Technical English" within the degree in Aerospace Engineering, organised in groups of 4 students, took part in the study. Their level of English ranged from A2 to B2 of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR, see Council of Europe, 2001), therefore it was a very heterogeneous group. The participants wrote their scripts collaboratively by simultaneously adding, removing or rearranging the contributions each of them was making in a Googledocs document (a tool which recently became integrated into Googledrive). In the documents they generated, the individual authors were blurred or erased right from the very beginning and each script was the result of synchronous and asynchronous collaborative and collective writing. Each group wrote subsequent versions of their script which was then shared with the teacher so that she could make her own suggestions and contributions. The teacher's contributions regarded morphosyntax, semantics and overall linguistic correctness. In addition, she also provided feedback on content, genre conventions and how they were used (e.g. how a script for a short film could follow a particular structure and include certain linguistic choices so as to become appealing and effective, underlining the importance of bearing in mind the audience's perspective and using the appropriate register). Moreover, she made suggestions for the improvement of the way the events were presented and how a more personal, in-depth perspective could be incorporated. The students were free to take in whatever suggestions they found useful with regards to these elements, whereas in the case of linguistic correctness, they necessarily had to react to the teachers' comments and feedback. In both cases, there was an appropriation that, again, blurred the teacher's contribution as an additional author.

In the case of the linguistic corrections, these too were the result of collaboration in the process of appropriation of the teacher's feedback, as the students were not given the corrections straight away. Instead, using an error self-correction template (which was itself the result of collaborative writing and research, as reported by Cardona-Sanchis, 2011), the teacher wrote a little number next to each error or mistake the students had made when writing the script, indicating the kind of mistake or error it was. The numbers for each error ranged from 1 to 26, to which a little triangle symbol would be added in case there was a word missing. After the teacher had written the different numbers next to each error or mistake, together with her feedback on the content, structure and genre conventions, she would give the script back to the students so that they could correct it using the error self-correction template as well as different resources accessible from the internet: online corpora (the British National Corpus, Global Web-Based English, Corpus of Contemporary American English, the Oxford English Corpus, etc.) and online dictionaries and web-based concordancers (Corpus Concordance English, Linguee, Wordreference, etc). The error self-correction template included many different kinds of mistakes and errors regarding lexis, morphosyntax, semantics, style, etc.

Results and discussion

Most of the topics chosen by students for their digital stories were directly related to aerospace engineering, as students mainly focused on different aspects of aircraft and spaceship.

The analysis of the data gathered through the questionnaires revealed that collaborative work was the most highly appreciated characteristics of the project. The students' answers to the close-ended and open-ended questions of the questionnaire showed that this was especially true in the case of the following activities within the project: the WebQuest, which required collaborative work to complete the different tasks; the creation of the digital story, in which each of the group members had a specific role to play; and the online forum, in which the students exchanged their opinions and tips about the creative process.

> *"I really enjoyed collaborating not only with my group but also with the other classmates" (Student 2, Group 2).*

> *"What I really liked about the project was teamwork in a multilingual and multicultural group" (Student 3, Group 2).*

> *"We were a great team, I loved working with all of them and I learnt so much, so my advice for future students who complete this project is meet your team mates as often as you can" (Student 4, Group 2).*

> *"Team working was the thing I enjoyed the most about the project. At a certain point, when we were recording the voices, we decided to take a break and played some music and right afterwards I started dancing spontaneously and then my group mates started to dance too, it was so much fun" (Student 3, Group 3).*

The following table illustrates the results obtained in the pre- and post-questionnaires.

Table 1: Comparison between the means obtained in the pre and in the post-questionnaires

Variables	Pre-Questionnaire		Post-Questionnaire		Differences		
	Mean	**SD**	**Mean**	**SD**	**Mean Dif.**	**SD**	**Sig.**
Interest	5.048	1.361	5.286	.970	-.238	1.411	.281
Knowled.	4.810	1.486	5.024	.897	-.214	1.490	.357
Topics	5.048	1.413	5.715	1.251	-.668	1.918	.029
Anxiety	4.571	1.382	4.786	1.523	-.214	1.957	.482
Oral sk.	5.500	1.018	5.476	1.330	.024	1.440	.915
Collabor.	**5.881**	**1.087**	**6.095**	**.878**	**-.214**	**.976**	**.162**
Digital lit.	5.357	1.226	5.524	1.131	-.167	1.545	.488

The comparison between the results obtained in the pre and in the post-questionnaire by means of a Student's T test performed with the SPSS software (IBM SPSS Statistics version 19) showed an increase in the mean of the variable of "collaborative work" in the questionnaire, as shown in Table 1. The starting levels for this variable prior to the project were relatively high: 5.88 points in a 7-point Likert scale; and this slightly increased to 6.09 points after the project, showing that the students' expectations were fulfilled. The reason why a Likert scale of 7 points was chosen is that generally speaking 7 has more discrimination than lower numbers, which enables for wider distinctions across the scale and thus more granularity and better decision making.

As for the direct observation and journal analysis, these research instruments enabled researchers to identify the different collective writing strategies used by students in the different activities, as well as the different collective writing roles they assumed at different times. Several collective writing strategies were identified as the main ones followed by students when creating their digital stories. The main collective writing strategies the students followed when writing their scripts for the digital stories coincided with the ones identified by Lowry, Curtis and Lowry (2004): group single-author, which means that one person was directed to write for the whole group and that he/she was therefore writing in representation of their group mates and reflecting the results of the negotiation between group members; sequential writing, through which different group members wrote at different

times, in a non-synchronous way; parallel writing (also known as separate writing or partitioned writing), which took place when a group divided the work into discrete units and worked synchronically or in parallel; and reactive writing, which involved the creation of a script in real time and "reacting and adjusting to each other's changes and additions without significant preplanning and explicit coordination", the reactions appearing in the form of "consensus or dispute, reflection, or off-the-cuff contributions" (Pinheiro, 2012).

As for the main collective writing roles, most of which were interchangeable and assumed by the members of each group (and even by the teacher) at different times when writing the scripts, these were: "Writer", which is the member responsible for writing a portion of the content; "Editor", which is the member in charge of the overall content production of writers and can modify the script so as to improve its linguistic correctness, style or content; "Reviewer", that is, a person who is internal or external to a collaborative writing team and provides specific content feedback but does not have responsibility to invoke the content changes; "Team Leader", a member who "may fully participate in authorship and reviewing activities, but also leads the team through appropriate processes, planning, rewarding, and motivating" (Pinheiro, 2012); and "Facilitator", which is a person external to the collaborative writing team who leads a team through appropriate processes and does not give content-related feedback (Adkins, Reinig, Kruse & Mittleman, 1999). In the digital storytelling project, the teacher would also assume different roles at different times, her main roles being those of Reviewer, Facilitator and even Team Leader. As for the students, they would alternatively assume any of the roles above at different times, and the individual characteristics of each of them would influence their preferences as for the roles they wanted to assume, as acknowledged in their open-ended responses in both the post-questionnaire and the interviews:

> *"Collaborative work was outstanding. Francisco contributed his computer skills, Antonio and me contributed our creativity and crazy ideas and Chema helped coordinating the whole group". (Student 1, Group 1).*

Moreover, the answer of most students to the semi-open statement about what they liked about the project (they were asked to complete the sentence "Something I liked about this project was…") revealed that they found collaborative work very motivating:

> *"…the group work" (Student 1, Group 2).*

> *"To be creative and work in a group". (Student 2, Group 2).*

> *"Teamwork". (Student 1, Group 3).*

> *"Everybody in my group did work very well; the organisation was very good and we didn't have many problems to complete the project" (Student 1, Group 4).*

In addition, all students had something positive to say about teamwork and many of them reflected about the ways in which working in groups had helped them to learn, as it can be observed in their answers when completing the open-ended statement "Teamwork helped me to…":

> *"…understand how to work with the people in any kind of project" (Student 3, Group 5).*

> *…improve my team working skills" (Student 1, Group 1).*

> *"…understand different qualities of team members and learn more things which my classmates know" (Student 2, Group 1).*

"…learn more things which my classmates know" (Student 4, Group 6).

Final remarks

Digital storytelling presents many opportunities for writing collaboratively and for working towards reaching the common goal of combining different multimedia elements by means of collective authorship in order to make a memorable, touching story. Ever since the advent of the internet and especially after the transition from Web 1.0 to Web 2.0 the notion of author of contents created and shared through digital technologies has shifted and evolved towards a state of what in many cases could be considered as being nearly invisible. This is because the affordances of Web 1.0 as a technological setting were more reduced: its user was just a passive receiver of the information and contents published; whereas the more democratic and participatory Web 2.0 has enabled individuals to become simultaneously users, receivers and producers of content and information. Very often, we do not know the "original" author(s) of the content we are constantly accessing, reinterpreting and modifying. This is because collaborative writing -which very often involves collective authorship- focuses on the actual collaboration towards meeting a common goal or towards achieving a final product.

The analysis of the project revealed complex processes of collaborative writing and collective authorship while group members were completing the different steps of the digital storytelling project and especially as they wrote the script for their digital story. Within these processes, the students followed several collective writing strategies at different times, namely: group single-author, sequential writing, parallel writing and reactive writing. Moreover, the students (and even the teacher) assumed different collective writing roles at different times, switching back and forth between the roles of Writer, Editor, Reviewer, Team Leader and Facilitator.

The aforementioned processes have to do with the ongoing evolution of the notions of authorship and writing which has been favoured by ICT use in creating different products resulting from collective authorship and collaborative writing, which in turn can be seen as reflection of the emergence of a new collaborative culture shared by internet users worldwide thanks to the advent of Web 2.0.

Even though one might have the impression that in this case theory and practice are in full line with each other, there are still many issues to be addressed and several questions could be raised. For instance, how might this new notion of authorship affect creators and their rights to claim a piece of work as their own? If the author is nearly invisible, what should the rules determining allocation of copyrights be? In addition, a major challenge concerning assessment has been brought about by this new notion of authorship. In fact, many practitioners in Spain and elsewhere continue to work in institutions where instructional practices are constructed by an outdated positivistic paradigm (Dooly & Sadler, 2013). This paradigm focuses on standardised tests and sees the learning process as internal to the student (Arnold & Ducate, 2006), which conflicts with the notion of collective authorship and would therefore be completely inappropriate for assessing the work of students within this project. Both issues, however relevant, are beyond the scope of this research and should be addressed by future studies.

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