

RE-Write: a mobile app as an L2 English teaching-learning resource for writing authentic texts based on textual genres

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Innovative impact

This paper analyzes the design of the mobile application RE-Write (Resources for English Writing) as an autonomous learning resource for the development of written production of English texts based on textual genres. Examples of these textual genres include opinion essays, job application letters, formal emails or articles. The learning resources hosted in each textual genre are structured as follows: (a) a brief videotutorial that explains the structure and the content of each text, along with the main linguistic features from three main approaches, namely, lexicon (semantic fields), grammar (verbal tenses) and discourse (use of connectors, rhetorical figures), (b) a golden text extracted from an online and open access source, that will serve users as a model pattern for writing their own texts and (c) self-corrected activities with gamification that will allow to measure the users' progress by obtaining points or trophies. Previous empirical studies have evidenced that students show high motivation for learning English through the use of mobile phones and the development of written production of texts in this language has considered to be positive via Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL) (Hao, Lee, Chen and Sim 2019; Khalitova and Gimaletdinova 2016). Therefore, RE-Write aims to contribute to help English second language learners with an A2-B1 level develop autonomous learning in the writing of textual genres through MALL and also aid these learners along their academic performance.

Keywords: mobile application, textual genres, self-correction, written production, English, autonomous learning

Introduction

This paper details the design of a mobile application entitled Re-Write (Resources for English Writing), designed as a tool to support Spanish learners of English as a second language (L2) in the autonomous development of their writing skills. Re-Write provides a range of 11 sample textual genres – from formal and informal emails and letters, to narratives, reviews and periodistic articles, each analyzed and explained in terms of structure as well as linguistic and pragmatic content. Each sample or 'golden text' is accompanied by a short video tutorial in Spanish offering practical examples of structural, grammatical, lexical and pragmatic features of the textual genre in question. RE-Write has been designed by the Innovation Group OLGA

(2018-3) at the UNED in conjunction with the technical assistance of Dabasystem Solutions. Aside from enabling the user to select particular textual genres to work on, it also allows the designers to access statistical analysis of use and thus facilitate analysis of user data.

Sate of the art

Technological development is being implemented in education. The use of the mobile phone is very popular and there is a great interest in integrating its use in the classroom (Buston 2015; Jarvis and Achilleos 2013; Khalitova and Gimaletdinova 2016). This incorporation has brought forth some changes, updating the methodologies used for the teaching of foreign languages, like English, with technologies from Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) (Basoglu and Akdemir 2010; Cavus and Ibrahim 2009).

Studies carried out about the subject suggest that mobile technology has proven to be a valid didactic resource and plays a key role in the improvement of foreign language learning for different reasons: it allows students to learn without any restrictions of time or place, and it increases students' interest and motivation for learning (Beauchamp, Burden and Abbinett 2015; Levy and Kennedy 2005; Simon and Fell 2012; Zhang, Song and Burston 2011). According to Conrad and Donaldson (2004), MALL provides students with online resources that contribute to the development of different skills (production and understanding of oral and written texts). Also, improvement in the development of vocabulary through the mobile application VocUp has been reported within the context of distance education (Makoe and Shandu 2018). These results suggest that mobile learning technologies are effective within distance education for their flexibility, openness, availability, and their potential for the design of activities that include efficient feedback when human interaction is not possible.

Another example of a successful mobile application for the study of English as a foreign language is "Grammar Clinic". Li and Hegelheimer (2013) evaluated this tool in relation to the development of grammar accuracy in the production of written texts by students of English. Their results indicated that 82% of the participants (N=17) agreed with the easiness of the app and 76% reported that the app helped them be aware of the mistakes in their written compositions and in those of their peers.

Hao, Lee, Chen and Sim (2019) focused on students with a basic level of linguistic competence. They studied the efficacy of an application for the acquisition of vocabulary in 10 secondary education students (12-13 years of age) in Taiwan. Results were obtained through class observation and showed that the use of the application improved their spelling, their oral production and reception skills and helped them memorize English vocabulary. Besides, it reduced the anxiety level in their learning process. It not only supported cooperative learning but also had a positive

impact on their self-confidence and fostered positive attitudes towards the process of vocabulary learning.

Likewise, MALL, through gamification, has shown to contribute positively to the motivation of students with a low level of linguistic competence in English in relation to language learning. It has also improved cooperative learning and helped teachers provide automatic feedback (Basoglu and Akdemir 2010; Schwabe and Göth 2005). For example, Schwabe and Göth (2005) designed the game Treasure Hunting as a didactic resource to improve interest on language learning through directional games such as navigation maps.

Hao, Lee, Chen and Sim (2019) used the application "Detective ABC". It included gamification with resources addressing production and reception skills on written and oral texts based on the student's coursebook. For each skill, it included stories based on the resolution of puzzles that lead to the achievement of specific missions. Such missions had different levels for the development of vocabulary in context and taking into account real communicative situations. In conclusion, games have proven to be useful tools for the acquisition of linguistic contents, motivation for language learning and academic performance (Elaish, Shuib, Gani and Al-Haiqi 2019).

Methodology

For this work, 11 textual genres which are commonly used by teachers and learners of instrumental English (Cassany 1990; Melissourgou and Frantzi 2017) were selected: news article, opinion essay, thank you letter, letter of complaint, job application letter, informal letter (to a friend), formal email, informal email (to a friend), report, storytelling/narrative essay, and book/film review.

The type of resources to be integrated into the Re-Write mobile application were defined. Specifically, the following resources were prepared for each textual genre:

1. **A Short video tutorial** (between 8-10 minutes). The following information was included:
 - Textual structure of the genre.
 - Prototypical semantic content of each section.

- Prototypical linguistic features of each textual genre:
 - Lexical features. E.g., formal vs. informal lexicon, terminology related to a specialised field, lexical units denoting emotion, greeting and farewell formulas.
 - Morphosyntactic features. E.g., verb tenses, syntactic structures, contractions.
 - Discourse features. E.g., inclusion of lists, connectors, enumerations, exclamations.

2. **A golden text**, adapted for the purposes of this project. This text will serve as a reference for users of the application when writing the same textual genre. These texts were extracted from online and open access resources.

3. **Self-correcting learning activities**. These activities will help users to reinforce what they have learned through the resources available in the application. Each textual genre will integrate four activities, related to (a) textual structure and content, (b) use of lexicon, (c) grammatical particularities and (d) the use of discursive resources. The activities are of two types:

- Activities on selection of a picture from a few options. E.g., selecting the image which corresponds to the appropriate structure and content of a textual genre.
- Activities on multiple-choice questions with four answer options.

The self-learning activities have the resource of gamification. Thus, as users complete the activities corresponding to each textual genre, they obtain trophies or cups that measure their progress. Likewise, the mobile application integrates sound effects depending on whether the answers are correct or incorrect.

Finally, these resources were integrated into the mobile application. In addition, a direct access to a repository of open access online tools for self-correction of written productions in English (e.g. Grammarly, AutoCrit, Outwrite, Hemingway, Reverso) was included, as available in <https://blogs.uned.es/herramientasautocorreccionescrituraingles/>. This repository is located on an institutional blog of our university, and it was created in

the framework of a previous teaching innovation project.

Conclusion

To conclude, this paper discusses a project that attempts to offer materials for students who need innovative skills and competences to respond to 21st century needs. In particular students are guided to design the structure of most frequent L2 English textual genres to succeed in their writing.

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