Website review

WeShareScience 101: A Website for Creating Video Abstracts

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Abstract

The video abstract genre is becoming a major platform for disseminating recent research, and websites such as *We Share Science* (http://wesharescience.com) provide researchers with opportunities to create them. In this review, a detailed description of the website is put forward along with its teaching and learning potentials for research writing, specifically in L2 settings. The researchers who publish their videos on this website come from different language and disciplinary backgrounds, so it is of interest to see how it can potentially benefit L2 learners. The review reveals the benefits along with the drawbacks that teachers will need to address if interested in implementing the website in their course for L2 students.

1. Description

We Share Science is a website that provides a very nice space for researchers to share their research ideas and to expose them to the public for discussion. The website exhibits and distributes research from across different disciplines through a social media platform and an online annual international science fair. These two services and their potential to boost language learning in L2 student-researcher populations are of main concerns in this review. Upon entering the website, a corpus of all the previously uploaded research abstracts and description videos are accessible for users. These videos are available even without logging in to the website which can provide the opportunity for people to evaluate whether the website fits their needs before starting to use it.

In the top, right hand corner of the website page, there are four main tabs; login, menu, share and browse (Figure 1). The login tab is for users to enter their personal account on the website. The menu tab leads the users to different main functions of the website such as advanced search of videos, participating in the science fair and getting involved in the website, creating a course using the website for instructors, sharing the website and using the support page. The share tab allows users to have access to making and sharing videos and creating notebooks of their favorite videos on the website. However, these functions are accessible only after logging in. In the creating a video section, the criteria for the appropriate videos for sharing are clearly described. Finally, the browse tab provides users with the opportunity to search for the already existing videos by discipline or by topic. Users can also search for the fund research or trending video abstract categories, and the search box enables users to search for specific videos. One concern regarding the search functions of the website would be that there is no difference between the simple search bar on top of the page (Figure 1) and the function of advanced search under the menu tab. In other words, the advanced search does not include the criteria for narrowing down the search findings.

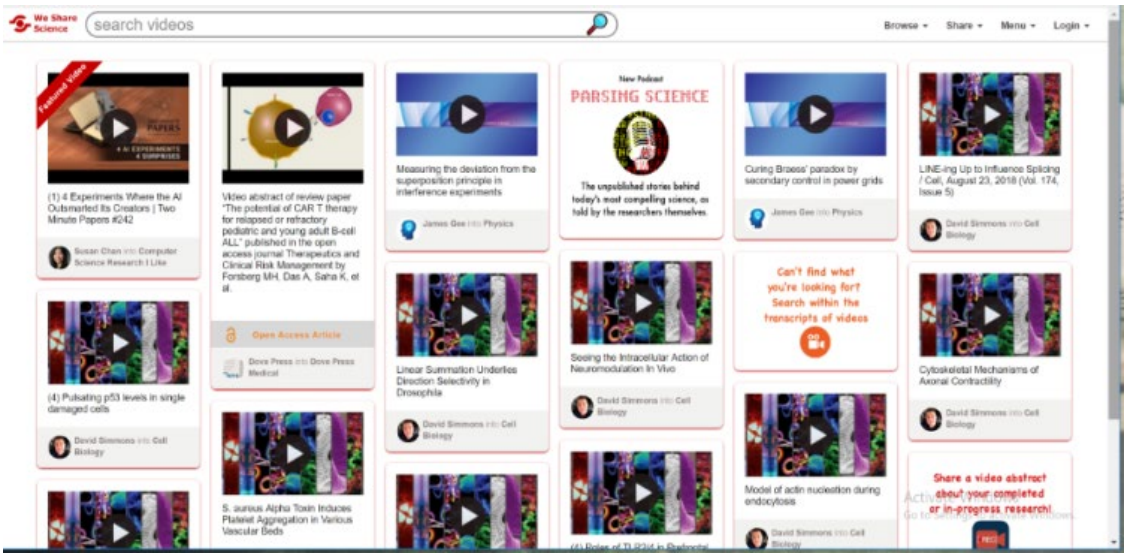

Figure 1. The Website's Interface Including the Browse, Share, Menu and Login Tabs.

In addition to the social media platform, the website links users to the 5-Minute Science Fair, which is a competitive way for researchers to showcase their research ideas. On this platform, the past fairs, their winners and the sponsors for the competitions are found. There are multiple agencies and organizations that support the fair financially, and *We Share Science* encourages other organizations to support the fair. Currently, there are three groups of sponsors who donate money for the best videos and winners in the fair funds: Diamond Sponsors ($5000 or more), Platinum Sponsors ($500 or more), and Gold Partners (in-kind assistance). There are also prizes for the videos with most Facebook likes and most tweets. A detailed description of the ten rules for competition and submission and the four main judging criteria including presentation, comprehension, innovation, and application can be found on the same page. On the website, it is also mentioned that web analytic services are the future aspiration to communicate different related organizations services' decisions to researchers. However, this opportunity is not yet available. Furthermore, in the past science fair section where the past fairs and their winners are described, there seem to be no updates after 2015 and the last science fair seems to have been held in that year so it is not clear if the science fair happens on a yearly basis or not. If so, it would be better to update the events on the website.

In this website, people can share their own research ideas or other researchers' studies by creating short (i.e., no longer than 5 minutes) videos and pinning the videos to the website. Most of the tabs, links, and services are available even without creating an account. However, for users to benefit from the website's services such as following other researchers, chatting with friends and followers and most importantly sharing their videos, it is necessary to log into the website. As stated in the website, this function is possible by either an already existing Facebook or Twitter account or by requesting a username and password from the *We Share Science* team. However, despite what is stated on the website, there seems to be no option for people to log in with their Facebook account.

As long as a system allows the use of one of Firefox, Safari, Opera, SeaMonkey, Internet Explorer (v10+) or Chrome browsers, creating videos is possible in three different ways. The first option gives users the access to different video making tools and tutorials. The second option gives users the possibility to create slides using external software such as PowerPoint and record their narration. Users, then, can accompany the narration and slides and upload their files to the website. In the third option, users can use a webcam or a recording tool to record videos and then upload the files to the website for others to watch. This third option provides access to Screencast O Matic recorder which is a java supported tool and a non-java tool which is Free Online Screen Recorder. If users use the Chrome browser, the first two options would not be applicable. In all these cases, there is an easy way to share videos on *We Share Science* by using a browser add-on called

"Share in". By installing this add-on, it is easy to pin the appropriate videos from different websites to the *We Share Science* website with only one click. The description of how to install this add-on and other widgets for blogs and websites is provided in Share It Buttons page.

The website's interface is very user-friendly, and it is easy to navigate through different tabs and sections. After users log in to the website, they will have access to a chat box on the bottom, right corner of the page that enables them to talk with their followers on the website or the researchers whom they follow. This has provided an interactive interface for users and an easier, faster way to discuss ideas with the community of researchers. In their profiles, users are free to share photos, quotes and other types of materials under the label of User Content, the protection of which is the user's own responsibility based on terms of use and privacy. One more interesting feature is that, if a user cannot find their intended video, they can search within transcripts of the videos to find the one they want. The search-in-video-transcripts feature is powered by the spoken data technology which turns speech into text and by entering appropriate keywords, users can find their desired videos from transcripts.

2. Teaching and learning potentials

Most technological advancements were not initially designed for use in L2 language classrooms; however, they could very well be adapted to this context. While, *We Share Science* is not a website that claims to be developing linguistic competence in learners, course developers, teachers and students could very well use it for this purpose. To further elaborate on how this website can be used in an L2 language classroom, a description of teacher and learner activities are put forward.

Under the share tab and in the make a video page, there is a section called "For Instructors," where four major types of assignments are described, and teachers and course developers can utilize them for their students and use them in their L2 research writing programs. One of the positive aspects of this section of the website is that the grading criteria for every assignment are included. The first assignment includes the analysis of research articles in which it is recommended that instructors ask students to create three short video abstracts for three research articles with a special focus on the content rather than the slides or visuals. Students are required to describe the main sections of the papers in their videos. Then, they will upload the videos on YouTube or Vimeo and pin them to WeShareScience.com. The videos should be accompanied by the names of the researchers and the title of the articles. Next, they will copy and paste the URLs in a word document and upload them on their classroom Dropbox folders. The grading criteria for this assignment are 20% for research background, 30% for what the researcher(s) did, 20% for what they have learned, 20% for application of research and 10% for the creativity in presentation. The second assignment is synthesizing three research papers drawing the major themes from every article and finding the relevance among the three. Then, the three paper's basic elements, their relations, and their shared value should be described in a video abstract. This synthesis video should not be longer than 8 minutes and the recording and submission will be the same as in the first assignment. The grading criteria are described as 15% for the quality of the papers, 15% for the summary of every research, 20% for the description of what the researchers have learned, 30% for the synthesis, 10% for applications and 10% for creativity in presentation.

The next assignment asks students to report their own research in progress creating a video abstract in which they describe the basic elements of their research and the value of the results. The creation and submission are similar to the assignments above. The grading criteria for this assignment will better explain what instructor have to expect in this assignment; 20% for research background, 30% for they have done or will do, 20% for the results they already obtained or will obtain, 20% for the value and application of the research and 10% for creativity in creating their video. The website then connects users to TED-Ed tools to create their own lessons around their desired video(s). As it is mentioned in *We Share Science,* TED-Ed can provide instructors with an opportunity to create their questions around videos, finding extra resources and having an online discussion on their desired topics. *We Share Science*welcomes any new ideas for assignments and lesson using the website's resources.

The students will need to create their videos in four major steps. In step one, students will create slides. As slides are limited in space, they are required to summarize their research ideas by breaking down a research paper into its main elements (e.g. the purpose, questions, method, results, discussion, and implications). However, the options for creating the videos on the boundary of the website itself are limited so this can restrict students' creativity in major ways. For instance, there is no room for creating animated videos; to do so, the website connects users to external websites, some of which are expensive to use. Moreover, students cannot work on a shared project or video collaboratively or benefit from immediate, in-the-process feedback. In the second step, students are required to record their narration. In this step, they are recommended to leave most of the information to be conveyed through narration and not the written words on the slides, which can help students develop speaking skills. For narrating their research, the website recommends students to be simple, energetic, inviting and unhurried. They are advised to hold the microphone correctly for better voice quality. Then students will use the recorder to narrate over their slides (Figure 2). Finally, they will send their final videos to Vimeo or YouTube and pin them to the *We Share Science* website. These functions require students to create accounts in the website.

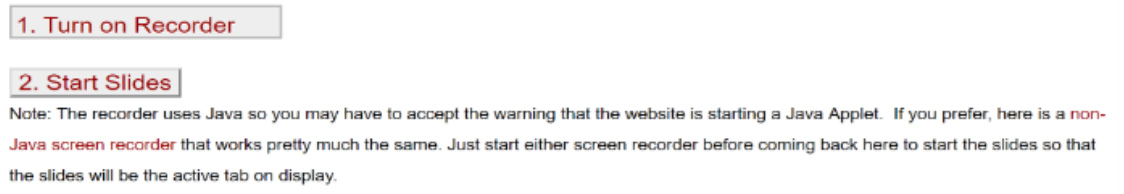

Figure 2. The Recorder and Slide Playing buttons.

The benefits of using video abstracts in a second language research course can be justified through Second Language Acquisition (SLA) approaches to linguistic development specifically the sociocultural and systemic functional perspectives. From the sociocultural perspective, humans make use of the many physical and non-physical tools to achieve command over their social and mental performances. The adaptation of this theory to second language acquisition encouraged scholars in this field to look at language as a medium to interact with self and with the environment or social context. The progression of research in this area led researchers to believe that the development of a second language is a by-product of a complex relationship between individuals and their internal factors and other human or non-human sources that are within a specific context in which language is used (Ganem-Gutiérrez, 2013). The advent of computer-based media and different technologies, as well as the accessibility of web-based data and information, have provided users with new mediums for communicating their research interests (Spicer, 2014). This is happening in online spaces such as *We Share Science* where researchers, using different mediums and modes of communication (i.e. spoken, written, audio and visual), communicate their desired meanings (i.e. research). Many of the users of this website are from non-English speaking countries and to access a wide audience they will need to explain their research in English. Knowing how to describe a research process can be a challenging task but this is compensated by the incorporation of other visual and written modes that accompany researchers' narrations. These are the options that technology provides for language users, and language in its written or spoken forms is not considered the only medium of communication. In fact, this technology makes it possible for users to produce multimodal texts and genres and these are the insights put forward by the systemic functional theory (O'Halloren, 2008).

One more benefit of creating video abstracts from specifically sociocultural perspectives would be for researchers to receive feedback as a form of assistance in doing their research hence the assisted learning, a concept embedded in the Zone of Proximal Development of Vygotsky. According to this theory, the development of individuals as language users (in this discussion) happens in three main stages; object-regulation, other-regulation, and self-regulation. An individual relies on instructions and follows them too closely in order to perform an activity. Next, they can perform the activity with the help of experts in the field and finally, they can become experts and independent learners in performing the intended activity (Lantolf & Thorne, 2007). Though there is a room for

learners to move from assisted to independent learning, the website falls short in providing true opportunities for receiving feedback. In fact, the transition from other regulated and scaffolded learning to self-regulation or autonomy (i.e. the zone of proximal development) is feasible if learners continue sharing and communicating through this website while in the process of creating and not after they have created their product. This does not happen in the website, though students can still benefit from sharing their finished videos.

Despite providing visibility for researchers and their research, the website does not truly challenge students' competencies. To develop linguistic competence, one needs to develop technological competence (Chapelle, 2009). As video abstract is a new genre for student-researchers (Spicer, 2014), they will need to get familiar with this genre before producing their own. Partly because it was intended for a different use, the website does not provide teachers and students with opportunities for learning about the video abstract genre prior to producing their own abstracts. It is upon teachers to design genre analysis lessons using the corpus of video abstracts on the website. Teachers can design activities in order to help students develop critical thinking skills by asking them to analyze the existing video abstracts using different criteria. This is in line with the assisted learning to an independent learning model that is introduced in sociocultural theory. Moreover, it is in line with the teaching and learning cycle in systemic functional theories of language learning, in which a genre is first modeled and analyzed, then, it is co-constructed by instructors and students so that, ultimately, students can produce the genre independently (Hyon, 1996).

3. Conclusion

The website offers a very nice environment for novice researchers and graduate students from different countries and different disciplinary backgrounds who produce video abstracts in English to access a wide ranging audience. The creation of videos for describing one's finished or in-progress research ideas requires students to have analytical, summarizing and explaining skills as well as the knowledge to work with the technology. Furthermore, the website sparks communication and provides a nice space for having conversations on researchers' desired topics or for receiving feedback from others on different aspects of their research. However, it could have been more interactive if students had the opportunity for co-construction of the videos in the same environment and for communication while in the process of creation. Furthermore, in a video abstract written words, images and audio are accompanied, which demands students to not only know how to write or talk in a second language but also know how to use the technology to combine these together. However, this needs training and a bit of effort on the part of the teachers to design tasks that can develop this competency, as the website does not provide such tasks for students. In addition, one major concern for using the website would be the fact that the internet, computers, and technology might not be accessible for people in every country in the world and this brings up social justice issues which need to be resolved in higher-level educational systems in those countries. It is rather apparent that our lives have become tied to technology and to develop various abilities such as the ability to produce an academic text, in most occasions, we need to be able to use certain technologies. Technology has appeal for today's world and the key is to make use of what is appealing as a learning opportunity. Furthermore, the creation of digital media such as *We Shares Science* has provided multiple, new opportunities for people to communicate in the world. In conclusion, this website is potentially highly beneficial to use in a second language research writing course with the required adaptations.

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