

Social Networking and Language Learning

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Abstract

Our increasing dependence on and use of various technological tools has impacted every facet of our lives, and language teaching and learning are no exception. Educators regularly incorporate a variety of tools (Thorne and Payne, 2005) to engage their students and to allow them to interact in new and different ways, both in class and beyond the walls of the classroom. In particular, popular social networking sites (SNSs) such as Facebook, Edmodo, and LinkedIn offer educators even more ways to help students increase motivation and reinvigorate the classroom climate (Mazer et al., 2007). Social networking tools such as these, and others, also provide opportunities for language learners to enhance digital and multiliteracy skills, interact in and through the target language, work collaboratively, and enhance their linguistic and pragmatic proficiency (Blattner and Fiori, 2011; Blattner and Lomicka, 2012b; Lomicka and Lord, 2012; Mills 2011). This chapter examines the theoretical underpinnings of using social networking in language learning, as well as how social networking tools can be effective in the classroom. Specifically, we look at current pedagogical practices that are linked to social networking communities. Moreover, we examine prominent studies thus far in the field that help to shed light on key issues and considerations in the use of social networks in the language classroom.

This chapter explores second language (L2) learning and teaching with technology, specifically in the area of social networking (SN). SN represents one aspect of social media, which has the broader focus of creating and transmitting information to others. SN is more about the tools used to make that content available to others and to allow users to connect, engage with it, and to build communities. According to Grahl (2013) social media can be categorised into six different but overlapping categories, which include: (1) social networks (e.g., Facebook, LinkedIn); (2) bookmarking sites (e.g., Delicious, StumbleUpon); (3) social news (e.g., Digg, Reddit); (4) media sharing (e.g., Instagram, YouTube, Flickr); (5) microblogging (e.g., Twitter); and (6) blogging, particularly comments and forums. The popularity of SN tools has increased dramatically over the past years. The upsurge of online social interaction may be attributed in part to a desire to connect with new people, to share opinions, to stay in touch with old friends and colleagues, and to share different types of information with a widespread community of followers. Simply put, there is a desire to develop and maintain online relationships that lead to community building, self-expression and interaction with others (Thorne 2010). In situations that involve the L2, these types of relationships can be built or maintained in a language other than one's own within a shared community, which makes them appealing to language educators.

Yet, despite this potential, and despite SN's popularity for personal interaction, it has not been as widely embraced in education. Lepi (2013) reports on a recent study by the

Babson Survey Research Group and Pearson Education of 8,000 faculty members, and notes that while “faculty have adopted some social media use in their personal life, fewer have done so professionally” (n.p.). Although there are an increasing number of academic studies related to various social media tools, many of them are not empirically based, nor do they offer strong theoretical advances. In the area of L2 learning, recent studies have only begun to investigate the potential that social networking sites (SNS) have for the classroom (Blattner and Fiori 2009; 2011; Blattner and Lomicka 2012a and 2012b; McBride 2009; Mills 2011; Mitchell 2012; Reinhardt and Zander 2011 and 2013; Stevenson and Liu 2010; Sykes and Holden 2011), as will be discussed below.

The next section addresses various theoretical approaches that have been associated with SN in the L2 classroom. We then examine the principal contributions that research-based studies have provided, and address the practical aspects of incorporating SN tools into the classroom. We conclude by looking at the future of SN in language learning.

1. THEORETICAL APPROACHES TO L2 LEARNING AND SN

For educators interested in incorporating aspects of SN with their learners, it is crucial to keep in mind the theory and current pedagogical stances that underlie language learning with technology. According to Blyth (2008), there are four distinct categories to language learning research: technological, psycholinguistic, sociocultural, and ecological. Technological approaches include studies that report on new technologies as they move from being used in society to their pedagogical application in the classroom, as well as how teachers and students react to their use. Studies driven by psycholinguistic theories integrate the interaction hypothesis and noticing, while sociocultural research, based on Vygotsky’s theories of social learning within communities, looks at how learning is mediated within those contexts (please see Chapter 2 of this volume by Hubbard and Levy for further reading). Finally, ecological approaches attempt to consider the whole context of a project and examine how all of the parts of a learning environment, such as the students, teachers, environment, and technological tools, work together to form the whole. Each of these four approaches to language learning is examined in turn to explore how SN fits within the various perspectives.

Technological Approaches

Technological theories are those that Blyth (2008) describes as a development stage, consisting of explorative and descriptive studies. These types of studies aim at assessing the potential benefits of the particular tool. Although, as Blyth points out, these studies are often criticized for their perceived lack of theoretical framework, they do contribute to the field by introducing new technologies to educators in L2 contexts. They also discuss how these tools may change the perception of traditional learning in the classroom. In terms of SN, preliminary studies such as Stevenson and Liu’s (2010) analysis of three SNS (Live Mocha, Palabea, and Babbel) investigate how they are used for language learning and social purposes. Their 2010 study showed that learners initially showed a greater interest in web 1.0 technology. Consistent with Blyth’s claims, studies such as this one are helpful for teachers seeking to use a particular social networking tool and pave the way for further research in the area of social networking.

Psycholinguistic Approaches

Psycholinguistic approaches to language acquisition are focused on the importance of social interaction and noticing. For example, Long's (1985, 1996) Interaction Hypothesis holds that language development is brought about by person-to-person communication and the linguistic interactions that take place. Proponents of such interactionist approaches (e.g., Chapelle 1997, 1998) highlight the crucial role that input, interaction, and output have on language learning. Input in the target language is essential (e.g., Krashen, 1994), and input that is comprehensible but slightly beyond the level of the learner ($i + 1$) provides direct information about the language and serves to illustrate what patterns are and are not evidenced in language. Additionally, input that is comprehensible is most likely to be noticed (e.g., Schmidt 1990, 1995) and processed by learners. When negotiation of meaning is required, either due to a gap in the learner's knowledge or through a breakdown in communication and the need for comprehension checks and communication strategies, it leads in turn to the output that a learner produces. Swain and Lapkin (1995), for example, have proposed the Comprehensible Output Hypothesis to explain how learning is facilitated precisely by the need to produce language.

Such interactionist approaches seem to be ideally suited as a basis for exploring the role of SN tools in language learning, given their emphasis on connecting learners to provide increased input, engage in negotiation of meaning, and require output. In fact, seminal research in CALL has long advocated the exploration of acquisition issues within an interactionist, psycholinguistic framework (e.g., Chapelle 1997, 1999; Salaberry 1999). For example, students can attend to the linguistic characteristics of the input from the speakers with whom they interact, they can reflect on their own language system and take note of their own errors, and use their computer-enhanced communication opportunities to improve their own production, be it oral or written.

Sociocultural Approaches

Researchers such as Lantolf (2000) have advocated that the sociocultural approach (based on work by Vygotsky, 1978) is ideally suited to examining the process of language acquisition, thanks to its emphasis on interaction from within a community of learners. Language and social interaction play a role in human development, and serve as cultural practices that can lead to the construction of knowledge shared by members of the community. In terms of how this might contribute to social networking, virtual connections with other learners and experts around the world can potentially offer a rich environment for socio-cultural language exchange (Harrison and Thomas 2009; Harrison 2013). Social networking spaces can also provide virtual spaces and offer promising opportunities to learn through observation, where students can observe others, interpret their behaviours, and adjust their own styles of interacting in SNSs. (Ryberg and Christiansen 2008). Through interaction in these spaces, learners can gain confidence by working with others and by establishing recognition as members of a particular community. Over time, virtual encounters within a community can even help learners to become experts. As proposed by Reinhardt and Zander (2011), SNSs allow

users to interact in a myriad of communication exchanges due to the fact the SNSs combine many technological features into one platform. This interaction can lead to developments in both identity and in relationships and can expose students to current, real and meaningful language use for specific tasks. He notes that because social networks offer spaces shared by communities of individuals, they can be considered social practices (Scribner and Cole, as cited in Lankshear and Knobel 2008). Mills (2011) advocates that social networking tasks can allow users to “write [themselves] into being” (Rosen 2007: 87). This formation of identity or writing into being takes place, as Mills notes, through shared postings, feedback from the community, and reflection and self-appraisal. Identity can be constructed virtually in these social spaces by posting, sharing ideas, media preferences, and news items (Pempek et al. 2009). Thus, from a sociocultural perspective, interaction, work within specific communities, as well as perceived identity construction are all plausible areas that can further be explored.

Ecological Approaches

In the fourth and final theoretical stance discussed here, van Lier (2004) advocates for an ecological approach in which context is not only central but also crucial to understanding the dynamic interrelations among various personal and environmental factors. Within this approach, the learner “acts and interacts within and with his environment” (van Lier 2004: 246), rather than the learning taking place individually in an isolated context. At times, this interaction can be mediated by affordances (Gibson 1979) available in the environment, and by which the learner may reach various goals. Affordances can be objects, places, events or things; however, the learner must be made aware of these affordances and their potential in order to make use of them (van Lier 2004). The existence of the affordance alone does not necessarily encourage action, rather it is the responsibility of the teacher and other interlocutors to help to make the affordances available and accessible to the learners so that they can use them to their benefit (van Lier 2004). Ducate and Lomicka’s (2013) study is grounded in this approach as they examine how students use a mobile device ‘on the go’ both within and outside of the language classroom, at a time and place that accommodates them, and suggests the types of affordances that are possible within mobile language learning. Their findings suggest that intermediate language students who are offered the use of mobile devices will take advantage of their affordances for personal and academic uses, thereby allowing themselves more exposure to the target language and culture. Although this study did not specifically explore social networks, the findings can be applicable to all virtual spaces. Many of the studies mentioned in this section will be revisited in the next section in more detail, where primary contributions from research-based studies are considered.

2. PRIMARY CONTRIBUTIONS FROM RESEARCH-BASED STUDIES

With these theoretical perspectives in mind, we now turn to recent studies in the area of SN to explore what they have contributed to the field of L2 learning. Karpati (2009) has argued that social web tools can, in general, facilitate educators in setting up collaborative learning, as they place students at the core of the learning experience while at the same time allowing the teacher to function as the mentor and guide of

knowledge construction and sharing. He also highlighted the fact that such tools provide authentic language education settings, an important consideration for achieving high communicative competence in a foreign language. Likewise, Komatsu (2011) conducted a survey of SNSs and Web 2.0 and concluded that these networks are potential forums of learning because they can be learner-centered, active, and collaborative. While survey-based research of this type is not designed to push the research agenda forward in terms of gains to learning and teaching, it does provide general information about social networking.

Educators, though, have claimed that relatively little empirical research exists on how (and if) social networking can facilitate language learning (Stevenson and Liu 2010; Lamy and Zourou 2013; Zourou 2012). Many studies report increased motivation for learning (Clark and Gruba 2010; Liu, Evans, Horwitz, Lee, McCrory, Park and Parrish 2013; Stevenson and Liu 2010, among others), and indicate that SNS can generate meaningful output and stimulate students' interest in language learning (Chartrand 2012). Other studies have investigated sociopragmatic competence (Blattner and Fiori 2009; Blattner and Lomicka 2012a; 2012b; Reinhardt and Zander 2011) and the potential to develop and explore online relationships and identities (e.g., Chen 2013; Klimanova and Dembovskaya 2013; Mills 2011; Reinhardt and Chen 2013; Thorne 2010) where expression, interaction, and community building are all important factors in the language learning experience. The following sections address this research in greater detail.

Motivation and User Profiles

One benefit that has emerged with regard to the use of SNS is motivation and student enjoyment. McBride (2009) suggested that daily engagement with Facebook could be a motivating factor for pedagogically useful foreign language experiences. Stevenson and Liu (2010) explored the pedagogical and technical use of three language-related SNS (i.e., Palabea, Live Mocha, and Babbel) in the context of foreign language learning. Five participants tested the three SNS as they engaged in different tasks (exploratory, closed ended, and open ended). The results of their exploratory survey study showed that the participants were interested and excited about the possibilities of collaboration on SNS in terms of learning directly from other users including native speakers. However, the data also revealed that the perceived user-friendliness of the sites also impacted students' reactions.

Similarly, Liu, Evans, Horwitz, Lee, McCrory, Park and Parrish (2013) looked at 21 university level ESL learners' use of SNS (Buusu, Live Mocha and English Café) for language learning, and their perceptions of these experiences. Twenty-one ESL students completed a survey (likert type and open-ended questions) to look at their usage and perception of SNS for language learning. Factors identified that are important to learner satisfaction of social spaces include comfort level, language proficiency level, preferred communication modes and the design of the sites. Additionally, Mitchell (2012) suggests that creating and developing friendships in SNS can increase motivation. Using a qualitative case study, her study explored Facebook with nine learners of English and a second language. Data were coded from interviews and analysed to identify salient themes, and the findings suggest that students were able not just to communicate with

friends but also to improve their linguistic and cultural competency. In a related study, Clark and Guba (2010) found that motivation is key to working in SNS like Live Mocha. While using an auto-ethnographic approach including self-aware participation, learner diaries and peer debriefing, their results indicate that a number of pedagogical impediments such as flaws in site design exist but may not affect growth in the number of site users.

In addition to motivation, other work has focused on student profiles. Harrison and Thomas (2009), for example, investigated Live Mocha with a small group of learners, who used the SNS one hour per week. Overall, students responded positively to the materials and experience. Results also suggest that profiles are central to the dynamic of interaction in online communities and thus play a role in learning. Finally, they propose that SNS such as Live Mocha can “transform language learning, by providing environments that allow new modes of active learning” (2009:121).

Development of socio-pragmatic competence

Blattner and Fiori (2009) considered the potential of Facebook to encourage positive student relationships, provide constructive educational outcomes and immediate, individualized opportunities to interact and collaborate with peers, instructors and native speakers of a variety of foreign languages (FL). They found that meaningful integration in Facebook in the language classroom can lead to a sense of community and impact the development of socio-pragmatic competence in language learners. Likewise, Blattner and Lomicka (2012a; 2012b) examined pedagogical practices using a social forum and a Facebook forum in the context of an intermediate French course. They administered structured linguistic tasks and questionnaires. Students were asked to identify information in posts made by forum members: types of salutations, use of pronouns, question formation, and colloquial vocabulary (i.e. abbreviations, syllabograms). The results suggest that language analysis on Facebook forums can enhance the awareness of important socio-pragmatic elements by transcending national and cultural boundaries. Finally, informed by a bridging activities model, Reinhardt and Zander (2011) conducted a sociopragmatic study with nine participants. Their study implemented activities using Facebook for elementary Korean with the goal of developing sociopragmatic awareness of Korean honorifics. Trends emerging from his work suggest that there is evidence of sociopragmatic awareness, understanding of contextual constraints on use and creative use of Facebook affordances.

Identity issues

Several studies have explored identity issues in SN communities. For example, Mills (2011) conducted a study that highlighted the nature of student participation, knowledge acquisition, and relationship development within SN communities. Facebook was used as an interactive tool where students could share collective reflection and access resources that enhanced the various topics discussed in class. Mills noticed that students made connections to course content, developed identities through the enhancement of interpersonal, presentational, and interpretative modes of communication, engaged in meaningful learning experiences, and contextualized interactions within these social communities in the L2. Similarly, Iskold (2012) examined the concepts of self-

authorship and performing identity among L2 learners on Facebook. She concluded that Facebook may enhance face-to-face learning, especially in the areas of critical thinking, and by providing additional opportunities to interact, increased motivation, and the ability to experiment with character identity. Reinhardt and Chen (2013) also investigated how SN is used to invest in new identities that lead to socialization in imagined communities. From an ecological perspective, their study shows how a learner made use of affordances to establish identity; results suggest that Facebook was used as a way to socialize and invest identity in the context of graduate studies, and to interact with broader communities and networks.

Chen (2013) looked at two multilingual writers and how they design and construct identities in literary practices in Facebook. Findings indicated that writers adopted various strategies, subject positions and even re-appropriated “symbolic resources afforded by the SNS as they aligned themselves with particular collective and personal identities at local and global levels” (2013:143). Klimanova and Dembovskaya (2013) provided an analysis of comparable SN community, VKontakte, in Russian classes. Online activities, phenomenological interviews and interactions with native speaker students all focused on identity construction through interaction.

Taken together, these studies show that even in its beginning stages, research on SNS indicates a beneficial impact of using such sites in the context of L2 learning. The next section examines the more practical issues related to developing and incorporating SNS-based tasks and activities in L2 learning.

3. INCORPORATING SOCIAL NETWORKING TOOLS IN THE CLASSROOM

As should be clear from the above, the case for incorporating social media into our language classes is compelling. Not only can these sites be used to share classroom resources, news and work, but they have also been shown to foster greater student engagement and, as emerging evidence indicates, linguistic gains as well. So with that in mind, this section addresses key considerations in incorporating SN tools in the language classroom.

Types of SNS

Although SNS are pervasive, they are also constantly changing, and for that reason we frame our discussion here around a few general types of social networks: tools that offer learners opportunities to engage in written discourse (such as Facebook, LinkedIn or Twitter); those that focus primarily on oral discourse (e.g., PodOMatic, VoiceThread or video messaging sites); and those that highlight the sharing of images (e.g., Instagram, Pinterest, or SnapChat). Table 1 displays a selection of current popular and freely available SNS that, based on the theoretical perspectives above, have promising potential for use in language classes.

NAME	DESCRIPTION	URL
EdModo	Education oriented site, shares layout of popular SNSs. Provides a safe and easy way for your class to connect and collaborate, share content, and access homework, grades and school notices.	www.edmodo.com

Facebook	Online social networking service, originally designed for college students but now extended to general population.	www.facebook.com
Google Hangout	Hangouts bring conversations to life with photos, emoji, and even group video calls for free. Connect with friends across computers, Android and Apple devices.	www.google.com/hangouts
GroupMe	A mobile group-messaging app owned by Microsoft.	www.groupme.com
Instagram	An online photo-sharing, video-sharing and social networking service that enables its users to take pictures and videos, apply digital filters to them, and share them on a variety of social networking services, such as Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr and Flickr.	www.instagram.com
LinkedIn	A business-oriented social networking service with similar functionality to Facebook.	www.linkedin.com
Pinterest	A visual discovery tool that people use to collect ideas for their different projects and interests. People create and share collections (called “boards”) of visual bookmarks (called “Pins”) that they use to do things like plan trips and projects, organize events or save articles and recipes.	www.pinterest.com
PodOMatic	A website specialized in the creation of tools and services that enable users to easily find, create, distribute, promote and listen to both audio and video podcasts.	www.podomatic.com
SnapChat	A mobile app that lets users take photos and short videos; users can decide how long data will be visible once opened, which can span of up to 10 seconds, and then supposedly disappears forever.	www.snapchat.com
Twitter	An online social networking and microblogging service that enables users to send and read short 140-character text messages, called "tweets". Registered users can read and post tweets.	www.twitter.com
VoiceThread	An interactive collaboration and sharing tool that enables users to add images, documents, and videos, and to which other users can add voice, text, audio file, or video comments.	www.voicethread.com

Table 1: Representative SNS

The tools listed in Table 1, and many others like them, offer language educators unique opportunities to engage their students and develop their cultural and linguistic awareness at the same time. The spectrum of skills and task types that educators can incorporate through various social platforms is limitless (see also Hsien-Chin Liou in this volume on reading and writing using social media), and SN tools can be exploited for a variety of languages and proficiency levels by focusing on different linguistic elements as the situation requires.

Sample task types using SNS

The sites listed above can be adapted and incorporated in a variety of productive ways, depending on the pedagogical goals. For example, tools that tend to focus on written discourse can be used in beginning or intermediate levels to create self-descriptions and to engage in self expression tasks, as was mentioned above. Other aspects of these tools may lend themselves nicely to longer, blog-type posts, which can be used for the development and interpretation of extended discourse. As learner proficiency increases, these same sites and tools can be maximized to promote metalinguistic awareness of language structures and sociocultural aspects of language use. Similarly, observing

group interaction on these sites provides rich material for further sociolinguistic and sociocultural discussions that more advanced learners will appreciate.

Likewise, as we have seen in the table above, SN is no longer limited to printed text, and the proliferation of podcasts and similar sites opens the door for the development of listening and speaking. In addition to similar discourse development – but oral, rather than written – these sites can offer learners the opportunity to observe native spoken language. They can use these sites to develop their comprehension skills, as well as to improve their own spoken speech. Depending on the level, learners can be encouraged to focus on their pronunciation and suprasegmental features like pitch and rhythm, or to assess their own fluency through such indicators as temporal aspects and discourse markers. Alternately, learners can analyse these features in the speech of native speakers from a variety of backgrounds, open up the door for comparisons between native and non-native speech, dialectal variation, and sociopragmatic variation.

Finally, networking sites that revolve primarily around sharing photos and images are rapidly increasing in popularity. In addition to lending themselves to the development of descriptive language, these visual elements can often lead nicely into cultural issues and development of cultural awareness and competence. It should be noted here as well that even though some sites work exclusively with images (such as Instagram), most other SNS have adapted to the ubiquity of photos and images, so virtually that any of the tools listed above can be used in this way.

It is important for instructors to keep in mind that social interaction is the main goal of any of these sites, and thus their successful incorporation into language curricula also depends on social interaction. Any activity using a SNS should depend upon the interaction and the connectedness it was designed to promote. If an activity or project does not allow for and encourage participation from multiple students, it is probably not truly maximizing the potential of the tool. Similarly, a passive SNS will be far less successful than one that is monitored frequently. Therefore, some students, depending upon their learning styles and preferences, may react better and engage more willingly if they know there is an audience of followers and if they are actively encouraged to produce their own content.

4. KEY CONSIDERATIONS WHEN USING SNS

Having considered various SN tools, we now look to several considerations when using SN. Rodriguez (2011) suggests that educators keep in mind the following: ownership, privacy and security, access, accessibility and compliance, stability of technology, intellectual property rights, and copyright law. Below we will address a few of these considerations.

Codes of Conduct

As a teacher, especially if teaching in online or hybrid environments, it is important to establish codes of conduct so that students know how to behave in SNS while they are in a course. A good place to begin would be to check with the institution to see what guidelines for SN conduct are already in place. As an educator, you can work from those guidelines and supplement with specific guidelines for the course. Obviously, it can be suggested that students be respectful of others and to use common sense when

making posts. It might also be helpful to include what the instructor has a right to remove and what happens if a violation occurs. It is important to go over rules for conduct at the beginning of a term or semester, and if necessary, ask students to sign a document specifying that they have read and agree to the specific terms.

Privacy

Students need to be made aware of, and reminded of, privacy issues, especially since what constitutes a “classroom” today is often archived and available for public viewing. Classroom spaces, whether within the traditional four walls or in cyberspace are now public spaces and students should be aware that comments and posts are potentially archived and can impact hiring and future references. It is also crucial to know what hosting sites do with data collected from users, especially in cases where students are required to use a certain SN tool for a course. Finally, students and instructors should consider maintaining separate personal and educational/professional sites, in order to avoid complications or violations of privacy in a classroom setting.

Accessibility

Faculty members must be prepared to accommodate diverse student needs, especially with regard to students with disabilities and accessing materials online. Educators should be familiar with accessibility issues that these particular groups of users face so that everyone will have opportunities to an inclusive learning environment. For example, when a spell checker is not available within a particular tool, educators can inform students to compose text in a word processor with a spell checking tool and then copy it into the other tool.

As educators today are using more new and innovative technologies, they must also be aware of associated considerations and issues. Code of conduct, privacy, and accessibility have been identified in the literature as legitimate concerns and ones that should be addressed in the classroom before embarking on projects using social media. In addition to these issues, copyright, anonymity and fraud are all issues that users should be aware of. While addressing these issues in depth would be well beyond the scope of this chapter, educators do need to consider these topics. According to Barretta (2014), educators can follow 9 simple policies to guide them in their use of social networking (her article references Twitter, specifically, but the principles apply to any social networking sites). She breaks her recommendations down into the four Cs and the 5 Rs: credibility, consistency, correctness and creativity; and relevancy, reactivity, responsibility, responsibility and respect. Robinson (201) also offers some valuable considerations, ranging from public records laws to freedom of speech, and provides guidelines for those interested in incorporating any kind of social media into classes.

5. LOOKING TO THE FUTURE OF SOCIAL NETWORKING

Three emerging trends that will likely characterize the future of SN both in personal and (eventually) in educational settings include: 1) a move toward mobility; 2) a focus on ephemerality and digital tribalism and 3) a reduction of text and subsequent increase in images (Beck 2014; Friedman 2013).

SN is projected to become increasingly mobile. As tablets, iPads, and smart phones grow more powerful and rapid, more and more users are accessing popular SN apps on mobile devices. Recent data published by comScore and analysed by Statista.com indicate that mobile devices have become the main channel for SN. Statista.com shows Instagram, Pinterest, Facebook and Twitter as the apps receiving the most time spent on mobile devices, whereas Tumblr and LinkedIn were accessed more from desktop locations (Richter 2014). There is already a push toward mobility in language learning, demonstrated by increased attention MALL is receiving in the literature (e.g., Ballance 2012; Stockwell and Sotillo 2011; Stockwell Chapter 21 in this volume).

Second, young people are migrating away from Facebook in favour of more ephemeral applications such as Instagram and SnapChat. The emerging trend for these ephemeral networks, where content literally vanishes seconds after being received (as is the perceived case with Snapchat), is claimed by some to imply a more genuine and unfiltered exchange. These so called “self-destructing” apps assure their users that their communication is more privately exchanged and may alleviate a fear of an archived and publicly available record of communications.

In addition, others have also noted that while the basic need to connect, communicate, and share has not changed, the way in which that is accomplished is changing. Beck (2014) explains that earlier generations of SN have relied heavily on status updates, likes, followers, connections, and notifications, creating a challenge to keep up with everything. The second generation of SN, though, is shifting its focus away from “networking” and toward “ephemerality and digital tribalism” (Beck 2014: n.p.), the push toward smaller subpopulation groups with shared interests. He says that this generation of users “will follow a small circle of close friends on Instagram, pin with a small handful of followers on Pinterest, message with a girlfriend or schoolmate on WhatsApp or Snapchat, or follow a co-worker's check-ins on Foursquare. Or, they will build the next platforms and apps that don't exist yet” (n.p.). While this trend offers the potential for slightly different ways to communicate, it also muddles the ease with which research can be carried out and data can be collected – for example, with SnapChat user-controlled settings allowing for text and pictures to disappear, it is difficult to imagine how L2 projects could be built around this particular tool. Likewise, with Instagram, it is a challenge to collect data from a mobile device, so to integrate the app effectively into L2 teaching and learning when certain aspects of the tool are not accessible from a laptop or desktop (such as posting, sharing, etc.) is complicated.

The third predicted trend will be a reduction of text and corresponding increase in images, as well as an increased use of hashtags. By the close of 2014, 140 characters may be too much text. Photos were the predominant social share in 2013. This focus today is on developing a sense of internet presence by sharing material/posts/pictures and increasing knowledge by assess, analyse, retain and share information. Photos, according to a recent study by Kissmetrics (on Facebook) receive 53% more likes, 104% more comments and 84% more click-throughs on links than text-based posts. The focus on the visual aspect of SN is also related to the mobility and that fact that more people access social media and engage with it on the go as photos can communicate information clearly and quickly. Ward (cited in Walter, 2012) confirms, “When we moved to status updates on Facebook [from blogs], our posts became shorter. Then

micro-blogs like Twitter came along and shortened our updates to 140 characters. Now we are even skipping words altogether and moving towards more visual communication with social-sharing sites like Pinterest" (n.p.). Engaging students with shorter amounts of text, increased hashtags and pictures is something that can be appealing to the L2 learner. Shorter amounts of text can encourage students to be succinct, and may motivate them to contribute more in the long run. Hashtags, if carried out in the target language, may pose complications, so students could benefit from first studying common L2 hashtags. Finally, photos can be accompanied by short descriptions in the L2 to engage readers in the post.

This chapter has illustrated how language teaching and learning can benefit tremendously from the incorporation of various aspects of SNS. Regardless of the theoretical approach to the acquisition of second and foreign languages that one adopts, the features of the social tools such as those discussed here open the door for students to engage in and with the target language in ways that were not possible before. Instructors that are well informed about these social sites and are able to develop pedagogically sound activities for their students are in the best position to foster linguistic and cultural development in their classes.

In spite of the benefits discuss here, there also continues to be some reluctance when it comes to using SNS in L2 learning. Educators may be intimidated by the need to learn new tools, and both educators and students may be reluctant to risk crossing inappropriate social boundaries or merging professional and personal social worlds (Schwartz 2009). These concerns are founded, but can be remedied by careful planning and sound task design that takes maximum advantage of the SNS while also providing solid technological guidance and advice to learners. SNS have created a unique way to bring individuals, communities, groups together to share information, engage in meaningful discussion, and reflection and learning. These new and exciting venues will impact both teachers and learners, and so we all must continue to explore and learn about new ways to expand collective knowledge and relationships to new horizons.

6. FURTHER READING

Blattner, G., and Fiori, M. (2011) 'Virtual social network communities: an investigation of language learners' development of socio-pragmatic awareness and multiliteracy skills', *CALICO Journal*, 29 (1): 24-43.

Blattner and Fiori found that meaningful integration of Facebook in the language classroom can lead to the development of community and socio-pragmatic competence

Blattner, G., and Lomicka, L. (2012a) 'Facebook-ing and the Social Generation: A New Era of Language Learning', *Apprentissage des langues et systèmes d'information et de communication*). Available from <http://alsic.revues.org/2413> [Accessed 28 April 2014].

This study examines pedagogical and sociopragmatic practices using a social forum and a Facebook forum in the context of an intermediate French course.

Iskold, L. (2012) 'Imagined Identities: An Examination of Self-Authorship on Facebook', in Chamness Miller, P., Mantero, M., and J. Watzke, J., (eds.) *Readings in Language Studies: Language and Identity*, Grandville: MI: International Society for Language Studies, Inc.: 119-210.

This study examines the concepts of self-authorship and performing identity in Facebook with 12 intermediate level students studying Russian.

Lomicka, L., and Lord, G. (2012) 'A tale of tweets: Analyzing microblogging among language learners', *System*, 40: 48-63.

This study explores the use of Twitter among French learners, who connected with each other and with native speakers of French. Evidence of cultural and linguistic gains is provided, along with student attitudes and reactions.

McBride, K. (2009) 'Social-networking sites in foreign language classes: Opportunities for re-creation', in Lomicka, L. and Lord, G. (eds.) *The next generation: Social networking and online collaboration in foreign language learning*. San Marcos, TX: CALICO Monograph Series: 35-58.

This chapter discusses the potential for creating 'mash-ups' from various SNS, and how these can be used in language learning endeavours.

Mills, N. (2011) 'Situated learning through social networking communities: The development of joint enterprise, mutual engagement, and a shared repertoire', *CALICO*, 28(2): 345-368.

In this study, Facebook was used as an interactive tool where students could share collective reflection and access resources that enhanced the various topics discussed in class.

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