

ISSN 1799-2591

Theory and Practice in Language Studies, Vol. 5, No. 5, pp. 1090-1095, May 2015

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.17507/tpls.0505.25>

Social Networks for Language Learning

Ali Derakhshan

Department of English Language and Literature, Golestan University, Gorgan, Iran

Samareh Hasanabbasi

Department of English Language Teaching, Golestan Science and Research Branch, Islamic Azad University, Gorgan, Iran;

Department of English Language Teaching, Gorgan Branch, Islamic Azad University, Gorgan, Iran

Abstract—Social networks play indispensable roles in fostering second language learning by providing a wide array of authentic materials. The purpose of this review is to consider social networks, such as Facebook, Electronic mail, Computer media which are proven to be effective to increase students' learning English out of the classes. Social networks facilitate students' interaction to share their ideas, and provide an opportunity for learners to experience online tools to foster their learning skills. It was realized that these online tools (e.g. Facebook, Email, and Computer media) can be used to improve students' language skills especially writing skill. Internet tools help the second language learners to accelerate their learning by being up-to-date and self-directed. In this paper, the literatures were reviewed to find positive aspects of using Facebook to improve second language learning. The researchers also pointed out that second language is learned incidentally and directly from second language speakers of different culture via Emails. Students can use e-mail to communicate with their teachers and with second language speakers or native speakers. Computer media are also useful means to guide those learners who are passively focused on English learning. The review would conclude that social interaction via social networks is a kind of stimulus for learners to communicate with others.

Index Terms—social network, Facebook, Email, computer media

I. INTRODUCTION

Along with the advancement of technology, many social environments have provided technologies to facilitate second language learning. Blake (1998) observed that “technology can play an important role in fostering second language acquisition by electronically increasing learners' contact with a wide array of authentic materials” (p. 210). Social networks are kinds of social environments which have been made for learners who want to have interaction with people from other countries to learn language easily (Godwin-Jones, 2008; Sturgeon & Walker, 2009).

Internet provides wide international resources of language learning. It enables second language learners to communicate directly with native English speakers. Generating language is the most important item for making interpersonal relationship for self-expression and social interaction. Receptive (listening & reading) and productive (speaking and writing) language skills can be facilitated through Internet. According to Mealman (as cited in Abidin, Ahmad, & Kabilan, 2010, p.185), second language learners would increase their abilities, self-knowledge, self-confidence, and lifelong learning. They improve their life skills by using different social media that enable the learners to foster their positive trends about learning English.

Web based interaction area like Facebook, as a popular social network, helps learners to use large amount of information which is always available. Language learners can keep in touch with people specially, with their family, friends and even their teachers whenever they want to. Second language learners can also learn various kind of knowledge, and be familiar with the laws of different cultures. Language and culture are dependent, and comprehending second language culture improves comprehending of the language (Chen & Yang, 2007). The tools and resources available on the Internet provide good areas for group documents and offer the best ways for promoting four language skills.

Getting more confident is an important feature which learners achieve during communication by real use of second language. On the other hand, computer media are useful models which attract learners to use their knowledge of language easily and solve their problems. Learners increase their communication with their peers around the world instead of being limited to the classroom. Thus, computer media are effective in forming student-student and student-teacher interaction out of the class.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

A. *Social Networking for Language Learners*

This paper explores researchers' views about the role of the social networks in second language learning to increase interaction between second language learners. Social media increase power of speech through online conversation about

various issues with native and other second language speakers (Depew, 2011). Carmean and Haefner (2002) explained that social networks are applied online technologies which make the second language learning more social, and enjoyable with minimal stress. They mentioned that real learning happens when it is social and students' centered. In other word, this type of learning leads to "meaningful understanding of material and content" (p. 29). Waters (2009) emphasized the importance of social media as an electronic tool which is new in process of second language learning.

Alternatively, Kendle and Northcote (2001) claim that discussion in online groups and searching online information can give learners the chance to learn useful skills implicitly. There is more feedback during discussion and communication in online situations because of the high confidence (Davis & Thiede, as cited in Chen & Yang, 2007, p.863). In comparing small groups of learner, researchers found that learners had much more participation in online discussion (Pratt & Sullivan, 1996; Warschauer, 1996). Lee (2002) performed a concurrent e-chat which has task-based instruction too increase learner relation and communication skills. An equal chance is supplied by the Internet technology to the second language learners (Goodfellow & Lamy, 1999). Warschauer (2000) mentioned that online interaction makes the learners motivated to have more interactive conversation without concerning about pronunciation or oral connection in the target language. Similarly, Beauvois (1998) stated that social networks encourage students to have more discussion in French classes.

B. Facebook as a Language Learning Tool

Facebook (FB) has been a useful tool to improve interaction between teachers and their students (Godwin-Jones, 2008; Sturgeon & Walker, 2009). It impacts academic settings for both teachers and learners (Villano, 2007). Facebook encourages students to do their homework (Kitsis, 2008), eases learning foreign languages (Abidin, Ahmad, & Kabilan, 2010), and has positive effects on learning language skills (Depew & Skerrett, as cited in Aydin, 2014, p.157). Facebook helped to improve students' social behaviors. Hamilton (2009) found that Facebook can make an appropriate environment to connect teenage readers and publishers, and increase literature circles between them (Walker, 2010). Blattner and Fiori (2009) emphasized that Facebook can develop competition in second language learners and help them to learn incidental vocabularies (Shahrokni, 2009).

Although positive effects of Facebook as learning tool were mentioned, Facebook has some negative aspects. For instance, some university students limited university staff to access their profiles, and it is reported that there is no significant different in using virtual and traditional office hours by students (Li & Pitts, 2009). On the other hand, Facebook is a program which learners use for writing, but it is not the same as academic writing which learners write in educational environments. Learners write an informal text in the Facebook, blogs and Twitter for communication. But in the school, students write for exercising (Yancey, 2009).

Some researchers discussed the effects of Facebook in educational environments. Schaffhauser (2009) found that Facebook and other social networks remove limitation of communication between learners, and help them to identify information for communication (Elliott, Maguth, & Yamaguchi, 2010). It can be used as reliable learning environments to enhance students' participation in learning process (Mazman & Usluel, 2010). Facebook has focused on social, electronic and environmental learning, art business, and chemistry education (Burton, Greenhow, & Robelia, 2011).

There are some positive effects on students' motivation to do exercises in such a social network environment like Facebook (Mills, 2009). Kitsis (2008) offered taking part in online conversations to make interaction in doing homework. Teachers and their students had a good time in their classes (Romano, 2009). In contrast, Fodeman and Monroe (as cited in Abidin, Ahmad, & Kabilan, 2010, p.181), mentioned that Facebook may cause to reinforce students' negative behavior and has negative social promotion. Although, Janda (1995) believed that Email activities can help English learners to increase their writing ability and skills such as narration, description and interpretation, Bloch (2008) claimed that there is little investigation on how Facebook improve learners' writing ability.

A number of studies showed the role of the cultural differences to have more relations in social networks (Cho, 2010), and those who are associated with people of different cultures can be easier than others who can adapt themselves to the new culture (Ryan, Magro, & Sharp, 2011). Facebook is a suitable environment to enhance cultures' relation and eliminate the cultural gap (Birky, Collins, & Christie, as cited in Aydin, 2014, p.157). It provides an opportunity for youth to communicate in various cultures (Christie & Bloustien, 2010). Mills (2011) cited Facebook as a useful mean which plays a prominent role in learning different languages. In some studies about supporting classroom assignments via Facebook, Roblyer, Webb and Witty (2010) discovered that university students can use the Facebook and similar social networks to support their classroom activities. In addition, Haverback (2009) inquired learners' participation in an online learning group on Facebook to argue about their tasks, share their ideas and solve the problems during a course study.

C. Using E-mail to Improve Language Learning Skills

Another social network which is used to improve language learning is an Electronic mail. Email is used to employ "dialogue journals" between learners and teacher (Wang, as cited in Li, 2000, p.231). Researchers explored that Email helps learners to have permanent interaction with their teacher and give his feedback outside of the classroom (Wang, as cited in Li, 2000, p.231). Li and Liaw (as cited in Li, 2000, p.231) stated that the cozy access to the Email system is an easier way to complete semester course activities. They also considered the effect of the Email writing to simplify target language interaction among EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners. Teachers performed various Emails projects

from students in different countries, cultures and languages (Warschauer, 1995). Email was used as a written tool to convey ideas and converting the writing into social activities. Underwood (1987) suggested using a Spanish Email for conversation students to practice and found its positive points. Kroonenberg (as cited in Liaw, 1998, p.238) for developing learner interaction and skills used Email system.

Research shows the reformative feedback of using Email on native speakers who learn second language (Sotillo, 1997). There is a quasi-experimental study by Kalaja and Leppanen (1995) which compared learners' feedback outside of the class in their written work through Email with the teacher's feedback on paper. Based on a content-based Email project, a group of English-speaking students who were French at an American university were compared with a group of high school students in France; results showed that language learning was facilitate through international interaction and communication (Kern, 1996).

The use of Email system for foreign language between cultures has expanded rapidly during the past decades. Electronic mail writing has become popular quickly. It was found that the performance of Email writing helps to teachers to gather individual students for communicating with native speakers and second language learners around the world. To take benefits of language learning via Email writing, second language teachers performed some projects for students of different languages. For example, in some studies scholars surveyed using Email for discussion among EFL students in Taiwan and English-speaking students in USA and found that communication between cultures facilitates learning the second language and promotes cultural understanding (Chang, 1992). Moreover, Cowan and Wong (1995) accomplished a project to interchange electronic message within students of City University of Hong Kong and Canadian high-school students. Researchers also organized this project between his elementary French students at the University of California, Berkeley, and a history class in France. Ham (1995) unified a German conversation and composition for under graduated university students and gave them a chance to use their language skills to show cultural perspectives. Goodwin, Hamrick and Stewart (as cited in Liaw, 1998, p.337), supplied a preface in language development and culture arrangement by Email for a group of Latin America's researchers before their entering into the USA. There also were some experiments between Harvard University and the University of Pittsburgh, and between Stanford University and the University of Pittsburgh (Barson, Frommer, & Schwartz, 1993).

D. The Role of the Computers on Language Learners Communication

Computer mediated interaction provide students a good chance for control and initiative in second language learning (Roberts, Turbee, & Warschauer, 1996). Using computer media by teachers and learners is effective in process of second language learning (Pennington, 1989). Bruce and Educorp (as cited in Liaw, 1998, p.335) have also reported that, computer media was used as a students learning tool. It has been used in the classes as a new tool to facilitate communicative competence of second language students (Lowry, Koneman, & Osman Jouchoux, 1994). Researchers investigated the role of computer network in the language classes that it was operated by microcomputer and also use for the concept of communicative competence, the notional/functional syllabi, and language teaching methodologies based on the Communicative Approach (Tell & Kelm, as cited in Liaw, 1998, p. 336). Survey showed that network computers can improve students writing skills (Hertel, 2003).

Kroonenberg (1995) claim that second language learners, who were shy and lacked confidence in speaking in class can express themselves by using computer media. Certainly these learners become motivated to participate in future discussions on the same topics. One of Keln's (1992) students mentioned about advantage of computer media "I think I participated 100 times more during the (electronic discussion) interchange than (orally) in class. Believe it or not, I really do not like to speak up in class. I'll bet my other professors think I'm a mute" (p. 444).

Computer networks can be used by second language learners who are restricted because of some barriers such as age, economic problems, age, and gender, have to learn language at home via computer media (Selfe, 1990). But before anything else, second language learners should be learned how to use all important computers features (Roberts, Turbee, & Warschauer, 1996). Despite social networks, like computer media, cannot solve all learning problems in the short time (Hiltz, 1990), this literature review shows that using social networks such as Facebook, Email, and computer media would eliminate most of barriers in learning second languages.

III. CONCLUSION

This paper has reviewed a number of social media which are used to develop language learning out of the class. New technologies have been introduced so that language learners can implement them in and out of their classes to improve their language ability, especially in terms of writing. Based on the studies conducted by many scholars, it was realized that Facebook has had the most significant effect on second language learning. Learners can improve their learning skills. Some studies determined that Email to a lesser extent has positive effect on the learning process and has had the greatest impact on writing skills. However, personal computers have not satisfied learners' expectations about second language learning; they have had an impact on self-centered learning to reform their mistakes in learning process.

Despite different opinion about the benefits of these media to English learning, the analytical results show that most second language learners approved of English learning via the Internet tools and their positive effect on learning skills. Most of them emphasize social media's effective roles on the writing skill. Social network platforms are mentioned as innovative and creative ways to learn English as a second language. Although some bodies of research disclose some

weaknesses of these technological tools, they can be used to their language skills provided that teachers give the required feedback.

IV. PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

It is recommended that further research has to improvise tools and techniques to focus on factors to develop the other learning skills like listening via social networks. Facebook or Email should be considered as an internalized environment. Therefore, students should always be encouraged to have interaction to each other and also their teachers. Also there should be a section for oral conversation in a group in conference form to focus on listening and speaking.

Further studies should concentrate on the role of the learners' age and gender on the quality of learning second language in various societies. Also, it should be born in mind to contemplate on other social media so that teachers can motivate their learners to learn second language incidentally. Moreover, there should be some instruments so that language learners can measure their English knowledge through online tools. According to Prensky (1998), "We must get our teachers – hard as it may be in some cases to stop lecturing, and start allowing students to learn by themselves" (p. 3).

REFERENCES

- [1] Abidin, M. J. Z., Ahmad, N., & Kabilan, M. K. (2010). Facebook: An online environment for learning of English in institutions of higher education. *Internet and Higher Education*, 13(4), 179–187.
- [2] Aydin, S. (2014). Foreign language learners' interactions with their teachers on Facebook. *System*, 42, 155–163.
- [3] Barson, J., Frommer, J., & Schwarts, M. (1993). Foreign language learning in using e-mail in a task-oriented perspective: Interuniversity experiments in communication and collaboration. *Journal of Science Education and Technology*, 2(4), 565–584.
- [4] Beauvois, M. H. (1998). Conversations in slow motion: Computer-mediated communication in the foreign language classroom. *The Canadian Modern Language Review*, 54(2), 198–217.
- [5] Blake, R. (1998). The role of technology in second language learning. In H. Byrnes (Ed.), *Learning foreign and second languages: Perspectives in research and scholarship* (pp. 209–237). New York: Modern Language Association.
- [6] Blattner, G., & Fiori, M. (2009). Facebook in the language classroom: Promises and possibilities. *Instructional Technology and Distance Learning*, (ITDL), 6(1), 17–28.
- [7] Bloch, J. (2008). From the special issue editor. *Language Learning & Technology*, 12(2), 2–6.
- [8] Burton, L., Greenhow, C., & Robelia, B. A. (2011). Environmental learning in online social networks: Adopting environmentally responsible behaviors. *Environmental Education Research*, 17(4), 553–575.
- [9] Carmean, C., & Haefner, J. (2002). Mind over matter: Transforming course management systems into effective learning environments. *EDUCAUSE Review*, 37(6), 27–37.
- [10] Chang, Y.L. (1992). Contact of the three dimensions of language and culture: Methods and perspectives of an e-mail writing program. *The proceedings of the Eighth Annual Convention of the English Teachers Association in R.O.C.*
- [11] Chen, Y. J., & Yang, S. C. (2007). Technology-enhanced language learning: A case study. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 23, 860–879.
- [12] Cho, S. E. (2010). A cross-cultural comparison of Korean and American social network sites: Exploring cultural differences in social relationships and self-presentation. Unpublished doctoral dissertation. New Brunswick: The State University of New Jersey.
- [13] Christie, E., & Bloustien, G. (2010). Cyborg: Disability, affect and public pedagogy. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 31(4), 483–498.
- [14] Cowan, P., & Wong, J. (1995). Two semesters of e-mail key palling: What works and what doesn't. In M. Warschauer (Ed.), *Virtual connections: Online activities and projects for networking language learners* (pp. 122–124). Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii.
- [15] Depew, K. E. (2011). Social media at academia's periphery: Studying multilingual developmental writers' Facebook composing strategies. *Reading Matrix: An International Online Journal*, 11(1), 54–75.
- [16] Elliott, J., Maguth, B., & Yamaguchi, M. (2010). Researching, producing, and presenting: Use of technology for global advocacy in the social studies. *Social Education*, 74(2), 105–106.
- [17] Goodfellow, R., & Lamy, M. N. (1999). Reflective conversation in the virtual language classroom. *Language Learning and Technology*, 2(2), 43–61.
- [18] Godwin-Jones, R. (2008). Mobile computing technologies: Lighter, faster, smarter. *Language Learning & Technology*, 12(3), 3–9.
- [19] Ham, J. (1995). Cultural encounters: German and American students meet on the Internet. In M. Warschauer (Ed.), *Virtual connections: online activities and projects for networking language learners* (pp. 335–351). Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii.
- [20] Hamilton, B. (2009). Young adult literature. *Library media Connection*, 28(3), 14–15.
- [21] Haverback, H. (2009). Facebook: Uncharted territory in a reading education classroom. *Reading Today*, October/November, 1.
- [22] Hertel, T. (2003). Using an e-mail exchange to promote cultural learning. *Foreign Language Annals*, 36(3), 386–396.
- [23] Hiltz, S. R. (1990). Collaborative learning: The virtual classroom approach. *THE J June*, 59–65.
- [24] Janda, T. (1995). On a role: Exploring the concept of voice and audience. In M. warschauer (Ed.), *Virtual Connections: Online activities and projects for networking language learners* (pp. 70–71). Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii.
- [25] Kalaja, P., & Leppanen, S. (1995). Experimenting with computer conferencing in English for academic purposes. *ELT Journal*, 49, 26–36.
- [26] Keln, O. (1992). The use of synchronous computer networks in second language instruction: A preliminary report. *Foreign Lang Ann*, 25(2), 441–454.

- [27] Kendle, A., & Northcote, M. (2001). Informal online networks for learning: Making use of incidental learning through recreation. Paper presented at the International Education Research Conference, December 2–6, Fremantle, Australia.
- [28] Kern, R.G. (1996). Computer-mediated communication: Using E-mail exchanges to explore personal histories in two cultures. In M. Warschauer, (Ed.), *Telecommunication in Foreign language learning: Proceedings of the Hawaii Symposium (pp.105-120)*. Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii.
- [29] Kitsis, S. M. (2008). The Facebook generation: Homework as social networking. *English Journal*, 98(2), 30–36.
- [30] Kroonenberg, N. (1995). Developing communicative and thinking skills via e mail. *TESOL J* 4(2), 24–27.
- [31] Lee, L. (2002). Enhancing learners' communication skills through synchronous electronic interaction and task based instruction. *Foreign Language Annals*, 35(1), 16–24.
- [32] Li, Y., (2000). Linguistic characteristics of ESL writing in task-based e-mail activities. *System*, 28, 229–245.
- [33] Li, L., & Pitts, J. P. (2009). Does it really matter? Using virtual office hours to enhance student–faculty interaction. *Journal of Information Systems Education*, 20(2), 175–185.
- [34] Liaw, M. L. (1998). Using electronic mail for English as a foreign language instruction. *System*, 26, 335–351.
- [35] Lowry, M., Koneman, P., Osman-Jouchoux, R., & Wilson, B. (1994). Electronic discussion groups. *TECH trends* 39(2), 22–24.
- [36] Mazman, S. G., & Usluel, Y. K. (2010). Modeling educational usage of Facebook. *Computers and Education*, 55(2), 444–453.
- [37] Mills, N. A. (2009, October). Facebook and the use of social networking tools to enhance language learner motivation and engagement. Paper presented at the Northeast Association for Language Learning Technology (NEALLT) Conference, Yale University, New Haven, CT.
- [38] Mills, N. (2011). Situated learning through social networking communities: The development of joint enterprise, mutual engagement, and a shared repertoire. *CALICO Journal*, 28 (2), 345–368.
- [39] Pennington, M. (1989). Teaching languages with computers: The state of the art. La Jolla, CA: Athelstan.
- [40] Pratt, E., & Sullivan, N. (1996). A comparative study of two ESL writing environments: A computer-assisted classroom and a traditional oral classroom. *System*, 29(4), 491–501.
- [41] Prensky, M. (1998). The role of technology in teaching and the classroom. *Educational Technology*, 46(6), 1–3.
- [42] Roberts, B., Turbee, L., & Warschauer, M. (1996). Computer learning networks and student empowerment. *System*, 24(1), 1–14.
- [43] Roblyer, M. D., Webb, M., & Witty, J. V. (2010). Findings on Facebook in higher education: A comparison of college faculty and student uses and perceptions of social networking sites. *The Internet and Higher Education*, 13(3), 134–140.
- [44] Romano, T. (2009). Defining fun and seeking flow in English language arts. *English Journal*, 98(6), 30–37.
- [45] Ryan, S. H., Magro, M. J., & Sharp, J. K. (2011). Exploring educational and cultural adaptation through social networking sites. *Journal of Information Technology Education*, 10, 1–16.
- [46] Selfe, C. (1990). Technology in the English classroom: Computers through the lens of feminist theory. In C. Handa (Ed.), *Computers and community: Teaching composition in the twenty-first century* (pp. 118–139). Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- [47] Schaffhauser, D. (2009). Boundless opportunity. *T.H.E. Journal*, 36(9), 13–18.
- [48] Shahrokni, S. (2009). Second language incidental vocabulary learning: The effect of online textual, pictorial, and textual pictorial glosses. *TESL-EJ*, 13(3), 1–17.
- [49] Sotillo, S.M. (1997). E-mail exchanges and corrective feedback between native speakers and non-native speakers of English. Paper Presented at the Annual Conference of American Association for Applied Linguistics. Orlando, FL.
- [50] Sturgeon, C. M., & Walker, C. (2009). Faculty on Facebook: Confirm or deny?. Paper Presented at the Annual Instructional Technology Conference. Murfreesboro, TN.
- [51] Underwood, J. (1987). Correo: Electronic mail as communicative practice. *Hispania*, 70, 413–414.
- [52] Villano, M. (2007). Social revolution. *Campus Technology*, 20(5), 40–45.
- [53] Walker, A. (2010). Using social networks and ICTs to enhance literature circles: A practical approach. Paper Presented at the School Library Association of Queensland and the International Association of School Librarianship Conference. Brisbane, Australia.
- [54] Warschauer, M., 1995. E-mail for English teaching. Alexandria, VA: TESOL publications.
- [55] Warschauer, M. (1996). Comparing face-to-face and electronic communication in the second language classroom. *CALICO Journal*, 13(2), 7–26.
- [56] Warschauer, M. (2000). Electronic literacies: Language, culture, and power in online education. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- [57] Waters, J. K. (2009). E-portfolios come of age. *T.H.E. Journal*, 36(10), 23–29.
- [58] Yancey, K. B. (2009). Writing by any other name. *Principal Leadership*, 10(1), 26–29.



Ali Derakhshan is an Assistant Professor at English Language and Literature Department, Golestan University, Gorgan, Iran. He received his PhD in TEFL from Allameh Tabataba'i University (ATU), Tehran, Iran in 2014 and his M.A. in TEFL from University of Tehran, Iran in 2009. His research interests are Language Assessment, Interlanguage Pragmatics Development & Assessment, Discourse Analysis, Teacher Education, Focus on Form/s. He is a member of the Editorial Board in more than 10 journals.



Samareh Hasanabbasi is currently an MA student at Islamic Azad University, Science and Research Branch, Gorgan, Iran. Her research interests include Social Networkig and CALL.