

## Students' Framing of Language Learning Practices in Social Networking Sites

Annika Lantz-Andersson\*, Sylvi Vigmo, and Rhonwen Bowen

Department of Education, Communication and Learning, University of Gothenburg, Göteborg, Sweden

**Abstract.** The amount of time that people, especially young people, spend on communicative activities in social media is rapidly increasing. We are facing new arenas with great potential for learning in general and for language learning in particular, but their impact on learning is not yet acknowledged as such in educational practice (e.g., Conole, 2010; Lewis, Pea, & Rosen, 2010; Thorne, 2009). The aim of this case study is to scrutinize how social networking sites (SNSs) serve as new contexts for learning when implemented in school practices. The focus is mainly on how students frame (Goffman, 1974/1986) this activity to scrutinize the implications for their language learning and how they learn to communicate in culturally relevant and productive ways. By applying a socio-cultural-historical theoretical view of communication (Vygotsky, 1939/1978; Wertsch, 1998), this paper reports findings from ethnographic data of a Facebook group in formal English learning contexts with students aged between 13 - 16 years old comprising one school class in Colombia, Finland, Sweden and Taiwan, respectively. The results indicate that the students' communication was characterized by a) a communication in response to institutional requirements, b) their customary interaction in social media, or c) a juxtaposition of both.

**Keywords:** social media, English language learning, framing, practices.

### 1. Introduction

The amount of time that young people spend on communicative activities in social media is rapidly increasing. These media offer great potential for learning in general and for language learning in particular. However, national and international studies have pointed to the difficulties of making use of social media in school settings (e.g., Bonderup-Dohn, 2009; Thorne, 2009) and as yet, relatively little is known about the pedagogical implications of integrating social media in the context of language classrooms (Blattner & Lomica, 2012). Thus, on the one hand, we have societal

---

\* Contact author: annika.lantz-andersson@ped.gu.se

knowledge of young people's considerable interaction and communication in social media using English and on the other hand, we have language education that does not make use of the language learning potentials on these new arenas. Sometimes they are even considered as conflicting with the aims of schooling as argued by Thorne (2009); "it is troublesome that new media literacies remain largely unacknowledged within instructed L2 contexts and curricula, or worse, are treated as stigmatized varieties that have no place in the classroom" (Thorne, 2009, p. 91).

This study aims at scrutinizing how social media cultures serve as a mediating resource in young people's language learning i.e., their potential impact on learning English in school contexts and how young people learn to communicate in culturally relevant and productive ways. The focus is on affordances of social media rather than the traditional language learning assignments.

### **1.1. English as a lingua mundi**

The web and various social media applications, represent vast spaces and resources for using English as a lingua mundi, a world language, for communication. These conditions also have an impact on the roles of English. Globalisation through digital media has contributed to changing conditions, as most users of English today are non-natives who will interact with other non-natives. In addition, the presence of English in young people's daily life displays similarities with the use of a second language (L2), e.g., the language is met in unforeseen and unorganised and more complex contexts as opposed to more organised school settings.

This has implications for learners who today should be prepared to develop approaches to language learning, which are based on viewing *language as hybrid, as context transforming, as representational* – and that your mother tongue is considered as a resource for achieving metalinguistic awareness (Canagarajah, 2006). It is argued here that learning English is no longer easily framed in traditional terms and discrete competences. Using English in digital media contexts is characterised by more complex encounters and settings. Other linguistic repertoires or language use in digital media genres are examples of language in use, which however, are seldom acknowledged in schools.

### **1.2. Social media as part of the educational practices**

Social media can be framed as involving social activities such as participation, interaction and collaboration using Web 2.0 technologies, and can be exemplified by Facebook, blogs, wikis, and Twitter. The focus is more on people's use and less on the technologies themselves, thereby indicating that technologies themselves do not bring about change, e.g., if the activity departs from traditionally framed educational practice (Bonderup-Dohn, 2009). Authorship, identity, agency, contribution and production are other concepts associated with acting and interacting in Web 2.0 modes (Warschauer & Grimes, 2007).

## 2. Method

The setting of the study is a closed Facebook group with students, 15-16 years old, of one invited class from Sweden, Taiwan, Finland and Colombia respectively. The Facebook group, which has been set up for this study, enables text, images, sound and video to be used for representing and expressing oneself, and all modes for language learning are explicitly encouraged already in the invitation. Initially, the students got assignments for their interaction but in the next phase they communicated with no instructions from the teachers.

The students' textual interaction has been logged and the screen has been recorded using Jing (a free Tech Smith software) to be able to study multimodal aspects, e.g., sound and videos that they used for representing and expressing themselves.

The research design involves following the language learners' interaction in social media, their contributions, their participation and collaboration. The analysis of the empirical material, i.e., the postings and comments in the Facebook group, focuses on interactions between students to explore how communication is managed using English as a lingua mundi. Goffman's (1974/1986) concepts of framing and an additional sensitivity to details in interactions, derived from Interaction Analysis (Jordan & Henderson, 1995) and some lines of reasoning within Conversation Analysis (e.g., Goodwin & Heritage, 1990; Macbeth, 2000; Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974) have been employed in the analysis of the empirical material.

In the works of Goffman (1974/1986), the concept of framing implies a 'definition of a situation' which the participants in the situation more or less share. Goffman argues that there are certain overall aspects that are part of every framing process that have a bearing on the possible ways of framing activities.

This also implies that framing in activities is constrained by social structures and social organisations, i.e., individuals are limited and not able to frame in situations entirely as they wish. According to Goffman (1974/1986), in many cases, individuals do things "in relationship to cultural standards established for the doing and for the social role that is built up out of such doings" (p. 662). In line with this reasoning, Goffman argues that institutions often play important roles in the framing process.

Interaction Analysis is used to systematically analyse the students' reasoning, posting videos, commenting and engaging in discussions with other students and how the variety of communicative affordances in the social media environment are used (Jordan & Henderson, 1995). The analytical focus is on how the communications get their meaning in relation to the preceding and subsequent utterances and postings in the context, inspired by Conversation Analysis (e.g., Goodwin & Heritage, 1990; Macbeth, 2000; Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974) in order to find interaction patterns in culturally relevant and productive ways.

### 3. Discussion

The social practices of schooling have emerged through history, and include certain discursive procedures with many, both explicit and implicit, rules along with teaching practices (Edwards & Mercer, 1987). Students become used to ‘doing school’ through their own experiences, and through this extensive socialization. When a task is framed in educational learning environments, students often implicitly try to understand what is demanded. The reasoning and action performed by the students can be seen as a response to what Brousseau (1997) has called the *didactic contract*, that is, the rules of communication established in educational settings that participants learn to identify and use as resources. Expressed differently, students become used to ‘doing school’ through their own experiences, and through this extensive socialization they also learn how tasks are normally organized. On the other hand, young people’s engagement in hybrid media practices in their spare time belongs to their ‘self-directed practices’ (Drotner, 2008), which are different from school practices in many ways. Tensions between school practices and young people’s ‘out-of-school world’ in Web 2.0 could thus be seen as based on divergent goals and assumptions of what constitutes knowledge and learning (Bonderup-Dohn, 2009).

In our study, the students’ communication is initially framed in relation to what counts as legitimate knowledge in a school context but as the communication continues these norms are negotiated and challenged.

### 4. Conclusion

In relation to this study, the ‘didactical contract’ (Brousseau, 1997), is an illustration of how the framing in educational situations operates and implies specific ways of framing in school activities, which include certain obligations. Goffman (1974/1986) argues that there are certain overall aspects that are part of every framing process with a bearing on the possible ways of framing situations. He assumes that “there is a main activity, a story line, and that an evidential boundary exists in regard to it” (Goffman, 1974/1986, p. 564). This means that defining the activity as ‘doing school work’ could function as superordinate in relation to defining the activity as e.g., ‘interacting with friends’. This shows the dilemma that arises when trying to transfer personal motivation that is associated with a voluntary commitment in an ‘out-of-school world’ into a formal education context where the driving force may be in relation to a commitment, perhaps even more often motivated by other factors such as being assessed and getting good grades. The framings related to ‘doing school work’ could thus be visible in the interaction even though the social media environments also promote the relevance and inclusion of out of school experiences.

To conclude, our preliminary result indicates that these new social media arenas open up for great possibilities for learning to use English to communicate in culturally

relevant and productive ways but the implementation has to be done with a sensitivity to the rules of the educational practice.

**Acknowledgements.** This work is funded by Marcus and Amalia Wallenberg Foundation and has been carried out at the Linnaeus Centre for Research on Learning, Interaction and Mediated Communication in Contemporary Society (LinCS), and within The University of Gothenburg Learning and Media Technology Studio (LETStudio).

## References

- Blattner, G., & Lomicka, L. (2012). Facebook-ing and the Social Generation: A New Era of Language Learning. *Alsic - Social media and language learning: (r)evolution?* 15(1). doi: 10.4000/alsic.2413
- Bonderup-Dohn, N. (2009). Web 2.0: Inherent tensions and evident challenges for education. *Computer-Supported Collaborative Learning*, 4(3), 343-363.
- Brousseau, G. (1997). *Theory of didactical situations in mathematics*. Edited and translated by N. Balacheff, M. Cooper, R. Sutherland, & V. Warfield. The Netherlands, Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publisher.
- Canagarajah, S. (2006). An interview with Suresh Canagarajah. In R. Rubdy & M. Saraceni (Eds.), *English in the World: Global Rules, Global Roles* (pp. 200-212). London: Continuum.
- Conole, G. (2010). A holistic approach to designing for learning: A vision for the future. *The Annual International CODE Symposium*, 18 February, 2010, Chiba, Japan.
- Drotner, K. (2008). Leisure Is Hard Work: Digital Practices and Future Competencies. In D. Buckingham (Ed.), *The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation Series on Digital Media and Learning* (pp. 167-184). Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.
- Edwards, D., & Mercer, N. (1987). *Common knowledge: The development of understanding in the classroom*. London: Routledge & Keagan Paul.
- Goffman, E. (1974/1986). *Frame analysis: An essay on the organization of experience*. Boston, MA: Northeastern University Press.
- Goodwin, C., & Heritage, J. (1990). Conversation analysis. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 19, 283-307.
- Jordan, B., & Henderson, A. (1995). Interaction Analysis: Foundations and Practice. *The Journal of the Learning Sciences*, 4(1), 39-103.
- Lewis, S., Pea, R., & Rosen, J. (2010). Beyond participation to co-creation of meaning: mobile social media in generative learning communities. *Social Science Information*, 49(3), 1-19.
- Macbeth, D. (2000). Classrooms as installations. In S. Hester & D. Francis (Eds.), *Local educational order: Ethnomethodological studies of knowledge in action* (pp. 21-69). Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing.
- Sacks, H., Schegloff, E. A., & Jefferson, G. (1974). A simplest systematics for the organisation of turn-taking for conversation. *Language*, 50(4), 696-735.

- Thorne, S. (2009). 'Community', semiotic flows, and mediated contribution to activity. *Language Teaching*, 42(1), 81-94.
- Warschauer, M., & Grimes, D. (2007). Audience, authorship, and artifacts: The emergent semiotics of Web 2.0. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, (27), 1-23.
- Wertsch, J. V. (1998). *Mind as action*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1939/1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.



Published by Research-publishing.net  
Dublin, Ireland; Voillans, France  
info@research-publishing.net

© 2012 by Research-publishing.net  
Research-publishing.net is a not-for-profit association

CALL: Using, Learning, Knowing  
EUROCALL Conference, Gothenburg, Sweden  
22-25 August 2012, Proceedings  
Edited by Linda Bradley and Sylvie Thouésny

The moral right of the authors has been asserted

All articles in this book are licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 Unported License. You are free to share, copy, distribute and transmit the work under the following conditions:

- Attribution: You must attribute the work in the manner specified by the publisher.
- Noncommercial: You may not use this work for commercial purposes.
- No Derivative Works: You may not alter, transform, or build upon this work.

Research-publishing.net has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party Internet websites referred to in this publication, and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate. Moreover, Research-publishing.net does not take any responsibility for the content of the pages written by the authors of this book. The authors have recognised that the work described was not published before (except in the form of an abstract or as part of a published lecture, or thesis), or that it is not under consideration for publication elsewhere. While the advice and information in this book are believed to be true and accurate on the date of its going to press, neither the authors, the editors, nor the publisher can accept any legal responsibility for any errors or omissions that may be made. The publisher makes no warranty, expressed or implied, with respect to the material contained herein.

Trademark notice: Product or corporate names may be trademarks or registered trademarks, and are used only for identification and explanation without intent to infringe.

Typeset by Research-publishing.net  
Cover design: © Raphaël Savina (raphael@savina.net)  
Aquarelle reproduced with kind permission from the illustrator: © Sylvi Vigmo (sylvi.vigmo@ped.gu.se)  
Fonts used are licensed under a SIL Open Font License

ISBN13: 978-1-908416-03-2 (paperback)  
Print on demand (lulu.com)

*British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data.*  
*A cataloguing record for this book is available from the British Library.*

*Bibliothèque Nationale de France - Dépôt légal: décembre 2012.*