

Chapter 3

Social-Networking Sites in Foreign Language Classes: Opportunities for Re-creation

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1. Introduction

Social-networking sites (SNSs) are websites built to allow people to express themselves and to interact socially with others. Self-expression and social interaction are some of the most important contexts for language use that we try to create, or at least imitate, in our foreign language (FL) classrooms to encourage language acquisition. SNSs are also increasingly popular and induce in some of their users a sense of ‘flow’ (Tufekci, 2008; Vie, 2007)—the experience of losing track of time as a result of being fully engaged in an activity (Egbert, 2005). This makes SNSs attractive possible sites for FL practice. If language learners become similarly involved with SNS activities containing pedagogically useful FL experiences, they might become more motivated and spend more time on the FL tasks. Also, if students gain skills in communicating and connecting with others through SNSs in the second language (L2) through a class, they will be well poised to establish relationships with other speakers of the L2 via SNSs in the future and to become autonomous, lifelong learners.

This chapter begins by defining and describing SNSs. It then reviews relevant learning theories to help us evaluate SNSs as a potential tool or environment for FL learning activities. Next, we examine some difficulties that using SNSs might present to educators. With these restraints in mind, the last part of this chapter looks at some SNS projects that have been implemented in FL classes and describes additional ideas.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Definition

Popular SNSs include Facebook (<http://www.facebook.com>) and MySpace (<http://myspace.com>), but there are countless other SNSs, as well as other sites that have the features of SNSs but are primarily considered to serve other purposes. Most SNSs are dominated by younger people; in fact, Cavarlee and Webb (2008) found that nearly 85% of users of MySpace are 30 years of age or younger, with the greatest number of users in their 20s and a nearly equal number of male and female users. SNSs like Facebook and MySpace are not used so much to make new social contacts, but to articulate already existing social networks and allow one to learn more about people one has met offline (boyd & Ellison, 2007; Lampe, Ellison, & Steinfield, 2007). Besides these general-purpose SNSs, others, such as LinkedIn (<http://www.linkedin.com>), focus on expanding one's professional connections, and yet others, such as Dogster (<http://www.dogster.com>) and Community of Veterans (<http://communityofveterans.org>), are meant to help strangers meet new people with similar, specific interests or experiences (boyd & Ellison, 2007; Campbell, 2005).

The basic building block of a SNS is the profile. Profiles have preestablished fields that users can fill in with demographic information and descriptions of their interests (cultural and otherwise), photos, and sometimes other types of media (e.g., songs, other images, and videos). Profiles do not always represent common individuals. Some profiles are made for celebrities in which the communication is less personal and more promotional, while other profiles may represent groups, events, causes, products, and other phenomena.

Profiles can be linked in a number of ways. The most important type of link is the 'friend list.' The other users with whom one has declared a connection are called 'friends,' regardless of the level of intimacy of the relationship (Vie, 2007), and the list of this group figures prominently in one's personal profile. On many SNSs, users can perform searches based on profile fields (e.g., demographic information, likes and dislikes, etc.) to see, for example, which users have listed a particular interest or go to a certain school. Users may also be linked on some sites, including Facebook and MySpace, through their common interests by having joined the same cause, declared themselves fan or friend of the same celebrity or phenomenon, or by accepting an invitation to an event. Such activities are noted on one's profile and figure importantly in the establishment of one's online identity (Hinduja & Patchin, 2008; Vie, 2007).

Identity is also established by the communication that takes place on personal profiles (boyd & Ellison, 2007; Vie, 2007). Prominent on the personal profile is a place for messages from one's friends. These messages are public, at least to one's other friends, and can be done with words alone or by sharing images or sometimes videos. At the top of the Facebook profile is a status update of maximally 180 characters. On MySpace it is called a headline and may be up to 255 characters long. These Twitter-like (<http://twitter.com>; see also Chapter 4 in this volume) updates generally answer the question "What are you doing now?" and

notice of them, as with other updates to one's profile, is posted in one's friends' news feeds on sites like Facebook and MySpace. Longer updates, such as blogs, can also be added to profiles. Additionally, it is common for people to take online surveys made for SNSs and post their answers on topics such as "How good of a friend are you?" and "What 'Sex and the City' character are you?" Thus users can learn a great deal about their friends without ever communicating directly with them or even going to their profile pages.

Users can determine who has access to read these published bits, whether it is only friends or a wider public. Facebook, for example, has fine-grained specification options about the privacy levels for the site's wide range of features. Vie (2007) includes privacy specifications as a defining characteristic of SNSs, although it is common for users to be ignorant of the options or to fail to use them even to achieve the level of privacy that they claim to desire (Acquisti & Gross, 2006; Vie, 2007). Besides public comments, SNSs allow for private messages—seen only between two users—in a within-site email format and also, frequently, through chatting or instant messaging. In all of these forms of communication, a user's chosen profile image (usually a personal photo but sometimes other images or an avatar) is displayed next to the sent message, unlike in traditional email systems.

Features from SNSs are frequently adopted by competitor SNSs (boyd & Ellison, 2007), but another powerful trend is that other websites that were not originally created as SNSs now have SNS features. For example, YouTube (<http://www.youtube.com>), the video-sharing website (see Chapter 5 in this volume), now includes profiles, messaging, friend-ing, and privacy settings and is used by many as a way of keeping in touch with friends (Lange, 2007). The same is true for the photo-sharing site Flickr (<http://www.flickr.com>). Many of these features have also found their way into course management software, such as Blackboard and Moodle, and the promotional websites for video games, including Guitar Hero and internet-based games like World of Warcraft (Thorne, 2008). This progression is a natural one: as the web has advanced from 1.0 to 2.0, it has become more interactive (Godwin-Jones, 2008; O'Reilly, 2005), and interaction begets sociability.

2.2 The Net Generation

The group of young learners that has, with slight variation on the exact dates of birth by which to define them, been labeled as Millennial students (Elam, Stratton & Gibson, 2007), neomillennials (Baird & Fisher, 2005-2006), digital natives (Prensky, 2001), Generation M (Roberts & Foehr, 2005), and the Net Generation (Tapscott, 1997, 2009) has always had fast, interactive media-sharing technologies surrounding them, and 80%-90% of them have profiles on SNSs (Lampe et al., 2007; Tufekci, 2008). Growing up receiving information and communicating in ways that previous generations did not, neomillennial students not only have different learning styles from other generations but qualitatively different thought patterns (Thorne & Payne, 2005; Baird & Fisher, 2005-2006; Prensky,

2001). This difference in ‘lifestyle’ gives educators reason to believe we should incorporate SNS usage into our class-related activities, to capture these students’ imaginations and fit their thought patterns and socializing habits (Godwin-Jones, 2008; Winke & Goertler, 2008).

However, although technology is an integral part of neomillennial students’ lives, they often do not know how to use technology in ways that would benefit them in computer-assisted language learning (CALL) (Dieu & Stevens, 2007; Kolaitis, Mahoney, Pomann, & Hubbard, 2006; Winke & Goertler, 2008). Successful CALL activities, then, often require a substantial training period at the outset (Jones & Bissoonaath-Bedford, 2008; Kolaitis et al., 2006), and students may be less enthusiastic about a class’s language and culture projects if the form of computer-mediated communication (CMC) employed is not the type they are accustomed to using (McBride & Wildner-Bassett, 2008; Thorne, 2003). A useful response may be to craft CALL activities more to the practices that our students are familiar with (Winke & Goertler, 2008). SNSs are an obvious possibility to consider, given their tremendous popularity.

If we can get our FL students to interact socially on SNSs, then they may be engaged in more authentic social and communicative behavior than typically happens in classrooms, because “instead of merely simulating other modes of interaction, technology mediated communication is, in and of itself, the real thing ...” (Sykes, Oskoz & Thorne, 2008, p. 529). Not only are SNSs an increasingly common means of socializing, constituting what boyd (2007) calls the “civil society of teenage culture” (Methodology Section, ¶ 5), but they are also becoming ever more common in the work world (“Companies and social networks,” 2008). Furthermore, “for many students across the world, performing competent identities in second and additional language(s) may now involve internet-mediation as or more often than face-to-face and non-digital forms of communication” (Thorne, 2008, p. 323). Communication and identity performance are becoming so frequently experienced via the internet—with SNSs as some of the most common locations for this—that including this type of communicative act in a FL class could be as practical for some students as teaching them how to order in a restaurant.

2.3 Writing of the Self and Self-authorship

The idea of performing identities (Atkinson, 2002), mentioned in the previous quote, is central to activity on SNSs. Users “write themselves into being” (boyd, 2007, ¶ 3)¹ through their personal profiles. Words, photos, and other media on SNSs express identity in ways that, in face-to-face contact, is done through clothing, tone of voice, body language, and bodies themselves (boyd, 2007). On SNSs, people experiment with and develop their identities (boyd, 2007; Tufekci, 2008). Experimenting with identity and impression management is of particularly great interest to teenagers. The ease of communication, receiving rapid reactions or comments from friends in response to changes in one’s profile, and simply observing others’ information and updates—their likes, their dislikes, who their friends

¹ Sundén (2003, p. 3) also talks about “having to type oneself into being.”

are, what they say to each other, and so on—explain much of what is attractive about SNSs to that age group (boyd, 2007; Hinduja & Patchin, 2008).

Acquiring an L2 is another experience that involves experimentation with and the development of new identities. This process often involves a stage where the learner experiences a loss, leaving behind one (L1) context and feeling forced to leave behind the sense of self that corresponded to that context (Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000). The virtual worlds of CMC, however, allow one to occupy multiple environments and experiment with multiple identities more safely because the experimentation takes place somewhere other than a single, monolithic real world (Sykes et al., 2008). Turkel (1995) raises the possibility that the danger of alienation that troubles modern society is perhaps, because of this ability to develop multiple identities that CMC affords, being replaced by a threat of fragmentation for people in a postmodern world. This metaphor of fragmentation, however, assumes that the character of the fragment-able thing is concrete, limited, and static, which is not true of identities. Like data on the internet, an identity can be expressed in two places at once without reducing what was there in the first place.

Experimentation with multiple identities through CMC, and the additive as opposed to subtractive nature of this experimentation, are prime examples of the shifts in communication and literacy that define Web 2.0 phenomena and are what differentiates them from previous forms of communication and literacy. In the older paradigm, value was defined through scarcity, whereas with Web 2.0 technologies, “value is a function of dispersion” (Lankshear & Knobel, 2006, p. 1). Computers and the internet allow copies of information to be made without damaging the original. Furthermore, modifications to copies can be made without limit, again, without damaging the original (Lessig, 2006). When Lessig talks about this phenomenon, it is in reference to the radical expansion of possibilities for artistic expression that our read-write society affords us because the technology now available to us allows us to take something that we read (including photos, sound files, and videos) and manipulate it in new ways—rewriting the original in an act of re-creation. The original work does not become ruined or fragmented by the new forms of expression.

The same is true of identity: an identity is not somehow reduced or damaged by finding a variety of expressions. Quite the contrary is true. People inevitably have a variety of roles that they play, and having a suitable outlet for different aspects of one’s identity is healthy. A better metaphor for understanding the nature of this multiplicity is the fractal instead of fragmentation (Lange, 2007). A fractal is a shape that is composed of smaller parts that have the same basic structure as the larger shape and has been found to be a useful model for exploring L2 acquisition (de Bot, 2008; Larsen Freeman, 1997; Larsen Freeman & Cameron, 2008). It can also be a powerful model for understanding the relativity and malleability of the characteristics of a person or a work of art as they manifest themselves at different levels through Web 2.0 technologies. In the way that fanfiction, for example, remixes popular movies and texts, thereby creating new expressions of both the original medium and the creator (Thorne & Black, 2007), “[t]hrough MySpace

and sites like it, knowing, socially and technically, how to re-use media in this particular way has become foundational for communication and creative expression over the Web” (Perkel, 2008, p. 218).

We can call this activity of writing/remixing the self through the manipulation of text and media ‘self-authorship.’ Within the framework of CALL, this term refers to students authoring their own materials which can then serve as the basis for learning and lessons. Using student-created materials as the center of a lesson fits with a student-centered pedagogy (Dieu, Campbell, & Ammann, 2006). Self-authorship activities can increase interest and time on task, and they put students in a more active role in their own learning process (Kramsch, A’Ness, & Lam, 2000; Nikolova, 2002).

Students must take an active role in their learning. They cannot simply be handed knowledge from an expert because understanding is the result of a creative process one must work through over time with other people (Bereiter, 2002). Learning and language develop through interaction with others, by means of internalizing problem-solving patterns that are first experienced in dialogue with others (Vygotsky, 1978). SNSs therefore are a promising tool for FL education in their capacity to be used by learners as L2 practice in a way similar to how they are used by the majority of young people in our society. Such use could instantiate the primary condition that research has shown to encourage L2 acquisition: time spent on meaningfully embedded interaction and negotiation with others (Gass & Selinker, 2001).

However, are interactions on SNSs really meaningful? Online socializing activities are often less about exchanging information and more about making symbolic gestures. Online, social language use frequently serves a ritual purpose (Lam, 2000), similar to grooming (Tufekci, 2008), done primarily to maintain social bonds (boyd & Ellison, 2007) in which it matters less what or how much one has written than the fact that something is written in profile fields which identifies the major groups (especially schools, for younger users) to which one belongs (Lampe, Ellison, & Steinfield, 2007). On SNSs, exchanges are often quite brief and may use simplified language and spelling (Vie, 2007). SNS writing does not lend itself to incorporating a process approach to writing but, rather, to publishing thoughts or ideas as soon as they are written which remain that way, usually in public view (Jones & Bissoonauth-Bedford, 2008).

Reading is also different online; one does not read a website the same way one reads a book. Text is not necessarily the fundamental building block of a message on a website but, together with other media, serves as a piece of the overall message. People tend not to read text on websites thoroughly but scan it instead (Boardman, 2004; Burbules, 1998; McBride, 2008a; Morkes & Nielsen, 1998), and words are often interpreted as pointers or loose tokens, as opposed to items embedded into a structure (Kress, 1998; McBride, 2008a). This process suggests impoverished reading because it implies that the reader has failed to take in the overall structure of a text. However, messages communicated on the internet—with many embedded images—are fundamentally different from text-only messages. On most webpages, words are not meant to fulfill the same role that they

would in text-only messages; they may work only to support the quickly processed images, and so scanning may be enough for comprehending such messages (Kress, 1998).

Given these differences in reading and writing online, it should be clear that what students might learn by engaging in SNS-based activities in their FL classes would be different from the pedagogical goals of extended reading and writing activities. Instead, students would be learning pragmatics, the manipulation of symbols and the language involved in these speech acts within the L2 SNS environment. Because Web 2.0 communications, principally among them SNSs, are bound to be a major part of neomillennial students' private and professional lives now and in the future ("Companies and social networks," 2008), these students need to develop pragmatic skills in this environment as well as the communicative and symbolic competences required by a diverse, postmodern, online world (Kramsch, 2006). Students would be well served to work with such technologies under the guidance of teachers, so that they might learn to be distinguishing and critical in their use (boyd, 2007; De Pew, 2004; McKee, 2002; Vie, 2007), as well as using the L2 appropriately in these formats.

Neomillennial students are known for being uncritical of media (Elam et al., 2007; Roberts & Foehr, 2005). What are now common technologies allow novices to produce what we might earlier have called 'professional-looking' products, and this promotes the hard-to-resist sensation that "'clickability' translate[s] into 'credibility'" (Kramsch et al., 2000, p. 86). Another area in which young users show a lack of critical thinking in online communication is in terms of privacy issues. Young users of SNSs and other forms of CMC often fail to distinguish properly between what is public and what is private or understand the consequences of this distinction (Tapscott, 2009; Vie, 2007). Their misunderstanding may cause them to inadvertently damage their reputation or offend others. Essentially, the need to teach netiquette, which became clear in the early 1990s as new forms of CMC emerged (Shea, 1994), remains a need and now must address our newest forms of CMC.

Yet another danger of uncritical usage of 2.0 technologies is narcissism. The other meaning of the "M" in the term "M Generation" besides "media," is "me" (Roberts & Foehr, 2005). One can imagine that using SNSs in a very limited way, only updating one's personal profile and participating in exchanges largely with the goal of increasing one's list of friends, could be somewhat narcissistic. A self-obsessed, uncritical "me-me-I-I-I" (Thorne & Payne, 2005, p. 382; Sykes et al., 2008, p. 532) use of technology is the opposite of what we seek to accomplish in second language and second culture classes. We hope that students' self-expression leads them to better understand themselves and make connections with others whose perspectives they then also learn more about.

In order to gain a critical understanding of social interactions with others, students must learn, in a sense, to step outside of themselves, to take on the perspectives of others, and to integrate these perspectives coherently into their own beliefs and understandings (Byram, 1997; Luke, 2004; McBride & Wildner-Bassett, 2008). Again the term self-authorship figures in, but this time in the way that it has

been used in the wider field of pedagogy, that is, to describe the stage of intellectual development in which learners have matured beyond the point of expecting fixed answers from teacher authority figures and are instead able to critically integrate new knowledge and other people's perspectives in their own personal experiences and reflections (Baxter Magolda, 2007; Meszaros, 2007). By integrating new knowledge into one's own perspective, one revises one's way of seeing the world, thus rewriting the self.

The two meanings of the term self-authorship that have been discussed here are intertwined. By performing, via technology, an act of self-expressive remixing of media and text, one opens up the lines of communication with others. This kind of expression, a defining characteristic of Web 2.0, has been contrasted with the kind of communication, referred to as publishing, which characterizes earlier uses of the internet (Web 1.0), and is instead referred to as participation (O'Reilly, 2005; Warschauer & Grimes, 2007). Forms of communication endemic to Web 2.0 have a greater potential for an active exchange of ideas, which is a necessary element in intellectual development: self-authorship may lead to self-authorship. Thus, Web 2.0 communications have great academic potential, if they can be used to encourage critical thought. The last section of this chapter discusses possible uses of SNSs that might promote this kind of learning. It is necessary first, however, to review some considerations that could impede the successful implementation of SNS-based activities in a FL class.

3. Difficulties for Implementation

Even if teachers are aware of the potential benefits of bringing SNS usage into the FL class, they may find it quite difficult to implement. Most FL teachers have limited freedom over their curricula because they have to coordinate with other instructors teaching at the same level and ensure that their students are prepared to meet the expectations of more advanced courses. It may therefore be difficult to find room in the syllabus for new activities. Although an enlightened "Pedagogy 2.0" would have a dynamic and student-driven curriculum (McLoughlin & Lee, 2008, ¶ 2), institutional restraints often make such flexibility difficult. Adding a new kind of activity into a course represents a time cost for teachers who must learn about new technologies and then design activities for them. It is also essential to take into account the time that should be spent explaining the new activity to students and training them to use the new technology (Jones & Bissoonaauth-Bedford, 2008; Kolaitis et al., 2006). In most FL situations, technology training would be difficult in the L2, and so this part of a project would likely represent time away from L2 instruction.

Students are also likely to lack pragmatic knowledge of how to interact on SNSs in the L2. Although SNS messages may frequently seem superficial, they require advanced pragmatic knowledge that most FL students do not have since the majority of FL classes are introductory (Furman, Goldberg, & Lusin, 2007). If teachers wish to use SNS activities in the FL class to teach the students about authentic language use, then they will need to provide sufficient models for this

purpose. In most cases, this normally involves making use of native speakers of the L2 as interlocutors in some way. Doing so, however, requires a good reason for the native speakers to want to engage with the language learners (Jauregi, Canto, & Ros, 2006). Interest in such a project can range from very high to very low, creating the potential for pedagogical intentions to backfire (Ware, 2005; Thorne, 2006). At the same time, an argument can be made for practicing learner-to-learner social interaction (Abrams, 2008). Decisions about how to proceed depend on course objectives.

While the intrinsically social character of SNSs is part of their attraction, it also makes them potentially dangerous for class-related activities. Given the nature of the type of information that people include in SNS profiles and the cultures-of-use (Thorne, 2003) that have established SNSs' function as something of a popularity contest in some contexts, it could easily be that in- and out-groups would form. Such a situation could cause alienation and anxiety in some students, turning those students away from the study of the L2 and its culture. CMC technologies certainly do not by themselves eliminate social injustices and power imbalances (McKee, 2002; O'Dowd, 2007; Ortega & Zyzik, 2008; Vie, 2007). In fact, one of the advantages of synchronous chat, the fact that the sharing of turn taking tends to be more equitable than in face-to-face situations (Beauvois, 1992; Bump, 1990; Kern, 1995; Ortega, 1997; Warschauer, 1996), could be lost because the increase in equitability that has been noted in some uses of CMC is generally attributed to the absence of many of the physical social markers that are present or approximated in SNSs, such as images of oneself and other signals that indicate to which social groups one belongs.

Some students may not want to be friends with each other. If this is the case, then trying to direct students to fulfill a class assignment of ongoing SNS exchanges would feel forced and false. Social networks form when people share common experiences (Hinduja & Patchin, 2008). Simply being classmates may or may not be sufficient grounds for students to become friends, and the teacher's experience of a class is certainly not the same as the students'. This would be an argument for not including the instructor in a class's SNS projects. Furthermore, teachers feel their authority decrease if students view their personal information on a SNS (Vie, 2007). Students who were surveyed on their reactions to a potential teacher's profile, while sometimes finding it an occasion for mutual understanding (at least in the case of a young female teaching assistant), also reported concerns that SNS use could undermine an instructor's authority (Mazer, Murphy, & Simonds, 2007).

If teachers choose to maintain a profile in the SNS associated with class activities, they risk this reduction in status, as well as feeling an infringement on their privacy or a severe restriction concerning what information they should include in their profile. Meanwhile, students might feel forced to interact socially with their teacher in a way they would not naturally be inclined to do. Email is widely considered an appropriate medium for communicating with authority figures, while SNSs and instant messaging are considered media through which one talks to one's peer-age friends (Thorne, 2006). Well beyond the awkwardness and un-

genuine nature of being forced to interact socially online with one's peers in a forum that leaves a permanent written record, being obligated to interact with one's teacher could be downright "creepy," as it is invariably labeled when an adult is seen as invading the social-networking space of young people (Vie, 2007). The alternative would be for teachers not to participate in the SNS activity but only observe. This, however, could also be seen as negative, casting teachers as the kind of lurker that earned Facebook the joke name Stalkerbook (Vie, 2007) or as a monitor following students too closely as in the history of parents and educators joining SNSs to chaperone, regulate, and at times punish young people who frequent SNSs (McLoughlin & Lee, 2008).

Before making SNS activities an integral part of a FL class, instructors should ask themselves if such activities would be a fair requirement for students who are not inclined to use them in their spare time. For a section of the population, using SNSs is not attractive under any circumstances. For this small, but not negligible group (14.6%) noted by Tufecki (2008), "it was as if the non-users were people without a sense of smell, wondering why others buy expensive water with which to squirt themselves" (p. 561).

In any technology-heavy assignment a similar question arises: is it reasonable to impose a greater burden on students who are not tech savvy? Because of the importance of electronic literacy (Association of College and Research Libraries, 2004), many are willing to answer this question affirmatively. Such a response assumes that the particular skill involved in the assignment is a worthwhile skill to have. Being able to engage and communicate with others in a critically aware, culturally sensitive, and decent manner via a widely used form of CMC is, in fact, a worthwhile skill. Teachers need to take care that what they assign will lead to this end and not degenerate into something else, as it might without proper structuring. Teachers requiring technology-bound assignments should also prepare ahead of time to deal with the occasional student claims that an assignment was not turned in on time because the technology failed. Fortunately, SNSs pose somewhat less danger here since users simply go to the site and post what they want without having to create and move files (except perhaps photos) and can easily see right away whether their posting was successful or not.

In addition to students' potential technical problems, problems can originate from the teachers as well. One teacher may be adept at integrating SNS activities into a curriculum, but, if colleagues are expected to follow suit (e.g., other teachers who have sections of the same course), problems may arise. Resistance from more traditional teachers is to be expected (De Pew, 2004), but graduate teaching assistants and newly graduated teachers may also resist because, while they—as younger people—may be familiar with a variety of technology applications, they may not know how to apply them to the classroom unless they experienced similar applications when they were students (Dieu & Stevens, 2007; Winke & Goertler, 2008). Newer teachers may resist trying out innovative assignments if they still have yet to master assigning, explaining, monitoring, and grading more traditional assignments. SNS-based activities present challenges especially in terms of

grading. Instructors need to clearly specify ahead of time how much students must contribute and the basis on which contributions are to be graded. Students must also be aware of what kind of feedback, if any, the teacher plans to give during the project and where such feedback is to be posted.

4. Using SNSs in FL Classes

4.1 General Considerations

The remainder of this chapter presents ways to use SNSs in FL classes. The first three questions to address are how SNSs can best be used, what the role of the teacher is, and which SNS to adopt. The most fundamental of these is the question of how the use of SNSs can support course objectives (Baird & Fisher, 2005-2006). CALL activities must not be merely added onto a course but must serve to further learning goals (Richards, 2005). It is not enough for the teacher to understand the connection between technology-driven assignments and course goals; students need to understand the connection as well (Murray, Hourigan, & Jeanneau, 2007). This connection can be presented through the syllabus and then further explored in other communications throughout the semester. CMC can be a convenient way to communicate these ideas, especially if the policy of the class is to keep in-class communication almost entirely in the L2. However, consistent divisions of topic, medium, and language (e.g., always having students work on culture projects online, and frequently in the L1, while class time is dominated by L2 tasks in which students communicate largely about themselves and rarely about other cultures) can make it difficult for some students to see connections between activities (McBride, 2008b). Care, then, should be taken to integrate all aspects of the FL class whenever possible.

While in some ways the teacher will need to take on more of the role of a “guide on the side” to resist dominating students’ activities (McLoughlin & Lee, 2008, Conclusion section, ¶ 1), telecollaboration studies especially have shown that a substantial amount of teacher guidance is required in such projects for students to have meaningful exchanges with others that heighten their intercultural understanding and critical-thinking skills (Müller-Hartmann, 2000; Lomicka, 2006; O’Dowd, 2004; Ware & Kramsch, 2005). The extent to which students are able to act autonomously depends on the quality of their relationship with their teacher (La Ganza, 2008) and how well their teacher structures class projects ahead of time (Wildner-Basset, 2008). Getting students to first reflect on their own identity and beliefs appears to be key in positioning them to engage critically, meaningfully, and respectfully in exchanges with others (Brookfield & Preskill, 2005; Lomicka, 2006; McBride & Wildner-Basset, 2008; McKee, 2002; Müller-Hartmann, 2000). Allowing room to discuss upcoming projects and problems that students encountered along the way can also do much to improve the quality of online exchanges (McBride, 2008b; McKee, 2002; Ware, 2005).

When choosing a SNS site for class-related social networking, teachers should take its features, appropriateness, and redundancy into account. Which features are available on the site will affect how its clients interact (Dieu, Campbell &

Ammann, 2006). Campbell (2005) provides a good model for evaluating the relative merits of several sites for different class objectives, with the primary concern being that participants can easily accomplish what is needed for the class project. Another feature that might be of interest to teachers is the ability to set the SNS interface in the L2, which, depending on the language, can be done at several sites, including Ning (<http://www.ning.com>), Elgg (<http://elgg.org>), and Facebook. Waugh, Dupuy, and Forger (2008) recommend choosing a SNS that is commonly used by speakers of the L2 in order to make contact with native speakers more likely.²

The issue of appropriateness is raised by the kind of advertising that is found on many popular SNSs, which is frequently about dating and related topics and typically contains various kinds of images. The Ning site also contains advertisements, but its Google ads tend to be less offensive because they are text only and always directly related to the words the users have produced.³ Advertisements can be avoided entirely by hosting one's own SNS (e.g., with Elgg), but doing so requires greater set-up and maintenance efforts. By creating a customized SNS for a class, one in essence creates a sort of gated community that avoids many problems but at the same time limits students' chances to meet other speakers of the L2 (Amman, Campbell, & Dieu, 2005).

With respect to redundancy, it is important to realize that students may resent having yet another website to go to for their classes (Oradini & Sandler, 2008). This issue has come up in my own experience; in a survey of 185 university students of first-year Spanish, 12 of them spontaneously brought up the issue of disliking having to check several different websites for their classes, even though the survey questions addressed other issues in CALL. This might seem especially irritating if a student had to check one SNS for social reasons and a separate one for a class. However users can typically choose to be notified by email of activity on a SNS, helping to inform them when to log on. Another way to address the problem is to use an aggregator such as Pageflakes (<http://www.pageflakes.com>) or SocialThing! (<http://socialthing.com>) (see Chapter 5 in this volume). Aggregators allow users to collect into one common place the contents from multiple social networking and other types of sites and can thus help students to meet their social and academic online needs in one place.

² boyd and Ellison (2007, Global Phenomenon section) discuss which SNSs are most popular outside of the United States.

³ Many elementary and secondary schools block access to SNSs, including more protected sites such as Ning. Eliminating such barriers would require convincing the stakeholders at many levels of the legitimacy of using SNSs for class work. While many language classes have made use of Ning (as will be illustrated later in the chapter), very few classes have sites on Facebook or MySpace. It is likely that this has to do with the nature of the advertisements on these two sites, but another strong possibility is that by keeping class-related online social networking off of the SNSs where participants probably already have a profile, the class-related personal profile will contain only the information that class members are willing to share with each other.

4.2 Example Projects

Having discussed general issues involved in SNS use for FL education, let us now look at some examples of how SNSs have been used in language education and then review some suggestions for other types of projects that could be launched. SNSs might be used as a new place for class members to communicate with each other and share their work. For example, one of the editors of this volume at the University of Florida has used Ning sites as the online point of coordination for several classes. On them, each member has a profile, including information pertinent to the course topic. Also, class documents are posted, students can communicate with each other and the professor about the course, groups of students can collaborate on projects online, and blogs and podcast postings are used to fulfill specific assignments.

In Australia, a Ning site was used for communication among the 20 Australian middle school students who spent 6 weeks in China, their hosts, the parents, and the educators involved (<http://gariwerdprogram.ning.com>). The SNS was found to be a very effective way of allowing people to stay in contact, exchange photos and videos, and communicate to the stakeholders that the educational resources were being put to good use (J. McCulloch, personal communication, December 6, 2008). McCulloch has set up another Ning site (<http://technochinese.ning.com>) to establish communication between students of Chinese in different schools in Australia and Singapore to show students that interest in the study of Chinese is something that extends far beyond their own context. McCulloch has found that the familiarity with the SNS environment, the intimacy it allows by including personal photos and information, and the fact that it is a medium that the students themselves create appear to motivate the students strongly. The latter site is an interesting one to see how people communicate in Chinese using the Roman alphabet.

In addition to numerous Ning SNSs that have been set up to allow class members to communicate and share information, many related sites exist, such as a German club, (<http://msugermanclub.ning.com>) which reflects more typical uses of SNSs because of its somewhat more social and less academic focus. Other SNSs have appeared for language learners from multiple institutions, such as the German Exchange Student Survival Guide (<http://gessguide.ning.com>), and others for people not necessarily part of a learning institution, such as the Spanish learning site (<http://learningspanish.ning.com>) which users mostly use for talking in English about Spanish learning, and the English as a foreign language SNS based in Japan iKnow (<http://www.iknow.co.jp>) which provides a space for English and Japanese learners to socialize and also houses study materials, such as vocabulary lists and dictionaries, and videos with bilingual transcripts.

Class-specific SNSs are generally used as communication tools and places to house materials and assignments. As communication tools, they tend not to have specified requirements for the quantity and quality of communication. What follows below are some suggestions for projects that would require communicative activities unique to the SNS genre and which could be required and graded.

4.3 Projects Centered around Profiles

4.3.1 Beginner profiles

A teacher might choose to use a SNS just once or perhaps only a few times during a course, which could be a comfortable first step into integrating SNSs into a class. A short-term project, for example, that would work well with beginners could be to practice the usual first-semester themes of physical and personality descriptions and likes and dislikes by filling out a personal profile. This task could be broken up into several brief assignments, each ideally tied closely to topics recently covered in the class. It may be best to have these initially turned in as electronic files or printed documents disassociated from a SNS. This way, there would be room for correction and editing before posting students' work. Once students have produced enough information to populate a full profile, they could place them in the SNS and be required to visit each other's profiles and interact with each other. The social network of participants might be limited to just one class or could be expanded to other classes at the same institution and in the same country or elsewhere.

4.3.2 Alternative identity profiles

Several risks involved in this kind of activity could be avoided or reduced if the students invented characters who were members of the L2 culture rather than writing about themselves. In this way, a student's relative popularity and the nature of other students' postings to his/her profile would not have to be taken personally. It should also keep students from indulging in the overly revealing disclosures and small talk about unbecoming behavior that is common among college SNS users (Tapscott, 2009; Vie, 2007). Instead, students would be extending themselves by trying to take the point of view of someone from a different culture, which is an important step towards intercultural understanding (Byram, 1997).

4.3.3 Group profiles

Even better might be to have students collaborate with one or two classmates in creating a group profile and then acting, posting photos, and speaking (writing) as the imaginary character from the L2 culture. This task would give students a chance to work together and discuss with peers both language use and what someone from the L2 culture would be like and do. Talking about these issues would force students to use metalanguage about language and culture and thereby encourage reflective engagement. The discussion process and requirement of at least one other person's approval for each posting should also make the publication of offensive, inappropriate, or prejudiced material less likely. The possibility of posting offensive material is a particularly important danger to plan against with CMC tools that are very similar to the ones that students use outside of school because it has been well documented that young people do not fully grasp the public nature of SNSs (Hinduja & Patchin, 2008; Tapscott, 2009; Vie, 2007). To teach students about diversity within the countries where the L2 is spoken, the instructor might

specify some demographic characteristics for each created personality before the students engage in the project. Letting the students choose which characters they want to work on could heighten engagement and would be a good way of deciding which students would work well together in a group.

4.3.4 Global simulations

This kind of simulation project could be limited to profile creation and occasional online exchanges between characters, or it could be one of many pieces in a more developed global simulation for a task-based experiential-learning course like those described in Dupuy (2006) and Waugh et al. (2008) in which students used a wide variety of resources to ensure the authenticity of the characters' attributes, resulting in the students learning a great deal about culture as well as having more experience reading authentic texts and viewing realia. In the Turkish course described in Waugh et al., there was an incident in which a student, playing his character, made a dramatic and sad posting to a blog to which previously unknown native speakers responded to express their condolences. Such situations raise some ethical issues if students choose to remain in character and continue to deceive the native speakers, but the special opportunity to be exposed to authentic pragmatic exchanges is undeniable.

Finding a way to view native speakers' profiles might at first be difficult on some SNSs where many profiles are viewable only to friends, but, once a connection with a node of a social network is found, additional connections are typically easy to find. Merely viewing a number of L2 profiles could provide students with a wealth of information about language use, much like watching movies has been promoted as a rich source of cultural knowledge (Herron, Dubreil, Cole, & Corrie, 2000). By viewing SNS profiles, students would have the opportunity to learn about the most current cultural trends in the age group of interest in the L2 culture. Providing current information about youth cultures is something that very few FL instructors, even native speakers, are in a position to provide. Production on SNSs need not be central or even required for students to benefit from the SNSs; instead, assignments could focus on students' reflections on what they have viewed (Vie, 2007).

4.4 *Projects Centered around Media*

Some sites that are arguably SNSs are not organized primarily around user profiles, although profiles exist on these sites, but around media. The two currently most popular of these are Flickr, a site for posting photographs, and YouTube, for videos (see Chapter 5 in this volume). Flickr has been lauded for its easy-to-use features (Baird & Fisher, 2005-2006; Campbell, 2006). Users upload photos and label (tag) them, and they can also fill out user profiles, add friends, join groups, and use the site-internal email. Friends can and often do comment on other people's photos. Individual occasions of language use tend to be quite brief, restricting the usefulness of this SNS to a limited realm that includes little extended discourse but a great deal of vocabulary and pragmatically important formulaic phrases.

4.4.1 Image searches

The search capabilities of Flickr are particularly attractive, and seeing what images come up for certain words and phrases in the L2 could be quite illuminating for language learners. Even more culturally enlightening could be looking at photos by geographical location through the use of the site's map. Students can see the images that are associated with the countries where their language of study is spoken. This also gives them the opportunity to view the profiles of the photographers, which often are linked to the users' other web resources, such as blogs. This kind of information would increase the chances of convincing interested students to spend additional time on their own exploring L2 culture connections.

4.4.2 Posting photos

More participatory activities for students might include having them post photos to represent course-related vocabulary or, alternatively, their own lives, either of which they should have to label properly in the L2. The process of searching for or creating images, posting them, and labeling them would be in itself enough to assure the learning of new vocabulary terms for many students. For additional language practice, students could be required to comment on each other's photos. The challenge would be to define clearly ahead of time how much and what kind of commenting would be required for the class, and on what basis such participation would be graded. By posting images and labeling them in the L2 and if the viewing audience is not set to private, other L2 speakers might comment on their photos, once again opening the doors for further L2 practice.

4.4.3 Video sharing

YouTube has similar social-networking features but presents even greater opportunities for language practice since the videos that are posted, favorited, and shared will probably contain spoken samples of the L2. Like Flickr, there are opportunities for other, noncourse-related speakers of the L2 to become involved, as long as posted videos are made public. There is also the option of allowing only one's friends to view a video. YouTube thus offers itself not only as a site for socializing, but also as a convenient repository for the sharing of media files. As with other educational uses of media, teachers will want to design assignments within the boundaries of fair use.

4.5 Projects Centered around Themes

In all of the suggestions above, activities might be structured around a particular theme as opposed to the expression of one's own or an assumed personality. For example, the videos posted to YouTube might be geared towards a project about food production in the L2 culture, with a connected collection of favorite videos from other L2 speakers who have posted on a similar topic, creating many opportunities for communication between video posters. Alternatively, a SNS that is typically used for personal profiles might instead be the site for creating profiles

about events and other cultural phenomena. These sites are flexible and invite creativity; the more interesting a project, the more its participants will want to continue adding to and participating in it, and the more likely that other users, if the SNS is open, will be drawn into the conversation.

5. Conclusion

In all possible SNS uses, a major challenge for the teacher will be to know how to attach a grade to participation. Expectations will need to be established ahead of time, most profitably in the form of detailed rubrics. However, because of the unpredictable nature of truly authentic, open-ended language and culture projects, it may be impossible to create the best rubric for a project ahead of time (Bednar, Cunningham, Duffy, & Perry, 1992; McBride, 2008b; Petraglia, 1998). Coconstructing the basis of grading with students would allow the students to feel that they have some control over their learning environment and that their voice is being heard and valued, can help the instructor to create a better rubric, and can even reduce the teacher's workload to some extent (Rogers, Magolda, Baxter Magolda, & Knight Abowitz, 2004). By thinking about how their own work should be graded, students will be encouraged in yet another way to reflect critically on their participation.

Aside from grading students on what they did in a SNS, students might also be graded on their ability to critically reflect on these activities (Vie, 2007). Godwin-Jones (2008), urges educators "to link informal and recreational writing with formal and academic writing" (p. 7). After the many opportunities of learning pragmatic and cultural information through SNSs, a reflective paper in the L1 could tie the gained experience together and help students better process it, while a reflective paper in the L2 would present similar opportunities, plus the chance to practice more extended discourse in the language.

Like the fractal, the SNS activities discussed and proposed in this chapter display self-similarity at their different levels. There is creation and re-creation of both websites and identities when learners author their own personal profiles online in the L2. If done well, the resultant social exchange, exploration of other perspectives and cultures, and experimentation with language and self-presentation can move learners further towards the stage of intellectual development referred to as self-authorship.

Discussion Questions

1. Think about the tasks discussed in the latter half of the chapter. At which proficiency levels would they be most appropriate? In what ways? How could the tasks be modified to accommodate higher or lower proficiency learners?
2. Which of the tasks described in Section 4.2 do you think would best fit the objectives of the classes you teach or are interested in teaching? In what ways? Would you make any modifications? Why?

3. Choose one of the tasks discussed in the chapter. Develop an assessment rubric for implementing such a project in a language class. Consider factors such as expected contribution of students, amount and frequency of contributions, quality of production, assessment criteria, and so forth.
4. What kind of feedback might instructors give to their students in a SNS-based L2 project, and where should this feedback be provided?
5. What are the advantages and disadvantages of having FL students participate in SNS activities only with other FL learners? What are the arguments for and against having them communicate also with native speakers on the SNS? For your own courses, which do you consider more appropriate?

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