Presenation 5

Social Networking:

Facebook as an English Learning Tool in South Korea

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I. Introduction

Research into how the internet and social networking sites can be used as a language tool will continue to be an ongoing process. One of the reasons for this is that today's students are the first generation to grow up with internet technology. Prensky (2001) says that students have changed drastically. They are no longer the people our educational system was designed to teach. He calls these students digital natives. He goes on to say that our students today are all "native speakers"of the digital language of computers, video games, and the internet. Katz (2005) conducted research into undergraduate students' uses and perceptions of technology in their learning. He concluded that "freshman students arrive at our institutions with a set of electronic core skills. Such skills include communications (email, text-messaging, and IM), Web surfing, word processing, and video gaming. These young people can make technology work but cannot place these technologies in the service of academic work" (Katz, 2005, 7). Kennedy et al. (2008) stated that an evidence-based understanding of students' technological experiences is critical in designing higher education policy and practice.

Since the emergence of Web 2.0 in 2005, the possibilities of using the internet as an educational tool have exploded. The term Web 2.0 refers to web applications that allow for collaboration and information to be shared through the internet. Perhaps the most significant change brought about by Web 2.0 was the surfacing of social networking sites (SNS). Boyd and Ellison (2007) defined social networking sites as web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and browse their list of connections and those made by others within the system.

Boyd and Ellison (2007) go on to say that what makes social network sites unique is not that they allow individuals to meet strangers, but rather that they enable users to communicate

and make visible their social networks. This can result in connections between individuals that would not otherwise be made. Therefore, according to Harrison and Thomas (2009), one of the main concerns with SNS is how computers can transform the way people learn languages using socially oriented software. They say in order to do this, a framework needs to be established that takes into account learning in social environments, where people are interacting with other, looking at what kinds of interactions are taking place and what they mean in terms of language learning.

II. Method 1

1. Participants

The participants consisted of forty-three second language learners in South Korea. The participants were chosen on a volunteer basis. A snowball effect was partly relied on. As Facebook is not commonly used in Korea, this method was chosen in order to gain a sufficient sample size. The criterions for the participants were as follows (1) native speaker of Korean (2) currently is studying or previously studied English (3) a user of Facebook for at least six months. The average age of the participants was 21.02 years old. There were 16 males and 27 females. The participants were all native speakers of Korean living in a large city in South Korea. Of the participants, sixteen, or 37.2% had spent time in a foreign, English speaking country, while twenty-seven or 62.8% had not. Their English ability was self-described as low to mid-level proficiency.

2. Measures

A twenty-one item questionnaire was created. It was first written in English. A translation was into made into Korean and then given to a number of native Korean speakers to be checked. A trial test was given to two native speakers of Korean whose level of English was mid to high. The low number of trial test participants was due to the difficulty of finding Facebook users who met the criteria. It was then given to the participants. It included ten background information questions, and eleven questions concerning their use and opinions of Facebook which consisted of six multiple choice questions, three questions based on the Likert scale, and two open ended questions.

3. Procedure

The questionnaire was given to the participants and the results were returned in person or by email. The data was then analyzed using SPSS Version 19.0. Upon the completion of the survey, the participants were given a document which included information on different social networking sites which could help improve the participants' language ability.

4. Results

The findings of this study show that while Korean learners of English tend to have more foreign contacts if they travel abroad, there is no significant difference since 14.8% of the respondents who had never travelled abroad updated their status in English often. It was also shown that the participants used English much more often if they had foreigner friends. Given these results, it could be said that a person who has more foreigner contacts on Facebook will use English more, and it is not necessary to have travelled to an English speaking country in order to gain foreigner friends.

It was also found that while most of the participants had no opinion on if they have learned English through Facebook, 39.5% said it had helped them. Moreover, more than half of the participants felt like English could be used as a learning tool, with 74.4% expressing a desire to use Facebook in the classroom.

While more of the respondents preferred Cyworld to Facebook, the reason for this was mainly because they were used to Cyworld and most of their friends were already using it. However, there was a large number of participants who favored Facebook, or both Facebook and Cyworld, mainly in order to learn English and be in contact with foreigners. This shows that the use of Facebook as an English learning tool, as opposed to Cyworld, could be a viable option for English learners in South Korea.

III. Method 2

1. Participants

Five of the participants were then investigated as to how they were using English on their Facebook pages. These participants included two males (given the English pseudonyms Eric and Rob), and three females (assigned the names Dina, Emily, and Julie). Four of them were current university students studying law or medicine, and one was a photographer.

2. Measures

A period of five months was chosen. This method offered a unique opportunity for a number of reasons. (1) The participants were unaware at the time that their communication would be researched at a later point, so there was no issue with researcher influence: no insider contaminated research. (2) As a type of personal diary the data was relatively authentic. (3) Unlike most diary data, no inconvenience was imposed as it was done as part of their daily life. (4) As information posted on Facebook is made public, there is much more freedom to use the data collected. Facebook's Privacy Policy (2010) states that information may be accessed by everyone on the Internet (including people not signed into Facebook), and can be imported, exported, distributed, and redistributed by Facebook and others without privacy limitations. While permission from the participants was not required in this part of the study, it was, however, obtained.

3. Procedure

The participants' communication was transcribed and placed into the following categories: (1) status updates in English, (2) communication in English with foreigners, (3) communication in English with native Korean speakers, (4) comments on the photos of foreigners in English and (5) comments on the photos of native Koreans in English.

4. Results

Participants' Use of English on Facebook

		Status Updates in English	Communication With a Foreigner in English	Communication With a Korean in English	Comments on a Foreigner's Picture in English	Comments on a Korean's Picture in English
N	Valid	5	5	5	5	5
	Missing	0	0	0	0	0
Mean		11.80	10.20	11.00	2.80	1.80

Perhaps the quickest way to communicate with your friends on Facebook is by updating your status updates. This method immediately disseminates your thoughts to all of your friends and gives them a chance to comment on what you have said. Below are some examples of status updates by the Korean participants:

1) hhhh i think i am crazy...

2) western cooking test soon.... getting nervous! new class for nail art on next week.... exciting!!!

3) OMG now i'm having a cough....And molecular, cell biology drive me crazy!! Moreover, 언어추론과제 read 'Justice' by michael and make a summary makes me cry 흑Finally, I just heard that i will have an ESL quiz next wed........my lord.......i love you!♥

s all of the five participants stated that the reason they liked Facebook was because of the ability of talking to and contacting their foreigner friends, it was a logical step to investigate what exactly was being written.

1) Are you ok in korea????? war??!!! (On November 24, 2010 after the North Korean shelling of Yeonpyeong island written by a Chinese friend)

2) Emily: earthquake, tsunami in Japan was 5,600times stronger than New Zealand..oh my buddha.. what a disaster,

Yoshi: Emily, thanks for your message. I'm fine thanks. The earthquake and tsunami was a long way away from me.

Instances of the participants commenting in English on their friends' photos were not that common. Usually they were in response to someone first commenting on a photo in English. However, some of the most interesting data was collecting in how the Korean participants were communicating with each other.

Unless you are already in contact with foreigners on Facebook, it might be a little bit intimidating to try and make other friends. One of the participants made contact with an American girl and has been communicating with her regularly for the last 5 months, and they are even discussing the possibility of meeting in Korea. This seems to confirm Parks (1996) study which showed that social interaction and social bonding through online communities could lead to intimate personal relationships if given enough time to develop:

IV. Discussion

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This study was limited in a couple of ways. First, there were some problems with the translation of the questionnaire. Also, it would have been more beneficial if I had asked for an exact number of contacts instead of the scale which was used. I chose this method so the participants would not have to access their Facebook accounts in order to recall their number of contacts and complete the questionnaire. Also, the population was not very large or as random as I relied mainly on word of mouth to find participants.

Any implications made from this study should be limited due to the small sample size. However, I believe it can be said that having foreigner contacts on Facebook leads to an increased use of English, and it is not necessary to travel abroad to gain foreigner contacts. Also, Facebook can be used as a tool to learn English in Korea, and it is a better tool for learning English than Cyworld. However, it is still unclear as to the best way to use Facebook effectively in the Korean classroom. I would like to see more research done in this area.

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Biodata

Jeremy Bissett is originally from the Chicago area in the USA. He received his undergraduate degree in political science and history from Northern Illinois University, and his master's degree in education from Columbia International University. He taught middle school and was a school administrator before moving to Korea in 2002. He is now a full time ESL instructor at Chosun University, and is currently pursuing his doctorate in applied linguistics at Chonnam National University.