SOCIAL NETWORKS AND LANGUAGE LEARNING

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ABSTRACT

In this article, we want to show how web 2.0 is used in websites dedicated to learning foreign languages. Our study is an exploratory research based on five informal and semi-structured interviews of researcher users who registered and participated in the activities offered by four web 2.0 sites. A few sites were more particularly analyzed because of their essential characteristic: it is the only one to offer the possibility of creating and animating a virtual class. The results presented are therefore linked to a particular posture, that of a researcher participating in different social networks. This researcher fulfills, on the one hand, the role of a learner and, on the other hand, the role of an expert teacher of a given language.

Keywords: Social media, analysis, role of the users, virtual class.

INTRODUCTION, LITERATURE REVIEW AND DISCUSSION

Web 2.0 is characterized by its great ease of use. The user no longer needs to have extensive computer knowledge. In a few clicks, he can create an account on different social networks (Facebook, Twitter, forums, blogs, etc.), view comments that users make on his profile, exchange on discussion forums, send messages to network members, create online content, advertise events, etc. This usability is, in our opinion, at the origin of the success of social networks such as Facebook, which has managed to attract more than 500 million users. It is associated with an "old human dream": "to free us completely from space and time".

Using the Internet in the educational process makes it possible to feel what real communication is, helps to better learn a foreign language with the help of foreign friends, promotes the interpenetration of two cultures, enriches students with intercultural knowledge and skills.[4]
It is important to distinguish two types of social networks. One is a generalist insofar as it is open to everyone and does not deal with any particular theme. This is the case, for example, of Facebook, Twitter, etc. where users discuss personal life events (hobbies, news, opinions, etc.). The other type is specific, that is to say that users deal with a particular theme: sport, politics or learning a domain. In the case of teaching / learning languages online, certain social networks aim to facilitate the acquisition of foreign languages without any institutional constraint. This is the case where the registration of the user is carried out by the simple declaration of an email address, a nickname and a password.

From the perspective of web 2.0, the user is fully engaged in the production and dissemination of online content. This promotes the development of the "participative culture" (of the participative web) which concerns "the ability of users to create, remix and share content" (to the contributory web). Each user feeds the virtual community by making their own contribution. The idea of sharing and mutual aid are the foundations of activities on online social networks. Most social networks offer users free virtual spaces to keep their data online. This involves creating a kind of virtual memory that allows personal data to be stored or shown to others (photos, videos accessible to everyone). Note that this virtual memory can sometimes take the

form of a "mobile office" which gives the user the possibility of accessing his personal data from any Internet connection.

Social networks allow exchanges between users. They can express themselves freely by posting information on their personal life, current events or their opinion on different subjects or themes. A time axis makes it possible to differentiate three types of information contained in these exchanges:

1. Oriented towards the past, where the user recounts his experiences and memories (for example by blogs);
2. Oriented towards the present, where the user tackles topical themes (for example by announcements, messages in forums, etc.);
3. Oriented towards the future, where the user announces events that will take place soon (by invitations on Facebook, or presentations on Twitter, etc.).

In general, in language learning sites, there is little orientation towards the past and the future, except perhaps when the user completes the form on his identity with information on the schools he already has frequented or the countries he would like to visit for example. On the other hand, the orientation towards the present is very real. Indeed, from the first visit of the user of the platform, he has the possibility of reading the latest developments of the site such as the announcement of the arrival of new members.

The collective display of information, particularly related to future events, aims to facilitate synchronous and asynchronous exchanges within the community. It allows the registered user to exchange with other members. Three types of profiles can be distinguished. Communication takes place by email, by voice or by chat. The components of the digital identity always indicate the online presence or absence of this person. The purpose of this information is to encourage the user to get in touch synchronously with another connected member.

Each registered user can ask another member, also registered in site, to become his friend (for exchanges around passions, interests or common mother tongue for example). People outside the community, that is to say those who are not registered on the site, are invited to join it. The user can send an email to someone they know to register for this mutual learning site. Exchanges in websites dedicated to language learning take place in several forms.

Comments can be posted by all users registered on the platform. These comments are made in the "guest book", specific to each "digital identity» that is to say to each person registered on the site, or in the "table" section, message visible to all the users.

- Messages in a forum specially dedicated to a language.
- Emails sent to different members of different communities.
- Voice exchanges between online users of the platform.

The identification of the characteristics common to sites dedicated to language learning allows us to raise a set of comments on user practices. These relate to the level of expertise, the teaching approach adopted, the targeted communication skills and the motivation of the participants. To identify the different roles that can be played by the user, we focused on the site. Compared to other sites, the latter has the characteristic of offering the possibility of creating and then managing a virtual class. This class can be offered by any registered user. Implicitly (because no charter is signed), this designer undertakes to deposit digital resources specific to learning the language he offers and monitoring of participants in his class. From a methodological point of view, our analysis was divided into two stages. We first identified certain traces left by users, we then questioned certain authors of these traces informally (by

email exchanges). This approach allowed us to identify seven user roles. We have grouped them according to three players in online teaching / learning: the role of learner, teacher and tutor.

The roles of the users were determined based on scientific work related to the fields of education and language sciences: roles of the teacher and the tutor. Are the roles of actors in a training situation in an institutional context related to the roles that can be played by a user registering on a site such as Twitter, for example? Our analysis showed that the reasons for registering for this type of site were to exchange (to meet people) and to satisfy a curiosity. We do not think that these reasons are comparable to those which push a learner to go to a foreign language course at university (professional project to become a teacher for example) or even at high school (to obtain his baccalaureate). Are we not in the presence of new roles? Why would you want to associate roles identified as belonging to actors already labeled (teacher, tutor) with emerging roles (of web 2.0)?

Our status as language teacher-researchers, in this study of sites dedicated to learning, weighs, in our opinion, a considerable weight in the results. Indeed, we wanted, based on our discussions within the team, to find benchmarks in the features that we discovered and listed together. These benchmarks could have been, for example, the objectives of the session in the virtual classroom, the clarification of the division of knowledge into resources, the presence of oral production exercises.

The institutional framework is characterized by reserved, controlled, time-constrained access (for example, rendering of duty) and knowledge control. The social network is more accessible. Its frequentation is constantly increasing but it appears that the functionalities proposed by the designers have not reached their educational maturity. Remember that most of the sites we analyzed have existed since 2007-2008. It takes time for the educational tools (scenario) and techniques (functionalities) necessary for the creation of collaborative activities to invade our practices. Future experiments will provide information on the uses of this type of site and may be prospects for bringing these two contexts closer.

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