TEACHERS AND STUDENTS ONLINE BUT DISCONNECTED

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Abstract

Online connection and participation in Social Medias are part of most people's lives today. Data from the last "We are social (2018)" report [1] shows the growth of social media users from 2017 to 2018 with 11 new users every second. Based on the data from this report, the present study aims to analyze how the most used social medias ranked by the report, namely – Facebook, Youtube, Whatsapp Messenger and Instagram – can contribute to the teaching and learning of English as a second/foreign language (L2). The study is based on the assumption that hybrid approaches to education that combine face to face classes with online instruction can be beneficial to learning for they can tailor classes to learners' needs increasing student engagement and collaborative work [2] e [3]. Given the potential of virtual communities and social medias in the information society [4] and for L2 teaching/learning [5] [6], the present study explores affordances of the most used social medias as ranked in the "We are Social (2018)" report for hybrid approaches to L2 teaching/learning.

Keywords: Social Medias; L2 teaching and learning.

1 INTRODUCTION

Internet has changed the way we act and interact with/in the world altering the way we receive and produce information in the cyberspace creating a new cyberculture [4]. In this context, new practices, attitudes and ways of thinking emerge as a result of the use of new information and communication technologies (hereafter NICT).

According to data in the 2018's we are social report [1] there are over 4 billion internet users nowadays, that is, over half of the world's population is connected in the cyberspace, creating the cyberculture. According to the aforementioned report, the growth of internet users is the result of more affordable smartphones, which increasingly afford easier connection to the internet. Another factor cited in the report is the offer of more affordable internet data plans. The expansion of access to internet tools also increases people's participation in social medias.

Social medias normally have an inductive/didactic interface, meaning that new users can learn to use them by themselves with the aid of icons and "first use tutorials" that help people to learn how to navigate and interact in that space. This feature of social medias is one of the reasons that attract people to them, besides the obvious advantages of connecting with friends, family and accessing information and entertainment. There are other reasons to use social medias in smartphones such as their usability, potential to personalize interfaces, compatibility with most handheld devices, and range of information/features/possibilities of use. Social medias allow people to follow people while chatting and sharing billions of posts every day in the form of memes, newspapers links, videos, photos and texts. The possibility of increasing benefits for an individual or a given community through relations in social networks is defined by [7] as Social Capital.

Social capital can also be exercised in the learning through shared materials [8] available online showing that the advance of technology made access to information easier, leading to a more autonomous learning process. Indeed, while [9] show that internet has increased access to information online, [10] in a study about the offer of Massive Online Open Courses (MOOCs), show that this access has also expanded for education online in the form of MOOCs. What these two studies have in common is the fact that access to information or education online is significantly increased when the user has some knowledge of English for most of the information online and MOOCs are available in that language.

Considering the role of languages in the cyberspace, [11] claim that technology has changed the way we use, learn and teach second/foreign/additional languages (hereafter L2s).

This is also an important change for teachers who can search, learn, share and bring new information, materials and methodologies to personalize classes, expanding the contact with and in the target language beyond classroom walls [3] [12]. As a result of this, the learning process is less dependent on the teacher giving more power and autonomy to the learner [13]. Adding information and communication technologies (ICTs) to education in the form of blended approaches can provide new learning potential events as well as enhance collaborative work [2]. Given the panorama outlined here, this paper aims to contribute to the reflection about the potential of NICTs to education in general and to L2 teaching/learning in particular by analyzing affordances of the most used social medias as ranked in the 2018 report [1] for hybrid approaches to L2 teaching/learning.

2 SOCIAL NETWORKS AND SOCIAL MEDIAS

The term social network assumes a relationship with people who share common goals, mutual interests and values and there is no need to be connected to the internet to be part of a social network. When it comes to the internet, a social network is a site or platform where people can connect with other people or group of people through a profile. Social medias are online platforms where people can create and share information, such as a blog. They provide tools that can be understood as technologies and practices that people use to share insights, experiences, content, perspectives, opinions, multimedia and information, whether general or specific in a variety of ways – photos, texts, videos, files, images, etc. Social medias have democratized information, making people both content readers, users and producers.

Every social network is also a social media and, vice-versa. Instagram, Twitter and Facebook, for example, can be both a social network and a social media once people can use them only to communicate with other people, as in a social network, or use them only to create and share content, as in a social media. Social networks and social medias can be useful tools for learning due to their dynamics and presence in our daily lives. Social medias also support collaborative learning and may develop critical thinking through synchronous and asynchronous communication among participants.

Teachers in the internet era can share ideas, knowledge and information through social medias, thus expanding classroom walls and L2 teaching/learning possibilities. So as to offer a glimpse of some of the possibilities of social networks for L2 teaching and learning, in what follows we analyze some of the affordances of these networks for L2 teaching/learning in hybrid approaches.

3 METHODOLOGY

Four of the most used social medias, according to the 2018 report [1], were chosen to be analysed in terms of their affordances to L2 teaching/learning in hybrid approaches in this study. The top ten social platforms listed by [1] are: Facebook, YouTube, Whatsapp, FB Messenger, WeChat, QQ, Instagram, Tumblr, QZone, Sina Weibo. According to the report, the top four platforms used are Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp Messenger and Facebook Messenger. Since FB Messenger and Whatsapp have similar functions (chat apps) and considering that Facebook Messeger is analysed within Facebook, we decided not to analyset FB Messenger apart. Thus, social medias Wechat and QQ were disconsidered for the same reason, that is, they have similar functions compared to Whatsapp. The social media ranked in 7th position, Instagram, was then selected for analysis. Therefore, for the analysis of this work we chose the following medias: Facebook, a community Social media; Youtube, a video platform; WhatsApp Messenger, a chat app and Instagram, a photos/short videos app.

For the analysis of these Social medias a literature review for each platform was carried out to analyze how these platforms are being used in L2. Moreover, some possibilities of use were added based on our experience as users and L2 teachers/learners. The study has a qualitative approach since the focus is not on statistics but on how Social media can contribute to L2 education in general and to L2 hybrid approaches in particular. The study is also interpretative since we are looking at how other authors have assessed these social medias.

4 RESULTS

4.1 Facebook

Facebook is the largest social network in the world, with 2 billion active users worldwide. The story of the world's most-accessed social network began in 2003 at Harvard University under the name

Facemash. In order to expand the use to students from other nearby universities, Facemash was turned into "the facebook". The expansion continued and, in the summer of 2005, "the facebook" was officially launched with its original name after Mark Zuckerberg's advisor, Sean Parker, suggested the subtle change of the name to Facebook.

In 2011, Facebook became the largest photo server in the world. Still, at the end of the same year, the number of users who accessed Facebook by phones had already surpassed the mark of 350 million.

Facebook has a number of features such as the organization of lists, groups, the "like" button, notifications, news feed, "friending" and following people, timeline, comment posts, live streaming, reactions, sharing of content, wall, tagging people, uploading files, sending messages inbox, creating photo/video albums, among others.

According to the 2018 report [1], Facebook is the second most visited website based on total traffic and the third based on average of daily visitors and page views. Also, Facebook was the top google search query in 2017, being the biggest social network with 2.17 billion monthly active users and 95.1% of users accessing via mobile – smartphones and tablets in 2018. Brazil is the third country with the highest number of connected users in the world, behind India and the United States. English is the top language spoken by the greatest number of users on Facebook – either self-reported, or set within profile settings – representing 50.9% or 1.1 billion users.

Facebook is one of the most used tools to connect with other people and it is also used as a kind of contact center. However, Facebook is not only seen as a way to connect with friends but also as a working tool, as well as a means of expanding businesses and brands.

According to [4] Facebook is an environment which provides authentic inputs and significant possibilities for interactions for L2 users, learners and teachers. [4] also concluded that Facebook possibilities offers great potential for L2 teaching/learning/using. Regarding the use of Facebook in L2 hybrid approaches, it is possible to suggest that Facebook enables the creation of online learning communities that can be used as virtual learning environments used in parallel to traditional classes [14] allowing the expansion of teaching and learning contexts beyond the physical space and time of the classroom, thus increasing the opportunities for exchange and collaboration between teachers and students and more interaction among them.

4.2 YouTube

Still according to the same 2018 report, YouTube is the second most used social network in the world. It is a free-sharing web site created in 2005 that allows people to upload and watch online videos, making them available worldwide. YouTube has increased a lot in the past years and today is considered one of the biggest companies in the world, having changed the media scenario in many ways. This open platform now allows people to search anything anytime. According to [15] YouTube has changed even the "television" way of delivering information, once now many TV channels also have a channel on YouTube mostly to post exclusive content related to what is on TV, attracting more viewers.

[16] claim that YT has huge cultural, social and political impacts on society. They mention that some orchestras use YT as an auditioning means, some police departments use videos posted online to investigate crimes, several religious people share videos on YT to evangelize and many Universities post online lectures that can be watched anywhere any time, in the form of MOOCs or just as open contents.

[15] study show some advantages and disadvantages of using YouTube to study English, according to learners' perceptions. Still according to the aforementioned study, many students use the platform to watch videos in English, some for entertainment, some for personal needs (professional or specific content videos available only in English or) and some English teaching/learning videos to review grammar and/or vocabulary.

[17] also studied some possibilities of using YouTube in L2 teaching and learning, concluding that this platform is a relevant tool to practice listening and speaking skills since the information is delivered in videos, the images can help learners contextualize the content and facilitate comprehension. The authors suggest a few activities for L2 development such as conversation analysis, making movie trailers voiceovers, making reenactments of famous movie scenes, or even producing videos in the "vlogging" style. For reading and speaking [17] suggest two activities: note-taking and summarizing videos into texts besides working with different videos genres whereby learners can choose to watch videos (trailers, vlogs, cooking videos, makeup tutorials, to cite some examples) writing down the

steps/ "how-to" make that type of video. Moreover the authors emphasize that YouTube is important to give English learners the opportunity to have contact with different varieties of English thus expanding from the standard English usually offered by most English materials.

4.3 WhatsApp

WhatsApp Messenger was founded in 2009 in the United States by Brian Acton and Jan Koum. Created as an alternative to SMS messaging, the application (App) is now one of the most popular communication platforms in the world. In February 2014 WhatsApp Messenger was purchased by Facebook, though it continues to operate as an independent app available for several smartphone platforms. It is possible to send and receive text messages, images and multimedia files with no additional communication cost by the means of 3G/4G/EDGE mobile data plan or Wi-Fi connection. Also, it is possible to share one's location and make free calls, in any country. WhatsApp Messenger works with the phone number so that the user's contacts appear in the contact list.

Among the advantages of WhatsApp Messenger are the use of push notifications so that the user can receive instant messages, encrypted text and audio messaging services, real-time conversations, read receipts, group creation to share messages, images and unlimited audios, and document sharing (PDFs, documents, spreadsheets, slideshows and more) up to 100 MB.

WhatsApp Web is another way to use WhatsApp Messenger through a browser or computer, but there are some requirements: it is necessary to scan a QR code on the web.whatsapp.com or WhatsApp Desktop to validate the account and use the tool. Also, both the phone and the PC must be connected all the time for WhatsApp to work on the web. WhatsApp Web does not give users most of the features of the mobile app such as sharing current location and making or receiving WhatsApp voice/video calls.

The motto of this application is to enable people to communicate quickly and without barriers anywhere in the world. Currently, WhatsApp Messenger has more than 1 billion users and it is in more than 180 countries being the top messenger/chat app/VoIPApp in 128 [1]. Still, according to the company, 55 billion messages, 4.5 billion photos and 1 billion videos are sent every day through the app. According to the report [1], WhatsApp Messenger is the second most downloaded mobile app by monthly active users and the third by number of downloads, ranking only behind Facebook Messenger and Facebook Apps.

WhatsApp Messenger App is a possible pedagogical tool for L2 communication involving teachers and learners in collaborative work by the combination of digital technologies and hybrid activities such as writing, listening to and producing audios, images and videos .

Teachers can interact through audio/video recording encouraging students who feel more constrained to use the language in less face threatening contexts. Students may feel more confident and take more risks in the interactions provided on the app. Also, students' autonomy is stimulated because they are responsible for the interaction once the teacher is a mediator.

The use of resources such as sending photos, videos and audios is relatively large compared to the writing resource, which is mistaken with the use of emojis. People have never written as much as nowadays and teachers can propose activities to better develop this ability.

By using WhatsApp Messenger App as a pedagogical tool, teachers have to be ready for possible hurdlers such as: size of monitors, mediation and response to messages instantly; the fact that WhatsApp Messenger app (or the phone) may be seen as an entertainment-only tool; lack of battery of participants' phones; the fact that not all students have compatible phones or an internet connection; students can leave groups at any time; difficulty of preventing students from posting/interacting after the set deadline; the impossibility of storing links and images because they are saved only in the users' phone.

4.4 Instagram

Instagram was created to allow its users to post personal content and create a social network with others through short videos and pictures with short texts in which people can comment or simply "like". It also has the possibility to share public post with friends or groups in what is called "direct message"

that is similar to a chat. Later on, Instagram, inspired by another app called Snapchat[1], created the option "stories" (Facebook and Whatsapp have similar functions). In this option users can post pictures or thirty-second videos that are available to be seen by others in the period of 24 hours, after which the media will not be displayed anymore. More recently, Instagram released a new feature called IGTV which is very similar to YouTube but in a new format since on YouTube the videos are horizontal and on IGTV they are vertical. Instagram has a large variety of accounts besides the personal ones, such as: gossip, fashion, comedy, sport, news and also English learning/teaching. They can be public or private, in the latter case, to see the user account's publications it is necessary to follow the account.

With all these features, Instagram can be a relevant tool for learners. [18] mentions some positive characteristics of this network such as: it is very popular among young people, the platform can be used to practice listening, since there are many accounts focused on English learning and also English speakers accounts in which people can watch short videos that are not time consuming, and the absence of pause/coming back of these videos makes listeners pay more attention since they cannot play black.

In this sense, students that want to have more contact with the target language in their daily lives can simply search for types of accounts that they like but in English or in any other language they want to learn/practice. For example, students can read/watch news videos, decoration texts, technology tips, professional related accounts and even meet people and chat with them in the language they are trying to practice. The study conducted by [18] shows that students felt motivated using Instagram because of its interface and the possibility to learn and practice the language at anytime and anyplace since it is an app that can be used with any mobile phone. Concerning writing, [19] suggests how Instagram can be helpful to develop creative writing with students with two possible writing activities: a poem activity that requires pictures from Instagram to brainstorm adjectives to create acrostic poems with their names to post on Instagram creating different hashtags, and the second activity is called Vacation Postcard whereby students search through hashtags #vacation, analyze how these posts are commonly written, share with classmates and after create their own vacation post with their pictures. [20] also presents this social media as a possibility to motivate students' writings through the genre "Flash Fiction", described as a short story, with less than 1000 words. In this study students received comments and constructive feedback on their writings.

Teachers can also use Instagram in the class asking students to support discussions, showing pictures of what they have done on vacation time and talk about it. Moreover, Instagram is full of teacher accounts (many of them use the hashtag #teachersofinstagram) where they share ideas of activities, books, tools and websites for all kinds of teachers.

All these possibilities show how incorporating Instagram to L2 can extend the walls of a classroom, and bring the possibility of learning not only the language but many other things through L2. Also it can be a possibility for teachers to innovate and motivate learners.

4.4.1   *Affordances of using Social platforms in L2 teaching/learning*

Teachers and students who are adept of social networks and medias have important digital learning tools. Indeed, it is necessary that teachers explore the possibilities of these platforms, specially in terms of hybrid approaches. The four platforms/applications here described provide interesting and interactive features for L2 teaching and learning such as free calls, video and audio recording, sending of texts messages and group chats. Some affordances of using these tools in hybrid approaches are:

- They can be used to extend the classroom space/time to increase exposure and contact with L2

- They can improve student - content interaction, student-student interaction and student - instructor interaction in class groups

- Teachers and students can participate/follow L2 education/learning communities/accounts and have access to L2 content and materials

- They can be used to develop students' sense of collaborative work

- They provide access to content in a more fluid way – information pops up in users' timeline/chats through shared material

[1]Snapchat: https://www.snapchat.com/l/pt-br/

- Teachers can use them to flip their classrooms by sending some of the class content beforehand in forms of videos, texts, posts, audios, pictures and documents
- Teachers can create digital spaces such as YouTube channel, Instagram account, Facebook community or Whatsapp groups to create and share contents
- Students can practice writing/reading of multiple textual genres by writing/reading authentic posts or messages and receiving feedback for their production (like comments or direct messages)
- Students can practice listening by watching different videos of different people around the world, according to their preferences and L2 level
- Students can also practice speaking making audios or videos with more time to prepare themselves, reducing speaking anxiety levels
- Students can have more contact with varieties of the language
- Activities go beyond mere correction and evaluative tasks to a more substantial interchange
- Users can save posts to review later
- These social platforms are free and accessible
- Opportunity to learn and practice are ubiquitous, only access to internet is needed

It is important that teachers are well prepared to motivate students to use these platforms and also to be there when students need online feedback or help. As mentioned before, cyberculture is constantly changing and due to this, L2 teachers are required to follow pace using these affordances in favour of education.

5 CONCLUSIONS

This study was based on the assumption and observation that most people today are connected and active in Social Medias. It was also based on data from the last "We are social (2018)" report which shows the growth of social media users in 2018 with 11 new users every second. The present study aimed to analyze how the most used social medias ranked by the report, namely – Facebook, Youtube, Whatsapp Messenger and Instagram – could contribute to the teaching and learning of English as a second/foreign language (L2). More specifically, the study explored affordances of the most used social medias as ranked in the "We are Social (2018)" report for hybrid approaches to L2 teaching/learning.

Regarding the four social medias analyzed, it was concluded that most of the activities supported by these medias can be used in hybrid approaches to L2 teaching/learning once students can increase contact with the target language outside the classroom. As such, these social medias can aid the expansion of varieties of English, registers, users, not to mention the forms of interaction fostering the development of the four skills (writing, listening, speaking and reading). Despite these possibilities, and as put forward by [5] and [6] in the case of Facebook and by [21] in the case of Duolingo, the incorporation of these social medias in L2 practices remains a challenge for most teachers, despite efforts to include them in L2 classes, for example [22]. Moreover, as suggested by [23] the use of technologies for pedagogical purposes is another challenge once most people see social networks, for example, as mere entertainment tools.

As a way to contribute to the critical use of social medias for L2 development, this study described some of the affordances of four social medias suggesting they are used in mobile devices so as to expand classroom walls and times.

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