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PEER REVIEWED ARTICLE

# Embracing social media for educational linguistic activities

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## ABSTRACT

This case study explores the implications of utilising social media as part of specific linguistic activities of language learning that comprise the practice of mundane communication. As part of an international collaboration project, closed Facebook groups were formed in secondary school classes in Colombia, Finland, Sweden and Taiwan. The results imply that the interactions were framed as social connections before an audience. The students' authorship was characterised by both educational language customs and digital vernacular derived from online communication conventions.

## Keywords

Social Media, Linguistic Activities, Framing, Facebook

## INTRODUCTION

The use of social media as a communication tool via various applications of Web 2.0 technologies, such as Facebook, YouTube, Twitter and Instagram, has become embedded in many young people's lives (Erstad & Sefton-Green, 2013). Communication on social media has reached such an extent that it has been argued to represent new forms of literacies that are needed in the twenty-first century (Greenhow & Gleason, 2012). Due to the communicative potentials, educators of language learning have for quite some time tried to embrace social media in teaching to prepare students for everyday, mundane communication (e.g. Boyd & Ellison, 2008; Chartrand, 2012; McBride, 2009). In many respects, the concern has been the opportunities for students to communicate, mainly in writing, with real global audiences, allowing spaces for practising collaboration, which counteract language barriers and social inhibitions (Applebee & Langer, 2011; Blattner & Fiori, 2011; Boyd, 2010). Since English has become a *lingua mundi* online (Crystal, 2003), and many users are non-native English speakers interacting with other non-natives, research has increased concerning the implications of learning English as a second language.

However, similar to the technology and education fields generally, research on the implications of utilising social media for language-learning purposes shows contrasting results (for an overview, see e.g. Manca & Ranieri, 2013). On one hand, research findings conclude that so far, educational value is limited, since students prefer to use social media for social purposes, self-expression, enter-

tainment and passing the time (Atkin & Krishnan, 2012; Hew, 2011; Hunt, Atkin, & Krishnan, 2012). Moreover, social media is generally not utilised to communicate with distant others but typically to interact with people whom the users already know (Alhabash, Park, Kononova, Chiang, & Wise, 2012; Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007; Manago, Taylor, & Greenfield, 2012). On the other hand, quite a few studies maintain that social media could be used for various linguistic educational purposes, including mundane language learning and as part of social learning functions, such as peer support from classmates and targeted help with school-related tasks (Ito et al., 2009; Manca & Ranieri, 2013). The starting point of this study is an interest in investigating the opportunities and constraints of utilising the communicative space on social media to prepare students for everyday, mundane communication. This topic is in line with Kern's (2014) argument that social media could be used as spaces for practising a variation of linguistic repertoires in a second language, especially a language used by young people (cf. Lantz-Andersson, 2015). Social media interaction thus involves the possibilities to communicate with real global audiences without having to travel abroad for this type of encounter. Moreover, this study is based on the assumption that the over-simplified research question of whether or not social media spaces function for educational purposes will not support the understanding of the multifaceted nature of the social web and education. Although studies continually point to young people's ubiquitous out-of-school interactions on social media, which often include the use of English, research on what it means to be a learner of English as a second language and how education as an institution relates to these powerful changes is still in its infancy. There is a need for more sensible studies on 'the many enduring boundaries, constraints and structures that persist within contemporary Internet use' (Selwyn, 2009a, p. 80).

## AIM AND INTRODUCTION OF RESEARCH DESIGN

This case study examines the interactions in two closed Facebook groups that were formed as part of learning English as a second language in an international collaboration project among classes in Colombia, Finland, Sweden and Taiwan. The study's general aim is to develop knowledge of the implications of utilising social media for practising colloquial communication when learning English as a second language. Its related, specific curricula components cover learning objectives that enable the students to develop self-confidence in *linguistic activities*, that is, in the *language used* for oral and written communication in everyday situations, and in adapting the language to different situations and for different purposes. Beyond the textual formulations, online language activities also include other multimodal elements that are regarded here as part of the linguistic activities. The study aims to scrutinise what characterises the interaction in the Facebook groups, and what such online spaces for interaction imply for the students' authorship, that is, how the linguistic activities emerge from their self-expression and how the interaction is interconnected with their awareness of the online audience. The roles of authorship and

audience are regarded here as intertwined, implying that acting as the audience includes participation relevant for the communication. Analytically, the study draws on sociocultural perspectives (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Vygotsky, 1939; Wertsch, 1998) in which language is considered the most significant tool, and learning is fundamentally understood as a series of tool-mediated social processes embedded in the activities, contexts and cultures. Every practice has its own implications for learning, and learning is perceived as ‘an integral and inseparable aspect of social practice’ (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 31). By viewing communication and learning as situated, the research design implies studying the local online communicative practices to understand the activities. To do so, the students’ and the teachers’ text-based interactions in the two Facebook groups have been logged and analysed. The conceptual distinctions of frame analysis (Goffman, 1974) have guided the research in analysing the manner in which the students compose messages and understand the interaction. Analysing how the students frame the interaction, that is, how they define the activity of interacting in Facebook as part of schooling, makes it possible to distinguish the context-specific ways of communicating, as well as how the students express themselves in relation to their classmates and the other international students. The following research questions have guided the study:

- 1 What characterises social interaction among students who are members of closed Facebook groups, formed for practising colloquial communication when learning English as a second language?
- 2 How do the students frame the linguistic activities in relation to authorship and audience?

### SOCIAL MEDIA AS SPACES FOR EDUCATIONAL LINGUISTIC ACTIVITIES

Social media sites are diverse, dynamic, flexible and constantly changing with the variety of the participants’ interactions. Collaborative and communicative practices are characteristics of social media, which are closely connected with the medium and the context. However, from this study’s perspective, social media practices are not determined by the medium itself but negotiated through the norms developed by the participants, which vary across different spaces and groups (cf. Selwyn, 2012). Ito and colleagues (2009) maintain that participation on social media sites could roughly be divided into *friendship-driven* or *interest-driven* categories. Many young people participate in both kinds of groups. Whereas language style in interest-driven groups varies in relation to the specific interest, it is common to communicate by using casual, social parlance in friendship-driven groups. Despite the interest-driven groups’ longer online history, the immersed social engagements and participatory culture that are becoming a baseline online imply that the groups repeatedly become intertwined. Classifying them as friendship-driven or interest-driven sometimes

becomes difficult and less meaningful for, for example, various gaming groups (Ito et al., 2009). Accordingly, the main basis of the online practices is affinity, which suggests certain linguistic aspects that are interesting from a learning perspective. For instance, McBride (2009) argues that one of the most important conditions that education attempts to create is social interaction involving the unpredictable nature of open-ended language, which could be provided by utilising social media. Moreover, social media sites enable out-of-school literacy practices in which many youths are accustomed to engaging, and ‘can help English-language learner students draw from prior knowledge to contextualise and develop understandings of new language forms and content’ (Black, 2009, p. 696). Thus, social media sites provide casual learning contexts, including conversational and collaborative qualities that are difficult to duplicate in a classroom setting (e.g. Chartrand, 2012; Lantz-Andersson, 2015; Lantz-Andersson, Vigmo, & Bowen, 2013; Mazman & Usluel, 2010).

Interaction on social media has also been shown to enable students’ creative engagement in communication by using their out-of-school digital vernacular with attention to an international audience (Thorne, 2009). These vast spaces for online social activities share much in common with other types of publics, allowing people to gather for social, cultural and civic purposes and help them connect with others. To understand the significance of the online audience, Boyd (2010) argues that three dynamics play significant roles. These are *invisible audiences*, *collapsed contexts* and *the blurring of public and private*, which provide a valuable framework for understanding the architecture of social media publics and the logic of their social practices. *The blurring of public and private* points to the complexity of maintaining the borders between what is possible to keep private and what becomes public. *The collapsed contexts* imply that the absence of spatial, social and temporal boundaries makes it difficult to maintain distinct social contexts. Additionally, negotiating for a socially appropriate interaction in the context becomes integrated with knowing and being aware of one’s audience. Consequently, the imagined, intended or *invisible audience* in the communicative space on social media implies participants’ awareness of the expected audience to whom the expressions are directed (Ellison et al., 2007). Even if the intended audience is not necessarily the actual public, the value of imagining the audience suggests an adjustment to what kind of interaction seems suitable to the intended norms of that collective. Importantly, even if the audience members are ‘invisible’, they should not be viewed as merely passive recipients but as engaged participants in the negotiation for culture and knowledge in the communicative space.

The learning perspective of this study implies that all practices are ‘shaped by the socio-cultural context within which those practices are enacted’ (Crook, 2012, p. 66). In turn, this means that the students’ interactions become constrained by the way school activities are usually organised and structured, even if the social media context might facilitate a more playful and meandering activity. Moreover, as mentioned earlier, previous studies have indicated that social media interaction is mostly conducted by people who already know one

another. When social media is implemented as part of schooling, the local audience consisting of the classmates are often considered the most important audience (Davies, 2012; Vigmo & Lantz-Andersson, 2014). The next section elaborates on the theoretical and analytical underpinnings of the study. It is followed by a description of the context and the study's results, and finally, a discussion of the findings.

### STUDENTS' FRAMING OF INTERACTION IN FACEBOOK GROUPS

An important premise for this study is that learning is viewed as comprising social activities that could not be predefined or given but something that the participants create, recreate and negotiate in the practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Vygotsky, 1939; Wertsch, 1998). The basic assumption of learning within sociocultural perspectives as developed in practices and interaction corresponds well with the concept of framing (Goffman, 1974). These research traditions have contributed to the situated perspective and share the same analytical focus on individuals' processes of interaction with other people and with physical and technological systems. The framing concept implies that individuals always relate events, actions and utterances to how and what they understand the situation to be. Accordingly, the framing becomes a resource for making sense of everything in each situation. By regarding social media as social practices, not merely as digital techniques, the framing concept becomes appropriate for the manifold, new virtual spaces for communication (cf. Lantz-Andersson, 2015; Lantz-Andersson et al., 2013; Pietraß, 2009). The framed understanding of interaction is viewed as a dynamic interactive concept, and the implications of framing are considered social processes (Goffman, 1981). Thus, participants adjust to invisible situational norms and to other people involved in activities, which is most often done quite unintentionally, and framing is shaped and reshaped repeatedly in interaction (cf. Ytreberg, 2002). This reshaping means that framing is transformed or *keyed* by shifts in context, for example, from being serious and truthful to joking or ironically pretending to tell the truth (Goffman, 1974). Furthermore, specific traditions and conditions of institutions are perceived as co-creating practices. In educational settings, this suggests that participants' framing of activities is viewed as constrained by social structures and social organisations, which interact with how participants regard framing as accepted and when a shift in framing occurs (cf. Pietraß, 2009; Selwyn, 2009b). Acknowledging differences between communicative affordances and constraints that are inherent in Facebook, as well as their implications for the collaborative and communicative practice of schooling, makes it interesting to study how social media interactions could include social and personal aspects of young people's lives in prevailing practices and notions of knowledge content in schooling.

Researchers should acknowledge that participants take cues from social media context to envision an audience, and to analyse what characterises interaction in Facebook groups. Media content is understood as 'communication of an

‘author’ with his reading, listening and viewing audience’ (Pietraß, 2009, p. 137). Importantly, specific ways of framing amount to a sense of a potential audience that offers cues on how to frame an activity and how participants should present themselves (Goffman, 1974). Even if participants do not know who will view the interaction online, they frame the interaction by acknowledging ‘a more specific conception of [the] audience than ‘anyone’ to choose the language, cultural referents, style, and so on’ (Marwick & Boyd, 2011, p. 115). Although previously the concept of frame analysis has been mainly considered for face-to-face contexts, quite a few scholars now utilise this approach for analysing online interaction (e.g., Boyd, 2008; Linderöth, 2012; Lantz-Andersson, 2015; Lantz-Andersson et al., 2013; Pietraß, 2009; Rosenberg & Egbert, 2011; Vigmo & Lantz-Andersson, 2014; Ytreberg, 2002). In line with this, frame analysis is employed in this study for exploring the characteristics of social media interaction and the relationship between authors and audiences.

## METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK, ANALYSIS AND RESEARCH DESIGN

### Methods and analysis

The research was conducted as a case study, departing from an open exploratory approach on the multiple interactions in the two Facebook groups, in contrast to a number of previous studies that focused on assessing and investigating the use of language with regard to vocabulary or grammar (Manca & Ranieri, 2013). The exploratory approach is often used for topics that have not been clearly defined, and the case studied here refers to multiple interactions in the two Facebook groups that are limited in time and embedded in their particular sociocultural context of schooling, thus denoting a particular case (Silverman, 2011).

By visiting the Facebook groups as soon as there was any activity (made possible by selecting the ‘on’ option for ‘push notifications’ for group activities), the researcher observed the development of the interactions with an attempt to discern nuances of framing during the ongoing phase and how the interactions proceeded through the participants’ communication (cf. Davies & Merchant, 2007; Selwyn, 2009b). This could be described as a kind of ethnographic-inspired research in the social media space, where the researcher was positioned as an observer rather than as a participant who interacted directly. This kind of online participant observation continued throughout the continuum of both Facebook groups to learn about the interactive activities, appreciate the linguistic activities, gain knowledge of the participants and so on. This part of the analysis was performed to become familiar with the cases. Instead of field notes, the students’ interactions were logged as screen dumps, and screenshots were also captured by using Jing (a free Tech Smith software), enabling analyses of multimodal elements, for example the videos they used for representing and expressing themselves.



When the Facebook groups were completed, a data-capturing method was used as a first step to systematise the group interactions. The NetVis Module (<https://apps.facebook.com/netvizz/>) was utilised, a free, open-source, web-based tool that extracts data from different sections of the Facebook platform (personal profiles, groups and pages) for research purposes. In this study, it was employed merely to obtain a general summary of the postings and comments in the groups, not to conduct further quantitative analyses.

The analysis then proceeded, with the researcher's search for patterns within the large sets of data. The search was conducted by focusing on the participants' orientations, what postings received multiple comments, and how the students responded to and interpreted one another's postings and comments. The analysis included going back and forth over the screenshots of the postings, and sorting them on a timescale, as well as by sorting the comments by genre (i.e. polite, humorous or nonsense comments), the kinds of language used (i.e. proper English, mundane English or the use of slang expressions), the comments from multiple international students or classmates, and so on. During the course of this analytical procedure, the initial participant observation served as support since the researcher had gained an appreciation of the group interactions. The analysis drew on interactional ethnography (Castanheira, Crawford, Dixon, & Green, 2001). With its roots in ethnography (especially participant observation), sociolinguistics, ethnomethodology, conversation analysis and other traditions, interactional ethnography aims to study interactions among participants, the parlance used and how participants employ all linguistic resources, such as uploading pictures, adding links and so on. In line with the framing concept (Goffman, 1974), the group interactions were regarded as a job that the students performed to accomplish something in the activity. The first step in the analysis was to scrutinise what the students wrote and how they interacted linguistically, in accordance with their temporary definition of the situation. The analysis focused on what kind of information the students shared, the contents of the posted messages, how the other students responded, and what kinds of situated local practices these entailed.

According to Goffman (1974), obviously the participants in a situation could frame it differently, but they endeavour to reach a similar definition. Analysing interaction sequences focuses on finding out what this consensus constitutes and how it is negotiated (Goffman, 1974). This focus enables the researcher to examine what the involved participants consider suitable literacy practices, which become visible in how they frame the activity, what they are oriented towards, for what they hold one another accountable, what they accept or reject as preferred responses of others, and how they engage in, interpret and construct the text. Castanheira and colleagues (2001) argue that the researcher 'must look at what is constructed in and through the moment-by-moment interactions among members of a social group; how members negotiate events through these interactions; and the ways in which knowledge and texts generated in one event become linked to, and thus a resource for, members' actions in subsequent events' (p. 357). Thus, by acknowledging the significance of

small shifts in the interaction, the analysis in the current study aimed at understanding what kind of framework had been established temporarily. The analysis endeavoured to follow Boellstorff, Nardi, Pearce, and Taylor's (2012) account of online analysis 'Ethnographic research is profoundly exploratory and deeply identified with discovery. It is up to us to develop sound, persuasive arguments about what we find interesting, and to convince others that these arguments illuminate our data and speak to crucial concerns and debates' (p. 160).

### Context of Facebook

Different social media applications are available on the Web, and new types are incessantly developed, providing various resources to support different public and private spaces, as well as making it easier to participate in one-to-many and many-to-many interactions (Boyd, 2010). Facebook's different features facilitate interaction, such as postings or status updates, likes, comments, pokes, chats, events, photos, videos, messages, checking in to show one's location, groups and so on. Facebook is a rather private site, described as a 'walled garden' by Rogers (2009), where users need to have an account to gain access and must add people (with their consent) as 'friends' to view their profiles. Being part of a closed Facebook group, as in the present study, implies that only those who receive an invitation and are accepted as members can participate and view the group activities. Group participants can then decide themselves whether or not they also want to be friends with the other group participants. The Facebook groups were established particularly for the purpose of this study. Facebook was chosen as the social media application because of its popularity, and because most of the students already had an account. Furthermore, the possibility of creating closed groups where only invited members could interact (invisible to non-members) matched this study's ethical considerations, as explained in the next section.

### Ethical considerations

The research adhered to the ethics code of the Swedish Research Council. The regional ethics board reviewed and approved the study before any fieldwork was conducted. The students were informed about the study's aims, and it was stressed that participation was voluntary. Written informed consent was obtained before the study started, and the participants' identities were made confidential. Although the groups studied here were closed and not totally public, questions concerning publicly accessible content on social media sites and the integrity of the individuals in the research would continue to be a central issue from an ethical perspective. Thus, it was carefully considered throughout the project.



### Participants and postings

This study is part of a research project called *Linguascapes*,<sup>1</sup> which aims to investigate young people's language-learning activities in social media contexts. To address the purpose of this specific case study, contacts were established with teachers in Colombia, Finland, Sweden and Taiwan. These countries were chosen primarily because English was not their native language, contacts with teachers were already established there, the Facebook group could be implemented as part of the students' learning English as a second language in school, and they had been studying English for about five or six years. The data were derived from two closed Facebook groups. All teachers were invited to join with their classes in both groups, but since the teacher in Taiwan did not choose to join the second group, another Swedish teacher and his class were invited. No comparative analysis of the data from the two groups had been conducted; rather, they should be regarded as representing two cases of utilising social media for practising colloquial English to obtain a broad picture of the research field. The first Facebook group, group A, was formed in October 2011 and lasted until June 2012, involving a total of sixty students, aged between thirteen and sixteen, in four school classes, one each from the following countries: Colombia, Finland, Sweden and Taiwan (see Table 1).

TABLE 1 THE NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS IN GROUP A

Students from Colombia	Students from Finland	Students from Sweden	Students from Taiwan	Teachers	Researchers	Total
14	21	17	8	6	4	70

The second Facebook group (group B) consisted of four school classes, one in Colombia, one in Finland and two in Sweden, lasting from November 2012 to May 2013. In total, seventy-one students from the three countries joined the group, as shown in Table 2.

TABLE 2 THE NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS IN GROUP B

Students from Colombia	Students from Finland	Students from Sweden	Teachers	Researchers	Total
21	12	38 (from 2 classes)	6	5	82 <sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup> After May 2013 two new classes in Colombian and Sweden, respectively were added to group B, so the total amount became 114, which is why the "seen by xxx" (visat av xxxx in Swedish) gives the figure 109 or 108.

1. The *Linguascapes* project is funded by Marcus and Amelia Foundation and includes several studies on Facebook and Blogger when implemented as part of language-learning activities.

As stated, the Facebook groups were created specifically for the purpose of this study. The research aim was discussed with the teachers in each country via email, who in turn introduced the activity to their students. Both Facebook groups were established as voluntary activities in all the classes. In an attempt to offer space to communicate that was not merely an extension of the already established approaches to language learning, the teachers in each country encouraged their respective students to interact, but neither their postings nor comments were quantified, assessed or graded. Although the basic principle was to enable more open space for communication in relation to more traditional educational interests in linguistics, the perspective taken indicated the importance of acknowledging that the Facebook groups were introduced in school contexts with the teachers present, which had certain implications for the communication. Thus, the schooled framing of the interaction was regarded as part of the activity despite the voluntary participation. Due to the voluntary nature of the group interactions, the students joined gradually, and some students chose not to participate at all. The researcher posted some initial activities for starting the discussion, and the teachers also posted some topics that the students could discuss and respond to. The guidelines were kept to a minimum to encourage the students to contribute whatever they found worthwhile discussing.

The dataset in Facebook group A consisted of 106 postings; 43 of these received no comments, but most of the postings had some ‘likes’, and 20 postings received one or two comments. Moreover, 43 postings received three or more comments, of which 39 included comments by students from more than one country (see Table 3).



Table 3. Overview of the data corpus from group A

Facebook group B consisted of 109 postings and displayed a similar pattern in that most postings received some ‘likes’. Of the total postings, 43 received no comments, and 26 received one or two comments. The remaining 40 postings received three or more comments, 26 of which included comments by students or teachers from different countries (see Table 4).

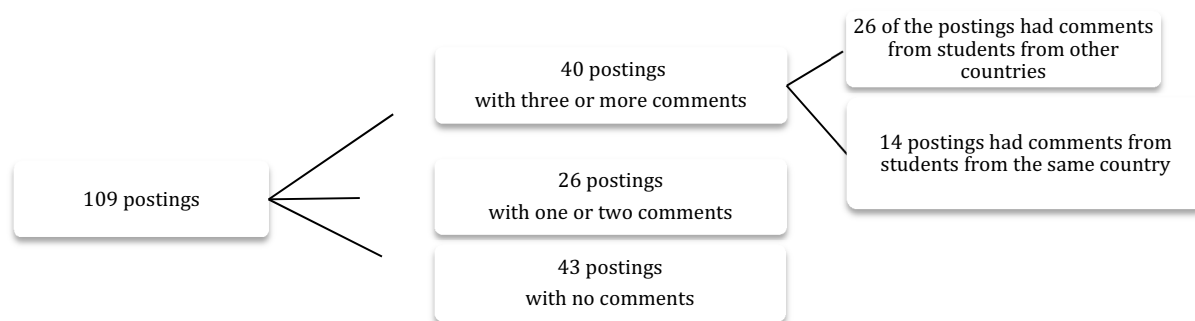


Table 4. Overview of the data corpus from group B

## RESULTS

### Initial framing

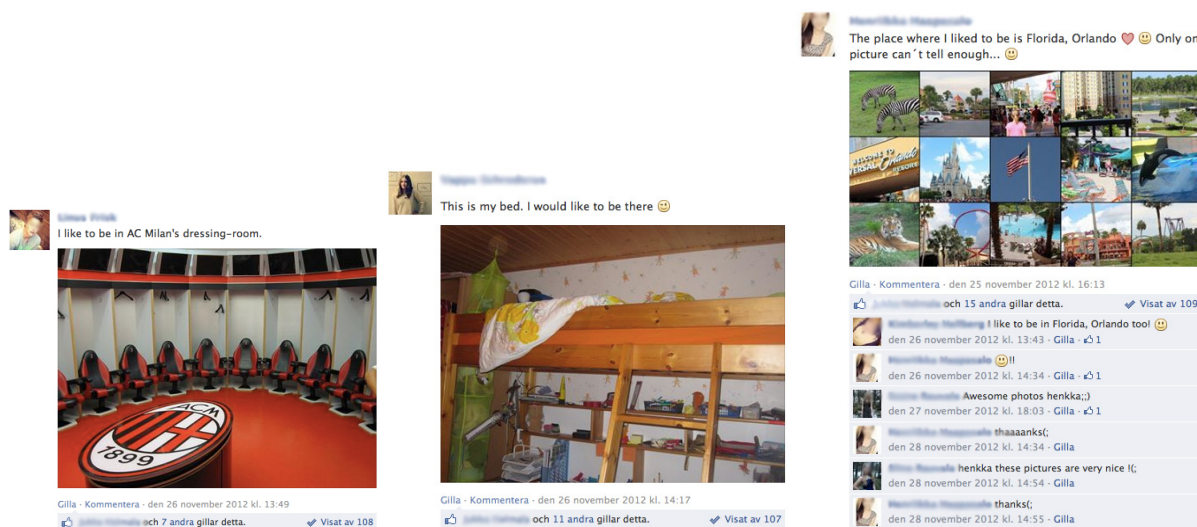
The interactions in both groups were initiated by the researcher's posting, suggesting that the students upload a photo with a description and they were also encouraged to comment on one another's postings. For group A, the posting stated: 'Upload a picture that means something special to you, and a short description of why this picture is important to you.' The group B students were asked to upload a picture of a place they liked, somewhere where they felt good. This first activity in both groups originated from pictures, with the intention to encourage interactions comprising a variation of modes. The group A students' responses were initially mainly self-descriptions, stating their names and ages, and in most cases, with a photo of a place where each had been on holiday. These postings did not receive any comments. Excerpt 1 displays three typical examples of these kinds of initial postings.

Excerpt 1 displays three typical examples of these kinds of initial postings.

Excerpt 1 Examples of initial postings from group A

The overall characteristic of the initial phase of the interaction in group A is that the postings resemble writing a letter to a pretended addressee, that is, a pretended audience, which is a common way of practising English as a second language in educational learning contexts. Since this Facebook group was created as part of their schooling, it could be considered neither a friendship-driven nor an interest-driven practice. Rather predictably, the students' framing is related to the traditions of a strong base of schooling: performing in a somewhat proper tone as if it is a language-learning school task. Even if the students include questions, or write that they look forward to hearing from the other group participants, such invitations do not trigger other students' comments on the postings. The framing of the activity as if students are performing an individual school task is also recognised by the students' posting of their own presentations without commenting on that of the others. Hence, in the initial phase of this Facebook group, the parlance and language-learning practice as part of schooling are not challenged by the students' digital vernacular and their out-of-school, social media practices (cf. Thorne, 2009).

Excerpt 2 exemplifies the group B students' responses to the first activity, where they similarly posted holiday pictures. Nonetheless, other pictures were related to sport, such as soccer, and there were a few more playful, ironic or mocking postings with uploaded pictures of the students' beds, for example.



Excerpt 2 Examples of initial postings from group B

Similar to group A, the overall initial interaction in group B is characterised by the students' framing of the activity as if it were a task to manage, that is, they post their own pictures and very sparingly comment on other postings. However, group B's posts lack the long text pattern of those in group A, and the parlance involves more jokes and irony. The framing of the linguistic activity is thus interspersed with parlance that draws on the students' out-of-school, everyday social talk (cf. McBride, 2009; Thorne, 2009). In the third example in Excerpt 2, the Finnish girl receives three comments from her classmates in

Finland. The comment thread resembles interaction patterns of friendship-driven, online practices, where the comments assess both the picture and what they refer to, followed by the author's response with a smiley and then by acknowledging the comments with 'thaaaaanks (; ' and 'thanks (; '. The interaction is kept in English although only Finnish classmates participate in it. This indicates not only the educational framing of the activity but also the significant value of the awareness of the audience consisting of other international students, who would be unable to understand if the Finns interacted in Finnish (cf. Boyd, 2010).

### Continuing framing of the activity – students from several countries interact

The continuing interaction could generally be characterised as a mixture of both the overall schooled way of framing the activity and a more colloquial, out-of-school, friendship-driven framing of social media interaction (cf. Ito et al., 2009). A frequent pattern is that the postings receive rather short comments, and the authors of the postings also orchestrate the continuing discussion, which is a common procedure in social media interaction (Park, Lee, & Kim, 2012). Selected interactive patterns emerging from the groups are exemplified and analysed in the following paragraphs, starting with two examples of a common interaction pattern in group A.



#### Excerpts 3 and 4

Subsequently, the postings in group A become shorter, containing jokes, more emoticons and other more personal considerations. In Excerpt 3, a Colombian boy introduces himself with the colloquial greeting 'Hey guys', which is more informal than the initial one in this group, implying a casual way of interacting, similar to friendship-driven, social media practices. His introduction includes a wish to know more about the others' cultures and his gratitude for being part of this group. Furthermore, he displays his digital vernacular by using emoticons and abbreviations for common phrases, such as 'Thk u' for 'thank you' (cf. Lyddy, Farina, Hanney, Farrell, & O'Neill, 2014; Thorne, 2009). The first



comment from a Swedish girl is a question ending with a smiley, followed by a Finnish girl who instead begins her question with a smiley. Both questions posted by the girls are fairly properly formulated, but their uses of emoticons indicate an uptake of a casual tone and illustrate a tendency towards a remix of in-school and out-of-school parlance. By using hedges such as 'I guess' and 'haha', the answers to the questions provide a personal touch, and these small signs of laughter, accomplished through the use of emoticons, become a way of relating the schooled activity to a common social media practice. In Goffman's (1961) terminology it also shows a way of achieving a *role distance*, that is, a desire to demonstrate an understanding of the applied framing of the activity but also a wish to display some degree of resistance. Excerpt 3 shows an interaction among participants from different countries, which seems to interact with the fact that the overall institutional way of framing the activity is not really challenged.

Excerpt 4 presents another example of participants from different countries, where a Swedish girl states that she likes a particular song. Using music as a basis for interacting on social media is common in friendship-driven, online practices. The posting ends with a question and a smiley: 'What do you think about it? :)'. The first comment from a Colombian boy displays irony, accomplished both with the use of emoticons and the purport of his statement, 'no comment', which is understood by the Swedish girl, who responds, 'haha you think he is so good youre speechless?;)'. The ironic tone implies that the comment is keyed into a make-believe framing of the interaction henceforth. According to the framing theory, make-believe framings of activities take precedence and are part of the interpretation of the continuing interaction (Goffman, 1974). Consequently, the Colombian boy's reply, 'jajaja no!' ('jajaja' means 'hahaha' in Spanish), continues the playful framing, and another Swedish girl adds a comment with more laughter. The interaction in this thread is framed by involving the students' out-of-school familiarity with discussion conventions on social media sites (cf. Blattner & Fiori, 2011).

The two examples from group B (Excerpts 5 and 6) illustrate a general characteristic of the continuing framing in this group, where the interaction draws on the students' experience of interacting in social media spaces in their native language, enabling a pragmatic use of English.





Thats's My favorite movie

Gilla · Kommentera · den 1 februari 2013 kl. 20:01

3 personer gillar detta. Visat av 108

Michael Svensson which of the two is your favorite the one with or the one without 3D  
den 1 februari 2013 kl. 20:30 · Gilla

Emma Spjeller Whitout 3D!!!  
den 1 februari 2013 kl. 20:36 · Gilla · 1

Michael Svensson why do you like this movie so much  
den 1 februari 2013 kl. 23:06 · Gilla

Emma Spjeller I don't know really :)  
den 2 februari 2013 kl. 06:41 · Gilla

fiction.. It has a love story in it... We call it realistic  
den 4 februari 2013 kl. 22:37 · Gilla · 1



http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WQJQRCM18p4

Manchester United – Lift it High (it's all about belief) (w/ lyrics)  
youtube.com

It's all about  
about belle

Gilla · Kommentera · Dela · den 24 februari 2013 kl. 23:59

2 personer gillar detta. Visat av 108

Nicolas Toleno this song is unic, i love manchester  
den 25 februari 2013 kl. 00:00 · Gilla

Juan Hernandez you don fooling anybody you ar from barcelona dude  
den 25 februari 2013 kl. 00:02 · Gilla · 1

Nicolas Toleno manchester it's unic listen this song  
den 25 februari 2013 kl. 00:03 · Gilla

Alfonso Torres I agree it's all about believe!!!!  
den 1 mars 2013 kl. 02:19 · Gilla

Nicolas Toleno Man United is the best mate  
den 4 mars 2013 kl. 20:58 · Gilla · 3

#### Excerpts 5 and 6

In Excerpt 5, a Swedish girl states, 'That's My favorite movie', including a picture of *Titanic*'s cinema poster. Likewise, several students in group B post topics of their favourite movies from a variety of genres, along with a picture of each (other examples are *Monsters Inc. 2*, *The Notebook*, *Hannibal*, *Pikachu* and *Harry Potter*). The first comment in this thread is from a Swedish boy who asks, 'which of the two is your favorite the one with or the one without 3D', a highly relevant question coinciding with the *Titanic* 3D movie's release in Sweden. The answer 'Without!!!)' is short and mundane, with three exclamation marks to emphasise the choice, and a smiley. The Swedish boy then continues by asking the fairly proper question, 'Why do you like the movie so much [the name of the Swedish girl]', which is answered with 'I don't know really! :)'. The final comment is from the Colombian teacher expressing her thoughts about the movie, 'It has a love story in it', which could also be perceived as a speculation about why the Swedish girl likes the movie so much, and concluding with a genre determination of it: '... We call it realistic fiction'. This elucidatory comment from the Colombian teacher indicates that the role of a teacher as an authority is not altogether challenged by the interactive space in this Facebook group (cf. Applebee & Langer, 2011). This thread exhibits signs of remixing of in-school and out-of-school parlance; complete sentences are interspersed with short answers, flavoured with emoticons. Online interaction in friendship-driven groups is often built on content that is brought in from outside of that specific platform (Ito et al., 2009), such as music or movies. The framing of the interaction thus largely parallels a framing of out-of-school, social media communication. However, the posting also relates to a framing in line with the overall educational circumstance, with quite formal questions asked as an English exercise yet with an appreciation of the other students as the audience.

Excerpt 6 shows a Colombian boy's posting, which combines two quite common topics in this group – music and sport. The posting simply consists of a link to a song about the football club Manchester United, 'Lift it High (All About Belief)'. He continues with the comment, 'this song is unic, i love Manchester'. This is immediately taken up in a playful manner by another Colombian boy, stating, 'you don fooling anybody you ar from barcelona dude'. The response to this is 'it's unic listeen this song'. The Colombian teacher enters the discussion a couple of days later, omitting the football context and making a more general statement: 'I agree it's all about believe!!!!'. Although the teacher's framing is quite formal, she adds a flavour of colloquial parlance by ending her comment with five exclamation marks (cf. Lyddy et al., 2014). A Swedish boy posts the last comment several days later, contextualising the interaction in this thread once again with regard to football, stating, 'Man United is the best mate :-D'. The language use in the thread is built on conventions of out-of-school, social media parlance and not on expressions that are taught in school. The framing in this thread corresponds with friendship-driven groups, with football as the main affinity (Ito et al., 2009). Moreover, the interaction in this thread is communicative even if in large parts it is not written in correct English, and despite the boys' linguistic shortcomings, the English language is maintained.

### Postings with many comments

The most significant result in both groups is that the longest threads (postings with multiple comments) are created by students from the same class who already know one another. The characteristics here are the framing in line with friendship-driven online practices, with the affinity as essential, the issues discussed as well known and the humorous, ironic comments (Ito et al., 2009). Furthermore, postings of this kind are conducted almost synchronously, comparable with chat discussions. The two longest threads in both groups exemplify these findings (Excerpts 7 and 8). The thread from group A has forty-six comments and starts with a posting from a Finnish boy who jokes about his age. In group B, the longest thread consists of forty-four comments and starts with a Colombian girl's post about having the Sunday blues.



**Riku Vuorilainen**  
hello everybody, im 5 yrs old  
Gilla · Kommentera · Följ inlägget · den 10 april kl. 16:15

👍 11 personer gillar detta.

**Vera Lohmeyer** Riku, we know that :)  
den 10 april kl. 16:18 · Gilla · 🔄 5

**Riku Vuorilainen** i know that you know it :D  
den 10 april kl. 16:19 · Gilla

**Vera Lohmeyer** :P  
den 10 april kl. 16:19 · Gilla

**Jukka Niemela** Riku, you probably mean 15 years old? :)  
den 10 april kl. 16:54 · Gilla

**Riku Vuorilainen** no im not that either :D  
den 10 april kl. 16:55 · Gilla

**Riku Vuorilainen** jukka please join the keskustelu  
den 10 april kl. 16:58 · Gilla

**Roope Karhonen** Riku är fyrtton år  
den 10 april kl. 16:58 · Gilla

**Riku Vuorilainen** kirjutetaan fjorton\* :DD  
den 10 april kl. 16:59 · Gilla

**Roope Karhonen** Riku is 14 yrs old...  
den 10 april kl. 16:59 · Gilla

**Riku Vuorilainen** asennetta vaa hei roope :  
den 10 april kl. 16:59 · Gilla

**Riku Vuorilainen** and roope is 12  
den 10 april kl. 16:59 · Gilla

**Roope Karhonen** we don't remember little mistakes  
den 10 april kl. 17:00 · Gilla

**Riku Vuorilainen** but big yes  
den 10 april kl. 17:01 · Gilla

**Riku Vuorilainen** MUSTAaHUUMORIA  
den 10 april kl. 17:01 · Gilla

**Riku Vuorilainen** fjorton  
den 10 april kl. 17:01 · Gilla

**Riku Vuorilainen** opi jo :D  
den 10 april kl. 17:01 · Gilla

**Roope Karhonen** learn learn fjorttonde  
den 10 april kl. 17:02 · Gilla

**Riku Vuorilainen** no no no: fyrtjotontodne  
den 10 april kl. 17:07 · Gilla

	Jukka Niemelä Boys remember things we talked about. Use english please. den 10 april kl. 17:12 via mobilen · <a href="#">Gilla</a>
	Riku Vuorilainen we actually used but you didn't noticed that cause roope has some talents den 10 april kl. 17:14 · <a href="#">Gilla</a>
	Annika Tuikka guys, try to behave. den 10 april kl. 17:15 · <a href="#">Gilla</a> ·  2
	Marjukka Pesonen it's acceptable, because boys are, as we can see, 5 years old. den 10 april kl. 17:18 · <a href="#">Gilla</a> ·  2
	Riku Vuorilainen Sorry... I was trying to speak English, but swedish is more easier than english den 10 april kl. 17:18 · <a href="#">Gilla</a>
	Riku Vuorilainen marjukka huutelee.. den 10 april kl. 17:19 · <a href="#">Gilla</a>
	Riku Vuorilainen OHO, se oliki suomee den 10 april kl. 17:19 · <a href="#">Gilla</a>
	Marjukka Pesonen boys,boys.... den 10 april kl. 17:19 · <a href="#">Gilla</a>
	Riku Vuorilainen girls, girls, girls! do you now that song? den 10 april kl. 17:19 · <a href="#">Gilla</a>
	Annika Tuikka O-O-O-OMG ,do you know that song ? please guys, BEHAVE! den 10 april kl. 17:21 · <a href="#">Gilla</a>
	Riku Vuorilainen annika, pplease.. den 10 april kl. 17:22 · <a href="#">Gilla</a>
	Riku Vuorilainen we see who behaves n school :D den 10 april kl. 17:23 · <a href="#">Gilla</a>
	Marjukka Pesonen .....hey plizz, try not to spam. this is not nice for anyone. den 10 april kl. 17:23 · <a href="#">Gilla</a> ·  1
	Riku Vuorilainen are we spamming? i dont see den 10 april kl. 17:23 · <a href="#">Gilla</a>
	Annika Tuikka riku; I do, you don't ! den 10 april kl. 17:24 · <a href="#">Gilla</a>
	Marjukka Pesonen when did you lost your ability to see ? den 10 april kl. 17:24 · <a href="#">Gilla</a> ·  1
	Annika Tuikka :D den 10 april kl. 17:24 · <a href="#">Gilla</a>
	Riku Vuorilainen you clearly dont know what is spammin, u want to see? den 10 april kl. 17:27 · <a href="#">Gilla</a>





 **Nooo tomorrow is MONDAY**

Gilla · Kommentera · den 24 februari 2013 kl. 22:52

 3 personer gillar detta.  Visat av 108

 **Juan Cristobal** seriously, no way jajaj  
den 24 februari 2013 kl. 23:00 · Gilla

 **Valeria Mendez Garcia** Oh yeah !!! This week is going to be to short, in our school we dont have class on friday.  
den 24 februari 2013 kl. 23:27 · Gilla

 **Laura Sofia Gonzalez** Ohh yeahh!!!  
den 24 februari 2013 kl. 23:28 · Gilla

 **Valeria Mendez Garcia** Lets make a party... Who wants to come...????  
den 24 februari 2013 kl. 23:29 · Gilla

 **Nicolas Talero** yeahhh!!! no school  
den 24 februari 2013 kl. 23:30 · Gilla

 **Laura Sofia Gonzalez** Jajajajaja PARTY IN Valeria's home the next friday  
den 24 februari 2013 kl. 23:31 · Gilla

 **Nicolas Talero** yes we have to dance with laura.... xd  
den 24 februari 2013 kl. 23:32 · Gilla

 **Laura Sofia Gonzalez** Nooo please with valeria because she is a litke bit crazy  
den 24 februari 2013 kl. 23:34 · Gilla

 **Nicolas Talero** jajajaja but you dance with more flow xd  
den 24 februari 2013 kl. 23:34 · Gilla

 **Nicolas Talero** and valeria is bad 😞  
den 24 februari 2013 kl. 23:35 · Gilla ·  1

 **Laura Sofia Gonzalez** Jajajajaja how you know it??  
den 24 februari 2013 kl. 23:36 · Gilla

 **Nicolas Talero** jajaja because i know it and it's true  
den 24 februari 2013 kl. 23:37 · Gilla

 **Juan Cristobal** lets face it we cant dance jajajaj  
den 24 februari 2013 kl. 23:43 · Gilla

 **Nicolas Talero** jajajajaja yees  
den 24 februari 2013 kl. 23:44 · Gilla ·  1



 **Nicolas Tolosa** also we can go to the cinema  
den 24 februari 2013 kl. 23:44 · Gilla

 **Juan Cristancho** yea that's a good plan  
den 24 februari 2013 kl. 23:44 · Gilla

 **Nicolas Tolosa** yes maybe the womens want to see some movie good  
den 24 februari 2013 kl. 23:46 · Gilla

 **Juan Cristancho** why thre is no school at friday  
den 24 februari 2013 kl. 23:46 · Gilla

 **Nicolas Tolosa** jmmm i don´t know it  
den 24 februari 2013 kl. 23:48 · Gilla

 **Juan Cristancho** it doesn't matter, no school= fun all day long  
den 24 februari 2013 kl. 23:52 · Gilla

 **Valeria Mendez Cortés** that right... is curriculum day.... lets go to the cinema...  
den 24 februari 2013 kl. 23:53 · Gilla

 **Valeria Mendez Cortés** and then party in my house  
den 24 februari 2013 kl. 23:54 · Gilla

 **Juan Cristancho** no kidding?  
den 24 februari 2013 kl. 23:55 · Gilla

 **Nicolas Tolosa** jajaja but i go with some one else yees!! cinema!!  
den 24 februari 2013 kl. 23:55 · Gilla · 🍷 1

 **Laura Sofia Gonzalez** Jajaja this song is perfect to the conversation <http://m.youtube.com/watch?v=542urpAYRVA>



**Sak Noel – Loca People (La Gente esta muy Loca)(Official Video)**  
Sak Noel – Loca People (La Gente esta muy Loca)(Official Video) Track incluido e... Visa mer

den 24 februari 2013 kl. 23:55 · Gilla · Ta bort förhandsvisning

 **Valeria Mendez Cortés** Okey you gou with anybody to the cinema  
den 24 februari 2013 kl. 23:56 · Gilla

 **Nicolas Tolosa** jajajaja nooo!!! or maybe yes xd  
den 24 februari 2013 kl. 23:56 · Gilla

 **Valeria Mendez Cortés** why  
den 24 februari 2013 kl. 23:56 · Gilla

	Juan Cristancho i want to go den 24 februari 2013 kl. 23:57 · Gilla
	Valeria Mendosa Cortés Laura come on what is that video den 24 februari 2013 kl. 23:57 · Gilla
	Nicolas Talero jajajaja yes go den 24 februari 2013 kl. 23:57 · Gilla · 👍 1
	Valeria Mendosa Cortés okey juanpis you go den 24 februari 2013 kl. 23:57 · Gilla
	Juan Cristancho --" den 24 februari 2013 kl. 23:57 · Gilla
	Nicolas Talero jajaja come on all den 24 februari 2013 kl. 23:57 · Gilla · 👍 1
	Juan Cristancho ? den 24 februari 2013 kl. 23:58 · Gilla
	Juan Cristancho that song god jajaja den 24 februari 2013 kl. 23:59 · Gilla · 👍 1
	Nicolas Talero jajaja yes den 25 februari 2013 kl. 00:00 · Gilla
	Laura Sofia Gonzalez Guys you are crazy like say the song den 25 februari 2013 kl. 00:01 · Gilla · 👍 2
	Juan Cristancho i'm not crazy den 25 februari 2013 kl. 00:03 · Gilla · 👍 2
	Laura Sofia Gonzalez I agree. Totally. den 25 februari 2013 kl. 15:55 · Gilla · 👍 2
	Nicolas Talero If im correct jajajajajaj means "lol" (hahahahahahah) den 25 februari 2013 kl. 19:47 · Gilla
	Alisa Yurina Soliman What's wrong with Mondays anyway??? You guys don't work hard on Mondays, lets be real!!!! den 10 mars 2013 kl. 22:02 · Gilla · 👍 1
	Laura Sofia Gonzalez We ALWAYS work very hard den 12 mars 2013 kl. 00:47 · Gilla
	Sebastian Mayorga talk for yourself den 12 mars 2013 kl. 03:01 · Gilla · 👍 1

Excerpts 7 and 8

In Excerpt 7, the Finnish boy starts by joking about his age: ‘hello everybody, im 5 yrs old’ (see also Lantz-Andersson et al., 2013). With this statement, the boy is distancing himself from the schooled way of framing the activity in group A, which could be considered a kind of *role distance* (Goffman, 1961). In other words, the boy shows his refusal to go along with the common, quite formal tone in the postings. With the joke, the framing is keyed into a make-believe type, which could be a more familiar way for the boy to frame discussions on social media. Accordingly, this facilitates his peers’ immediate playful comments, such as ‘we know that;’, acknowledging his childishness. This illustrates the context-specific ways of understanding a posting, where the respondent has to accept the way the posting is framed by maintaining this frame and continuing to display to the audience what it is that is going on here (Goffman, 1974). The interaction continues with a lot of nonsense, where the boys in the thread mix their native language with Swedish and English (they come from a Swedish-speaking part of Finland, so most students also speak Swedish). The flow of the interaction and teasing and playing with words and expressions make this thread resemble a spoken interaction or a chat, and it is also conducted more or less synchronously for half an hour. However, the combination of the students’ native language with other languages that is shown here is extremely rare in both Facebook groups. Nonetheless, this does not mean a lack of awareness about the audience, because when the interaction is not in English, the realisation about the audience is evident in the responses. For example, the Finnish teacher posts, ‘Boys remember things we talked about. Use english please’, and two Finnish girls continue with ‘guys, try to behave’ and ‘.....hey pllzz, try not to spam. this is not nice for anyone’. With these postings, the boys’ attention is drawn to the audience, reminding them to use English and reprimanding them for fooling around and employing languages that could not be understood by the audience. Thus, the boys’ manner of mixing languages does not match the considered appropriate framing of the interaction here, where the presence of the students from the other countries as the audience is essential (cf. Boyd, 2010).

In Excerpt 8 from group B, almost all the comments are interactions by the Colombian classmates, except two comments. The fifth comment from the end, ‘I agree. Totally’, and the subsequent comment, ‘If im correct jajajajajaj means ‘lol’ (hahahahahahah)’, are from two Swedish boys. This thread is initiated by a Colombian girl who posted, ‘Nooo tomorrow is MONDAY’. The capital letters of the word ‘MONDAY’ indicate an emphasis or even a loud cry. The posting thus expresses the author’s current emotional state, which is common in friendship-driven, social media communications (Manago et al., 2012). The uptake of this posting is framed quite ironically by a boy in her class, writing, ‘seriously, no way jajaj’. In the next comment, another classmate reminds them that they have no class on the following Friday: ‘Oh yeah !!! This week is going to be to short, in our school we don’t have class on Friday’. This comment can be considered a reminder directed to the other Colombian students, but the ‘our’ modifying school implies an awareness of the audience. The uptake by the initial girl is done by echoing the introduction of the previous

comment, ‘Ohh yeahh!!!’, spelled with a double h. This kind of misspelling is part of the digital vernacular for emphasis. Then the second girl suggests that they should plan a party. This becomes the main topic in the continuing thread, alongside associations and jokes, for example, if some of them are crazy or if they should dance, go to the cinema, upload a song about partying and so on. The interaction resembles linguistic activities in friendship-driven networks – playful, with short comments, free associations and posting of links, among others. Furthermore, it is characterised by a flow of various issues addressed in the style of mundane communication on social media, displaying fairly simple language but communicative and effective in its free association, with similarities to talk (cf. Black, 2009). Although it is obvious from the content of the interaction that the students know one another well, the communication is in English throughout the thread, except for laughter (jajajaja) that is written in Spanish. This indicates that the Colombian classmates frame the interaction with a sensibility and knowledge of the international audience and thus, of the context of schooling (Boyd, 2010). Both Excerpts 7 and 8 are representative of updates that facilitate interaction; such threads also illustrate the importance of the communicative involvement of the initial author. These kinds of threads point to the possibility of negotiating the framing of the linguistic activities by combining their schooled ways of language use with their out-of-school digital vernacular to practise mundane communication in the targeted language.

## DISCUSSION

Basing the study on sociocultural perspectives on learning and scrutinising the interaction in the Facebook groups through the analytical lens of Goffman’s (1974) framework theory make it possible to discern the characteristics of the framings. The results imply that initially, the framing of the linguistic activity relates to the strong tradition of the schooled way of interaction and is not particularly challenged by the social media context. By recognising the task as an interaction in a foreign language with other students whom they do not know, in a group that cannot be classified as either friendship-driven or interest-driven, the social media context simply becomes subordinated. However, as the interaction proceeds, the framing becomes interspersed with the students’ digital, out-of-school parlance. This is particularly evident in the long threads consisting of a local, internal and synchronous conversation, tied to students from the same class, but still with an awareness of the public aspects of the practice. In such threads, the commitment increases, which is observed in the number and frequency of the comments. The students’ interactions with classmates lower the required threshold for maintaining the conversation. From a student perspective, there are seemingly more interesting things at stake, that is, the framework verges on friendship-driven, out-of-school, social media interaction. This finding is consistent with earlier general research on social media practices, concluding that despite the potential for a larger audience, the interaction in friendship-driven practices is usually done with people whom



the users already know, as a way of acknowledging one another in a public space (Alhabash et al., 2012; Boyd, 2010; Manago et al., 2012).

A major conclusion from the study is that awareness about the audience plays a significant role in how the students maintain the interaction as on a stage (cf. Goffman, 1974). This implies that the interaction is understood not only as a dialogue among the active interlocutors but also as a performance of social connection before a broader audience, which the participants acknowledge in assessing whether or not they believe their performance is socially appropriate, interesting or relevant (cf. Boyd, 2010; Selwyn, 2012). As Pietraß argues, ‘in the logic of frame theory, media content has to be understood as communication of an ‘author’ with his reading, listening and viewing audience’ (2009, p. 137). The absence of spatial boundaries and the ‘invisibility’ of the audience in the social media context imply that the textual genres of the communication need to be understood when deciding how to behave and assess others’ reactions and how to frame the interaction. Thus, the dynamics of the linguistic activity are articulated well in some of the curricula goals, involving opportunities for students to adapt their language to different situations and audiences, as well as to develop confidence in their ability to use the language, by practising different strategies for supporting communication when the language skills are insufficient. However, the students mostly interact with already-known participants from the same class, that is, the social media space is generally used for communicating *in front of* the international audience than actually *with* them. These findings suggest that the international audience causes the students from the same class to maintain the conversation in the targeted language, and they rarely switch to their first language, allowing space for practising colloquial English of educational significance.

The study’s results also indicate that the hybridity between oral and written communication makes the linguistic interaction rather unique, that is, the spontaneous writing that is common in this type of practice has no real equivalent in offline contexts. Consequently, this raises issues about the discussion on the new varieties of the literacies essential for communication in the twenty-first century, and how digital vernacular texts differ from or align with conventional literacy forms (Thorne, 2009). What counts as literacy in such spaces becomes evident in participants’ interaction, that is, how they engage with and understand one another, what they accept and so on (Castanheira et al., 2001). The intertwined framing between schooled language-learning activities and the use of social media thus implies spaces where students can practise language by means of communicating in their own terms in a genre that is not fully set up by the institutional norms and by utilising their familiarity with social media site conventions (cf. Lantz-Andersson, 2015).

In line with earlier research results (e.g. Boyd & Ellison, 2008; Chartrand, 2012), this study reveals that social media offers opportunities for mundane communication with real global audiences, in a casual and encouraging context – in spaces that might motivate students to dare to communicate and begin

practising a second language in a known context. The international audience plays an important role in maintaining English as the language to use. Despite the potential international communication, many of the postings receive no comments at all or just a few from schoolmates, and the participation could partially be perceived as one-way, passive consumption (cf. Selwyn, 2009a).

This study was designed without including mandatory elements and assessment. However, to meet the requirements of formal education, some important questions remain regarding the implications of this communicative practice for students' emergent language skills. Hence, further studies are needed comprising discussions on developed practices, ways to encourage active participation, criteria for assessment and so on. This small-scale case study indicates some potential for using social media as part of second language learning by exposing the students to the colloquial, unauthorised language of young people, which is otherwise not easily accessed without going abroad (cf. Kern, 2014). The results thus indicate possibilities for interplay between a schooled, structured framing and a more flexible one where the students can practise the target language in a relaxed, colloquial space for learning, which is valuable for establishing future language practices. Considering the indisputable trend towards even larger social networks, we will most probably witness an expansion of utilising social media for a variety of educational purposes. Addressing such developments requires further critical research on the implications for learning and discussions about what this kind of interaction means in relation to new varieties of literacies.

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