

THE USE OF SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES FOR LANGUAGE PRACTICE AND LEARNING

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Abstract:

Recent descriptions of online social networking communities (i.e., Facebook, MySpace) within the Web 2.0 movement¹ have suggested that these sites might be used in educational contexts to promote cultural awareness, interaction, and collaboration (Ferdig et al., 2007). Here it is argued that social networking sites can also be used for language teaching and learning. The purpose of this paper is therefore threefold: (1) to provide a theoretical framework justifying the use and incorporation of social networking sites in foreign language courses; (2) to review existing social networking sites and provide suggestions for how they might be used in different language contexts; and (3) to describe an ongoing study in which one social networking site, Orkut, is being used for a course in Portuguese as a foreign language. Besides suggesting that social networking sites can serve as an authentic way to be exposed to language and culture outside of the classroom, it is also argued that participation in social networking sites can be an ideal medium for language practice and learning.

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Using social networking sites for language practice and learning

Social networking sites are interactive social spaces on the Internet where people can communicate and network with others. Examples of such sites include MySpace and Facebook, both of which have several million registered users. Once a person has joined and created a profile, they can post information about themselves on their site, upload pictures and videos, and connect with friends. Members can also join different groups and communities that interest them. Among friends or groups, a member can send and receive messages, get information on upcoming events, and also get notification of the latest changes their friends have made to their own sites via the site aggregator. Thus reading, writing, and some familiarity with social networking technology are necessary for participation in any social networking site. As Ferdig, Coutts, DiPietro, Lok and Davis (2007) describe, participating in social networking communities, what they refer to as SNCs, minimally requires “users to have access, to be literate, and to be educated” (10). The popularity of social networking sites has exploded in the past five years, as has the availability of different applications² in these social network platforms. Social networking sites have therefore expanded opportunities for instantaneous communication and sharing with others, be it via written, video or even iconic format.

At present, there are over 100 social networking websites available. The membership of these social networking sites is worldwide; MySpace alone has 110 million users, with 45% of them outside of the United States (Swartz, 2008). The result of this global expansion has required that these sites be available in multiple languages. Most social networking sites allow users to change and designate their profile language, giving users several different

language options. MySpace Latino provides a platform completely in Spanish; Orkut allows users to designate their language as English, Portuguese, Catalan, Greek, or Dutch, among others. Other social networking sites have been created that are particular to just one language or country; Grono is popular in Poland, for example, while Mixi has found remarkable success in Japan with a strictly Japanese platform. These sites have great potential as pedagogical tools and as promoters of multicultural awareness. For example, Ferdig et al. (2007) discuss how they could be used in the field of education:

SNCs provide a variety of opportunities within multicultural education. By joining these online networks, participants have the opportunity to learn about other cultures, interact with participants from other cultures or their own, and collaborate with participants across the world. (p. 10)

Besides promoting multiculturalism, social networking sites have also caught the attention of applied linguists as an emerging technology that can be used for language learning (Godwin-Jones, 2006). Godwin-Jones was the first to suggest social networking sites potential for language learning and also for the development of electronic literacy, as interacting in social networking sites exposes the learner to authentic language use. To date however, no study has reported on the use of social networking sites with practice and learning opportunities in a foreign language (FL) as the end goal.

Theoretical Motivation for the Use of Social Networking Sites

Before incorporating any new technology into the language learning setting, the reason for doing so should be motivated by theories of second language acquisition. Indeed, the inclusion of social networking sites in a FL classroom can be motivated by the theoretical underpinnings of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT),

to include Schmidt's (1995; 2001) Noticing Hypothesis and the Output Hypothesis (Swain, 1985; 1995). First, TBLT is a pedagogical framework for language teaching premised on providing learners with real-world tasks during which focus on form and interaction can take place. By providing learners with real-world tasks for language learning instead of units based on grammatical sequencing, learner readiness is better taken into account (Doughty, 2003).³ Myriad definitions of tasks abound; a general approach is that tasks are real-world activities in which the communication of meaning is primary, and the end goal of the task is accomplished via the use of the language. According to Ellis, a task "requires the participants to function primarily as 'language users' in the sense that they must employ the same kinds of communicative processes as those involved in real-world activities" (2003: 3). An important component of TBLT is that tasks are authentic, meeting the needs of what learners might experience in the world outside of the classroom.

TBLT integrates many of the main tenants of the Noticing Hypothesis and the Output Hypothesis, two important theories of second language learning. The Noticing Hypothesis premises that learning cannot take place if learners do not notice forms in the input. In other words, learners must attend to and notice features in the input in order for it those features to be learned. Schmidt explains: "SLA is largely driven by what learners pay attention to and notice in target language input and what they understand the significance of noticing input to be" (2001: 3-4). Some tasks can be designed to help learners notice critical features in the input (e.g., consciousness-raising tasks as described by Ellis (1997)). At the same time, while carrying out tasks (for example, via a social networking site) learners also have the opportunity to produce output. Swain's (1985; 1995) Output Hypothesis posits that it is actually having to *produce* language that causes learners to think about their interlanguage, and that input alone

may not be enough for certain aspects of L2 acquisition. In having to interact in another language, learners are 'pushed' to produce comprehensible input so that they can be understood. While Swain's work was mostly completed under the premise of conversational interaction (i.e., where L2 output subsequently prompts recasts from a NNS or NS interlocutor in conversation), it can also be argued that carrying out a task online in a social network site, where other members can see what one has posted and interact with that post, is an equally beneficial form of output. Some social networking sites do have mediums through which learners can interact synchronously (via chatting or video chats) and receive feedback; all also allow for asynchronous posts that let learners practice their writing, where *ex post facto* feedback can be given. Having this opportunity to carry out real-world tasks, to receive authentic input in a social network setting and to pay attention to forms, receive feedback and also have the opportunity to produce output, are what makes social networking sites an ideal medium for language practice.

While the above theories have been empirically proven in the conversational 'oral' mode, it is an interesting question to ask whether or not learners can notice the unique online e-discourses omnipresent in the social networking setting and apply them to their own FL online output in such a setting. How FL interaction takes place within a social networking site still needs to be explored, especially considering the multitude of input and output types: instantaneous postings, photos, music, videos, media content, and the potential to connect with an almost limitless number of people online at the same time. E-discourse features of social networking sites include abbreviations or acronyms in the language, emoticons, and even the use of graphics or letters to communicate an iconic message. Shetzer and Warshauer (2000) see the importance of being familiar in e-discourse, and so it seems that giving learners the

opportunity to notice and interact with e-discourse in a FL would be a valuable part of any language course:

[The Internet] is becoming one of the primary media of literacy and communication practices in the current era... Thus it is no exaggeration to say that the development of literacy and communication skills in new online media is critical to success in almost all walks of life. (p. 1)

Giving learners access to e-discourse in the FL is especially important to consider, as the very nature of CMC has been shown to mediate how people interact with each other. For example, interaction in the CMC mode has been shown to differ from interaction in the face-to-face (FTF) mode, sometimes with better learning outcomes (Abrams, 2003; Böhkle, 2003; Kern, 1995; Lai & Zhao, 2006; Salaberry, 2000; Sullivan & Pratt, 1996; Sykes, 2005; Warschauer, 1996). More research is needed in this area. A TBLT approach to this line of inquiry is particularly useful, and well as for studies that want to explore FL learners' computer-mediated communication (CMC) and interaction (via the completion of real-world tasks) within social networking sites.

Existing Social Networking Sites

To begin, how might a practitioner go about deciding which social networking site to use for his or her language class or for a research investigation? The first step is deciding which site to use, as many exist and each presents their own unique formats, applications, and options for synchronous and asynchronous communication. A summarized list of sites that can be most beneficial for FL teachers, based on their popularity, language options, and technological platforms, is shown below. While some sites can be used in several different languages (see Table 1), others are particular to only one language, and in some cases, only one country (see Table 2).

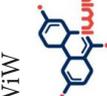
Table 1: Social networking sites with multiple language platforms (comparison of features)

	*Orkut	MySpace	Facebook	Friendster	LinkedIn	hi5
						
Web address	www.orkut.com	www.myspace.com	www.facebook.com	www.friendster.com	www.linkedin.com	www.hi5.com
Founder/Year	Orkut Büyükkökten, 2004	Tom Anderson, 2003	Mark Zuckerberg, 2004	Jonathan Abrams, 2002	Reid Hoffman, 2003	Ramu Yamamachi, 2003
Number of Users	67 million	114 million	90 million	75 million	24 million	80 million
Language(s)	Bulgarian, Catalan, Chinese, Croatian, Czech, Danish, Dutch,	English, Spanish (MySpace Latino); MySpace International	Catalan, Chinese, Czech, Danish, Dutch, English, Finnish, French,	Chinese, Indonesian, English, Japanese, Korean, Malay,	English, Spanish	Chinese, Czech, Danish, Dutch, English, French,

English, Estonian, Filipino, French, Greek, Hungarian, Indonesian, Italian, Korean, Latvian, Norwegian, Portuguese, Romanian, Russian, Spanish, Slovak, Slovenian, Swedish, Turkish, Vietnamese	Danish, Dutch, Finnish, French, German, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Norwegian, Polish, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish, Swedish, Turkish	Spanish, Thai, Vietnamese	anyone can join—must have Google account	anyone can join	anyone 18 years and up can join	anyone can join	Accessibility
Yes- “bater papo”	Yes- “MySpace IM”	No	Yes- “chat”	school or work email address is required	anyone can join	anyone can join	Yes, but not built into site. Must add a chat application

Unique features	depoimentos and video messages	learners can create their own site URLS; request text message notices of site activity	Originally intended for school populations (universities, high schools)	personal interactive avatars are possible	JobInsider	learners can create their own site URLs
Monitoring possible?	Instructor can be requested as a 'friend' to observe learners' sites	Instructor can be requested as a 'friend'; get activity updates from learners' sites, send out bulletin messages to all learners	Instructor can be requested as a 'friend'; get updated on learners' activity in mini-feed aggregator	Instructors can be requested as friends, and see learners "latest updates"	Instructor could create a "group" and have everyone join. This site might be used for an English for Specific Purpose class, where learners post their resume/cv	Instructor can be requested as friend and observe learner site updates

Table 2: Social networking sites for specific languages / specific countries (comparison of features)

	      						
Web address	http://mixi.jp	www.cyworld.com	www.iwiw.hu	http://lunarstorm.se	www.ning.com	http://grono.net	www.cloob.com
Founder Year	Kenji Kasahar, 2004	SK Communications, 1998	Virgo Systems Kft, 2002	Rickard Ericsson, 2000	Marc Andressen & Gina Bianchini, 2004	Unknown	Unknown, 2004
Number of Users	Over 15 million users	Over 12 million	Over 1.5 million	1.2 million	Does not specify	1.7 million	Unknown after various changes implemented by the government
Language(s)	Japanese	Korean, Chinese, Japanese, English, Vietnamese	Hungarian	Swedish	English	Polish	Persian

Accessibility	invitation only; a Japanese cell phone email address is also needed	anyone can join	invitation only	anyone can join; users can also pay 25 kroner monthly for Lunarstorm Pro	anyone can join	invitation only	invitation only
Synchronous chat availability	Yes	Cyworld collaborates with Nate.com to provide users with an instant messenger service	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Unknown
Monitoring possible?	instructor can be requested as friend and observe site development	instructor can be requested as friend	instructor can be requested as friend	instructor can be requested as friend	instructor can be requested as friend	na	na

The pedagogical rationale for employing these social networking sites varies according to the goal of the task(s). For example, while some might be used for socializing (i.e., MySpace), other sites are used with specific outcomes in mind, such as job hunting, marketing or dating. An instructor might have learners interact in Facebook to practice their L2, or create a photo album on their Facebook page with descriptions of each picture in the L2. An adult-based ESL class that promotes obtaining a job in the United States might have its students participate in LinkedIn, a social networking site dedicated strictly to job networking. Learners could post a resume or curriculum vitae, upload cover letters, type notes in LinkedIn and market themselves to potential employers. At the same time, an instructor might consider using one of the social networking sites presented in Table 2 that are specific to L2s or other cultures. Mixi is strictly a social networking site in Japanese and is very popular in Japan. Students of Japanese as a FL might use this site to interact with each other and/or native speakers in Japan for extra practice outside of class. iWiW, a site that functions solely in the Hungarian language, could be an ideal platform for students of Hungarian. In language-specific sites such as these, learners will get practice writing in the FL, be able to see videos and share pictures with native speakers, and see how native speakers employ their language's online discourse in such a setting. Thus, not only do social networking sites provide students with an opportunity to practice writing, interacting, socializing, and even speaking (as videos can be uploaded to many sites), they also are a domain in which native-speaker colloquialisms, e-abbreviations, and other forms of socialization are exchanged. This gives learners a chance to notice and observe how native speakers carry out interaction in a social network medium, and also attempt to use these means of socializing for themselves.

Brazil's Orkut: A Social Networking Site for Portuguese as a FL

As an example, the current study will now describe one social networking site, Orkut, which is presently being used for an ongoing study, and also how it is being used for Portuguese foreign language courses at Georgetown University. This section therefore serves as a model for other instructors or researchers who might have similar goals for their own students.

The case of Orkut is particularly interesting due to the fact that it has a significant stronghold in Brazil. While the social networking sites MySpace and Facebook are also available in Portuguese, they have not enjoyed the same popularity as Orkut. Currently, Google's Orkut is the most common socialization network in Brazil, with approximately 67 million users (53.9% of which are in Brazil, www.orkut.com). In fact, it is the most visited website in Brazil (Top Sites Brazil, www.alexa.com), second only to Google.com. In a recent interview with *Conta Corrente*, Orkut founder Büyükkökten himself admitted:

I knew that it was going to be successful, but I wasn't expecting it to be so successful in Brazil, which is great. One of the questions I get asked the most is why is Orkut such a phenomenon in Brazil (Büyükkökten, 2008).

The use of Orkut in a FL classroom is potentially very meaningful to students, as so many native speakers of Portuguese in Brazil use Orkut. To date, at least, three masters' theses and one doctoral dissertation, all completed in Brazil, describe phenomena in Orkut; none however have been from the perspective of second language learning. Their topics include online marketing (Koo, 2006), the use of the internet for political campaigning (Roman, 2005), how

women in the Orkut community *Mothern* define their status of motherhood and femininity (Braga, 2006), and the use of reference to 19th century epistolary novels online (Filho, 2007). References to Orkut in Brazilian mainstream pop music are an even more prolific source that demonstrates the site's popularity. A consultation with the musical website Vagalume (www.vagalume.uol.com.br) reveals over 120 songs that mention Orkut in their lyrics. One song by Frank Aguiar, titled 'Sou Brasileiro' [I'm Brazilian] has the line "Vou te excluir do meu orkut" ["I'm going to kick you off my Orkut"]. A second song, by Adilson Richartz Jr., sings "Nós é pobre, mas tem Orkut" [We're poor, but we have Orkut]. It is surprising that no one to date has attempted to use Orkut to promote Portuguese as a FL or for language practice. This is the goal of Georgetown's project, as well as to justify Godwin-Jones' (2006) claim that social networking sites have great potential to promote language practice and learning.

Specifically, the study aims to examine the role of Orkut as a technology through which students can carry out tasks, notice new forms (to include e-discourse), receive authentic input and produce output. In giving learners real-world tasks to carry out in Orkut, the study seeks to: (1) provide learners with an authentic medium for interaction, one that Brazilians use on a daily basis; (2) expose learners to the unique Brazilian e-discourse present in Orkut; and (3) examine how learners interact with a social networking site in a foreign language. At present, the researchers are carrying out a study over the course of one semester in which students of Portuguese as a FL are interacting with Orkut outside of class. In line with the tenants of Task-Based Language Teaching, eight pedagogical tasks were designed for students to carry out over the semester, alongside their own interactions and postings within Orkut. To maintain ecological validity in this study, tasks were chosen that are real-world, authentic

tasks actually done by Brazilians as they construct and interact with their own Orkut sites (see Table 3).

Table 3 - Orkut tasks for students

Tarefa/ Task	In Portuguese	[Translation]
1	Criar a sua conta de Orkut e preencher o perfil social.	[Create your Orkut account and fill out your social profile.]
2	Pesquisar as comunidades de Orkut e se associar a pelo menos quatro que lhe interessam.	[Research Orkut communities and join at least four that interest you.]
3	Enviar scraps ¹ a dois de seus companheiros de aula.	[Send 'scraps' to two of your classmates.]
4	Criar um álbum de fotos na sua conta de Orkut, com pelo menos 4 fotos. Descreva cada foto em português (pode ser de família, amigos, viagens, etc.).	[Create a photo album in your Orkut account, with at least four photos. Describe each photo in Portuguese (they can be of family, friends, travel, etc.)]
5	Na opção de <i>Meus vídeos favoritos</i> , adicionar três vídeos de YouTube em português à sua página de Orkut.	[In the 'My favorite videos' option, add three YouTube videos that are in Portuguese to your Orkut page.]

- | | | |
|---|---|--|
| 6 | <p>Onde diz <i>depoimentos</i>, escrever um depoimento para alguém na sua página de Orkut sobre uma pessoa, como você mesmo, membro da família, melhor amigo/a, etc. Um bom exemplo seria ver as páginas de outras pessoas.</p> | <p>[Where it says ‘depoimentos’, write a testimonial for someone on their Orkut page about a person, such as yourself, a family member or best friend, etc. A good example would be to see pages of other people.]</p> |
| 7 | <p>Navegue o Orkut para conhecer brasileiros que usam este meio. Que tipo de pessoas você encontrou (jovens, velhos, estudantes, profissionais, etc.)? Procure membros do Orkut que tenham interesses semelhantes aos seus.</p> | <p>[Search in Orkut to learn more about the Brazilians that use this medium. What kind of people do you come across (young, old, students, professionals, etc.)? Look for Orkut members that have the same kinds of interests as you.]</p> |
| 8 | <p>Dentro desses sites de tarefa 7, prestem atenção a pelo menos 5 palavras de vocabulário, ou frases (ou mesmo detalhes) do português que agora são novas para você. Favor envia sua lista para a pesquisadora quando você terminar.</p> | <p>[Within the Task 7 sites, pay attention to at least five vocabulary words, phrases or even details of Portuguese that are new to you. When you finish, please send your list to the researcher.]</p> |
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To address the issue of privacy (Shetzer & Warschauer, 2000), participants were told that they could use their own names or aliases before creating their accounts. This was an important component of the study as it employed a new form of technology:

Você não precisa utilizar o seu nome verdadeiro se não quiser, caso queira manter a sua privacidade dado que é um site on-line e é público. Pode usar um pseudônimo (nome falso). [You do not have to use your real name if you do not want to, should you wish to maintain your privacy given that this is an online and public site. You can use a pseudonym (false name)].

Participants were also told that they did not have to upload a photo of themselves if they did not want to, so that those who wished to participate but not reveal their identity in an online medium could. Once students created their Orkut accounts, they were instructed to email the researcher their Orkut name. In this way, the researcher could look up participants in Orkut and request them as a friend (*amigo/a*) so that she could have access to each participant's site. This is because, as most social networking sites do, Orkut has a privacy feature that allows only those users designated as friends to view an Orkut website.

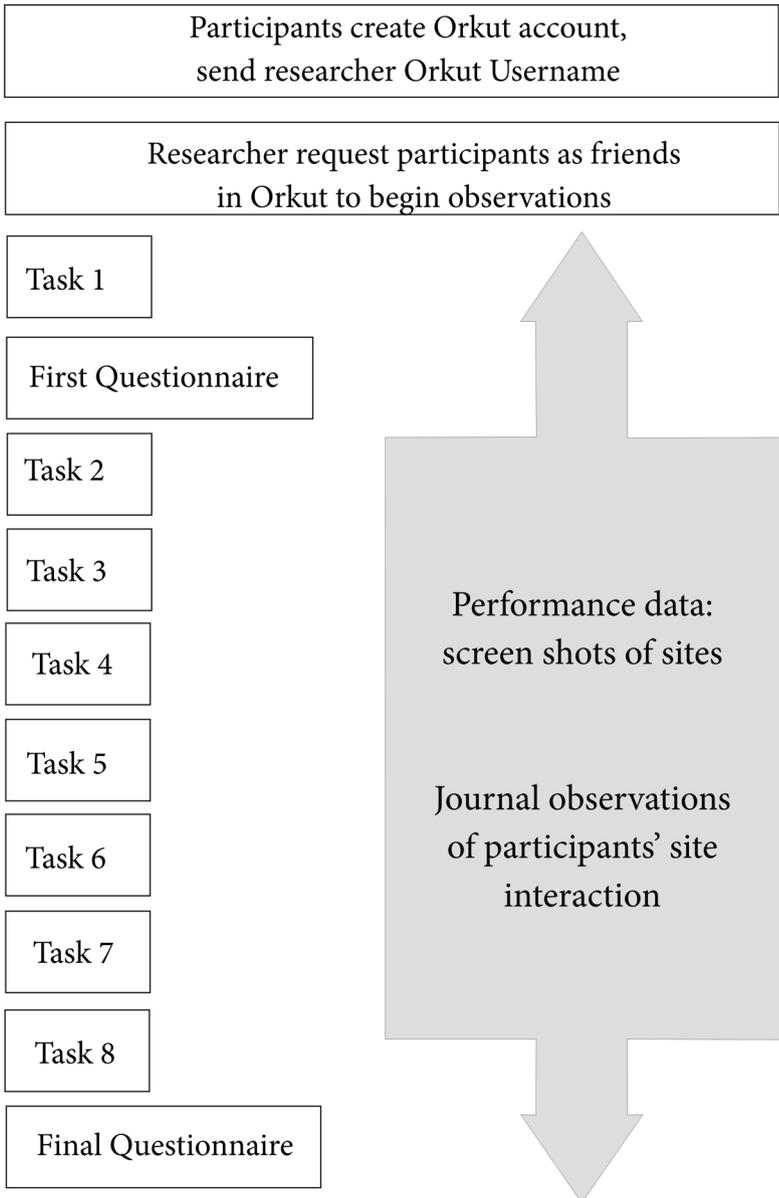
Participants in this study were recruited from three sections of the Portuguese for Spanish Speakers I courses. All of the participants thus already spoke English and Spanish, and were learning Portuguese as a FL. Questionnaire data indicated that participants had varied L1 backgrounds and had studied other languages as well, and all were between the ages of 18 and 22. Every participant indicated on their questionnaire that they already had a membership with at least one social networking site: 100% had Facebook, while two also had MySpace sites. Participants were offered extra credit for their participation in the study.

At present, 19 learners are participating in the study, and have L1 backgrounds that include English and Spanish. Throughout the semester, the researcher will email participants the *tarefa* (task) they are to complete in Orkut. After finishing the task, participants are

instructed to send the researchers an email or note through Orkut to inform them of their task completion. All correspondences will be done via email or messaging within Orkut.

Performance data (still ongoing) is being gathered by taking screen shots of each participant's Orkut site after completing each task. The researchers will also keep notes in a journal to catalog general observations of how participants' Orkut sites develop. For example, other activity that participants do in Orkut (besides the tasks) will be recorded, as is commentary on their interactions with each other, with other users, the language they use, and overall trends. Because no previous study has explored participant activity and interaction in a social networking site, data collection will be observatory in nature as to provide a holistic description of participant behavior in Orkut and gain insight on how Orkut might shape language output and learning. Questionnaire data will also be gathered via the two questionnaires given to participants—one, after the second task, and then a final post-treatment questionnaire. Both qualitative and quantitative data will be gained from these instruments. This use of multiple methods of observation: (1) taking screen shots of participants' Orkut sites; (2) maintaining observational notes in a journal; and (3) giving questionnaires, is for the purpose of triangulation so that the most comprehensive results possible can be obtained. A figure of the entire study procedure is provided below (figure 1), to serve as a model for how one might go about studying learner's use of a social networking site. Altogether, this study will last the duration of one semester.

Figure 1 - Study Design



Preliminary Results: primeira e segunda tarefa

So far, all participants have completed the first task in the target language, writing information on their backgrounds and providing descriptions of themselves in the social, professional, and personal information subtabs available in the profile section of Orkut. As an example, one learner, Participant 14, wrote in the following information on his profile (below in Portuguese and with English translation):

idade: 21	<i>age: 21</i>
idiomas que falo:	<i>languages I speak:</i>
Espanhol, Inglês (EUA)	<i>Spanish, English (USA)</i>
interesses no orkut: amigos	<i>orkut interests: friends</i>
etnia: hispânico/latino	<i>ethnicity: Hispanic/latin</i>
religião: Cristão/católico	<i>religion: Christian/Catholic</i>
altura: 5 pés 11 polegadas	<i>height: 5 feet 11 inches</i>
cor dos olhos: mel	<i>eye color: honey</i>
cor do cabelo: castanho escuro	<i>hair color: dark brown</i>
tipo físico: atlético(a)	<i>physical type: athletic</i>
aparência: atraente! 😊	<i>appearance: attractive! 😊</i>

All of the participants are so far using the target language to identify and describe themselves; most used their real names and uploaded photos of themselves for their profiles. Some have taken initiative and started searching for groups to join in Orkut, which is the goal of task 2. For this task, participants are to join groups pertinent to their own interests and identity, but also groups that connect them with Brazil. For example, one learner, who in his profile wrote that he was originally from Venezuela, has joined a group *Fanáticos por*

Arepa-Venezuela [Fanatics for Arepa-Venezuela], and later, *Eu amo a Venezuela!* [I love Venezuela!]. Another participant joined a group *Adoro correr* (I adore running), and a third participant, *Minnesota Tiberwolves*, to indicate one of his favorite teams. Reasons for which participants have joined groups are because groups are similar to those they belong to on Facebook, or they are groups that pertain to Brazil so that they can connect with Brazilians as well as the Portuguese language. As an example, participant 11 wrote:

“I joined the same groups I would join, say, on Facebook. I think this is important because it makes me learn words, contexts, and other important factors in the Portuguese language that I otherwise wouldn’t learn in the classroom but will want to know to describe myself to other people. For examples, I am in a group about protecting the environment, a group for vegetarians, a group that supports Barack Obama for president, a group of fans of the actor Gael Garcia Bernal, a group of Brazilians living in my hometown of San Francisco, and finally a Georgetown Portuguese for Spanish Speakers group! I joined because I am hoping to connect with and learn from people that I share similar values and interests as, and these are some of the issues that I care about the most or simply want to discuss about with a peer.”

When asked what they think of the use of Orkut as an activity to use outside of Portuguese class, students have provided positive feedback thus far. One participant has reported: “I think [implementing] Orkut is a great way to practice what we’ve learned in class. Plus, you are exposed to words you may not have been exposed to in class.” Many participants have also stated how interesting it is to see the way in which young people in Brazil interact on Orkut, what one of our participants has called “the Brazilian version of Facebook networking.” Another participant has shared that so far, Orkut shows

that "...Brazilian youth communicate much like American youth." While this commentary serves strictly as anecdotal feedback received so far from the students on Orkut, it seems that incorporating real-world tasks in this social networking site does promote cultural learning, practice in the L2, and learning opportunities. After all of the tasks are complete, the researchers look forward to analyzing final results from the study in the near future.

Applying the Orkut Model to other Languages

Other researchers or even classroom teachers could incorporate the same kind of pedagogical approach if they are interested in incorporating social networking site usage into their FL classrooms. Teachers might pre-design tasks as have been presented here, or simply require that their students interact in a social networking site (for example, ESL learners participating in Facebook) and observe their socializing via inductive methodology. Depending on available resources, instructors could also use other means of technology used in social network sites for creating tasks: a task could be designed that requires learners to watch videos posted on a social networking site by a native speaker, and then create their own video and post it to their site. Facebook for example is one site where user-posted videos for socialization and interaction are mainstream. The fact that social networking sites all provide the opportunities to read, write, interact in real time (via synchronous chat), upload videos of oneself speaking—all mechanisms of interaction shown empirically to promote language learning—makes them an ideal mode for language practice outside of the classroom that is novel, fun, and relevant to today's learners.

Conclusion

To conclude, the goal of this paper was to theoretically justify the use of social networking sites in foreign language courses; to summarize existing social networking sites; and to share the tasks and design of an ongoing study in which learners are interacting in the social networking site (Orkut for Brazilian Portuguese). Most importantly, argumentation for why social networking sites can be used for language practice and learning purposes has been provided, as well as examples of these sites and a model with which other researchers and instructors can approach them. Instructors and researchers alike can choose from the hundreds of existing social network sites (as presented in Table 1 and Table 2) for their own classes, goals, students, and student needs. Learner interaction in social networking sites is indeed a promising area of research for the future—certainly an up and coming trend in the field of SLA.

Notes

1. In their new book on online collaboration in foreign language learning, Lomicka and Lord provide an excellent definition and history of the “Web 2.0.” movement. This term was created by Dale Dougherty of O’Reilly Media, and “refers to the second generation of the Internet in which the emphasis is on online collaboration, networking, and sharing among users” (Lomicka & Lord, 2009).
2. Applications here refer to programs, widgets, or even games that are interactive features available in social networking sites. Examples include collaborative games, some of which allow users to compare their scores with friends (e.g., Scrabble, Entourage, Football Fans, etc.). Some applications let members ‘poke’ their friends (Buddy Poke), create avatars (mEgo), and collect and demonstrate their favorite music and/or videos (i.e. Minha Musica or Slide Shows). One recent Orkut application, “Meus Momentos” [My Moments], allows users to post emoticons that best demonstrates how they are feeling.

3. Long (1985), Ellis (2003) and Van den Branden (2006) provide essential readings on TBLT.

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