

Krashen's Theory of Second Language Acquisition as a Framework for Integrating Social Networking in Second Language Learning

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Abstract

Social networking is a potential learning tool for second language learners as it provides them with extensive resources of authentic materials to complement language lessons. There is a growing interest in how social networking can be used for second language learning purposes. Second language acquisition (SLA) is a complex adaptive system as it can adapt to different conditions presented by both internal and external learning environments. Various SLA theories have been adapted to inform the design of different language learning tools. This paper analytically explains how Krashen's theory SLA supports the effective use of social networking in language learning. There are various social networking sites on the Internet; however, this paper will mainly focus its reference to Facebook.

Keywords: second language learning, Krashen's theory, social networking, Facebook

1. Introduction

Computer use and social networking has become increasingly part of everyday life (Blattner & Fiori, 2009). A social network is a social structure made of nodes, generally individuals or organizations, which are connected by one or more specific types of interdependency (Tufekci, 2008). Social networking tools are web-based services through which individuals may maintain and develop social ties with people in their personal network. One of the social networking sites (SNSs) Facebook, established by Zuckerberg in 2004 and initially targeted high-school and college students, went global and is actively gaining in popularity with adults of all ages (Tufekci, 2008). According to Fewke and McCabe (2012), between 2009 and 2011, the number of Facebook users worldwide increased by 150%. In May 2011, Facebook has increased membership to more than 500 million users, and 700 billion minutes are spent on this social networking website per month. Facebook popularity has attracted language acquisition researchers and teachers that it could be a useful learning tool (Blattner & Fiori, 2009; Tufekci, 2008).

The challenge of using Web 2.0 technologies in the classroom is to use them in a way that enhances learning, not simply because they are available. One way to make effective usage of social media is to allow research findings and second language acquisition theories to inform the designing process when integrating social media tools in language learning. Although there is relatively little research that discusses the pedagogical implications of integrating SNSs in the specific context of language classrooms, it is important to note that the few studies reviewed below unanimously point to positive influences that SNSs may

have on the language learning processes. Thus, this paper analytically explains how Krashen's theory of SLA supports the effective use of social media in language learning.

2. Krashen's theory of second language acquisition

Krashen (2009) advocates that, "there is nothing as practical as a good theory" (p. 12), especially in the case of second language instruction. His theory of second language acquisition consists of a set of five (5) hypotheses, namely: The acquisition learning hypothesis, monitor hypothesis, input hypothesis, natural order hypothesis, and affective filter hypothesis.

The **Acquisition-Learning** hypothesis hypothesizes two (2) distinct independent systems of second language performance, the acquired system and the learned system (Krashen, 2014). According to him, the 'acquired system' (acquisition) is a subconscious process comparable to the way children acquires first language. It requires meaningful interaction in the target language - natural communication - in which speakers are not concentrated in the form of their utterances, but rather in the communicative act. Conversely, the 'learned system' (**learning**) features formal instruction and it is a conscious process which promotes conscious knowledge (grammatical rules) about the target language. This hypothesis also hypothesize that the acquired system surpasses the learned system in terms of yielding good results in second language acquisition.

The **Monitor** hypothesis highlights the relationship between acquisition and learning; it also explains how the latter influence the former. Krashen (2014) believes that the monitoring

function is triggered by the learned grammar. Hence, the acquired system assists in initiating utterance, whereas the learned system enacts as the monitor. He further explains that:

The monitor acts in a planning, editing and correcting function when three specific conditions are met: that is, the second language learner has sufficient time at his/her disposal, he/she focuses on form or thinks about correctness, and he/she knows the rule.

Krashen (2014) classifies language learners into three groups: Those learners that use the 'monitor' all the time (over-users [usually introverts and perfectionists]); those learners who have not learned or who prefer not to use their conscious knowledge (under-users [usually extroverts]); and those learners that use the 'monitor' appropriately (optimal users). Krashen (2009; Krashen, 2014) marks the lack of self-confidence to be highly linked to the over-use of the 'monitor'. Thus, he warns that the role of the monitor should supposedly be used minimally and only to correct deviations from intelligible speech.

The **Input** hypothesis explains how the learner acquires a second language and it is only concerned with 'acquisition', not 'learning'. The learners learn the target language when they receive second language 'input' which is sufficient and comprehensible. Comprehensible Input is the target language that the learner would not be able to produce at the time, but can still understand. The meaning successfully conveyed constitutes the learning experience.

The **Natural Order** hypothesis explains that the acquisition of grammatical structures follows a 'natural order' which is predictable. For a given language, some grammatical structures tend to be acquired early while others late. However, Krashen (2009) points out that the implication of the natural order hypothesis is not that a language program syllabus should be based on the order found in the studies. In fact, he rejects grammatical sequencing when the goal is language acquisition.

The **Affective Filter** hypothesis explains that numerous affective variables (for example, motivation, self-confidence and anxiety) have a facilitative, but non-causal, influence on second language acquisition. Learners with high motivation, self-confidence, a good self-image, and a low level of anxiety are better equipped for success in second language acquisition. On the other hand, low motivation, low self-esteem, and anxiety can stimulate the affective filter that prevents comprehensible input from being used for acquisition. In other words, when the filter is 'up', it impedes language acquisition.

3. Integration of social networking in second language learning: Krashen's SLA theory perspective

Facebook, as a learning tool, has been commended for its educational value and potential, and that it encourages second language learners' motivation and engagement (Fewkes & McCabe, 2012; Terantino & Graf, 2011; Tufekci, 2008). Facebook has become part of students' everyday life, including education. The fact that 73% of students answered yes when asked if they have used Facebook for educational purposes goes against the

hypothesis that students are not using Facebook to “support the learning agenda” of the classroom (Fewkes & McCabe, 2012). Therefore, in this section, there follows an explanation of how Facebook helps second language learners to improve their language skills, as well as how its contribution to language learning can be interrelated and qualified by the five hypotheses of Krashen’s SLA theory.

Although Krashen (2009; Krashen 2014) rejects grammatical sequencing in language instruction when the goal is language acquisition, his *Natural Order* hypothesis acknowledges that some grammatical structures tend to be acquired early while others late. According to Krashen (2014), the varied rates of acquiring different grammatical structures occur when babies are exposed to language, likewise when adults are exposed to a second language. Therefore, it is likely that second language learners may respond positively to the natural order when they are exposed to language through authentic activities, in an authentic environment like Facebook. Thus, in an effort to imitate the various interaction patterns observed in real life, learners can ‘Poke’ (give a virtual “hey, how are you doing?”) other friends, write on virtual message boards, which is commonly used for performing various social tasks, such as wishing happy birthdays, and can send cyber gifts (Vander Veer, 2008).

Despite the traditional consensus that form-focused instruction is beneficial and necessary for L2 learners (Cancino, Rosansky, & Schumann, 1975; Russell & Spada, 2006), Krashen’s theory opposes that meaning-focused interaction, engagement, and discussion among L2 learners may be more beneficial to SLA. Facebook presents an opportunity for learners to

rather acquire language than just learn it. When students are exposed to the target language through Facebook, they do not feel the acquisition process (Blattner & Fiori, 2009). Their focus is rather on the content and activities on the social networking site rather than on learning the target language; but still, they unconsciously acquire the language. In Krashen's (2014) view, and the *acquisition-learning* hypothesis, acquisition is unconscious, easier, effortless, and effective in yielding good results in the target language. He also argues that, although focus is not placed on conscious knowledge (grammatical rules) about the target language, in a way, the language rules are already embedded in the comprehensible input that the learner receives; in this case through Facebook.

According to the *affective filter* hypothesis, various affective variables like motivation, self-confidence and anxiety have a facilitative influence on second language acquisition. It is also important to note that low motivation, low self-esteem, and high anxiety can stimulate the affective filter that prevents comprehensible input from being used for acquisition.

Accessing a social networking website such as Facebook may lower students' fear of making mistakes, unlike when they are in a classroom. It may enhance their motivation when they find positive similarities with peers and instructor's personal interest on Facebook, which can lead to more comfortable communication and learning outcomes (Mazer, Murphy, & Simmonds, 2007). As a result, students are likely to develop positive attitudes towards the teacher and the language learning process.

Second language learners have a good chance of accessing abundant "comprehensible input" (Krashen, 2014), when Facebook is integrated in the target language instruction.

Facebook facilitates a language-learning-friendly interface created for and used by native speakers of the target language, and in a format comprehensible to the learners. In Mills' (2011) study on the nature of student participation, knowledge acquisition and relationship development with social networking communities, it was found that students engaged in meaningful learning experiences and contextualized interactions within electronic communities.

In addition, teachers can also create pages where learners can subscribe, and the teachers can post links that direct learners to online videos recorded in the target language, which can also act as comprehensible input for the learners. Learners have also an advantage of choosing to 'like' (subscribe to) pages of certain celebrities, favourite sport teams, company, or even join a group where the medium of communication is the target language. This allows them to receive updates on the newsfeeds which will expose them more to the target language. To some extent, student dependency on the language teacher is lessened since students continue to learn the language from their peers and other users of the target language, even when they have left the classroom

One of the useful applications in Facebooks is the spell checker. If users (language learners) set their default language to the target language, the spell checker will correct their spelling mistakes. This is comparable to the suggestions made by the *monitor* hypothesis that the learned system act as a monitor for mistakes made by the language learner. Since the learned system is still developing, it is in no full capacity to correct all the mistakes that the learner may make. The spell check application in Facebook, on the hand, is programmed

with full capacity to detect all the spelling mistakes; therefore, it supplements the learners monitor, and in the process the learner learns how to spell more words in the target language.

The teacher can also supplement the learners' monitor by observing mistakes made by students when interacting on Facebook. However, there is a need for careful consideration of how to treat the errors. For example, Terantino and Graf (2009) warn that errors should not be necessarily corrected as they occur because it might hinder the "free-flowing interpersonal communication." They suggest that teachers could use private messages to correct mistakes in extreme cases. In formal writing assignments completed on Facebook, they (2009) advise that teachers provide written feedback and assigned grades using a marking grid for second language writing.

4. Proposed framework for integrating social networking in Language Learning

It can be deduced from the above discussion that Krashen's theory of SLA can serve as a framework for the design of social-media-based language instruction.

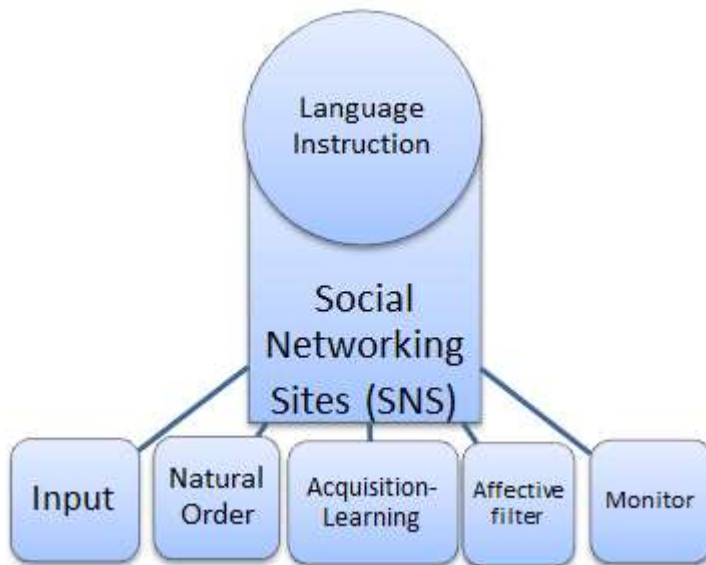


Figure 1. Framework for integrating social media in language learning

The framework in Table 1 suggests that SNSs should be integrated in second language learning, in a manner that they facilitate the following avenues:

- They should expose the learners to abundant comprehensible input.
- They should expose the learners to authentic/natural target language that allows the acquiring language rules in a natural order.
- They should be promoting the acquisition of the target language in the same unconscious way as it is done by babies acquiring first language.
- They should lower the affective filter of the learners so that there is greater language acquisition.
- They should allow students to monitor their language errors; they should also allow the language teacher to carefully assist learners to correct their language errors.

5. Precaution to be taken when integrating Facebook in language learning

Lately, identity theft has been a concern especially through online environments (Stuzman, 2006). In their study, Gross and Acquisti (2005) investigated the type of information posted publicly on Facebook by students. The results showed that about 40% of the students exposed their personal phone numbers on their profiles, and more than 50% exposed particulars about their current or real residences. It was also noted that most privacy leakage results from voluntary disclosure; hence, Facebook users should first learn about what kind of information to avail online in order to maintain a rewarding experience of social networking in language learning (Tufekci, 2008).

Students may not often know the boundaries between their public and private lives. It may be necessary for teachers and students to discuss some ground rules for using Facebook before starting to use it. This may also save some embarrassment later when improper photographs or videos, for example, are posted online. Furthermore, in some situations, it might require certain amount of time for both teachers and learners to learn how to use Web 2.0 technology. For example, even if one is familiar with computers, there might still be a need to learn how to set-up accounts and use Facebook, or any available social networking website.

Conclusion

The popularity of the social networking site Facebook is indisputable. Facebook is already an integral part of many students' daily online routine. Consequently, if educators decide to

provide guidance to the students to use Facebook (and other SNSs) as a learning tool, it can be an invaluable asset to their educational and social experience. Second language acquisition theories can guide teachers to better target and implement strategies that use social networking to facilitate the learning programs in their classrooms. Additional work is required to refine the understanding of the design and support of social networking websites not only in language learning, but also in a variety of disciplinary and institutional contexts. Future research should focus on engaging faculties and possibly students in exploring different ways to integrating social networking in language learning (Mazer et al., 2007). Further systematic research into online learning is needed to enlighten educators as to how to best integrate and utilize tools and applications from SNSs in language curriculum. These tools can be accessed easily; they are free and interesting to users, and are the new tools for learners of English to express themselves in authentic ways.

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