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Abstract

Social media is a powerful tool in communicating in English as a second language, its utilization affecting students in meaningful ways. The purpose of this study was to ponder issues and nuances in utilizing social media in second-language communication. Data constituted memoirs and introspections, drawn heavily from personal experiences of the author-participant in an online learning course at an open university, highlighting the use of the English language in virtual meetings with classmates, the teacher, and friends, utilizing synchronous and asynchronous modes. Dialectical tensions emanating from the narratives indicate that social media utilization offers learning facilitation in mediated communication. However, technology creates learning difficulties such as chunking sentences into small words and phrases, replacing words with acronyms, giving rise to incorrect spelling and grammar usage, which lead to faulty sentence construction. These are juxtaposed with social media's capacity to broaden learning opportunities due to the high presence of the English language in social media networks, maximize technological capacity to auto-correct spelling errors, provide suggestions for proper phrasing and sentence construction, and broaden cross-cultural communication because of foreign language appropriation in different communication contexts. The study's implications centered around personal and cultural nuances of second-language communication bordering on a self-driven desire to improve English communication using creative methods, while bridging cultural divides through decolonization as a democratic process, exemplifying openness and interconnectedness of foreign language in the global front.

Keywords: cross-cultural communication; social media communication; English as a second language.

Prologue

This paper comes third in a series of autoethnographic studies on English-based, second-language communication. The previous publications, published by *Studies in Self-Access Learning (SiSAL Journal)* in September and December 2023, highlighted readiness, familiarity, and self-perceived competence to communicate issues in utilizing English as a second language, spoken largely in a classroom setting with classmates, peer learners, the teacher, and outside interactions with friends. Viewed from an autoethnographic lens, this paper exemplifies social media utilization, its effects, and its impacts on English communication from the perspective of the author-participant as a second-language communicator. The narratives weave together packets of personal encounters drawn from fragments of memory that are analyzed and explored with

theoretical and conceptual resonances to depict the relationship between the self and the cultural milieu, illuminating dialectical tensions that traverse between comfort and dismay in a world of digital communication.

Related Literature

Social media is a prominent medium of communication used by all generations (Zainal & Rahmat, 2020). It plays a vital role in learning English language (EL) skills because it provides possible opportunities for adult learners to improve their listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills (Yadav, 2020). As such, the emergence of different social networking sites (SNSs) such as Facebook, Twitter, and e-mail have driven a more refined revolution in the way people communicate (Esteron, 2021).

Social media provides several platforms that help students to create and grasp ideas and interact with large audiences (Desta et al., 2021). Platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, Facebook, Skype, and many others serve different purposes in communication (Zainal & Rahmat, 2020). TikTok, for instance, can be an effective supplement to traditional language learning methods, providing learners with a fun and engaging way to develop their language skills (Ibrahim, 2023). This makes it an ideal tool for language learning because it provides learners with exposure to authentic language use in real-world contexts (Ibrahim, 2023). Facebook affords the situating of language learning in authentic community/social contexts beyond the classroom (Wong et al., 2017).

In the context of second-language learning, acquiring wider vocabulary knowledge is an important step for mastering a foreign language and becoming a proficient foreign language speaker (Kozhevnikova, 2019). However, language usage is changing because of the use of different linguistic features in social media such as exclamatory spelling of emoticons, letter homophones, acronyms, misspelled words, shortening of words, numbers representing words, a combination of two different languages (Esteron, 2021). Moreover, the usage of internet slang such as ROFL (rolling on the floor laughing), BTW (by the way), TTYL (talk to you later), and LOL (laugh out loud) bring worries to some as it might affect the English vocabulary (Zainal & Rahmat, 2020). Social media has gained criticism as teenage learners are too dependent on social media such as Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube. These students rely heavily on open accessible data and information on social media, hence, by and by, it could divert language students to

deception, unscholarly and ungrammatical contents, obscenities, and generic collaborations (Zainal & Rahmat, 2020). The findings of this investigation shed light on the influence of social media on learners' writing, which include the use of abbreviations, unnecessarily shortened words, and the use of numbers instead of the complete word form.

Process

This paper is a qualitative inquiry that utilizes autoethnography. Autoethnography builds upon the ethnographic tradition; however, in contrast to conventional ethnography, autoethnography places more emphasis on using the personal experiences of the researcher-participant to understand facets of the social world within which s/he is embedded (e.g., Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Napier, 2011 as cited in Hokannen, 2017).

In this study, personal stories as fragments of memory recollection were retrieved and analyzed within the self and cultural praxis. Using conceptual and theoretical underpinnings, this autoethnographic sketch provided thick descriptions of personal reality as it immersed in the social world of the author-participant.

My Autoethnography

I was born and raised in the Philippines where several languages and dialects are spoken by Filipinos, the natural citizens of the country, who are scattered in the different islands of the archipelago. The country is considered one of the largest English-speaking nations in the world, and in fact, English is one of the official languages (Santos et al., 2022).

When I took my graduate course, I enrolled in an online university. In the beginning, I was hesitant to pursue this new mode of learning because I feared that technologically mediated communication, for one, especially social media uptake, could hinder my progress in language learning. Compared to face-to-face interactions with my classmates and the teacher in traditional classrooms, I had doubts about learning with a digital screen in front of me all the time. Nevertheless, as an overseas worker, online learning was still the best choice considering my flexible work schedule.

In the online class, teaching and learning activities were conducted using synchronous and asynchronous modes, where students utilized online resources such as e-journal articles, online

video lectures and tutorials, among other resources for their various learning needs. These materials were all written in English. The advantage of utilizing synchronous communication tools was that it facilitated real-time collaboration, just like in the traditional classroom, where the student and the teacher could interact spontaneously, and the participants could have immediate feedback from each other (Lim, 2017). At first, I felt awkward speaking in front of the screen when my teacher asked me. I did not really talk naturally since it was not the practice I grew up with, but in time, I became a spontaneous speaker, embracing nearness with my classmates in the virtual world.

In asynchronous mode, social media platforms like Facebook messenger applications such as chat, video calls, and Google Classroom, were utilized for optimal learning, and the teacher's role was to facilitate online discussions. In these sessions, a community of engagement transpired with my fellow classmates through collaborative activities, chat meetings, and break-out sessions. I was personally drawn to ask questions and clarify issues with my groupmates; however, internet connectivity was a critical issue with some of us having difficulty to express clearly due to disruptions in the signal. In fact, I was having a hard time understanding what was said, and I asked the speaker to repeat sentences. In some cases, repetition made the utterance clearer and more organized, providing more time for the speaker to correct errors in English communication. Depending on the quality of internet connection, social media utilization presented valuable ways to improve my English communication skills.

However, internet disruptions contributed to my conributions to the discussions. I was annoyed because I thought I communicated with ease as I would normally do in face-to-face interaction, but messages kept popping up in the chat box, indicating that my signal was choppy. These incidents affected the way I re-constructed my sentences because I had to rephrase what I had said earlier to make it sound less repetitive. Anyhow, occasional repetition led to disorganized sentence construction, which literally disturbed the overall thinking process. In effect, effective communication using social media was not pursued thoroughly.

On the other hand, asynchronous learning activities in my online class constituted complying with class assignments, posting answers to the teacher's queries through virtual discussions which were accomplished within a given time, usually for a week. In both instances, English language was also the popular medium of teaching and learning.

Moreover, social media was largely utilized to foster learner-content interaction. For online learners of English, interaction with the course content was especially vital because it provided them with necessary knowledge in language competence and contributed to the success of online learning (Thach, 2018). In many ways, using English in the formation of thoughts such as memorization of written content signified focused knowledge absorption in English, strengthened as a self-directed learning approach. Apart from its cognitive value, I also experienced a community of belongingness every time we performed collaborative activities through Messenger and break-out sessions in Google Meet assemblies. I opted for instant and direct messaging, while at other times, I opted for video calls. In fact, for online learners, nurturing a sense of belonging may present a way of improving their experiences and attainment, as well as reducing attrition rates (Peacock et al., 2020). Indeed, there was a high degree of attendance in meetings, a sign of effective learning pursued through enlightened sharing of experiences.

I started using English in my conversations with the teacher and fellow students the moment our virtual classes commenced for a variety of reasons. First, communicating in English has long been a normative practice in the academe as far as I can remember. Being a university student, I felt proud imbibing the culture of foreign-language utterance. Indeed, pride can be triggered both by an individual's perception that they have achieved some kind of outcome of personal value or that they are valued as a person by others (Ross & Stacke, 2016). That value motivated me to indulge, as evidenced in my active participation in various class discussions and debates, including informal conversations with the teacher during virtual assemblies. Although it was not a compulsory requirement, it was a natural consensus to do the practice, being a popular choice in school. Second, I was happy to use English knowing that my classmates also enjoyed using it.

The communication practices highlighted the use of social media, where I discovered that exchanging texts between peer learners on messenger applications in Facebook, for instance, was quicker because short words replaced long sentences, information was chunked, and sometimes, a single word was enough to convey the message. As such, interpersonal communication was not really fostered because interactions were short and brief. Young adults have an emotional attachment to their mobile devices and want interaction that is quick and to the point, with minimal "in-person" contact (Jimenez & Morreale, 2015).

I wrote "Wanna drink?", instead of "Let us go outside and have a drink," for instance. Using this example, I was able to see how chunking words without changing the meaning may be a useful and simple approach to convey ideas because one need not have to type a lot of words on a small mobile screen. I even skipped certain vowel characters at times, sometimes unintentionally as the application autocorrects itself such that shortened words might be automatically changed. Most people type internet language when they communicate on social media to make it easier for them to communicate (Asare et al., 2022).

But over time, excessive use of acronyms and chunked messages made me disregard proper English sentence-construction, hindering my ability to communicate effectively even for practicality, I saved time typing letters on the screen. However, it was fortifying to limit words and phrases using touch-screen phones as I could organize my thoughts well in my head before I posted them on Facebook. In other words, the delay caused further scrutiny in thought process including the choice of English words, phrases, and sentences. In the comment section on Facebook, for instance, I posted short replies or with non-verbal symbols such as emojis, and virtual reactions like thumbs up, likes, and loves incorporated therein. Although signs and symbols did not require English proficiency, I thought there was continuity in conveying the message along with the use of non-verbal cues in a comment thread on Facebook. This implies that social network sites require a multimodal approach of embedding and combining words and written texts from numerous sites (Songxaba & Sincaba, 2019). As a result, such mixed emotions urged me to continue without restraint, while the latter fueled stress in the communication practice.

Epilogue

With the resurgence of social media networks, English-language utilization continually evolves with the numerous digital applications proliferating in various digital tools, providing a mountain of opportunities to hone English communication skills because of its high presence in social media networks. In fact, social media has many contents and facilities which can be used for practicing English (Anwas et al., 2020). In building English vocabulary, for instance, social media places English language learners in multicultural communities where they can acquire new vocabulary knowledge and use it communicatively (Wannas & Hassan, 2023). Throughout the years of Facebook in operation, words like "wall," referring to the Facebook homepage, have

now been changed to "timeline," 'emoji,' GIF (generated information format), and hashtag, among others, which have become popular vocabulary taking on different meanings from their original dictionary definition. With this, digital communication continuously cultivates new avenues for self-expression, news-searching, and entertainment.

Second, since social media is being used as an educational tool, it is necessary to understand "the medium is not the message." Put differently, second-language learners should not neglect their need to adhere to grammatical norms and maintain logical coherence in sentence formation, even while technology affordances foster a learning virtue. To claim that someone cannot communicate without using technology is to imply that an excessive reliance on digital technologies is necessary. It can quickly degrade one's cognitive ability to speak fluent English in a society where technology is pervasive.

Yet, there is an issue with word manipulation or sentence distortion on account of too many abbreviations and acronyms used that have become generally accepted, like using "OMG" for "oh my God," "BTW," for "by the way," "OTTD" for "outfit of the day," among others. While they deliver shortcut messages that are understood anyway, the danger is looming large for second-language speakers who are bound to create faulty speaking and writing skills.

Third, thinking about the broader cultural implications of my social media utilization, I believe that being a second-language speaker essentially opens new possibilities by way of a decolonization process. The statement implies that decolonization, as a democratizing agent that leverages cross-cultural communication and multiculturalism, encourages me to learn a foreign language without infringing upon the local language. For instance, localizing the English language allows me to explore new ways to express myself because I do not feel constrained by the structures of the foreign language. In effect, it becomes a welcome gesture for me to embrace creativity and openness in recognizing the interconnectedness of global language that I willfully adapt.

Finally, I understand that social media is to be construed as an aid to writing and speaking effective English rather than to manipulate it for the sake of personal comfort, which will provide immediacy in my communication practice. Essentially, I should continue to harness my English communication skills while using digital tools and enhancing interaction with the use of various social media networks and applications.

In the next issue, I will return to communicating my native language in the digital age, exploring nuances of my personal interactions.

Notes on the Contributor

Dr. Leoncio P. Olobia is the program coordinator of the Bachelor of Communication of Leyte Normal University. He obtained his Doctor of Communication from the University of the Philippines Open University in 2022.

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