Chapter 7
Social Networking Sites: Cross–Cultural Perspectives, Implications, and Applicable Frameworks for L2 Teaching and Learning

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ABSTRACT
The goal of the paper is to highlight the research examined within the context of social networking sites (SNSs), cross-cultural approaches, and relevant findings and implications for second language teaching and learning (L2TL). Furthermore, the study also investigates applicable frameworks across the academia that can be adapted by applied linguists and L2TL experts in SNS research. For this purpose, relevant findings from other fields of research and their potential implications for L2TL are presented along with applicable theoretical and methodological frameworks. It is pointed out that a number of studies from the fields can contribute to a better understanding of social networking technologies and their roles in language teaching and learning context. Therefore, it is recommended that L2TL experts investigating SNSs should familiarize themselves with SNS research across the academia and they carry out interdisciplinary projects by employing applicable theoretical and methodological frameworks.

INTRODUCTION
Social Networking Sites (SNSs) and the way networks and relationships are formed, maintained and overall effects of these sites on both individual and societal level have been recognized by scholars from a rich variety of disciplines –ranging from sociology, communications, and psychology to marketing, public relations, education, and information technology (Zhang & Leung, 2014). Even though the wide variety of research asks up-to-date questions and aims to provide fresh perspectives, the diversity of the theoretical and methodological frameworks used in SNS research make it difficult to lay out a coherent analysis of the literature (Wilson, Gosling & Graham, 2012). However, since “such varied perspectives and approaches serve to enrich our work as language educators in general, and as computer-assisted
language learning (CALL) researchers in particular” (Meskill & Quoh, 2013, p. 39), it is important for scholars of second language teaching and learning (L2TL) to develop familiarity with the research outside the field. For this purpose, the current paper aims to highlight the research examined within the context of SNS, cross-cultural approaches, and what the relevant findings and implications for L2TL are as well as applicable frameworks that can be adapted by applied linguists and L2TL researchers.

**SNS Research Across the Academia**

The increasing popularity and ubiquity of social networking sites with the advent of interactive Web 2.0 technologies drew the attention of scholars, and a remarkable body of literature emerged across the various disciplines including but not limited to communications, sociology, psychology, and education. Compared to computer-mediated communication, the novelty of social networking sites and websites with social networking features (e.g., YouTube) come from its functions which allow researchers to visualize the information and structural patterns of a user’s network (Zhang & Leung, 2014). Traversing through their list of connections and their networks (e.g., friends’ profiles) (Boyd & Ellison, 2008), users have access to a virtual space where they can present themselves through the use of multimodal resources available within the system. This interconnectivity and self-presentation provide a new way of data collection and analysis of SNS users, and it is exploited in not only fields like information technologies and computer sciences, but also social sciences such as psychology and education.

Given that researchers pay close attention to the growth and spread of social media, a better understanding of SNSs and their aspects need to be examined across the academy. Reviewing the literature extensively, Williams, Terras, and Warwick (2013) identified that there were four aspects of SNSs researchers considered: message, user, technology, and concept. While a research investigating ‘message’ is essentially interested in the “text that the user enters and associated metadata identifying such things as the time sent” (Williams et al., 2013, p.7), “user” studies focus on the digital identity of the user (e.g., their profiles, networks, self-presentations). As the name implies, “technology” research is centralized around technical aspects of the system, “concept” research includes introductory overviews and discussion pieces. While Williams et al.’s (2013) research specifically reviews microblogging literature; the analysis of other social networking studies confirms that their conclusion regarding microblogging studies is valid in broader context of social networking spaces as well.

Despite the identified four aspects of SNS research above, the SNS research is hard to be neatly categorized due to the variety of research interests and disciplinary differences. Nonetheless, a number of topics ranging from “Arab Spring” social protests in a broader sociological context to technical aspects of SNSs and its application in marketing and public affairs have been examined. For instance, Greenhow and Gleason (2012) reported that Twitter was examined for a better understanding of its use for mobilization and social protests through the analysis of social media discussions. Dabner (2012) found that social media could effectively support information sharing and communication especially in times of crisis (e.g., earthquake). Kietzmann, Silvestre, McCarthy, and Pitt (2012) highlighted a number of social media research including public affairs and social media marketing, online communities, government activities, the development of opinion leaders, and individual customer behaviors.

In their earlier paper, Boyd and Ellison (2008) noted that sociology, communication and education research mostly examined SNS use in four areas: impression management and friendship performance, networks and network structure, online/offline connections, privacy issues. Apart from these topics, perceptions and SNS use habits of students, faculty and institutions, social capital and social presence,
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