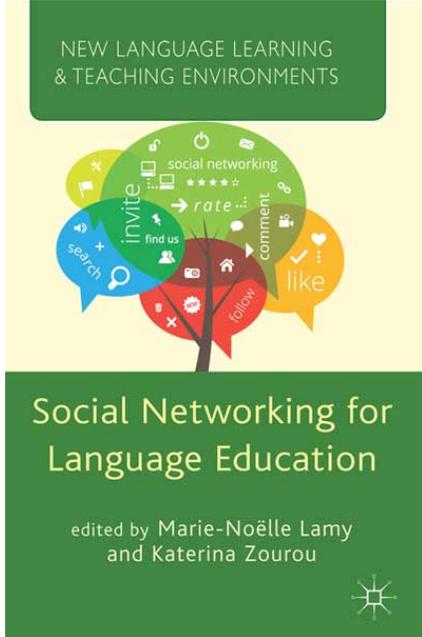


## REVIEW OF SOCIAL NETWORKING FOR LANGUAGE EDUCATION

<p><b>Social Networking for Language Education</b> Marie-Noëlle Lamy and Katerina Zourou (Eds.) 2013 ISBN: 9781137023377 US \$31.00 256 pp. Palgrave Macmillan Location of Publication</p>	
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### Review by [Florence Le Baron-Earle, University of Limerick](#)

Research and publications about social media in relation to the learning and teaching of foreign languages is developing researcher and educator interest at a rapid pace. Indeed, the emergence and easy access of social networking sites (SNS) have dramatically changed the way we communicate and interact with each other. The plethora of tools available online (e.g. *Facebook*, *Twitter*, *Ning*, *Google Plus*) offer promising opportunities for educators (Zourou, 2012), and these tools are now gaining significance among the CALL community. Despite the enthusiasm, the potential of online applications is underexploited in classrooms (Hung & Yuen, 2010), and as a consequence, the number of publications in education remains small. *Social Networking for Language Education*, edited by Marie-Noëlle Lamy and Katerina Zourou, is a welcome addition to this area which currently offers limited empirical data (Wang & Vasquèz, 2012).

The book explores the concept of social web and language learning in post-secondary education, and more particularly, focuses on the concept of identity development, social construction, and online community building. As explained in the introduction, the terms ‘social web’ and ‘social media’ have been carefully selected in order to describe the Internet tools that enable the creation and exchange of user-generated content, and to differentiate them with the term *web 2.0* (Musser et al., 2007), since the latter refers to the technological and ideological platform on which social media applications evolve (Lamy & Zourou, 2013; Zourou & Loiseau, 2013). This edited volume addresses two main issues: (1) the relationship between social media and language learning and teaching, and (2) the investigation of how socialization in networked spaces pertains to language education.

The book combines theoretical frameworks and empirical studies and provides an insight into nine projects examining the benefits and limitations of SNS for educators and for using a variety of SNS within non-educational sites such as *Facebook* or tailor-made ones like *Livemocha*) into their curriculum. Results are depicted through a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods, though qualitative data methods are clearly dominant, and many of the chapter authors take participatory or observational stances in their inquiries. The contributors to the book are recognized researchers and practitioners in the field of

applied linguistics, foreign language teaching, distance language learning, and language technologies.

The book is composed of four parts, each addressing a specific area of the social web for language learning and teaching. Part I compiles three projects concentrating on the wider ecology of language learning with online tools. Part II is composed of three chapters examining the design of specific social networking sites and how they may affect teachers' pedagogies. Part III brings together three chapters that depict the benefits and challenges of using social media for language learning, including the controversial issue of assessment. Part IV is a reflective summary of the nine preceding chapters. The online applications analysed in the book are *Facebook*, *RenRen*, *Second Life*, *Livemocha*, *Google wave*, *Busuu*, *English Café*, and *Babble*.

Chapter 1 examines the use of Facebook and RenRen as two possible means of second language socialization. It depicts a case study taking place between March 2009 and May 2011 of a female Chinese postgraduate studying and teaching in the United States. Using an ecological approach combining qualitative and quantitative analysis, Reinhardt and Chen examine the intercultural identity development of "Sue" through her online social networking practices. Chapter 2 thoroughly investigates how identity was constructed in *Second Life* used as part of a Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) course. Wigham and Chanier look at how 17 students of architecture learning French or English as a foreign language developed online identities, and how these were influenced by the characteristics of their avatar and the use of non-verbal communication, including gestures. The analysis is twofold: firstly, the authors consider the extent to which the changes in avatar appearance impacted students' verbal interaction (e.g. the way they addressed each other in *Second Life*); and secondly, they observe whether L2 participation increased through identity construction and non-verbal communication. Chapter 3 by Lima and Lamy explores the relationship between a worldwide Online Reading Group (ORG) for professionals in English Language Teaching (ELT) and historical reading groups with the aim of understanding how they relate to each other, as well as how they relate to ELT teachers' professional development.

Chapter 4 and 5 are both examinations of *Livemocha*, a free online language learning SNS launched in 2007 that provides language lessons in 35 languages. In Chapter 4, Zourou and Loiseau scrutinize the Culture section of the website in order to provide conceptual and technical improvements and to suggest pedagogical recommendations. To do so, they analyse a corpus made of 105 Culture threads, and identify the design choices that affected language interaction. Chapter 5 is a follow-up of a publication made by Harrison and Thomas (2009); it revisits the analysis they had made of *Livemocha* in order to determine the process of mediation. To accomplish this, it summarizes results from previous publications on the online site and also reveals new data that show how user profiles affected language learning processes. Other issues raised in the chapter are the relationship between digital social behaviours and the development of language skills; the construction of identities through the user-centred, participative framework of social networks for language learning; and the role of peers (native and non-native speakers) in SNS. Chapter 6 explores the impact that instructional design of CALL applications has on learning. Fuchs and Snyder emphasise the fact that the success of a course using SNS is not solely reliant on the technology: it needs to be supported by sound teaching methods that encourage student engagement and teacher collaboration (Chapelle, 2003). Based on this theory, Chapter 6 investigates the extent to which 30 pre-service language teachers in the United States and Taiwan used *Google Wave* beyond the pedagogical tasks set by their teachers, and it discusses the instructional design implications of this analysis.

Chapter 7 depicts both the benefits and limitations offered by three online language learning communities: *Busuu*, *Livemocha*, and *English Café*. It investigates how 21 university students from 11 countries attending an intensive English as a Second Language (ESL) programme in a US institution used the aforementioned sites for language learning. It also analyses their perceptions of the overall experience. Participants were asked to complete a series of tasks, and their feedback pertaining to their use and

perception of each site were collected in a survey. The authors provide answers to three main research questions: (1) When are SNS for language learning used as a tool for classroom and off-site language practice? (2) What do university ESL students think of them and how do they use them? and (3) What features of these sites do students find most useful in helping them develop language skills and why? The results provided indicate that the three sites offered a generally positive experience for participants; students valued the language practice opportunities, with a preference towards the use of text chats, and the grammar and vocabulary exercises. However, they showed conflicted responses to socializing with learners they did not know, and were generally uncomfortable to providing feedback to other users. Furthermore, Chapter 7 provides useful considerations for practitioners wishing to implement *Busuu*, *Livemocha* and *English Café* in their classroom. For instance, it was noted that the proficiency levels of participants had a direct impact on their appreciation of communication modes (e.g., text, audio or video chats.).

Chapter 8 provides rich insight into a year-long telecollaborative project between university students in France and Taiwan coordinated by Liaw and English. A website was created by the authors to enable their respective students to learn English via a series of intercultural learning tasks. As the project took place, and interaction between students intensified, they noted that, on their own accord, students created an “unofficial” site on *Facebook* to interact. The chapter analyses the students’ interaction and production in both sites by looking at turn-taking, the use of first names, speech function, and choices of pronouns that indicate closeness, solidarity, and degrees of politeness or distance between participants. Results indicate that the official site did not foster intercultural dialogue, but the unofficial site enabled students to build interpersonal relationship that demonstrated the skills of discovery and interaction advocated by Byram’s model of intercultural communicative competence (Byram, 1997, 2000).

Chapter 9 focuses on formative assessment within SNS that promotes language learning using immediate formative feedback. The authors offer an auto-ethnographic perspective of their experiences as language learners of beginning Spanish, Korean and Japanese on three SNS sites: *Busuu*, *Livemocha* and *Babbel*. They explore the mechanisms and processes related to placement, as well as their own progress and interaction. Chapter 9 provides guidelines for future designs; it may also help educators to consider how these sites may be blended into existing curricular options. Finally, Chapter 10 is an overview of all chapters and raises a number of issues pertaining to future research into online networking and language education, including data collection, learning tasks, and forms of interaction. The perspective offered in this final chapter is threefold: for researchers, for designers and practitioners (or design and pedagogy), and for learners in formal and informal learning settings.

To conclude, Lamy and Zourou’s collection of chapters compiled in *Social Networking for Language Education* is an accessible read which delivers a good balance of theoretical perspectives and informative case studies. Each chapter can be read individually. Similar to recent publications (Guth & Helm, 2010; Meskill, 2012; Thomas, 2011), it is a useful resource for language teachers, practitioners, researchers, and education professionals at university level interested in honing their understanding of the social web for teaching and learning purposes. Though the book is not directed towards SNS and CALL neophytes, it may well develop readers’ knowledge of Internet technologies for language learning and teaching with the literature reviews, and in addition can provide language teachers with practical insights with the series of richly documented case studies.

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Florence Le Baron-Earle is a teaching assistant of French at the University of Limerick, Ireland. Her recently awarded PhD investigated the role of social media in enhancing the intercultural communicative competence of learners of French. Her main publications are on computer-assisted language learning and teaching.

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