

## MICROBLOGGING ACTIVITIES: LANGUAGE PLAY AND TOOL TRANSFORMATION

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The following is a qualitative case study presenting three vignettes exploring the use of language play while microblogging during an academically sanctioned task. Ten students and one teacher used *Twitter* in an intensive, English as a second language advanced grammar course to practice writing sentences with complex grammatical constructions from the academic genre. In turn, the students received occasional corrective feedback from the instructor. Drawing on qualitative data consisting of a corpus of time- and date-stamped tweets, retrospective interviews and discourse analysis of the students' tweets, the author presents three "micro-vignettes" demonstrating how three students responded to contradictions within the original task by qualitatively transforming its context. As a result, they created new learning opportunities, 'spinning-off' (Wertsch, 1998) the microblogging tool, due to the tool's features, the students' previous cultures-of-use, (Thorne, 2003) and their pre-existing social networks (Stefanone & Gay, 2008). The students used Twitter as an instant messaging chat room, moving from the sentence to the utterance (Bakhtin, 1953/1986), embedding target grammar constructions in various forms of ludic language play (Cook, 2000). By dynamically reframing (Goffman, 1974) their own learning activities students took ownership of the task and went through a process of expansive learning (Engeström, 2007).

**Keywords:** Language Play, Computer-mediated communication, Computer-assisted language learning, Collaborative learning

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### MICROBLOGGING

Microblogging was developed in 2006 with the launch of *Twitter* from the short message services used to generate and send text messages. One of its co-founders, Evan Williams, founder of *Blogger*, imagined a broadcast system in which users could share short messages. Twitter's popularity rose dramatically following the South by Southwest (SXSW) conference in 2007. Growing from a small start-up with little more than ten thousand users by the end of its first year, (Shah, 2010) who mostly shared links and information about their daily activities, (Java, Finin, Song, & Tseng, 2007) as of 2012 Twitter had more than a half billion users, (Semiocast, 2012) who send out an almost equal amount of messages per day (Martinez, 2012; Tsukayama, 2013). Twitter is currently one of the ten most visited websites in the world (Fitzgerald, 2012) and is used by parents, teenagers, politicians, entertainers, corporations, athletes, spiritual leaders, and students—sometimes to great folly, as a number of politicians and athletes have demonstrated; other times to dramatically transform society, as in the case of the Arab Spring (Eltantawy & Wiest, 2011; Grossman, 2009).

Although microblogging is a relatively new form of computer-mediated communication, it has an historical analog. Humphreys (2010) finds a strong parallel between microblogging and diaries of the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. He suggests that technological advances allowing the production of 'small leather-bound journals,' contributed to a quantitative and qualitative shift in diary writing: the length and

the content of the entries became briefer and more quotidian. In a digital reincarnation, advances in SMS and web technology, contributed to a qualitative and quantitative shift in the blog genre, again, the length and content of the entries became briefer and more quotidian.

On Twitter, users post short messages, known as *tweets*. Each tweet, which is time and date-stamped, can contain up to 140 characters and may include links, photos, audio, and video. Users connect by *following* each other. Once you are following a user, their messages appear on your home page in reverse chronological order. Users interact with tweets through a variety of features (Figure 1): by replying to messages using the @ symbol as a form of addressivity, by favoriting a tweet (similar to the Like function on Facebook) or by retweeting it so that all of your followers can also see it. In order to aggregate the abundance of messages into topics, users attach hashtags to their tweets, which are words denoting topics, preceded by the # symbol, e.g., #languagelearning. Twitter is also a de facto corpus; users can perform simple Boolean searches by limiting searches to keywords, phrases or topics using Twitter's search box (Appendix A).



Figure 1. Interactional Features of Twitter

### Twitter and Language Learning

In spite of its widespread popularity, research on microblogging and language learning remains scant. A few studies on microblogging have focused on how Twitter can be leveraged for collaborative learning and community building (Lomicka & Lord, 2011; Newgarden, 2009) as well as to train students in communicative competencies (Borau, Ullrich, Feng & Shen, 2009). Other studies have focused on whether Twitter can be a useful forum for generating input, output, and interaction with students, instructors and native speakers (Antenos-Conforti, 2009; Castro, 2009; Hattem, 2012; Ullrich, Borau; Stepanyan, 2010). In one relevant and early microblogging study, Perifanou (2009) used Edmodo as a microblogging application in an Italian foreign language class, designing four communicative activities, including dialogue and subtitle writing. She found that a large majority of the students described the activities as 'fun' and would prefer that microblogging activities be the central focus of the curriculum, not a secondary one. Perifanou concludes that micro-gaming language activities had a positive effect on students' participation, collaboration and achievement of learning outcomes.

### Language Play

In the last fifteen years, the study of language play has begun to attract the attention of second language researchers (Lantolf, 1997; Belz & Reinhardt, 2004). Early research led to discussions on whether language play was used primarily for language development through private rehearsal of unmastered forms (Lantolf, 1997) or for pure enjoyment through various ludic forms (Cook, 1997; 2000). This led Broner and Tarone (2001) to study the occurrence of play in private speech vs. ludic play in a fifth-grade Spanish class. The authors developed a 5-point criteria scale for distinguishing between the two, finding evidence of both types being used. The authors concluded that both might play a distinct role in the acquisition process. Whereas language play as rehearsal allows learners opportunities to compare their current interlanguage systems with new forms, ludic language play increases noticeability due to the affective charge of the language, helps learners develop voices in multiple registers, and may help

stabilize the interlanguage system (Broner & Tarone, 2001). Since Lantolf's (1997) call for more research into language play, more focus has been placed on language play with adults learning a foreign language, primarily on how language play may contribute to the development of sociolinguistic competence (Bell, 2005; Forman, 2011), multi-competence (Pomerantz & Bell, 2007) and the use of unsanctioned language play to reorganize tasks to create learning opportunities (Bushnell, 2008; Pomerantz & Bell, 2007). These studies helped lay the groundwork for future research on language play and adults in foreign language classrooms. Since this article is primarily concerned with forms of ludic language play outlined by Guy Cook (2000), a short explication of Cook's theory follows.

### **Ludic Language Play**

In his article "Language Play, Language Learning," a prelude to his book of the same title, Cook (1997) argues that play is associated with "enjoyment," "relaxation," and "intelligence." Language play is, "behavior not primarily motivated by human need to manipulate the environment and to form and maintain social relationships—though it may indirectly serve these purposes." Cook (2000) later developed a tri-partite construct for identifying features of language play on the formal, semantic and pragmatic level, emphasizing the causal role between the three features, "The patterning of form, though apparently random, leads to the creation of alternative realities, and this in turn performs essential functions in human life," (p.122). We can focus the lens on any particular feature of language play, yet these features are inextricably linked in a causal chain.

One type of language play on the linguistic level includes repetition of forms (Cook, 2000). Grammatical parallelism, for example, involves the repeated use of structures in tandem with lexical substitution. The repeated patterning of forms places the language learner in a relaxed environment, allowing them greater processing time to notice abstract categories and common collocations (Cook, 2000). Cook highlights the many examples of grammatical parallelism in children's stories, as seen in the back and forth between Little Red Riding Hood and the Big Bad Wolf in the children's classic (Perrault, 1697/2002). In one interesting comparison, Cook notes that the structural substitution drills popularized by the audiolingual method of the 1950s bear a striking resemblance to the lexical substitutions in parallel grammatical structures found in many nursery rhymes (Cook, 2000).

Another type of language play is on the semantic level and includes the creation of alternative realities and the inversion of existing realities. Fictional worlds created through language also abound in the world of both children and adults. As Cook notes, children grow out of their games of make-believe, only to grow into fiction (Cook, 2000). Examples of carnival language include the use of grotesque realism, such as references to lower bodily functions, slang words, jokes, and grotesque references. Indeed, if we want to have a complete picture of language play with imaginary worlds we might include any sentence or utterance that employs a hypothetical proposition. On a formal level, certain linguistic forms, for example, the subordinating conjunctions of condition, such as *if*, *only if*, and *even if* can be used to speak of hypothetical situations which do not exist in reality (Cook, 2000). In his study of Rabelais, Bakhtin (1965/1984) describes how participants in Medieval and Renaissance festivals used ludic language to invert the social order and equalize power relations between the populace and the church. Iddings and McCafferty (2007) examined the use of language play in a children's classroom, finding unsanctioned use of carnival language during off-task behavior helped create additional learning opportunities not present in the original task, allowing the students to recoup their role as a student when they had grown disinterested.

As an illustration of pragmatic language play, Cook (2000) draws an analogy between competitive language games and various games played with a ball. On the one hand, Cook argues that simple, non-competitive ball games, such as a game of catch, can be used to establish solidarity between the participants. On the other hand, more competitive ball games may be played to establish superiority. Similarly, some language games—in which conversational turns are similar to the passing of a ball—can

also be used to establish solidarity or superiority between its participants (Cook, 2000). One example of can be found in verbal duels, such as *The Dozens*, a language game originating with African-Americans that consists of competitive, ritualized boasting (Labov, 1974). Another example is freestyling, a form of rapping in which participants take turns improvising lyrics, sometimes instantaneously to topics which are given to them by the audience. These word games show dexterous and creative language use but also serve the pragmatic function of building solidarity and competition.

Warner (2004) helps broaden the perspective of language play for pragmatic purposes drawing on the work of the social interactionist models of Cook (2000), Bateson (1972) and Goffman (1974). Warner synthesized their approaches and introduced a category for analyzing pragmatic language play called, “play with the frame” which focuses primarily on “the level of understanding,” and the transforming of established frameworks, known as *keying* (Goffman, 1974), which Goffman describes as the use of frameworks as a pattern for another activity that is understood by the participants as distinct from the original frame. This notion of frame and key bears a resemblance to the distinction between task and activity seen in research on task-based learning and student agency, in which students have been found to transform classroom tasks at their own behest into new activities to target their own self-prescribed learning goals (Coughlan & Duff, 1994; Iddings & McCafferty, 2007; Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2001).

### **Bakhtinian Discourse**

In his critique of Sausserian linguistics, *Speech genres and other late essays*, Bakhtin (1953/1986) makes a distinction between a “sentence”, which is a unit of language, and an “utterance,” which is a unit of speech communication. Sentences are monologic—they are not bound to any other sentence that has come before or will come after it. They are isolated, decontextualized, unexpressive and unresponsive. They are not directed towards any interlocutor. Utterances, on the other hand, are dialogic. They exist between people—they unite sentences into a speech communion that exhibits a change of speaking subjects, where preceding and proceeding utterances are co-dependent, directed, responsive—forming a continuous dialogue. The analysis of real language use is performed by focusing the lens on utterances (Bakhtin, 1953/1986).

According to Bakhtin, (1935/1981, 1953/1986) utterances and the words that fill them can be said to belong to no one, to another, and to oneself simultaneously. Belonging to no one, words are neutral, empty, a framework for construction. Yet, we learn words from the way others use them. Their words come to us with a certain flavor for generic usage, impressed with ideological overtones and established norms that define the function, style and phraseology, thus becoming the “authoritative discourse” of a genre and era. However, exposed to generic language, individuals still shape their own understanding and usage of words through their own accumulated and unique speech experiences whereby utterances take on individual expressiveness through a process of ‘creative assimilation,’ of others words, language learning itself, in which people shape and reshape utterances to make them their own (Bakhtin, 1935/1981). In *The Discourse of the Novel*, Bakhtin (1935/1981) notes a type of discourse known as double-voiced discourse, where the speech of a character represents not only the ideological intentions of the character in the novel, but also of the author, who uses the character to advance dual intentions, “...two voices, two meanings, two expressions,” and can be seen in forms of “...comic, ironic and parodic discourse...” (p.324). Bakhtin marks double-voiced discourse as a special kind of utterance in which the author and character hold a conversation with each other.

### **Cultures-of-Use and the Spin-Off Function**

Thorne (2003) has coined the term “cultures-of-use” to help understand how mediating cultural tools are malleable and become imbibed with cultural resonances that accumulate over short and long-term repeated individual and collective usage, shaping how the tool is used in the present and the future. Humans are not shaped by their tools; on the contrary, humans shape and reshape tools through directed activity. Applying a cultures-of-use analysis to the use of internet communication tools between French

and American students in sanctioned educational contexts, Thorne (2003) found in one case study that a shift in the mediating tool from email to chat resulted in a quantitative and qualitative shift in communication patterns of two students, providing them with additional, and at times, more effective and authentic opportunities for language learning and interrelationship building. Thorne (2003) argues that in this tool shift the two students crossed a threshold in which they positioned, “themselves as insiders with a vested interest in the educational, social, and communicative activities at hand,” (p. 48) allowing them to construct zones of proximal development not previously afforded in the classroom. He concludes the availability of tools and the cultural ‘sedimentation’ they carry play a large role in the formation of communication and resulting interpersonal relationships.

As cultural tools are used and reused in varying cultural contexts and resonances build, the opportunity exists for a novel and complex transformation in the intended use of the tool to take place, known as the spin-off (Wertsch, 1998) or ratchet function (Tomasello, 1999). The evolution of Twitter to date presents itself an illustrative example of a spin-off. When Twitter was first introduced it was seen more as a monologic, broadcast tool. However, users had a need for more dialogic forms of communication, so they articulated ways to respond to each other’s tweets with addressivity symbols, using the @ symbol followed by a particular username (Williams, 2009). This advent, although, was not unique to Twitter, and had been previously articulated in other computer-mediated communication (CMC) settings, replete with their own cultures-of-use, such as internet relay chat. In using Twitter again and again, and carrying to each use their historical experiences with Twitter and comparable communication tools, the users repositioned not only Twitter’s purpose but also its foundational communicative practices. They articulated new ways of using the tool that significantly and dramatically changed it in ways that even its inventors had not imagined, notes Twitter co-founder, Evan Williams, who credits Twitter’s users for shaping how Twitter is currently and will be used in the future (Williams, 2009).

### **Language Play & CMC Environments**

Despite the plentiful opportunities for ludic engagement in CMC environments (Herring, 1999; Nardi, Whittaker & Bradner, 2000) a lack of research exploring language play, adults and CMC environments persists, particularly with social media. In some of the first studies Warner (2004) explored types of language play in a Mud, object-oriented (MOO) environment, concluding that although there was no conclusive evidence of language learning through play, its ubiquitous use in the CMC setting demanded attention. In another study, Belz and Reinhardt (2004) looked at the use of language play by an advanced German student involved in a tele-collaboration project. The authors found that the language play the student used served a variety of functions, including consolidating grammar, building personal relationships and presenting a positive face in the CMC community.

Although these studies have set the table for future research, they were conducted on what may be considered first-generation, or Web 1.0 technologies, such as email, chat and MOO. As far back as a decade ago, Goodwin-Jones (2003) suggested that as new internet 2.0 technologies begin to make their way into the classroom, researchers should explore how they may create new opportunities for language play. To date, however, sparse research on these new technologies and their connection to language play exists. Two noteworthy studies involve new technologies: memes and Second Life. Gawne and Vaughan (2011) explored how contributing to a popular internet meme craze, known as LOLspeak, in which people take on the role of personified cats that use non-standard grammar to communicate ludic messages, helped second language students develop their understanding of identity and grammar, such as: morphology, clause structure, orthography, lexemes, and syntax. Moreover, Liang (2012) used Second Life, an online virtual world in her class. She found that competitive, virtual role-playing helped to recreate languages and tasks by facilitating various forms of language play.

## The Study

### Setting

Twitter was used in a high advanced grammar class—where high advanced is the sixth of nine levels in an eighteen month intensive, academic English program hosted at a state university located in the northeastern United States. The class met for one hour and twenty minutes twice a week for seven weeks, for a total of twenty-one contact hours during the course. Eleven students plus the instructor made up the participants of the course. The instructor brought in a laptop, speakers, and projector in order for the class to have access to the internet during demonstrations and instructional activities.

### Outcomes and Student Learning Objectives

The learning objectives for the entire course, High Advanced Grammar, were taken from the program course curriculum. Among the outcomes were: 1) to express surprise, contrast, cause/effect, and hypothetical conditions by writing complex sentences using a variety of subordinating conjunctions and 2) to use verb + preposition combinations with accurate collocation and meaning. There were five objectives for the course: 1) to learn to express surprise using *although*, *even though* and *though*; 2) to demonstrate contrast using *while* and *whereas*; 3) to show cause and effect using *because*, *since*, *so...that*; 4) to be able to describe purpose using infinitives and *so that*; and 5) to use frequent verb+preposition combinations, such as *guilty of*, *apologize for*, and *married to*.

### Task

Students were given the option of using Twitter during our class. In considering the various ways one can interact with and view tweets, I imagined Twitter would be a useful forum for comprehensible input (Krashen, 1982), comprehensible output (Swain, 1995), and meaningful interaction (Long, 1996). Students would be able to test hypotheses by writing tweets, they would have those hypotheses confirmed or challenged through corrective feedback with me, and they would get model sentences from the other students and me to serve as comprehensible input. To provide the student with feedback, I imagined I could use the *favorite* and *retweet* features to let individual students and the whole class know that accurate grammar was used in a tweet. The reply and direct message features could be used to engage the student in various forms of corrective feedback.

I introduced the optional assignment of using Twitter for getting extra practice on the first day of class. I gave a short talk on what Twitter was and an in-class demonstration of how to use it. I also provided the students with a handout (Appendix B) of how to use the various features of the Twitter application and step-by-step instructions for signing up for a Twitter account. The instructions for the task were to 1) write 70 sentences during the seven-week session, or 10 sentences per week, 2) use the grammar structures presented in class in the class in their tweets, and 3) use contexts created in class or their own life experiences to fill the content of the tweet. I then encouraged the students to check their Twitter accounts daily to read the feedback I would be providing them through the direct message, “private interaction”, and the reply feature, “public interaction”.

### Participants

Based on the content of their tweets and their use of Twitter, six months after the completion of the course, three participants were selected to participate in a study about their use of Twitter (Table 1). In each case, the student has given written consent for their tweets and other information herein to be used in this article. The names of the participants have been changed.

### Gülden



*Figure 2.* Humorous tweet by Gülden

Gülden, who had never used Twitter prior to this study, was 32 years old and the oldest of the three students. She, fluent in Turkish, was born and raised in Germany in a middle-class family with one German and one Turkish parent. She lived in the US by herself with her young daughter and throughout the course developed a close relationship with another classmate in this study, Florence. They were also friends with another Turkish woman in the class and all sat near each other in class and spent time with each other outside of class as well.

### Florence



*Figure 3.* Florence reaching a goal

Florence was a high school graduate from Turkey who was 19 at the time of the study. She came from a middle class background. She had the internet in her house in Turkey and usually spent between 30 minutes to one hour using the internet per day. She also had experience with digital communication tools, such as texting and chatting, using these to communicate with people in her social group before coming to the US. Since she had arrived in America, she had lost contact with her social circle in Turkey, "...bcuz in this country no one has time actually after coming to usa I also stop calling my friends who live in Turkey now." Prior to this study, Florence had never used Twitter.

### Michael



*Figure 4.* Michael announcing he was getting ready to tweet some Yo Mama jokes<sup>1</sup>

Michael, aged 24, was from the Philippines and had a strong foundation in English, testing immediately into the advanced level. He received his Bachelors of Science in Nursing from the Philippines. He had had access to the internet in his house since 2000. He also had experience with various digital communication tools, such as texting, instant messaging (IM), blogging and emailing. His preferred method of communication was IM. At times throughout the session, Michael seemed to cross the line with the female students through insensitive comments made both in and out of the classroom about some of the female students involved in the study. Despite his penchant for inappropriate jokes, he remained friendly with the females, one of whom he met occasionally with on Twitter to practice. Prior to this study, Michael claimed that he had made a Twitter account, but never used it and mostly communicated

with friends through instant messaging.

**Table 1.** *Participant Demographics*

Name	Gender	Age	Nationality	Native Languages	Experience with digital communication tools	Experience with Twitter prior to study
Gülden	F	32	Turkish	Turkish & German	E-mail, chat, text messaging	None
Florence	F	20	Turkish	Turkish	E-mail, chat, text messaging	None
Michael	M	24	Philippine	Tagalog	Email, chat, text messaging, blog, social media	Opened account, but never used

### Data Collection

Qualitative data was triangulated and consists of discourse analysis of CMC conversations, analysis of the use of language play, as well as interviews with three students. Content from the tweets is analyzed using various methods of discourse analysis. To identify conversations between students, I analyzed tweets and coded them for characteristics of CMC coherence (Herring, 1999). According to Herring, coherence in CMC conversations differs from coherence in face-to-face conversation. Coherence in CMC is marked by considerable lag time, disrupted turn adjacency and violations of sequential coherence. Thus, in order to identify connections between tweets, they are analyzed for such cohesive features as addressivity using the @symbol (Honeycutt & Herring, 2009), as well as for topic continuation, evident through the use of similar grammar structures, lexemes, or semantic ideas. Once coherence among tweets was identified, I analyzed and coded the semantic content for instances of language play using Cook's (2000) tri-partite construct for distinguishing between formal, semantic, and pragmatic language play as well as for other salient characteristics which may suggest language play, such as smiley face emoticons ☺ or abbreviations for laughter, such as *lol*, *lolololol*, and *LOL*. Chat interviews with the 3 students involved in the study serve as additional source of qualitative data. These interviews took place through instant messaging services on Gmail and Skype six months after the class had ended and were used to ascertain student attitudes, motivations and lived recollections of their participation in the task ([Appendix C](#)).

### Research Questions

Despite more of a focus on language play and adults in CMC environments, there is still a gap in the literature focusing on Web 2.0 internet technologies, in particular involving the use of language play on social media tools. Given the abundance of users of social media, such as Twitter and Facebook, and the sheer amount of language that is produced on a daily basis on these networks, exploration is warranted. As I examined the data set, I had two questions driving my inquiry:

1. Did the students' tweets exhibit any characteristics of ludic language play? If so, which kinds of ludic language play were used?
2. If language play was used, what may have been contributing factors?

## RESULTS

### Vignette 1. From Sentence to Utterance: Repetition and Verbal Dueling

“Whereas Michael today is very offensive, their girls are very defensive.”



In the following vignette Gülden, Florence, Michael, and another student, Yucel, a young Turkish woman who was friends with Gülden and Florence and was also in the grammar class, had come to the computer lab after class to use Twitter, where I also happened to be assisting other students. In one of the earlier classes that day, Michael had made a playfully-intended, yet derogatory comment toward Gülden, Florence, and Yucel, which they referenced during the grammar class. Now in the computer lab, Gülden and Florence used Twitter and subordinating conjunctions of contrast (*while/whereas*) and surprise (even though/although) to sound out Michael for his behavior through reprimands and insults. Although it appears to be serious, their reprimands and insults are done somewhat in jest and tongue-in-cheek, as before they had begun to reprimand Michael on Twitter, I had observed them speaking casually with him in the computer lab.

In turns 1 through 6, Gülden, Yucel and Michael play with language form, perhaps influenced by each other, paralleling each other's form using subordinating conjunctions of contrast, *whereas* and *while*. In [turn 1](#), Gülden is expressing her pleasure with writing on Twitter, while in [turns 3 and 4](#), she comments on what was happening in real-time in the lab, mainly, Michael was showing Florence some disgusting pictures. In [turn 5](#), Michael begins a chain of playful substitution patterns writing a sentence containing *whereas*. In [turn 6](#), Gülden may be picking up on Michael's use of the word *whereas* to compare German and English pronunciation. In [turn 7](#), she makes a veiled reference to Michael's impropriety earlier in the day when she engages Florence in direct conversation, "@florence, hey, while hate words are forbidden in the lab, you can use peace or even love words." In [turn 8](#), Michael displays a playful substitution pattern with the subordinating conjunctions *whereas*. In [turn 9](#), Gülden makes a direct reference to Michael's behavior, showing her displeasure with it, and contrasting it with the behavior of the women: "Whereas Michael is today very offensive, the girls are more defensive." Florence also now begins to reprimand Michael ([turn 10](#)), indirectly chastising him, using the same conjunction as Gülden: "whereas some people are nice, some people are bad." Michael then seemingly tries to defend himself ([turn 11](#)), justifying his behavior by arguing that there is a direct correlation between hating and loving, as he directly responds to Florence: "@Florence The more you hate, the more you love." While his sentence does not contain a target word, it displays a rhythmically and grammatically parallel structure. In [turn 12](#), Florence continues to antagonize Michael indirectly, expressing her displeasure: "Whereas I don't want to speak to some people, I want to talk some of them," before she directly responds to Michael's previous utterance in excitable disagreement ([turn 13](#)): "@Michael don't believe it!!!!!!!!!!!!!!" In [turn 14](#), "Whereas some people are tall, others are short," Michael continues his chain of playful substitution patterns, now moving *whereas* to the initial part of the sentence. In [turn 15](#), Gülden perhaps makes another dig at Michael, who had expressed an earlier interest in studying philosophy, which is what I studied as an undergraduate student, by stating that Michael wants to become something she inaccurately believes that I have already become. In [turns 16-19](#), the conversation digresses and Yucel and Florence appropriate the semantic and structural content of each other's tweets to discuss real world intentions ([Table 2](#)).

In the preceding exchange, these students demonstrated a dynamic transformation of the original task I had proposed to reframe the activity to suit their own goals. Whereas I had thought the students would work individually, asynchronously, writing informational sentences with prescribed grammar structures with me as their audience and their goal as practice, the students met up in the computer lab, worked synchronously and collaboratively not only to practice but also to accomplish a more meaningful objective. On the one hand, they are using the forms *while* and *whereas* as prescribed in the syllabus to practice writing with structures we were studying in the class. Their playful repetition, substitution and rhythmic patterns suggest linguistic play as described by Cook (2000). On the other hand, it seems the purpose of Gülden and Florence's tweets is not simply to practice but is also an attempt to ridicule and admonish Michael for his behavior earlier that day by engaging him in a quasi-verbal duel. Gülden frames parts of her discourse almost as if it were a game pitting Michael vs. the women: *Whereas Michael today is very offensive, the girls are more defensive*. Her teamwork with Florence to insult Michael may be seen

as an attempt to establish gender solidarity, while also trying to gain superiority over Michael by letting him know his behavior is unacceptable. At the same time, as like with other verbal duels in which violence or insults remain largely symbolic and not taken to heart (Cook, 2000), these students appear to be engaging in this duel in a tongue-in cheek fashion as I did observe them walking into the lab together joking around before they sat down to Twitter just a few minutes before these verbal duels.

The reframing of the activity was made possible in part through the ‘spinning off’ (Wertsch, 1998) of the microblogging tool, which allowed the students to use it in a novel way that I had not imagined. Rather than broadcasting unrelated, disjointed sentences, Gülden, Florence and Michael collaborated in real-time on Twitter, using CMC conversational elements, such as addressivity and topic continuation (Herring 1999, Honeycutt & Herring, 2009). The students thus moved from the sentence to the utterance (Bakhtin, 1935/1981, 1953/1986) in which a large portion of their tweets established a formal, semantic and pragmatic continuum. Their proximity to each other in the computer lab, their simultaneous tweeting, and their restricted network of followers helped them turn Twitter into a quasi-instant messaging chat room and the task into something interesting, fun and intrinsically meaningful. In fact, in the interviews, Gülden comments on how the first time she realized the enjoyment of using Twitter was when the students met in the lab and used it together. This initial experience of collaborating in the lab would lead the students to collaborate from their homes as seen in the following two vignettes.

Table 2. *From Sentence to Utterance*

Turn	Student	Tweet	Time
1	Gülden	<b>While</b> professor and Florence are discussing about time, I have a lot of fun.	1:48 pm
2	Yucel	<b>Even though</b> I am so tired, I am still studying in computer lab.	1:52 pm
3	Gülden	Florence feels disgusting <b>while</b> Michael are showing her pictures about dog who were eaten	1:55 pm
4	Gülden	<b>Whereas</b> Yucel looks to the picture voluntarily, Michael has to force Florence alias Takiturkar to look at the pictures.	1:56 pm
5	Michael	Some people are tall, <b>whereas</b> others are short.	2:00 pm
6	Gülden	<b>Whereas</b> English language pronunciation is soft, the german pronunciation is more hard.	2:01 pm
7	Gülden	@Florence hey, <b>while</b> hate words are forbidden in the lab, you can use peace or even love words.	2:04 pm
8	Michael	Some people are short, <b>whereas</b> others are tall	2:05 pm
9	Gülden	<b>Whereas</b> Michael today is very offensive, the girls are more defensive	2:05 pm
10	Florence	<b>Whereas</b> some people are nice, others are so bad.	2:05 pm
11	Michael	@Florence The more you hate, the more you love	2:05 pm
12	Florence	<b>Whereas</b> I don’t want to speak some people, i want to talk some of them	2:06 pm
13	Florence	@Michael don’t believe it!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!	2:07 pm
14	Michael	<b>Whereas</b> some people are tall, other are short.	2:07 pm
15	Gülden	Michael wants to become a philosopher, <b>whereas</b> our professor already has become one	2:08 pm
16	Yucel	I would like to go home, <b>while</b> Florence wants to stay here	2:08 pm

17	Florence	<b>whereas</b> i asked Yucel to go home, she send me this sentence	2:08 pm
18	Yucel	<b>Whereas</b> Florence is hungry, I am full	2:12 pm
19	Florence	Yucel is full, while I am hungry	2:15 pm

Note. Target subordinators from the syllabus are in bold.

## Vignette 2. Word Games: Free-styling, Sounding Off and Solidarity

“I am proud of to be addicted to twitter anyway, because I associate it with our class and through twitter I am prepared for the next class.”



Figure 5. Initiating a word game.

In this vignette, Michael and Gülden are on Twitter. They are in their homes and come online at different times. Once they realize that they are both on Twitter, they begin chatting with each other using Twitter as an instant messaging tool like they had done in the lab in the previous vignette. Once again, the students seem to have dual objects at hand as they engage in an impromptu improvisational word game in which one student gives a verb/preposition combination and the other student must create a sentence using the combination.

Gülden first appears on Twitter at 8:10 pm hoping to find someone “in” Twitter, “Is anybody in there???? Come on....” She begins to share YouTube videos containing Arab humor. At 8:12, Michael responds to her with a playful take on the word hello, “Halo!” Gülden continues sharing videos seemingly unaware that Michael is now online. “I’m here,” he tweets. The two then trade humorous YouTube videos. Michael then attempts to engage Gülden in an improvisational game involving preposition combinations (in bold), they were studying in class: “Give a preposition then we’ll make a sentence.” Gülden replies, “**Be done with.**” Michael begins on his own, however, “Thou shall not be **absent from** any gathering in PALS.” Gülden writes two tweets of her own containing prepositions, before Michael finally responds to her initial prompt, “Our class will be **done with** lots of knowledge gained.” Gülden is excited by Michael’s response and gives him some positive feedback, “Yeaaaaah!” The two continue trading tweets. Then Michael makes a joke about Gülden’s use of Twitter, addressing her by her Twitter handle: @thelaw, “Its not easy to be **addicted to** tweeter like thelaw.” She finds this funny, responding, “hahahaha!” before justifying her addiction in her next tweet by using a variety of combinations to express how Twitter helps her, “I am **proud of** to be **addicted to** twitter anyway, because I **associate** it **with** our class and through twitter I am **prepared for** the next class,” (Figure 6) Gülden then once again takes the opportunity to sound off on Michael for another instance of inappropriate behavior in class earlier that day, “Michael seemed today in Marnie’s class to be **bored with** the topic, but anyway he **succeeded in** making jokes about Brandy, Marnie and me.” Michael apologizes blaming his behavior on the early start of school, while also using preposition combinations, “I **apologize for** my bad behavior.” “Its just because I **arrive in** school too early I get nuts.” In her next two tweets, Gülden tries to console Michael, while still admonishing him, explicitly marking her sentences as jokes. “Mike doesn’t have to feel **guilty of** what he had done today with us in Marnie’s class. However, in real there is no **excuse for** his behavior.” “hey I am just kidding and trying to use the prepositions, so please dont be **upset with**

me.” Michael seemingly did not take offense as the two continued to chat for a few more tweets about topic sentences for an essay before Mike takes leave and says good night in two separate tweets, “Can I be **excuse for** my sleepiness? “Good night! peeps! my bed is seducing me.. and I can’t resist it! maybe I’ll just **give in..**”



Figure 6. Addicted to Twitter

In their impromptu word game, Michael and Gülden once again reframe the activity reimagining the rules, objectives, tools, and division of labor I had set forth in the task guidelines. Michael attempts to transform the original solitary informational task I had constructed into a game in which he and Gülden must improvise a sentence based off of the other’s prompt. As with verbal dueling, improvisational word games like this may be an exercise in solidarity building or an attempt to establish intellectual superiority by coming up with the most ingenious sentence (Cook, 2000). Michael’s suggestion to, “Give a preposition and make a sentence,” may have come from his interest in hip-hop culture, which was apparent in the language and content he used and shared in his tweets as well as his enthusiasm for Yo Mama jokes, which we had studied in class as an example of the *so...that* subordinating conjunction of cause/effect. This invented game they were playing may be viewed as a type of ‘freestyling,’ a style of singing common in hip-hop music, where rappers come up with rhymes extemporaneously and try to continue as long as they can without stopping while rapping about different topics. At times, rappers engage in “battles,” a type of verbal duel in front of audiences to determine who the most skilled freestyler is. The more dexterous ones will take prompts from the audience about topics to rhyme about without breaking their flow, while also engaging in insulting and discrediting their competitors.

Gülden responds to Michael’s request and gives him verb/preposition phrase: *be done with*, which he successfully uses to create an accurate sentence. In the beginning, Gülden is seemingly playing the game with Michael, even encouraging him and finding humor in his responses, evidenced by her use of *hahahahaha*. However, after Michael takes a humorous jab at Gülden’s Twitter usage, she once again takes the opportunity to sound off on Michael for another instance of inappropriate behavior. Thus, once inside the reframed activity Michael has set-up in order to practice and have fun through an improvisational word game, Gülden uses the frame to express her real feelings towards her classmate. Despite her claims that she is just kidding and trying to use the prepositions, given the previous vignette, there does seem to be an element of truth to her displeasure with Michael’s actions. He at least believes so, evident by his apology and attempts to save face and reestablish solidarity with his classmate. All the

while the two stay within at least one parameter of the original frame I created for the task: use grammar structures from the syllabus.

Moving from the computer lab, where they tweeted in real-time in the presence of each other, the three students began to meet and communicate with each other from their own houses, conceptualizing Twitter as a virtual meeting space for synchronous communication in the vein of an instant messenger or internet relay chat room. That they conceived of Twitter as a place is evident in their arranging times to meet as well as in their various tweets describing Twitter as a place, such as when Gülden signed in and impatiently asked: Anybody in there???? Come on.... 8:10 PM Dec 14th from web. The exchange in this vignette took place around 8:00. Gülden mentions in her interview how it had been difficult living in America the short time she had been here, raising her daughter alone with no real social life due to family and school obligations. Gülden and Florence also both describe how moving to America contributed to them losing contact with their primary social circles back in Turkey, leaving their only friends in America the ones they had met through going to school. That these students felt a lack of a social circle and began meeting on Twitter to chat, suggests Twitter had become a place not only to practice their English, but also to establish, build, and maintain relationships with their classmates

### Vignette 3. Hypothetical Carnage: Carnival, Alternative Realities and Double-Voiced Discourse

“If I put my picture here, you will see my beautiful face. I don’t wanna bad eyes on my face. LOL.”

In the following vignette, Gülden, Florence, and Michael are each at their homes using Twitter in the evening at the same time. Over a span of 10 minutes from 8:53 pm to 9:03 pm, the students have a conversation on Twitter, blending such forms of language play as: speaking to hypothetical situations, using a foreign phrase, referencing fictional worlds, repeating structures, double-voiced discourse and parody. The students draw out two distinct conversational threads. The first one involves good natured teasing and references to foreign ideas and words. Michael initiates the teasing by prodding Florence to put her picture on Twitter, which she did not want to do and which had been a running joke both online and in class throughout the seven-week session. Florence and Gülden are clearly amused with the banter as they use abbreviations and emoticons to back channel their enjoyment. In the second thread in Table 2, the students used the function of the 1<sup>st</sup> conditional<sup>2</sup> to create an imaginary world in which they discuss the possibility of Florence being murdered by Michael, Gülden and myself.

In [turns 1 through 3](#), the students make it known to each other that they are on Twitter, yet still accomplish this task by using a target grammar structure. In [turn 5](#), Michael teases Florence about not having her picture on her Twitter account, a running joke throughout the session, “If Florence can only put a picture on her profile, it’ll be great!” In [turn 7](#), Florence justifies not putting a picture on Twitter by hypothesizing that if she had a picture of her ‘beautiful’ face on Twitter, it could lead to ‘bad eyes’ and envy. “If I put my picture here, you will see my beautiful face. I don’t wanna bad eyes on my face. LOL.” In [turn 11](#), however, Gülden tries to convince Florence with a witty hypothesis that if Florence does put her picture on Twitter, “...we can all say *mashallah* to her, which keeps her safe from bad eyes ;-).

The second topic revolved around murder as the students joke about killing each other. The students had been working on collaborative essays with each responsible for an individual part of the essay. The topic of murder is brought up by Florence in [turn 4](#), who appears to be attempting to use a joke as a leave-taking strategy when she writes, “If I go will you kill me?” Michael appropriates the topic from Florence in [turn 8](#), noting that if there is utility in killing Florence, then he has no problem committing the act, “If killing you would do me any better than I will.” Gülden appropriates the semantic and structural content of Florence and Michael’s previous tweets in [turn 9](#) by joking that she’ll turn a blind eye toward this

murder, “If Michael will kill you, I don’t know anything about it.” In [turn 10](#), Florence, still on the topic of death wonders whether I will murder her if she doesn’t complete her homework, “If I don’t correct my individual essay, Dave can kill me or not?” Michael then leaves the conversation, which continues with Florence and Gülden. In [turn 12](#), Gülden maintains her blind eye towards murder, “If Dave will kill you, I won’t know it too.” In [turn 13](#), Florence tries to persuade Gülden not to kill her by asking Gülden what she would do without her, “IF I die, what are you going to do without me, So don’t kill me.” In [turn 14](#), Gülden now tries to support Florence, assuring that killing her is not permitted, “If Florence won’t correct her individual essay, Dave is not allowed to kill her, even Michael.” In [turn 15](#), although, Gülden speculates that I might “murder” something else, Florence’s grade, if the essay is not completed, “But if Florence won’t correct her individual essay, Dave can kill her grade.” In [turns 16 & 17](#), Florence is expressing her happiness about surviving her physical death, but realizes she is not safe from the death of her grade: “ok I am not going to die tomorrow it is great... but I see I will die anyway.” Finally, in [turn 18](#), Gülden unites the two topics of envy and murder by threatening to kill Florence should she not put her picture on Twitter ([Table 3](#)).

In this vignette, the students rely heavily on addressivity, carnival language, parody and double-voiced discourse (Bakhtin, 1981, 1984, 1986) to establish and continue their conversation. Each successive tweet seems to be the fuel for the next as students practice grammar structures picking up on each other’s linguistic and semantic content in their pseudo world of carnage. Their references to fictional words in which the students and teacher may consider murder for such actions as leaving a conversation or not completing an assignment dramatically invert the accepted social order, yet provide the students with semantic content that may be intrinsically interesting and motivating due to its humorous nature. Their use of parody, in which they use the content of each other’s tweets to maintain and advance their conversation, makes the whole episode possible and heightens the sense of humor. It can also be argued that the students not only have become the authors, but also the characters of their tweets. In double-voiced discourse the author’s words serve two intentions, to further and advance the ideology of the character as well as the author (Bakhtin, 1935/1981). As the author of their tweets, they seem to stay within the confines of the authoritative academic discourse by restricting the linguistic content of their tweets to the subordinating conjunction *if* and the pragmatic purpose to practice. However, the semantic content repositions the students as characters of their tweets, which advances a different, if not hidden ideology; the students’ parodying of the power relations between the teacher and students might be seen as a form rebellion against the task that allows the students to gain greater control over their learning and reframe the activity in a way that is more enjoyable.

**Table 3.** *Hypothetical Carnage*

Turn	Student	Tweet	Time
1	Gülden	If Michael can start tweeting too, then Florence would know that he is also here	8:53 pm
2	Michael	If Florence is here, it’ll be great!	8:55 pm
3	Florence	If I am not here, how can I write something. LOL :D	8:56 pm
4	Florence	If I go will you kill me?	8:57 pm
5	Michael	If Florence can only put a picture on her profile, it’ll be great!	8:57 pm
6	Gülden	If you send me your paragraphs, I could check my text because I need it for the introduction.	8:57 pm
7	Florence	If I put my picture here, you will see my beautiful face. I don’t wanna bad eyes on my face. LOL	8:58 pm

8	Michael	If killing you would do me any better then I will...	8:59 pm
9	Gülden	If Michael will kill you, I don't know anything about it.	8:59 pm
10	Florence	If I don't correct my individual essay, can the professor kill me or not?	9:00 pm 9:00 pm
11	Gülden	If Florence is afraid of bad eyes, we can all say mashallah to her which keeps her safe from bad eyes ;-)	
12	Gülden	If the professor will kill you, I won't know it too.	9:01 pm
13	Florence	IF I die, what are you going to do without me, So don't kill me.	9:01 pm
14	Gülden	If Florence won't correct her individual essay, the professor is not allowed to kill her, even Michael.	9:01 pm
15	Gülden	But if Florence won't correct her individual essay, the professor can kill her grade.	9:02 pm
16	Florence	Ok I am not going to die tomorrow it is great	9:02 pm
17	Florence	but I see I will die anyway.	9:03 pm
18	Gülden	If you don't put a picture in here, then I could kill you tomorrow ;-)	9:03 pm

## DISCUSSION

During their use of Twitter during the seven-week session Gülden, Michael and Florence did in fact use a variety of types of language play, including repetition, joking, insulting, improvisational word games, foreign words and references, imaginary worlds and carnival language. While communicating collaboratively, the students seemed to show a preference for using language play, continuing to embed it in frames that used academic grammatical constructions, resulting in awkward, if not humorous and memorable tweets. That they were enjoying themselves and finding humor in the interactions in the vignettes is corroborated by the abbreviations and emoticons signaling humor which appear in the tweets as well as the students' own admission in the interviews that their real-time communication on Twitter helped make the task fun.

The use of language play may have been influenced by a few factors. Dialogic, synchronous digital communication tools, such as internet relay rooms and chatting, have been demonstrated to foster online communities with relaxed interactional norms which students can exploit for creative, risk-taking and playful language (Herring, 1999, 2009; Nardi, Whittaker & Bradner, 2000; Thorne, 2000). Furthermore, using Twitter as a bounded community in educational, language learning settings contributes to the building of classroom community (Antenos-Conforti, 2009; Lomicka & Lord, 2011; Newgarden, 2009). The camaraderie and support of the micro-community may have further helped to establish a space which opened up opportunities for language play and risk-taking.

One may ask why these students in particular formed an online community and not any of the other students. Stefanone and Gay (2008) posit that students who have established in-class social networks based on choice homophily—such as age, gender, and ethnicity—tend to reproduce these social networks in computer-mediated communication forums. This is clearly evident in the case of Gülden and Florence both females with Turkish cultural heritages, who were roughly around the same age and had similar experiences with digital communication tools, particularly instant messaging applications. Although Michael did not share the same gender and ethnicity as Gülden and Florence, he was a part of their social network in class—he sat next to them in all of their classes and usually worked with them in groups. He only seemed to be outcast from the group when his attempts at humor were not met kindly by his classmates. This social network at times led the students to visit the computer lab together with each other

after class time, where they practiced on Twitter. These visits to the computer lab allowed them to initially discover that they could communicate in real-time on Twitter.

The students could not have formed an online community had they not ‘spun-off’ Twitter from a microblog to a quasi-instant messenger. These students brought to their experience with Twitter sustained, cultures-of-use (Thorne, 2003) with a variety of digital communication tools in non-academic speech communities. Yet, according to the interviews, they all preferred chatting and texting above others, which was how they communicated with their friends back home. Confronted with a largely asynchronous, digital communication tool given to them to learn authoritatively-sanctioned ways for using academic English grammar, while struggling with being taken out of their established social networks with their friends back home, the students may have responded to this contradiction by spinning it off, drawing on their repertoire of communication methods with chatting and texting, noticing similar affordances in Twitter’s interactional capabilities, despite synchronous communication not being the intended nor dominant method of communication within the Twitter speech community or the space I originally constructed for the class. Spinning off the tool, the students moved from the *sentence* to the *utterance* (Bakhtin, 1953/1986) resulting in a quantitative and qualitative change in language use. The students displayed conversational, interactional language marked by characteristics of synchronous CMC communication (Honeycutt & Herring, 2009; Thorne, 2000). Their tweets contained parody and double-voiced discourse (Bakhtin, 1935/1981) becoming the vehicle for multiple intentions, including the appropriation of sanctioned academic grammar, as well as informal language commonly used in synchronous digital communication and the building and developing of interpersonal relationships established in the micro community. This study suggests similar findings to Thorne (2003) who described how CMC tool shifts in language learning tasks in academic settings opened up possibilities for transformative change, creating additional learning opportunities.

In the interviews, Gülden, Florence and Michael all mention how their real-time collaboration on Twitter, as seen in this previous vignette, was beneficial to their learning experience. Gülden points to being able to compare sentences with each other to see if they were using the forms accurately. She also remarks that how I initially set up the task for the students to work individually clashed with her cultural experiences in Germany, where she was used to working with groups. Florence provides insight into how collaborating on Twitter gave the students the opportunity to practice their informal language use, which wouldn’t have been possible if they had only worked individually practicing the sanctioned academic structures outlined in the course syllabus. This “street language,” as she terms it fit in better with the nature of the tool as they were using it and helped her develop and broaden her style and generic repertoire, as Florence rightly remarks it is not too common to use academic language while chatting. Michael states that while not too practical, they were able to leverage Twitter as a conversational tool in order to help them get ideas for the content of their tweets and receive instantaneous feedback, “...sometimes what happens is, we get ideas from the first person's post. In my opinion, I think it's better to work with them, cause you can get corrected in some instances you make mistakes.” When I asked Michael about the positive or negative aspects of using Twitter, he commented that one positive to using Twitter for the class was that he found another way to use Twitter, one that was not intended “as it's main purpose”. (*sic*).

## CONCLUSION

Student agency is not an individual state of being, rather direct actions taken by the student. It is doing rather than being, initiating rather than reacting, meaningful rather than void (van Lier, 2008; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). Although constrained by their material environment, agents—individually or collaboratively—choose their own motivations, tools, partners, rules, divisions of labor and direct their activity accordingly. In educational settings, students form their own motivations that direct their activity and result in learning. Even in the middle of a single activity, students may reshape the context, and thus the activity, by redefining the object according to their own goals and outcomes (Coughlan & Duff, 1994;



Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2001). Students therefore show agency in creating their own learning contexts (van Lier, 2008). Gülden, Michael and Florence did not solely place themselves in the task designed for them, but co-constructed their own activities to better direct their own educational and social goals. Thus, the students engaged in a process of “expansive learning,” in which they ‘resolve[d] the pressing internal contradictions by [co-]constructing and implementing a qualitatively new way of functioning...’ *horizontally* distributing the learning process amongst themselves in ‘situationally constructed social spaces,’ (Engeström, 2007), which, according to the students, positively impacted and changed the learning outcomes and objectives set forth in the class syllabus, as well as the interpersonal relationship dynamics between the students.

This study suffers from a few limitations, such as a small sample-size, the time between the retrospective interviews and the closing of the task as well as a lack of inter-rater reliability for coding the data in the corpus. However, the findings still serve to make us consider Cook’s (2000) suggestion that teachers and researchers need to expand their conceptualization of what constitutes authentic language use and make spaces in classrooms for language play to attain learning outcomes and objectives remains highly relevant, especially in the current era of innovation and expansion in digital communication and the additional and surprising opportunities they afford for sanctioned and unsanctioned language learning. It is advisable to perform further research in how language play can be integrated into tasks involving synchronous digital communication tools, while remaining flexible and open to task design and implementation, as transformative uses affecting language use and learning outcomes may be latent in the tools, student networks and cultures-of-use, and may remain unapparent to curriculum designers and teachers at the outset of or even during the task.

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## NOTES

1. **Yo Mama jokes** are often crude jokes told about people’s mothers. The jokes usually insult the intelligence or appearance of one’s mother and depending on the context may be taken light-heartedly or more seriously.
2. **The First Conditional** expresses a hypothetical future situation and uses the subordinator *if* in the subordinate clause and the modal auxiliary *will* in the main clause.

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## APPENDIX A. Tweet Clouds

19 agree alias amazing answer bad bayram best better big black book brother canim chapter check class coffee combinations come cookies course crazy daughter dave daves david day did die dream eat eating e @el english @esl essay fact favorite feature feel finish finished food fun funny germany ghandi going good grammar great guys hahaha hahahahaha happy hard hey home homework hours humans idea individual jokes kill king know @kora lab lama learn let life live living look lot love make makes mama man marisols means michael @michael mike miss mistakes mother need new night ok pals people person picture pictures post preposition professor read reading really related repeat right sad say saving second sentence sentences sleep soon start stop students stuff stupid sure tak @tak talk teacher test text thank thing time tired today told tomorrow topic try turkey turkish twitter upset used wait waiting want wants watch way wife wiki wish wondering wont world wouldnt write www yes yo youtube

Gülden’s tweet cloud displaying most used words

2xyg ^^ absent accused actually add advance aemxgp agree asked bad basak bassak begining believe better  
 black born bring burger bury bye camera car channel characters check china class conclusions dark dave decided die  
 different dogs doing doorbell dream @el end @esl exited expected fat father fingers  
 flush friday funny gain girls goes good great gurl guys hahaha hahahaha halo happen hear heard hello  
 heres hey high history itll jump kfc kicking killing kinda king knew @kor lets lick liz lizzy lol look lots love mail make  
 mama mamas marked mommas mother moving need needs new night oh ok old pain paragraph party people peoples  
 picture poor prefer prepositon prince profile really ring said saw school self send sent sentence share shes  
 short smell smelly soon sorry star stop street students study @tak tall thanks  
 @the theres things think thousand time toilet town treasure truck true turn tweettn twice ugly  
 unless videos watch went whered wiki wish word WOW write www yeah yes yo youtube

Michael's tweet cloud displaying most used words

## APPENDIX B. Task Handout



### Task-Based Activity

1:

### Microblogging

#### Rationale

Output, or production of language, contributes significantly to language acquisition by allowing the student to test ideas they have about language, by noticing a gap in their language output, and by giving them the opportunity to use meta-language to reflect on their production (Swain, 1995). In addition, becoming a member of an English language community also can aid acquisition, both cultural and linguistic, by allowing the student to participate in a community first on the periphery, then as an outright member. Finally, micro-blogging helps to build classroom community (Newgarden, 2009).

#### Background

Microblogging is a social media platform which has become quite popular in the United States. It consists of writing short messages, or updates, of 140 characters or less, and then posting them to a public timeline, which can be viewed by anyone. A person builds their network by following people. As you follow people and they follow you, your messages appear on their home page, and vice-versa. This is the core of the microblogging network. Similar to Facebook and other social-networking sites, users can post short messages, photos, videos and audio to their profile, and even engage in conversations; however, microblogging differs from social-networking in that one's network of friends may be based on similar interests, rather than on prior friendship or acquaintances.

The most popular microblogging service to date is TWITTER. Twitter is used by more than 6,000,000 people in the United States, including famous actors and celebrities, well-known businesses and news outlets, even President Obama. Being the most-well known service, Twitter will be the microblogging platform used for this class. To further acquaint yourself with microblogging and Twitter, view these two short videos: <http://tinyurl.com/384n2f> <http://tinyurl.com/d33u14>

With Twitter you can:

- Update your status: 140 characters including spaces
- Send direct messages: private messages to your friends
- Favorite someone's tweets
- Retweet: display a friend's tweet so all of your other friends can see it
- Reply to someone: use the @username to reply to someone's tweet.
- Search the public timeline: use the search box to enter words you want to search on Twitter.

### Objective

To develop grammatical competence especially accuracy and complexity in sentence writing and conciseness through micro-blogging.

### Summary

During the course of the sessions, it is your option to use Twitter. I suggest you write a total of 75 tweets. This averages out to approximately ten sentences per week. However, I encourage you to take advantage of this opportunity to have your English reviewed and write as many sentences as possible. I will give you suggestions during each week about which grammar constructions should be in your updates; the content of the updates should revolve around your life and interests.

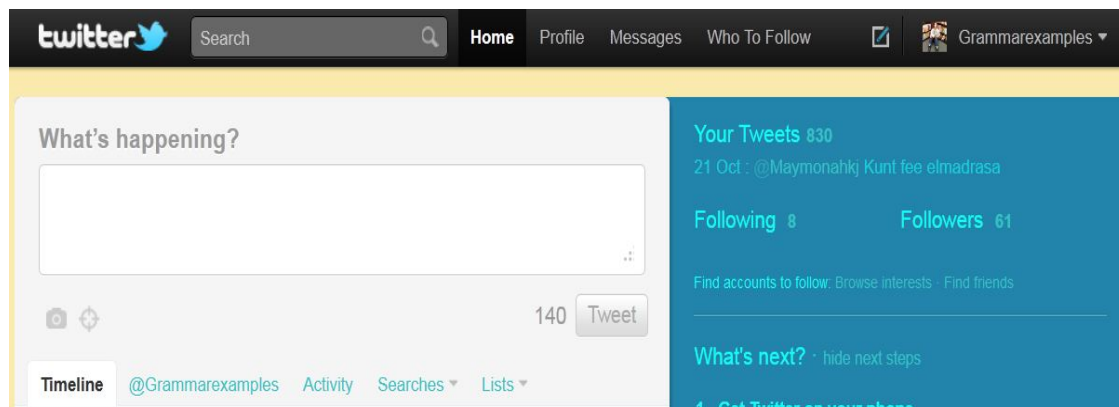
As you begin to Tweet, I will do one of two things. First, I might REPLY to a tweet you have written and MENTION your name. If I do this, the tweet is non-normative and should be corrected. Second, I might FAVORITE and RETWEET your sentence. This means that the sentence is normative.

### Assessment and Grading Criteria

This assignment is optional and does not count towards your grade, but should you choose to do it, you should aim to write 10 sentences per week throughout the session. I will provide you with feedback for all the sentences you write.

### Twitter's Layout

#### Home Page



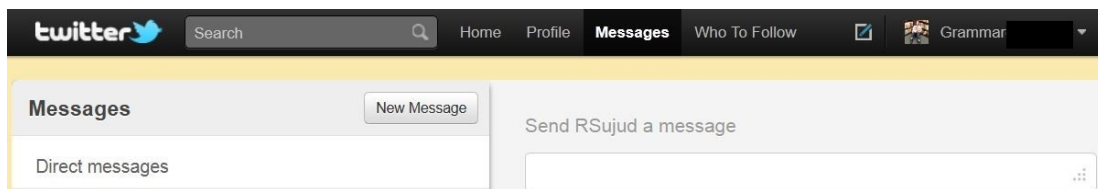
On your home page is where you write your sentences. You write them in the box that says WHAT'S HAPPENING? Also on your home page, you can check any mentions by clicking on the @username link. Those are the two tabs useful to you for this task



### Profile Page

Your profile page shows all of the tweets you have made. It also shows you any tweets that you have favorited as well as any people you are following.

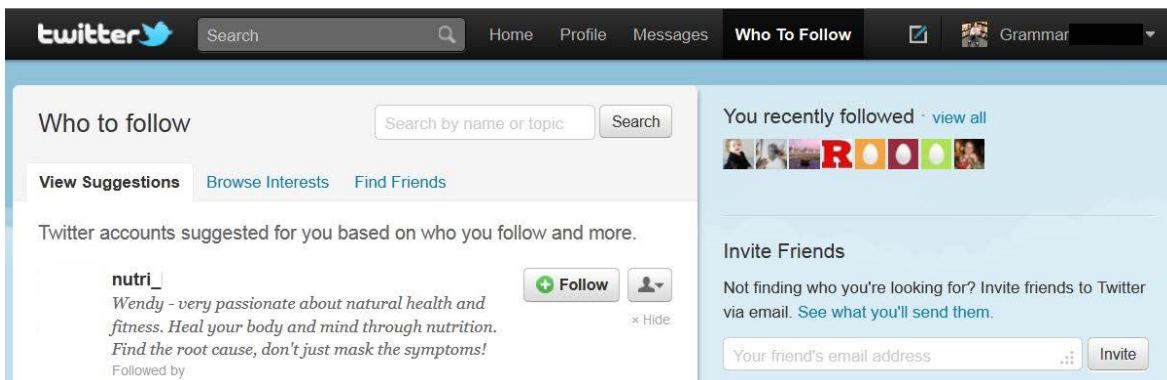
### Message Page



On Twitter, you are allowed to send users private messages, messages that only you and the user can see. You can do this on your message page. Simply create a new message and choose which user you would like to send it to.

### Follow Page

On the following page, you choose who you want to follow. Enter their twitter name or email in the user box. When the user appears, click on the FOLLOW button. This user's updates will now appear on your page.



## APPENDIX C. Interview Questions

1. Had you ever used a chat tool, instant messaging service or microblog before attending this course?
2. What is your preferred method of communication among your friends?
3. How competent are you using a computer and the internet?

4. Compare your interactions with your social circle in your home country from the last few months living in your country to your interactions with the social circle during your time in the class.
5. What are your thoughts about the microblogging experience we had in class?
6. What is your memory of the instructions for using Twitter in the class?
7. Do you remember using Twitter to chat?
8. If so, what do you remember about the experience?
9. Whose decision was it to use Twitter as a chat tool?
10. If so, what do you remember about the experience?
11. What were your goals while you were using Twitter as a chat tool?

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

I have 8 years of experience teaching English as a Second Language in northern New Jersey. I attained my M.A. in Applied Linguistics from the University of Massachusetts-Boston in 2011, where I concentrated on ESL and EFL pedagogy. My interests included computer-assisted language learning, additional language acquisition, sociocultural theory, cognitive approaches, critical pedagogy and corpus linguistics.

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