

## **SOCIAL MEDIA “FACEBOOK” IN THE SERVICE OF LEARNING FOREIGN LANGUAGES**

Nabil Al-Awawdeh

Graduate instructor - French 1100, 1200 and 2100  
University of Missouri - Columbia

### **ABSTRACT**

This paper will describe the process of setting up and operating a group of cultural and linguistic exchanges (francophone / anglophone) created on a social network: Facebook. My reflection is based on an experimental project developed in an American academic institution teaching French for (specialist and non-specialist) students in the university of Missouri- Columbia. It will be a question here of evaluating the various possibilities of exploiting such a group and of defining their limits, It will also be necessary to question the possibility for teachers of today to use social networks for pedagogical purposes, in which public and private spaces intermingle. My reflection will be developed in three stages: first, I shall describe the essential steps involved in setting up such a mechanism, and then analyze the possibilities for the pedagogical exploitation of such a group. At the end, what restrictions related to the use of Facebook in the classroom?

### **INTRODUCTION**

At the heart of this project lies the primary desire to find educational alternatives in order to motivate non-specialist students who mostly choose to learn French only to meet the academic requirements of their university program.

While digital technology may prove to be an ally of choice in the teaching of French as a foreign language, it nevertheless becomes the number one enemy when learners use it in a bad way inside the classroom class. As Hadi Salehi points out: The benefits that SNSs tools bring to the classroom can easily be seen. However, excluding the educational functions, SNSs like Facebook, Blog, or Twitter are still serving us as entertainment on a large degree. Therefore, inserting SNSs into ESL classroom may cause students' distraction. The struggle is also uneven in that the teacher, alone in front of his class, must ensure that text, Facebook statuses and other tweets do not monopolize the attention of the student public to the point of making any attempt to transmissions of knowledge. But, rather than fight against the use of social networks in the classroom, would it not be possible to tame them in order to use them for pedagogical purposes? The relationship between professor and student would not be better to be part of a dynamic of exchanges, even if they were virtual. It is from these multiple questions that the current project was adopted.

### **HOW TO SET UP SUCH A GROUP?**

The creation of the group is quite simple. It is preferable, initially, that the teacher creates a Facebook profile that is not his private profile, which avoids having to juggle with the different privacy settings. Once the profile is created, just create a new group, the device is quite simple. 3 types of groups can be created: public, accessible to all and by all; Closed: visible (members and group) by all, only publications are private; secret: only visible to members who cannot register until they receive an invitation by e-mail. This alternative is for me the one I have chosen, It is the most secure and it makes it possible to reassure the parents, especially on the French side, and to know that I somehow preserve my students from the dangerous drifts of " Internet. Once the group has been set up, everyone can publish on the page on different media: photo, text, or video.

### **WHAT ARE THE PEDAGOGICAL POSSIBILITIES OF SUCH A GROUP?**

Such a project can be developed at the local and / or international level. Originally, the public consisted of two classes of non-specialist American students in verbal agreement with a class of French students, also, non-specialists in English. Consideration could be given to extending the public to Francophiles in addition to Francophones and Anglophones and not necessarily creating other groups, but rather to expanding the network. Another alternative would be to propose a unilingual group that would consist of learners of French, but who would only exchange in the target language , as we did in our project case. It should be noted that no student should be forced to participate in the project. Only the learners who show a real desire to participate in the life of the platform integrate the group.

A paper alternative, more traditional, is therefore proposed to the others. In her article "Technology and Research in the Teaching of Foreign Languages, Literature, and Culture", Nancy Mandlove recalls: Student involvement with technology falls into three basic categories: use of prepared materials (commercial materials or materials prepared by faculty); use of technology for class assignment and projects; and preparation of multimedia programs for use in the department by other students. (Les Lloyd 300)

Such a project therefore has the advantage of cumulating these three categories insofar as the teacher can quite use the Facebook platform as a form of Blackboard in order to put online teaching aids: grammar reminders, Videos (dialogues or even monologues dealing with the subject studied in class, etc. One of the tasks that immediately enchanted students was online writing. For some, editing at home comes down to using Google translate or other online translation sites. Access to such resources has become so free in recent years that it has become a reflex for many non-specialist students. It seems that the use of Google translate, at least for the comparison group of about twenty individuals, has been less systematic in a Facebook editorial. In particular, they were asked to post a photo taken during their spring break and to recount what they had done during their holidays.

Unlike traditional dramas, the compositions written on Facebook showed a real investment on the part of the students. Whatever their level of French, all those who had accepted to join the group started writing without hesitation. The digital medium thus made it possible to remove the blockages that some could feel in front of a sheet of paper. As John Osborne points out, the value of exploiting digital resources within the foreign language classroom is multidimensional: Warschauer (1997) cites a number of studies indicating that computer-mediated exchange tends to achieve better involvement of all members of the class. The particular nature of online communication, intermediate between speaking and writing, also means that learners will often use more spontaneity and interactivity. (Osborne 102) The project can also be done in class, the teacher guiding students to find and correct syntax, lexical errors, or giving them idiomatic expressions that allow them to correctly express what they have Meant. If the teacher notices common errors, he may choose to go back to a grammar point which seems particularly problematic in order to allow the learners to correct their publication later. Once they have been corrected, they can be exploited either orally by a simple reading followed by correction of the pronunciation or by revision of the interrogative words by putting the students in pairs and asking them to transform the editorial staff into a dialogue By inserting questions like "What did you do during your vacation?" "Did you love Missouri?" "Etc. As Nancy Mandlove points out, digital support changes the learning dynamic in a fundamental way. It no longer puts the teacher in the front line, the latter is no longer the essential actor of didactic exchange, because the students themselves become the main actors, the teacher acting in his background: The Internet has revolutionized the teaching of foreign languages by providing immediate access to news, people, cultural information, radio broadcasts, and images from all over the world. It allows students to find and contribute valuable information to the classroom in a way not previously possible. Students feel a sense of ownership and a direct connection between their own experience and their academic work Learning becomes much more student-centered, while the teacher becomes a kind of "orchestra leader" who helps to integrate and assess information that the students, themselves, contribute to the class. (Mandlove 303).

Beyond the linguistic skills that such a group can reinforce, the cultural aspect is also a fundamental element in so far as it is he who, more than the language as a system, will arouse the interest of non-specialist learners. In order to enrich the cultural knowledge, students were asked to post their favorite song with a short note about the artist or to share the traditions of their university, their country in order to make them Members of the group. The compositions written in English by the young French can be exploited in order to initiate discussions around cultural themes such as the comparison of French and American educational systems. For intermediate audiences, compositions written in English may be used as a translation medium. Other activities can of course be set up according to the objectives of the teacher. The main thing is to create among students the desire to invest in learning the language by showing them that the French language is not limited to what is contained in the didactic works. French is a gateway to the world, to a world that resembles them, while differing in certain aspects. Like them, young French people learn a foreign language and, like them, make mistakes in syntax and lexicon, but all share the same desire to get to know the culture and country of the other members of the group.

While social networks can certainly become educational allies, the setting up and operation of such a medium is not without its difficulties. French national education is a major obstacle. In France, teachers are obliged to respect the programs established by the national education system. The weight of the common core of knowledge and skills leaves them little room for maneuver, they are not free to exercise their creativity as they see fit. The bilateral agreement that I tried to put in place did not have the expected success on the French side, insofar as my colleagues met the reluctance or even the categorical refusal of their hierarchy. The Internet is frightening in France and parents, like some members of the national education, fear for the safety of children. Having only secondary school teachers in my network, the age of our correspondents was also an obstacle in that they were not all allowed to use the Internet freely.

Implementing such a project also involves clearly setting limits on the teacher-student relationship. The digital medium introduces a relationship of proximity which, if it is planned to be done in an anarchic way, risks causing

harm to both parties. As Chen Chenzi writes, "Besides, sometimes online teacher-student relationship could be tricky. This is why it is better to create a professional Facebook profile before setting up such a group. One can always change the security settings of the account, but it is an additional manipulation that is not useful and may otherwise confuse teachers less comfortable with computers. This is why we created American - American group. Students could post their writing and other members of class could comment on it. Another way to attract student to be engaged in the project, we posted a riddle every evening and first three students guess the answer, would get two extra credits. That did help the students a lot and engaged them in the project daily.

In conclusion, in order for such a group to be truly effective, in the case of a bilateral agreement, the two teachers must also be invested in the project and each group of students must be aware that the work will generate a note. If one proposes something optional, the investment will not be the same. Alternatively, once the group is formed, motivated, and active on the page, set up conversation exchanges on Skype possibly but with profiles created in class so that the boundary between private sphere and the educational sphere is not too confusing. In pairs, students could spend 10 minutes talking in French and 10 speaking in English. The time difference would not be without problems, it would be advisable to think about the problem on a case by case basis. In any case, social networks provide instructors with the opportunity to increase interactivity and increase student interest, which is essential in the case of non-specialist students.

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