

Social Media: A Plain-Sailing Platform in the 21st Century Facilitating English Language Acquisition for Esl Learners

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ABSTRACT

Over the years, the modes of communication and the methods used have changed drastically. Most importantly, technology and its vast popularity of social media marks a milestone in the advancements. Social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, Telegram, etc., have become an essential part in today's day-to-day life. The screen life of people has been increased in this new era of technology. To effectively engage and upsurge with the latest technology, social media creates a need to have a basic understanding of the language of English. Though social media has evolved and introduced itself to many regional languages, still to operate it properly, one certainly has to know the basics of English language. Thus, the social media conversation intensifies encourages realistic interaction among users and English language acquisition.

Thus, Social media can be utilized as a tool to develop the second language acquisition. The process of second language acquisition in the context of social media is much quicker and easier due to the realistic interactive platform it offers. The paper analyses the effects as well as introspectively scrutinize the quality of language aptitude among the users and its acquisition in the effect of social media.

KEYWORDS: Social media, second language acquisition, language skills, interactive platform, language aptitude

INTRODUCTION

Language is a medium of expression and exchange of ideas and emotions. It is an integral part of the effective communication in human beings. The language which has been learnt from childhood becomes a person's first language, whereas language acquired other than the mother tongue becomes the second language. In most of the cases, the second language is learned for educational, professional and social purposes. Second language acquisition is more formal when it comes to educational setting. The classroom environment for acquiring a second language has generally constructed with a context to encourage communication worldwide. Social media as a platform, encourages the users to communicate and also instigates the users' language skills. Social media, though it offers some of its features in regional languages, still English is a widely popular language and users are familiarising themselves with English even it is the second or third language. In this scenario, social media becomes both the tool

and a catalyst for learning English. The written or spoken words are part of the language, and the signs, symbols and gestures are essential aspects of language.

SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION AND SOCIAL-MEDIA AS AN INTERACTIVE TOOL

Second language acquisition is the process involving the intellectual faculty of the mind. Muriel Saville-Torike aptly designates the understanding of a second language. He mentions,

A second language is typically an official or societally dominant language needed for education, employment, and other basic purposes. It is often acquired by minority group members or immigrants who speak another language natively. In this more restricted sense, the term is contrasted with other terms in this list. (4)

Thus, the need for a second language other than the mother tongue is required to communicate with a wide range of audiences socially. In the classroom environment, the interactive mode is preferred in acquiring a second language as it facilitates the learning process. The communicative mode is followed in social media, which facilitates the second language learning process. Muriel Saville-Torike further mentions that the key concepts in the socio-cultural theory of language learning emphasize interactive strategy. It mentions, "interaction not only facilitates language learning but is a causative force in acquisition; further, all of the learning is seen as essentially a social process which is grounded in sociocultural settings" (111)

Interpersonal interaction helps in gaining fluency in the new language acquired. The debate regarding classroom teaching based on directly teaching grammar and vocabulary and the interactive method which raises the introspective question regarding the role of social media in acquiring a second language. In the context of the teaching-learning method of a second language, Lourdes Ortega reflects that, Language teachers across institutions worldwide hotly debate whether students in their classrooms need to be taught grammar and vocabulary to get the basic building blocks of a language first, or whether it is better to somehow approximate in their classroom the richness of natural language meaning-making processes. (8)

These two approaches mark the vastness of the language learning process. Social media in the context of the language learning process acted upon the second theory based on the practical participation of the new learner in communication. Communication enriches the vocabulary, and with the regular use of the new language, the user gets acquainted with the correct grammatical framework of a language.

In acquiring a second language, the role of immersion or the focused mental involvement is important. Social media has the capacity to engage its user with it. Thus, it creates an ideal interactive scenario where the learner or the user is fully immersed in the process. Ahmed, in the article "Social Media in Teaching Languages", refers that,

Social media, considering its interactive set-up, can allow learners to freely interact with others in a near-natural setting. Learners can competitively acquire new languages if they are immersed in an environment where the foreign language they learn is used for instruction. (73-74)

In learning the new language, the user can maintain a balance between his/her native and second language. This process of handling both at a time is partial immersion. Where the conversation with a foreign language speaker only involves a common language, i.e. English makes the user converse only in the common language, which demands the user's complete immersion with the language. Thus, both the complete and the partial immersion phenomenon help develop vocabulary and language aptitude

among social media users. Further, the learning process becomes much more difficult for the learner who does not have any prior knowledge of a second language and does not have any supplementary knowledge of a language other than their native language. For such users, the social media platform allows the learner to get acquainted with it through signs and symbols. The audio-visual media and the emoticons are an important part of language learning in social media. Thus, social media platforms allow the learner to communicate with others to nurture competence in the communicative second language, English. Social media also encourages the communicative scenario by creating:

Connections between learners of English as a second language who speak a specific first language and speakers of English as a first language who seek to speak the other first language. This would result in the development of an exchange program of sorts, mediated through the use of social media. In practice, the learners would be able to direct each other on the acquisition of the second languages they seek to grow their proficiencies in. (Ahmed 75)

Thus, social media places the user in front of an interactive scenario where the learner learns through “try and error method”. In the current digital age, computers, laptops and smartphones have become essentials of life. These have become the learning tool which, at the same time, is time effective and encourages self-learning through digital aids. In the book, *Digital game-based Learning*, Marc Prensky mentions students of the present area as 'Digital Natives (467)', who are more responsive toward the digital world rather than the conventional model of the teaching-learning process. Thus, not only the interaction but also the content available on social media platforms encourage learners to acquire language skills. The role of audio-visual is an excellent part of it as the learner learns more effectively through this.

SOCIAL MEDIA AND LANGUAGE APTITUDE

An interactive method of learning a second language through SMS is an effective medium for fluency, skill and vocabulary. The short messaging service motivates students to write. And in a gradual process, it improves the writing quality. Thus, social media promotes interaction, group discussion and online discussions. Students who hesitate to speak in the classroom also express themselves on social media platforms as it provides the users with a private space and creates a comfort zone. Besma Allagui, in his research, analyses the impact of WhatsApp on students' writing skills. He argues that

WhatsApp can be used effectively to help students focus on the choice and spelling of words. Although the study points to the advantages of using WhatsApp to develop basic writing skills, it can be used to help learners write longer pieces of writing. Focusing on peer-feedback and audience, it can prompt learners into thinking about the fundamental aspects of writing. (228)

Thus, the interaction on social media platforms incorporates self-teaching. The learning method is based on practical participation. Sanaz Jafari and Azizeh Chalak, in the article “The Role of WhatsApp in Teaching Vocabulary to Iranian EFL Learners at Junior High School”, mention that social media conversation enhances the vocabulary of its users. They reflect that,

Mobile applications can bring a wide range of technological possibilities to the class. Language learners also can increase their vocabulary knowledge by simply using WhatsApp. WhatsApp can help the language learners to find the implementation of the words, remember words for a longer time, and practice the words after learning (90).

In the case of second language acquisition, an enriched vocabulary makes the learner more confident in writing and speaking. Writing text messages, comments, and brief self-reflection on social media platfo-

ms enhances the writing skill of the users.

Additionally, in the current digital age, institutions are more inclined to the technological tools for teaching-learning. To make the method essay, the teacher and learners use social media platforms to share study materials and instructions. This official use of social media makes all the students learn English (second language) to understand the interactions. Most importantly, English is preferred as the communicative language to communicate with a diverse population on social media. Therefore, using social media as a second language learning tool nurtures the communicative method of teaching a new language.

Moreover, social media is an effective tool for second language acquisition, but still, it negatively impacts the user. The first and the foremost problem of social media conversations are the abbreviations and the non-standard spellings. The abbreviations are used to save time and space in typing, but it creates a hurdle in learning the correct form of the word. Moreover, non-standard spelling is also used for the same purpose, but they make the learner of the second language more confused. Both the criteria are the barriers of learning the correct spelling of the words. For example, the word 'night' is commonly used and spelt as 'nite' or 'ni8'. The students easily acquire this kind of distortion of spellings, and in formal conversations, letters, emails and classroom settings, they promptly to use them unknowingly. This drawback of social media needs to be corrected among the students who want to learn a second language through social media.

Summation

English, an international language, has given the opportunity to grow under the surge in global media. Social media is no exception in that. Information, entertainment, and engagement with a larger digitally literate audience have the sense of the medium of language used in all the social media. The nature of simplified English, along with the picturesque description, has enabled the integration of the second language very effective. Having no greater knowledge of the language in its grammar and syntax, people are easily communicating in it and making it a tool for daily use. The overuse of such language in social media becomes the point of merging differing cultures, practices and modalities. Although there are distortions in acquiring the language, people are eagerly taking it as their daily mode of communication. And that communication is creating a constructive logic of language learning. The good thing is that people are knowingly or unknowingly taking part in it and making it a more assertive approach for this purpose.

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