SOCIAL NETWORKING SYSTEMS IN TEACHING / LEARNING ENGLISH FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES

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Abstract

The greatest achievement of technology, the Internet, not only changed the lifestyles of the world population, but also created unheard of before opportunities for learning and teaching foreign languages. The development of technology provided the important shift from the informational Web 1.0 to the social Web 2.0, which allows involving users in active communication and collaboration with each other. The number of social media websites keeps constantly increasing, which makes them available to learners all over the world.

This article aims at examining use of social media websites by the university students who study English for Law and Customs Activities. The current research data are compared with the results obtained by A. Paciuk (2012) with the students of the same specialization. Some similarities and statistical correlations between the findings for 'often used' sites have been found, but results differ significantly for 'sometimes used' or 'never used' sites.

Introduction

In 2014, the world commemorates the 25th anniversary of the creation of the World Wide Web by Sir Tim Berners-Lee. In March 1989, Tim Berners-Lee submitted a proposal for an information management system to his boss, Mike Sendall. It was a proposal to develop a radical new way of linking and sharing information: the World Wide Web (http://info.cern.ch/Proposal.html). New technologies changed the way of human communicating and made 'digital literacies' a must (Hockly, 2012). In other words, in the 21st century students will need skills that include "information, media and technology skills".

The Internet provided great opportunities for learning and teaching foreign languages. C. Dudeney and N.Hockly (2012) presented a thorough review of how specific developments in information and communication technologies have impacted on English language teaching over the past three decades. The major shift was the transition from Web 1.0 to Web 2.0, which ensured that online users with no programming skills could produce creative resources. Much of the e-learning since the early 1990s has centered on the Web 1.0 technologies. In contrast to Web 1.0, which refers to the original informational web, Web 2.0 refers to the social web. It is a grouping of newer generation social technologies, whose users are actively involved in communicating and collaborating with each other as they build connections and communities across the web. The term itself was coined by Dale Dougherty in 2004 and popularized by Tim O'Reilly (2012). Here is the question to students and teachers: Web 2.0 or Web 1.0? For the inventor of the Web, Sir Tim Berners-Lee, there is a tremendous sense of *déjà vu* about all this. When asked in an interview (Anderson, 2007) whether Web 2.0 was different from Web 1.0, he replied: *"Totally not. Web 1.0 was all about connecting people. It was an interactive space, and I think Web 2.0 is of course a piece of jargon, nobody even knows what it means. If Web 2.0 for you is blogs and wikis, then that is people to people. But*

that was what the Web was supposed to be all along. And in fact, you know, this 'Web 2.0', it means using the standards which have been produced by all these people working on Web 1.0." Moreover, Sir Tim Berners-Lee has pointed out that the ability to implement Web 2.0 is based on Web 1.0 standards. Therefore, Web 2.0 is not in opposition to Web 1.0, it is its development. In Web 2.0 everyday users generate and share content. It enables groups of users to socialize, collaborate, and work with each other.

In recent years social networking systems, which make use of Web 2.0 technologies, have received much attention in higher education. In the United Kingdom, increasing numbers of younger people have made use of Facebook and MySpace (Oradini and Saunders, 2007). This means that social networking systems have the capability to deliver a platform for learning where the student is potentially at the center of activities. For instance, in the University of Westminster approximately 4,000 students out of 24,000 and 50 staff have made use of e-portfolio, weblogs and wikis.

The key findings on social networking site usage and adoption from the Pew Research Center's Internet Project are as follows (Duggan and Smith, 2013): a number of online adults now use a social networking site of some kind. Facebook is the dominant social networking platform in the number of users, but a striking number of users are now diversifying onto other platforms. 42% of online adults now use multiple social networking sites. In addition, Instagram users are nearly as likely as Facebook users to check in to the site on a daily basis.

Chart 1 on Social Media Sites shows the percentage of online users who use different social media. The 1st columns display the percentage of users in 2012, and the 2nd columns – in 2013. Facebook is the most popular site: the number of users increased from 67% to 71%. Other sites are less popular, but there were more users in 2013 than in 2012. LinkedIn is especially popular among college graduates. Twitter and Instagram have particular appeal to younger adults.
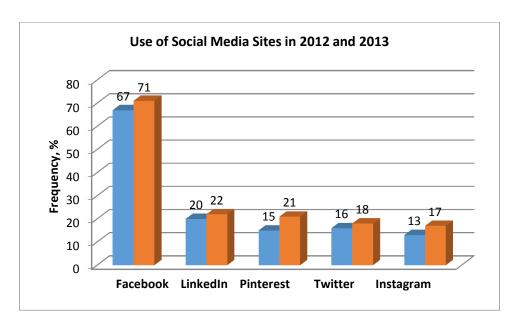

Chart 1. Data from Pew Research Centre's Internet Project Tracking Survey on use of social media sites. 1st columns display the data in 2012, 2nd columns show the data in 2013. The number of respondents N=1,445 aged 18+. (After M. Duggan and A. Smith, Social Media Update 2012-2013).

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The use of social media – from blogging to online social networking – became very popular among teenagers (Lenhart, et al. 2007): "93% of teens use the internet, and more of them use it for social interaction; 42% of teens who use social networking sites also say they blog. 70% social networking teens report reading the blogs of others, and 76% have posted comments to a friend's blog on a social networking site. Email continues to lose its importance among teens as texting, instant messaging, and social networking sites facilitate more frequent contact with friends. Only 14% of all teens report sending emails to their friends every day, making it the least popular form of daily social communication".
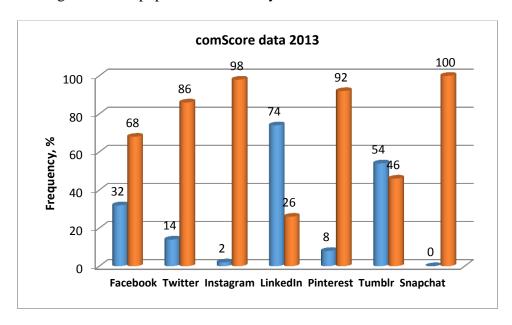

Chart 2. Recent data (7 April 2014, USA) on desk use of media sites versus mobile use. 1st columns show desk use, 2nd columns show mobile use: http://www.comscoredatamine.com/2014/04/users-engage-with-major-social-networks-predominantly-via-mobile/

Recent (7 April 2014) online survey in the USA claims that users engage with major social networks predominantly via mobile. It is seen in Chart 2 that desktop usage (1st columns) has largely remained lower in 2013 for top media sites while mobile usage (2nd columns) continues to increase. In fact, this is a very new trend in social networking: mobile/desktop divide continues to grow. Among the largest social networks, only Linkedin and Tumblr maintain a majority share on desktop, while newer social networks such as Instagram, Pinterest and Snapchat are almost exclusively mobile.

The latest review (Mahdi, 2014) of the literature published in the journal "Teaching English with Technology" analyzes the impact of Computer-Mediated Communication Environments on foreign language learning. It has already been mentioned that the current media sites include Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Wikis, weblogs, Moodle. *Facebook* was launched 10 years ago, in February 2004. In language learning, it facilitates the interaction between the students and the teachers. In the research by K. Mitchell (2012) the students joined *Facebook* for social reasons: they were able to communicate with existing friends, learn English through *Facebook* with few difficulties. *YouTube* is a video-sharing website, which was created in 2005, and it can also be successfully used for language learning purposes. The implementation of wikis in language learning has also received some attention in the recent years, but has not always been successful. G. Kavaliauskienė (2011) reports that the application of wikis in English classes proved to be unproductive and unpopular due to the technical difficulties that kept appearing

when students made attempts at editing their classmates' writing. Weblogs have been known useful for developing reflective learning (G. Kavaliauskienė, 2007). Moreover, the use of Moodle virtual area that combines different approaches to learning and teaching and comprises various reading, listening and vocabulary exercises is supported by university learners of ESP (G. Kavaliauskienė, 2011).

Respondents

The respondents in this study are two groups of the 1st year students, who studied English for Law and Customs Activities at Mykolas Romeris University in 2014. The students are mainly mother-tongue speakers of Lithuanian and entered the university after having studied general English at secondary schools. The design of the English for Specific Purposes course reflects the students' needs in professional language. The course is adjusted to the requirements for a Bachelor degree. The level of students' proficiency is B2 according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages.

Research methodology

The findings have been obtained from two sources: 1) a survey completed by the respondents, 2) comparison of their responses with the data of previous research (Paciuk, 2012), which analyzed the responses of the students of the same specialization two years ago. The survey is designed in accordance with accepted standards of constructing surveys (Dornyei, 2003). It contains statements on students' perceptions of using social media networks. The used survey is reproduced below. Some specific information for each website is included in Table 1 in brackets. It consists of 8 statements, to which students responded on a 4-point Likert's scale ranging from "very often" (1) to "never" (4). The responses have been processed by a means of Software Package for Social Sciences in order to determine if there are any correlations between the current data with the data of the previous research by A Paciuk (2012).

Table 1. Survey „Social networking systems" (Paciuk, 2012).

Social network websites
1.Media sharing websites
2.Media manipulation websites
3.Collaborative editing websites
4.Social bookmarking websites
5.Wiki
6.Conversational sites
7.Social network websites
8.Weblogs

Results and discussion

This part of the article reports the findings of the survey and analyzes the key points that emerged. Chart 3 shows the statistics of the most often used Internet Media Websites. The meanings of the abbreviations are as follows: MSW – Media Sharing Websites, MMW – Media Manipulation Websites, CEW – Collaborative Editing Websites, SBW – Social Bookmarking Websites, WIKI – Wikipedia or created weblogs, CW – Conversational Websites, SNW – Social network Websites, Weblogs – personal e-portfolios. The specific examples of each media are given in Table 2 below.
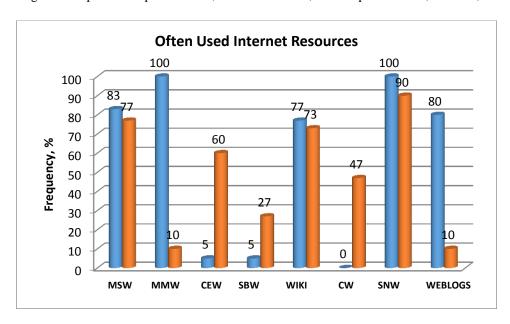
Chart 3. Frequency of students' responses on the most often used Internet Media Websites. The 1st columns display the data of the current research, the 2nd columns – the data by A. Paciuk (2012).

It is seen that responses are close in 3 cases, namely, MSW (83% vs. 77%), WIKI (77% vs. 73%), and SNW (100% vs. 90%). The statistical processing by a means of SPSS has confirmed that there are Pearson's correlations between the response at the probability of 95% and correlation coefficients in the range between 0.82 and 0.93. As far as other results are concerned, the responses differ significantly and no correlations have been found. The causes for such diversities are hard to elucidate, particularly having in mind that the respondents of both streams study the same subject (Law and Customs Activities) at the same University and are of the same age.

Table 2. Responses to the survey questions. Current research data versus Reference A. Paciuk (2012).

Social network websites	Use often Current Ref.		Sometimes Current Ref.		Never use Current Ref.		Not familiar with the item Current Ref.	
Media sharing websites (DropBox, MediaFire, 4Shared, Google, SkyDrive, iCloud)	83% 77%		17%	20%	-	-	-	3%
Media manipulation websites (YouTube, Facebook. Twitter)	100% 10%		-	20%	-	63%	-	7%
Collaborative editing websites (Collabedit, Etherpad, Firepad)	5% 60%		-	30%	50%	7%	50%	3%
Social bookmarking websites (slashdot.org, reddit.com, squidoo.com, stumbleupon.com, digg.com)	5% 27%		-	33%	33%	30%	67%	10%
Wiki (Wikipedia)	77% 73%		23%	17%	-	10%	-	-
Conversational sites (J&M, ELLLO, English Baby, LiveMocha, OmAudio, 1-Language)	5% 47%		-	23%	25%	17%	75%	13%
Social network websites (Facebook, Twitter)	100% 90%		-	10%	-	-	-	-

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Weblogs (individual portfolios)	80% 10%	20%	33%	-	50%	-	7%

The distributions of students' responses for answers 'use often' (also shown in Chart 3), 'use sometimes', 'never use' or 'unknown site' are presented in Table 2. It contains specified social media websites (1st column), and their use: 2nd column –'use often', 3rd column – 'use sometimes', 4th column – 'never use', 5th column – 'unknown site'. The scatter of responses is even more obvious in the 3rd, 4th and 5th columns. The most credible interpretation seems to be a lack of experience in using some sites. Another reason might be the fact that Social Network Websites in the survey were not concretized in (Paciuk, 2012). Statistical processing of the data failed to reveal any correlations between the responses.

Conclusions

The comparison of the current research data with the results obtained two years ago (Paciuk, 2012) reveal that students are familiar with many social media sites, but use only some of them. It is necessary to emphasize that similarly as with the stream of students of the same specialization in 2012, it is essential to increase training in application of social websites learning / teaching ESP. Web 2.0 has a great potential for making changes in the Higher Education. Students can collaborate on projects, create images, edit videos, write blogs, and share bookmarks using web 2.0 tools. The students in the 21st century, or the Generation Y, also known as 'digital natives', is a generation that has grown up with digital technology, performing multiple activities simultaneously. They have different ways of thinking and processing materials, which make Web 2.0 technologies invaluable in helping change learning and teaching methods.

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