

“just facebook me”

**A study of the use of Facebook in a German language course at a
tertiary institution in New Zealand**

A Thesis
submitted in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in the University of Canterbury

by
Vera Monika Leier

University of Canterbury
2016

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Dedicated to my late father Klaus Leier

Abstract

This thesis is a study about the use of social media in language learning at a tertiary level. The social medium chosen was Facebook which was used as part of the classroom curriculum as a way to make the German language more authentic and accessible for the students and to incorporate the language into students' everyday lives. The students were required to submit short informative posts about German culture onto the Facebook-group on a regular basis. This meaning-focused and student-driven activity afforded the students not only the ability to communicate in the target language but also to share cultural knowledge about the German speaking countries.

The aim of the use of Facebook-group was to connect the students of the language class in both a virtual and offline manner and create a tighter class community.

To learn about the perspectives and practices of teacher and students using the Facebook platform, ethnographic methods were used for data collection. Ethnographic tools, such as semi-structured interviews, fieldnotes and participant observation, were applied over a period of one semester, with a pilot study prior to this period. The data were analysed combining thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) and activity theory (Engeström, 1987) to gain a thorough understanding of the mechanism in the Facebook-group. Activity theory helped with focusing the ethnographic narrative. Analysis of the activity systems in operation revealed interesting tensions between the participants (the students) and a) the tools (Facebook-group), b) the rules (course expectations and the conventions of Facebook use), c) the community (students, student teachers and the teacher) and d) the division of labour (power relationships within the community).

The analysis showed that the 23 undergraduate students of the intermediate level German class enjoyed using the Facebook platform for their learning. The students developed relationships in the classroom, taking the opportunity to further practise their informal written German on a social platform which greatly reduced a lot of inhibition. A drawback of the use of Facebook was the fact that the task was part of the curriculum and therefore assessed, although the teacher did only acknowledge the contributions and did not mark them. However, the students were aware of the risk of making mistakes because their contributions could be seen by everybody in class. This led to anxiety by some students who were crafting their posts carefully and did not make use of the Facebook task to improve their spontaneous more informal language production. The behaviour of the students in the Facebook-group during the semester was similar to the way they would behave on a learning management site.

They took care in preparing their written contributions and lacked spontaneity. After the end of the semester a few class members continued using the Facebook-group to keep up contact with each other. They wrote messages and posted announcements in the target language.

The role of the teacher on the Facebook-platform changed during the research period. Initially, the teacher's role was active as the designer of the assignment and the founder of the Facebook-group; eventually the students took over control of the Facebook-group administration and the teacher retreated into a more passive position. The teacher merely observed the activities on the Facebook-group but still contributed with occasional posts and regularly provided feedback to the posts of students. The feedback was perceived as positive and motivating. Students enjoyed the acknowledgement when the teacher made small corrections.

The Facebook-group as part of the language classroom was a valuable component for community-building and provided the students with an additional opportunity to use the target language. The use of Facebook-group can be recommended to practitioners.

Keywords:

Facebook-group, authentic, German language

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Table of Contents

Abstract.....	iii
Acknowledgements.....	v
List of Abbreviations used in this thesis	xiii
Chapter 1 Introduction.....	1
1.1 Context information.....	1
1.2 Theoretical framework.....	3
1.3 Statement of the problem and gap in the research	3
1.4 Focus of this study and research question.....	6
1.5 Aim of this project.....	7
1.6 Design and methodology of this study.....	7
1.7 Thesis structure	8
1.8 Summary.....	9
Chapter 2 Literature Review	10
2.1 Communicative language teaching (CLT).....	10
2.1.1 Input hypothesis.....	11
2.1.2 Input-interaction theory	12
2.1.3 Output theory.....	13
2.1.4 Grammar teaching in CLT.....	13
2.1.5 Feedback in CLT.....	14
2.1.6 Criticism of CLT.....	15
2.1.7 Section summary.....	16
2.2 Task-based language teaching (TBLT) and authentic setting	16
2.2.1 Definition of task-based language teaching (TBLT).....	17
2.2.2 Definitions of “task”.....	18
2.2.3 Models of task-based language teaching.....	21
2.2.4 Task-based language teaching applied in the classroom.....	23
2.2.5 Section summary.....	25
2.3 Computer-mediated communication	25
2.3.1 Affordances of asynchronous CMC tools.....	26
2.3.2 Reaching out: using CMC tools to telecollaborate.....	30
2.3.3 Section summary.....	32
2.4 Social Networking Sites (SNS).....	33
2.4.1 Use of SNSs.....	33
2.4.2 Identity creation and profiles	34
2.4.3 “Friends” on SNS.....	35
2.4.4 Spaces.....	36
2.4.5 Social networking sites in language education	38
2.4.6 Section summary.....	41
2.5 Social presence.....	41
2.5.1 Section summary.....	47
2.6 Chapter summary.....	47
Chapter 3 Theoretical background of this thesis.....	50
3.1 Introduction and overview of the activity theory (AT) framework.....	50
3.2 Background and history: Vygotsky and Leont’ev.....	53
3.2.1 Vygotsky.....	53
3.2.2 Leont’ev	56
3.3 Engeström and his principles of activity theory.....	57
3.4 Relevant applications of activity theory.....	62

3.5	Summary.....	65
Chapter 4 Methodology.....		66
4.1	Pilot study.....	67
4.2	Facebook-group.....	70
4.2.1	The characteristics of the Facebook-group and its affordances.....	70
4.3	Main study.....	72
4.3.1	Participants of the main study.....	72
4.3.2	Context of the main study.....	74
4.3.3	The Facebook-assignment and the course curriculum.....	74
4.4	Ethical considerations.....	75
4.4.1	Facebook and privacy.....	75
4.5	Ethnographic methods.....	76
4.5.1	Ethnography and the internet.....	77
4.6	Methods of data collection.....	78
4.6.1	Timeline of the data in this study.....	79
4.6.2	Participant observation.....	81
4.6.3	Observations.....	84
4.6.4	Field notes and research diary.....	84
4.6.5	Questionnaires.....	85
4.6.6	Archive of Facebook-site and entries.....	87
4.6.7	Interviews.....	87
4.7	Description of the analysis-process.....	88
4.7.1	Activity theory as used in this study.....	88
4.7.2	The four cycles of coding.....	90
4.7.3	NVivo and the process of analysis.....	94
4.8	Summary.....	96
Chapter 5 Data presentation and analysis.....		97
5.1	Description of the data.....	98
5.2	Ethnographic analysis to set the scene.....	101
5.2.1	Descriptive analysis.....	102
5.2.2	Thematic analysis.....	108
5.2.3	Summary.....	128
5.3	Activity theory analysis of the data set.....	128
5.3.1	The unit of analysis.....	129
5.3.2	The students' viewpoint.....	130
5.3.3	Subjects involved in the activity of learning German.....	131
5.3.4	Object of the activity.....	132
5.3.5	How do the subjects try to achieve these motives or objects?.....	133
5.3.6	Who does what in the AS? Distribution of power.....	134
5.3.7	Community.....	134
5.3.8	Rules for the activity.....	134
5.3.9	Historicity of the course (development of the activity during the course).....	135
5.3.10	Contradictions.....	136
5.4	Summary.....	143
Chapter 6 Discussion and implications.....		145
6.1	Facebook as the location for the research study.....	145
6.2	The Facebook assignment.....	146
6.3	Students' attitudes towards the Facebook assignment.....	147
6.3.1	Social coherence and the Facebook-group.....	151
6.4	Theoretical implications.....	153
6.4.1	Practices and perspectives of students' Facebook use discussed through the lens of AT.....	153

6.4.2	Section summary.....	159
6.5	Methodological implications.....	159
6.6	Summary.....	160
Chapter 7 Limitations, recommendations for future use, future research, and conclusion		161
7.1	Recommendations for future educational use	162
7.2	Recommendations for future research.....	163
7.3	Limitations	165
7.4	Conclusion.....	166
Bibliography.....		167
Appendix A Web 1.0 and Web 2.0		181
Appendix B Instructions for the use of Facebook-group.....		182
Appendix C Facebook Smart Use Guide		184
Appendix D Ethical consent		186
Appendix E Pre- and post-course questionnaires		187
Appendix F Excerpts from research diary		191
Appendix G Screenshots from archived Facebook-group.....		192
Appendix H Segments analysed using NVivo		193
Appendix I Excerpt from Memos (main study)		194
Appendix J Specific questions designed to highlight defining characteristics of the activity system.		195
Appendix K Word count of Facebook-posts.....		196

List of Tables

Table 2.1: A selection of definitions for “tasks”.....	19
Table 2.2: Affordances relevant to asynchronous online (adapted from Conole & Dyke, 2004).	27
Table 2.3: Social presence research.	44
Table 3.1: The hierarchical structure of activity with activity-object-community as the highest level and operation-conditions-routinised as the lowest level (CRADLE, 2014, http://helsinki.fi/cradle).	56
Table 4.1: Overview of pilot study data collected.	68
Table 4.2: Changes to the main study	69
Table 4.3: Data collection summary	80
Table 4.4: Application of activity theoretical principles	90
Table 4.5: AODM eight-step model (Mwanza, 2002, p. 128).....	93
Table 4.6: AODM Activity notation (Mwanza-Simwami, 2013, p. 181).....	93
Table 5.1: Data of entire class selected.....	100
Table 5.2: List of students who consented to interviews.....	101
Table 5.3: Summary of themes with categories found after thematic data analysis: teacher observations and student practices and perspectives using Facebook	108
Table 6.1: Interactive behaviour on the Facebook-group	149
Table 6.2: Level of interaction on the Facebook-group site	150
Table 6.3: Willingness to communicate on the FB-group	152

List of Figures

Figure 2.1: Components adapted from the TBLT framework (Willis, 1996, p. 38).....	21
Figure 2.2: Components of a task (Nunan, 2004, p. 41).....	23
Figure 3.1: Activity system (adapted from Engeström (1987).	51
Figure 3.2: Basic activity system, adapted from Engeström (1987).....	52
Figure 3.3: Example of an activity system in an educational setting.....	53
Figure 3.4: Vygotsky’s mediated action model (Vygotsky, 1962).....	54
Figure 3.5: Four levels of contradictions in a network of human activity systems (CRADLE, 2014 http://helsinki.fi/cradle)	60
Figure 3.6: Matrix for the analysis of expansive learning (Engeström, 2001).	62
Figure 4.1: Functions to create a contribution to the Facebook-site.....	71
Figure 4.2: Features to react to a post.	71
Figure 4.3: Features available for administrators.	72
Figure 4.4: Four cycles of coding used in this study	90
Figure 4.5: Interim representation of activity system of the German intermediate class.	96
Figure 5.1: Presentation of findings.....	98
Figure 5.2: Frequency of interaction (Feb-May).	105
Figure 5.3: Frequency of interaction (May-October).	105
Figure 5.4: Feedback.....	106
Figure 5.5: Example for social communication (Facebook-archive, 5.3.14).....	112
Figure 5.6: Example for logistic communication (Facebook-archive, 7.3.14)	113
Figure 5.7: Example for social communication (Facebook-archive, 8.4.14).....	114
Figure 5.8: Example for social communication (Facebook-archive, 16.8.14.).....	114
Figure 5.9: Example for social communication (Facebook-archive, 5.10.14).....	115
Figure 5.10: Teacher’s corrective feedback.....	116
Figure 5.11: Teacher asking about the value of the feedback.....	117
Figure 5.12: “gesehen”- “seen” function	125
Figure 5.13: Basic activity system adapted from Engeström (1987).....	129
Figure 5.14: Activity systems (AS) of the total assessment of the German class	130
Figure 5.15: Individual student’s activity within the collective	132
Figure 5.16: Timeline of activity in the beginning and at the end of the semester.....	135
Figure 5.17: Contradictions emerged at the end of the course	136
Figure 5.18: Contradiction between subject and tools.....	136
Figure 5.19: Contradiction between subject and rules.....	138
Figure 5.20: Contradiction between community and subject	139
Figure 5.21: Members of the Facebook-community.....	141
Figure 5.22: Contradiction between community and division of labour	142
Figure 5.23: Facebook-group members and their status in the division of labour	143
Figure 6.1: Relationship between the subject and selected components in the AS	154

Figures of activity models are used with permission.

List of Abbreviations used in this thesis

AODM	Activity-oriented design method
AT	Activity theory
AS	Activity system
CALL	Computer-assisted language learning
CAQDAS	Computer-assisted qualitative data analysis
CLT	Communicative language teaching
CMC	Computer-mediated communication
EFL	English as a foreign language
ESL	English as a second language
FL	Foreign language
ICC	Intercultural communicative competence
L1	First language, native language
L2	Second language, target language
LMS	Learning management system
PPP	Practice presentation production
SNS/SNSs	Social network site/social network sites
TELL	Technology-enhanced language learning
VLE	Virtual learning environment
ZPD	Zone of proximal development

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Context information

Four years ago I tried to contact my 12-year old daughter via email. I did not succeed; she never got the message as she never checked her emails. Around the same time I reminded my German language class in a New Zealand university that I had sent out information about their upcoming oral exam via their university email. Many of the students looked at me blankly, I could overhear them saying ‘well I guess I need to check my emails’. What was going on, why would they not check their emails, were they not interested in the outside world any longer? Where and how was the communication happening? My class of undergraduate students was part of the demographic of the heaviest users of social networking sites, such as Facebook, according to the Pew Internet Report (Perrin, 2015). These were students who were relatively new to university and wanted to adapt to their environment Yang & Brown (2013) surveyed 193 undergraduate university students in their first year at a US college and found that communication among the students had not declined, although they were new to their environment and not known to each other previously; on the contrary it had increased, although the means of communicating had changed. Students had moved from using a variety of communication platforms to only using one or two platforms for channelling most of their communicative needs. The most dominant communication platform which students used at the time this study was taking place was Facebook (Facebook-Statistics, 2013) a social networking site. Social networking sites are places where individuals can upload photos and videos, keep in touch with their friends, create their unique online identities and communicate via synchronous chat, and asynchronous messenger functions have replaced traditional email services. The expression “I will facebook you,” meaning “I will contact you” had become a commonly used expression among the students.

German-speaking countries are a long way away from New Zealand and with little contact with the target language innovative ideas need to be found to keep German language students interested in learning the language. In pursuit of a more authentic German language-teaching environment for my students, I have continuously tried to ensure they are as immersed in the target language as possible. Facebook, as an authentic platform which had been part of the students’ daily life for the previous few years, seemed to offer potential to bring the target language into the classroom. The platform was, and continues to be, very versatile; students

can not only upload multimedia files but also produce writing to accompany their uploaded artefacts. Writing in the target language is a very difficult skill for language students and they often experience a form of writing block in assessment situations; they seem to be either unwilling or unable to produce the amount of words required for assessments.

In the past, I have tried to improve student attitudes towards writing by integrating blogs into the class curriculum to make writing more authentic and informal. Blogs worked well to afford an immediate and intimate mode of communication but when Facebook became more mainstream I chose Facebook as a platform for writing tasks. Jong, Lai, Hsia, Lin, and Liao (2014) commented that “there is no need any longer for a user to write long and tedious blogs; instead, micro-blogs such as Facebook posts can be used to inform friends about users’ most recent status and activities” (p. 201). Alm (2015) researched tertiary students in New Zealand who wrote in the target language, German; on the social networking site (SNS) and she praised Facebook as a platform to practise informal writing in German.

Facebook offers an authentic and relaxed environment to write in the target language; it also serves as an ideal platform to foster a closer-knit class community by making use of Facebook features to create online profiles. Facebook is already part of the students’ lives; Reid (2011) researched 90 teacher students at a South African university and found that by making Facebook part of her students’ “schooled space”, they are able to build or further enhance relationships, communicate with each other through shared experiences, celebrate each other’s achievements, extend birthday wishes, exchange feelings and information, and talk about their studies, assignments, and tests (Reid, 2011).

This current study was informed by research focusing on students of foreign languages interacting socially on SNSs which found that students became engaged in more authentic social and communicative behaviour than typically happens in language classrooms. Facebook is used as a medium because it is not primarily an educational tool but taken from the daily routine of the students. As Lantz-Andersson, Vigmo, and Bowen (2013) describe in their study of 60 high school students in Sweden, using Facebook means applying practices which are not determined by the medium itself, rather they are seen as practices that are negotiated dynamically through the norms developed out of everyday use of the medium.

1.2 Theoretical framework

The framework chosen to guide this research was activity theory (AT) (Engeström, 1987). This is applied as a perspective to understand the use of the mediational tool Facebook better; AT will be presented and discussed in Chapter 3. AT is a structured approach based on key components, subject, object, rules, division of labour and community.

Using AT as an analytical lens can offer deeper insight into the development of the teacher and students during the period of the activity. The unfamiliar educational setting of Facebook will challenge the traditional rules that students apply when learning, for example completing assignments. The role of the teacher is challenged as Facebook is an integral part of students' private lives and environments rather than being under the authority of the teacher. The AT principles of historicity and contradictions enable the tracing of the development of the activity and an analysis of the tensions within and between the components of the activity system during the activity. A timeline of historicity and contradictions will be presented in graphical form and discussed in Chapter 7. The present study contributes to the theoretical field of AT as applied to language education.

Other theoretical influences on this study are paradigms of communicative language teaching (CLT), computer-mediated communication (CMC) and task-based language teaching (TBLT). These concepts will be presented in the literature review in Chapter 2 and further discussed in relation to this study in Chapter 6.

1.3 Statement of the problem and gap in the research

Research on the use of SNSs, and particularly Facebook in tertiary institutions, has focused on students' attitudes and perceptions, their general usage of the platforms (Brick, 2011; Duncan & Barczyk, 2013; Grosseck, Bran, & Tiru, 2011; Jong et al., 2014; Madge, Meek, Wellens, & Hooley, 2009; Mitchell, 2012), identity construction (Blattner & Fiori, 2011; H.-I. Chen, 2013; Mills, 2011), and how it benefited their language learning when applied as part of an second language (L2) course (Blattner & Fiori, 2009, 2011; Mills, 2011; Terantino & Graf, 2011; S. Wang & Vasquez, 2014). Much of the research on SNSs applied in L2 learning environments to date has been based on language learning social networking sites (LSNS) platforms such as e.g. Livemocha, Buusu or Babbel (Clark & Gruba, 2010; Harrison, 2013; Harrison & Thomas, 2010; Lin, Warschauer, & Blake, 2016; Stevenson & Liu, 2010; Valencia, 2016).

Facebook as a communication platform was not designed for educational purposes and is breaking boundaries when applied to a formal learning environment. Educators have noted that social networking tools such as Facebook hold great potential for L2 pedagogy because the use of these tools is an everyday literacy practice for millions of people, and can be useful for inclusion into L2 curricula (Blattner & Fiori, 2009; Blattner & Lomicka, 2012; McBride, 2009; Reinhardt & Zander, 2011).

Users of language learning social network sites (LSNS) such as Livemocha, Babbel or Busuu have different expectations and attitudes when contributing to the site than users of Facebook. By using a LSNS, students expect the platform to be beneficial for their L2 learning. The affordances of LSNS make language learning interactive and authentic, with their specific pedagogical resources targeted for communication in the target language. Facebook, however, was designed for online socialising and communication. To use Facebook in an educational context, both students and teachers need to change the way they use the platform, adapting it to the intended learning purposes. The challenge lies in creating an environment within the platform as authentic and non-education-focused as possible so that the students can create and maintain the illusion of an area for communicating in the target language as informally and unthreateningly as possible.

Past studies of social networking sites in language teaching have not clearly distinguished between SNS and LSNS, and have assumed that both types of social networking sites operate in the same way. This study attempts to differentiate between the two and will problematise the use of Facebook as a SNS when used in an educational setting.

Students in tertiary institutions perceive Facebook as a platform to get to know their fellow students better; they use the SNS to keep in touch and communicate (Duncan & Barczyk, 2013; Jong et al., 2014; Madge et al., 2009; Mitchell, 2012; Vie, 2007). Mitchell (2012) proposed that learners of English should use Facebook to acclimatise themselves to college life, build friendships with speakers of English as a first language (L1), and experiment with the language. Vie (2007) also suggested that SNSs provided a space for socialisation in which students were exposed to authentic language used for diverse purposes. The data of Madge et al. (2009) illustrated that once at university, Facebook was part of the “social glue” that helped students settle into university life. However, although it has been important for many years now, care must be taken not to overestimate the role of Facebook: it has clearly always been only one aspect of students’ more general social networking practices along with face-

to-face interrelationships and interactions. Duncan and Barczyk's (2013) study found that the tertiary students in the UK whom they studied perceived Facebook as enhancing their sense of social learning and also improving their sense of connectedness. Additionally, students perceived that Facebook facilitated their sense of community in terms of knowledge sharing, collaboration, and learner-centered activities. Jong, et al (2014) surveyed 387 students at a Taiwanese university and their results showed that 81% of the students had discussed course-related problems with their peers on Facebook (p. 202).

When social media were introduced in educational settings, Mills (2011) and also Brick (2011) found that students showed more engagement, with an increase in activity, participation and interaction. Mills integrated Facebook in her French class at a US university and Brick used Livemocha in his English as a second language (ESL) class at a UK university. Affordances of identity construction in SNS and LSNS helped to build closer relationships. H.-I. Chen (2013), in her study of two Chinese researchers learning English in the US, claimed that SNSs empowered language learners to navigate across languages, cultures, and identities. Similarly, research by Blattner and Fiori (2011) and Mills (2011) confirmed that SNSs were useful for helping learners to construct their L2 identity and build a relationship with the target language.

Some studies have found an association between SNS use and improvement in new literacies and language skills (Mills 2011; Blattner & Fiori, 2009, 2011). Others have focused on non-standard uses of language in interactions (i.e. H.-I. Chen, 2013). Terantino and Graf (2012) noted improved student confidence in writing in the target language, Spanish, when using Facebook as part of the class secondary school curriculum and Wang and Vasquez (2014) found Facebook use advantageous when used in a writing task in their university Chinese class.

The above mentioned studies examined how students used and perceived SNS platforms, and particularly Facebook, in educational settings. None of them seems to consider the role of the teacher in the educational use of SNSs. A few researchers looked at student perceptions of instructor¹ presence on Facebook at tertiary level (Mazer, Murphy, & Simonds, 2009) or the impact of the instructor's self-disclosure on Facebook on the student teacher relationship and on student motivation (Mazer et al., 2009; Richardson, Besser, Koehler, Lim, & Strait, 2016). This current study attempts to look at both the students and teacher and how they perceive the

¹ The terms instructor and teacher are both used with the same meaning in this thesis.

Facebook platform when used as part of their curriculum in a German language course.

To summarise, the rationale for this study is our limited understanding of Facebook when used as part of a L2 curriculum. By using Facebook in educational settings, its purpose is being changed from a tool of leisure to one of education. This means that the general rules of interaction change. Students need to adapt to new rules when using the mediation tool, Facebook, and they need guidance from the teacher. This study explores these changing perspectives of teachers and students. When Facebook is adopted for language learners to practise using the target language and being assessed for it, it can “bring a popular out-of-school literacy practice into a schooled space” (Lantz-Andersson et al., 2013), but very few studies have actually been conducted on Facebook use in foreign language classrooms and particularly not as part of the curriculum. This study will explore whether Facebook is a tool which can further the authenticity of the tertiary language learning environment, leading to a more immersed setting and heightened motivation in learning the language. The lens of AT is ideal for revealing the perspectives of students and teachers and for researching the “division of labour” of all participants in the activity system and how the “rules” of the activity are affected. Activity theory offers a lens through which to identify patterns of historicity, meaning the development and changes of the activity over the period of the study and contradictions in the data which help to reveal the activity during the Facebook assignment in more depth.

1.4 Focus of this study and research question

The focus of this study is the complex activity which happens when Facebook is used not just as a communication tool in a language classroom but as part of the class curriculum.

Facebook is both a social medium and a cultural tool. Students collaboratively generate their own cultural contents and knowledge base by posting their contributions to the site. Activity theory is employed to get a better understanding of the social phenomenon of Facebook being used in the classroom setting. The social media site is designed for socialising and communication purposes; when used in educational settings, tensions and contradictions within the components of the activity system occur. This research aims to describe the relationships between the components of the activity system with particular focus on students and their teachers, their relationship to the rules of the activity and their development during the historicity of the activity of this study.

To accommodate this claim, the following overarching research question is proposed:

What are the practices and perspectives of the teacher and students when Facebook is introduced as part of the curriculum in tertiary foreign language education?

Addressing this broad research question will result in a description and understanding of the practices of the German language students on the Facebook platform. The focus of this study is not on improving or monitoring the language proficiency of the students but on the learning of the foreign language in an unconventional setting and describes the way the students take to the new environment. This study is tightly focused on understanding the perspectives and actual practices of the participants in the Facebook group.

1.5 Aim of this project

The aim of the study is to describe and understand the learning and teaching of German at tertiary level in New Zealand in the Facebook environment, and to understand the implications of using social networking sites for students.

The pedagogical aim of this study is in line with three challenges in teaching and learning with technology identified by Little and Page (2009):

1. Creating learning environments that promote active learning, critical thinking, collaborative learning, and knowledge creation;
2. Developing 21st century literacies (information, digital, and visual) among students and faculty;
3. Reaching and engaging today's learner

1.6 Design and methodology of this study

The design of this study is based on the outcomes of a pilot study. The pilot study was conducted in a similar setting to the main study but included additional L1 speakers of the target language to contribute in the class Facebook group. The telecollaborative setting was intended to be beneficial for immersion into the target language but was not received as a benefit (see page 29), partly because the students of the German class and the participating L1 speakers in Germany were constrained by different roles and expectations, presented as 'rules', within the activity system for the Facebook task in the pilot study.

This study uses ethnographic methods for data collection, with multiple sources of data: semi-structured interviews, and observations of the class Facebook group, including artefacts posted in the group. Ethnographic research has the potential to give a much more vivid and

complete picture of the Facebook environment, providing ‘thick’ description of the relationships between the context and situation of language activity (Geertz, 1973; Gleason, 2013). A total of 12 undergraduate German students were repeatedly interviewed over a period of one university semester. The study was conducted with the instructor as a participant observer which required adjustment from students and teacher (see section 4.8.2) at the beginning but eventually led to a thick description of the setting.

This longitudinal study uses qualitative methods (see section 4.5) to get a more in-depth understanding of the behaviour the students show when using the Facebook group. A combined inductive and deductive approach to analysing the data helps to explore as many aspects of the online environment as possible. The relatively unknown landscape of Facebook as a teaching tool will be analysed using thematic analysis and activity theory (AT). Activity theory provides a tool to investigate interlinked mediated actions such as developmental and historical processes on individual and social levels (Engeström, 1987; Kuuti, 1995). The mediated actions are always situated in a particular context, in this study in the context of the language class. An activity theory perspective can demonstrate the complexity of the activity of language learning which is happening in the Facebook group and can help present a critical explanation of behavior and conduct within this Facebook group.

1.7 Thesis structure

There are seven chapters in the thesis:

Chapter 1 has presented the context of this study and introduced the theoretical framework and the design and methodology. The focus and aim of the research have been outlined.

Chapter 2 is a review of relevant literature around language learning covering communicative language teaching, task-based language teaching, computer-mediated communication and social presence.

Chapter 3 outlines the theoretical framework underlying this study, activity theory.

Chapter 4 presents the methodology and design of the study. It describes and explains the use of an ethnographic methods design to support the data collection process. In this chapter ethnographic sampling methods, data collection methods, and data analysis strategies are described and the position of the participant observer discussed. The chapter also includes a presentation of the pilot study.

Chapter 5 presents an analysis of the findings. The analysis is based on an interpretation of the data using thematic analysis in combination with an activity theory perspective. The chapter consists of two sections, the first section presenting an inductive thematic analysis of

the data, the second section presenting the activity theoretical analysis of the data. Chapter 6 discusses the findings in relation to the literature in the field and addresses the research question. This discussion chapter has been divided into three sections: the first part discusses the findings, the second part presents the theoretical implications and the final section presents the methodological and pedagogical implications. The chapter concludes with recommendations for future use of SNSs in educational environments. Chapter 7 is the final and concluding chapter of the thesis. It outlines the limitations, and recommendations for future research.

1.8 Summary

This first chapter has introduced the background to this study, presented the research question, described the aim and focus of this study and outlined the structure of the thesis. The following chapter will discuss the literature in relation to topics already mentioned in the introduction.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

In this chapter, relevant previous work will be presented. This literature review encompasses fields of research which are both practically and theoretically relevant to this study and is divided into the following parts:

- 2.1 Communicative language teaching
- 2.2 Task-based language teaching
- 2.3 Computer-mediated communication
- 2.4 Social networking sites
- 2.5 Social presence

The selection of literature discussed is not comprehensive, the review being an overview to support the research of this thesis. The readings chosen comprise literature most frequently cited and with the biggest impact in their field.

2.1 Communicative language teaching (CLT)

Communicative language teaching (CLT) was designed to address the perceived shortcomings of more behaviouristic teaching models. These emphasised grammar and vocabulary input in very teacher-centred environments which were designed by the instructor and where students had to demonstrate that they understood the learning contents, primarily through tests (Skinner, 1957). The teaching methods used in behaviourist models were based on the three Ps, present, practice and produce (PPP).

CLT was developed by practitioners from the early 1970s as a new concept of language teaching (Gass, 2004; Krashen, 1981, 1982; Krashen & Terrell, 1983; Pica, 1994; Richards, 2006; Savignon, 1991, 2002; Skehan, 1998, 2003; Swain, 1997, 2000). The desired outcome of the students' learning should be communicative competence, in line with Hymes (1972), who defined this competence as “a fluency of the target language similar to children learning a language and by taking part in speech events, and having their accomplishment evaluated by others” (p. 277).

The core of the “new” language curriculum which was developed by the European Council in the late 1970s (Byram & Parmenter, 2012; van Ek & Alexander, 1980) adopted the CLT

approach which subsequently changed the roles of teacher and students. The learner was considered as the centre of the activity and as an active communicator favouring discourse and rhetorical skills; the teacher became a guide and adviser who facilitated the communication in the language classroom (Krashen, 1981, 1982; Krashen & Terrell, 1983; Richards, 2006).

The CLT approach embraced three different schools of thought. First, the input hypothesis, which encompassed the idea that learners needed regular exposure to the target language but with limited focus on form to learn (Krashen, 1981, 1982; Krashen & Terrell, 1983). Second, the input-interactive theory, which considered that the students needed frequent opportunities to actively use the target language in communicative situations for them to interact and negotiate meaning (Ellis, 1985; Gass, 1997, 2004; Long, 1985; Skehan, 1998). The third theory is output theory, which proposed negotiation of meaning and focus on form to achieve communicative competence (Pica, 1994; Swain, 1985; Swain & Lapkin, 1995b). When CLT is applied in teaching contexts through meaningful tasks which promote language learning, it is called task-based language teaching (TBLT) (Ellis, 2000, 2003, 2004, 2009; Nunan, 2004; Willis, 1996; Willis & Willis, 2001). These different theories will be presented below, followed by a separate section introducing literature on TBLT.

2.1.1 Input hypothesis

Krashen (1982) conceptualised the communicative approach of language teaching by formulating a theory consisting of five hypotheses:

- The acquisition-learning hypothesis,
- The monitor hypothesis,
- Natural order hypothesis,
- Input hypothesis
- Affective filter hypothesis

The input hypothesis is amongst the other hypotheses the most influential and Krashen's work is often referred to as "input hypothesis" or "input theory". This hypothesis claimed that humans acquired language in only one way. This was by understanding messages, or by receiving "comprehensible input" and that the reception of language, such as listening to and reading "a large amount of comprehensible input", should precede production of language, particularly in the early stages (Krashen & Terrell, 1983, p. 79).

The method which Krashen called the "natural inquiry" or "natural approach" (Krashen & Terrell, 1983) left the students working at their own pace to produce output when they were

ready. Communicating in the classroom was sufficient for comprehensible input. The students were not forced and were allowed to concentrate on one skill at a time according to their individual needs; there was no demand for early speech production (Krashen & Terrell, 1983, p. 59). Error correction and explicit teaching of rules were not relevant and feedback was kept to a minimum to guarantee a low-anxiety environment, resulting in a more communicative approach (Krashen, 1981, p. 1).

2.1.2 Input-interaction theory

The input hypothesis or the “natural approach” was soon criticised and concepts extending Krashen’s theory were proposed. Criticism focused on the lack of guidance for the learner, which would potentially lead to “fossilisation” of the target language or premature “stabilization” of the target language, which it was feared, might lead to pidgin English (Long, 1985, p. 87). Ellis (1992) pointed out that over extended periods of time students did learn to understand more and how to speak, but it often seemed to take much longer than Krashen implied, indicating that there were perhaps many more factors involved.

In light of this criticism of input theory, Long (1985, 1996) proposed his input-interaction theory in which he claimed that interaction was important for language development. He differentiated between strong and weak interactions. Strong interaction was the active interaction of a learner using the target language. Weak interaction was seen as passive interaction, not necessarily making productive use of the opportunities to interact. Ellis (1985) was concerned about too much interaction in input-interaction, which could overwhelm the language teacher. He also cautioned that in the interactive approach the contributions of individual learners might be ignored. Gass (1997) was likewise inspired by Krashen’s input theory and was in agreement with Long (1985) that language learning needed to focus on input and interaction; she based her input-interaction model on Krashen’s monitor hypothesis. For Gass, input combined with task stimulated negotiation of meaning with interaction being necessary for output. Input for her characterised the awareness of new L2 information that was not yet part of the learner’s L2 repertoire (p. 25). Gass also responded to Krashen’s concept of comprehensible input and recommended making a distinction between “comprehensible” and “comprehended” input, emphasising that input was not only recognition of language but needed to be comprehended by the learners who needed to interact and negotiate the input; for her the learner was ultimately controlling the intake. Gass called this input type “appereceived input” (Gass, 1997, p. 3).

2.1.3 Output theory

Swain (Swain, 1985; Swain & Lapkin, 1995) responded to the input theory with the proposal of the output hypothesis framework, focusing on language production in the form of speaking and writing. Swain emphasised the importance of understanding the output the learner was producing which was often achieved by several attempts at negotiating the meaning. Ten years later Swain and Lapkin (1995) wrote that output also triggered reflection and allowed second language learners to identify gaps in their linguistic knowledge; only through production was the learner able to receive feedback, either implicit or explicit (Swain & Lapkin, 1995). Their argument for the need for output was based initially on observations of immersion programmes in Canada and dealt with the lack of target-like abilities of children who had spent years in such programmes. She suggested that what was lacking was sufficient opportunities for language use. Swain's method was to video students' output and then analyse the errors.

2.1.4 Grammar teaching in CLT

CLT theorists were divided in their opinion about the importance of grammar teaching. Krashen's theory (1982, 1994) emphasised the distinction between learning and acquiring a language. Learning for Krashen was the conscious act of learning the grammatical rules, and practising to apply these rules when producing output; conversely he suggested that "acquiring" the language was the ability of students to understand the target language (primarily through context) from a little above their current level of understanding ($i+1$). The concept of acquiring language did not focus on form (paying attention to grammar). Students were supposed to recognise new language structures as they were inserted into utterances, containing language already known to the students (Krashen, 1994).

Savignon (1991, 2002) postulated that grammar was an important component of language learning. As an advocate for communicative teaching done in context, she believed that learner engagement in communication allowed the students to develop their communicative competence. She considered grammar to be important in reaching this aim, noting that learners seemed to focus best on grammar when it related to their communicative needs and experiences (p. 7). Skehan (1998) and Swain (1985) held that production of output required attention to form and that grammar should always be part of the communicative language teaching approach.

The terms “weak” and “strong” CLT are also used in discussion on pedagogical practice and the importance of grammar (East, 2012). The view of “weak” CLT is in line with focus on form teaching whereas ‘strong’ CLT is understood as the radical move away from the behavioristic approach (East, 2012, p. 22). In ‘strong’ CLT, communication is seen as most important and the teaching of grammar, focus on form, is avoided.

2.1.5 Feedback in CLT

The concept of feedback and the amount of feedback appropriate in language learning was an important factor in CLT. Krashen (1994, 2003) believed that students should be as relaxed as possible and a high level of error correction was seen to have an adverse effect on the students’ study. Krashen and Terrell (1983) believed that learners were responsible for their own correction: “Through discourse the learner was able to come to a correct conclusion after an initial faulty hypothesis” (p. 142).

Krashen further recommended that error correction, only useful for “learning”, should thus be generally avoided if acquisition is the aim of the teacher. Krashen believed that the classroom should be a place to equip students for real-life conversations and for real-life situations where acquisition is more likely to take place.

Swain (2000) emphasised that not only is attention to form needed, but also feedback, to produce comprehensible output. By receiving feedback the learner was challenged to question the output and would try out new grammatical structures to achieve comprehended meaning. As a result comprehensible output pushed learners deeper, with more mental effort, than only output would do (p. 99).

Studies showed that feedback played an essential part in students’ grammatical learning. Earlier Swain and Lapkin (1995) presented an empirical study of a French language classroom with students learning in an immersion environment. The students were given a writing task to produce output. Feedback was given by the instructor which forced the students to reflect on the form of the linguistic output (p. 386). They needed to negotiate meaning, which resulted in more grammatical processing and finally in improved grammatical and syntactical language use.

Pica (1994) also looked at feedback in her study of the output of 32 Japanese students learning English. She observed that learners and interlocutors needed to repair breakdowns in

communication or ensure mutual comprehension of meaning took place. She pointed out the importance of feedback in negotiating meaning and named this type of corrective feedback, as lexical feedback (p. 510). She also found that if learners were not ready for a new word, form, or rule they could not acquire it. Negotiation would not help learners to accept the change as they needed to be ready for it (p. 518). Long (1985) proposed that feedback given would motivate learners to negotiate meaning through interaction and that this would consequently lead to modified output.

2.1.6 Criticism of CLT

Input-interaction and output theory proved insufficient to explain second language learning. The need for a new and more detailed analytical framework was expressed by Gass (2004) who compared the two frameworks: conversation analysis and input-interactive theory. She used data supplied by colleagues and concluded in her findings that input-interaction theory was less detailed and not complex enough as it did not supply the researcher with enough information (p. 601).

Pica (1994), a defender of the interactive method, critiqued Gass's frameworks and found the lack of practical applications a matter of concern. She noted that CLT as a concept was too theoretical with very few practical applications recorded and that newer tasks were needed for the language classroom. Her critique was taken up by Bax (2003) who strongly argued for a change of paradigm in CLT. He wanted a less theoretical approach to learning, moving to a more practice-oriented one. Bax noted that there was not enough consideration given to the context in which the teaching was taking place and this resulted in serious consequences for the affected research (p. 278). He urged that a change to more focus on the contexts in which teaching and learning operated was required; language teaching everywhere would benefit from this. Bax further emphasised that teachers would only give attention to more authentic target language content when they were explicitly empowered, educated, and encouraged to do so. As things stood, they were not empowered by the dominant paradigm to address context directly, nor were they encouraged to do so — on the contrary they were implicitly and in practice discouraged from such matters by the emphasis on methodology (p. 284). Bax believed that CLT would be important for research into a new teaching and learning style and that what he called a “context approach” was needed (p. 278).

2.1.7 Section summary

Communicative language teaching (CLT) was a reaction to previous form-focused behaviouristic teaching approaches, prescribing language input, output and interaction. CLT as discussed was not a teaching method defining and recommending teaching practices. Task-based language teaching was a development of CLT, applying the concepts into the foreign language teaching classrooms. The next part of this review will discuss task-based language teaching.

2.2 Task-based language teaching (TBLT) and authentic setting

Task-based language teaching (TBLT) is an approach which aims to let the students do something “real” with the language. TBLT proposes that students acquire language through the process of completing tasks that require meaningful communication (Erlam, 2016). Task-based language teaching (TBLT) is viewed as a development of CLT (East, 2012) or as a development within the CLT movement (Littlewood, 2004). There is no single TBLT methodology (Levy & Stockwell, 2006). TBLT is a complex system that comes in different versions. There are two main approaches to TBLT, ‘weak’ and ‘strong’; they are a logical development of the CLT paradigm (see page 12). TBLT in its ‘weak’ version is focused on meaning but will target grammatical forms that students themselves have noticed during their task (Ellis, 2009). It is believed that students will learn and retain grammar structures better if discovered by themselves (Ellis, 2003). The ‘strong’ version of TBLT is meaning-focused and avoids grammar teaching. The following variations can be taught using TBLT learning designs:

- Strong version of TBLT: focus on meaning
- Weak version on TBLT: focus on form, when it occurs in a meaning focused learning environment
- The third “P” in PPP, the production, can be in form of task as in focus on meaning (Richards & Rogers, 2014).

Tasks and the selection of tasks were relevant in providing the learner with authentic and real-life learning. Such tasks were recognised as the driving force of teaching and learning in a TBLT approach. Both versions aim for authenticity but have different foci. Ellis (2009) remarks that ‘authenticity’ can refer to “situationally authentic” which is not in the classroom and interactionally authentic. An example for an authentic task which requires the learner to use language and skills which resemble real-life might be booking a hotel, a flight ticket or shopping in the supermarket. Tasks can happen in authentic situations, i.e. a classroom with a

mix of native speakers to create a more “realistic language” atmosphere; real-life tasks can be integrated in any classroom setting, online and offline.

“Task” and “task-based language teaching” (TBLT) as a method focused more on the use of authentic language through meaningful and interactive tasks and could be seen as a branch of CLT (Long, 1985; Swain & Lapkin, 1995; Savignon, 2001; Skehan, 2003). Especially modern media such as computers and mobile devices facilitate task-based design as they have made it more accessible for learners of the target language to access authentic material. Lai and Li (2011) explained that technology provided a natural and authentic venue for the realisation of the methodological principles of task-based language teaching (TBLT) and helped to support learning by creating an authentic situation.

2.2.1 Definition of task-based language teaching (TBLT)

Tasks as in “task-based language teaching” (TBLT) are, as mentioned above, situated in the paradigm of CLT and derived from the need to make CLT more learner-focused. TBLT can be seen as a refinement of CLT (Ellis, 2003). Criteria for TBLT are that it is important that the activity has focus on meaning, that there should be an information gap which requires the student to communicate in an authentic situation to obtain the information, and that the outcome of the task should be clearly defined and situated in real life, for example producing a poster (Ellis, 2003; Erlam, 2016; Shintani, 2013). Long (1985) defined “task” as a meaningful and viable unit of analysis in (i) Identifying learners’ needs (ii) Defining syllabus content; (iii) Organizing language acquisition opportunities; (iv) Measuring student achievement “ (Long, 1985, p. 89).

Long (1985) recommended a more structured syllabus in the language classroom based on pedagogical task types. He provided a guideline for integrating tasks into a language classroom including:

1. Conduct a needs analysis to obtain an inventory of target tasks;
 2. Classify the target tasks into task types;
 3. From the class types, derive pedagogical tasks;
 4. Select and sequence the pedagogical tasks to form a task syllabus
- (Long, 1985, p. 91).

Long’s guideline is helpful but does not imply any structured teaching and learning and does not accommodate for linguistic improvement of the learner. He also does not specify what his

understanding of a pedagogical task might be. Skehan (2003) explains the characteristics of the task structure in more detail. His choice of task suggests that the task has a time limit, that familiar information is implied, that outcomes of the task are justified, and that the students receive a variety of monologic and interactive tasks (p. 5).

Underlying the TBLT approach is the concept of holistic teaching. According to Willis and Willis (2001), language development is prompted by providing the learners with a series of tasks which involve both the comprehension and production of language with the focus on meaning (p. 175).

2.2.2 Definitions of “task”

Tasks are the centre of TBLT; they are seen as units supported by principles from CLT theory:

1. Interaction and meaningful communication;
2. Effective classroom learning tasks and exercises to provide opportunities for students to negotiate and expand their language resources by taking part in a meaningful interpersonal exchange (Richards, 2006).

There are multiple definitions of tasks (Ellis, 2003; Long, 1985; Nunan, 2004; Samuda & Bygate, 2008; Swain, 2000; Willis & Willis, 2001). Table 2.1 lists the most common definitions, which will be described in the following section.

Table 2.1: A selection of definitions for “tasks”.

Researcher	Key concepts
Long (1985)	What people do in everyday life, at work, at play, and in between.
Skehan (1998)	Meaning, task completion, the real-world and outcome of task as focus.
Willis (1996)	A classroom undertaking for a communicative purpose to achieve an outcome.
Ellis (2003)	A work plan that requires learners to process language pragmatically to achieve
Nunan (2004)	A piece of classroom work to convey meaning rather than to manipulate form.
Samuda & Bygate (2008)	Content of tasks should be accessible and adjusted to the level of knowledge of the learner.

Long (1985) was one of the first researchers who looked for a way to convert principles of CLT into practical applications. He recommended the integration of tasks in the curriculum. His general understanding of an authentic task was:

A piece of work undertaken for oneself or for others, freely or for some reward. Thus examples of tasks included painting a fence, dressing a child, filling out a form, buying a pair of shoes, [...]. Put it simply, ‘task’ describes the hundred and one things people do in everyday life (p. 89).

His understanding of “task” had a very general perspective and was non-linguistic in itself. It described everyday things a person could use on the streets when in the country of the target language. A more pedagogically oriented understanding of task was suggested by Ellis (2003) who defined “task” as a “work-plan”.

A work-plan required learners to process language pragmatically in order to achieve an outcome that could be evaluated in terms of whether the correct or appropriate propositional content had been conveyed. To this end, it required them to give primary attention to meaning and to make use of their own linguistic resources, although the design of the task may predispose them to choose particular forms. A task was intended to result in language use that bore a resemblance, direct or indirect, to the way language was used in the real world. Like other language activities, a task could engage productive or receptive, oral or written, and also various cognitive skills (p. 16).

Another perspective on the definition of “task” was introduced by Skehan (1998) who proposed that tasks needed to focus on meaning:

1. Meaning is primary;
 2. There is some communication problem to solve;
 3. There is some sort of relationship to comparable real-world activities;
 4. Task completion has some priority;
 5. The assessment of the task is in terms of outcome
- (Skehan, 1998, p. 95).

An example for this type of task would be to prepare a travel itinerary for a friend from the target language who will visit your city. The student is preparing an entertainment programme and needs to negotiate with the friend what s/he would like to do when coming for a visit.

Nunan (2004) also considered the concept of tasks as part of the negotiation of meaning. For him a task was a piece of classroom work that involved learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing or interacting in the target language while their attention focused on mobilising their grammatical knowledge to enable them to express meaning. The intention was to convey meaning rather than manipulate form (p. 4). The change from focus on form to focus on meaning in language teaching influenced the curriculum design, integrating more authentic content with links from the classroom to the outside world (see also Chapter 6, discussion). Ellis (2009) recognised this change and the advantages of this development and wrote that tasks provided “an opportunity for “natural” learning inside the classroom” (Ellis 2009, p. 242). Skehan (2014) also regarded tasks as a means to create a more authentic teaching atmosphere, which linked the “real-world” and the classroom. The learners in TBLT environments were taken into account as well; researchers reflected on integrating different learner types, and learners’ different levels of proficiency. Ortega (2014) noted that learning should be authentic but also connected with students’ personal experiences within a classroom. Samuda and Bygate (2008) recommended implanting what was still seen as the new task-based teaching approach into the classroom and adapting it to the proficiency of the learner; they focused on seeking out new ways of teaching so that the content was accessible, useful and relevant given the levels of experience and understanding of learners (p. 20). East (2012) in his study concluded that reluctance by practitioners implementing TBLT into foreign language teaching environments might be a “lack of knowledge and understanding of TBLT among practitioners; concerns about how students might most effectively learn the FL;

concerns about meeting the demands of high-stakes assessments (negative washback)” (p. 193).

2.2.3 Models of task-based language teaching

Communicative language teaching (CLT) is generally regarded as an approach to language teaching (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). As such, CLT reflects a certain model or pedagogical paradigm, or a theory (Celce-Murcia, 2001). It is based on the idea that language learning happens in meaningful interaction. The application of CLT in language teaching can be in the form of TBLT (Long, 2003). TBLT is also understood as the ‘strong’ or ‘weak’ version of CLT. ‘Strong’ TBLT reflects the aims of ‘strong’ CLT and the differences between ‘weak’ CLT and ‘weak’ TBLT is where and how tasks fit into the overall structure of the lesson, and how grammar is attended to (East, 2012; 2016).

Researchers introduced frameworks to help the teacher succeed in the application of task-based teaching. Early on, Willis (1996) introduced a framework which proposed a three-part task cycle. The framework included a planning stage, or pre-task, followed by a task cycle and a language focus sequence. The three components are illustrated in Figure 2.1:

1. Pre-task: an introduction to the topic and the task.
2. Task cycle (task, planning or report): learners hear task recordings or read texts.
3. Language focus (analysis and practice): review and repeat the task.

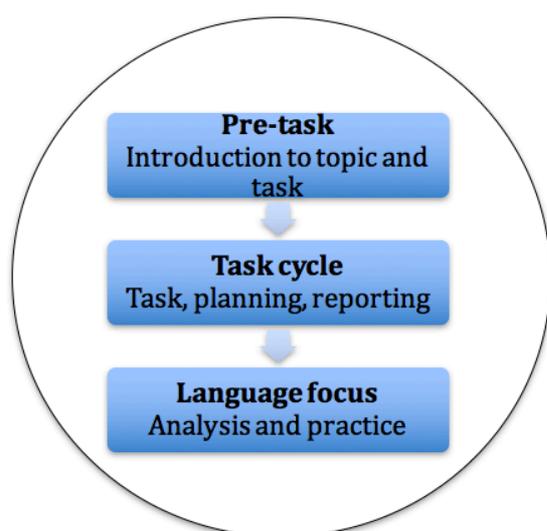


Figure 2.1: Components adapted from the TBLT framework (Willis, 1996, p. 38)

The pre-task stage is the preparation for the task which could include the teacher introducing key vocabulary, or the learners selecting the appropriate language for any given context themselves. The instructors might also present a model of the task by either doing it themselves or by presenting a picture, audio, or video demonstrating the task.

The task cycle is the planning, completion and reporting of the actual task. The task is done by the students including the planning with the teacher monitoring it from a distance. After the completion of the task either individual students or groups of students report on the process of the task completion and present these reports to the class then exchange reports, and compare results.

The final stage, language focus, is meant to let students examine and discuss specific features of the text or result of their work and finally practice the newly learned language. The teachers' role is to conduct the practise of new words, phrases and patterns either during or after the analysis. (Willis, 1996, p. 38).

The role of the teacher in the Willis framework changes depending on the phase. In the pre-task phase the teacher helps the students to plan their contents with more focus on form. The teacher corrects and gives advice. At the report phase the teacher acts as chair, commenting on the content and summing it up (Willis & Willis, 2001, p. 178).

A model similar to the "workplans" introduced by Ellis (2003) to integrate tasks into learning environments was developed by Nunan (1989, 2004). He introduced his model (Figure 2.2) with tasks at the centre which were influenced by various components of the classroom environment.

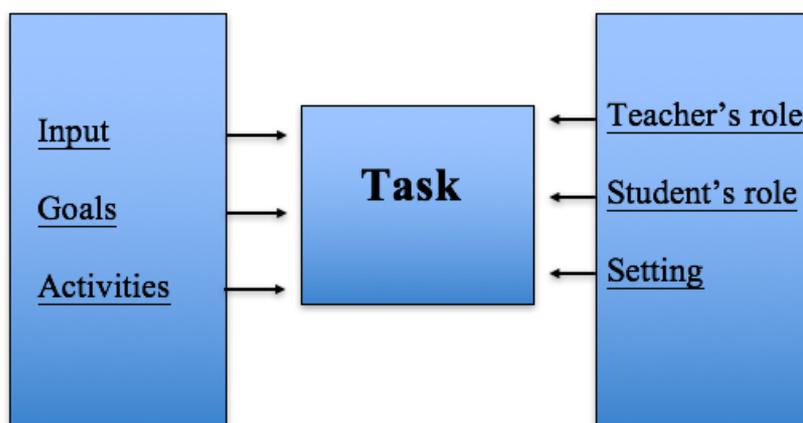


Figure 2.2: Components of a task (Nunan, 2004, p. 41).

Nunan (1988) in his description of tasks proposed the integration of authentic tasks into the language curriculum. His understanding of such tasks was that “authentic tasks in language teaching are tasks which are not designed for the classroom but are produced for purposes other than to teach language” (p. 99). *Authenticity* and *authentic* are words often used in describing a task in TBLT. The first to discuss the term *authentic* in language learning environments was Breen (1985). He divided authenticity into two research areas, authenticity of texts used as input data for learners, and authenticity of the learner’s own interpretation of such texts. According to Gilmore (2007) authenticity relates to the material itself and further to the meaning it holds for the learner. Tasks have also been investigated from the perspective of sociocultural theory which considers tasks as artefacts that can mediate language learning through interaction (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). Accordingly, a distinction is made between “task” and “activity”, with ‘task’ referring to the workplan (Ellis, 2003) that is given to the learners as a tasks or artefacts, and “activity” referring to the communication that results from the performance of the task (see Chapter 3, theoretical framework and discussion of “activity”). Ellis (2003) acknowledged this separation of “task” and “activity” and pointed out that “learners inevitably interpret the workplan in terms of their own needs, motives and histories, and thus the same tasks can result in very different kinds of activity when performed by different learners or even by the same learners on different occasions and in different contexts” (p. 18).

2.2.4 Task-based language teaching applied in the classroom

Research contributions in TBLT focused on a variety of areas, see Robinson (2011) for a review of the current research agendas. I chose two areas to consider, grammar and learner

types: the first area was concerned with the status of grammar and the way it was taught (Perdue & Klein, 1992; Prabhu, 1987) and the second was the learner types (Lai & Li, 2011; Oxford, 2003; Shintani & Ellis, 2010).

Grammar and TBLT. Prabhu (1987) was one of the first practitioners to apply CLT concepts in practice and to document this; he became a pioneer of task-based language teaching (TBLT). His communicative tasks were introduced in English language classes in primary and secondary schools in India. He was influenced by Krashen and claimed that a focus on language form prevented language learning. He believed that language development was achieved by the outcome of natural processes and it was not necessary to explain grammar in the beginning stages.

The results of Perdue's and Klein's study (1992) of beginner learners of different languages, were in line with what Prabhu believed. They observed that initially the students communicated using a "pre-basic variety", characterised by "nominal utterance organisation with extensive use of context", and they claimed that focus on form should not be the centre of learning, especially at the beginning. Learners acquired grammar progressively and in a dynamic mode. Approaching teaching to beginners from this point of view, grammar instruction was considered to be of little use unless their developmental readiness for early-acquired features could be determined. Klein and Perdue observed that grammaticalisation took place only very gradually and it was some time before finite verb organisation appeared in the "post-basic variety". Production of language skills at this beginning stage involved scaffolded utterances, that is utterances constructed using several attempts and which were context-dependent.

Learners and TBLT. Researchers with a focus on learner types were divided in their beliefs about which learners were most suited to being taught in TBLT environments. Some researchers found TBLT useful in more advanced classes when the first steps of language acquisition had passed. Skehan (2003) acknowledged that TBLT "tended to be with adults, generally at intermediate proficiency levels, and mostly with English as the target language" (p. 3), and Swan (2005) noted that TBLT was oriented toward those who "have already been taught more language than they can use" (p. 255).

Shintani (2011) reported that TBLT was a suitable approach with complete beginners after she compared the effects of TBLT and present-practice-produce (PPP) methodology on the acquisition of vocabulary and grammar by 6-8 year old Japanese children who were complete

beginners. PPP was used in the traditional way as drill teaching. She gathered data using pre- and post- testing in the language classrooms. Her results showed that the interactions in two classrooms were different. In the TBLT classroom learners participated more actively, and asked questions first in their native language but later in English. She found TBLT useful for younger students. Caution is needed in interpreting the results of Shintani's study because the learner group was young children who may be assumed to have a more intuitive approach to language learning than older students (Piaget, 1959).

2.2.5 Section summary

TBLT offers an opportunity for “natural” learning inside the classroom. This section presented TBLT and the advantage of using authentic tasks to make teaching more relevant and authentic. A selection of definitions of “task” was presented followed by an introduction to models of TBLT to help the integration of authentic tasks into the classroom curriculum. The final sub-section presented selected studies with TBLT applied in classrooms. TBLT emphasises meaning over form which needs to be considered especially when used in classes with beginners. The tasks used can afford learners a rich input of the target language. The focus of TBLT is on communicating in a purposeful way and also connecting the classroom with the outside world. The next section will introduce computer-mediated communication which can bring authenticity into a TBLT classroom with authentic materials and speakers from the target language.

2.3 Computer-mediated communication

Communication can take place in online learning spaces which are characterised by an additional layer of mediation through the computer (Hampel, 2014). Devices used in these online discourses can be laptop computers or computer-based technology, such as mobile phones or tablets. These technological tools can be used in either synchronous or asynchronous learning environments. Asynchronous tools such as wikis, blogs, email and discussion forums afford the creation of a student-centred and authentic learning environment (Ducate & Arnold, 2011). Asynchronous technologies relevant to this study offer the potential for encouraging reflection and critique, with users engaging in discussions over a longer time frame than is possible in face-to-face discussions (Conole & Dyke, 2004). These tools can be used to mediate or enhance collaboration and interaction among the learners in a single language classroom (Alm, 2001; Hampel, 2010); they can also be used for telecollaborative communication designed to include learner groups from other institutions or with speakers of the target language (Belz, 2003, 2005; Belz & Müller-Hartmann, 2003; Helm, 2015; O'Dowd,

2005a, 2011a, 2013, 2015; Ware, 2005; Ware & Kessler, 2016; Ware & Kramersch, 2005; Ware & O'Dowd, 2008). They can also be used for tools such as blogs, discussion lists and forums to establish online communities (Slaouti & Motteram, 2006).

The concept is embedded in the overarching concept of computer-assisted language learning (CALL). CALL as defined by Levy (1997) is “the search for and study of applications of the computer in language teaching and learning”. The subject area CALL is interdisciplinary and has evolved out of efforts to use the computer for teaching or for instructional purposes across a variety of subject areas (Stockwell, 2007). More recent developments in technology made it possible to use not only computers for teaching purposes but also mobile technology such as mobile phones or ipads. The term “technology-enhanced language learning” (TELL) has been gaining ground to describe this learning with technology which is not limited to computers (Cunningham, 2016; Thorne, 2016).

2.3.1 Affordances of asynchronous CMC tools

The term “affordance” is used in this study frequently to explain the possibilities which online tools offer with the aforementioned additional layer of mediation (Hampel, 2014).

“Affordances” as a theoretical concept was developed by Gibson (1979) who related it to animal behaviour. He defined affordances as possibilities for action in the environment, which are determined, on the one hand, by the objective properties of the environment and, on the other hand, by the action capabilities of the animal or human.

The concept was later defined by different researchers as, for example, “the properties of the physical and social environment that establish possibilities for action” (Kulikowich & Young, 2001, p. 167), or termed “social affordances” which facilitate the triggering of a communication in an environment which is open to constructive interactions preferably guided by mentors (Billett, 2001; Kreijns & Kirschner, 2001).

Affordances in relation to CMC tools used in language education encompass two relationships. First, the reciprocal relationship between the learners in a classroom or learning group and the CMC learning environment must be meaningful and support or anticipate the social intentions of the language learner. Second, the relationship is one of perception and action.

CMC tools have features which enable communication between members of the online platform. Kreijns and Kirschner (2001) describe it as, “when a member of the group perceives information and thus the social affordances will not only invite but will also guide another member to initiate a communication episode. The reaction of the other member may depend upon factors such as the expectations, focus of attention, and/or current context of the fellow member” (p. 14).

Exchanges developed in CMC-supported environments can achieve an almost synchronous, immediate communication quality. Twelve years ago Conole and Dyke (2004) noted that

the speed with which information can be exchanged via the Web has led to a shift in user expectations in terms of response times to requests from other users. This, in turn, has led to a consequential intensification of working patterns, with users being increasingly required to respond almost immediately to requests which, in the past, would have been dealt with over longer timeframes (p. 120).

The following affordances (Table 2.2) are an overview of affordances of CMC tools supporting asynchronous learning environments.

Table 2.2: Affordances relevant to asynchronous online (adapted from Conole & Dyke, 2004).

Affordances	Definition
Accessibility	Easy access to vast amounts of information through a variety of different mechanisms. Internet access is available through computers and mobile devices.
Diversity	ICT offers access to a vast range of diverse and different experiences such as overseas Web sites that can inform learning.
Communication and collaboration	The abilities of CMC tools such as wikis, blogs or social network sites offer the potential for learning enriched by engagement with the “other”.
Reflection	Asynchronous technologies offer the potential for reflection, with users engaging in discussions over a longer time frame than is possible in synchronous discussions. In addition, users are able to access and build on archived material available from earlier discussion.
Multimodal and non-linear	The non-linearity of the Internet enables the learner to move beyond linear pathways of learning. Learners can adopt more individualised strategies and pathways.
Immediacy	The speed with which information can be exchanged via the Internet leads to the expectation of short response times to requests from other users.

Blin (2016) reminds the designer of CALL systems to have affordances - technological, social, and educational - embedded in the system to support the emergence, perception, and realisation of linguistic affordances (p. 57). Some CMC tools have affordances in terms of asynchronous use and are part of the student's real life. Wikis and blogs are platforms which can support interactive and collaborative learning in the target language by writing text exchanging cultural information. They are authentic in the sense that they are often used in students' everyday life (Hampel, 2014).

Blogs are online diaries which afford the addition of multimedia and web links. Bloggers can add content which appears in chronological order on a public blog website (Elola & Oskoz, 2010). Blogs were used by Alm (2009) and Y.Chen (2015) in foreign language classroom settings designed as single blogs collaboratively written by all class members, whereas Vurdien (2013) researched the use of individual blogs written by each class member and accessible by the group. Research found that blogs were generally beneficial for the learners' proficiency in the foreign language but that they did not suit every learner because some learners felt that blogs were personal (Alm, 2009) and using a blog demanded certain technical knowledge not all the students had (Y.Chen, 2015; Vurdien, 2013).

Vurdien (2013) used task-based activities such as letter-, report-, proposal-, article- writing to encourage students' interaction. Her study described how a blog was used to encourage collaborative learning of a group of English as a foreign language learners at a language school in Spain. Their five months long study involved eleven students who were preparing for the Certificate in Advanced English (CAE). All the participants created their personal blogs so that they could read each other's views, share ideas and comment on their peers' postings. Writing the blog was found to be beneficial for preparation for the examination because it comprised writing tasks but Vurdien remarked that the integration of blogs was also problematic because "editing skills required teacher help and topics needed to be relevant to foster the motivation" (p. 140). Y.Chen (2015) observed that keeping up motivation when using blogs was also dependent on the learner type. She integrated a blog into her curriculum design when teaching 33 EFL learners at a Taiwanese university. The students had studied English for various lengths of time ranging from beginners to students studying in their fourth year English. The students wrote personal blog entries in the target language over a period of ten weeks. Chen found that the learners' motivation for the exercise varied depending on their level of experience with using blogs and it was also dependent on the learner type; she named the ones who enjoyed blogging "knowers", learners who were very confident with producing

language (p. 192). Alm (2009) used blogging with her 26 intermediate learners of German at a New Zealand university. They had to write about current German topics as part of their assessment. She noticed a difference in communication style among the learners that she related to their previous familiarity with the medium. She saw blogging as having great potential for students to express themselves and find their own voice. The students were able to put the learning material into the context of their own experiences and to share the gained understanding with their classmates (p. 134).

Wikis are similar to blogs in the sense that they are both websites sometimes created collaboratively by their members. Wikis feature a loosely structured set of Web pages, linked in multiple ways to each other and to internet resources and an open-editing system in which participants can edit any page by clicking the "edit this page" button. In learning environments, wikis can be created by students collaboratively in the target language, whereas blogs are compilations of contributions by individual students, sometimes with comments by others. Godwin-Jones (2009) explained that wikis afford the creation of shared projects and therefore are suited for project-based learning and are intensely collaborative (p. 15).

Wikis have been appreciated for affording collaboration and motivating students' learning (Miyazoe & Anderson, 2010; Y.-C. Wang, 2014) and for fostering autonomous learning with little teacher interference (Kessler, 2009; Oskoz & Elola, 2014). Miyazoe and Anderson (2010) compared blogs and wikis to see which platform was better received as a writing platform by their students. They integrated both platforms into their EFL classroom at a Japanese university. The 61 students in their study preferred wikis. They found them more suited to a collaborative translation task. In Y.-C. Wang's (2014) study at a Taiwan university, his EFL students who used a wiki in their second year composition course not only enjoyed the collaboration with their classmates but also found it motivating for their language learning. Collaboration could lead to more motivation but also to production of more genre-specific communication. Oskoz and Elola (2014) studied how 16 advanced students of Spanish in the USA used a wiki to collaboratively create content knowledge. They found that engaging with various writing conventions and constructing and reconstructing the content together led to the adoption of an appropriate, genre-specific language register (p. 138).

Wikis have the advantage that they can be used autonomously by the students with little teacher guidance. Kessler (2009) found that wikis offered an ideal platform to support autonomous language learning. He observed forty students from a Mexican tertiary institution

who were studying to become English teachers. His study was over the period of one semester which lasted sixteen weeks. The online content-based course aimed at improving the teachers' language skills and their knowledge about the different cultures of the English-speaking world. The students used a wiki to share information related to the culture they were studying. The students had to construct the wiki without interference from the teacher and were also encouraged to correct one another's errors. The tasks were aimed at fostering the students' autonomous learning. The students were very reluctant to make the required corrections but enjoyed the focus on the meaning of their writing. Kessler proposed that "students may benefit from a carefully created and controlled environment that encouraged autonomous collaboration without the teacher having a strong presence or any presence at all once the collaboration was underway" (p. 91). He suggested that it may be fruitful to provide the group of language learners with a variety of different tasks to give them the choice to be able to choose a task which is most suited to their needs.

The result of the application for learning was positive in most of the discussed cases and was found to lead to more collaboration and motivation among the learners. The affordances of these wikis and blogs can also be used to reach out and incorporate speakers of the target language.

2.3.2 Reaching out: using CMC tools to telecollaborate

Telecollaboration is the application of online communication tools to connect language learners in geographically distant locations. The aim of a telecollaborative co-operation is to develop the foreign language skills of the different learner types. Telecollaboration can provide opportunity to build up intercultural competence through collaborative tasks and project work (O'Dowd, 2007, p. 342). Tools can be blogs, wikis, discussion forums, emails, used among learners who are interacting and learning a language, not in a single classroom but separated by distance. A telecollaborative learning environment can be either the classroom next door or in the same neighbourhood, or classes or individual speakers of the target language located in the country of the target language or elsewhere. Telecollaboration projects became interesting in foreign language teaching when networked computers became faster and more widely available in educational institutions (O'Dowd, 2011; Ware, 2005; Ware & Kessler, 2016). Projects set up between language students were mostly between the US and countries in Europe, and the most commonly reported projects were between the USA and Germany and Spain (Helm, 2015).

In a well-documented project, Belz and Müller-Hartmann researched a telecollaboration exchange between tertiary students in the US and students at a German university (Belz, 2003; Müller-Hartmann & Belz, 2003; Belz, 2005). Ware (2005) and Ware and Kramsch (2005) described the setting up of an exchange with students between the US and Germany. O'Dowd (2005, 2007) reported on an email exchange between a US university and Spanish universities. The different projects focused on the interaction and collaboration between the learners. All the studies discovered tensions and problems in the exchanges resulting from difficult teacher-teacher relationships and task-design problems dependent on the different background and expectations of the students involved. The project that Belz (2003, 2004) and Belz and Müller-Hartmann (2003) set up was a telecollaboration between a fourth semester German class at a university in the USA and an English class at a German university. The students met four times a week and had to share and discuss various artefacts. The teacher guided the students, chose the topics and supervised their participation. Both groups relied very much on the guidance of the teachers and Belz noted that teacher presence was essential and that the role of the teacher was intensified rather than diminished. In addition Belz and Müller-Hartmann (2003) noted that problems occurred when the two groups of students had different assessments to complete which led to different levels of motivation among the two groups. In a later paper on this setting, Belz (2004) also found it difficult that the two groups of students often seemed to be at different levels of language proficiency, making the exchange problematic (Belz 2004).

Ware also set up various telecollaboration projects between students in a German and a US university (Ware 2005; Ware & Kramsch 2005). The participants, 12 advanced-level students of English in northeastern Germany and nine advanced-level students of German in the US communicating online over a period of four months, were found to have different motivation levels. The German group were more motivated because they had to participate in the exchange as part of their assessment whereas the Americans had the choice to voluntarily contribute. Ware and Kramsch further noted that teachers brought their own experiences with and assumptions about online communication, which influenced their comfort level in the classes that incorporated online inter-cultural interaction. Another researcher, O'Dowd (2005), noted that his students always suffered from the different levels of proficiency of the two groups of students. His research was between a group of US university students learning Spanish and a group of Spanish-speaking university students learning English. They had to write emails to each other over a period of one year informing each other about their culture. He, too, found the demand on the two teachers led to tensions. But overall the outcome of the

study was mostly positive with some breakdowns of communication reported when students had different levels of proficiency which caused some of the students to develop negative attitudes towards the target culture (p. 138).

Later projects involved more interactive tools such as blogs and discussion forums on Blackboard (Ware & Kessler, 2014; O'Dowd, 2013). Problems were reported with teacher involvement and uneven levels of proficiency in the groups. Ware and Kessler (2014) reported that teachers needed to be too involved in the activity which led to a breakdown of the exchange. O'Dowd (2013) observed from his exchange on Blackboard that the Spanish and American students had different levels of access to technology, that there were differences in the course requirements at the two institutions and that each group held negative and stereotypical attitudes towards the other group's culture (p. 53).

Telecollaboration continues to be of great interest in the field of CALL and multiple publications and conferences are taking place to encourage teachers to integrate telecollaboration elements into their language classes, the latest conference took place in Dublin in April 2016. In the past telecollaboration was believed to be interesting for the students to connect with the native speakers of the country but eventually it was noticed that telecollaborative settings require enormous engagement by the teacher. Teachers need to manage different settings and expectations, and have to handle different skill levels of learners. It is obvious that help and training need to be put in place and be available for the teachers who want to integrate telecollaborative exchanges into their language classroom. The latest developments are recorded in O'Dowd (2016). The most recent project is an international project of telecollaboration INTENT² financed by the European Union.

O'Dowd (2013) in particular shows keen interest in motivating the teachers; he developed a checklist of 40 descriptors for a successful telecollaboration teacher. He also runs training sessions for teachers. A later article (O'Dowd, 2015) reports on the training given to four teachers from different countries on how to set up telecollaborative exchanges.

2.3.3 Section summary

The use of computers and technology to mediate and enhance language communication encouraged learners to become more creative by using blogs and wikis. The use of such tools to create their own projects made the learners more autonomous and motivated (Kessler,

² www.unicollaboration.eu

2009; Wang, 2014). By using the affordances of CMC for telecollaboration, language learners could reach out to the countries and learners of the target languages. Social networking sites have been around for quite a while now, but they are still exciting new environments to build asynchronous learning environments with affordances similar to blogs and wikis to create a telecollaborative environment. The following section will report on literature to date using social networking sites (SNS) in language classes.

2.4 Social Networking Sites (SNS)

“Social Networking Sites (SNS) are a computer-mediated communication (CMC) tool that emerged during an industry-wide innovation boom referred to as the Web 2.0 phenomenon (see Appendix A) and are part of a category of tools referred to as social media” (Ellison & boyd, 2013)³. The most popular social networking site used at the time of this study is Facebook. SNSs are a

compelling focus for the field of CMC because they were designed to support interaction and have been adopted by many diverse kinds of individuals connecting with one another in novel ways, leveraging existing tools to do unexpected things and reconfiguring CMC technologies to meet their need (Ellison and boyd, 2013, p. 163).

This section will present literature relevant to SNSs, firstly covering their general use with particular focus on identity creation facilitated by the affordance of online profiles, and, secondly, informing about research contributions on SNS use in educational environments.

2.4.1 Use of SNSs

As the use of SNSs became more widespread they became the object of scholarly attention in the fields of communications and sociology. Vie (2007) and boyd (2008) were the first researchers who conducted comprehensive studies on Facebook and MySpace respectively as part of their doctoral theses. Both presented longitudinal studies and used ethnographical methods to describe the behaviour of young people using SNSs. In 2008, boyd wrote her doctoral thesis about the use of MySpace among teenagers in the USA. In her study she looked at the behaviour of teenagers when using MySpace and claimed in her discussion that people defined their identity more authentically on social networking sites than in real life which would lead to more meaningful connections with others. Vie’s (2007) thesis research was situated in a university setting. She was interested in the behaviour of students on

³ danah boyd prefers to have her name written in lower case.

MySpace compared to Facebook. She explored their perception of privacy when creating profiles and tried to find out if the platforms were suitable for educational purposes. The outcome of her ethnographic study found that the students preferred the affordances of Facebook to MySpace. Vie recommended to instructors that students should be encouraged to showcase their online social networking site profiles in the classroom and that instructors should also create their own profiles. She believed that the creation of profiles had pedagogical possibilities and that SNS technology was changing educators' ideas about writing and the teaching of writing (p. 203).

2.4.2 Identity creation and profiles

Every SNS user is required to set up a personal profile which can be accessed by members of her/his chosen SNS circle. The Facebook user creates this profile with more or less private information and with more or less easy access which can be regulated by the user. By developing an online profile, SNS users are able to create and show a unique online identity.

When Facebook is used in a class setting with students who are not known to each other prior to attending the same university class, Facebook profiles can be accessed by clicking on the names of the fellow students and the personal information they made available can be obtained, helping them to get to know each other (Lampe, Ellison, & Steinfield, 2007).

Lampe, et al.'s study was based on over 7,000 student profiles of a US university's Facebook-site. The students' Facebook profiles reveal their online persona. The "online persona" is the virtual self-presentation of the student. The student can create this "virtual persona" by presenting pictures, composing the page in their own words and their own design; they are also able to add information ranging from favourite books and movies to sexual orientation and relationship status (Tufekci, 2008). Researchers were keen to describe the process of this new form of identity creation in an online environment (Reid, 2011; Sundén, 2003; Tosun, 2012; Turkle, 1995). Sundén (2003) described the process of profile creation as people "learning to write themselves into being" which is consistent with Turkle's (1995) notion that participation online involves impression management and self-presentation through text. She found that students enjoyed presenting themselves online and felt comfortable doing so. As one of Turkle's participants explained, "real life is just one more window, and it's not usually my best one" (Turkle, 1995, p. 13).

Tosun (2012) described online identity profiles created by students as the act of creating a "true self". She studied the motives of 143 university students in Turkey for expressing their "true self" through Facebook use. She reported that the main reason for students' use of

Facebook was for entertainment. She discovered that Facebook users had the intention of using Facebook to complement their already established life events and routines. Tosun termed this Facebook use in harmony with one's offline life (p. 1515). This is in line with Tufekci (2014) who claimed that the development of social media and the way users presented themselves socially led to online and offline identities which were increasingly intertwined and that the internet was no longer the world of "disembodied" and "shallow" relationships of the "virtual" kind but a technology that mediated and structured social connections between real people. General studies have considered social connections between people; they have been found these profiles to be helpful for fostering friendships among new groups of students (H.-I. Chen, 2013; Lampe et al., 2007; Lantz-Andersson et al., 2013; Tosun, 2012; Tufekci, 2008, 2014). Lampe et al. (2007) focused in their quantitative study on different elements of the profiles and tried to predict which elements would foster friendship. Their findings suggested that SNS users who added the high school they attended, favourite music and their birthday to the profile were more likely to attract a larger number of friends (p. 441). They concluded that at undergraduate level especially, students were making use of profiles to attract more friends.

2.4.3 "Friends" on SNS

The term "friend" as used on social networking sites differs from the traditional understanding of friends in that online friends are made much more quickly through the simple "friending" process in which a friend relationship becomes established when a user sends a "friend" request to an individual by clicking the "add" button and the other party accepts the request (Tong, Van der Heide, Langwell, & Walther, 2008). Some Facebook users have many hundreds of friends. These Facebook friends have generally been found to be real people the Facebook users knew in offline life (boyd, 2006; Lampe et al., 2007; Pempek, Yermolayeva, & Calvert, 2009; Reich, Subrahmanyam, & Espinoza, 2012; H. Wang & Wellman, 2010).

boyd (2006) claimed that friending supported pre-existing social norms because the architecture of social network sites is fundamentally different to the architecture of unmediated social spaces. These sites introduced an environment that was still quite new at that time. She wrote in her conclusion that the choice of friends online was not a set of arbitrary personal decisions; each choice had the potential to complicate relationships with friends, colleagues, schoolmates, and lovers. Social network sites were not digital spaces disconnected from other social venues. Support for these observations can be found in the study by H. Wang and Wellman (2010) who researched a sample of 677 US households,

indicating that both close and distant friends were among online friends. Lampe et al. (2007) indicated that many users of SNSs add old high school friends they once had known and no longer had contact with. Pempek (2009) and Reich et al. (2012) found that high school students interacted mostly with friends who they knew offline and with whom they wanted to strengthen relationships. All these studies were conducted in the US and used relatively small homogeneous samples of university student groups.

Ellison, Gray, Vitak, Lampe, and Fiore (2013) used a different context in their research of online friends and employed measures of social capital. They named the structure of SNS users' Facebook friends network "Facebook-specific bridging social capital" (p. 857). The terms "bridging" and "bonding" social capital go back to Gittel and Vidal (1998) who developed Bordieu's (1986) work to define the term "bonding social capital" as the type of capital that brings people who already know each other closer together and "bridging social capital" as the type that brings together people or groups who previously did not know each other" (p. 15). Ellison et al. (2013) collected data from over 2000 non-faculty university staff at a US university to find out more about their use of online communication tools. They adapted Williams' (2006) 10-item bridging scale which captured aspects such as "contact with diverse others, feeling part of a broader group, and engaging in reciprocal behaviours with one's community" (Williams, 2006, as cited in Ellison et al., 2013, p. 6). Their findings showed that weaker ties, relationships which were not well established in the offline life of users, were more likely to develop bridging social capital, and that people who knew each other offline did not show so much curiosity about each other online.

2.4.4 Spaces

Users of SNSs communicate on a regular basis with their circle of friends and develop unique online spaces consisting of text and multimedia (boyd, 2006). Researchers have tried to name, describe and define these new online places (Aaen & Dalsgaard, 2016; H.-I. Chen, 2013; Lantz-Andersson et al., 2013; Reid, 2011). Lantz-Andersson et al.'s (2013) study was looking at 13 - 16 year old Swedish high school students who carried out collaborative language-learning activities with students from Colombia, Finland, and Taiwan. The researchers called the Facebook groups used for collaboration "extended spaces". They were interested in observing the secondary school students' interaction on SNSs and they wanted to find out if it affected the language teaching and learning. Their results indicated that students in these spaces needed to adapt to new roles with diverse communicative genres and linguistic repertoires. Furthermore the language use consisted not only of communication but also of

negotiating new and changing roles in the form of a new way of online representation. This online representation was created by setting up profiles. The researchers were disappointed with the outcome of their study and regarded the platform as less dynamic than expected. They concluded that it was important that the interaction on an SNS be regarded as communication but with its own values (p. 310). Similarly, Aaen and Dalsgaard (2015) termed the Facebook group they used in their research a “third space”. Their contribution was a study of the use of Facebook groups managed by high school students in Denmark without interference from their teachers. They found that students communicated on Facebook groups in a more specific and targeted way than on their Facebook wall where the language was more informal. In their content analysis they found that the students blended discussion of their personal and social life with academic schoolwork within the groups. The student-managed Facebook groups in this study revealed a different kind of use from Facebook as a teacher-managed or controlled group. The study showed that forming class communities where the students participated in a shared practice of helping each other in coping with and enriching school life was beneficial.

Similar to the Aaen and Dalsgaard study, Reid (2011) encouraged her students, who were studying teacher education at a South African university, to set up a closed Facebook group before the group dispersed to go to their placements. The tutor group was intended to keep the students in touch with each other but also provide them with a platform to support each other. Reid termed this group “schooled space” because it brought informal relationships usually reserved for out-of-class communication modes into a domain which normally promoted formal, academic literacy practices. She observed that students in this FB-group felt safe enough to make their voices heard; the students were excited about the use of the Facebook group and they believed that they got to know each other better (p. 21). They mentioned that the communication norms of this Facebook platform made it an easy space for them to communicate freely with their classmates and that they crossed racial, cultural, religious and gender boundaries (p. 69).

Facebook as a support tool for crossing cultural boundaries was also the focus of Chen’s (2013) ethnographical study of the online communication of two Chinese post-graduate students who were learners of English at a US University. She was interested in looking at Facebook not only as communication tool but also as a platform to bring together different cultures. She called the space her two students created a “hybrid third space”. She wanted to see how they presented their identity on Facebook and how these online identities developed and changed over time. She found that the two women used different types of literacy

activities and social interactions which were dependent on their Chinese or English speaking social networking communities. Her results showed that these “hybrid third spaces” enabled new and alternative identity options and allowed multilingual learners, with their semiotic repertoires and cultural values, to navigate across multiple languages, identities, and cultures (p. 147). Both participants viewed their online identities as a reflection of the face-to-face reality in which they were situated and perceived Facebook life as an extension of their real life experiences (p. 162).

2.4.5 Social networking sites in language education

Facebook has the potential to be used as a learning environment for students because many students do not experience Facebook as a separate learning software but as part of their daily socialising, as part of their social grooming (Tufekci, 2008). The combination of students perceiving Facebook as both personal and very familiar is an attractive feature and provides the instructor with potential opportunities to create learning contexts on Facebook which can be authentic and educational. This makes Facebook well suited for language learning and teaching. Immersion into the target language can be made easy.

Studies conducted on the use of Facebook for language learning can be divided into three topics: first, discussions on the usability and potential of Facebook (Aydin, 2012; Blattner & Fiori, 2009; McBride, 2009); second, research on learner habits (Alm, 2015; Blattner & Fiori, 2011; Chen, 2015; Mitchell, 2012; Terantino & Graf, 2011; S. Wang & Vasquez, 2012) and third, a small group of studies of the use of Facebook as part of the language curriculum (Blattner & Lomicka, 2012; Mills, 2011; Terantino, 2012).

Facebook with its affordances of personal profile creation can be used in L2 learning to explore other perspectives and cultures and experiment with language and self-presentation. This can move learners further towards the stage of intellectual development referred to as self-authorship (McBride, 2009, p. 51). Blattner and Fiori (2009) saw a great potential in Facebook-groups as a platform for building telecollaborative communities. They believed that a social network community could be an asset in building a community of learners and that the community could develop pragmatic competence, including knowledge of speech acts and speech functions and the ability to use language appropriately in specific contexts. Aydin (2012) contributed to the research with an extensive literature review on Facebook. He looked at research on Facebook in different tertiary educational environments ranging from astronomy courses to library courses. The outcome of his review showed that Facebook and

other SNSs could potentially provide valuable additional educational environments, particularly when learning about different cultures. Moreover, Facebook increased learners' self-efficacy, motivation, self-esteem, positively changed perceptions and attitudes, reduced anxiety, and improved foreign and second language learning skills in reading and writing (p. 1101).

The second group of studies of Facebook report outcomes of empirical studies which explored learner habits when using Facebook (S. Wang & Vasquez, 2012; Blattner & Fiori, 2011; Alm, 2015). These studies found that students not only benefitted in language learning but also gained a better understanding of the culture of the target language when integrating SNSs into their learning. S. Wang and Vasques (2012), Blattner and Fiori (2011) and Alm (2015) researched language use and the choice of language type applied by students on Facebook. S. Wang & Vasquez (2012) used Facebook for writing tasks in a Chinese language class at a US university. They wanted to find out whether there was any difference in the quality and quantity of the written texts produced by two groups (n=18) of intermediate Chinese language learners. They found that the group of students who used Facebook for the writing task wrote more Chinese characters than the control group who did not use Facebook. They concluded that Facebook could be used as an alternative pedagogical space for L2 literacy practice outside of class, with the potential for helping L2 learners improve at least some aspects of their writing performance (p. 90).

Blattner and Fiori (2011) also found that the students who used Facebook improved in their production of the target language. They conducted a study with 13 undergraduate students enrolled in an intermediate Spanish culture course at a US university. Their research interest was in multiliteracy and the socio-pragmatic awareness of the participants. The participants were asked to make corrections to L2 writing in authentic settings, a Facebook group. Their observations confirmed that the students developed a better L2 socio-pragmatic awareness (greetings and slang). This informal socio-pragmatic awareness was also observed by Alm (2015) whose study revealed that students tended to use a more informal tone when writing in L2 on Facebook. Alm's (2015) quantitative research on multilingual students of different languages found that learners of different proficiency levels used the Facebook platform differently, but all of them communicated on Facebook using informal language.

Some empirical studies were conducted focusing on cultural learning when using SNSs. Mitchell (2011) conducted case study research on nine students learning English at a US University. She wanted to find out how they used the Facebook-site when writing in the

foreign language. The students liked the fact that they were not corrected and could learn cultural aspects; they also enjoyed the social aspects of Facebook interaction which led to enhanced motivation. Similarly Y.Chen (2015) found the aspect of cultural learning a potential benefit of Facebook. She studied nine adolescent EFL English learners and conducted a qualitative study on the perception of the students' use of Facebook as an extension to their classroom. Her results from group interviews showed that the participants perceived this group as having a social bond and as an extension of the classroom which leads to cultural learning.

The third category are studies which reported on the use of Facebook when applied in language classes as part of the curriculum. Only a few studies of this kind seem to have been published. In 2012, Blattner and Lomicka studied a group of 24 French students enrolled in an intermediate level course at their US university. Their study was a structured telecollaborative exchange using Facebook between native French speakers in France and French learners in the US. Twice a month, students had to post information on Facebook about topics chosen by the instructor or chosen by themselves. Unlike their previous exploratory studies of Facebook use in language learning settings, this study was part of the actual French course for the French learners. They were awarded full credits when they responded to a post in a comment with at least 50 words. The students viewed participation positively, they remarked that Facebook should be implemented in student-centred ways that promote communication and collaboration.

Studies involving students within a single class and focusing on individual learner output were conducted by Mills (2011) and Terantino and Graf (2011). Mills (2011) integrated a Facebook task into the curriculum of her French intermediate class at a US university. The 17 students of French who participated in the project had to develop Facebook-profiles and interact three times weekly within the Facebook community. Their online profiles were fictitious French characters. During the course of the assignment the characters interacted and developed an L2 community of practice with joint enterprise, meaning the students created an online space, in this study in Paris, with collective goals and mutual engagement, as well as a shared repertoire of cultural artifacts (p. 350). Another research study using Facebook as a platform for writing tasks was conducted by Terantino and Graf (2011) who set a series of writing assignments for their beginning and intermediate Spanish US high school students in the Facebook environment. The students experienced positive effects on their writing and reading skills and increased their confidence. The students' writing was of an informal nature. The authors did not present an empirical study in this article, they reported on anecdotal

observations. No studies to date have presented linguistic proficiency outcomes while using SNS. Future research on the gains of linguistic proficiency may be a valuable addition to the research agenda of Facebook and SNS.

Selwyn (2009) noted that despite the advantages Facebook had for educational purposes, it had not found its way into education yet. In 2015 he again expressed his continuing disappointment about the lack of use of technology in education and he noted that a greater diversity of people needed to be encouraged to speak up about education and technology (Selwyn, 2015, p. 6). Kurtz (2014) observed a lack of Facebook use in education and assumed that many teachers are discouraged from becoming their students' "friends" and vice versa. A connection between a social network and a learning environment, such as Facebook, was often considered an invasion of privacy and overexposure of personal life (p. 66). Aydin (2014) also found that students were reluctant to interact with their teachers on SNSs in his Facebook study. His 121 ESL students from a Turkish university preferred observing the SNS platform with little active contribution. Aydin urged educators not to dismiss SNSs as educational platforms. He recommended that teachers make more use of SNS tools because nowadays they are an essential part of social interaction. SNSs were found to be valuable to connect students with more knowledgeable others (p. 161).

2.4.6 Section summary

This summary of the literature confirms that Facebook can be a valuable tool to include in language learning environments. Both students and teachers need to get used to Facebook in a learning environment, as it is primarily used in private communication of the students. As McBride (2009) noted, SNSs could be seen as meaningful, especially since they significantly differ from communication in written and printed form. There is still not enough research to demonstrate convincingly a positive outcome for using Facebook in an educational setting at this time and there have been calls for more research (Aydin, 2012; Lamy & Zourou, 2013; Levy, 2015).

2.5 Social presence

It is common for learners to find text-based online environments impersonal. This is due to the lack of communication cues such as facial expressions and hearing a tone of voice. In asynchronous online environments (for example social networking sites such as Facebook), the common delays between a contribution and a response can often be perceived as impersonal which can then affect levels of collaboration and interaction in educational environments thus prejudicing learning. Kear, Chetwynd, and Jefferis (2014) have described

this impersonality of online communication as “a lack of social presence”.

The concept of social presence was introduced by Short, Williams, and Christie (1976). They defined it as the “degree of salience of the other person in the interaction and the consequent salience of the interpersonal relationships ” (p. 65). In their research they described it as the critical factor in a communication medium and researched the effect of visual and auditory cues in various types of real-time communication (for example, video-conferencing, audio-conferencing and face-to-face meetings). They believed that social presence was based on interpersonal contact using the psycho-linguistic concepts of intimacy and immediacy, referring to research by Argyle and Dean (1965) who understood the concept of intimacy as a joint function of eye contact, physical proximity, smiling, etc. (p. 293) and Wiener and Mehrabian (1968) who described immediacy as the relationship between the speaker and the objects. Definitions and interpretations of social presence have been presented subsequently by researchers who have looked at online communication and online learning (see Kehrwald 2010 for a review). Researchers include Gunawardena (1995) who looked at social presence as “the degree to which a person is perceived as a ‘real person’ in mediated communication” (p. 151) and Garrison, Anderson, and Archer (1999) who defined social presence as “the ability of participants in a community of inquiry to project themselves socially and emotionally, as ‘real’ people (i.e., their full personality), through the medium of communication being used” (p. 94). In Tu and McIsaac’s (2002) work, social presence is understood as “the degree of feeling, perception, and reaction of being connected by CMC to another intellectual entity through a text-based encounter” (p. 140). For Picciano (2009) social presence “refers to a student’s sense of being in and belonging in a course and the ability to interact with other students and an instructor” (p. 22).

These definitions seem to focus on the ability of the online participant to project him or herself as being “real” in the online environment but also on the ability of the members of the group to perceive this person as being there and being real. Researchers wanted to find out how to measure this perception of reality and searched for methods to study social presence (Gunawardena, 1995; Gunawardena & Zittle, 1997; Rourke, Anderson, Garrison, & Archer, 1999; Tu, 2000). Gunawardena and Zittle (1997), as well as Tu (2000), focused on the study of user’s attitudes in online environments whereas Tu and McIsaac (2002) and Rourke et al. (2001) focused on observing and studying the behaviour of user in online spaces.

Gunawardena (1995) and Gunawardena & Zittle (1997) developed the *Social Presence Scale*, an instrument to measure the degree of social presence in CMC educational settings.

Gunawardena's (1995) used a 17-item 5-point bipolar scale, with "1" indicating positive and "5" to negative, i.e. "very dull". The bipolar scale she applied to research social presence focused more on the participants' feelings toward the medium of CMC and not as much on which others in the group were perceived as "real". In 1997, together with Zittle, she developed this scale further. Rather than responding on a bipolar scale, students were asked to rank 14 statements on a scale of 1 to 5. For instance, one question asked students to rank, on a scale of 1 to 5, to what degree they agree or disagree that CMC is an excellent medium for social interaction.

Rourke et al. (2001) developed a measuring instrument containing social presence indicators. Their aim was to measure social presence through analysing online discussions. Rourke et al. identified three different indicators of social presence: the expression of emotions, use of humour, and self-disclosure. Rourke et al. developed these indicators based on their previous work and as part of the community of inquiry model (Garrison, Anderson, & Archer, 1999; Rourke, et. al., 2001). A third measuring instrument was proposed by Tu and McIsaac (2002) who called their catalogue of questions the Social Presence and Privacy Questionnaire (SPPQ). They listed 17 social-presence items and 13 privacy items which evaluated e-mail, bulletin board, and real-time chat. It was designed to measure online social presence and also the perception of privacy. Their choice of questions was based on their belief that social context and privacy played a larger role than previously thought.

Today, research in this field continues to use the instruments introduced by Gunawardena and Zittle (1997), Rourke et al. (2001), Tu (2000) and Tu and McIsaac (2002). Their studies on social presence in online environments have adapted the questionnaires⁴ to fit their different areas of research. The most common fields of interest relating to social presence are listed in Table 2.3.

⁴ The terms questionnaire and survey are both used and have the same meaning.

Table 2.3: Social presence research.

Field of interest	Research conducted
Social presence and the feeling of privacy and intimacy : this research looked at how intimate online learning environments are and how intimacy can be achieved	Measuring the level of intimacy and immediacy: Tu and McIsaac, 2002; Wiesenberg and Willment, 2001; More intimacy by exchanging personal information: Lomicka and Lord, 2010; Swan and Shih, 2005 Intimacy by using online profiles: Kear et al, 2014; Lim and Richardson, 2016 Use of emoticons: Dressner and Herring, 2012; Ko, 2012; Lowenthal, 2015;
How to achieve more social presence	Superficial communication mode: Gunawardena, 1995; Oztok et al, 2015 More interaction and praise by teacher: Tu and McIsaac, 2002; Richardson and Swan, 2003
Does learning improve when more social presence exists in class environments?	Hostetter and Busch, 2013

The level of privacy or intimacy was seen as an important factor when assignments were given to learners in online environments. A sufficient level of privacy needed to be established to make the community intimate enough to be able to fulfil learning requirements (Tu, 2000). Wiesenberg and Willment (2001) tried to create a feeling of privacy in their online classroom of 24 continuing education students in Canada through social negotiation and social engagement. They used tasks which involved sharing some key pieces of personal information in the form of a brief biography and noting personal experiences on a discussion board. The result of their study suggested that personal information connected students by helping them form their online identities and enabling them to form stronger interpersonal ties.

Lomicka and Lord (2007) were also focused on privacy and intimacy in their online language class, teaching 14 student teachers in training of Romance languages throughout the world. The outcome of their study showed that the level of intimacy between the learners in the online environment was high at the beginning of the computer conferencing when students were asked to exchange more personal information to enable them to get to know one another. As the course continued these “intimate” relationships decreased or levelled out. Lomicka and Lord applied the community of inquiry framework as an analytical lens in their study.

Lomicka and Lord's findings were in line with Swan (2002) who found that the course progressed and so called cohesive indicators declined in importance while the importance of interactive indicators increased. This was seen as a pattern that related to their importance at various stages of the community building (p. 43).

Early research by Gunawardena suggested that the more educators incorporated and used CMC tools for educational purposes, the more they noticed that CMC environments could be very social and interpersonal (Gunawardena, 1995; Gunawardena & Zittle, 1997). This observation led online education researchers to reconceptualise social presence theory. Researchers began to focus less on communication media and its constraints and more on how people actually used communication media. Kear et al (2014) looked at the way students used the affordance of online profiles. They were interested to see if the use of profiles and photo uploads would make them feel more connected (p. 1). Kear et al.'s (2014) study consisted of two case studies, each case using a different social network, *First Class* and *Moodle*. Forty students from the Open University in the UK were asked to make use of the profiles function afforded by the SNS platform. Interestingly, the profiles, which were expected to increase the social presence in the course, were not perceived as helpful by some students. Several found it too artificial, others had concerns about their privacy. (See also section 2.4.2 on profiles).

Social presence in primarily text-based CMC environments is difficult to sustain because of the lack of nonverbal behaviours and cues. This deficiency has made users develop paralanguage to express more emotions, specifically in the form of emoticons (Dunlap et al., 2015; Ko, 2012). Emoticons is short for *emotion icons*. Emoticons are used to enhance the feeling of intimacy and closeness in the online environment and offered ways to support text to represent emotional and personality nuances similar to face-to-face communication. Emoticons are said to not only enhance the feeling of intimacy in online environments but also make the users feel more immediately connected to each other (Ko, 2012). One study conducted on communication between the researcher and her doctoral student found emoticons helped to convey the speech act performed through the production of the online text; they helped to express the intentions of the users of how they wanted the text to be interpreted (Dresner & Herring, 2010, p. 255).

Dunlap et al. (2015) presented a review of research on the use of emoticons. Only very few studies have researched the effect of emoticons in language learning settings. Ko (2012) in her study of 12 French learners at a university in Taiwan asked her students to use emoticons in

their writing to substitute for missing nonverbal cues. The participants enjoyed the use of emoticons in their text-based CMC environment, and found that it mostly enhanced social presence

Non-verbal expressions have been found to contribute to social presence and also played a large role in the mode of language used in the online environment. Early on, Gunawardera (1995) used her catalogue of 17 questions to observe students' feelings towards the computer as a medium in an asynchronous text-based learning environment. She found that the online classroom had implications for interaction and collaborative learning. She recommended that starting with some chit-chat would help to build a cohesive environment. She further recommended developing protocols for CMC interaction, etiquette for CMC discussion and techniques for managing information overload that would enhance online communication. Likewise, very recently, Oztok, Zingaro, Makos, Brett and Hewitt (2015) observed that the users of online communication spaces preferred a more superficial code of discourse. Their study showed that people who did not share a close relationship before they started their collaborative learning actually had more impact in building the online community than the learners who knew each other better. Their research was based on 198 students on an online course. They combined social presence with social capital theory and found bridging social capital and people less acquainted with each other, were more likely to show interest in establishing a community (see also Gittel & Vidal, 1998 in section 2.4.3). They concluded that "a reason for the preference of communicating with the less familiar participant might be that students are generally shy to contribute on an online platform and prefer the shallower conversation type as in weak ties to the deeper more meaningful conversation registers" (p. 23).

Adding features and using a specific code of languages to enhance social presence in online environments is often not enough. It was observed that the role of the teacher is an important factor in creating social presence, either by giving feedback to students (Richardson & Swan, 2003) or contributing online with personal comments (Swan & Shih, 2005). Richardson and Swan (2003) conducted a quantitative study in an online learning course and used Gunawardena and Zittle's (1997) survey tool, adding an additional open question after each of the three sections. Their results showed that students who received more frequent, immediate verbal and nonverbal feedback from their teachers were more likely to give higher ratings to the overall quality of instruction and value of a course and rate their satisfaction with their instructor highly. Personal disclosure by the teacher was motivating for the students and created more social presence, as Swan and Shih (2005) concluded. They researched a group

of 91 students who participated in an online education course. The students contributed to a discussion forum, and their contributions made up part of the final assessment. The results indicated that course designers and instructors should seek ways to evoke personal experience in discussion starters and other design factors.

An enhanced social presence level is a desirable factor to have in an online classroom to create a more intimate and friendly atmosphere which may lead to more motivation for learning. The research on social presence presented so far has shown that it is difficult to measure a mediated environment using criteria such as satisfaction and the degree of social and emotional interaction. It appears to be much harder to measure the actual learning outcomes in the mediated environment. Very few studies have looked at learning outcomes correlated with social presence.

The results of Swan and Shih's (2005) mixed method study has suggested that students who perceived high social presence in the online discussions also believed they had learned more from them than students who perceived low social presence. Their results were based on the qualitative interview data from their four participants who were students of education technology at a US university. Hostetter and Busch (2013) measured the learning outcomes of their 121 students in a tertiary institution in the US who took general courses using Powerpoint slides and discussion forums. The researchers used an extended version of the Community of Inquiry model (Swan et al., 2008) as the survey tool. Their results showed that a discussion forum with questions which were graded and rewards for the students when answering correctly could be seen to be profitable for increasing students' sense of belonging to the online community. Students who experienced social presence in an online setting performed better in the final assignment (p. 83).

2.5.1 Section summary

The research presented on social presence has shown that researchers tried to explore ways of measuring social presence by developing different catalogues of questionnaires. The focus of the research was on finding out what factors contributed to social presence and how students felt connected with one another in online learning environments. There has been little research conducted on either the correlation between social presence and learning outcomes in online spaces or on the social presence in online language classrooms.

2.6 Summary

The focus of foreign language learning today is on communication. Communicative language

teaching (CLT) with input, output and interaction models is the foundation of contemporary language teaching and basis of this study. CLT applied in task-based language teaching (TBLT) uses authentic materials for teaching. With the onset of computer-mediated communication (CMC), TBLT has been able to reach into the world of the target language more easily, thus connecting classroom students with native speakers. Learning foreign languages with CMC tools has afforded more authenticity, interactivity and collaboration. Research reported in this literature review has presented studies of various telecollaboration projects which experimented with this modern approach to learning.

Social networking sites (SNS) are one of many CMC tools available to the learners. SNSs are unique in the way as they are a new dimension of communication. Facebook in particular, is currently the number one communication tool among students and young people worldwide. Teenagers and young adults have transferred their social life partly online and spend a vast amount of time communicating with friends instead of meeting face-to-face (Ellison & boyd, 2013). Affordances of SNSs, including easy multimedia uploads and quick and easy response mechanisms developed a strong social presence on the SNS platform. Communication has become almost synchronous due to fast internet connections and the use of mobile devices.

In language classrooms, such social platforms can play substantial roles in bridging the gap between the learners in the classroom and the speakers of the target language, to produce a more authentic learning experience, which potentially could lead to more desire amongst students to learn. Despite these advantages, teachers are reluctant to integrate SNSs into their teaching. Teachers seem to avoid personal communication platforms in educational settings and particularly as part of the language curriculum. There has been very little research conducted into the use of Facebook in educational settings.

The literature up to now has shown that while a considerable amount of research has been done in the field of computer-mediated communication using the task-based approach, little research has been done on the use of social network sites, and on social presence in relation to how these constructs affect language learning or are affected by it. As the literature has demonstrated, current technology and learning research is starting to transform learning in the language classroom.

The three elements of task-based language learning, social networking and social presence applied in language learning environments are topics which are under-researched. This study hopes to contribute to previous research and bring together the concepts of SNS, social

presence and TBLT and to subsequently make an impact in applying these concepts in language learning environments in order to create more authentic and contemporary learning environments.

Chapter 3

Theoretical background of this thesis

Activity theory (AT) is a branch of sociocultural theory that has its origin in the work of the Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky, who is understood to be the founder of activity theory. His follower Leont'ev (1978, 1981) continued Vygotsky's work after his death and presented a more elaborate activity system.

Engeström (1987, 1991, 1999, 2001) presented his version of activity theory in 1987. He and his team of researchers at the Center for Research on Activity theory, Development and Learning (CRADLE), the Institute in Helsinki dedicated to activity theory research, are the leading force behind the activity theory concept today.

This chapter is structured into the following parts:

- 3.1 Introduction and overview of the activity theory framework
- 3.2 Background and history: Vygotsky and Leont'ev
- 3.3 Engeström and the principles of activity theory
- 3.4 Relevant applications of activity theory

The first section will present a brief overview of the AT framework with components and principles based on Engeström's interpretation of AT. This will be followed by a section looking at the history of activity theory, presenting Vygotsky's contribution to second language learning with his proposed concepts of mediation, Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) and scaffolding, and will look at Leont'ev's work which influenced Engeström's contemporary version of AT. The following section of this chapter will look at Engeström's contributions to the development of AT. The final section will discuss applications of AT in e-learning and language learning environments.

3.1 Introduction and overview of the activity theory (AT) framework

“Activity theory is a philosophical and cross-disciplinary framework for studying different forms of human practices as developmental processes, both individual and social levels interlinked at the same time” (Kuuti, 1995).

Activity theory (AT), sometimes also referred to as Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT), is a sociocultural theory that originated from Vygotsky's work. Alexander Leont'ev,

a student of Vygotsky, elaborated on the concept of Vygotsky’s mediated action; Leont’ev’s (1978) research described AT as an object-oriented activity theory. Engeström’s (1999, p. 61) term “tip of the iceberg” (1a in Figure 3.1) is based on Leont’ev’s concept representing individual group actions embedded in a collective activity system. Engeström (1987, 1999, 2001) developed this collective activity system further by adding a base representing the communicative aspects of activity (1b in Figure 3.1). The so called ‘hidden curriculum’ are components, often neglected in educational research and therefore ‘hidden’, which represent the rules of the activity, the community involved in the activity and the division of labour which describes the different roles of the members of the activity system. The “hidden curriculum” (1b in Figure 3.1) together with the “tip of the iceberg” (1a in Figure 3.1) are the triangle representation of Engeström’s (1987) model of an activity system (1c in Figure 3.1 and Figure 3.2).

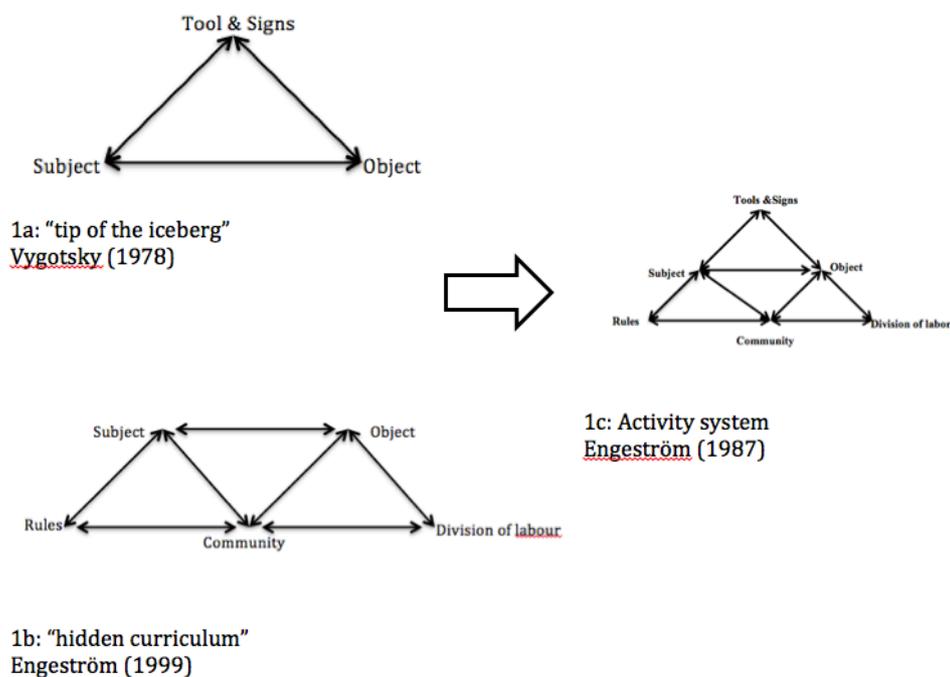


Figure 3.1: Activity system (adapted from Engeström (1987)).

The underlying concept of the AT framework is activity which is described as purposeful and transformative. The activity is developing interactions between a subject or groups of subjects and its object (Kaptelinin, 2013). AT provides an analytical model for analysing human development by focusing on components which relate to each other. The basic unit of analysis is the contextualised activity of an activity system. An activity system is made up of a subject (individuals or groups, whose agency is selected as the point of view for the analysis) and an object, as well as the tools which can be conceptual or physical tools, community, rules and

division of labour. These components mediate the relations between subject and object (Thorne, 2003; Thorne & Smith, 2011). The activity enables the transformation of the object into an outcome. The commonly used model of an activity system to date is Engeström's which includes the above core components of the theory: object, subject, tools, rules, division of labour and community as shown in Figure 3.2. The development of one activity system or multiple activity systems is driven by contradictions that lead subjects to find new solutions which may include new rules, a change in the division of labour, new tools, and new objects which result in transformation and the creation of new forms of activity (Blin, 2004; Engeström, 2001). Using activity systems with the components as described above helps to analyse how human behavior such as learning takes place, where it takes place and why.

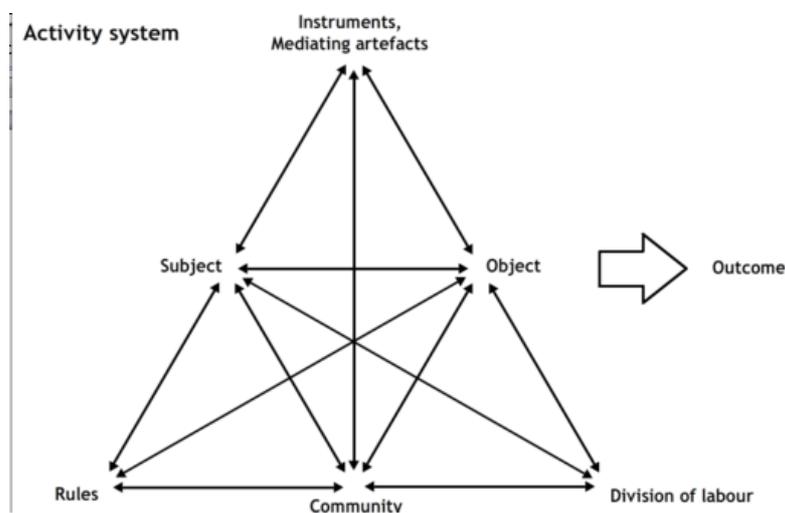


Figure 3.2: Basic activity system, adapted from Engeström (1987).

- The *subject* of an activity system refers to the individual or sub-group whose agency is chosen as the point of view in the analysis.
- *Object* refers to “the raw material or “problem space” at which the activity is directed and which is molded or transformed into *outcomes* with the help of “physical and symbolic, external and internal tools” (Engeström, 1993, p. 67). The object precedes and motivates activity.
- *Tools* mediate the object of activity. They can be external tools (i.e., a textbook, a computer) or internal, symbolic tools (i.e., language). “Tools take part in the transformation of the object into an outcome, which can be desired or unexpected. They can enable or constrain activity”. (Kuuti, 1995)

- *Community* refers to the individual participants and sub-groups involved in the activity system. The community members share the same object and are distinct from other communities.
- The *division of labour* describes both vertical and horizontal division of tasks among the members of the community of the particular activity system. The division of labour reflects on power and status distribution and development within the system.
- *Rules* are “explicit and implicit regulations and norms that constrain actions and interactions within the activity system”. (Engeström, 1993, p. 67)

An example of an activity system in an educational setting would resemble Figure 3.3.

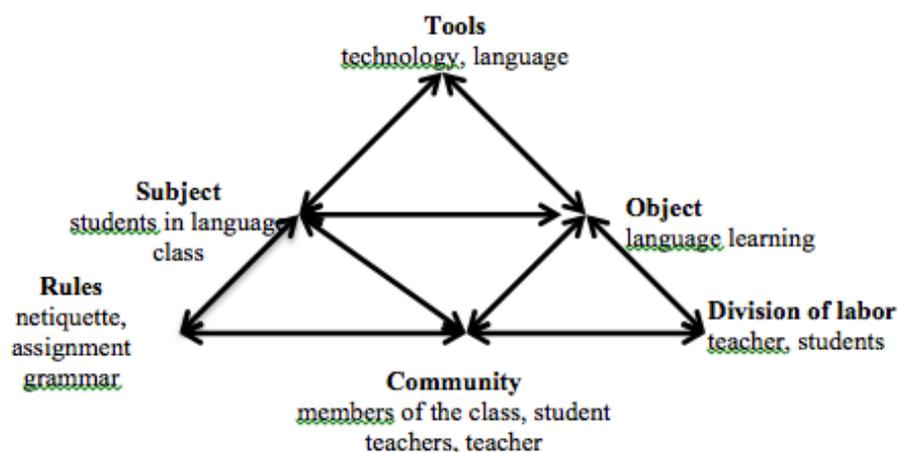


Figure 3.3: Example of an activity system in an educational setting.

3.2 Background and history: Vygotsky and Leont'ev

The origin of activity theory can be traced back to different sources, which led to the theory as it is used today by Engeström and his followers. The two most important strands are the work by Vygotsky and Leont'ev.

3.2.1 Vygotsky

AT has its origin in the work of the Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky who developed social constructivist theory in the early 1920s after the Russian revolution. Thus Vygotsky's social constructivist concept had its background in Marxist philosophy, important at the time, which explained the structure and practices of socially organized labour and provided the context for people to act and think collaboratively. Vygotsky applied his theory by analysing the way that children construct knowledge: that learning leads to development, that development cannot be separated from its social context, and that language plays a role in development (Vygotsky,

1978). Vygotsky believed that social environment was critical for learning, and furthermore that social interactions transformed learning experiences. Fundamental to Vygotsky's work is his thinking about mediation and the zone of proximal development (ZPD).

Mediation

The sociocultural framework is based on the concept of *mediation*. Vygotsky claimed that the human mind is dependent on the mediating function of a tools and signs system. He rejected the stimulus-response concept from behaviourist psychology and claimed that human development was mediated by tools and signs:

The tool's function is to serve as the conductor of human influence on the object of activity; it is externally oriented; it must lead to changes in objects. It is a means by which human external activity is aimed at mastering, and triumphing over nature (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 55).

The signs for Vygotsky are: "The sign acts as an instrument of psychological activity in a manner analogous to the role of a tool in labor" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 52).

As shown in Figure 3.4, mediating factors (X) included *signs* (e.g., language and artefacts) as the internal factors of the mediated activity and *tools* as the external elements of mediation (e.g. computers and smartphones). For Vygotsky "the culturally produced sign systems bring behavioural transformations and forms of individual development" (p. 7). *Signs* help to establish relationships between the individual subject (stimulus-S) and the goal (response R), they stimulate a relationship.

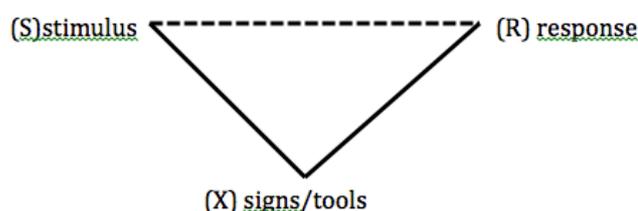


Figure 3.4: Vygotsky's mediated action model (Vygotsky, 1962).

Tools for Vygotsky are cultural, i.e. artefacts. They are used by humans to interact with the world supporting them to reach a higher level of cognition.

ZPD and scaffolding

The best known and most widely used concept of Vygotsky's theory is the zone of proximal development (ZPD). It is "the distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving in collaboration with more capable peers" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 78). This concept of the difference between what a learner is able to do independently without help and what s/he is able to do with the help of, and in collaboration with others was further developed by Bruner, Jolly, and Kathy (1976), who introduced scaffolding in this context as a form of assistance to create and maintain the ZPD.

Some studies found that ZPD does not always need to be a collaboration with more capable peers but can also be the process of teaching and socializing students to construct and develop their own strategies for learning by reflecting on their learning in dialogue with the teacher and their learning environment (Donato & McCormick, 1994). Swain (2000) also suggested that students of the same proficiency level can collaborate in knowledge building and do not necessarily need more capable peers. She claims that dialogue-mediated co-construction of strategic processes as well as linguistic knowledge lead to more ability (p. 109).

Alm (2001) uses the concept of ZPD and scaffolding in her internet-enhanced classroom for teaching German grammar. She set up a learning website, a cyber-course book with German newspaper articles. The 12 students in her group had to do activities using indirect speech. The learning aids added to the website helped the students in their progression through the ZPD. She finds a scaffolded learning environment important in language acquisition to achieve an authentic learning environment (Alm, 2001, p. 8).

Roth and Lee (2007) critique the scaffolding interpretation of ZPD arguing that it constitutes a possible misinterpretation of Vygotsky and is a tough concept to implement (Roth & Lee, 2007, p. 205). They explain that there are two forms of learning possible in the ZPD and not just one as normally represented in the literature. The first form is ZPD-learning occurring when a less experienced person, in the context of this study a language student, may observe the language production of a more experienced fellow-student and imitate parts of the more advanced learner's output. The second form of learning made possible according to the concept of ZPD occurs when two or more students work together in collaboration and new and unforeseen actions develop, leading to new and unpredictable outcomes. Roth and Lee

(2007, p. 205) illustrate this form of ZPD with the example of two or more children working together to measure the width of a raging creek and therefore learn to measure the width of the creek, which would have been impossible if they had been each working alone (p. 205). ZPD is central to the thought behind part collaborative activities (Alm, 2001, p. 8).

3.2.2 Leont'ev

Leont'ev's concept is also called "second generation AT" and is associated with the three-level scheme describing the hierarchical structure of activity as shown in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1: The hierarchical structure of activity with activity-object-community as the highest level and operation-conditions-routinised as the lowest level (CRADLE, 2014, <http://helsinki.fi/cradle>).

Level	Oriented towards	Carried out by
Activity	Object/Motive	Community
Action	Goal	Individual or group
Operation	Conditions	Routinised human or machine

The central level of Leont'ev's model is that of actions (Table 3.1). Each individual activity is conducted through actions in a unity of time and space, with specific intentions. Actions are aimed towards a goal or subject. Activity develops through a reciprocal process which transforms the object, the subject and their relationship within a specific context. Leont'ev differentiated clearly between object-oriented activity and goal-directed actions:

Thus in the total flow of activity that forms human life, in its higher manifestations mediated by psychic reflection, analysis isolates separate (specific) activities in the first place according to the criterion of motives that elicit them. Then actions are isolated – processes that are subordinated to conscious goals, finally, operations that directly depend on the conditions of attaining concrete goals (Leont'ev, 1978).

Leont'ev's model was first applied in a foreign language classroom by Donato and McCormick (1994). They described their learning environment having the student as the

subject engaged in an activity, for example, the activity of learning the new language. The object was the aim the student intended to achieve, learning the new language. The goal or object of the activity gives it a specific direction. In the case of an individual language learner, the object or goal can vary from full and entire participation and immersion into a new culture to just receiving a high enough mark to pass the course. To achieve the object, actions are taken by the student, and these actions are always goal-oriented; “different actions or strategies may be taken to achieve the same goal, such as guessing meaning from context, reading and different goals may be fulfilled by the same action” (Donato & McCormick, 1994, p. 455). The difference between goal and objective is difficult to define, and researchers raised awareness of this problem. Lave (1993) critiqued the approach of the second generation AT theory. She wrote that object-oriented activity and goal-directed actions were fluid, intertwined and changing from moment to moment. Kuuti (1995) also noted that the borders of the action-activity model can be blurred so that activity can lose its motive and become an action or an operation, when the goal has changed. Donato and McCormick (1994) approached language learning tasks and contexts from a sociocultural perspective as situated activities that are continuously under development. Similarly, in a study of language learning using Facebook and other social media, these will be constantly be changing.

3.3 Engeström and his principles of activity theory

Based on the second generation of activity theory which derived mainly from Leont’ev’s work, Engeström (1987) enlarged the original framework by adding three new conceptual components to it: *rules, division of labour and community* (see also Figure 3.2). His activity system is situated in three levels as introduced by Leont’ev (1978), collective activity, individual or group actions, and routinised operations. Engeström’s activity system as it is widely used today consists of the following six components that form a relationship and lead to an outcome as shown in Figure 3.2.

The *subject* is “an individual or a group of people who have a common *object*. The object is the “raw material” or “problem space” at which the activity is directed and which is moulded or transformed into outcomes with the help of physical and symbolic, external and internal *mediating instruments*, including both tools and signs” (CRADLE, 2014). The subject does not act in isolation but as part of the *community* (Blin, 2004). The relationship between the subject and object is mediated by the *rules*, which are directions, instructions, and etiquette. *Division of labour* refers to both the horizontal distribution of tasks and the vertical division of power and status between the participants and the members of the community. The division of labour depends on who controls the tools. The *tools* can be “anything which is used in the

transformation process, including both material tools and tools for thinking” (Kuuti, 1995, p. 9). In this study the tool mediating the activity is a computer or mobile device but also the social media platform. These components interact and build relationships within the system. Activity analysis is conducted in combination with Engeström’s (2001) five principles:

- Activity systems as the prime unit of analysis
- Multi-voicedness
- Historicity
- Contradictions as sources of change and development
- Expansive cycles

The first principle: Activity systems as the prime unit of analysis

The researcher has to decide on the unit of analysis. Kaptelinin and Nardi (2006) point out that activities need to be analysed in the context of development. Yamagata-Lynch (2010) reminds researchers and practitioners that they need to clarify how they define an object-oriented activity as a series of mediated actions and that they need to conceptualise the activity as a unit of analysis (p. 28).

The second principle: Multi-voicedness

Multiple points of views, but also traditions and personal interests, come together in an activity theoretical research scenario. As Engeström (2001) remarks, “participants carry their own diverse histories, and the activity system itself carries multiple layers and strands of history engraved in its artefacts, rules and conventions” (p. 136). The concept of multi-voicedness can be presented in multiplied networks of interacting activity systems. The networks are a source of tension or tensions but can also be a source of innovations. Blin (2004) shows multi-voicedness in an activity system by describing the change occurring when an L1 language assistant contributes in the French language class. She reflects on her own language teaching history and cultural background in her study. The activity system will change within its components. Ryder and Yamagata-Lynch (2014) understand the rules as an etiquette that will change according to the participant in the activity system. They observed that the student teacher being close in age to the students will trigger a more colloquial, less formal etiquette. The component division of labour will undergo changes within the activity system. Ryder and Yamagata-Lynch researched a telecollaborative activity between Chinese students and English L1 speakers. The students had to work in pairs and the single English native-speaking student had to act as the teacher. Each pair had its own activity system. The

student teachers' positions in each system were more horizontal, close to the level of the students, and not as vertical as the class teacher. The class and the teaching personnel were still engaged in the overall activity of learning Chinese and English but the objects were different for every student teacher and learner pair depending on the different object and differences of language proficiency of each English student teacher. Lantolf and Pavlenko (2001) also found in their study that students are different and therefore not all engaged in the same way in the activity. Each one has different motives and goals during the process of learning a foreign language (p. 156). Some students aim to fulfil course requirements, while others work towards gaining the linguistic skills necessary to communicate in the target language. Lantolf and Pavlenko's research suggests that activity systems should be seen as individual actions and seen separately from the collective activity. With this understanding Blin and Appel (2011) analysed a class of French learners at different stages. They modelled the language learning activity by dividing it into sub-activity systems that related to five assessed units of learning. They claimed that these sub-activity systems could not be seen in isolation, but rather as interacting with each other, thus contributing to the transformation of the main activity (p. 479).

The third principle: Historicity

Activity systems undergo changes, they "take shape and are transformed over lengthy periods of time. Their problems and potentials can only be understood against their own history" (Engeström, 2001, p. 136). Also, in the shorter timeframe of a language course students and teachers develop skills and change practices during the period of the learning activity.

The fourth principle: Contradictions

Contradictions within one activity system or between activity systems are described as "a driving force of change and development" (Engeström 1987, p. 6) and play a central role. Contradictions are structural tensions within one activity system or between different systems and they develop historically over time. Contradictions result in disturbances but also innovative solutions (Engeström, 2001). Nardi (1996) defines contradictions as "problems, ruptures, breakdowns, and clashes" which can be sources of development; activities are virtually always in the process of working through contradictions and result in transformation (Nardi, 1996, p. 34). As in Engeström (2011), "contradictions are historically accumulating structural tensions between opposing forces in an activity system. An activity system is a virtual disturbance- and innovation-producing machine" (p. 609).

A key point in Engeström's framework is that activity systems are constantly developing. This development is a reciprocal process and is driven by contradictions. Engeström introduces four types of contradictions to conceptualise different steps in the process of transformation. The four levels of contradictions are represented in Figure 3.5.

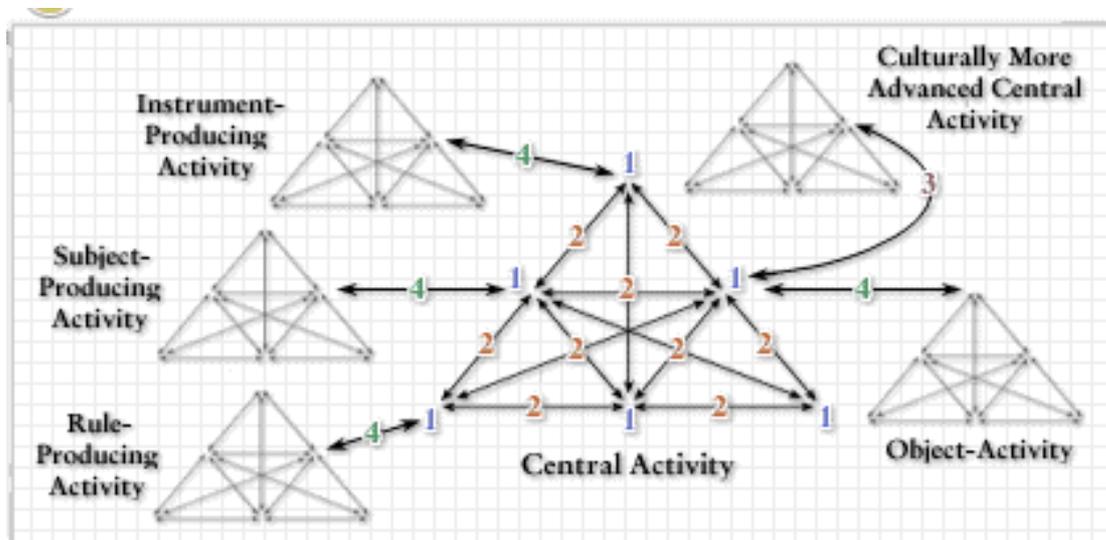


Figure 3.5: Four levels of contradictions in a network of human activity systems (CRADLE, 2014 <http://helsinki.fi/cradle>)

The *first-level contradictions* (1) are inner contradictions within the components of the actual activity system: subject, object, community, instruments, rules, and division of labour (Kaptelinin & Nardi, 2012). An inner contradiction or first-level contradiction can be a difference in understanding of rules about how to do the activity which can consequently cause problems in applying rules for the activity.

Second-level contradictions (2) are disturbances between different components of the activity system. There can be a disturbance between rules and subjects if new or different rules are introduced in the activity system. The rules of Facebook as an educational tool are not known to subjects or students. If Facebook is introduced into an educational environment it is likely that second-level contradictions might occur.

Third or *tertiary level contradictions* (3) occur when new, more culturally advanced elements are introduced in the activity (Engeström, 1987). Tertiary contradictions can arise between a new activity system which influences the object of the old one. Adjustments have to be put in place in the old activity system to regain the balance. As an example, Engeström (1987, p. 103) uses the activity system of a primary student who wants to play with his friends but parents and teachers who have higher motives influence the object of the student's activity

system. Finally, the reconfiguration of the activity system can lead to *fourth* or *quaternary contradictions* (4) referred to as contradictions within a network of activity systems, between an activity system and other activity systems involved in the production of a joint outcome.

Fifth principle: Expansive cycles

There is the possibility of expansive transformations in activity systems when the activity systems move through relatively long cycles of qualitative transformations. “An expansive transformation is accomplished when the object and motive of the activity are reconceptualised to embrace a wider horizon of possibilities than in the previous mode of the activity. A full cycle of expansive transformation may be understood as a collective journey through the zone of proximal development” (Engeström, 2001, p. 137).

Expansive cycles result from undergoing different levels of contradictions. The students and teachers will experience transformations. The transformations will lead to new activities. For example, introducing social media as an assessed component of a language course is a new experience for the students but also for the teacher. Contradictions occur during the course of the use which will change the teacher and student perspectives and practice of the use of social media.

Engeström (1999) introduced a matrix to guide analysis of activity systems (Fig. 3.6). The five principles outlined above will help to answer the following questions:

- Who is learning?
- Why do they learn?
- What do they learn?
- How do they learn?

	Activity system TM as unit of analysis	Multi-voicedness	Historicity	Contradictions	Expansive cycles
Who are learning?					
Why do they learn?					
What do they learn?					
How do they learn?					

Figure 3.6: Matrix for the analysis of expansive learning (Engeström, 2001).

3.4 Relevant applications of activity theory

Studies discussed in this following section involve work conducted in technology-mediated environments and refer to Engeström's AT model (1987). The foci of some studies are the identification of contradictions within components of one activity system while others identify contradictions between different elements of the activity system or contradictions which resulted from activity occurring between more than one activity system.

Activity theory and e-learning

In the early 2000s AT analysis started to be of interest in researching technology-mediated environments. Barab, Schatz, and Scheckler (2004) used activity theory as an analytical framework for describing the activity of developing and facilitating a web-based forum used by science staff at a US university. They presented examples and explained how activity systems analysis can be used to develop an online communication site and to observe team interactions within this collaborative learning environment. They found AT useful for illuminating challenges in designing an online community. Earlier, Barab, Barnett, Yamagata-Lynch, Squire, and Keating (2002) used both quantitative and qualitative data to research the online components of an astronomy course. Their ethnographic study was over a period of two years, they studied 10 undergraduate students at a US university and wanted to find out about their attitude towards the online tool, their participation in the course and the overall

course dynamics. They claimed that analysis may need to be ongoing, and should involve data from additional sources. Issroff and Scanlon (2002) conducted two case studies, one in a science classroom and another one in a history classroom, both with undergraduate students at a US university. The two case studies looked at technology to support student discussion. Contradictions between subject and rules, subject and tools and division of labour and community were discovered but not further discussed or visually demonstrated. The authors found AT valuable for highlighting problematic features of the learning and teaching setting but would prefer “to be able to predict contradictions and difficulties which may arise”. They also found that “AT demands a high degree of understanding of the culture, practices and situations of the course” (p. 83). Greenhow and Belbas (2007) used Activity-Oriented Design Method (AODM) and the eight-step model introduced by Mwanza (2002) to understand a collaborative knowledge-building activity among 35 course members in a statistics course at a US university. Their study aimed to explore and understand the educational practices from the viewpoint of the course design team and also from the perspectives of the students. Greenhow and Belbas concluded that “AODM tools and procedures helped to make tacit values explicit and could assist designers in understanding whether and how sub-activities reinforce a common objective” (p. 388). They noted that the contradictions encountered were, for example between subject and division of labour when students did not actively participate in achieving the object, or between subject and rules when students believed that distance learning was independent. They noted that contradictions gave insight but that it was difficult to use and make changes to the courses they studied.

Activity theory and CALL

Within an activity system, all components continuously interact with one another and change is always experienced. Adding a new tool to the activity system would possibly influence the subject’s orientation toward the object, which in turn would change the outcome of the activity. Kuuti (1995) mentioned that it is even possible that the object and motive will undergo changes during the activity. Basharina (2007) referred to Engeström (1987) calling an activity system “a virtual disturbance-and-innovation-producing machine” and pointed out the importance of contradictions (p. 85). The following research conducted in language learning environments focused on contradictions.

Russell and Schneiderheinze (2005), in their case study, adopted AT and developed a transformation model explaining the contradictions in their telecollaboration groupwork, a summer course in Chinese language taught to English speakers. Participants of the study were

the four instructors of the course and the students. Contradictions occurred between the activity system of one student and the activity system of the instructor. Blin (2004) in her in-depth work on learner autonomy researched students learning French in a technology rich environment. In her thesis, Blin (2004) developed different levels of activity systems of individuals and groups and showed contradictions occurring. First-level contradictions occurred within the subject and object of her activity system and fourth-level contradictions happened because she introduced sub-activities such as diary writing which caused tensions between the activity system of the language learning and the activity system of the diary writing (p. 166). Blin and Appel (2011) described the work of an ESL class. The students involved were working in a telecollaborative environment. AT systems represented the different levels of activity among the students. Special interest was given to the base of the activity system triangle (see Figure 3.1), the so-called communication part or “hidden curriculum” (Engeström, 2001). Brine and Franken (2006) used AT in their study of English as a second language (ESL) students who were doing an online writing course. AT guided the design of their study and the analysis of their data. Activity theory orientation enabled the researchers to uncover the tensions and problems students had in managing the collaborative work required in the online learning environment which caused learning difficulties (p. 21). Antoniadou (2011) was looking at ESL students and their teachers in a collaboration between tertiary institutions in Spain and England. She used ethnographic methods to collect her data and analysed it with activity theory and the notion of contradictions (p. 238). She found three intra- and inter-institutional contradictions relating to technology use. Basharina (2007) used WebCT bulletin boards with her students who were from different cultural backgrounds and were learning English. She found three contradictions: intra-cultural contradictions where students from different cultural backgrounds had different ideas about when and how to post and when to use formal and informal speech; inter-cultural contradictions where students from the different nations had different expectations of the topics, and a third contradiction relating to technology where the students in the project expressed feeling they were overloaded with messages. Ryder and Yamagata-Lynch (2014) used AT analysis to identify tensions in a telecollaboration between Chinese as a foreign language students in China and seven students learning Mandarin in an American university. They compared two activity systems where what they termed high functioning students were paired with low functioning students. The following four tensions occurred within the systems and became obstacles to attaining the object: a) tools-division of labour: varying amount of target language knowledge as a tool created a barrier for participants to play the role of a teacher, b) rules-object: participants’ individual interpretation of rules such as explicit and implicit rules of etiquette

regulating how to behave online, c) tools-object: current level of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC), and d) subject-subject: individual differences between participants (Ryder & Yamagata-Lynch, 2014, p. 209).

Activity theory and social media

So far a literature search only found one source where AT was used to describe learning activities using Facebook as a mediating tool. Abdullah (2014) found AT useful to gain insights into interactions and contradictions of student teachers' learning of design creativity. Student teachers had to post their interface designs on Facebook. Their designs were viewed and reviewed by professional designers. Two activity systems were drawn, one for the student teachers and one for the designers. Contradictions occurred between the two systems and the study reported on two contradictions in regards to what type of feedback the learners expected.

3.5 Summary

This chapter introduced activity theory as an effective analytical framework to research activity in an educational setting. AT has its roots in Vygotsky's work which was further developed by Leont'ev (1981) and then by Engeström (1987). Vygotsky focused on the development of human consciousness through mediation. He showed in his model that humans do not act in isolation but that their activity is constructed by their environment using tools such as language and artefacts. Leont'ev claimed that there is no action without an object and that the object changes over the period of the activity. He also made a distinction between the different types of activity, dividing them into activities, actions and operations. Engeström developed the theory further by introducing more components to the system, in particular a social level of rules, community and division of labour to help exploring the complex relationship between participants in an activity more thoroughly. This study applies Engeström's interpretation of AT and the next chapter will describe the methodology used to implement the theory as an analytical tool.

Chapter 4

Methodology

This thesis attempts to describe how students experience social media when used as part of their learning in a German language class. This new way of teaching and learning was explored in a longitudinal study applying an ethnographic methodology for data collection to gain a better perspective and deeper understanding of this unique online environment.

This study is situated within a qualitative research paradigm. Qualitative approaches are most applicable and appropriate to local, detailed study of human social behaviour in specific contexts (Markham & Baym, 2009). The qualitative approach is naturalistic and descriptive, and it draws on multiple methods (Patton, 2002; Silverman, 2011). Qualitative research is conducted in natural settings rather than in controlled ones and has two unique features according to Rossman and Rallis (2012): first, the researcher is the means through which the study is conducted, and second, the purpose is to learn about some facets of the social world. Both of these characteristics are integral to a view of learning that sees the learner as a constructor of knowledge rather than a receiver.

This study describes how students participated in the creation of their own learning environment in a Facebook-group which they were asked to use to develop a knowledge base in their target language, German. The methodology used to describe this socially constructed learning environment was virtual ethnography. The focus of this study was to describe how students of German at a New Zealand university experienced the use of Facebook as a learning tool and as part of their assessment. In order to answer this question, ethnographic methods were applied to collect data. Ethnography is defined as: “The art and science of describing a group or culture” (Fetterman, 2010, p. 1). The group for this study was the students in the course. A Facebook-group was created and served as the online field in this virtual ethnographic study - it became the “hunting ground for the ethnographer’s hike through the social and cultural wilderness” (Fetterman, 2010, p. 31).

4.1 Pilot study

In order to trial the proposed methods, a pilot study was set up. In an advanced beginners' class with a proficiency level of A2 in the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR).⁵ The main study was in the following semester and was conducted in an intermediate German class with a proficiency level of CEFR B1. In both German classes a Facebook-group was created and used as the ethnographic field.

The pilot study class comprised 27 students in the second half of their German beginners' course. Their ages ranged from 17 to 21 years and they were predominantly female. The design of the pilot Facebook community included the requirement that students had to invite a German-speaking friend to join. Thus German native or near native speakers were included to enhance the authenticity of the Facebook-group in the tradition of scaffolding and ZPD, according to the theory of Vygotsky (1962) and Bruner, Jolly and Kathy (1976) and more recent researchers, e.g. Gibbons (2013), who believed that a more advanced learner can assist the less advanced to perform the learning task in a shared, goal-oriented activity (Bruner et al., 1976; Gibbons, 2013; Vygotsky, 1962).

The students developed their own knowledge base by posting eight artefacts on the Facebook group site as part of their assignment; the contents of the posts included favourite short films, poems, photos and various podcasts. The students in the pilot study had a free choice of topic for the posts. Students were required to write one paragraph with at least three complete sentences in German about each chosen artefact. The paragraph had to include the reason why they chose the artefact, where they had found it, and a short description of the artefact. At the end of the semester they needed to have commented on at least two other entries by their fellow students. Each of these comments needed to be at least one complete sentence each. These entries were part of the students' assessment but were not graded.

4.1.1 Data collected

Several data collection techniques were piloted. The collection techniques included field notes using the participant observation method and questionnaires administered at the beginning and the end of the semester (see Table 4.1); eleven students handed in both questionnaires. Interviews were conducted with nine students, two German friends invited by students to participate in the Facebook-group, and one student teacher who was in the class at the time.

⁵ <http://www.coe.int>

The interviews ranged from 5-22 minutes. The transcribed data was coded thematically using NVivo⁶ software. The purpose of the pilot study was to develop an understanding of the way students experience Facebook and to develop a perspective on how to conduct the main study in order to answer the research question.

Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014) advised initial coding of data in order to focus the data collection process and noted that a researcher must be flexible and alert, in the event that the data needed to be rearranged from the initial categorisation scheme. The pilot study helped in testing and consequently adjusting the different instruments of data collection and coding.

Table 4.1: Overview of pilot study data collected.

Week	Type of instrument	Type of data collected
2	Pre-course questionnaire (n=11)	Students reported about their experience of Facebook
1-12	Research diary and field notes by instructor	Daily entries > Facebook activity
11	Post-course questionnaire (n=11)	Students made recommendations for improvement
After the semester	Interviews (n=10)	Recommendations for improvement

The pilot interviews in particular revealed useful insights that later informed the choice of data collection procedures in the main study. A limitation of the interview process was the requirement of the Educational Human Ethics Committee of the university to have the interviews conducted by someone other than the researcher/instructor of the course. The ethnographic character of the data collection process is difficult if a non-participant researcher conducts the interviews. The non-participant researcher did not have a good understanding of the workings of the Facebook-group and was not able to ask focused questions which might have provided more insight into the activity within the group.

4.1.2 Lessons learned for the main study

The participant observation and the field notes were very rich sources of data and fed into the design decision made for the main study. The interviews, post-course questionnaires, and observations revealed that the search for new artefacts to post was demanding for the students. They had free choice of topics for their posts and they ran out of ideas, commenting as follows:

⁶ NVivo is a software for qualitative data analysis: <http://www.qsrinternational.com/nvivo-product>

Everything had already been said, I did not know what else I should write. (pilot)

I would like to have less entries but more entries which are personal, I want to get to know the students in the class better. (pilot)

The design of the main study took this concern into consideration and the students were instructed to post on given topics, which were of a personal nature, or linked to the content of the textbook. The students commented on the participation of the German-speaking friends and were not in favour of having them in the Facebook-group:

The German-speaking friends were intimidating. (pilot)

I did not know this person and did not feel comfortable. (pilot)

The main study did not include invited guests because the post-course questionnaires and final interviews of the pilot study revealed that the students preferred to continue with the Facebook-group exercise in an exclusive environment without guests.

The students found 5% of the overall mark to be not enough credit for the amount of time used to do the Facebook-assignment example. The percentage was raised to 10% in the main study.

Table 4.2 shows the implementation of the design of the main study based on what was learnt in the pilot study.

Table 4.2: Changes to the main study

Design of pilot study	Design of main study
8 artefacts to be posted	5 artefacts to be posted
Topics of artefacts: 8 general topics	Topics of artefacts: 2 introductory entries, 3 entries relating to the contents of the textbook
Each student in the class had to invite a German speaking Facebook friend to make the group more authentic	No German friends were invited as the students in the pilot found the German speakers too intimidating
5% of the final overall mark of the course	10% of the final overall mark of the course

The pilot study provided valuable feedback and strengthened the main study.

4.2 Facebook-group

A Facebook-group is a webpage that can be created within the Facebook social networking site. Anybody who has a Facebook account can create a group and invite people into it. A group can be used to discuss topics and share information in a small intimate circle. The founder of the Facebook-group has to choose a unique name for the group, decide on the security settings, and can then invite others to the group. The invitation can only reach people with a valid Facebook account. People who want to join the group can search for the group name (unless the founder has set the group to be hidden) and ask to be accepted into the group⁷.

The Facebook-groups underlying this study were established by me as instructor of the German course. The status of the first student who entered the group was given administrator status. As an administrator the student was authorised to invite other people and to change the settings of the group. All students of the class became members of the group within a few days and were made administrators as soon as they accepted their invitation. The assignment was posted to the University's Moodle-based learning management site (LMS). This was because the use of social networking was intended to provide the students with an authentic environment. The intention was that they should not see the class assignment on their Facebook-group; it should not remind them of the didactic use of the site. They should retain the notion that Facebook is primarily for entertainment, communication and leisure. It was felt to be important to give the students the feeling of having ownership of this learning platform which is in line with the work of Rüschoff & Ritter (2002). The learners are authorised as soon as possible to manage the Facebook-group site to give them a feeling of ownership.

4.2.1 The characteristics of the Facebook-group and its affordances

Facebook is part of the online learning environment for the course; it supports communication and discourse. The platform itself is content-free at the beginning (Harasim, 2012), its contents being generated by the learners.

Figure 4.1 shows how Facebook-group members can share and start a discussion by writing a post. The students had to write posts and comment on other students' posts. A post can contain up to 5000 characters. To facilitate the immersion into the target language the

⁷ "closed" refers to the optional settings of Facebook. Facebook offers three different privacy settings: "closed", "public", or "secret".

students were advised to set their Facebook language to German. The students needed to change the language on their own devices.

A member of the Facebook-group can write a post (Beitrag), ask a question (Frage) and attach photos or videos (Foto/Video), but also a pdf or word file (Datei); the students can also choose to add one of many available emoticons to the message for enhanced expressivity.



Figure 4.1: Functions to create a contribution to the Facebook-site.

At the time of the data collection, Facebook enabled users to react to posts as shown in Figure 4.2; this helped with building relationships and interactivity.



Figure 4.2: Features to react to a post.

To motivate language production and enhanced interactivity between the users of the site, “seen”, “like” and “comment” were available. “Seen” (“gesehen” in German, which was the language used by the class) indicates how many people have looked at the post. The students need to click on the post and read it in order to be listed under the “gesehen” button. The “gesehen” button records observers; no time or date is linked to the “gesehen” element. “Like”, in German “gefällt mir”, is a more personal appreciation of the comment. By clicking on the button the user is indicating her/his appreciation of the comment. Members of the group can see who liked the post as the names of the group members appear under the comment. As in the “gesehen” function, there is no date or time linked to the interaction. The person who posted the comment will receive an alert when another user responds to her/his post. “Comment”, in German (“kommentieren”), enables members of the group to post a comment in response to a post. The responding comment could also have an emoticon from the Facebook-library or a personal photo attached. There will be an alert on the Facebook feed of the person who posted it. The time and date will be visible at the top of the comment.



Figure 4.3: Features available for administrators.

As administrators of the Facebook- group, all students were able to announce “events” or German “Veranstaltungen” on the group site, they could add new members/Mitglieder and were able to choose a photo (“Foto hochladen”) for the site to personalise the Facebook-group (Figure 4.3).

4.3 Main study

The main study was conducted one semester after the pilot study and the design based on the findings of the pilot study (Table 4.2).

4.3.1 Participants of the main study

The main study comprised 18 female and five male students enrolled in German intermediate level B1 of the European framework, all over the age of 18. Most of them were residents of New Zealand with the exception of two international students. They were all either in their first or second year at university and studied a diverse range of subject combinations, including Engineering and German, Music and German, and Law and German. Three were distance students and used Facebook to get to know their fellow students and two students withdrew from the class after the first two weeks. Many of the students had completed the advanced beginners’ German course and took part in the pilot study. All of the students were familiar with Facebook and most of them with the Facebook-group assignment.

The proficiency level of the 23 students⁸ was intermediate German; the students needed to have some prior knowledge of the language to meet the pre-requisite requisite. A minority of the students (n= 6) had learnt German in high school and were required to pass an entry test in order to enroll in the university intermediate German class. The majority of the students

⁸ The actual number of participants in this study were fewer because of lack of consent.

(n=11) had completed the beginners' German course the previous year and passed it with a C+ mark or better. Most of this group of students (n=17) had never been to Germany and felt relatively insecure using the language spontaneously. Another group of students (n=4) had spent up to a year in Germany and opted to take the German course so that they would not forget the language they had learned. Some students had German family connections or German parents (n=2). The last two groups of students had to take an entrance test⁹. The students who had lived in Germany or were heritage language speakers enjoyed the conversational style of the online Facebook-activity. They did not have the shyness around language production which many of the school leavers had. The students who had come directly from school had a good grasp of grammar and vocabulary but little confidence in using the language spontaneously.

All of the students were familiar with Facebook and did not see an obstacle using it in class, although none of the students had any experience of Facebook-use in a class situation. All of the participants had their own computers and the majority of them also used a smartphone. The students had various reasons for learning the German language, ranging from holidaying in Germany to pursuing a career in Germany. Some students were interested in spending part of their university study in Germany and were working towards gaining a scholarship or trying to arrange an exchange. The University requires that students complete the intermediate German course before being eligible to apply for scholarships or exchange programmes. The students in the German class in this study had varying backgrounds and interests but belonged to the same age group, between 18 and 21.

The Facebook-group also included four students from another New Zealand tertiary institution. They did not have the Facebook assignment as a course requirement and were joined by their teacher to have more immersion into the target language and get to know other German students in New Zealand. Participants also included myself as the teacher of the class and two student teachers. One student teacher was part of the class structure during the main study and the other student teacher was active during the pilot study but had returned to Germany. However, she kept contact with the students through the Facebook-group.

⁹ The entrance test is available through the textbook the class is using and can be completed online. The results are available to the instructor and indicate the level of proficiency in relation to the European framework regulations (CEFR).

4.3.2 Context of the main study

The class Facebook-group was designed taking the results of the pilot study into consideration as shown in Table 4.2, with the social constructivist guidelines of autonomy, authenticity and scaffolding in mind (see section 4.2.1). The students had to find the group by searching on Facebook for the group name. Most of the students attended class four times a week for 50 minutes each time but some could only come two or three times because of timeable clashes, so they did the course partially by distance. One student did the entire course as a distance student. The course material was uploaded to the Moodle site and the students could study in their own time. Facebook was a connector for the class, enabling them to get to know each other better, and also to integrate the distance learners into the class.

The devices the students used were smartphones and personal computers. The computer lab was never used because of the availability of personal computers and smartphones and the fast campus wifi internet connection available to every student.

4.3.3 The Facebook-assignment and the course curriculum

The course curriculum included standard homework grammar sheets which the students could complete online or as hardcopy, two written tests, two oral presentations and the Facebook activity. The course duration was 12 weeks. Since this intermediate German class had students from different majors, they met in German class but not in many other on-campus activities. The Facebook-group was created to cater for the community building of the class and to improve their written language proficiency.

The Facebook activity comprised five posts. The posts had to be in German on given topics. The topics included cultural items like film clips or book recommendations. The length of each entry was at least three complete sentences. To receive full marks the student had to write a one-sentence comment in response to a fellow student's post. Specific dates for the completion of each post were given at the beginning of the semester. Each post was worth 2% for 10% of the course grade in total. The posts were not graded, meaning every contribution counted regardless of the language proficiency demonstrated; they received a pass mark for their contributions if they met the criteria.

The ungraded nature of this activity allowed the students freedom and creativity in language production without the constraint of needing to be grammatically correct. The aim of this assignment was to enable the students to use the language spontaneously in a semi-authentic

L2 environment where every-day German was used. By accomplishing this task the students were building knowledge based on their discourse and interactions. For the complete description of the Facebook-activity instructions see Appendix B.

4.4 Ethical considerations

Opting for an ethnographic study puts the teacher into the dual role of researcher and instructor who teaches and assesses the students' work. When teaching becomes part of research, ethical rules need to be considered (Mutch, 2005). The University of Canterbury has its own ethics committee for educational research, the Educational Research Human Ethics Committee (ERHEC), with its own standards. An application with the research intent was lodged and ethical approval granted. When teachers are participants in the research it is important that students clearly understand the purpose of the study (Cullen, 2005). To avoid coercion the following steps were taken:

- the students were given free choice of participation;
- the interviews with consenting participants were conducted after the completion of the course assessments;
- the interviews were conducted by a colleague and not by me as instructor;
- the assessment of the researched course segment was only 10% of the overall assessment;
- the interviewees gave their informed consent and the transcripts of the interviews were sent to them afterwards;
- students who were not comfortable with the use of Facebook to fulfil the assignment requirements were given the option to use the Moodle-based virtual learning environment (VLE), instead.

4.4.1 Facebook and privacy

The formation of virtual identities, such as those used in Facebook, presented new and unknown ethical dilemmas. The media attention Facebook has received in recent times concerning privacy issues relates to the so-called “Facebook-wall”, an open platform, which can be set to be freely accessible to all Facebook users. The Facebook-group feature used in this study was a closed platform, only accessible to chosen members. The students were able to control their privacy, although complete anonymity of the members of the Facebook-group could not be guaranteed as they were known to each other and each responsible for their own privacy setting. The group's privacy setting was set as high as possible, as a closed group, only accessible to those invited to the group. The Facebook-group under investigation was

archived and consequently made inaccessible after the completion of the data collection. The students were given information about the privacy issues regarding their profiles, because, as Spinello observes, Facebook's architecture was (and still is) oriented to self-exposure (Spinello, 2011). A Facebook-Smart guide was developed to help students with setting up their Facebook privacy settings (see Appendix C). Students were offered the use of the Moodle LMS to complete their assignment if they were not comfortable with the use of a Facebook-group. No student opted for this alternative platform.

4.5 Ethnographic methods

The application of classical ethnography known in anthropology is not intended in this study of social media and it is of importance to remind the reader that this study does not claim to be an ethnographic study in the traditional understanding; nonetheless ethnographic methods are well suited for data collection in a virtual field as described in the following sections.

Ethnographic methods were chosen as suitable to study L2-language use in the context of the students' everyday life. Ethnography has its roots in cultural anthropology (Brewer, 2000; Geertz, 1973; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007; Wolcott, 1999). Using ethnography, and particularly virtual ethnography (Hine, 2000), seemed to be an appropriate working platform to gain insight into the activities and experiences of students in a social media environment. Ethnographic fieldwork relies on observation, qualitative interviews, and analysis of cultural artefacts to understand cultural practices. Appadurai (1996) noted that ethnographic methods are constantly changing. In earlier times ethnographers were looking at unique cultures situated in a specific geographical environment. Today remote cultures are not as remote any longer but are touched by globalisation; to go even further, ethnography has now evolved into a method used to explore internet cultures. Appadurai believed that ethnography can capture the impact of deterritorialisation on the imaginative resources of lived, social experiences (p. 52).

Ethnography takes a very open approach, with a number of possible methods. It does not have a set way to do things. These methods are suitable for the rapidly changing internet and the unknown culture of the social network sites students are using. Brewer (2000) noted that ethnographic research methods can be used in studies that are unstructured, flexible and open-ended. Markham (2013b) wrote that internet research has been plagued by a constant reinvention of the wheel and a significant degree of trying to force fit methods that were invented for and function best in face-to-face settings (p. 3).

4.5.1 Ethnography and the internet

Virtual ethnography

Appadurai's thoughts led to the new field of internet ethnography, also called virtual ethnography, mediated ethnography or cyberspace ethnography (Beaulieu, 2004; Hakken, 1999; Hine, 2000; Markham, 1998; Markham & Baym, 2009; Miller & Slater, 2000). Markham (1998) gives a detailed account of her ethnographic study on online discourse. Hine (2000) laid the groundwork for understanding how ethnography can be performed in a virtual environment, pointing out the significance of the distinction between online and offline research. She discussed this distinction as a translation task between the authenticity standards of two different discourses. Miller and Slater (2000) remarked that relatively little has been written about analysis that combines online and offline data and about how online communication helps to contextualise what is said offline (Miller & Slater, 2000). Markham (1998) observed that the original purpose of ethnographic research has disappeared and the only ethnographic feature left in internet ethnography is the methods (Markham, 1998). Markham (2014) was still showing concern, in her blog, about the adequacy of methods used in internet research. She described ethnography (virtual, online-netnography) as an add-on approach but she did not recommend a better method for collecting data in the digital field, urging researchers to address the methodology suitable for internet research and to start asking questions. Other common objections to online ethnography include the lack of face-to-face interaction and the lack of a notion of place in which to ground fieldwork (Markham, 2013a). It has, on the other hand, been argued that ethnographic methods are actually quite well suited to studying "internet sociality", given the theoretical debates in anthropology about multiple identities and the dynamism of communities (Hakken, 1999). Hine noted that ethnographers of the internet may see as an advantage the fact that they no longer have to struggle "to get away" and can pursue their fieldwork from their offices (Hine, 2000). Eleven years later she was still in favour of ethnographic methods for internet research. Hine (2011, p. 12) used ethnographic tools to explore online antique roadshows. She found ethnography useful to understand cultural practices in their own right, accepting that they make sense for the people engaged within them. Miller (2012, p. 159) found that social networking may be bringing the world back closer to the premises of anthropological research.

The current study at the core of this thesis used ethnographic instruments to harvest data to address the key questions about the nature of social networking culture in a particular context. The instruments are discussed in more detail below; limitations are discussed and recommendations made at the end of this chapter.

Ethnography and networks

Based on Appadurai's theory of scapes¹⁰ (Appadurai, 1996), network ethnography is the process of applying ethnographic field methods to the cases and field sites selected. It is important to choose the field carefully. As Wittel (2000) wrote, ethnographic research in and on a network requires careful consideration about which areas and parts of the network to include, which ones to partially include and which ones to exclude. Networks are somehow infinite, they are open structures and highly dynamic. By drawing boundaries, the ethnographer actively and consciously participates in the construction of spaces and in the spatialisation of difference. Howard (2002), in his essay on networked ethnography, saw this type of ethnography as a process of using ethnographic field methods for field sites which he had selected using social network analysis. He suggested that conducting in-depth interviews at multiple sites with subgroups sampled through social network analysis (Howard, 2002, p. 561) would lead to the field selection.

The field selected for this study was the Facebook-group and the research methods applied were mediated and unmediated interviews, active and passive observations, extended immersion by the participant observer, and in-depth interviews. For this study and the preceding pilot study, students in the particular language classes being studied were selected as the main group; other members of the Facebook-group and the student teacher involved were treated as a subgroup. As the teacher and researcher, I chose to take part in the Facebook-group rather than being solely an observer in line with Baym (2009, p. 184) who noted that, to understand the many contexts of a field, it is necessary for the researcher to become immersed in it over time.

4.6 Methods of data collection

Researching the behaviour of students within a social media platform is new and relatively uncharted territory. The aim of this study was to find out how students experience social media as part of their learning. To do this, a qualitative research approach was suitable; in line with Lincoln and Guba (1985), "qualitative approaches to inquiry are uniquely suited to uncovering the unexpected and exploring new avenues" (p. 73). This study suited a qualitative ethnographic research paradigm because of the small sample of students investigated (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007).

¹⁰ Appadurai calls the five dimensions of global cultural flow: ethnoscaples, mediascaples, technoscaples, finance scaples and ideoscaples

Setting up an online group entirely in German is similar in many ways to setting up a target language cultural island within domestic New Zealand. The group shared the same foreign culture and developed shared values and beliefs. The underlying concept was in line with the notion of liminality; the norms that apply in the virtual seminar room – here the Facebook-group and the requirements of the University are not those that normally apply. At the same time, the participants were subject to the norms of their physical environment and their day-to-day lives that may in fact be continuing around them. The participants were detached and thus free in the sense that their minds and senses are occupied by the learning activity (Cunningham, 2011).

Ethnographic methods throughout the research were used to gather data and to develop an understanding of the culture of the Facebook environment in line with the research question. The data that shaped this project stemmed from a variety of different sources and included: interviews, both structured and informal; participant observation with daily field notes; and screenshots of the Facebook-site. Students were given pre- and post-course questionnaires inquiring about different issues connected with the research questions. Some questionnaires asked for demographic facts. Table 4.3 shows all the data sources. This multi-method approach (triangulation) helped to guarantee greater trustworthiness and reliability of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

4.6.1 Timeline of the data in this study

By the time the research project formally took shape in late 2012, I was already immersed in the social network site phenomenon and had used Facebook in the German classes for almost a year. In 2012 I started taking field notes on the Facebook-group use of my students, with the observations being presented at a conference prior to commencing the research project (Leier, 2012). The formal research started after the University of Canterbury granted ethical consent (see Appendix D). This section of the chapter will describe the different instruments of the data collection process, including a discussion of the importance of the participant observer.

The formal ethnographic data collection took place during a period of one year, including a one-semester pilot study and a one-semester main study. Informally, it began earlier and continued after the course was over. The data of this study (see Table 4.3) includes the online contents of the Facebook-group under investigation. The activity of the Facebook-groups in the different German classes was captured in screenshots and archived. Semi-structured

interviews and open-ended interviews were conducted both face-to-face and online. Observations of the Facebook-group were made by me as a participant observer. Informal data about general Facebook-use was collected as field notes and research diary entries, such as overhearing conversation as well as experimenting with the use of Facebook to detect more features of the media under investigation. The year of data collection has been omitted here to protect participant confidentiality.

Table 4.3: Data collection summary

Data sources	When	Who	Methods used	Remarks
Interviews: Pre- interviews	March	6 members of German intermediate class	Ethnographic: Open-ended interviews, recorded, transcribed	
Interviews: Post- interviews	July-October	4 members of the intermediate German class, 1 distance learner, 1 student from another New Zealand university, 1 student teacher	Semi-structured interviews, recorded, transcribed	
Interim interviews	During time of investigation, before and after class time	6 members of German intermediate class	Open interviews, field notes	Spontaneous questioning
Questionnaire: Pre	March	12 members of German intermediate class	Multiple choice and open comments	Questions based on themes that surfaced in the pilot study
Questionnaire: Post	July	12 members of German intermediate class	Multiple choice and open comments	Questions based on pre-course interview and pre-course questionnaire and pilot study. AT categories applied in questionnaire
Observations: Participant	End of Feb 2014 - end of July	Teacher/researcher German intermediate class	Ethnographic: field notes, research diary, screenshots	
Observations: Non-participant	Beginning of 2011 – 2014	Researcher	Ethnographic: screenshots	Informal conversations, comments, norms and patterns of FB culture. General comments about FB use (people independent from assignment)
Miscellaneous	Beginning of 2011- 2014	Researcher	Quantitative	Regularity of posts, 'likes', 'comments', 'seen'. Number of words used in post (comparison between two groups with the same language level)

4.6.2 Participant observation

Some contemporary researchers share the early anthropologists' belief that in order to understand the world "first hand", you must participate rather than just observe people from a distance. This has given rise to what is described as the method of participant observation (Silverman, 2006, p. 68). Bernard (2006) defines participant observation as the process of establishing rapport within a community and learning to act in such a way as to blend into the community so that its members will act naturally, then removing oneself from the setting or community to immerse oneself in the data to understand what is going on and be able to write about it. He gives the following reasons to include participant observation to increase a study's validity:

- it makes it possible to collect different types of data. Being on site over a period of time familiarises the researcher with the community, thereby facilitating involvement in sensitive activities to which he/she generally would not be invited;
- it reduces the incidence of "reactivity" or people acting in a certain way when they are aware of being observed;
- it helps the researcher to develop questions that make sense in the native language or are culturally relevant;
- it gives the researcher a better understanding of what is happening in the culture and lends credence to interpretation of the observation; participant observation also enables the researcher to collect both quantitative and qualitative data through questionnaires and interviews;
- it is sometimes the only way to collect the right data for one's study (p. 142).

Being part of the field site observing and participating in the activity can be challenging, especially in a virtual field. The researcher must first attempt to understand the nature of the community where the research is situated: this is usually accomplished online by observing, called *lurking*, in the site for long enough to recognise the environment and its conventions (Vie, 2007). Participation in the digital world can lead researchers to confuse representation with reality, mistakenly equating culture with rules, scripts, or norms rather than embodied practice (Böllstorff, 2012, p. 55). Hine, Kendall, and boyd (2009) remind the researcher always to be reflective about interpretations, biases, and limitations (p. 31).

Participant observation is one of the methods in this study to observe and harvest data generated through students' use of the Facebook-group. I was very reluctant to join the group

and tried to keep my participation to a minimum, a common behaviour in this type of research. Bogdan and Biklen Knopp (2007) note that the researcher often remains somewhat detached, waiting to be looked over and, hopefully, accepted. As relationships develop, the researcher will participate more, but too much participation can lead to the researchers getting so involved and active with subjects that their original intentions get lost (p. 92). Fetterman (2010) recommends that the ethnographer should maintain a professional distance (p. 35). Cresswell (2012) recommends not contributing in the beginning and calls it the general observational process when the participant observer will only conduct brief observations first. This slow entry helps to build rapport with individuals and helps to assimilate the large amount of information (p. 215). Markham even doubts the effect of participant observation, observing that lurking is a common and socially acceptable form of non-active participation and questioning whether participation is always necessary and how it might help (Markham, 2013, p. 442).

There are also pedagogical reasons for limiting my participation. As the instructor of the class, I was careful not to be active in the Facebook-group too early and wanted to remain as an observer in the background to ensure that the students would get used to the social media environment in a relaxed manner and experience autonomy. The Facebook-group was intended to develop as a student-driven group in line with the sociocultural epistemology underlying the design of the course; that is, the students were the constructors of their own online environment and, consequently, the creators of their own knowledge base. This is theoretically in line with Lave and Wenger (1991), who describe the sociocultural perspective on learning as part of generative social practice in the lived-in-world (p. 35). In spite of the precautions that needed to be taken to keep the distance between students and researcher, the pilot study interviews revealed that the students enjoyed the degree of teacher participation, with comments like:

It had the feeling that the instructor cared more when she posted a comment or commented on our posts. (pilot)

Keeping this student feedback in mind, I eventually participated on a regular basis in the Facebook-group used in the main study. The assignment the class was asked to do included posts about different artefacts, including three sentences in German. To receive the full marks the student also had to comment briefly on a post by a fellow student. Each post was modelled to clarify the format of the assignment task. As soon as the group understood the concept and started posting, I spent extensive periods observing the way the students used the Facebook-

group. As a participant observer, I commented on and acknowledged the entries students posted in one or two sentences responding to the student's post. Then I would pick one sentence from the student's comment and give corrective feedback. I "liked" comments the students made in response to posts of their group members as a form of showing that I was around and present in the virtual field. I regularly talked informally after class with several class members to gather information about their experiences using the Facebook-site.

While I was investigating the Facebook-group I was constantly aware of my dual role as the researcher in this study and also the instructor of the language course. Because of this role I had easy access to and more familiarity with the research site. I played an important part in creating the group in which the students and I participated during the research process. Liamputtong and Ezzy (2005) note that through the immersion as a participant observer the researcher is able to see things from the participants' perspectives and hence to have a deeper understanding of the people they are learning from (p. 169), and Rossman and Rallis (2012) observe that the researcher by her mere presence becomes part of the participants' social world and they modify their actions accordingly. The more she appears to be like the members of this social world or the longer she stays in it, the less her presence may affect the everyday routines (p. 47). Drawbacks of the participating researcher are of an ethical nature. The researcher/instructor needs to be constantly aware of the separateness from the participants in her study. Researchers need to know who they are and what they are doing in the setting. This self-awareness allows them to distinguish their sense-making from the sense-making of those from whom they are learning (Rossman & Rallis, 2012, p. 46). Bogdan and Biklen Knopp (2007) recommend that the researcher should communicate clearly to those with whom she spends time that she is there to learn from them how they feel about what they do and what they see as strengths and weaknesses (p. 228). The researcher has to be ethically aware of the situation and should take precautions not to coerce the participants of the study. For further discussion, see the ethical discussion in section 4.4.

During the research period, I also experienced a generation conflict and cultural divide. As a 50-year old teacher from Germany, I was not on the same level as the students who were mainly New Zealand-born and around 19 years old, the so called digital natives (Prensky, 2001) the controversial name applied to those who grew up with technology and incorporate mediating technologies in every aspect of their lives (Palfrey & Gasser, 2011). The students who participated in this research had lived their lives with constant access to the computer and technical devices at the time of the data collection, used Facebook as their tool to

communicate among themselves, instead of email. Students could be overheard many times saying: “I will facebook you tonight”.

It was a challenge to repurpose this informally used Facebook-platform for a more formal course assignment. I had to find a mediating role in this group, being perceived as neither a controlling teacher nor a developing friend. As Hine (2000) notes, “active engagement with a newsgroup might be seen to make the ethnographer’s observations more authentic in the sense of being more like the experience of the participants” (p. 24).

4.6.3 Observations

Observing entails the systematic noting and recording of events, actions, and interactions (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). The patterns and norms of the Facebook-group and also the Facebook-groups of previous years were observed. The social systems of the groups, their activities and actions were carefully observed and recorded on an ongoing basis. The “likes”, “seen”, and “comments” of the groups were counted and compared.

Patterns of interactions, the ways people organised themselves, tacit rules of the sites, but also unplanned activities, were noted down. The observations resulted from studying the Facebook-group’s posting activity in combination with remarks the students made to each other in and outside class. The students’ attitudes in class in relation to Facebook use were observed, along with overheard remarks, collected in the form of subjective field notes or researching entries.

4.6.4 Field notes and research diary

Ethnography combines being part of the environment, seeing and observing what is going on and writing about it; it combines researching and writing (Morton & Mills, 2011). Field notes in the form of a daily diary and regular memos made up a major and vital portion of the data collection. These notes provided a rich source that included observations about the development of the online group and the changes in the relationships within the group. The field notes were also an important way to reflect and let thoughts flow in an informal, less structured way. As Bogdan and Biklen Knopp (2007) advise, “...confess your mistakes, your inadequacies, your prejudices, your likes and dislikes” (p. 122). The field notes were strictly private and only seen and used by myself. They were often scribbled on a piece of paper.

These field notes documented the interaction in the Facebook-group as a participant observer, as well as the role as agent of change. I wrote more formal diary entries after every class and during the weekend when checking the Facebook-site. I wrote down comments I overheard in class when students spoke about their FB use; observations made when looking at the site

were written down and noted; comments the students made about Facebook were: “I facebooked my friends,...”. I was interested in how many people looked at a specific comment or if the group site was used in a more informal, conversational way and not just as a learning platform. I reflected about these things and wrote them down. The final journal consisted of nearly 8500 words of entries over a period of five months (see Appendix F for excerpts). I always made screenshots of the daily Facebook posts to accompany the diary entries and field notes. The screenshots were archived as jpg-files. Later on I added memos (see section 4.7.2) after I reflected on the field note entries in line with the understanding of memos as defined by Glaser and Strauss (1967) who wrote that “memo writing on the field note provide an immediate illustration for and idea if an incident is coded for several categories, this tactic makes the analyst to use an incident as an illustration only once” (p. 108), in other words, memos are used to refine ideas while coding each category.

4.6.5 Questionnaires

Questionnaires (see Appendix E) were used to gain an understanding of the students’ attitudes towards and uses of the Facebook-group site. While questionnaires go into less detail than interviews, they can deliver a broader understanding of the setting than interviews (Trochim & Donnelly, 2008). The questionnaire results allowed the researcher to choose particular conversational themes she could later use in the interviews. The combination of questionnaires, interviews, observation and field notes allowed greater triangulation to gain a more thorough insight into the use of the Facebook-group site. Using a variety of data sources is in line with Geertz (1973) who wrote that many different data sources provide the wealth of data needed to provide the level of “thick description” (p. 6).

The questionnaires in this study were a mixture of multiple choice questions and open ended questions. The pre-questionnaire contained 15 questions with 11 questions multiple choice and 4 required a comment instead of a choice. The post-questionnaire had eight questions. Seven questions had a combination of multiple choice and an additional comment section, the last question was open ended and invited students to make longer comments on the future improvement of the use of Facebook. The multiple choice questions supplied me with quantitative data and the open ended questions with qualitative data.

The questionnaires were handed out to the whole class. Both pre- and post- questionnaires were trialed in the pilot study and the questions adjusted after a review process. A pilot phase (see section 4.1) was necessary to eliminate all types of errors, including vague and

misleading questions (Fetterman, 2010). In the pilot study questionnaires the students commented that they felt intimidated having native German speakers as members in the group. Following this result the decision was made not to include German-speaking friends, so the main study was an exclusive group made up of the students of the German class.

(a) Pre-course questionnaires

The first phase of the main study's data collection was a pre-course questionnaire. In the first week of teaching all the students in the class (n=23) were given the questionnaire in class. The questionnaires were hard copies and not put online or sent via email to ensure a higher response rate. The demographic questions allowed me to characterise and categorise the respondents. The questionnaires were conducted anonymously, the students not being required to give their names or contact information.

(b) Post-course questionnaires

The post-course questionnaires were conducted at the end of the semester. The eight questions included general questions asking about the use of the participants' personal Facebook use. The core questions aimed to find out about the students' preferences in using the Facebook-group feature and the application of Facebook as an educational tool. The final section of the questionnaire asked for ideas for the future use of Facebook in general as an educational learning platform. All the questions had a choice of three to four recommended answers and an open line allowing for comments. The last question was open-ended. The questions were informed by the themes that emerged from the analysis of open-ended interviews at the beginning of the semester. The questions in the questionnaire aligned with the research question to find out what activity was happening in the Facebook-group environment (see Appendix E for questionnaires). The research question was:

What are the practices and perspectives of the teacher and students when Facebook is introduced as part of the curriculum?

Though the questionnaire only covered a small sample of participants, this was acceptable for a qualitative study. Silverman (2011) wrote that if you think a project is too small, make it smaller. The strength of qualitative inquiry has always been close, local, emergent exploration.

4.6.6 Archive of Facebook-site and entries

The Facebook-group site was archived as a webpage. Additionally, the individual entries were copied into a separate Word document for analysis. The language of this document was German and consisted of 24,109 words. (see Appendix G for examples of screenshots of the archived webpage)

4.6.7 Interviews

Interviews are an essential part of this study, in line with Peräkylä and Ruusuvuori (2011) who find interviews crucial to reach areas of reality that would otherwise remain inaccessible, such as people's subjective experiences and attitudes. The interview is also a very convenient way of overcoming distances both in space and time (p. 529). This study approached interviews as a series of face-to-face conversations, both open and semi-structured. The interviews were conducted with students in the class, and the student teacher who was part of the teaching staff. I wanted to explore the participants' individual attitudes towards online social networking sites and their experiences with the sites and wanted to find out about their use of Facebook in other classes and particularly the familiarity they had with the group function of Facebook. It was of interest to find out if the participants were members of multiple groups and with what exclusivity they treated groups—if they identified with the Facebook-groups to which they belonged and actively engaged in them or if they treated the Facebook-group as a collection of separate sites they happened to be part of but did not contribute to. It also was of interest to find out if the German Facebook-group stood out in the participants' online life or was more part of the general information overload generated by online entertainment and communication. The in-depth interviews with the participants were important to develop an understanding of the activity in the German language group. The interviews were in English, took around 20 minutes each and were recorded and transcribed. One of the pre-interviews was done as a pair interview. The conversational style was more easily achieved in this group setting because one of the students was very shy. The iterative progression of the conversation, where the interviewer and interviewee are constantly doubling back to what has previously been said in order to clarify and add detail, is ideal for allowing emerging conversations to follow their own course (Glesne, 2006).

The main study started with six pre-course interviews that were conducted in the second week of the semester. The interviews were open-ended and served to illuminate the answers that respondents had provided in the initial pre-course questionnaire. While the questionnaire asked respondents to categorise their level of familiarity with online social networking sites,

the interviews enabled more accurate capture of each interviewee's knowledge of how to use Facebook and their experiences in other environments. Follow-up interviews were conducted at the end of the semester after the students had used the Facebook-group for 12 weeks. Altogether 12 students gave their informed consent to be interviewed. The interviews were semi-structured, lasted 30-60 minutes each and were conducted face-to-face.

4.7 Description of the analysis-process

At the end of the data collection process the data were transcribed and analysed in a four-step process (Figure 4.4). Initially I familiarised myself with the data and carried out thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Rossman & Rallis, 2012). The data, including all entries of the Facebook-group, interview transcripts, field notes and the researcher's diary, were imported into PDF and Word documents and were coded according to what information a group of words provided. A combination of inductive and deductive methods was used to analyse the data as is common in qualitative data analysis (Bernard & Ryan, 2010, p. 266).

4.7.1 Activity theory as used in this study

Activity theory and its principles (see section 3.3 and Table 4.4) serves in this study as an underlying theoretical framework. It supports the analysis of the use of Facebook in a language learning environment. The activity in the social media-enhanced learning environment is the primary unit of analysis. Activity theory enables the data to be described and understood systematically. This study applies the principles of contradictions and multi-voicedness (see section 3.3 and Table 4.4) when describing the use of Facebook as a mediating tool in the German language classroom. The principles of historicity and expansive cycles (see section 3.3 and Table 4.4) are used to analyse and interpret the results of the activity after completion of the assignment. The application of activity theory as the underlying framework is suitable for the analysis of technology-rich language learning environments (Yamagata-Lynch, 2010). Facebook as a mediating tool leads to enhanced authenticity in the language-learning environment. It is anticipated that the following questions will find answers in the data analysis:

- to what extent did the students use the social media environment?
- to what extent did they create individual and group goal-oriented actions?
- what internal or external contradictions occurred and to what extent?

- do all the students use the technology in the same way or are there differences?

Table 4.4: Application of activity theoretical principles

Principles based on AT	German class
Unit of analysis	The study will begin with one activity system as the unit of analysis but will eventually consider surrounding activity systems influencing the activity system in focus.
Contradictions	Activity theoretical analysis will be used to identify contradictions between or within the components of the activity system.
Multi-voicedness	Criteria should be applied in view of the goals of individual or group actions and the object or motive of the language learning activity.
Historicity	Components of the activity system like the tools-social media, the subjects-students will develop over time will be considered.
Expansive cycles	The development of the activity observed and analysed during the activity time will show expansive cycles that will lead to transformation of the activity.

4.7.2 The four cycles of coding

A combination of inductive thematic and deductive application of AT analysis was used to code the data. This analysis was conducted applying iterative cycles as shown in Figure 4.4:

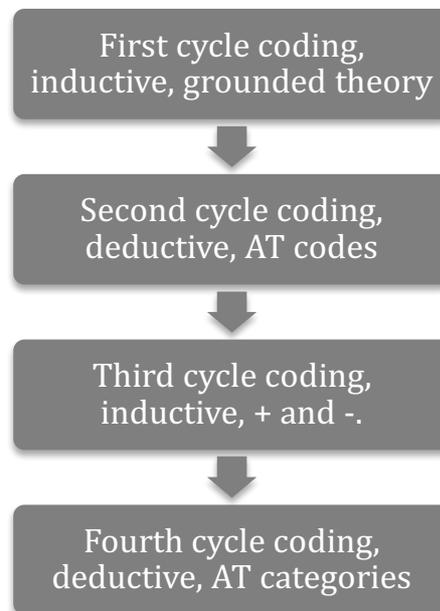


Figure 4.4: Four cycles of coding used in this study

Four cycles of coding were used to analyse the data set. The inductive method was used in the first and third cycles of the analysis.

First cycle: thematic analysis

The initial stage of coding was of an exploratory nature. I familiarised myself with the data and applied thematic analysis to the corpus (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The data were first coded and fragmented manually and then using NVivo (see section 4.7.2) in an inductive approach (Bernard & Ryan, 2010), and codes were identified (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). This first cycle was informed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) who advised that at the beginning of the data collection process the initial decisions are not based on a preconceived theoretical framework, but the researcher should begin with a partial framework of “local” concepts, designating a few principal or gross features of the structure and processes in the situations will be studied (p. 45).

Second cycle: activity theoretical coding

After the initial inductive cycle, a deductive cycle of analysis was applied to the data, with AT elements (subject, object, community, rules, division of labour, tools/artefacts, and outcome; see Figure 3.2) entered in NVivo as predetermined nodes (Ezzy, 2002). This order of analyses was an attempt to avoid pre-empting the emergent nature of codes in the face of the influence of preexisting theory (p. 10).

Third cycle: inductive coding for “+” and “-”

To step back from the pre-defined categories of AT elements and to keep an open mind about the data, the researcher conducted a third cycle of analysis, using open coding. It involved the entire data set and this form of coding allowed for inductive interpretation of the data, while also considering pre-existing theory. Units of meaning were defined, such as key issues, topics, concepts, and actions. These units of meaning were categorised into “+” or “-”, where “+” might be what worked well, or what was positive in regard to the activity, and “-” what was not working well. This process was intended to allow more themes to surface.

Fourth and final cycle: AODM analysis

A final cycle was applied to the inductively coded data in order to identify patterns within the data using Mwanza-Simwami (2002, 2011, 2013) Activity-Oriented Design Method (AODM) to translate components of the activity system in terms of the activity being investigated. Mwanza-Simwami (2011, p. 79) explained that her AODM toolkit is an analytical schema based on Engeström’s (1987) interpretation of activity theory. It helps to “identify essential

elements of human activity and to examine inter-relationships”. It also presents guidelines “to identify contradictions that exist in the activity investigated”. Table 4.5 shows the eight-step model which provides questions by Mwanza-Simwami that help to focus the analysis of the data by translating components of the activity system in terms of the activity being investigated (Mwanza-Simwami, 2011, p. 79). Table 4.6 shows how AODM adds mediators between the Actors (subjects and community of the activity system) and Purpose (object of the activity) of an activity.

Table 4.5: AODM eight-step model (Mwanza, 2002, p. 128)

Steps	Identify the:	Question to ask
Step 1	Activity of interest	What sort of activity am I interested in?
Step 2	Objective	Why is the activity taking place?
Step 3	Subjects	Who is involved in carrying out this activity?
Step 4	Tools	By what means are the subjects performing this activity?
Step 5	Rules and regulations	Are there any cultural rules and regulations governing the performance of this activity?
Step 6	Division of labour	Who is responsible for what, when carrying out this activity and how are the roles organised?
Step 7	Community	What is the environment in which this activity is carried out?
Step 8	Outcome	What is the desired outcome from carrying out this activity?

Table 4.6 shows the “activity notation” which breaks down an activity system into smaller chunks by arranging activity system components (subject, object, community, rules, division of labour, tools/artefacts, and outcome) and reducing the complexity in activity analysis (Mwanza-Simwami, 2013, p. 181).

Table 4.6: AODM Activity notation (Mwanza-Simwami, 2013, p. 181)

Actors	Mediator	Objective (Purpose)
Subjects	Tools	Object
Subjects	Rules	Object
Subjects	Division of labour	Object
Community	Tools	Object
Community	Rules	Object
Community	Division of labour	Object

In this final stage of the coding process, axial coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) was undertaken, meaning that the AT concepts/categories were related to each other in an activity system. The constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) was used with chunks of the data to identify emergent themes within the AT-categories. As individual codes emerged

from the data, they were constantly compared with all other codes to identify similarities, differences, and general patterns (p. 101-115).

During this process, contradictions between the nodes of the class activity system became apparent. The AODM (Mwanza-Simwami, 2011, 2013) was used to develop sub-activity systems for more focused analysis of the contradictions.

By applying this process of deduction and induction of theory building, testing and rebuilding to the coding process, the researcher tried to prevent preconceptions from narrowing what was observed and theorised.

The data collected were coded in NVivo, a qualitative data analysis software package particularly helpful for creating connections between individual themes through the creation of nodal connections. Memos were written for each coded segment, ensuring a stability and uniformity of coding over a period of time (see Appendix I).

4.7.3 NVivo and the process of analysis

Nvivo was used to assist with and facilitate the data analysis process in this study. This is one of several CAQDAS (Computer assisted qualitative data analysis software) packages available for the qualitative researcher. It was used to chunk the data into separate phrase lines and then attach codes and keywords to these chunks (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 312).

Memos were attached to each code/node.

The software assisted with structuring and making sense of the data but not with the thinking, interpretation and conceptualisation of codes. As Ezzy (2002) notes, whether the thesis is done on screen with a software package or on paper does not make a big difference in the end; there is no right way of making sense of what a document, experience or event “means” (p. 127). The major benefits of the software were to help to explore ideas and experiment with and observe patterns in the data.

Memos

The coding process was accompanied by the writing of analytical memos as recommended in NVivo’s help manual and by the qualitative research literature. Rossman and Rallis (2012) wrote that they could not overstate the importance of writing analytic memos throughout the coding process. The process of writing short narratives encourages analytic thinking (p. 267). Memos in other research literature find their place under “field notes” and are also defined as

additional “think-pieces” about the progress of the research (Bogdan & Biklen Knopp, 2007, p. 122). Memos in this study were an integral part of the research process, they were like documents and linked to nodes. The NVivo software package offers memos as a feature; they can be automatically linked to the categories and emerging themes. This study applied analytical memos to every node/category during the data analysis process and recorded the findings as they evolved into patterns, as a way of documenting analytical thinking (see Appendix I).

To increase the validity of the coding process, a second coder participated in the process. This co-coder was a doctoral PhD student in Linguistics at a German university and familiar with social constructivist theory. She was given an overview of the AT framework and the research methodology as discussed in Chapters 3 and 4. The co-coder first coded sample data and discussed the procedure with me. As she became familiar with the concept, she crosschecked reports of the codes generated in NVivo. Skype meetings with the co-coder were conducted several times throughout the data analysis process. The coders were in line with each other.

AT enabled the documentation of the complex nature of the online environment, its tools, and the stages the community moved through as it established itself during the course.

The unit of analysis in this study was one activity system for all students in the class. The system is modelled in the Figure 4.5 below. The activity system will give a preliminary representation corresponding to the Facebook-activity in the German intermediate class. Activity system diagrams are a convenient graphical way to show the context of the activities that are unfolding. As the language learning activities transform themselves over time, new activity systems are likely to emerge which is in line with the principle of historicity (see section 5.3.9 and Figure 5.16).

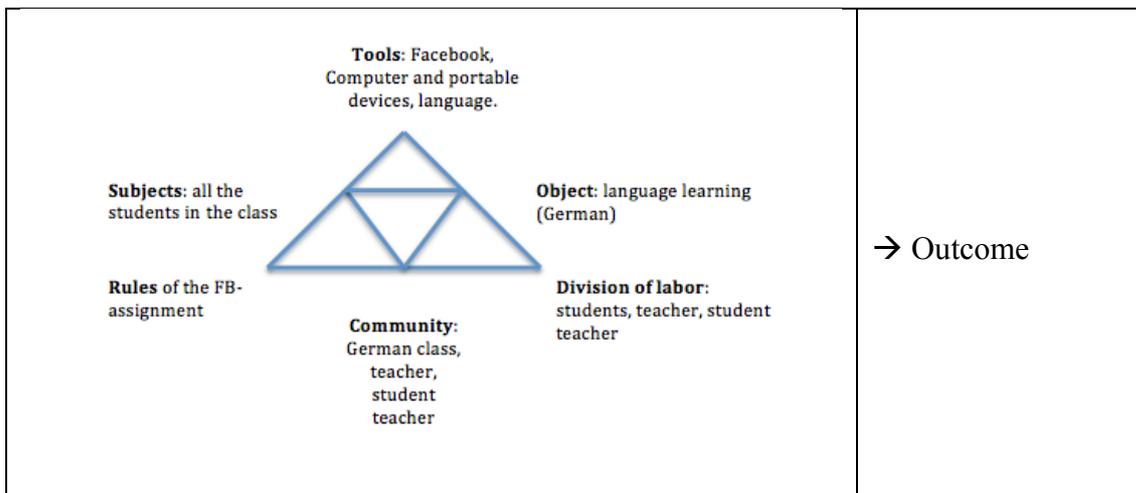


Figure 4.5: Interim representation of activity system of the German intermediate class.

4.8 Summary

This chapter has introduced the methodology of this study. Ethnographic methods were used to collect data and inductive and deductive approaches were used to analyse it. The inductive method used was thematic analysis and deductive approaches were situated within activity theory. Activity theory analysis was based on Engeström's (1987) model in combination with mediators from Mwanza's (2002) AODM model. The next chapter will present the data, first with the ethnographic description of the data in section 5.2, followed by an exploration of the selected categories through the lens of activity theory (section 5.3).

Chapter 5

Data presentation and analysis

In the previous chapter the methodology was explained and also the setting in which this research was situated. This chapter presents the analysis of the data collected with respect to the study's research question. The data will be described in relation to the research intent of this study which is to understand the implications of using social networking sites for students of German at tertiary level in New Zealand.

The research question was: What are the practices and perspectives of the teacher and students when Facebook is introduced as part of the curriculum?

Following an initial description of the data (section 5.1), the results of the data analysis will be presented in two parts. The first part (section 5.2) will present the ethnographic analysis of the data (data analysis cycle one as shown in Figure 4.4). This initial cycle of data analysis produced insights into how the students used Facebook as a communication tool. The outcome of this inductive data analysis will be presented as an ethnographic narrative focusing on gaining a better understanding of the online environment in which this learning activity was situated. Particular attention will be paid to the themes that surfaced in the thematic analysis: use of Facebook, use of Facebook in an educational setting, Facebook as a learning tool, and students' Facebook identity. The analysed data will be presented from the viewpoint of both the teacher and the students.

This inductive analysis (section 5.2) will be followed by a deductive analysis presentation facilitated by activity theory (AT) tools and models (section 5.3).

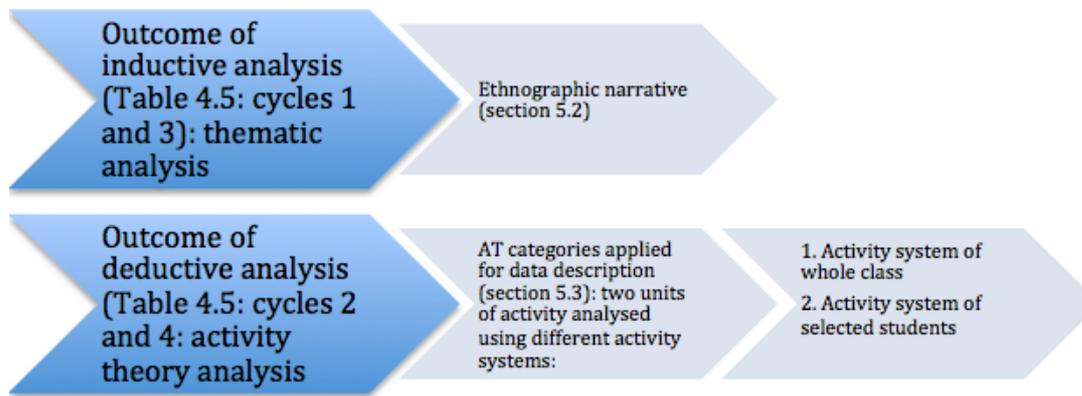


Figure 5.1: Presentation of findings

The second and fourth cycles of the analysis model described in Chapter 4 (Figure 4.4) are activity theory analysis. The outcome of this AT analysis cycle will be presented in section 5.3, in two different parts as shown in Figure 5.1 above. The first part of the analysis will look at the activity system of the entire class as the unit of analysis (section 5.3.1) based on the background of the data of the main study, activity chart and posts on Facebook in line with Barab, Kling and Gray (2004). The second unit of analysis will be selected members of the Facebook community (section 5.3.3). The students each have their own activity system. Finally, a re-assessment of the activity system of the entire class is conducted and outcomes presented (Figure 5.16 in section 5.3.9). This part will use the definition of historicity as defined by Engeström (1987) for better understanding of the activity (section 5.3.9). The final part of the analysis, in section 5.3.10 is the presentation of contradictions within the activity theory paradigm which surfaced during the different steps of analysis. These contradictions will be discussed in depth in Chapter 6.

5.1 Description of the data

As described in the previous chapter, the data for this study consisted of an anonymous background pre-course questionnaire and a post-course questionnaire returned by 12 of the students. The questionnaires were followed up by interviews. Six students from the intermediate German class gave their informed consent to participate in pre-course interviews which were conducted at the beginning of the semester. Five students gave consent for the second interviews which were held after the completion of the Facebook assignment at the end of the semester. Four of the five students were the same as for the pre-course interviews. Three more interviews were conducted after the course, two with distance students and one with the student teacher. The entire data set collected by the end of the main study period

included pre, post and interim course interviews with students, who had consented to be interviewed; observation of the Facebook-group; the researcher's diary and field notes covering the 12 weeks of the course; informal observations before and after the completion of the official study phase; and memos generated while analysing the data with the help of NVivo software (see Table 5.1 for an overview of the data collected). The total class number was 23 enrolled university students and the teaching staff consisted of a student teacher and myself.

Table 5.1: Data of entire class selected

Data collection	n=	Date/Time frame	Size of corpus
Pre-course and post-course questionnaire	12	Beginning and end of the period of investigation (see appendices)	
Facebook-group posts		During the entire period of investigation	Number of words: 24,000
Facebook-logs		During the entire period of investigation	
Interviews: pre-course, post-course	13	Beginning and end of the period of investigation	Number of words (transcripts): 16,160
Interim interviews	6	Each week, brief interviews after class	Number of words (transcripts): 4,636
Research diary	During the entire period of investigation.	Number of words: 8,500	Research diary
Memos (NVivo)	During data analysis.	Number of words: 5,000	Memos (NVivo)

The post-course questionnaire asked questions about the students' experience of using Facebook as part of their curriculum. The same students who participated in the pre-course questionnaire answered the post-course questionnaire.

The post-course questionnaire results were followed up with in-depth interviews. Six participants volunteered to be formally interviewed. The sample size in this study was small, but as Sarantakos (2013) wrote, there is no clear cut answer about sample size; decisions about sample size can be informed by a number of factors which include methodology employed, available time and resources, purpose and intensity of study. However, in this case the ethnographic methods helped the researcher to collect very rich data; also the archived Facebook-group activity helped to gain thorough insight into the practices of its participants.

The formal interviews were conducted based on insights gained into the background of the students from data collected in the pre-course and post-course questionnaires. The interviews supplied knowledge about the perceptions the students had about using Facebook in a class environment and their personal use of the social media. The outcomes of the individual interviews were graphically supported by activity systems. In addition, field notes of excerpts of unrecorded informal interviews and conversations, mostly conducted by the researcher and

the student teacher directly after class time, were analysed and used in this presentation. Table 5.2 lists participants who consented to formal interviews.

Table 5.2: List of students who consented to interviews

	Pre-course interviews	Post-course interviews
Student 1	Interview 1, 16 mins	Interview 7, 10 mins
Student 2	Interview 2, 24 mins	Interview 8, 25 mins
Student 3	Interview 3, 19 mins	-
Student 4	Interview 4, 8.5 mins	-
Student 5	Interview 5, 9 mins	-
Student 6	Interview 6, 9 mins	Interview 9, 22 mins
Student 7 (distance)	-	Interview 10, 43 mins
Student 8 (distance)	-	Interview 11, 16 mins
Student 9	-	Interview 12, 10 mins
Student teacher	-	Interview 13, 24 mins

The Facebook activity of the main study underwent an iterative cycle of refinement and ongoing reflection supported by the pilot study over a period of 18 months. The process was an experience of interpreting and re-interpreting as the data grew and the understanding of the research process developed. These findings represent only a portion of the data collected. The findings reported and discussed (Chapter 6) are chosen with respect to their relevance. Factors excluded from the presentation of data are a description of the tools the students used, such as computers and smartphones, and a discussion of the university environment in which the German class and study was situated, including issues surrounding institutional support for e-learning and central learning support for students.

5.2 Ethnographic analysis to set the scene

During the first cycle (see Figure 4.4) the data from all the sources mentioned in Table 4.3 was coded inductively and I familiarised myself with the way students had reported experiencing the Facebook environment and how they adapted to it as a learning platform. The analysis of the data was divided into two parts: a descriptive analysis of how the Facebook-site had been used, followed by a thematic analysis of the data from the teacher's and students' points of view.

5.2.1 Descriptive analysis

Student behaviour. The observations in this section are based on the archive of activity on the Facebook-group site. The affordances of the Facebook-group site, here a German language class, are creating interactivity and subsequently building a community of the language learners. It is important that the reader can understand the way a Facebook-group can be used to develop this unique community. Firstly, there will be a description of the functions available to the users of a Facebook-group, followed by a presentation of the reported experiences of students, student teachers and the teacher/researcher as they used the Facebook-group.

Interactivity. The Facebook-group is empty to begin with; before contents can be added the potential for interactivity needs to be designed for, members added to the group and mutually agreed ways of interaction established. After these initial steps content needs to be created by the members, using Facebook tools to communicate. The better interactivity is designed for, the more it will enhance communication quality that then will result in increased motivation and satisfaction in the German learner community (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). The setting up and administration of the group are described in section 4.2.

To be in line with the underlying socio-constructivist course design the students were authorised to administrate the Facebook-group as soon as possible in order to enable them to construct their own online learning environment. The students continued to add each other to the group. It soon became obvious that some students were more experienced users of Facebook than others; these students were nominated to administrate the group site as chief administrators who helped to change the settings of the group or assist with the visual design of the site, i.e. adding a class photo as a banner at the top of the group site. The chief administrators were also empowered to look after other students when they had problems. I withdrew after one week from the administration function and left the construction of the Facebook-group to the students. I also encouraged students to change the name of the group to a more unique one and to add a class photo to foster a shared identity and enhance the notion of ownership of the Facebook-group site. After gaining administrator status one student changed the access of the group from “public access” - open to every Facebook-member’ to “closed”—only accessible by Facebook-group members as she wanted to ensure that nobody, unless a member of the group, could see the posts.

After the Facebook-group had been set up (uniquely named, closed and filled with members) the new members started to use the affordances that Facebook offers to construct a

communicative, socio-constructivist environment. They posted a comment each and attached various media to it. This first comment or post was their first assessment task; they were required to use the target language, German, and introduce themselves by name, age and their reason for studying German; they were also asked to add a photo of themselves. All the students posted comments ranging from 54 to 230 words and they either attached photos or a short video of themselves. (Appendix K, Figure K.1 for word count of the posts)

Membership of this group. The members of this group are primarily the course students. The instructor encouraged the students to expand their learning environment and make it more authentic by inviting more German learners to the group but the students who participated in this study showed resistance to this extended language environment. However, a teacher from another New Zealand tertiary institution asked four of her students to join the Facebook-group. The students from the other university had the same level of proficiency. They had the choice to join the Facebook-group, it was not a course requirement. These students were admitted to the Facebook-group but were not made administrators. Two student teachers were affiliated to the Facebook-group. One student teacher spent one term prior to this study in New Zealand and took part in the beginners' German class (see section 4.1, pilot study). The majority of the students in this study had met her and kept in contact with her after her return to Germany. She took part in the online discussions on the Facebook-group and frequently posted comments in response to student contributions or sent interesting artefacts she came across.

The second student teacher was a young woman who joined the class in the second half of the 12-week semester. For the first six weeks of the course, prior to her arrival in New Zealand she maintained an online presence on the Facebook-group. She introduced herself, posted comments related to the assessment topics and posted comments including photos from her travels in Australia. She was not acknowledged while she was not yet a "real" person to the students, a person they had met face-to-face. Her comments were acknowledged as "seen" but never "liked" or commented on. Her mere online presence was not enough to trigger a discourse between her and the students. When she arrived in New Zealand and joined the class she was perceived as a real person. As she developed her relationship with the students, her online presence got stronger; students started to communicate with her online, commenting on and "liking" her posts; she was accepted into the group and discourse developed.

Communication. After the Facebook-group infrastructure had been established, the

Facebook-group site was filled with user-generated content. Content creation took place in the form of text-based communication but also pictures, videos, and other forms of media were shared. Based on the understanding of community creation and interactivity, the members started their discourse by posting messages. They had the following functions available to respond to the posts of fellow group members: “seen“, “like“, and “comment“ function.¹¹ Facebook-group members who had used these functions were listed with their username under the named commands. Members who left a comment could also be traced back by time and date.

When I myself commented on a post, a “seen“ response indicating that students had read it would show up within the next five minutes. The reactions were multiple and immediate in the first ten days of the semester but ebbed away during the semester, only increasing at times when an assignment post was due.

¹¹ Available affordances in Facebook-groups at the time of the data collection in 2014. The fast-growing internet has already changed and enhanced the affordances and will continue to do so.

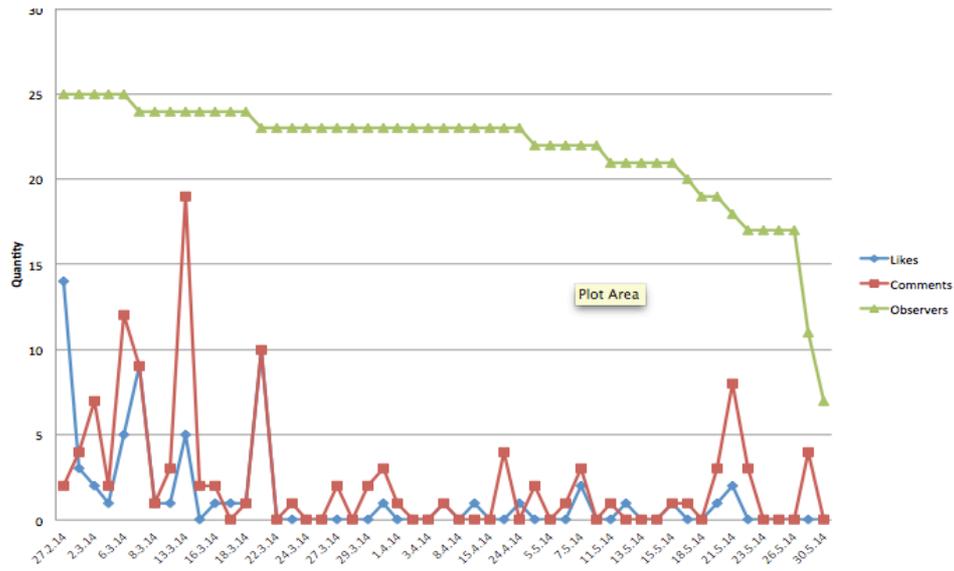


Figure 5.2: Frequency of interaction (Feb-May).

It is interesting to note that the graph in Figure 5.2 was generated at the beginning of June, after the end of the teaching period but prior to the mid-year exam which was scheduled for the end of June. Another observation chart (Figure 5.3) was generated from the archived Facebook-site and shows the following results.

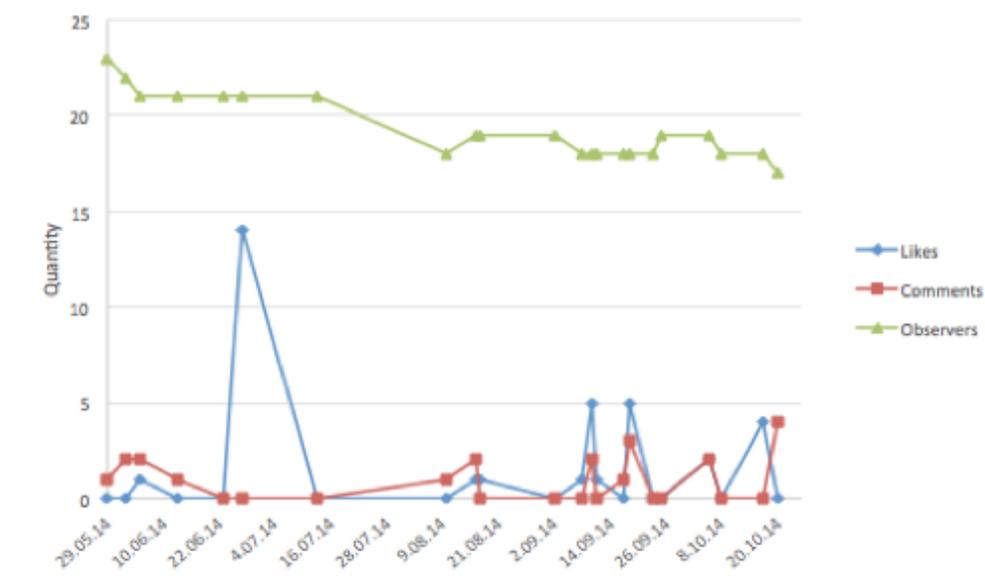


Figure 5.3: Frequency of interaction (May-October).

Figure 5.3 shows that students had continued to use the site and interacted on it after the teaching period had finished. The data presented in Figure 5.2 shows a drop-off of views at the end of the semester. Revisiting the site at the end of October, after the site was archived and activity ended, the views/observers had increased to an even larger number throughout

the semester. It can be assumed that the members had been using the site and looking at the posts even after the assessment period had finished.

Reaction to feedback. I responded with constructive feedback on content when students posted a contribution. The feedback was usually one sentence long containing information about the improvement of a grammar point. The reaction to feedback was sometimes immediate. For example in Figure 5.4 I posted the feedback at 10.24 pm and 10.32 pm respectively and the students reacted at 10.26 pm and 10.55 pm. The students can evidently be reached almost immediately, giving the Facebook-platform an almost synchronous character.



Figure 5.4: Feedback

It is of interest to observe the choice of language. The student in the first example chose English to answer the teacher feedback whereas the student in the second example chose German to continue the discussion of content. The instructor encouraged the students at the beginning of the course to use German on the Facebook-group site if possible but assured them that they would not be penalised if they used English as long they showed that they understood the German questions and comments and responded appropriately. Many students did not comment on the feedback they received but they could be traced by the “seen” function which lists the individual names and showed that the feedback had reached the students addressed as well as other students.

Participation of teacher and student teachers. Participation in the Facebook-group was the key concept and requirement of this sociocultural environment. The aim was to develop a strong community focused on collaborative learning and knowledge building using the target language, German. The teacher and student teachers were acting as motivators. I am a native German speaker, as were the German student teachers who were asked to join the group with the aim of making the Facebook-group more authentic. The student teachers were asked to post cultural content of interest to the students.

I kept my participation to a minimum at the beginning of the semester but developed a more frequent discourse when the class members were comfortable with each other and with the teachers. Palloff and Pratt (2007) stated that instructors participate as “cheerleaders”, attempting to motivate deeper learning through online discussions than would usually occur in a face-to-face classroom situation. It is also recognised that instructor participation may be overdone as too much participation by the instructor may reduce the amount of student–student interaction and create an unnecessary degree of reliance on the teacher. There is a fine line between, on the one hand, posting too much and, on the other hand, not posting enough and giving the impression of not being interested in the students. To speed up the process of each required assessment post and to clarify the amount of words and level of language required, I participated on the Facebook-platform by modelling the pattern. I would write two or three sentences about my own experience to motivate the students to do the same. The Facebook-group members never commented on or “liked“ the model post but it was always “seen“ by the students. The “seen“ feature is powerful; anyone in the group can see the names of the people who have seen the comment by clicking on the “seen“ button and a list of the names will pop up. The “seen“ function was perceived as non-verbal communication because it constitutes an acknowledgement.

5.2.2 Thematic analysis

The thematic analysis of the data conducted and described in section 4.7 resulted in themes as listed below in Table 5.3.

Table 5.3: Summary of themes with categories found after thematic data analysis: teacher observations and student practices and perspectives using Facebook

5.2.2.1 Teacher observations	5.2.2.2 Students' practices and perceptions
Students' behaviour on Facebook Non-spontaneous Sporadic participation	Importance of Facebook in students' online lives Connectivity Ease of use Familiar Widespread and common Length of contributions Lack of novelty factor
Facebook as communication tool Facebook used instead of email Facebook used to announce events Facebook used for social communication	Facebook use in education setting Passivity Anxiety Usefulness Authenticity
Teacher feedback Feedback as stimulus Feedback to give correction Feedback as acknowledgement	Facebook as social platform Social capital and social presence Synchronicity Teacher feedback Teacher participation and student anxiety Usefulness

The themes will be discussed in the order listed in Table 5.3. The teacher observations are based on my research diary, field notes, participant observation and the memos which were created while analysing the data with Nvivo software. The student practices and perspectives are based on interview data and questionnaire outcomes.

5.2.2.1 Teacher observations

Student behaviour on Facebook. Asynchronous use of the Facebook-group function in German seems to be an ideal way to immerse the students into the target language. Despite the popularity of Facebook and its constant use by the students in their private lives, sharing Facebook-posts as part of a curriculum requirement was less spontaneous than anticipated. The students had to post comments by a certain date and about certain topics taught in class using the new grammar structures and vocabulary. The graph in Figure 5.2 shows the activity in relation to the due dates of the posts. The activity on the chart shows little active participation between the due dates of the posts, whereas the observational “seen” function was at a constantly high level of activity, indicating that the students were interested in the content of the Facebook-group site and looking at the posts, but they seemed to be reluctant to actively contribute on the Facebook-group channel which is visible to all the members of the group. When a post was due the students wrote long descriptions about the required topic, exceeding the minimum of three sentences recommended in the assignment description.

I worried about the students’ approach to their task and noted that

So much production might not be necessary and might take away the spontaneity of the site. (Research diary, 24.4.14)

Considering that a Facebook-group platform is valued for more lightweight conversations and that it is acceptable for the interaction to be “overheard”, spontaneous and “chatty” communication is expected and desirable. I was surprised by the way the students used the Facebook-group platform passively and as observers. Their public posts appeared forced, with the posts carefully crafted. On several occasions, I commented on this:

It seems so formal these long entries, the students should take it more casually. (Research diary, 7.5.14)

A student told me that she prepares a few drafts before post the actual comment. I need to ask them in the next round of interviews how to encourage them to add comments more spontaneously. (Research diary, 2.5.14)

Despite the students’ reluctance to write publicly, I noticed:

That there was constant activity on the site with ‘seen’ increasing but very little or no spontaneous comments. (Research diary, 19.3.14).

The situation did not improve and I noted that:

The students took it too formally with their long entries. I wonder how I can make the site more appealing, affording casual and spontaneous communication. (Research diary, 7.5.14)

Sporadic use of Facebook. In between the required posts were long breaks of non-communication. It was assumed that:

The students stopped post because they might be busy. (Research diary, 13.3.14)

I was disappointed with the students' minimal use of the Facebook-group and wanted to find out about the reasons why the students behaved non-spontaneously and posted sporadically on the Facebook-site. With the help of the "seen" function, the names of the individual students who looked at the posts could be seen. Even the most interested students who regularly clicked on the post, creating "seen" notifications, had dropped off during the semester:

The interest has decreased, and even the "seen" is decreasing. I noted two girls who used to look at all the entries, their names did not show any longer. (Research diary, 17.5.14)

The two girls were contacted via private Facebook messaging asking them if they were willing to discuss their problems with the site. They were interviewed after class and one girl commented that:

I was very busy with other university work and did not have time. (Interim interview)

Facebook-group as a communication tool. Facebook is used instead of email. Using the Facebook-group as a learning tool enabled the teacher to access the students' Facebook-message function. As soon as the student is part of the class Facebook-group, the teacher has access to the student's name and profile. (It is the user's choice as to what level of privacy the individual Facebook profile is set at). The teacher can choose to message the student using the private messages channel. Only the student can see the message, the communication is structurally similar to private email exchange; photos or different file formats can also be attached. The Facebook messaging function serves as a replacement for traditional emailing for most of the students. A respondent said:

It is, unlike email, a very fast way to communicate, because if they have a smartphone (most of the students have by now) they would get an immediate alert on their device. (Interview 7)

This private messaging is so common among the students that a new vocabulary has developed; for example, the teacher overheard on several occasions students saying “just *facebook me*”. The teacher could choose either of two channels to contact students, the public Facebook-group site visible to all the members in the group or private messaging. Both channels, private and public, have the function of allowing the sender to see that the recipient of the email has received the message, making the conversation more transparent. The “seen“ function on the group site lists the individual names of the group members who have looked at the entry. There is also the notification function linked to public and private Facebook messages which pops up on students’ devices when a message has been sent to them. The teacher observed that:

They (the students) seem to be available on Facebook all the time. It is unlike email; they did not need to check the email but would get automatically alerted on the screen of their smartphone. (Research diary, 2.6.14).

These public and private communication channels which are available on Facebook make communication between teacher and students easier and more immediate.

Facebook is used to announce events. The first event was created towards the end of the semester. This function is only available on a Facebook-group and not on the public Facebook-wall. I set up the event informing the students about the date, time and location of the upcoming oral exam. There was also a link to a booking sheet on a google.doc site. After an event is created on the Facebook-group site, each member of the group is sent an individual invitation link to the email address which is linked to their Facebook-account. Clicking the link takes them back to the Facebook-group and they can accept or decline the invitation or leave it pending. Events show up on the Facebook-group site in a separate side panel and also alert students closer to the time with pop-up messages similar to new message notifications or a digital alarm clock.

I was surprised how easily the students could be reached using this Facebook function:

I posted the information about the oral exam as an event on Facebook and the students had to write their names and times in a google.doc attached to the

comment. I am always amazed how fast the students react and 'like' something, some students almost within seconds, making it in line with synchronous exchanges. (Research diary, 4.6.14)

Facebook is used for social communication. Facebook enables the students to build a richer and more interactive social presence than on a wiki or blog platform. They can respond to each other in a range of ways, private or more public, immediate or later in time. They can include media to show their individual personality or add emoticons to show their mood. The students had introduced themselves during the first weeks of the term, describing their hobbies and the places they had visited in Germany. They attached photos to their posts and fellow group members could get to know different sides of their classmates they would not have known otherwise. One student was a soldier prior to his university studies and the introductory photo showed him in uniform. Another student could be seen with friends at the Oktoberfest in Munich. Some students recognised that she was in a relationship with another German language student in the next level and commented on this in their responses. Another student posted photos of the paintings she does as a hobby; everybody “liked” them and some students posted admiring comments. Yet another student was remembered for her worms because her hobby is a worm farm and as well describing her worm farm she posted photos of her worms (from: Facebook-archive). The students were able to get to know their fellow classmates in this more personal way and started to settle into a more comfortable and relaxed social situation. A few weeks into the semester, they had built up enough trust to use the platform as a non-educational communication tool enabling them to connect with each other. Soon after the Facebook-group had been established, students used the platform to ask advice about logistical matters relating to the class organisation. In the second week of the semester a student asked when she had to hand in the first homework (Figure 5.5).



Figure 5.5: Example for social communication (Facebook-archive, 5.3.14)

A day later another student asked via the Facebook-group if people knew where the next German class would take place and a few days later a student wanted to know the time for the Skype session (Figure 5.6).



Figure 5.6: Example for logistic communication (Facebook-archive, 7.3.14)

These comments were “gesehen” (seen) by all the fellow students and commented on by some students. There was no need for a teacher response to most of the posts because the questions had been answered by class members.

The first post to the platform which did not relate to the German course was a student asking for advice on how to knit a scarf (Figure 5.7). She could not understand the pattern so posted a photo of the knitting and sought advice from group members. Two students were able to help and commented on her post, two other students “liked“ her comment and it was “seen” by the whole class:



Figure 5.7: Example for social communication (Facebook-archive, 8.4.14)

As the semester proceeded more private posts were added by the students. One student showed off the new soft toy she had made:

Ich habe meine Plüschtiere endlich genäht! Ich machte ein Foto von meinem Plüschtier-Pferd und meinem Plüschtier-Dinosaurier. (Facebook-archive, 12.4.14)

The Facebook-group site remained active even after the assessment period. The students used the platform to ask about things that were unrelated to the course content, for example, one student asked about a word (Figure 5.8):



Figure 5.8: Example for social communication (Facebook-archive, 16.8.14.)

And they would still share their German artefacts (Figure 5.9) with the class many months later:



Figure 5.9: Example for social communication (Facebook-archive, 5.10.14)

The Facebook-group site was archived in November thus rendering the site inactive.

Teacher input in the Facebook group. I would participate in the Facebook-group on three different occasions each week by posting additional information posts to extend the group's knowledge of the foreign culture. Corrective feedback was given and the level of feedback I should give was negotiated with the students.

I participated at times when the flow of communication ebbed away. I believed it would remind the students of their German class and would encourage communication. My posts included following up on conversations and units taught in class, such as posting videos related to in-class discussions to help with building a stronger knowledge base in the target language German:

Guckt, das ist der Film über den [Student X] und ich gesprochen haben! (Facebook - archive, 4.3.14)

The entry was “seen” by all class members and commented on by the one who started the conversation. Other input was offered occasionally. When I visited Germany during the Easter break I posted photos of the Easter celebrations in Germany to show the students the German festival culture with its unique artefacts (Facebook-archive, 20-22.4.14).

Corrective feedback. Participating as a teacher and assessor by adding corrective feedback to the posts was a difficult process. I was reluctant at first to post feedback and was worried it would discourage students from producing spontaneous posts. I wrote:

I checked the first entries. I was shy about post a correction. I decided to add an entry to each entry and make a minor correction when vocabulary or grammar was used incorrectly.I will check with students next week if they like the corrections. the corrections might make the Facebook-site more attractive because the students are keen to learn the foreign language. (Research diary, 28.2.14)

As soon as I started to write comments I noticed that:

Some students were constantly connected (to the internet and logged-on to Facebook). (Research diary, 2.3.14)

Students would thank me for the corrective comments or click the ‘like’ button for acknowledgment. I eventually developed a feedback pattern commonly used at toastmasters (Dlugan, 2009). I would first set the scene by writing a sentence of praise congratulating the student on writing in German or adding such an interesting artefact. Then I would continue by giving a short correction, usually picking one or two mistakes carefully chosen in accordance with relevance to the grammar or vocabulary previously taught in class (see Figure 5.10).



Figure 5.10: Teacher’s corrective feedback

Feedback as acknowledgement. The students always reacted to the corrective feedback with either a short comment saying “danke” (thank you) or with the “like” function (see Figure 5.10). Every comment was “liked” in this way letting the teacher know that the feedback had reached the students. I also addressed the students directly on the Facebook-group asking them about their reaction to the corrective feedback given. The students reported enjoying the feedback and posted appreciative comments in response or clicked “like” (see Figure 5.11).



Figure 5.11: Teacher asking about the value of the feedback

5.2.2.2 Students' practices and perspectives

Importance of Facebook in students' online life. The students were asked about the importance of Facebook-groups in their online life. All students were members of Facebook-groups; one student was part of 43 groups! One student commented that she used Facebook-groups but:

I am not active in most of the groups. (Interview 3)

Facebook was at the time of data collection and still at the time of writing the most popular social media tool in New Zealand and widely used. Other social media applications like Snapchat or Instagram are popular but do not provide the plethora of communication functions that Facebook does. One student commented:

In general I use Facebook, about 5 hours a day. As soon as I turn my computer on, I check it. I use it mainly to share photos, that's the main purpose and then message, email forums as well. I am part of groups but only of those which have direct influence to my life. (Interview 11)

Facebook use in students' university classes. When the students were introduced to Facebook as part of their German course that was new to them. Some students had had experience with Facebook-groups in their university life:

I am in a few groups ... none of the groups are part of the assessment, just organise your work. (Interview 11)

I have a maths study group. We (students) prepare together for tests. (Pre-course questionnaire)

I am part of groups but only those that have direct influence to my life, for example my hall group (hall of residence group). This is the only way we get information for our hall, through our Facebook-group, this is the only group I take part in, otherwise I don't feel the need to use Facebook-groups. (Interview 7)

Facebook gives constant notifications. Most students in New Zealand own smartphones which include the affordance of constant updated notifications. As soon as a message is posted in a Facebook-group smartphone users are alerted to it on their phone screens; smartphones are usually not turned off neither are notifications and students are therefore everywhere and at all times instantly available online.

Ease of use. The students enjoyed the fact that the Facebook-group was an easy to use platform and did not require any prior training:

It is technically not complicated, everybody lives on Facebook nowadays, it is an easy way to have the language. (Interview 3)

As the students started to use the Facebook-group in their class they experienced it as an easy, friendly and unthreatening way of communication. A student said:

It is a friendly environment, I don't really care what people think of me, or how good I am, this is a class and you are supposed to learn, I don't care if I make mistakes. It is a more personal style of teaching. (Interview 10)

Although there was reluctance on the part of some students, one student mentioned:

It was scary in the beginning. (Interview 6)

I had no issues with using Facebook-group in class. It was not really me, it was me as a student of German. (Interview 10)

Producing text on Facebook. Writing on the screen refers to the way smartphones and touch devices allow writing on their integrated keyboards which are smaller than the computer keyboard. Touch screen applications have less writing functionality which spurred the development and use of emoticons, making these platforms not very useful in a language classroom; as one student commented:

People use less words because there are so many symbols now. (Interview 9)

Facebook allows the students to write up to 500 words in a message, unlike other social networking sites which offer the user a smaller number of words and focus more on communicating visual material. The most popular such sites are Snapchat and Instagram which are applications for handheld devices like smartphones and iPads; students commented that:

You can write a lot (on Facebook) (Interview 3)

I find there is not enough space on Snapchat and Instagram to write. I always want to write a whole sentence but you can't. You write on the screen which is tricky. (Interview 9)

Familiarity of site. Many students already used Facebook prior to the course assignment for their communication needs:

It is the easiest and most widely spread — not all my friends use their email. (Interview 11)

Lack of novelty factor. Overall, though, the familiarity of Facebook offered many advantages when integrated into the class curriculum, but it also had drawbacks because of the lack of novelty factor:

First it (Facebook) was exciting, then Facebook is a couple of years old, you need to get your excitement back, the novelty wears off. (Interview 2)

and another student found Facebook fun but did not enjoy the regular use in class:

I think it is a fun thing to do now and again, but maybe not that consistently. (Interview 11)

Facebook use in the educational setting

When students posted on Facebook to complete an assignment their behaviour on Facebook changed. They were self-conscious about producing posts in the target language. The following behaviours of students were uncovered by analysing the data:

Passive reception. Students found that the Facebook exercise developed into one-way communication:

It was pretty much one way post, post, dumping, not getting the interaction. Some posts not even received comments, they just had 'like' and what is "like"? You don't even get information — no German output. (Interview 10)

The comparison of Facebook as a one-way street was certainly in line with the development Facebook made in recent years. Facebook affordances like easy photo and video uploads enabled its users to add a massive number of information items. Facebook users, in this study the German students, developed a tactic to cope with this information overload by using Facebook passively, similar to reading a glossy magazine, rather than making use of its affordances to create content or to interact verbally with people who posted information. Students explained their behaviour:

I always look at it (Facebook) but sometimes I am not interested in the posts (e.g. dragons). (Interview 3)

This passive behaviour can also be distracting:

Many people use it passively, messaging their friends, they don't post things...they scroll through newsfeeds, when they see a pretty picture, they stop for a moment, but then keep scrolling. They might react but not really. They forgot what they wanted to look up, they get side-tracked. (Interview 9)

Anxiety. The passive use of the Facebook-group site was related to the students' underlying anxiety about producing foreign language output in front of their classmates.

The students had to write five posts related to the topics taught in class. The students had set dates to post these comments of around three complete sentences. As soon as the instructor acknowledged a Facebook-post the students would get a tick added on the gradebook of the virtual learning environment, Learn, which also held their other course material. This assessment item was non-graded and was meant to encourage more spontaneous German language production. Considering this non-graded nature of the assessment item, the students were surprisingly conscientious about their language production and they experienced it similar to a test performance. They said that:

It takes time to write well, that it is reasonably alright, no rubbish. (Interview 8)

I took a long time, I was worried the others could see my stuff. (Interview 4)

It is good you can prepare the sentences beforehand. (Interview 10)

One student was proud:

I wrote it (the comment) by myself without a translator, as if I was doing it in a test.
(Interview 9)

Some students would have preferred shorter entries but more frequently:

Shorter replies would have been good, I lack confidence. (Interview 10)

Shorter entries more often would be better. (Interview 5)

The Facebook-group was meant to facilitate a more casual application of the language taught in the classroom. It was expected that because Facebook was a platform familiar to the students they would feel 'at home' and behave exactly the same as on their private Facebook site. It appeared that students did not accept the Facebook-group in the same way as their private Facebook-site. The Facebook-group was seen as more formal than other groups used for other purposes, because their contributions were part of their assessment. One student commented on the Facebook-assignments, that:

I forget about it and in the end of the semester they suddenly think 'oh yes — I forgot this post', then they are looking at the gradebook and yes — I have to do this.
(Interview 9)

and another student:

As soon as I see the work optional, it means "don't do it". (Interview 11)

I suggested that the students invite German-speaking friends to participate also in order to create a more authentic language environment and to be more connected outside their class and their Facebook-group, explaining the benefits of an extended community. The reaction was mixed, with some students preferring to maintain the Facebook-group as exclusively class-based because they found native-speaking Germans too intimidating:

I found it scary to have German native speakers in the group. (Interview 2).

And another student:

There are no benefits of people I don't know. (Interview 8)

Whereas other students would have liked it to have German native speakers in the Facebook-group:

If there were more of a mix with people who are German speaking, I think I would have learnt more. (Interview 10)

Usefulness and authenticity. Students found the Facebook assignment helped them with developing different skills; one student thought that it improved her reading of German:

Facebook was not of help to write better but to read. (Interview 2),

whereas other students rated it helpful for improving their writing:

Good that we don't get marked. Writing is my weakest point. (Interview 3) or I have more time to process it. If it is in class I don't really get it- I can write it down and think about it and look at it later. (Interview 10)

Another student enjoyed using a more contemporary style of language:

It is a good forum to share modern German and not textbook German, what you are taught in the classroom. (Interview 11)

Facebook as a social platform

Social capital and social presence. The Facebook-group is a group where all members are visible to each other and the attached profiles of each member ensure a more transparent class identity. The group as an exclusive environment, still part of the easily accessible Facebook, but separate, seemed ideal for use as a German language platform because it included not only affordances of video and photo upload with comments attached to create a knowledge base in the target language, but it also helped to create a unique group identity. The working language in the group for the written communication was "German only" to afford total immersion into the target language. The instructor also recommended setting the Facebook interface to

German¹², one of the functions Facebook offers in its settings and a few students made use of it:

I set my phone and Facebook to German, you are faced with German, it is confusing at first; it is very useful. (Interview 7)

When the students were asked about the friends they have on their personal Facebook they answered that the friends they had invited or had accepted an invitation from came from their real lives and were personally known to them (pre-course questionnaire, n= 12). This is in line with the observation by boyd and Ellison et al. (see section 2.4.3) that people prefer to communicate with online friends who live nearby and that they avoid strangers (boyd, 2007; Ellison et al., 2013). This concept of social capital and Facebook will be discussed further in Chapter 6. Facebook seems to be an extension of the students' personal circles of friends. One student answered:

I keep in touch with my school friends. (Interview 2)

The student teacher commented:

Also, als ich angekommen war, da waren kaum Reaktionen, bis ich die Studies tatsächlich im Unterricht kennengelernt habe, mit im Kurs sass- da wurde es besser mit der Beteiligung- durch die Distanz haben die Leute weniger reagiert. When I arrived here, there were hardly any reactions to my posts. When I started to sit in the lessons and got to know the students, it got better – by distance the students did not react so much). (Interview 13)

Another student commented on the physical presence of the student teacher:

It is good that we know her in person. (Interview 6)

The idea behind the Facebook assignment was to integrate German learning into the daily routine of the student and to immerse the student into a world of German language. This would fit with the observations and previous research of boyd (2008) who wrote that students would usually get to know someone and follow up the acquaintanceship by adding the 'new' friend on their SNS site. Facebook has the potential to deepen the friendships the students make in class so that they continue into their world outside the classroom. The German Facebook-group has the potential to foster closer friendships. Asking the students how they

¹² Setting the language of the Facebook site to German was only a recommendation of the instructor and not a requirement of the assignment.

experienced the Facebook-group to create friendships revealed that the Facebook-group has a different status for them than the commonly used Facebook-wall; one student explained, that:

Group (here Facebook-group) is different to wall (Facebook-wall)...in a group, unknown friends are more accepted, and she continued ..I am not directly Facebook-friends with them- with the people I don't know in the group [...] although I am a member, it is like anything public- when you are a member of a group, you don't know any single person or same with the class I suppose. (Interview 11)

Another student confirmed that the functions of the Facebook-group were reserved more for learning and not as much for socializing, she said:

Groups are for learning, groups are expected to be focused on special achievement, they are subject oriented. (Interview 7)

and she accepted people she did not know in person,

If people know what we are doing... I don't need to know people in the group. (Interview 1)

Another student, who had also taken part in the pilot study, expressed her fear of more knowledgeable students in the group and said:

It is intimidating when native speakers are in the group; we need to be more fluent. (Interview 3)

The Facebook-group helped the class to get to know each other faster. One student enjoyed the posts, she said:

It was enjoyable to see the real names because I could relate it to the person but this only works if you know them. (Interview 10)

Some students took the opportunity the Facebook-group offered and extended their network of friends, "befriending" fellow students to their own network of Facebook-friends. One student answered:

I asked two of the students in the German class to be my private Facebook friends. (Interview 3)

and another student:

We (three of us) made a separate group on Facebook to study together for the exam.
(Interview 2)

In 2007, boyd and Ellison observed that friends on SNSs are not the same as friends in the everyday sense; instead, friends provide context by offering users an imagined audience to guide behavioural norms.

Students who were members of the German Facebook-group could not automatically access the private Facebook-profiles of their fellow students unless the students were unaware of the privacy setting of the social media or opted to have an openly accessible profile. The students were in the age group that is used to being exposed on the internet and had a relatively low level of concern about their privacy. To facilitate the process of introducing the class members to each other, the instructor asked them to write about themselves in the first two posts. The first post included their name, age and the subjects they were studying and the second a description of their hobbies as shown in Figure 5.12. Facebook allows the members to see how many and who viewed each entry.

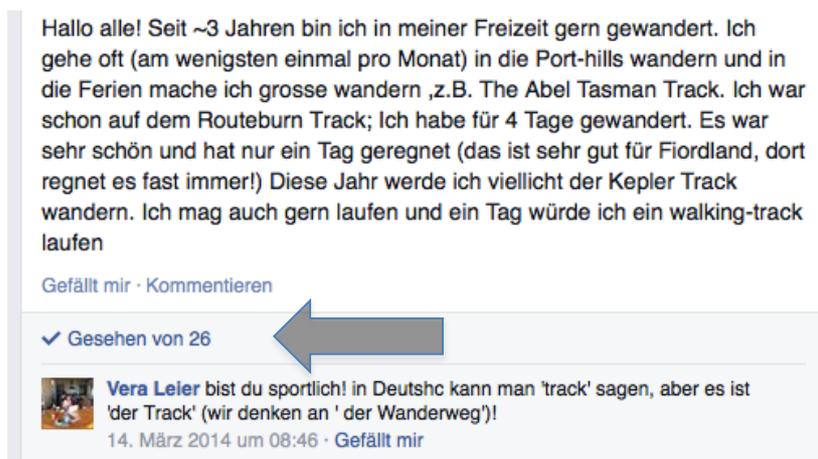


Figure 5.12: “gesehen”- “seen” function

The interest in the Facebook posts was high at the beginning; Figure 5.12 shows 26 “gesehen” (seen) meaning that 26 members of the Facebook-group had looked at the entry.

The procedures for introducing each other online are different from face-to-face, there are no bodies in the corporeal sense; the students online are not able to use facial expression, gesture and body language to add to anything they might actually say in class. The online students do not have their physical bodies in the classroom, they are disembodied (Cunningham, 2014, p. 44). To exist in mediated contexts, people must engage explicitly. On social network sites

this means creating a profile and fleshing out the fields as an act of self-presentation; as an online participant one has to actively and consistently “type oneself into being” to exist and be visible online (Sundén, 2003).

In the Facebook group, the students were given the opportunity to enrich the identities they had already established in German class. They were able to learn about different classmates and find out about similar hobbies and interests:

Guten Tag, ein Hobby von mir ist Fechten. Ich habe zuhause für zwei Jahre Fechten gelernt, und in Neuseeland wurde ich in (my High School) gelernt. Ich mag Fechten, weil es ein Präzisionssport ist. (Facebook-entry 3.3.14). Good day, my hobby is fencing. I learned to fence at home for two years and when I came to New Zealand I learned it again at school. I like fencing because it is a precision sport.

In the unconnected classroom, it would have taken the class members much longer to get information about their classmates or they might not have had the chance to get to know each other at all because of the few lectures a week and the diverse backgrounds of the individual students. Students appreciated the advantage of the Facebook-presence in addition to the classroom teaching, one student commenting:

I was quite surprised – it was interesting, you do relate to a person. I knew a person already and I see something on Facebook I could relate it to them and yes, I would get to know them better. (Interview 10)

Students appreciated these opportunities and commented:

I feel more comfortable in class now. It isn't so scary. Better that you know them (fellow students). (Interview 7)

and another student finds that:

We are more integrated, we can sit next to anyone in class. (Interim interview)

and in the same line a student said that she posted something and then:

I got lots of comments from someone I never sat next to in class. I talked to them [...] and actually sat with them [...] I got to know them a bit better via the internet. [...] I made a friend who is now a friend on my private Facebook. (Interview 9)

Synchronicity. I was surprised how connected the students were to the Facebook-group and how actively they observed; I commented that:

a Facebook post was ‘seen’ within seconds after post, 15 minutes later there were already 11 “seen”-notifications. This tool functions almost like a synchronous communication. (Research diary, 19.06.14)

The German students were also aware of their audience; the instructor overheard one of them saying that she was surprised about the interest in her new post:

I already have 12 likes after 11 minutes after posting a contribution, isn't this good?
(Field note, 2.05.15)

Teacher feedback

Teacher participation and anxiety. As teacher, I had initiated the Facebook-group and explained the assignment. The control mechanisms were teacher oriented at the start but soon became more student driven after the initial steps were taken. The division of power will be analysed in more depth in section 5.3 using activity theory. The German Facebook-group was used as part of the assessment and was explained at the beginning of the semester to the students. The students were well aware of the expectations and experienced the Facebook-group as a learning environment and not a private chat room:

I took a long time, I was worried the others could see my stuff. (Interim interview)

Since the Facebook-group was taken on as a learning platform, my presence, as the teacher, was not rejected as a disturbing factor. Students commented:

the teacher should be involved, everybody knows who she is. (Interview 2)

...nobody thinking that you are any different from the rest. The class was so relaxed and friendly, [...] I don't think that you as an instructor would be a problem [...] it was good that you were posting and it was good to get a real example [...] we were not wasting our time. (Interview 10)

Usefulness. Unlike in the pilot study, in the main study there was teacher feedback, commenting on selected mistakes carefully chosen to support the teaching modules. The students appreciated the feedback they were given:

I liked it and I liked the corrections. (Interview 5)

She corrects us, that is so useful. (Interview 7)

The corrections were carefully selected to complement grammar structures taught in class; grammar structures were chosen to extend the students' grammar proficiency:

We can see on Facebook that we want to use certain structures but we have not used it yet. You can see that we try and you explain it in class later like for example the genitive the other day. (Interview 7)

Some students would have liked a more extensive correction scheme:

You need to be harsher with feedback. (Interview 4)

5.2.3 Section summary

The previous section presented the analysis of the data set using thematic analysis. The themes and categories were listed in a table and described in narrative form. The next part of this chapter (section 5.2) will present the findings of the data analysis using activity theory as a theoretical framework.

5.3 Activity theory analysis of the data set

This section will present the analysis of selected data with the help of activity theory (AT), using activity systems to visualise the data. The AT analysis works to deepen and structure the data description. The concept of activity systems and their components was described in depth in Chapter 3. A key belief of activity theory is that “activity is a historically developed phenomenon” (Jonassen, 2000, p. 108), therefore, it is not enough to simply describe a phenomenon, one must also understand its history or how that phenomenon has emerged and developed over time (Cole & Engeström, 1993; Lantolf & Appel, 1994).

In line with this understanding, the data collection of this study will be presented by examining the collective and individual activity systems of the students at the beginning of the language course, throughout the course and at the end of the course. The presentation of activity systems will complement the ethnographical narrative and the AT analysis will focus on the research question of this study:

What are the practices and perspectives of students and teachers using Facebook as part of the curriculum in a German language class?

The aim is to understand the characteristics of the Facebook environment in the learning and teaching of German at tertiary level in New Zealand, and to understand the implications of

using social networking sites for students.

5.3.1 The unit of analysis

This study refers to Engeström's interpretation of expanded activity theory (Engeström, 2001) (see section 3.1 and Figure 5.13). He introduces five principles, the first of which is called "the unit of analysis"; this is a collective, artefact-mediated and object-oriented activity system (AS), seen in its network relations to other activity systems (p. 136).

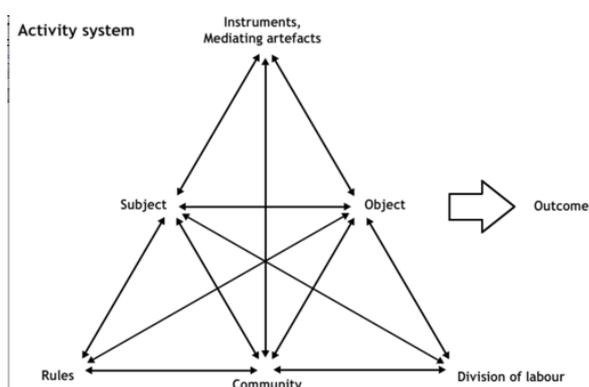


Figure 5.13: Basic activity system adapted from Engeström (1987)

In this study the collective AS is the activity of the entire German class using Facebook as part of their course assessment. The components of this activity system include the collective subject of the students, the central object and related intended outcomes, mediational tools and artefacts, the community, the division of labour, and rules. After the initial presentation of the collective AS, sub-categories of the collective AS, based on the fourth cycle of deductive data coding (Figure 4.4), will be introduced to help with the understanding of the activity of the learning of German within a social media environment.

The activity system associated with the Facebook assignment in the German intermediate class was analysed from the students' perspective. This is presented in section 5.3.2. The relationships between categories of the activity system and the contradictions they highlight are then examined with respect to the development or historicity of the system under investigation. The students' individual activity systems will also be explored (section 5.3.3) and finally, an expanded activity system will be presented (Figure 5.16).

Contradictions resulting from tensions and disturbances within the activity system will be identified (section 5.3.10) and the underlying reasons for these contradictions will be

explored. The contradictions will be described and discussed further in Chapter 6.

5.3.2 The students' viewpoint

This section puts forward activity systems based on the analysis of the students' interviews, questionnaires and Facebook-posts. The activity system is visualised from the students' point of view with the entire class as the unit of analysis.

The curriculum of the German intermediate course under investigation consisted of several assessment units or of several different activity systems (see Figure 5.14). The unit of analysis (see Chapter 3), that is the activity system in this study, is the Facebook activity which is one part of the overall course assessment. This unit of analysis is situated within a set of six activity systems all interconnected to create the overall German course assessment in line with the requirements specified for B1 proficiency level.

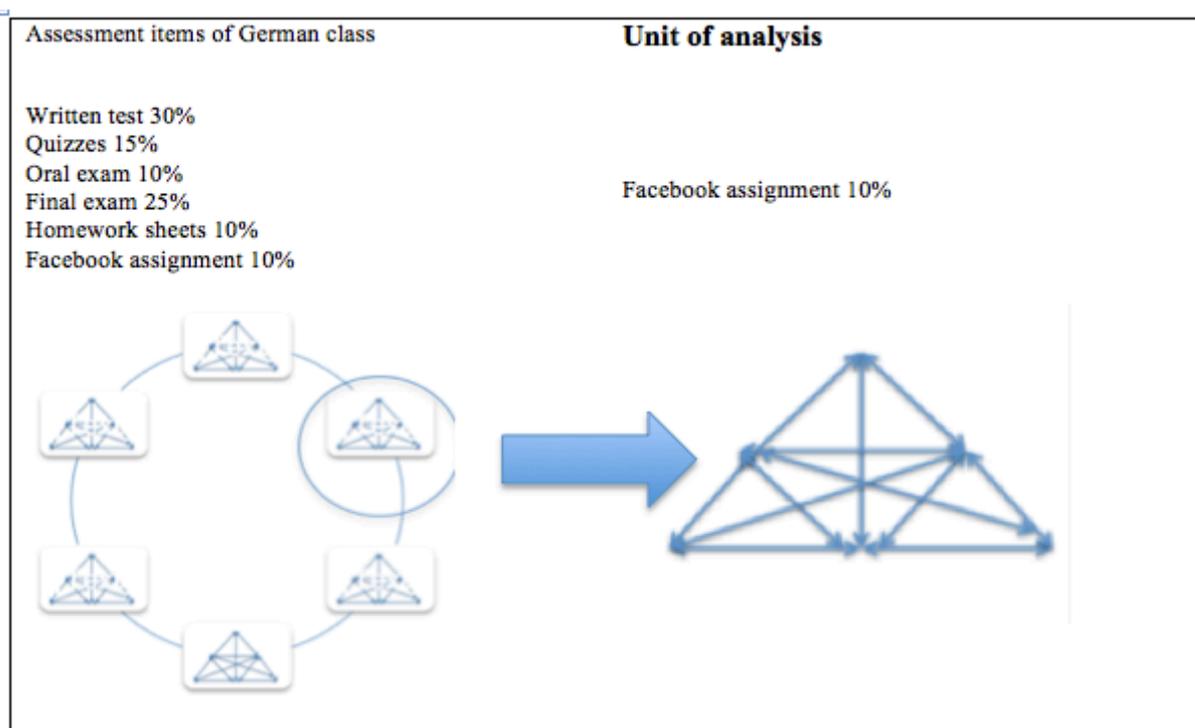


Figure 5.14: Activity systems (AS) of the total assessment of the German class

Activity systems are always “a part of a network of activity systems that in its totality constitutes human society” (Roth & Lee, 2007). Here, the Facebook-based assessment task is part of the assessment and can be seen as one of several activity systems. In this first analysis, the entire class is seen as an independent unit. Later (Figure 5.15), the activity systems of individual students will be shown, to describe how the objects or motives of the different

activity systems come together to create a collective object, leading to the intended outcome. The analysis looks at the different categories of the activity systems using AT principles to describe the activity under observation. The principles applied are

1. The activity is object-oriented; the students want to learn German;
2. The activity is mediated using language, computers and Facebook;
3. The activity is transforming and changing over time, the activity develops during the course.

First, the different categories of the collective AS will be described, then the dialectical relationships between the different categories will be presented with examples from the data collected. The dialectical approach is suited in this analysis because it aims to explain the change, movement, and interconnections, with their opposite and contradictory sides in unity (Bødger & Nylandsted Klomose, 2011, p. 218).

5.3.3 Subjects involved in the activity of learning German

Defining the participants' activity systems at the beginning of the course allowed the researcher to track the students throughout the research, observing the categories and interactions of the AS while they changed during the course. To establish the students' initial activity systems, the pre-course questionnaires, personal interviews and Facebook-posts of the students were analysed (Cycle 4 in Figure 4.4). This analysis entailed identifying the components of the activity system by answering specific questions designed to highlight their defining characteristics (see Appendix J). When the German course began, the participants each had their own activity system. Their initial activity systems appeared to be typical of university level students in a German course in New Zealand. Each student's activity system began with the same subject (the student participating in the course), community (all the members of the Facebook-group), division of labour (between the instructors, the students and the student teacher, established by the course procedures), and rules (formal and informal). The students had the same object, learning German. By working towards the same object using the same tools, the target language and Facebook, the intermediate German class, including all the individual members (subjects) is seen as the collective subject in this system.

5.3.4 Object of the activity

The central object of the whole class activity system is learning the foreign language, German. Figure 15 shows how different students have different motives which lead to the object in the collective activity system (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006).

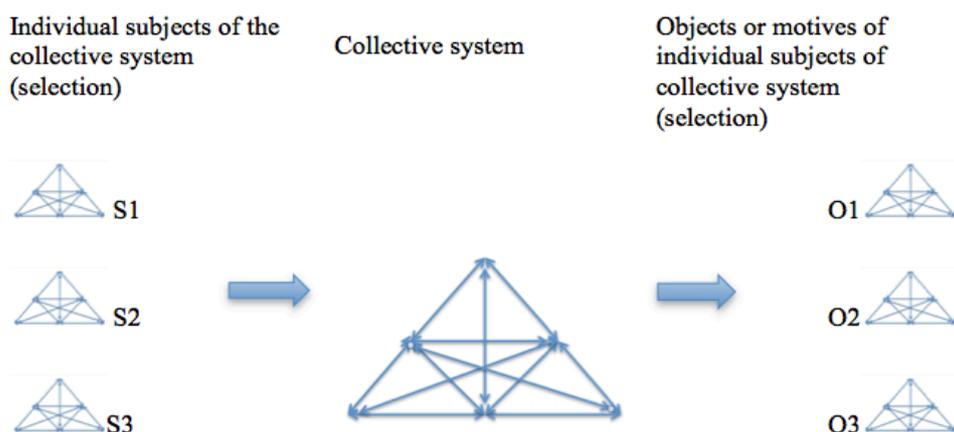


Figure 5.15: Individual student's activity within the collective

Every student had a different perception of the object or motive to do with learning German. Some students answered in their interviews that they were learning German to be able to travel to and in Germany, other students wanted to use the language to help their careers in business or engineering studies, or gave reasons like:

I always loved German, my mother did it as a degree, and my brother is very good at it. (Interview 3)

My ancestors are from Germany. (Interview 4)

I like written German, because I study music. (Interview 6)

The object of this selected AS, the Facebook assignment (see Figure 5.15) is learning German as part of the overall course assessment. All of the course participants had equal access to mediational tools such as the internet and its tools, Facebook and online dictionaries and grammars. One variation to the tools was that some students used the internet via smartphones, other students used computers, usually laptops. All the students were able to

communicate in the foreign language, German, with variations because the participants had different ability levels in German prior to taking the online course.

Different motivations the students reported for wanting to learn German included:

Ich lerne Deutsch, weil ich habe viele Freunde in Deutschland. Auch ich in Deutschland gewohnt für 9 Monate. (Facebook-entry)
(I learn German, because I have many friends in Germany. I also lived in Germany for 9 months.)

Die Familie von meinem Vater kommt aus Deutschland, also das war die Gründe für meine interessant. (Facebook-entry)
(My father's family is originally from Germany, this was the reason that I took German.)

Ich heiße, ich habe Deutsch für fünf Jahre in der Schule gelernt. (Facebook-entry)
(I have taken German for five years in High School.)

5.3.5 How do the subjects try to achieve these motives or objects?

The course investigated in this study is an intermediate level course which requires prior knowledge of the foreign language. The students met the pre-requisites in different ways. Some students started learning the foreign language at university whereas other students had learned it in Germany or at high school. These different linguistic ability levels resulted in the mediational tools being used in individual ways by the students. Students with more experience were able to refer more to existing knowledge while others with less experience relied more on mediational tools such as translation websites or other help sites on the internet.

Facebook as a mediation tool was familiar to all the students who enjoyed the fact that they did not have to learn a new language software but could apply their most familiar online communication tool to doing the German assignment.

...killing time with Facebook, if you have to wait somewhere for example. (Interview 2)

Facebook is such an immediate and quick communication tool, there should be abundance of use possible. (researcher diary)

5.3.6 Who does what in the AS? Distribution of power.

The category of division of labour included the teacher who planned the course and examined the students, students who were learning and wanted to pass the course with their status defined in the course syllabus, and the student teachers who were assisting the teacher and motivated the students during their course of learning. Each party had a different level of power, and the relationships between them were vertical or horizontal (see section 4.3.1 Participants of this study and also section 4.6.2 Discussion on participant observation). During the course, the power relations within the AS shifted:

Some of the students showed that they knew about topics better than others and they helped each other. (Research diary)

One student commented that the instructor should be more strict:

We should be required to post more often. (Interview 5)

5.3.7 Community

The community in the AS is the group of people who were part of the Facebook-group: the teacher, the students, the student teachers and the students from the other university. The collective subject, the students of the course, was situated in this unique German language community. The students wanted to keep the community closed and non-accessible to native German speakers.

It is probably good not to invite German-speaking friends to the group, that makes us feel safer. (Interview 2)

It is intimidating to post if there are native speakers. (Interview 1)

I would like to have native speakers maybe next semester when we feel more confident about the language. (Interview 5)

5.3.8 Rules for the activity

Rules or norms were part of the description of the assignment presented on a handout with the description of the course and its objectives. The rules also embraced the norms connected to the use of Facebook, Facebook-etiquette, including a Facebook-smart guide (see Appendix C) to inform the students about the safe use of Facebook and how to protect their privacy. These rules and policies were consistent for each student.

5.3.9 Historicity of the course (development of the activity during the course)

The presentations and visual representations in this section are based on data collected in field notes, the research diary, the final and interim interviews with the students and course questionnaires. In order to uncover the contradictions of the AS, dialectical components of the collective system will be outlined and described as they appeared in the data during the period of the course. Most of the components or categories of the activity developed during the course, the most noticeable developments happening in the components of “division of labour” and “outcome” as shown in Figure 5.16.

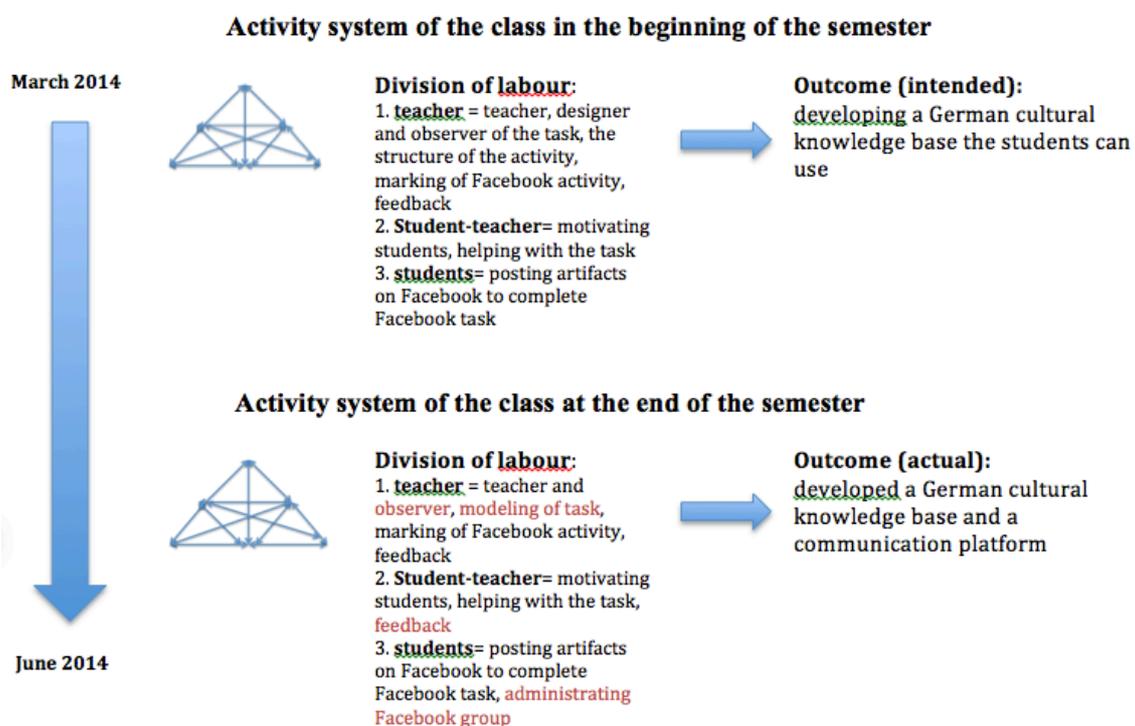


Figure 5.16: Timeline of activity in the beginning and at the end of the semester

The red writing shows the changes in the component of the division of labour in the activity system of the German class.

However, the purpose here is to address the most significant changes in the students’ activity systems as shown in Figure 5.17, showing four contradictions. The analysis of the following contradictions will be presented: 1) the participants (subject) and Facebook as their mediational tool, 2) the subject and the activity’s rules, 3) the subject and the community of the AS, and finally 4) the division of labour and the community.

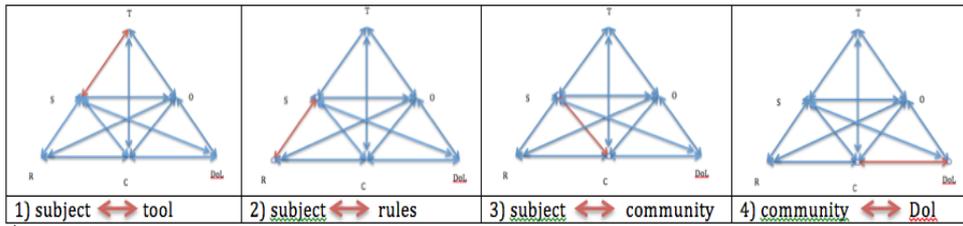


Figure 5.17: Contradictions emerged at the end of the course

5.3.10 Contradictions

1) Relationship between subject and tools

This first contradiction (Figure 5.18) shows tension between the components of subject and tools.

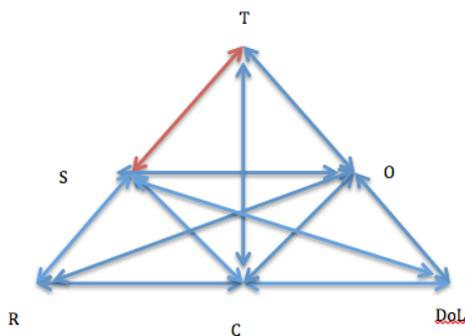


Figure 5.18: Contradiction between subject and tools

The students in the class were diverse in terms of ability and access to and use of technology. Many of the students perceived Facebook software to be easy to use, familiar and part of their online lives:

I don't use anything else (but Facebook), that's basically all. Everybody looks at Facebook and lives on Facebook nowadays. (Interview 4)

Facebook is the easiest and people don't need to learn how to use another tool. (Interview 10)

I generally use Facebook about 5 hours a day. As soon as I turn my computer on, I check it. It is the easiest and the most widely spread, not all my friends use email. (Interview 11)

Contrary to the common assumption that the computer-savvy millennial student lives a double life, both on social media and in real life, and is always connected to the internet, some students revealed a low level of interest in the Facebook-platform:

I was never a Facebook fan, never used it much. I don't like Facebook, I know about the privacy. (Interview 8)

I have a problem with Facebook, because there are quite a lot of privacy issues with Facebook. (Interview 10)

I don't do social media. It is a hassle when you don't use it often. (Post-course questionnaire)

Some students expressed feeling bored by what they saw as a very common, mainstream and possibly overused platform:

First I was excited but Facebook is now a couple of years old; you need to get your excitement back, novelty wears off. (Interview 9)

People got tired of Facebook, everybody posts at the same time. (Interview 10)

As a medium to learn German, Facebook was well received and accepted by the students as a valuable learning tool:

It is a good forum to share modern German and not textbook German, what you are taught in class. (Interview 11)

Facebook is a friendly environment. (Interview 10)

It was scary to write in German in the beginning, I got used to it. (Interview 6)

You can write a lot and it is technically not complicated. (Interview 4)

2) The relationship between subject and rules

The second contradiction (Figure 5.19) occurred between rules and subject.

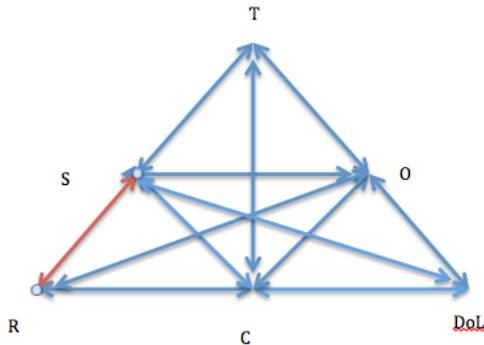


Figure 5.19: Contradiction between subject and rules

Rules and norms in this AS are the assessment rules and prescribed norms for how to use Facebook in an educational setting. The students accepted the assignment task and all posted contributions to the Facebook-site as required in the rules. The outline of the assignment was handed out to the students as a hard copy at the beginning of the semester and also explained in class and an electronic copy of the assignment instructions was accessible on the class VLE throughout the course. The students seemed to understand the rules and conform to them; they showed keen interest in the activity at the beginning of the course. They eventually lost interest which became evident when the activity on the Facebook-site showed a decline in participation (see Figure 5.2), partly because of a misunderstanding of the assignment instructions:

I did not add comments because I often thought I was too late. (Interview 7)

I found it very interesting and helpful! But sometimes I am a bit confused about one or two topics. Yes, maybe the topics were not interesting for me. (Post-course questionnaire)

Topics are not clear. I am not sure what to say. (Interview 5)

Other students were concerned about the privacy on Facebook. The researcher handed out a Facebook-safe guide and supplied instructions for how the students could set their own private Facebook site to a level of open or more closed status. The students were asked to follow the advice in the guide and use Facebook responsibly to protect their privacy to the level they felt comfortable with. Students still expressed anxiety about their online privacy:

I don't want everybody to see my whole life on a page. (Interview 8)

Privacy on Facebook is an issue. I don't like it. (Interview 10)

3) The relationship between subject and community

The third contradiction (Figure 5.20) occurred between subject and the community.

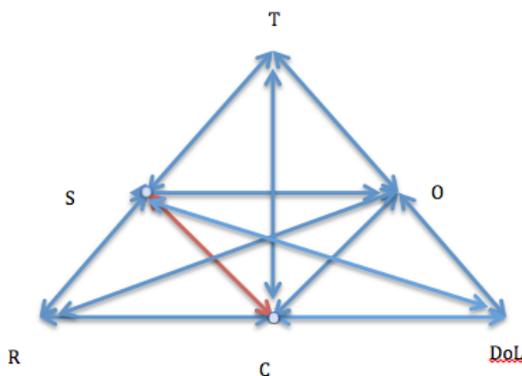


Figure 5.20: Contradiction between community and subject

The community of this collective activity system included all the members of the German class; they were interested in completing the German assessment activities in order to pass the German course. The community also included students from another New Zealand institution (other students) whose instructor wanted them to take part in this activity; they invited themselves to the Facebook-group. The students of the other institution were part of the community of the activity system. Their activity was limited and did not contribute to the development of the activity system, so they were not considered in this research study. Two student teachers and one instructor were the teaching staff in the community who also

contributed on the group.

The AS in this present study is analysed from the perspective of the enrolled German language students; they are the subjects of the AS. According to Engeström (1987) the community of an AS shares the same object. The student teachers, students from a different institution and the instructor participating on the Facebook-site each bring their own AS into the community of the AS in this study.

As described previously (section 4.3.1), two student teachers were affiliated to the German class. One student teacher (Student Teacher One) had returned to Germany after having assisted the instructor the semester prior to the research period. She was known in real life to most of the students and they accepted her in their virtual group environment as a member, but she believed that the acceptance of her virtual presence needed to be linked to her physical presence:

Und als ich gefragt wurde, ob ich nach der Sommerpause noch einmal auf Facebook mitmache, habe ich das gemacht. Einige kannten mich noch. Aber ich fand, durch die Distanz, dass die Leute weniger darauf reagierten. (Interview 13)

(And when I was asked after the summer break to join the Facebook-group, I did that. Some people still knew me. But I thought that because of the distance, fewer people reacted to me.)

The new student teacher (Student Teacher Two) joined the class in the second half of the semester. Before she physically joined the class she posted information about herself and news items to the class Facebook-site; she did not get the same response and acknowledgement as Student Teacher One. The interest rose when Student Teacher Two arrived in New Zealand and physically joined the class; then the students in the class started to interact with her online. One assignment topic required the students to give the new student teacher some travel information about New Zealand. The students enjoyed this topic and the opportunity to get to know the new student teacher:

She wanted to know, that was good. She made it much more interesting. She had the need to know. If it is an assessment, purely for assessment sake, it can get boring for a few people. (Interview 9)

The student teacher (Student Teacher Two) entered the group. That was good that we know her in person now. (Interview 6)

Figure 5.21 shows different members of the Facebook-community with their own activity systems (AS1 - AS4). I took part in the group as a participant observer, instructor and researcher.

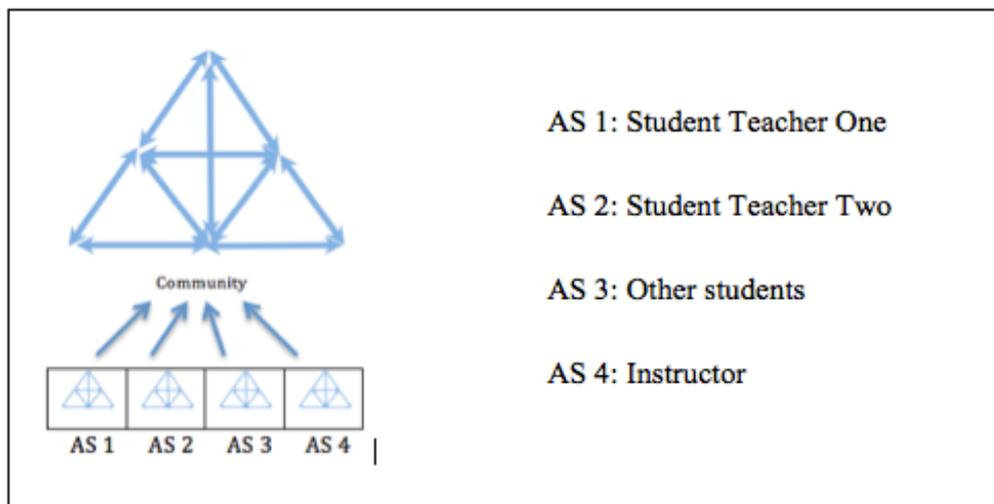


Figure 5.21: Members of the Facebook-community

Each AS of the two student teachers (AS 1 and AS 2) has the same tools but does not share rules or the central object with the collective AS under research. The students of the other institution used the same tools and shared the same object of learning the foreign language, with the difference that they were not being assessed; they followed different rules to achieve their German learning. They behaved very passively on the Facebook site; they did not contribute with posts but only observed the development of the class:

We had some people from outside the class in the group. It did not really work because they did not really post things. (Interview 9)

..die Leute von ausserhalb haben oft nicht den Anspruch viel beizutragen, weil sie nicht wissen, für was es ist. (Interview 13)
 (The people don't want to contribute, because they don't know what it is for.)

As a native speaker, I performed the same activities as if I was a participant of the Facebook-group, using the same tools to post contributions to share with the group. I was constrained by different rules because I was not doing the prescribed assignment, and I had a different object in that instead of learning German, I wanted to teach it to the students and research their learning.

4) The relationship between community and division of labour

The fourth contradiction (Figure 5.22) analysed occurred between the community of the AS and the division of labour.

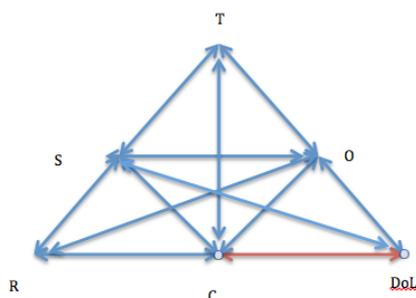


Figure 5.22: Contradiction between community and division of labour

The community was also subjected to changes in the inner *division of labour*, including overall horizontal compartmentalisation and vertical hierarchisation (separation of planning and execution) within the research field, here the Facebook-class setting (Engeström, 1987, p. 220). The members of the group, instructor, students, student teachers and students from other institutions, all had their unique levels of power which changed in strength during the course (see section 4.3.1). The instructor started in a vertical relationship to the students at the beginning of the course since she had the power to inform students about the assignment and initiated the Facebook-group. As soon as the first student entered the group the administration tasks were handed over step by step to students of the class; the instructor withdrew from the organisation of the group, developing a less vertical and controlling position within it.

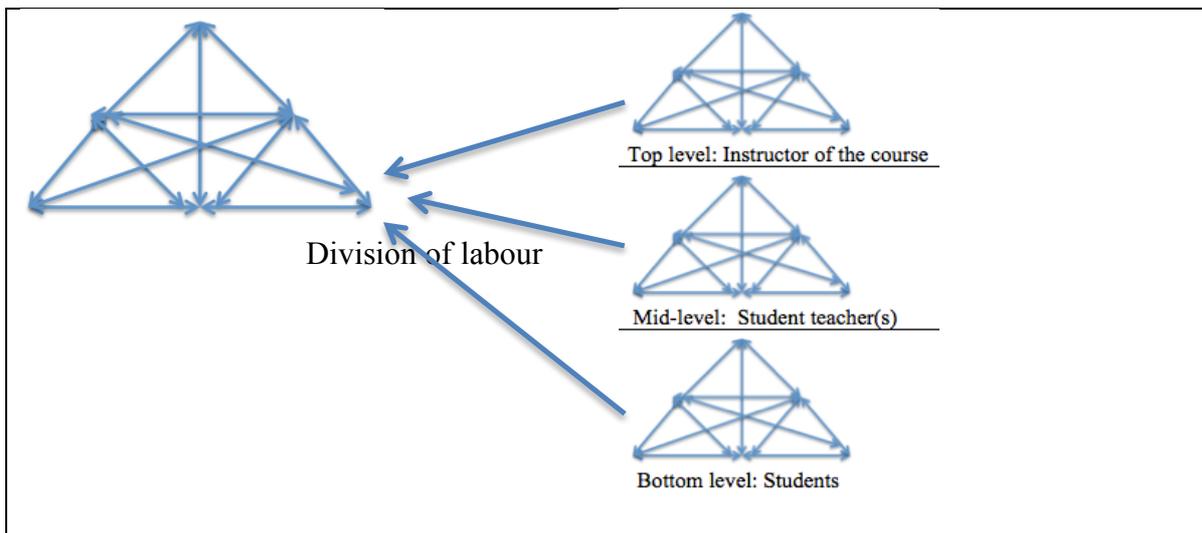


Figure 5.23: Facebook-group members and their status in the division of labour

Figure 5.23 shows the different levels of power within the division of labour. The students of the group had horizontal relationships to each other as they were subjected to the same assignment and controlled by the teacher who was marking the assignment. The students of the other institution did not participate in the division of labour, they were not given any tasks but were solely observers of the group. The student teachers were in the middle between the students and the teacher with vertical relationships to both. They were native speakers of the target language and were asked by the teacher to give corrective feedback for students' posts but they were not the creators of the assignment and had no impact on the final marks of the students. The students preferred the teacher to give the feedback and not the student teachers. The students perceived the participations of the diverse community members as follows:

Sometimes one person is too dominant. (Interview 4)

It is good the teacher makes corrections (Interview 6)

One student recommended empowering the class representative:

We have class reps. That could be an add-on to the class duties, tag on this responsibility. They could be in charge of looking after the group. (Interview 7)

5.4 Summary

Section 5.3 has presented the findings of the internet-mediated collaborative activity using Facebook and showed how the participating subjects of the activity worked through contradictions and reorganised the activity system through the adoption of new solutions that

took the form of a shift in the division of labour, tools, rules and objects within the AS (Figure 5.16). The findings highlight the interaction of multiple agents, and the role of the components of the AS, i.e., tools, rules, and division of labour, in both mediating and transforming the activity (Nardi, 1996). Most of the students interviewed tended to focus their final reflections on the challenges they faced to integrate the Facebook exercise into their busy assessment schedule and they indicated that they perceived it as an educational performance rather than a leisure type activity. The two student teachers pointed out that it was important to be visible to the students and not merely a virtual member of the community. The student teachers also reported that the students did not accept them on the same level as the instructor and that the students did not appreciate their constructive feedback.

Finally, activity systems introduced in this chapter are visualisations of the activity which happened in this study during the period of research. The various activity systems are used to communicate the findings. These will be interpreted and discussed in the next chapter (Chapter 6). The activity systems themselves were not the core of the findings, but rather used as tools that enabled the visualisation and description of the observations made to complement the thematical analysis in section 5.2. The question remains, is Facebook the right tool for the job, that is the job of constructing a sociocultural environment within a German language classroom where students can practise spontaneous writing but also create a virtual community with a unique community spirit which the students would not experience if they were only in a classroom situation?

Chapter 6

Discussion and implications

This chapter will discuss the results described previously in Chapter 5. They will be synthesised and their theoretical, methodological, and practical implications will be discussed. The discussion will be in two parts, first, discussion on the ethnographic findings (sections 6.1 – 6.3), followed by a section 6.4 on theoretical implications and 6.5 on methodological implications.

In order to address the research question which was to describe and understand the practices and perspectives of German students when using a Facebook-group as part of their German curriculum, I will firstly discuss the place where the activity took place, i.e. the Facebook-group. Then, I will move on and discuss the activity the students pursued on this site and how they did it.

6.1 Facebook as the location for the research study

I had assumed that the students would communicate in a Facebook-group in a way similar to the communication mode on the Facebook-wall which some students were using all the time (at the time of the data collection) to post content and receive immediate feedback or just to view and possibly respond to content. The Facebook-wall was a virtual meeting place on Facebook where friends and “fans” of the students could post their thoughts, views, or criticisms for everyone to see. The students used their individual Facebook-walls to express their “true self” (Tosun, 2012), whereas a Facebook-group is a space which allows users to share resources with easy filters to post updates, photos or documents and message other group members. A Facebook-group can be described as the individual’s identification with a virtual community whose users share the same interests (Sanchez, Cortijo, & Javed, 2014). A Facebook-group is regarded more as an information resource than an online socialising place like the Facebook-wall. The students in the German language group treated their group just like a one-way information and communication channel. They always looked at the entries of the group members—we know this as they could be traced under the “seen” button—but they rarely acknowledged other group members’ posts by clicking on “like”, or writing a comment.

My results show that not all the students enjoyed the Facebook-assignment. Some found it distracting because they had to access their personal Facebook to access the German Facebook-group. They were tempted to waste time on scrolling through their Facebook-wall for news instead of looking at the German Facebook-group; other students had concerns about the privacy of the Facebook-group.

Despite the drawbacks of the Facebook-group set-up as a learning platform, it was well received as a useful tool to share additional cultural knowledge, especially after the semester was finished and the students no longer met in class. They kept the group active and some students continued to post information about German events for the others to see. It was encouraging to observe that these posts were also written in German. Writing in German became more relaxed, the students could practise their informal German writing in a non-threatening environment, and they could build a unique German community on an authentic socialising platform (Mazer, et.al, 2007). Mazer and his colleagues noted that by accessing a social networking website, students may see similarities with peers and instructor's personal interests which can lead to more comfortable communication and learning outcomes.

6.2 The Facebook assignment

The students were asked to use the Facebook-group for their assignment but it was also intended to become a place to get to know each other, an extension of their classroom. The language use required on this group was the target language, German. The students had to add content and share German cultural artefacts. Some students did not like the set topics and did not want to participate and share information.

In the context of second language acquisition, the sociocultural approach to language learning views students as active learners who become involved in their own learning process by engaging with others through authentic interaction (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). Given the versatility of the Facebook-site, it is likely that an online public resource, where the students of the class can see each others' writing in German, could positively impact the learning experience of many students and be a spring board for real-world activities that are not necessarily associated with the educational environment (Blattner & Lomicka, 2012) and extend the knowledge base taught in class.

It was expected that the language used on the Facebook-group would be informal, relaxed and focused on the students experiencing the language in its context. Informal language use is usually not taught in a formal classroom setting. Facebook seemed the ideal environment to

practise this informal communication, a mode of language which is close to spoken language. Nevertheless, the use of informal language did not happen as the students felt anxious about performing writing tasks in the target language. They knew that they were being seen by the others in the class and felt performance anxiety. They prepared their posts as if they were formal assignment tasks. In the interview, one student answered that she would prepare several drafts before posting the actual contribution to the Facebook-group. These long posts did not correspond with the norms of Facebook-etiquette where the expectation is that multimedia posts are accompanied by short descriptions only. The way the students handled the task appeared very formal and academically-oriented. This behaviour was observed in previous research, i.e. S. Wang & Vasquez (2014) whose study revealed that posts in Chinese on Facebook did impact the participants' writing ability in the aspect of quantity, but did not demonstrate impact on improvement in the aspect of quality.

6.3 Students' attitudes towards the Facebook assignment

The students appeared excited about the prospect of having Facebook, a communication platform familiar to them, as part of their university learning. The first post they were required to make was to introduce themselves either in a recorded video or audio message. The students were very reluctant to proceed with this self-disclosing contribution. The teacher arranged to make the first post together in class-time so the students were able to get support. This procedure was in line with Steel and Levy (2013) who reminded practitioners that even very familiar platforms such as Facebook may need training if used in a context other than the one the software was designed for.

The students' persistent reluctance to add content to the Facebook-group motivated me as the teacher to model each artefact post to show them the format the posts were meant to be in and the kind of content expected. The students enjoyed my contributions and were more engaged in writing their own posts after they had been shown the format required.

Perception of feedback and teacher's contribution. I believed that the Facebook-group would be the ideal platform for the students to develop their autonomous learning. I encouraged them right from the beginning to administer and take ownership of their group, keeping minimal presence in the background as a facilitator if needed. Soon it became obvious that the students were not very actively involved in maintaining the Facebook-group unless I stepped in on a regular basis to give feedback. The students reported enjoying the corrective and acknowledging feedback, and would post more regularly if feedback was

received immediately. This is in line with work of Tu (2000) who found that “when an immediate response is expected and is not received, interactivity is less, social presence decreases” (p. 30). The students’ preference for corrective feedback came as a surprise, because feedback, and in particular corrective feedback, might be expected to impact on the students’ willingness to contribute to the Facebook-group and have a negative effect on their confidence building (Krashen, 1982). The posts were visible to every class member, and students were anxious at the beginning about revealing their level of German proficiency. The need for feedback is in line with the literature (Krashen, 1981; Swan & Shih, 2005) and confirmed that feedback, showing interest in students by acknowledging their work, is an important component for motivating them (Tu, 2000).

Active and passive behaviour on the Facebook-group. While the Facebook-group members posted more and more content, the teacher observed that interaction, such as making comments about the contribution of others or acknowledging them, was kept to a minimum of one response to others per topic by the fellow students, i.e. the platform appeared to be a one-way street, almost like a repository for assignment topics.

The students who did not comment on any artefact posts might be characterised as passive users of the site. An active user would be a student who actively contributed to the site with comments and engaged with other students by acknowledging their entries. This may, however, miss some of the nuance affordances of acknowledgement that Facebook groups offer.

Table 6.1 below shows the understanding of active and passive language use. The first row shows the traditional way and the second row shows the way the students appeared to have used this site.

Table 6.1: Interactive behaviour on the Facebook-group

	Active	Passive
Traditional, non virtual understanding of interaction	Active contribution by adding content and writing comments	Not contributing either in written or spoken form – just reading
Students' understanding of interaction in the Facebook-group	Adding content and writing comments. Acknowledgment by clicking on “like” Observing by clicking on artefact and being aware that one’s name is listed under “seen” button.	Not interacting with the website, not leaving a digital footprint - name does not appear on the Facebook-group, just viewing (without clicking on the comment)



The table (Table 6.1) shows that the conventional understanding of passive and active engagement and interaction has changed in virtual environments. According to boyd (2014) users’ behaviour on social networks can be compared with the way a flaneur walks the streets. The term “internet flaneur”, sometimes also referred to as “digital flaneur”, (boyd, 2014, p. 183) is a metaphor which goes back to Beaudelaire’s description of the person who ambled through the grand new shopping boulevards of Paris at the end of the 19th century, and, as boyd defines it, the flaneur is an individual who walks the streets not to go anywhere in particular but in order to see and be seen. The flaneur is neither fully an exhibitionist nor fully a voyeur at any moment, but a little of both all the time (boyd, 2014, p. 203).

This type of digital flaneur is similar to the behaviour of the German students who, despite taking little action in posting interactive comments, were still interested in interacting with the group and they wanted to be recognised by the group. The “seen” feature on Facebook-group allows their fellow students to see who looked at their entries and in what chronological order. This feature is powerful because it reveals that a fellow student clicked on the contribution, looked at it, showed interest in it and was willing to be seen. This is similar to boyd’s flaneur entering the shops on the street but not talking to the people inside and not interacting by buying a product, but still being influenced by the shop display or content. The student in the German class would click on the artefact, watch, read about or listen to the artefact and would potentially gain deeper knowledge of the German culture without actively adding content or writing comments.

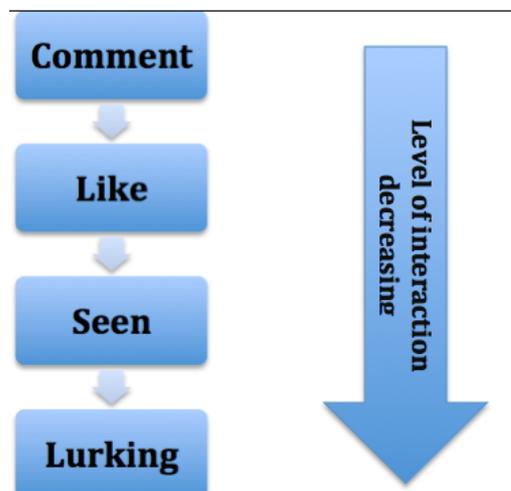
The digital flaneur is not to be confused with the passive observer of a SNS termed a “lurker” (Brandtzaeg & Heim, 2011). That term has a more negative connotation, more like someone who spies, someone who does not want to be seen. People who lurk are the ones who are not clicking on the artefacts entries, and therefore do not leave a digital foot print behind (Plüss, 2014). The table below (Table 6.2) shows the different levels of digital interaction. The features “comment”, “like” and “seen” are interactive. The Facebook-group members can see who is active on the group site. Lurkers are present on the site but not visible to the group members. The existence of “lurkers” in the class was confirmed through the interview data. Students answered that:

I scroll down but do not click on the posts. (Interview 9)

I find it too much information at once, I can only look at the posts. (Interview 10)

The arrow in Table 6.2 indicates how the level of interaction decreases.

Table 6.2: Level of interaction on the Facebook-group site



Transition to personal Facebook-use. After the Facebook-group became more established towards the middle of the semester, the students gained more confidence and actually stepped out of the assignment task and its educational scene and occasionally treated the site as a social place. They posted questions about private matters, such as travels, cooking tips or how to knit. They also created or advertised events. After the end of the semester the Facebook-group continued to exist and was kept as a private place to announce events or share

information about Germany or German in New Zealand (see Figure 5.3). The students finally took ownership of the group and used it autonomously as it was originally intended, still communicating in German. It took time for the students to establish the Facebook-group, they had to overcome the pressure of being assessed for their work on the group but by the time the assessment period was over they were familiar with the affordances of the tool and free from their use of it being assessed.

6.3.1 Social coherence and the Facebook-group

The Facebook-group was used in a class with students who had not met before and did not socialise on campus except in the German language class sessions. They did not know about the German proficiency of fellow students and therefore initially felt anxious to write in German on the Facebook-group.

The Facebook-group was intended to enhance the social coherence between the students and create a closer and more intimate learning community. Each student joined the Facebook-group with a unique Facebook-profile. Before they joined the group they were reminded to secure their profiles and only reveal the information about themselves that they chose to disclose. Surprisingly, the students opted to show their profiles and did not take much precaution to protect them. Maybe it was socially not “cool” to hide. By being able to access the Facebook profiles, the students were able to find out about similarities with their classmates in a much shorter time than would have happened during regular class-time, if at all. Students made use of this channel to get to know one another both in person and online and the atmosphere in the class became very comfortable. Soon students also befriended each other on their personal Facebook-sites and towards the end of the semester individual students got together in smaller Facebook- study groups. Although the students did not seem to be concerned about their privacy, it was interesting to find out that they did not opt for an extended community on the Facebook-group but preferred to stay as a small class group. The students were given the choice of inviting German native speakers who did not belong to the class but were personal friends of other students to create a more authentic Facebook-group. For the students however, the prospect of having native speakers of German on the Facebook-group appeared intimidating.

The fear of native speakers might have to do partially with performance anxiety but also with the fact that the students did not know the German speakers personally. Users of SNSs prefer to be online friends with people they know in real life. Ellison et al. (2013) confirm in their

study that SNS users who know each other face-to-face are more likely to relax into an online platform, are more interactive, and use the online platform as an extension to their real lives.

The preference of communicating with people who are known in real life was also obvious when the students interacted with the two student teachers affiliated to the German class. As described in section 4.3.1, one student teacher was known to the class and received regular and immediate feedback when posting content to the Facebook-group. The second student teacher had not started her appointment but wanted to make herself known to the class prior to her arrival in New Zealand. When she posted content and added questions she hardly ever got any response. The same phenomenon happened with the distance students who were shy about contributing to the site and did not disclose information about themselves. Social coherence appeared to develop among the group members who not only knew each other virtually but also face-to-face. This behaviour is aligned with Haythornthwaite's (2002) observation that the highest level of social coherence was thought to exist face-to-face and decreasing with less personal forms of communication. Other researchers like Jacques and Salmon (2008) or Salmon (2016) recommended icebreaker activities to help team building and socialisation in physical and virtual classroom situations. For most of the students in this course, this was not a factor, as they also met in class.

The table below (Table 6.3) shows the degree of openness the students have with regard to welcoming members to the Facebook-group and interacting with them. The arrow shows the decrease of willingness to communicate.

Table 6.3: Willingness to communicate on the FB-group

Members of the Facebook-group	Level of willingness to socialise and get to know each other
Students on-campus, in class	
Teacher	
Student teacher known to class	
Distance students affiliated to class	
Students from other New Zealand tertiary institution	
Students in Germany, not known to students enrolled in course	
Student teacher not yet known to class	

After an early phase with minimal teacher presence, the students were given immediate feedback to comments. They found this motivating, especially the immediate feedback which is in line with Tu (2000) who reminded the practitioner to respond immediately and not wait with feedback. The students also enjoyed personal disclosure by the teacher. It is a thin line, knowing as a teacher how far to go with personal contact with the student. Care was taken to keep a professional distance to the students.

It appears that using the Facebook-group in addition to on-campus class-time is ideal because the students get to know each other faster and better when they are able to see each other face-to-face on a regular basis to build up trust on the online platform. This enhanced closeness which the Facebook-group enabled motivated the students to learn the target language at more ease and in a more authentic environment.

6.4 Theoretical implications

In this section implications from the findings in this study will be presented and applied to activity theory, the theoretical framework that informed this research. Firstly, practical implications resulting from the practices and perspectives of the students when using Facebook in class and the relationships between the different components of the activity system under investigation will be revisited and discussed. This discussion will be followed by a presentation of the contradictions and implementations. This section will then conclude with future recommendations.

6.4.1 Practices and perspectives of students' Facebook use discussed through the lens of AT

The activity system (AS) of the class using the Facebook-group is the focus of the following discussion. By investigating and defining the activity system, the dynamics of online language learning are revealed and seen from multiple vantage points, not just that of the learner in isolation. In this study the interaction between facets of online language learning becomes clear, including the role of the students, their use and acceptance of Facebook as a mediational tool, the rules of the assignment and the role of the community and the teacher in this activity system.

It is significant to note that historicity is an important consideration in this study as it helps with understanding problems as they develop. The presence of the historical past in this investigation is essential to making visible the change that may be going on in an AS; it is in

line with the concept of ‘prolepsis’ which is the ability of a culture-using human to reach into the cultural past, project it into the future, and then “carry” that conceptual future “back” into the present to create the sociocultural environment (Cole, 1996, p. 186). The following section will discuss the components of the activity system in this study and how they developed socio-historically during the period of the research. The final section will discuss contradictions identified and opportunities for expansion will be recommended.

The subject as the centre of the discussion. The activity in this study is learner-centred. The students of the German class are the ‘subject’ of the class activity system. Their practices and perspectives are the focus of this discussion. The relationships they developed with selected components of the AS under research will be discussed.

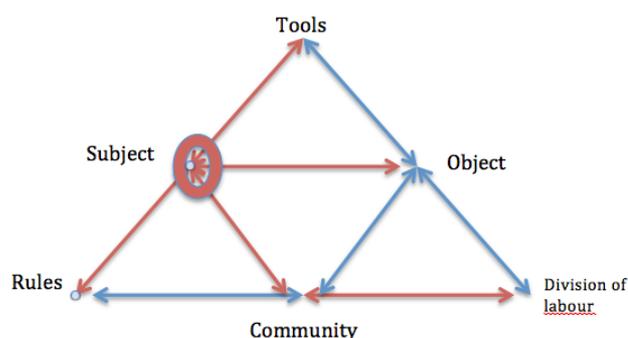


Figure 6.1: Relationship between the subject and selected components in the AS

The relationship of the subject with the components in Figure 6.1 (subject-tools, subject-object, subject-rules, subject-community/division of labour) will be discussed in the following section. First, there will be a discussion on the subject emphasising its importance within the system, followed by the relationships of the subject with different components in the AS, as highlighted in Figure 6.1.

The subject or students in this study entered the activity system of the FB-task with their individual activity sub-systems in the words of Engeström (2001), that is, “they carried their own diverse histories” (p. 136). All students used Facebook as part of their German class assignments but adapted it to their individual style of learning. The students can be divided into two groups: one group used Facebook at all times, the other group used it only occasionally or only when doing the German exercise.

The first group, “the connected students”, aligns with the concept of digital natives (Prensky,

2001). These students used Facebook as second nature, having the Facebook-app downloaded to their smartphones which gives them access to Facebook 24/7. These students experienced the German Facebook exercise as part of their online life and internalised it as such. They were listed as having “seen” content immediately after a new entry was posted, within seconds, almost synchronously. Interactive affordances such as “like” and “comment” have time logs which indicated that the connected students looked at the entries during night-time as well as during the day; there was no boundary between education and leisure time for these students. This is in line with Lantz-Andersson et al. (2013) who found that there are possibilities for boundary crossing that could create extended spaces when implementing social networking sites in education. Such extended spaces where students can engage in language activities could be triggered by the students’ established communicative, collaborative practices that belong to their everyday use of language in social media. The more developed these practices of using Facebook were, the more automatically the students used the socialising mediating tool in the new environment, as a learning platform. The internalised relationship the connected students had with the mediation technology helped them to experience the German Facebook-task as authentic and close to their “real life” which is in line with the TBLT approach (see section 2.2 and illustrated in Figure 2.2). The students were asked to use the internet, available to them, to carry out the assignment task.

The second group of students, “the less connected”, although the same age group as the “connected” students, showed little interest in social networking technology. These students accepted the use of Facebook as part of their German learning but would not use it in their private lives. Their contributions to the Facebook-group were less spontaneous, the writing was prepared in advance with several drafts and they only clicked “like” or commented when asked direct questions by fellow students regarding their posts. Blattner and Lomicka (2012) postulate that Facebook as a tool clearly allows students to easily collaborate on projects; these virtual exchanges enhance the communicative engagement of language learners and increase their confidence as well as their enthusiasm for the subject matter. This is certainly true, but it needs to be taken into consideration, that every class consists of different learners with different levels of technological interest and expertise.

The object of the Facebook-activity. The exercise the students were asked to pursue as part of the German assessment was object-oriented. The object in the activity system is, according to Kaptelinin (2005) the reason individuals and groups of individuals choose to participate in an activity. The students in this group participated in the Facebook-group assignment because they wanted to improve their German but also wanted to pass the assessment. The object is

constantly under construction. At the beginning of the study period the students were motivated to achieve the assignment requirements. During the period of the study some students developed a purpose of socialising and posted contributions not only to gain the points required but also to socialise and share knowledge about Germany on their own account. After the period of the assignment, when the semester had finished, the Facebook-group was still in use but the object had shifted from task fulfillment to socialising and keeping up contact, still in German. The Facebook-group shifted from a teacher-managed space to a student-managed space; the students took ownership of the group. Aaen and Dalsgaard (2015) called this type of Facebook-group “third space”, meaning a space which exists between the institution and the students.

The subject and the mediational tools. Thorne (2003) introduced the term ‘cultures-of-use’ to explain the use of a tool as specific to communities who have historically formed activities related to the tool. He argues that mediating internet communication tools are cultural artefacts and that as such they pose challenges to the development of online collaboration where different cultures-of-use are involved. The following section will discuss three tools which are of importance in this activity system. First, Facebook will be discussed, then devices, and thirdly the language of use in the AS.

Facebook as a tool. Facebook as a tool in the understanding of AT framed the engagement in the activity. Using Facebook as a tool removed the students from the traditional classroom setting into an online setting which was familiar to and used by some of them in their personal lives (Murphy & Rodriguez-Manzanares, 2014). The different learners, as discussed above, took to Facebook in different ways. Some made use of its affordances in ways similar to how they used it in their private lives, whereas other students treated the Facebook environment like a learning platform similar to the class Moodle-based VLE.

Secondly, technology to mediate their connection to the world dictated how the students were able to use Facebook. Students who owned smartphones had access to the internet at all times, whereas other students had more limited internet access by choice or circumstances which prevented them from experiencing the Facebook-task as informal and second nature.

A gap between linguistically confident and less confident students was noticeable. The activity was situated in an intermediate German class with students who varied in German proficiency; some had lived in Germany, others had German parents and so were heritage speakers and yet others had learned German up to five years in school prior to their university studies. The ones with more limited proficiency and experience of communicating in German

were sometimes intimidated by more proficient students and shy to post content on the public group site. As the students progressed through the course, they got to know each other better and felt less anxious about showing themselves online; they had also developed more strategies for how to write content by writing several drafts and using dictionaries.

In conclusion the mediational tools are multi-faceted and complex. Their use varied from user to user, according to their social background, knowledge and experience. It was the interaction between the tools and the other components of the AS which resulted in the activity of each student. It needs to be noted that the activity in line with AT thinking is not completed and will continue in a transformed AS which is the result from the activity in this study. Facebook in this study changed the practice of writing and communicating in the class community; this practice may actually change the use of Facebook as an artefact by these students.

Community and the division of labour. This section will discuss the community and the division of labour, first separately as two components in the AS, and then bringing the two components together and looking at them as one relational unit which influences the AS.

The community is the social group the subject belongs to while engaging in the activity (Engeström, 1993). A subject in the AS is not deemed to act in isolation but is part of the community (Blin, 2005). The group community consisted of the German students enrolled in the class, the two student teachers, the guest students from the other institution and myself the instructor. The possibilities of enlarging the group to make it more authentic by inviting native speakers of the target language was not accepted by the students because they were too self-conscious and anxious about presenting their German artefacts publicly.

The division of labour component helps to explain the power each member of the community of the activity has; it is also called the “locus of control” (Kaptelinin & Nardi, 2006). The members of the community share tasks in either a horizontal or a vertical relationship (Engeström, 1993). The power or strength of control of the different members in the community changes during the historical development of the activity. In the Facebook-group I controlled the design of the Facebook-site and the assignment task; I had a vertical power in relationship to the students at the beginning of the semester. The power shifted from vertical to a more horizontal relationship when the student teacher took over the feedback function

and the administration tasks. Later the group members of the German class became more confident and took over the administration roles in the community. Unfortunately only a small number of the students were active in the Facebook-group and took on that responsibility; the majority of the community members were passive users of the group (see Table 6.2), only acknowledging the posts by clicking the artefacts posted which made them visible to the community members as having “seen”. This visible acknowledgement helped them to be accepted as part of the group. As Barab et al. (2004) put it, the passive students did not demonstrate substantial “ownership” by “accepting responsibility for building and maintaining a community” (p. 33) to advance professional development or the authentic notion of being more immersed in the German language.

The intention initially was to let the group develop without feedback on the students’ linguistic output to let the students develop their autonomy without teacher interference. Ethnographic observations during the semester revealed that the students preferred feedback and I started to give corrective feedback after each post but also posted personal contributions on a regular basis. This measure is aligned with Mazer et al. (2009) who found that the staff should have and encourage Facebook relationships with students, allowing students to see a more human and accessible side of their tutors (p. 151).

Feedback motivated the students to write their own comments and comment on other contributions. The learners corrected their language errors and produced modified output after receiving feedback (Chapelle, 1997; Collentine & Collentine, 2015). Corrective feedback also provided opportunity to notice gaps and correct errors (Chapelle, 2009).

After a while, the student teacher took over the control of the Facebook assignment and was giving feedback, which resulted in changes of control and power. The student teacher gained more control whereas the teacher retreated more into the function of a facilitator.

Subject and the rules of the AS. Rules in activity theory are, according to Engeström (1991), the norms and standards that regulate the activity. In traditional school learning, the most important rules are those that sanction behaviour and regulate assessment (p. 249). The understanding of rules in social networking differs from the traditional rules of university assessment which are submitted individually for marking. The students need to be informed about how to convert a tool usually applied in their leisure time into the educational environment. It was important to communicate clear guidelines for how to use Facebook. The guidelines included two parts: guidelines relating to the purpose of interaction via social

network environments, and guidelines relating to the process of interaction using this medium (R. Wang et al., 2012). Wang et al. emphasised in their recommended guidelines that communicating the purpose of the exercise, here the educational purpose, was most important.

6.4.2 Section summary

The students as the subject of the AS developed relationships with different components of the AS and contradictions between the following components were identified:

Subject – tools

Subject – rules

Subject – Community/ Division of Labour

The next section will discuss implications for methodologies. This chapter will conclude with the presentation of recommendations made for future practices in Facebook use.

6.5 Methodological implications

This study benefitted from the use of ethnographic methods to research the learning as it occurred in its natural environment (Hine, 2000; Markham, 1998; Slater, 2002). The students were able to use Facebook on their own devices, their natural settings, and were independent of more controlled learning environments, such as computer labs.

The ethnographic approach was effective as it generated rich data through longitudinal observation of the Facebook environment. Data collected included my research diary, the interview and questionnaire data and the archived Facebook-posts (see Table 5.1); by utilising multiple methods of data collection the research did not rely too much on any one source of data. These various methods of data collection also enabled the tracking of the socio-historical development of the learners who were engaged in the language learning activity. It was surprising how effective Facebook was as a data gathering tool. The site could be archived after the completion of the assignment and the research period, and data retained. Facebook as a controlled environment preserved all the conversation logs between the research participants and was accessible for the researcher in written form.

The students' practices in the class Facebook-group were explored but it was in a controlled Facebook-group environment and no claims can be made that the actual private Facebook life of the students was accessed. It has to be noted that, if the researcher serves both as participant observer and as the instructor in the context of research, it is important to recognise that there are competing interests. The instructor in a teacher role might view the

students' passive behaviour in doing the assignment as problematic for learning. However, for a researcher, the apparently passive behavior of the student is a new and interesting form of communication typical of online environments (see Table 6.2).

6.6 Summary

In discussing the use of the Facebook-group in a language learning environment the three most important components in this environment were the mediational tool Facebook, the manner of communication online and the collaboratively created platform the Facebook-group members used.

The entire design of the Facebook study was based on communicative language teaching CLT (see section 2.1). Focus on form was not seen as relevant; it was important that the students relaxed and used the platform, Facebook, as a tool to practise their informal use of the target language but also to engage with the fellow students, getting to know each other better. Correction of errors was kept to a minimum so that the students did not feel anxious posting in German on the Facebook-group which was visible to the members. TBLT (section 2.2) was used in that the students had to find information on internet sites and sources outside the classroom; they ended up focusing on the actual interaction and social exchange, at least toward the end, when they were talking about knitting, helping the student teacher with travel tips and inviting each other to events using the Facebook group site and the target language.

Observations resulting from ethnographic methods were discussed and AT was used to focus the discussion and concentrate on AT components within the activity under research.

Activity theory offers conceptual and methodological tools which can assist researchers, designers and teachers to better understand the intricacies of the mediational, communicative and collaborative structure of online activities (Blin & Appel, 2011).

Chapter 7

Limitations, recommendations for future use, future research, and conclusion

This thesis has described and analysed the experiences of students of German who used Facebook as a learning tool during their German intermediate level language course at a New Zealand university. The aim of this study has been to understand the characteristics and affordances of the Facebook environment in the learning and teaching of German, and to understand the implications of using the social networking site for students.

The course included face-to-face sessions, independent learning using texts, and online components. I integrated Facebook as an online tool to help the German class students to get to know each other better and to practise the target language in a relatively informal way using a real-life and familiar platform. I investigated the use of this particular social network site (SNS) to examine if it is suitable as a pedagogical resource.

Research up to now has not examined the pedagogical value of the Facebook-group in language classes in depth (Blattner & Fiori, 2011; R. Wang, Scown, Urquart, & Hardman, 2012; Zourou, 2012). In this study I have tried to draw a bigger picture in this study of the practices and perspectives of the students and the teacher involved. The intermediate German class included students from different faculties who only met during the German lessons but not in other courses. The online site also included distance students who did not have a strong feeling of belonging to the class community. I included Facebook as part of the curriculum to create a unique learning community and to integrate all students enrolled in the course so that they could engage in authentic German communication in line with the TBLT approach (Ellis, 2003; Erlam, 2016; Shintani, 2013).

At the time of the study, Facebook was the number one social communication platform among university students (Facebook-statistics, 2013). As outlined in section 2.4, features of Facebook include not only text messaging and posting of content, but also the ability to create individual user profiles. Students are able to add individual Facebook-profile information about themselves, which can be accessed by the fellow students in the class. This online presence can help them to get to know each other better. The students have limited time together in the classroom and the online environment gives them another space to get to know

each other and communicate. The communication on the Facebook-group was in German, the students' learning experience was enhanced.

The combination of these features provided an exciting and new tool to make the German language classroom more authentic and intimate. Students were able to get to know each other better not only by being in class together four times a week but also by having the opportunity to communicate with each other outside class on the always available Facebook application that today's students have adopted as a second home in their social lives. With these preconceptions in mind, I wanted to explore if Facebook could be the right tool to construct a sociocultural environment in a German language classroom as well as a feasible tool for students not only to practise their spontaneous writing but also to feel more at ease with writing in the target language.

The data for this research I collected over a period of one semester (12 weeks) using ethnographic methods (see Chapter 4.7). These were advantageous for observing the learning experience over a longer period of time with myself as the teacher and researcher immersed into the learning environment of 23 German students who were undergraduates studying for different degrees. I gained additional insight by daily observations. The analysis was conducted using a combination of thematic analysis followed by activity theory analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Engeström, 1987; Murphy & Rodrigues-Manzanares, 2014; Mwanza-Simwami, 2013; Yamagata-Lynch, 2014). I used activity theory to help me to better understand the ethnographic narrative. I identified tensions within the activity system of the class and visualised them using AT modelling.

7.1 Recommendations for future educational use

I used Facebook as a mediational tool as the centre of the research in this study. Most of the students in this study enjoyed using Facebook in their language class. They liked its authenticity, as the Facebook bridged the gap between settings where the target language is spoken and an accessible learning platform. A few students did not show interest in the Facebook platform. There was a gap between technologically interested students and the ones who have less interest in living a virtual life or are more reluctant to disclose their "self" online (boyd, 2007). This needs to be taken into consideration when planning future Facebook tasks. The teacher needs to engage the different learner types, the introverted or extroverted learner, the visual or kinaesthetic learner (Oxford, 2003), also the connected and

disconnected learner. It might be an advantage if the students were divided into smaller groups consisting of different learner types and were asked to carry out a more collaborative exercise on Facebook. The students could distribute the work according to their interests and could complement each other.

Communication in the Facebook-group seems to be second nature and daily e-routine for most of the students. I believed that I did not need to give the students rules for how to communicate on Facebook because of this familiarity with the platform. I was surprised that students struggled with the educational approach to using Facebook. Rules for how to use Facebook in an educational environment need to be very clearly communicated and possibly adjustments may need to be made to rules or norms of the activity system in this research to cater to the different learner types. Students should also be made aware of the different communication channels on Facebook, Facebook-wall and Facebook-group, personal messaging and the different rules connected to each of the channels. They also have to be thoroughly informed about the educational benefits of using the Facebook-site. If the rules of the Facebook activity are aligned with the students' understanding of online communication, they might be more responsive to the Facebook exercise.

The Facebook task, taking place as it did on a transparent platform where students can see each other's contributions and can comment and acknowledge each other's work, seemed to be suitable to support collaborative learning and scaffolding. However, only a few of the students were actively engaged in collaborative work, while others passively observed the Facebook-site. A solution might be that the students or the teacher directly address students who do not contribute by asking them questions online regarding the content posted. It would probably initially intimidate them but eventually would make them feel more welcomed into the Facebook-group.

7.2 Recommendations for future research

After the initial stage of research it became evident that the students began the course with different backgrounds but also were situated in diverse environments. It would be interesting in future research to analyse the underlying sets of activity systems of these diverse students and how they interact with the activity system of this group; potential contradictions between different activity systems could be exposed. This measure might help to gain more insight into the students' perceptions of the Facebook-group, thus helping with the collaborative process of the exercise.

It might also be of interest to investigate the role of the instructor. The instructor's changes from a traditional face-to-face language teacher role to an online instructor could be analysed. It might also be beneficial to investigate how much teacher presence would be beneficial (Richardson et al., 2016). As the instructor I wanted the students to develop a learning environment where they could work autonomously and collaboratively. In order to achieve this, I showed little teacher presence, other than the required instance of starting the group. I retreated and left the students to their task. I soon noticed that the students were not working on the group, or only very reluctantly doing so. In future I will possibly model the tasks more frequently and react with immediate feedback when students post comments.

The platform can be useful as an integral part of language classrooms. More research needs to be conducted particularly in the fields of:

- The role of the teacher
- Benefits of SNS use for students' learning and community building
- Further SNSs such as Instagram and Snapchat could be explored and studied. They are quite different to Facebook, with their focus on images rather than text. In the case of Snapchat, there is the additional feature of posts disappearing once seen, which could give confidence to hesitant students.

More research is also needed to explore the affordances of SNSs for community building in the classroom and to find out more about the role of the teacher when using SNSs with the class. It would be of interest to find out how teachers perceive these platforms as teaching tools and what code of practice is required to make the teacher and students comfortable enough to collaborate on SNSs.

This study is part of a German language course; consequently it would have been of interest to study the impact of the assignment on the writing proficiency of the students. Many students found writing in German difficult and experienced writing block in formally assessed writing tasks. Introducing the Facebook assignment was intended to give the students the opportunity to practise writing in a more relaxed environment by being encouraged to write freely with no assessment of the correctness of their language output. I noticed that the students wrote longer essays in their exams and I compared the number of words students wrote in their final writing test, the number of words was substantially more in 2014 compared to 2013 (see Appendix K). In the future, it would be interesting to explore

language use in more detail. Research could look at vocabulary used in the Facebook posts. A possible technique could be the Lexical Frequency Profile, calculated by a computer software programme which can provide a detailed picture of vocabulary use measured against several frequency lists of words. The vocabulary use could be measured before and after the integration of the Facebook assignment and the richness of vocabulary use calculated (East, 2004).

Using a social media site in a language class has affordances to reach out and integrate intercultural elements (see pilot study, p 66). In the future an SNS such as Instagram could be used to develop intercultural awareness in the class. The students could be divided into several groups of three or four students, each group being asked to create its own Instagram (group). The students would have the task of finding four or five photos each in their private environment which remind them of Germany or the German language. They could contribute these photos to their group and collaboratively design a group Instagram. At the end of the semester the students could present and share their Instagrams to the class community. Each student could be asked to write an individual diary about the photos, the choice of photos and why they reminded her/him of Germany. The task would also support the framework of multiliteracies (Pegrum, 2011).

7.3 Limitations

There were several limitations to this study. First, the sample size was small. Although 23 students took the course, only twelve students consented to partake in the study. A larger group of participants could have led to more varied results into the use of Facebook. Second, Facebook as a place to post comments on topics of interest for the students was intended to be a “free” platform for writing in the target language and for experiencing a feeling of authentic use of the language. The students’ actual use of the platform was perceived more as having a pedagogical purpose, to fulfil the assignment requirements. The Facebook task appeared to be an obligation to the students. A third drawback was the lack of teacher feedback and correction of the language used. The students agreed in the interviews that more teacher intervention would have been appreciated. I did not participate in the Facebook-group a lot as I was trying to create the illusion that the platform was owned by the students and part of their private lives, thus there was also no established code of language or etiquette for the communication between the teacher and students.

7.4 Conclusion

The results of this study gave insight into the use of the SNS platform Facebook in an educational setting. The students used Facebook in a similar way to the learning management system (LMS) Moodle which had been an integrative component of their course. The question has arisen as to whether it is necessary to use two separate learning platforms simultaneously, both Moodle and Facebook, or whether teaching should be limited to only one of these social networks. Both platforms were used as part of the learning process but have different affordances. Facebook is accessible by everyone who is a member of the platform. It allows students and teachers alike to be creators of a shared knowledge base. The Moodle-based LMS is owned by the university and has password access for enrolled students only. The students are limited to posting their own content and are mostly consumers of the platform. Moodle is used as a storage space for class-related material but lacks outreach affordances. Facebook on the other hand is a tool which has the potential to reach out into the culture of the target language, not only reaching speakers of the target language and including them into the class online environment but also accessing authentic material in the target language and developing a unique contemporary cultural resource created by the class members. Facebook is an ideal tool to add contemporary contents to the textbook used in class; as Petrovic, Petrovic, Jeremic, Milenkovic, and Cirovic (2012) wrote, the internet supplies us with information which is “hot off the keyboard”. Individual students, if guided accordingly, can search the internet and supplement information on topics taught in class about the target culture by posting unique and contemporary artefacts. If the teacher facilitates the Facebook activity well, learners could also become more autonomous (R. Wang et al., 2012).

SNS platforms have great potential to make the language classroom more dynamic and authentic and the learner more autonomous. When Facebook is integrated into a language classroom with students using it comfortably and actively, it is a powerful and unique window to the world and can facilitate the creation of a classroom by bringing in authentic elements of the target language, which never was possible before.

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Appendix A

Web 1.0 and Web 2.0

Internet services can be divided into Web 1.0 and Web 2.0 applications. The term "Web 2.0" was born in a conference brainstorming session between O'Reilly and MediaLive International (O'Reilly, 2005). Web 2.0 opened a new range of network possibilities for language teaching.

Table A.1: Web 1.0 and Web 2.0 applications.

Web 1.0		Web 2.0
Britannica Online	-->	Wikipedia
personal websites	-->	blogging
screen scraping	-->	web services
publishing	-->	participation
content management systems	-->	wikis
directories (taxonomy)	-->	tagging ("folksonomy")

(Excerpted from O'Reilly, 2005, p.2)

Appendix B

Instructions for the use of Facebook-group

Assignment: Posts on Facebook

A FB group can be set up so it is closed, half-closed/half-open, or fully-open to the general public. As soon as the group is established and has a unique name, students and members of the public can search for the group and can ask to join it. Administrator members may add the new arrivals. The members of a group need to have their own, private FB address in order to access a FB group. The private FB is separate from the group and cannot be accessed by the group members unless they get an invitation. Students need to consider the set up of their private FB. As soon as they are members of the FB group, fellow members can click on their names and enter their private FB title pages. Depending on the level of security the private FB site is set up with: visitors may see the site's pinwall, photos, etc. or only an excerpt of the title page with everything else locked. (see "Facebook Smart guide")

To get started: FB assignment

You need to find the group by name: [redacted] and ask to join.

As soon as you are a member you will be made an administrator. As an administrator, you need to invite one more German-speaking member who is not part of our class. The idea is that we create a wider German-speaking community. The invited guests who are not part of the German class will be observers and not made administrators.

What you need to do - assignment

You need to post five items onto the FB-site. The first contribution will be your introduction including a photo. For your introduction you should write about the place you live, where you come from, maybe your age, your hobbies, etc. (of course in German!).

Then you will post five posts (= music videos, film trailers, photos, recipes, beauty ideas, travel recommendations, etc.) that are of interest for you. For every item you will upload you will need to include a short paragraph (3 complete sentences) written in German describing the contents of your upload.

To gain the full 2% per upload you need to comment on one contribution of a fellow student, writing one sentence in German.

Grading: a total of 10% of the overall course. You will get one credit if your comments (own upload + comment on an upload of fellow student) are sufficient (long enough), if too short you will get half a credit. The credits will be added to the gradebook on Learn.

Dates and activities:

Second week, latest until Montag:

Join the FB group 

(2 %): post 1: introduce yourself, including a photo (around 3 sentences/German), including

- Name
- Woher Sie kommen.
- Hobbies
- ...

(2%) – Post 2 (your choice)

(2%) – Post 3 (your choice)

(2%) – Post 4 (your choice)

(2%) – Post 5 (how do you study? Share your secrets)

Note

If you are not comfortable using Facebook as a learning tool, please let me know and I will set up a Forum on Learn for your posts.

Appendix C

Facebook Smart Use Guide

Privacy on Facebook

To fully understand privacy on Facebook and privacy online you need to understand that open social media has the tendency to be very public. You can make your personal settings more private but you need to be aware that whatever you do some things will always remain semi-public. Do not trust the settings to entirely protect you. The best protection is awareness of the type of information you are post on the FB-site.

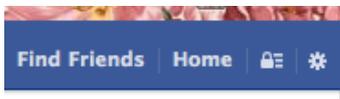
Facebook-group and privacy

If you join a FB-group, you are not automatically FB-friends with your FB-group members. Your FB-group members though can access your profile information by clicking on your name. It is recommended that you control your FB-profile and keep it as private as possible. You can befriend FB-group members later if you choose.

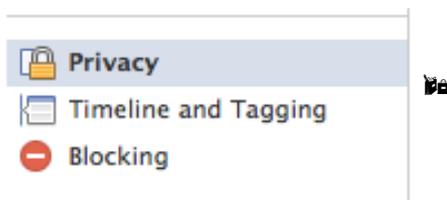
The FB-group we are using in class will be a closed group, the posts will only be visible to the FB-group members.

In order to check your personal FB-profile settings, and protect them, you need to follow these steps:

Step 1: On the top right hand side of you FB-Website, you find the control icon, click on it.



Step 2: On the left hand side you will find different options, click on 'privacy'.

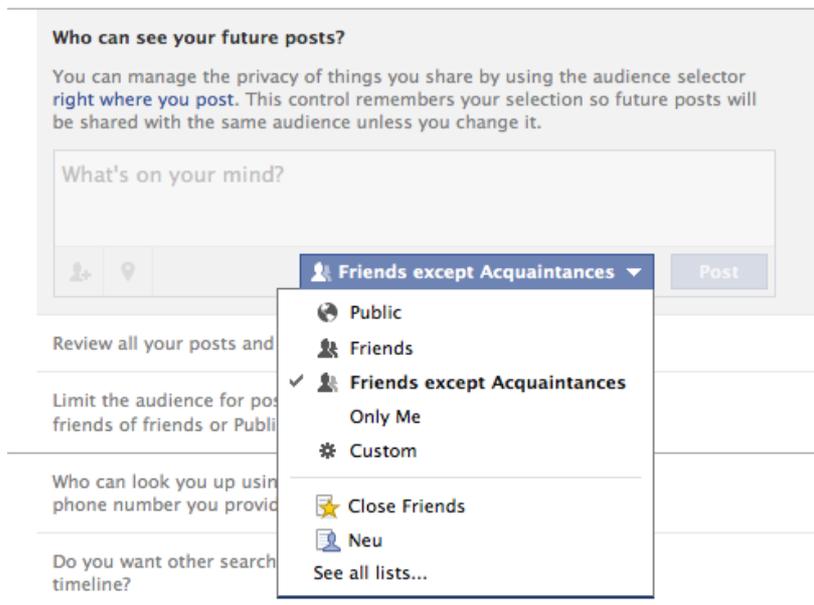


Step 3: The privacy options will open and you can click on ‘edit’ for the different options. Click on ‘Who can look me up’:

Privacy Settings and Tools

Who can see my stuff?	Who can see your future posts?	Friends except Acquaintances	Edit
	Review all your posts and things you're tagged in		Use Activity Log
	Limit the audience for posts you've shared with friends of friends or Public?		Limit Past Posts
Who can look me up?	Who can look you up using the email address or phone number you provided?	Friends	Edit
	Do you want other search engines to link to your timeline?	Off	Edit

Step 4: You will be taken to a side with a pull-down menu. Click on its arrow and choose your preferred option. It is recommend that you choose ‘friends except acquaintances’.



Only your friends can access your full profile. You need to befriend a FB-group member before they can see your full profile. Your basic profile, including your name, your profile photo, and gender will always be accessible by everyone.

If you want to make your information (beyond the basic profile) inaccessible to your classmates in the FB group, you can defriend him/her as well. You will still remain a part of the FB-group if you do this.

Facebook is an ever-changing environment. The settings and the menu options might change or their appearance will differ. This guide is only a guideline for you to follow.

Appendix D

Ethical consent



HUMAN ETHICS COMMITTEE

Secretary, Lynda Griffioen
Email: human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz

Ref: 2013/70/ERHEC

18 December 2013

Vera Leier
School of Languages & Cultures
UNIVERSITY OF CANTERBURY

Dear Vera

Thank you for providing the revised documents in support of your application to the Educational Research Human Ethics Committee. I am very pleased to inform you that your research proposal "How does social media (here: Facebook) impact on students' work" has been granted ethical approval.

Please note that this approval is subject to the incorporation of the amendments you have provided in your email of 18 December 2013.

Should circumstances relevant to this current application change you are required to reapply for ethical approval.

Appendix E

Pre- and post-course questionnaires

Facebook_pre-course questionnaire

This questionnaire is confidential and anonymous.

A. General

1) Your Age?

- under 20
- 21 - 25
- 26 - 30
- 30+

2) Your gender?

- male
- female

B. Social networks

3) Which of the following (if any) social networking sites are you a member?

- Facebook
- Instagram
- other-please specify:

4) Roughly how long have you been using social networking sites?

- up to 1 year
- 1-2 years
- 2-3 years
- 3 years +

C. Facebook

5) How many FB friends have you got?

- 20-60
- 60-100
- 100-150
- more than 150

6) Do you have FB-friends from other countries than your native country?

- yes,
- no

If you answered 'yes', how many foreign FB-friends have you got and from what countries do they come from?

7) How do you know your online friends?

- most of them are friends from my real-life
- most of them are friends I have never met in person
- most of my friends I know in real-life and some of them I never met before

8) How often do you check your personal Facebook?

- several times a day
- once a day
- a few times a week but not every day
- once a week or less frequently

9) Do you post items on you FB wall?

- yes , regularly- almost every day
- yes, sometimes – maybe once a week
- not very often, maybe once a month or less
- never, but I follow the entries of my friends

10) Do you use the ‘like’ (‘gefällt mir’) function on FB?

- yes, every time
- yes, sometimes
- no, never

11) Do you use the ‘comment’ (‘kommentieren’) function on FB?

- yes, every time
- yes, sometimes
- no, never

D. Facebook-groups

12) Do you work with Facebook-group feature in other courses at UC?

- yes
- no

If you answered ‘yes’, which course:

13) Do you feel that Facebook-group used as a platform of your class assessment is:

- intruding into your personal FB life
- doesn’t intrude into your personal FB life

14) Do you belong to FB-groups?

- Yes, how many? _____
- No

15) If you belong to FB-groups, what type of groups are they?

- hobbies, leisure
- professional
- educational
- other, please indicate _____

This questionnaire is confidential and anonymous.

Would you be able to assist me with my PhD research and comment on the Facebook assignment and on your general life on Facebook?

Your Facebook assignment and your general life on Facebook.

General:

Are you contributing information to the Internet, Facebook, or other social media sites?

- post comments
- uploading photos
- having a blog or a website
- observing the Internet, not actively contributing

comments: _____

Facebook and Facebook-groups:

Do you belong to FB-groups?

- yes no

if yes:

How many groups do you belong to? _____

How many of this groups are educational? _____

Do you have other FB-groups that are part of your courses and part of your assessment?
yes no

If yes, how much percentage of the final mark do you get for FB-work? _____

Friends:

Did you invite a fellow German student from Grmn251 to be friends on your personal Facebook? yes no

Learning:

Do you think that the German Facebook-group helps you learn German?

- yes no

If yes, in what areas do you think the Facebook assignment helped you most? (you can tick more than one)

- learn more about German culture.
- learn about your own culture.
- improve German language.
- find friends who have the same interests.
- become more cosmopolitan.
- express yourself.
- complete the assignment and get full marks for it.

other:

Structure of the assignment:

Was it well explained? yes no

Would you prefer more teacher input? yes no it was just right

Was the level of difficulty pitched correctly?

yes I found it a bit hard, but I liked the challenge too hard

When and where did you do the Facebook assignment entries?

in the morning lunch time evening no particular time

you did it:

at home

at university: where- in the café, computer lab, other? _____

other place: _____

Facebook community:

Would you like to expand the group? yes no

If yes, would you like to

invite German friends to the group

include Grmn152

include Grmn152 and Grmn352

other suggestions: _____

Ideas for future Facebook use:

Could you write a few lines about:

1) Did you loose interest in the Facebook activity during the semester? If yes why do you think that was?

(extra sheet of paper!)

2) Could you suggest five topics you would be interested in to use in the Facebook assignment for Grmn252:

(extra sheet of paper!)

Thank you! Danke für eure Mithilfe!

Appendix F

Excerpts from research diary

30.3.14

action: students need to comment on German fashion and design in preparation of the poster 2, they need to present in week 7.

observation: The students seem very motivated after I decided to guide them more with the contents of the entries. They need to share in entry 5 an information about fashion and design. I also noticed that they start to comment more in each other and show more interest.

2.4.14

action: I corrected the entries of the students. They had to write about fashion and design to prepare their next poster presentation with the same topic. I corrected the entries. First I wrote a personal note of acknowledgement, then a feedback correcting one specific thing. I sent a message to a student who talked about a soft toy she made. We'll see if she posts a photo or not.

observation: They posted long entries, more than 3 sentences. I seem to write longer comments as well, it motivates when the students write more and take more care. (as Christie said in her interview: if I comment and add entries, it shows that I care what the students do and don't just leave them up to themselves) I can observe in the 'seen' field, that the corrections are looked at.

7.4.14

observation: a member of the group added a comment about second hand clothes shops. I discussion evolved, recommending different clothes shops in town. It was the first time that students commented quite freely.

9.4.14

action: I posted the instructions for the next entry. A contribution in line with their holiday reading about the resistance in Nazi Germany.

observation: I could see that 11 people checked it, relatively fast after the entry, within a couple of hours. One person liked it. Still too shy to add a comment, I guess. One girl asked advice about her knitting pattern (personal use of the FB-site)

14.4.14

action: I travelled to Germany and did not check. Checked again this morning and not much change since the time before I left. I posted a contribution, a link to a new video the Goethe Institut made. I also did the marking of their course work and communicated via email and reminded them to post something.

observation: I noticed an immediate interest in the FB-site. More 'seen', one contribution about Nazi Germany. I have the feeling that students like to get feedback and encouragement, that feeds back to the FB-site.

17.4.14

action: I posted photos of windturbines (topic of first poster).

observation: immediate reaction, already seen by 8 students, 3 likes.

Considerations/thought: The students like it when I am active, it shows, that I care. I will post more. I guess asking for a WW2 topic as a next entry is too complicated (more German, B2 level). I will try to communicate via FB and negotiate the next entry. But to get their attention you need to small talk it. Make the site alive. Interesting how fast a group site can go dormant.

19.5.14

action: Luise asked the last question of the semester, recommendations for travelling New Zealand.

observation: the first people commented, there was some dialogue already.

thoughts: I hoped that the students are getting more relaxed with the entries, not so formal and maybe keep up the writing in the holidays.

Appendix G

Screenshots from archived Facebook-group

Schreibe einen Kommentar ...

 **Givra Winiugnoy**
24. April

Hallo Leute! Heute schreibe ich über was ich habe für Ostern gemacht. Am Freitag habe ich mit meinen Arbeitskollegen einen Frauenparty für unsere Leiterin gehalten. Es war sehr nett. Wir hatten ein teegesellschaftes Thema. Die ganze Woche habe ich mit einer Freundin ein Fahmentuch gemacht. Wir haben 'happily ever after' an der Fahmentuch genäht und jedermann haben an der Kehrseite eine persönliche Mitteilung geschrieben. Wir haben auch ein schönes Geschenk gemacht. Weil ein... Mehr anzeigen



Gefällt mir · Kommentieren

 Givra Winiugnoy gefällt das. Gesehen von 22

 **Vera Leier** was für eine tolle Idee von euch! Das sieht auch so schön aus. Dein Deutsch ist wirklich gut, nur eine kleine Verbesserung: Sie können es auf meinem Foto sehen. Es war ein schöner Tag.
27. April um 22:21 · Gefällt mir

Schreibe einen Kommentar ...

 **Givra Winiugnoy**
23. April

Heute schreibe ich über Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Er ist mein Held, weil er so viele Mut hatte.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer ist in 1904 in Deutschland geboren. Er hat Theologie studiert, und ein Pfarrer war.

Wenn Hitler gewählt wurde, hatte Bonhoeffer eine Rede auf Radio gegeben. Er hat gesagt dass Hitler ein Verführer, nicht Führer war.

 **Givra Winiugnoy**
7. April · Bearbeitet

Hallo, Ich kenne nicht viel über Mode, nicht in Neuseeland oder Deutschland. Meine Meinung nach ist, Kleidung sollte praktisch und bequem sein. Es ist nicht wichtig, dass Kleidung, eine Marke und teuer ist. Einfach dass man gut fühlt über sich selbst. Ich liebe shopping, aber ich aushe für schöne preis günstig und ausverkauf kleidung. Weil dann, fühle ich glücklich nach shopping nicht schuldig. Mode ist die Fähigkeit, gut auszusehen und sich gut fühlen, ohne viel Geld auszugeben. Meine Lieblings-Mode ist bei einer zweiten Hand Laden kaufen. Das Gefühl, wenn man etwas, das man für so wenig Geld leben gefunden hat.



Gefällt mir · Kommentieren

 Givra Winiugnoy gefällt das. Gesehen von 23

3 weitere Kommentare anzeigen

 **Givra Winiugnoy** meinst du Savemart oder was
7. April um 12:03 · Gefällt mir

 **Givra Winiugnoy** Ja... die Salvation Army und Vinnies Laden sind ok, aber nicht so gut wie Tasman Traders (die Kleidung in Tasman Traders ist sehr gut Qualität). Danke, ich würde Savemart untersuchen.
7. April um 12:05 · Gefällt mir

Appendix H

Segments analysed using NVivo

Look for: Search In Nodes Find Now Clear

Nodes				
	Name	Sources	References	Created By
<input type="checkbox"/>	subject_collective	4	24	VL
<input type="checkbox"/>	subject_behaviour	5	17	VL
<input type="checkbox"/>	community	14	69	VL
<input type="checkbox"/>	communityStart	2	30	VL
<input type="checkbox"/>	community_nonAss	3	40	VL
<input type="checkbox"/>	community_shared interests	2	42	VL
<input type="checkbox"/>	subject	5	25	VL
<input type="checkbox"/>	object	5	26	VL
<input type="checkbox"/>	outcome	0	0	VL
<input type="checkbox"/>	tools_artifacts	9	35	VL
<input type="checkbox"/>	artifacts	11	86	VL
<input type="checkbox"/>	artifact_topic2_hobbies	1	26	VL
<input type="checkbox"/>	artifact_topic3_films	1	17	VL
<input type="checkbox"/>	artifact_topic4_ModeDesign	1	17	VL
<input type="checkbox"/>	artifact_topic5_resistanceEaster	1	14	VL
<input type="checkbox"/>	artifact_topic6_GermanHelpWhy	1	13	VL
<input type="checkbox"/>	artifact_topic7_LuiseTravel	2	11	VL
<input type="checkbox"/>	rules	12	44	VL
<input type="checkbox"/>	division of labour	9	36	VL
<input type="checkbox"/>	teacher	4	25	VL
<input type="checkbox"/>	researcher	2	13	VL
<input type="checkbox"/>	students	5	18	VL
<input type="checkbox"/>	studentteacher(s)	3	25	VL
<input type="checkbox"/>	contradictions_disturbances	1	2	VL
<input type="checkbox"/>	+	21	122	VL
<input type="checkbox"/>	-	16	86	VL
<input type="checkbox"/>	+_pilot	8	32	VL
<input type="checkbox"/>	-_pilot	8	15	VL

Appendix I

Excerpt from Memos (main study)

These are memos in order to reflect on the categories which emerged when coding the data.

Subject:

- ‘I message Laura on FB how do you find the Arbeitsblatt.’> the behaviour among the students changes, they establish smaller community systems after they get to know each other.

Subject_collective:

- Node ‘subject’ of the activity system is including all the students in the class in this activity system, that’s why it is named ‘subjects_collective’.
- The students have to introduce themselves in the first post. They become part of the community and part of the activity system and they identify themselves as the subjects who are planning to achieve an object. All these students share a similar object, they all want to learn German.
- Example: ‘subject’ _Laura identifies herself in her greeting the Swiss way (gruezi)- qualifies her as a Swiss expert.
- subjects are part of other activity systems- the other activity system can influence their objects.
- I also want to find out, how are the subjects/students of this particular course? What behaviour do they demonstrate? (‘student_behaviour’ as separate node)

Student_behaviour:

- Great, end of May students correct themselves!

Object:

- object defined as the individual goals the students have by learning German.
- object= motivation of the learning activity!
- ‘[student X] likes to learn the written language because she studies music. Echo wants to travel, Sarah wants to study in Germany.’> they all have different objects!

Appendix J

Specific questions designed to highlight defining characteristics of the activity system

Each student has his/her own activity system. These questions from the interim and post-course interviews were asked to get more focussed information about the individual students and their activity systems.

Table J.1: Students' activity system.

Subject	Who are you? Background?
Object	Why are you learning German? what do you want to gain?
Tools	What do you use to learn? get distracted on FB? is it a problem?
Norms, rules	Assignment structure? Enough percentage? or would you like to do it non-assessed? would you be willing to suggest five topics of interest to you for the FB assignment in Grmn252
Community	Should we expand or not? how can we make it more authentic?
Division of labour	Are some people dominant? How do you find the teacher feedback?
Outcome	So far, what do you think the outcome of the FB component is?

Appendix K

Word count of Facebook-posts

The amount of words the students wrote the year before the study, when the Facebook task was not assessed in comparison to the year when the task was part of the formal assessment.

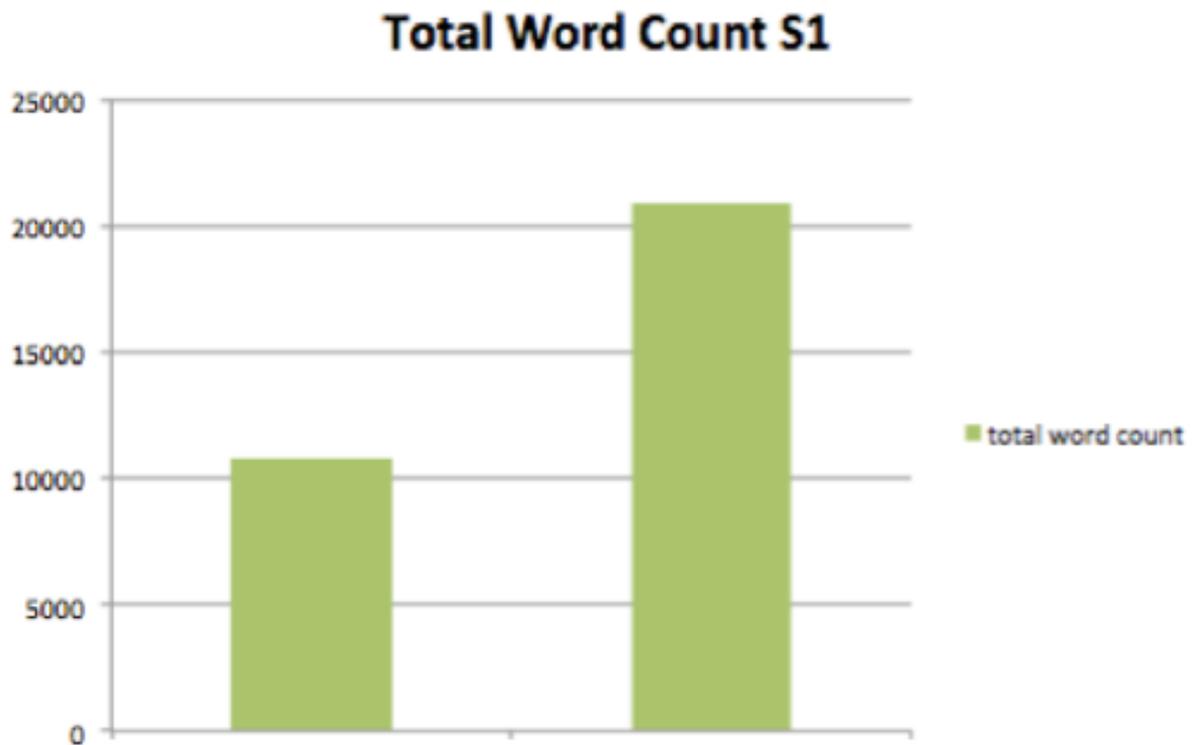


Figure K.1: Total word count of the Facebook posts.